

CHILDREN RELIANT ON BENEFIT RECIPIENTS

Introduction

In New Zealand, children who are reliant on benefit recipients are a particularly vulnerable group. During 2009, 75% of all households (including those with and without children) relying on income-tested benefits as their main source of income were living below the poverty line (housing adjusted equivalent disposable income <60% of 2007 median) [1]. This proportion has increased over the past two decades, rising from 39% of benefit dependent households in 1990, to a peak of 76% in 1994, and then remaining in the low–mid 70s ever since [1], with these trends being attributed to three main factors: cuts in the level in income support during 1991, growth in unemployment (which peaked at 11% in 1991) and escalating housing costs, particularly for those in rental accommodation [2].

The vulnerability of benefit dependent children was further highlighted by the 2000 Living Standards Survey, which noted that even once the level of family income was taken into account, families whose main source of income was Government benefits were more likely to be living in severe or significant hardship and as a consequence, more likely to buy cheaper cuts of meat, go without fruit and vegetables, put up with feeling cold to save on heating costs, make do without enough bedrooms, have children share a bed, postpone a child's visit to the doctor or dentist, go without a computer or internet access and limit their child's involvement in school trips, sports and extracurricular activities [2]. The 2004 Living Standards Survey suggested that the picture may have worsened between 2000 and 2004, with the proportion of benefit dependent families living in severe or significant hardship increasing from 39% in 2000 to 58% in 2004 [3].

The following section reviews the number of children aged 0–18 years who were dependent on benefit recipients during April 2000–2011, using information from the Ministry of Social Development's SWIFTT database. While the number of children reliant on benefit recipients does not correlate precisely with the number living below the poverty line (in 2004 they comprised 60% of those in poverty [4]), in the context of New Zealand's recent rises in unemployment rates, they nevertheless reflect a particularly vulnerable group, who may have higher health needs, and as a consequence, may make a significant contribution to future health service demand.

Data Source and Methods

Definition

Children Reliant on a Benefit or a Benefit Recipient by Benefit Type

Data Source

Numerator: Number of Children Aged 0–18 years who were reliant on a Benefit or Benefit Recipient as recorded in the Ministry of Social Development's SWIFTT¹ database

Denominator: Statistics NZ Estimated Resident Population

Notes on Interpretation

Data was provided by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) from their SWIFTT database which records information on recipients of financial assistance through Work and Income for 2000–2011. All figures unless stated otherwise, refer to the number of children who were dependent on a benefit or benefit recipient as at the end of April and provide no information on those receiving assistance at other times of the year.

Note: New Zealand level trend data is for children 0–18 years, whereas Service Centre Data may also include a very small number (n=5 in 2010) who are aged 19+ years.

To be eligible for a benefit, clients must have insufficient income from all sources to support themselves and any dependents and meet the eligibility criteria for benefits. These are:

Domestic Purposes Benefit – Sole Parent (DPB-SP) and Emergency Maintenance Allowance: This benefit provides income support for sole parents living with their dependent children under 18 years, who meet an income test and are New Zealand citizens or permanent residents. To be eligible, a parent must be 18 years or older OR have been legally married or in a civil union. A 16 or 17 year old sole parent who has never been married may be eligible to receive an Emergency Maintenance Allowance. This emergency benefit can also be paid to sole parents aged 18 and over who do not meet specific criteria for DPB-SP or other benefits.

¹ SWIFTT is the income support database developed by the New Zealand Income Support Service to calculate, provide and record income support payments and related client history [5]



Unemployment Benefits: These benefits are available to people who are available for and actively seeking full time work. Clients must be aged 18+ years or 16–17 years and living with a spouse or partner and dependent children. Those receiving unemployment benefits are subject to a full time work test, as are their spouses or partners if they have no dependent children, or if their youngest dependent child is aged 14+ years. Applicants must have continuously lived in New Zealand for two years or more. An Unemployment Benefit-Hardship is available to those who do not meet these criteria but who are not successfully able to support themselves through paid employment or by other means.

Sickness Benefit: To be eligible for a Sickness Benefit people need to be 18 years of age, or 16–17 years of age and either 27+ weeks pregnant or living with a partner and children they support. They must have had to stop working or reduce their hours because of sickness, injury, pregnancy or disability OR, if unemployed or working part time, find it hard to look for or do full time work for the same reasons. To qualify, a person's (and their partner's) income must be below a certain level and they must have a medical certificate, the first of which can last for only up to 4 weeks. For pregnant women, payments may continue for up to 13 weeks after the birth of their child. At least two years' residence is required, though a benefit may be granted in cases of hardship.

Invalid's Benefit: To be eligible for an Invalid's Benefit, people need to be 16+ years of age and unable to work 15+ hours a week because of a sickness, injury or disability which is expected to last at least two years OR their life expectancy is less than two years and they are unable to regularly work 15+ hours a week OR they are blind with a specified level of visual impairment. A doctor's certificate is required and an applicant must be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident and have lived in New Zealand for 10 years or more.

Other Benefits: In this section, Other Benefits includes DPB Women Alone and Caring for Sick or Infirm, NZ Superannuation, Veterans and Transitional Retirement Benefit, Emergency Benefits and Widows Benefit, Independent Youth Benefit, Unemployment Benefit Training and Unemployment Benefit Training Hardship, Unemployment Benefit Student Hardship. As Orphans and Unsupported Child Benefits are not means tested, they have not been included in the analysis.

Indicator Category Ideal B–C

New Zealand Distribution and Trends

Total Number of Children Reliant on a Benefit or Benefit Recipient

In New Zealand, the number of children aged 0–18 years who were reliant on a benefit, or benefit recipient, fell from 272,638 in April 2000, to 201,083 in April 2008, before increasing again to 234,572 in April 2011. A large proportion of this variation was due to changes in the number of children relying on unemployment benefit recipients, with numbers in this category falling from 49,499 in April 2000, to 5,289 in April 2008, before increasing to a peak of 16,380 in April 2010. Similarly the number of children reliant on DPB recipients fell from 188,216 in April 2000, to 158,173 in April 2008, before increasing again to 180,845 in April 2011 (**Table 1**).

Proportion of All New Zealand Children Reliant on a Benefit Recipient

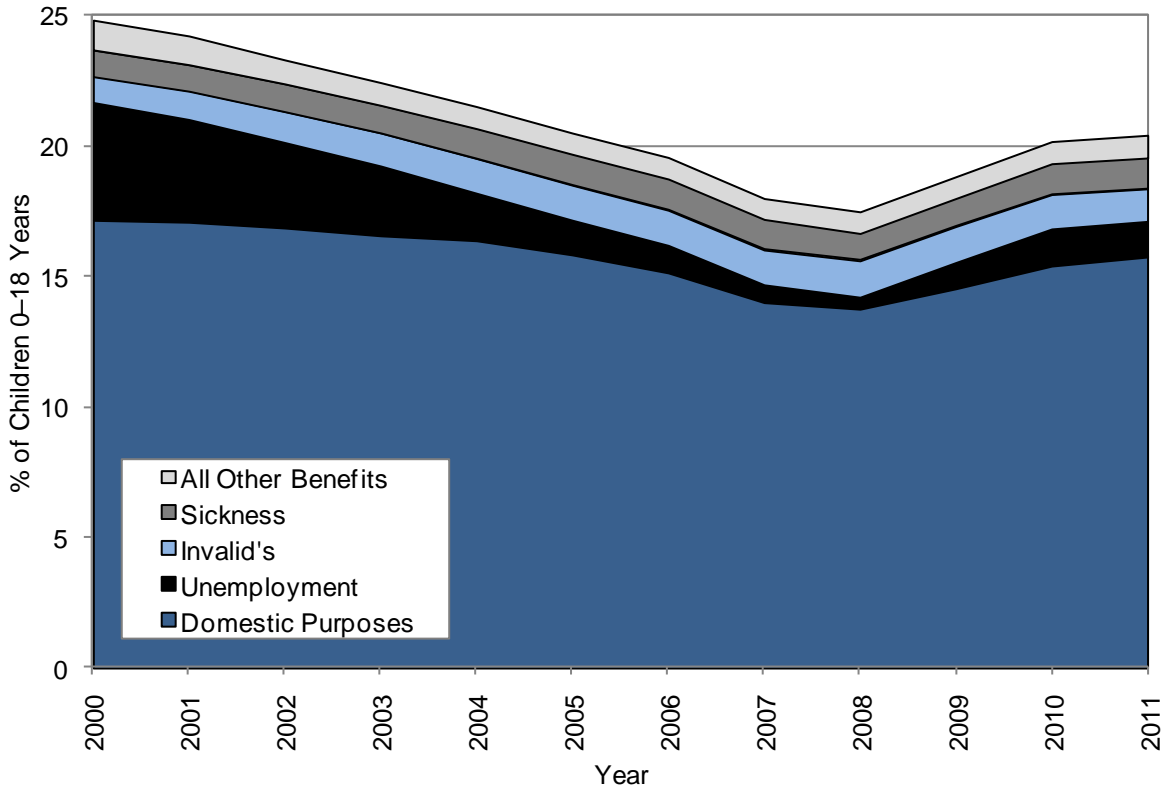
In New Zealand, the proportion of children aged 0–18 years who were reliant on a benefit, or benefit recipient, fell from 24.9% in April 2000 to 17.5% in April 2008, before increasing again to 20.4% in April 2011. A large proportion of the initial decline was due to a fall in the number of children reliant on unemployment benefit recipients (from 4.5% of children in 2000 to 0.5% in April 2008 → before increasing to 1.4% in April 2011). While the proportion of children reliant on DPB recipients also fell (17.2% of children in April 2000, to 13.8% in April 2008, before increasing to 15.8% in April 2011 (**Figure 1**)), the rate of decline was much slower than for unemployment benefits, meaning that in relative terms, the proportion of benefit dependent children reliant on DPB recipients actually increased, from 69.0% of all benefit dependent children in April 2000, to 77.1% in April 2011 (**Table 1**).

Age Distribution

During April 2011, the proportion of children reliant on a benefit, or benefit recipient, was highest for those 0–4 years of age. Rates then tapered off gradually during middle-late childhood and early adolescence, and then very steeply after 17 years of age (**Figure 2**).

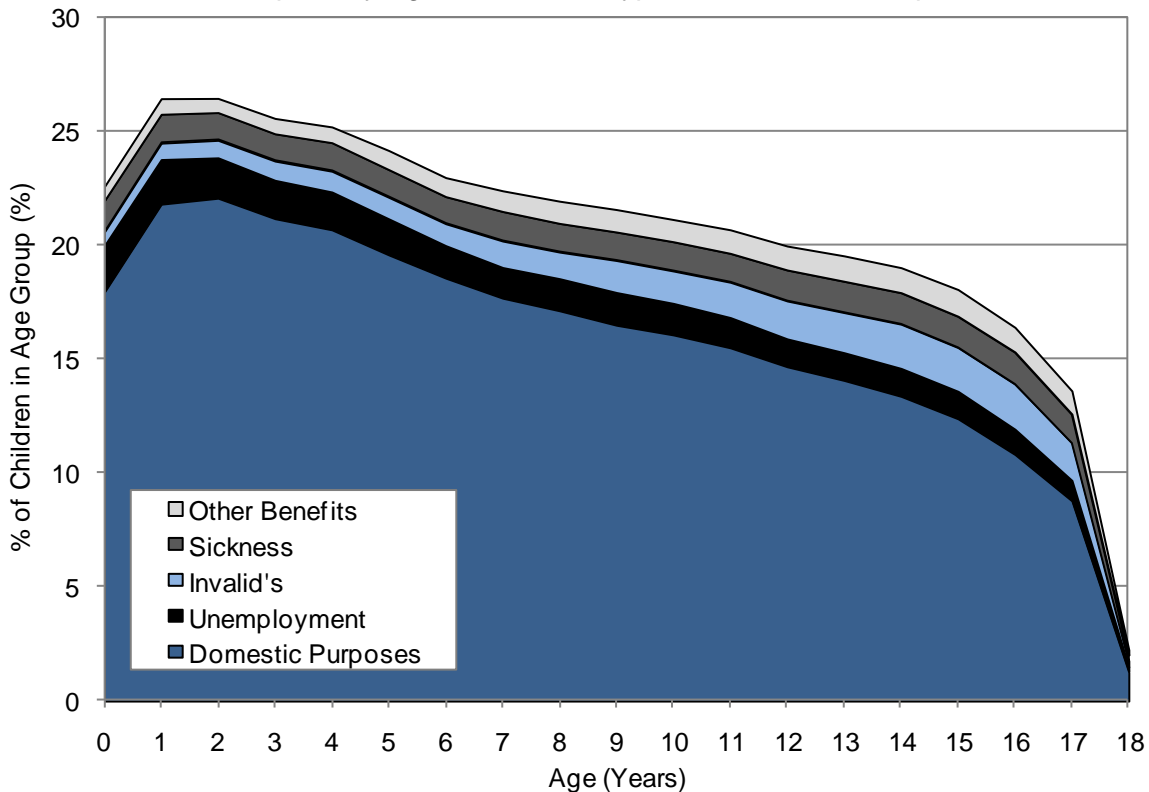


Figure 1. Proportion of All Children Aged 0–18 Years Who Were Reliant on a Benefit or Benefit Recipient by Benefit Type, New Zealand April 2000–2011



Source: Numerator: Ministry of Social Development; Denominator: Statistics NZ Estimated Resident Population. Note: For Composition of Other Benefits, see Methods Section; Orphans and Unsupported Child Benefits excluded.

Figure 2. Proportion of New Zealand Children Aged 0–18 Years Who Were Reliant on a Benefit or Benefit Recipient by Age and Benefit Type, as at the end of April 2011



Source: Numerator: Ministry of Social Development; Denominator: Statistics NZ Estimated Resident Population. Note: For Composition of Other Benefits, see Methods Section; Orphans and Unsupported Child Benefits excluded.



Table 1. Number of Children Aged 0–18 Years Who Were Reliant on a Benefit or Benefit Recipient by Benefit Type, New Zealand April 2000–2011

Year	Domestic Purposes		Unemployment		Invalid's		Sickness		All Other Benefits		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
New Zealand											
2000	188,216	69.0	49,499	18.2	11,120	4.1	11,295	4.1	12,508	4.6	272,638
2001	187,791	70.5	43,245	16.2	12,122	4.5	11,253	4.2	12,117	4.5	266,528
2002	187,207	72.3	36,342	14.0	13,219	5.1	11,983	4.6	10,209	3.9	258,960
2003	186,184	73.8	30,067	11.9	14,225	5.6	12,119	4.8	9,798	3.9	252,393
2004	185,610	76.0	20,663	8.5	15,053	6.2	13,182	5.4	9,572	3.9	244,080
2005	180,035	77.2	15,134	6.5	15,214	6.5	13,636	5.8	9,261	4.0	233,280
2006	172,995	77.4	12,069	5.4	15,332	6.9	13,797	6.2	9,430	4.2	223,623
2007	160,634	77.8	7,819	3.8	15,247	7.4	13,515	6.5	9,172	4.4	206,387
2008	158,173	78.7	5,289	2.6	15,962	7.9	12,128	6.0	9,531	4.7	201,083
2009	167,142	77.2	11,581	5.3	15,800	7.3	12,482	5.8	9,573	4.4	216,578
2010	177,226	76.3	16,380	7.1	15,116	6.5	13,752	5.9	9,757	4.2	232,231
2011	180,845	77.1	15,711	6.7	14,273	6.1	13,748	5.9	9,995	4.3	234,572

Source: Ministry of Social Development. Note: % refers to % of children relying on benefit recipients, rather than % of all children; Other Benefits includes DPB Women Alone and Caring for Sick or Infirm, NZ Superannuation, Veterans and Transitional Retirement Benefit, Emergency Benefits and Widows Benefit, Independent Youth Benefit, Unemployment Benefit Training and Unemployment Benefit Training Hardship, Unemployment Benefit Student Hardship (Orphans and Unsupported Child Benefits excluded).

Summary

In New Zealand, the proportion of children aged 0–18 years who were reliant on a benefit, or benefit recipient, fell from 24.9% in April 2000 to 17.5% in April 2008, before increasing again to 20.4% in April 2011. A large proportion of the initial decline was due to a fall in the number of children reliant on unemployment benefit recipients (from 4.5% of children in 2000 to 0.5% in April 2008 → before increasing to 1.4% in April 2011). The proportion of children reliant on DPB recipients also fell, from 17.2% of children in April 2000, to 13.8% in April 2008, before increasing to 15.8% in April 2011.

References

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