

**Case Worker's Perspectives of Ontario's Social Assistance Program During the COVID-19
Pandemic**

Practice-Based Research Paper

Morgan Parnell

Kendra Pitt

School of Social Work, York University

April 6th, 2021

Abstract

This study explores seven Ontario Works case workers' perspectives of the social assistance program in Ontario, Canada, during the novel coronavirus pandemic 2019 (COVID-19). Rooted in a critical paradigm, this research was guided by the following research questions: How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced case worker's perspectives on the effectiveness of Ontario's income support program? What gaps do case workers identify in this system and how do they think they would be best addressed?

Data for this study was generated through the use of semi-structured interviews and the major findings that emerged include 1) Challenges clients faced while transitioning to virtual service delivery highlight lack of communication and support; 2) COVID-19 emphasizes Ontario Works' universal service delivery approach and the inability to support people with complex needs; 3) The implementation of CERB highlights Ontario Works' inflexible program requirements, insufficient assistance rates and who is defined as deserving versus underserving during the pandemic; and 4) Quality of case management service delivery could be improved if case workers experienced less stress, more flexibility and more support from the organization. Participants also identified two major recommendations to address these gaps, including the implementation of a wraparound, wholistic, mixed-methods model that offers financial amounts that meet MBM and inflation, and consult welfare recipients and Ontario Works case worker's and involve them in the decision-making process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction	5
Significance of Research	5
Methodology and Theoretical Framework	7
Research Design	10
Ethical Concerns.....	13
Reflexivity.....	14
Overview of Chapters’	16
Chapter 2. Literature Review	17
Cursory to the Income Support Program in Ontario.....	18
Ontario Works (OW)	20
Impact of Economic Crises on Low-Income Individuals.....	21
Sacrifices and Reduced Quality of Life	21
Working Poor and Structural Economic Inequality.....	23
Urban vs. Rural Poor	25
Disproportionate Impacts on Women	26
Impacts on Children	27
Critiques and Pre-Existing Gaps in Social Assistance in Ontario	28
Inadequate Income Payments & Counterproductive Policies	28
Gendered Implications.....	29
‘Individual Deficiency’ & Restricted Citizenship.....	30
Accessibility Issues	31
COVID-19 and the Social Assistance Program	34
Conclusion and Intervention.....	35
Chapter 3. Findings, Analysis and Discussion.....	39
Challenges transitioning to virtual service delivery.....	39
Lack of Communication Regarding Transition	40
Lack of Transparency and System Navigation Support.....	41
Potential Mitigating Effects of Positive Relationships with Case Workers	42
Inability to support complex needs: limits of universal service delivery approach.....	44
challenges for people with multiple barriers to employment.....	44
Unrealistic expectations and universal approach create strain during pandemic	48
CERB highlights ow’s limitations.....	50

Inflexible program requirements and unchanged assistance rates – a commitment to anti-fraud...	50
CERB more accessible and financially secure	51
Less stress and more flexibility/support could improve Quality of case management services.....	52
Lack of pre-pandemic planning and increased expectations exacerbate case management challenges	53
Virtual service delivery offers case managers more flexibility and work-life balance	54
Increased support would increase staff performance.....	55
Recommendations	57
A wraparound, wholistic, mixed-methods model that meets inflation.....	57
Consult welfare recipients and case workers	60
Chapter 4. Conclusion	64
Limitations	65
Recommendations	66
Future Research	67
References	69
Appendices.....	75
Appendix 1. Ethics Forms.....	75
Appendix 2. Ethics Approval	94

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Practice-based Research Paper is to explore potential gaps in Ontario's social assistance program, Ontario Works (OW), that have emerged due to implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. I centre case workers' perspectives of the Ontario Works program as their role affords them an understanding of the challenges low-income individuals face during the pandemic, along with the organizational policies, practices and mandates that influence service delivery at the structural level of the program. Therefore, their unique positionality helps them identify the gaps that have emerged during the pandemic and any recommendations to address these gaps. Critical social work theory and an intersectional framework are used to understand the gaps that case workers feel exist in the Ontario Works program, and to emphasize the structural oppression and systemic racism that is embedded in these gaps. The following questions guide this research: How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced case workers' perspectives of the effectiveness of Ontario's social assistance program? What gaps do case workers identify in this system and how do they think they would be best addressed?

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

Minimal literature on the impact of COVID-19 on low-income Canadians exists thus far considering the novel nature of the topic, however grey literature that does exist demonstrates that the economic impact of COVID hits low-income individuals the hardest (Grooms, Ortega & Rubalcaba, 2020.; Joyce & Xu, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020; Rigolini et al., 2020; "Wilson," 2020). In addition, plenty of research has been conducted to examine the impact that other economic crises, such as the Great Recession, has had on low-income individuals around the globe. The research shows that those experiencing poverty prior to the crisis experience disproportionate

effects, as they lack financial cushion and material resources to adapt to increasing prices and strain (Devarajan & Kasekende, 2011; Espey et al., 2010; Lankin & Sheikh, 2012; Parrott et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2008; “Statement on the Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 2020). Ruel et al. (2010) also indicate that of the poor, those in urban areas are at particularly higher risk as they are more likely to rely on cash income, employment, and labour markets, with limited access to agriculture and land to increase food access during times of crisis. My research adds to this body of literature by exploring the current economic crisis of COVID-19 and how this crisis has exposed gaps within Ontario’s social assistance program.

Plenty of research highlights pre-existing gaps in Canada’s social safety net and criticizes the effectiveness of Ontario’s social assistance program, however these were published prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Brewer & Gardiner, 2020; Cubrich 2020; Powell, 2020). Of the grey literature that does exist that critiques OW in the face of COVID-19, issues regarding the inadequacy of payments are emphasized. Part of the concern lies in stagnant social assistance rates during the pandemic, which results in increased financial strain for welfare recipients trying to meet their basic needs (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020; “Wilson,” 2020). The Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB), a benefit provided to those who are employed/ self-employed and affected by COVID-19, is discussed within critiques as well. Commentator note that its existence depends on the failure of existing income support and social assistance programs, such as Employment Insurance and Ontario Works, to meet the needs of abruptly unemployed and financially vulnerable individuals during the pandemic (“Wilson,” 2020). However, as mentioned, there is a lack of empirical research conducted to date on the potential gaps that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed within Ontario’s social assistance programs, so the findings within this research are extremely significant.

Recommendations to improve social assistance in Ontario are discussed by many researchers and scholars. Models such as the Universal Basic Income are discussed as alternatives to the current system that could prove effective during times of crisis (Green et al., 2020; Johnson & Johnson, 2019; Lankin & Pate, 2020; Lightman et al., 2010; “Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017; Standing, 2020). However, missing from this literature are the voices and recommendations of those who work within the system, which is why I centre the voices of Ontario Works case workers. Their recommendations are useful as funding for CERB diminishes and policymakers are making new ways forward post-COVID-19.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Neuman and Kreuger (2003), a research paradigm or approach represents different ways of looking at the world, including the ways to observe, measure, and understand social reality. There are many different paradigms or approaches to social science and although they may study the same social phenomenon, they will have very different outlooks, assumptions, and positions about the social phenomenon. A critical research paradigm is used to guide this research. The critical paradigm rejects the restrictive, objective nature of positivist paradigms and the subjective, micro-level focus of interpretive paradigms (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). In critical social science, the focus is on the conditions of social order that shape individual experiences to uncover unjust structures in the material world, with the goal of initiating social change. Under this paradigm, the subject of study is social structures and institutions rather than individuals and their subjective experiences (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). This research study fits within this paradigm because it focuses on case workers’ perspectives of the effectiveness of Ontario Works, making the subject of study the social assistance program

itself. This research recognizes that the social reality of low-income Canadians is not static, and economic crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, impacts their experience of the social assistance program.

Critical social science is political and interested in the development of new social relations, the evolution of social institutions or societies, and the causes of major social change (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). My research fits within this framework as I emphasize Ontario Works case workers' recommendations to address the gaps they think exist within the social assistance program, to underscore potential ways to evolve and develop new social relations for low-income Canadians.

Kin to the critical research paradigm is critical social work theory, which Payne (2017) describes has three elements: "a sceptical stance towards knowledge for practice, ideas critical of existing social orders and theory from sociological traditions, in particular Marxist thought, critical social theory of the Frankfurt School and postmodern and feminist thought" (p. 169). In addition, critical social work theory rests on understandings of social constructionism and draws on ideas from intersectional feminism, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive theory, so it is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, and the problematization of oppression and mobilization of these discourses (Payne, 2017; Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser, 2004). I draw on critical social work theory to critique the social order of Ontario Works and to interrogate the gaps that case workers identify within this system. In particular, critical social work theory informs the examination of social problems that stem from the structure and organization of the social assistance program (Payne, 2017). However, my utilization of critical social work theory extends further than the Marxist perspective that emphasizes structural, economic disadvantage.

I also use critical social work theory to analyze how sites of difference intersect and influence how welfare recipients experience the gaps within the social assistance program. My approach to this research also draws on the work of intersectional feminists of colour, who highlight the complexity of sites of difference, particularly because you cannot “separate race from class from sex oppression because in [their] lives they are most often experienced simultaneously” (Combahee River Collective, 1997 as cited in Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 234). The term intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw (2006) and this approach to feminism is rooted in transnational Black women activist and intellectual traditions, which has been used to inform critical social work. Crenshaw (2006) emphasizes “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 8) because it situates individuals differently within economic, social, and political worlds. This is because dimensions of class, race, sexuality, and gender converge to create multiple, interlocking forms of subordination, for example through structures of racism, class exploitation, sexual exploitation, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and colonialism (Crenshaw, 2006; Collins, 2015).

In addition, while the intersection of race, gender and class shape the experiences of Black women, there are other sites where structures of power and oppression intersect, for example within the immigration system, child welfare system and the criminal justice system. This renders Black women and immigrant women vulnerable in ways that are not reducible to economic class, and they are increasingly vulnerable in comparison to those who are racially privileged (Crenshaw, 2006). However, institutional expectations are often based on inappropriate non-intersectional contexts that do not appreciate interlocking systems of oppression, which further shapes and limits the opportunities and outcomes for women of colour (Crenshaw, 2006; Collins, 2015).

Intersectional subordination is often unintentionally the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities that creates yet another dimension of disempowerment (Crenshaw, 2006). This is valuable for this research study because it helps illuminate how the burdens of Ontario Works interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities and subordination. By failing to take into account the vulnerability and complex experiences of Black, single mothers, for example, Ontario Works positions these women to absorb the simultaneous impacts of social assistance rates that are below the poverty line and inflexible eligibility requirements that ignore structural barriers to employment, which exacerbates their underlying vulnerabilities to abject poverty, risk of intimate partner violence, contact with the child welfare system, risk of intimate partner violence, etc. Intersectionality is imperative to understand how interventions, such as financial support through Ontario Works, is ineffective when the intersectional location of welfare recipients is not considered when fashioning social assistance policies. As such, utilizing an intersectional lens allows me to use sites of difference as an entry point to this research, to understand the gaps identified within the Ontario Works program. This enables me to examine how power imbalances shape the social realities of those who access the social assistance system, and how social institutions such as Ontario Works perpetuate and maintain structures of domination, control, and inequality.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Recruitment and Sampling

Seven Ontario Works case workers were recruited to participate in this study through flyers posted on social media (Facebook, Instagram) utilizing convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability method of recruiting research participants from samples or members of the population who are available to the researcher, for example

through personal and professional network connections (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). Snowball sampling is a convenience sampling method, where existing research participants recruit future subjects by telling their friends, colleagues, etc. about the study and providing their contact information to the researcher (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). These convenience sampling methods were utilized considering they are cost and time effective.

Interested individuals contacted me to participate and I confirmed their eligibility through a brief pre-screening via email. Initial inclusion criteria included: being over the age of 18, being social work trained (minimum BSW), and having worked or are currently working at Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic (starting December 2019 to present). However, upon initiating recruitment, it was discovered that having a background in social work is not required to work at OW or ODSP, so recruiting individuals with these credentials created significant barriers. As such, this inclusion criteria were removed from the study. The researcher also faced challenges recruiting case workers from the Ontario Disability Support Program, possibly because the researcher does not have connections within this organization, so only OW case workers participated in the study.

The seven eligible participants are employed throughout the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada. One participant works in Toronto, one in Peel Region, and five work within York Region. Five participants have worked at OW for longer than five years (ranging from 5 to 11 years), and the remaining 2 participants have worked at OW for less than 5 years. Of these participants, all but one had a social service background, with either a Bachelor of Social Work, a Social Service Worker diploma, or other social science degree.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were engaged in semi-structured interviews via Zoom that were approximately 45 minutes to one hour long. Semi-structured interviews follow a more informal format and consist of open-ended questions, which allows a greater depth of discussion. It also offers the researcher greater flexibility to seek clarification, utilize probes and explore topics that stem from organic conversation (Reid, Greaves & Kirby, 2017). The researcher had a set list of research questions to cover with each participant, however a question bank of overflow questions was utilized if there was time at the end of the interview, if participants did not have answers to the other questions or if they requested reframing, for example. This was useful when discussing policy recommendations with participants, as some case workers faced challenges thinking of solutions due to a lack of involvement in decision-making. Having this flexibility allowed the researcher to reframe questions, seek clarification regarding their challenges, and then ask follow-up questions from the question bank.

The interviews were audio recorded with consent and conducted over Zoom. All audio recordings were saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not the cloud-based services. Participants were identified by a pseudonym as opposed to their name on any data collected and any identifying data (e.g., names) was removed during the transcription process. Transcription was completed by the researcher and the transcripts were saved as password protected files on the researcher's computer, separate from the audio recordings. The transcripts were permanently deleted once the audio was transcribed. The data will be kept for one year following the completion of the study and after this, the transcripts will be permanently deleted.

Interview transcripts were analyzed and coded inductively, meaning that the themes were generated from the content of the data gathered from research participants (Barbour, 2014) using

a mixed-methods data analyzing application called Dedoose. Inductive coding uses direct phrases from the data to name themes and codes. The researcher approached the data with the research questions in mind, consistently reflecting on if and how the data was answering the questions, while noting any nuances that emerged. Transcripts were reviewed several times during this process. During the first readings, the researcher highlighted bits, or freestanding portions of the data that make sense in relation to the research questions on their own. Codes, or characteristics of bits, are the words and phrases that help describe, define, and identify bits, so coding is the process of assigning a word or phrase that summarizes a section of data (bits) (Reid, Greaves & Kirby, 2017). A code book was used to explain, define, and organize evolving codes. The researcher reviewed the code book before each data analysis working session to reorient with the data and ensure that the codes were clear and consistent. Codes were grouped together when they overlapped, addressed similar data or even opposed certain data to identify significant themes (Reid, Greaves & Kirby, 2017). Notes were maintained in the code book which assisted with theme development.

ETHICAL CONCERNS

Issues regarding confidentiality were managed by storing the data securely, stripping the transcripts of identifying information and using pseudonyms. However, considering that this researcher is a social worker and some of the participants have a social work background, it was possible that some of the interviewees would be the researcher's colleague or acquaintance, posing a potential conflict of interest.

To mitigate these risks, it was made clear to all participants during the pre-screening conversation before the interview that their participation is completely voluntary. Participants were reminded that they will receive the honorarium regardless of whether they choose to

withdraw from the study and they were reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any time – before, after or during the interview. Participants were also sent their honorarium, which was an electronic coffee gift card of their choosing, before the interview commenced so they did not feel pressured to complete the interview. The researcher confirmed that any such decision to withdraw participation will have no bearing on the existing relationship or any future relationships with participants.

REFLEXIVITY

As discussed by Gringeri, Wahab and Anderson-Nathe (2010), reflexivity involves conceding that knowledge and research is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced and that it is grounded in the social location and biography of the researcher and participants. Therefore, utilizing critical reflexivity is imperative to examine the impact that I have as the researcher on the research process. Beckman (2014) describes reflexivity as the process that the researcher uses to engage in self-reflection about their thoughts, feelings, values, biases, experiences, and theoretical models to reveal different types of knowledge, hidden privilege, and identify power differentials that impact research design.

Prior to conducting this research study, I reflected on my motivation and interest to conduct this research. It is apparent that I am drawn to this topic of study due to personal experience that is illustrative of the challenges that families and individuals face while accessing Ontario Works. I understand how inadequate social assistance payments can perpetuate experiences of poverty and how gender-neutral social assistance policies fail to recognize the gendered experience of social assistance or single mothers' multiple barriers to employment. I understand the far-reaching implications that this can have for individual survival and well-being, and subsequently on child rearing and development. As such, I come to this research with

a politically informed curiosity to situate and contextualize my experience, and to explore the variable experiences of those who navigate the system during COVID-19. The objective of this research is inherently political as it is fueled by a desire to expose how the social assistance system does not meet the needs of low-income and financially vulnerable individuals, with the goal of advocating for structural change and reformation that acknowledges how social processes within OW reproduce oppression and inequality.

It is evident, then, that my personal experience and political intentions, as well as my social location and identity, influence this research. As a critical social worker, I come to this research from a sceptical stance of neoliberalism, capitalism, and the settler-colonial state because I have educational knowledge of the power mechanisms that organize oppressive, hierarchical social structures that rely on the domination and control of ‘undesirable identities’ (such as welfare recipients) to maintain unequal social relations. This scepticism is also fueled by my personal contact with the social assistance system, as I felt the lived, material impacts of being treated as undesirable and pushed to the margins. However, I simultaneously experience privilege along dimensions of race, sexuality, and ability, which allows me to understand the intricate workings of power and how it operates to influence this research as well. The power and privilege I experience allows me to benefit from the subjugation of marginalized identities through processes of neoliberalism, capitalism, and colonialism, and I strive to use this research to highlight these inequities and interrogate how societal structures, such as Ontario Works, are designed to reproduce disadvantage and maintain the marginalization of specific identities across the intersections of gender, age, class, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity (Smith-Carrier, 2017). The critical research paradigm and critical social work theory were used as means to this end, as this theoretical framework and methodology align with my personal and professional

practice values. Throughout the research process, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity by maintaining a research journal where I noted my thoughts, feelings, actions, and reflections. I noted what knowledge I bring to the research, the knowledge that I produced throughout, and how I experienced the research and reflexivity process, in attempts of being transparent with my subjectivity.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS'

The following section provides an overview of existing literature on the impacts of economic crises on low-income individuals, as well as the pre-existing and emergent gaps in Ontario Works since the introduction of COVID-19. Thereafter, Chapter 3 reviews major themes and findings with a discussion of how they relate to existing literature. This paper will end with a conclusion which provides an overview of this work, emphasizing the limitations of this study and areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative research study explores the perspectives of case workers working with low-income individuals within the Ontario Works (OW) program in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions guide this research: How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced case worker's perspectives on the effectiveness of Ontario's social assistance program? What gaps do case workers identify in this system and how do they think they would be best addressed? The following section provides an overview of relevant literature and a cursory to the social assistance program in Ontario.

This literature review analyzes the main themes identified within literature that examines the impacts of economic crises on low-income individuals, as well as the pre-existing and emergent gaps in Ontario Works. Minimal literature on the impacts of COVID-19 on low-income Canadians and the potential gaps that COVID-19 has exposed within the Canadian social safety net exist thus far, considering how novel the topic is. However, plenty of research has been conducted to examine the impacts that other economic crises, such as the Great Recession and the financial crisis of 2007-08, has had on low-income individuals. In addition, plenty of research has been conducted on the gaps and pitfalls of Canada's social assistance programs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, these findings were included within the scope of this literature review to understand how COVID-19 has potentially impacted low-income Canadians and the potential gaps that the crisis has exacerbated or exposed within this context.

Section one of this literature review provides a cursory to the social assistance program, or income support program, in Ontario. Section two examines the emergent themes within literature on the impact of economic crises on low-income individuals, including: 1) Sacrifices and Reduced Quality of Life; 2) Working Poor and Systemic Economic Inequality; 3) Urban

Poor versus Rural Poor; 4) Disproportionate Impacts on Women and; 5) Impacts on Children. Section three reviews the critiques and pre-existing gaps and pitfalls of the social assistance program in Ontario, including: 1) Inadequate Income Payments and Counterproductive Policies; 2) Gender Implications; 3) ‘Individual Deficiency’ and Restricted Citizenship; 4) Accessibility Issues; 5) Unresponsiveness to Individual Needs and; 6) COVID-19 and the Income Support Program.

CURSORY TO THE INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAM IN ONTARIO

Many changes have been made to the administration of social assistance in Canada since the 1990’s. Under the federal Liberal government in the 90’s, the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP), which granted a universal, needs-based social safety net and welfare policies that did not force recipients to work for welfare benefits, was dismantled and replaced with the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST). The CHST shifted responsibility for social services from the federal to the provincial governments. Provincial governments now receive block funding and the freedom to allocate funds to social services like healthcare, education, and welfare, as they see fit, with no standards from the federal level. The Mike Harris Ontario Conservative government took advantage of this shift to launch the Ontario Works Act of 1997, institute workfare, increase regulation, restrict eligibility, and implement other neoliberal policies that reflect a more stringent welfare system (Maki, 2011). It is important to note that these changes were supported and facilitated by the larger neoliberal context that advocates for free markets and maximizing profits by providing capitalists with greater freedoms and weakened government restrictions, with the justification that increased market profits will have a trickle-down effect, reduce poverty, and diminish the need for social services such as welfare (Maki, 2011). However, as Wendy Brown (2005) argues, neoliberalism is not just a mode of organizing the

economy, the state, or relationship between the two. It is also a form of governmentality that “produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social” (p. 35). With an increased emphasis on individualization comes a decreased consideration of structural inequalities, and neoliberal policies do this while treating individuals as non-gendered, classless and race-less ‘workers’ with the goal of exploiting their labour for wage.

Within the context of Ontario Works and the OWA (1997), neoliberal workfare policies and values of personal responsibility, freedom and choice obscure the structural barriers that shape people’s lives and impact their ability to obtain employment (Pinto, 2010). Such assumptions disregard local labor market conditions, work practices or implications of racism and discrimination, and subsequently rely on standards of job performance that reflect the white, male, able bodied, independent citizen (Pinto, 2010).

Today, social assistance programs vary across provinces as they are still funded and administered at the provincial level (Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020). In Ontario, social assistance continues to be a workfare program of last resort that is intended for those who are in need and have already exhausted other sources of financial support. Ontario residents can receive financial support through two income support programs: Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) (Adams, Chow & Rose, 2018; Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020). The maximum amount of assistance that someone can receive depends on the program, family type (such as single adult, single parent and couples), as well as disability status (Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020). Employment Insurance benefits and additional avenues of support are available through the tax and transfer system in various forms such as child benefits, sales tax benefits and other government benefits and credits (Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020), but this literature review will focus on Ontario Works.

ONTARIO WORKS (OW)

Eligibility for Ontario Works depends on meeting asset and income-cut offs and an agreement to participate in an active labour-market program. Recipients are assigned to a program after being connected with a caseworker and the goal is to help individuals secure employment and cease dependence on social assistance. Employment assistance programs include job-search assistance and job placements, or skills and education training (Adams et al., 2018; Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020). There are no limitations on the length of time recipients can access the program, and exit is voluntary as long as their eligibility is maintained (Adams et al., 2018). Individuals on Ontario Works receive financial assistance for basic needs and shelter. Those eligible for Ontario Works are also eligible for a variety of supplemental benefits, including housing related benefits, and health insurance such as drug coverage (Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020).

Municipal governments within each city in the GTA administer the Ontario Works program to low-income individuals. For example, the municipal government of the City of Toronto delivers the Ontario Works program to low-income individuals living in Toronto according to the *Ontario Works Act* (Gazso, 2020; City of Toronto, 2017a), as does Peel Region, etc. All applicants are qualified based on the same eligibility criteria. For example, as outlined by the City of Toronto, to qualify for OW an individual must be living in Toronto and have status in Canada, be over the age of 18 (except in special circumstances), be in financial need, and be “willing to make reasonable efforts to find, get ready for or keep a job” (2017a). If approved, the individual will be assigned a caseworker and the office they receive assistance from is dependent on their postal code (City of Toronto, 2017a).

IMPACT OF ECONOMIC CRISES ON LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS

The following section examines the emergent themes within literature on the impact of economic crises such as the Great Depression and the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income individuals. Themes include: 1) Sacrifices and Reduced Quality of Life; 2) Working Poor and Structural Economic Inequality; 3) Urban versus Rural Poor; 4) Disproportionate Impacts on Women; and 5) Impacts on Children.

SACRIFICES AND REDUCED QUALITY OF LIFE

Low-income individuals are harder hit during economic crises, and they are forced to make sacrifices that impact their quality of life. Evidence from past economic crises suggest that those who are poor are likely to be disproportionately impacted as they lack room for maneuver (Devarajan & Kasekende, 2011). Prabhakar reports that in the UK, many households have faced falls in income during the COVID-19 pandemic, but poorer households are less able to cope because a larger part of their household budget is spent on essential items (2020) and they are less likely to have a financial cushion, or savings, to rely on (Parrott et al., 2020).

Espey et al. (2020) report that during economic crises, the prices of essential items increase so in response, lower-income households change their spending patterns and more of their budget is spent on food. To compensate, these households make sacrifices by reducing expenditures on other, predominantly nonessential, goods and services. However, Silva et al. (2008) find that the share of the budget spent on health services and education also declines, especially for the poorest, showing that some families are forced to cut back on the essentials too (Espey et al., 2010). The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights released a statement (2020), that highlights how individuals in poverty cannot afford to purchase goods and services in the private market during economic crisis and they might not have the

resources to follow public health measures, such as those given during the COVID-19 pandemic, putting them at increased risk (Frances Lankin & Pate, 2020).

Brewer and Gardiner (2020) suggest that to cope during economic crises, lower-income families are more likely to take on new debt, borrow from friends or family, or cut back on saving because they lack access to more formal financial support. They add that higher-income families do not necessarily experience greater income falls but they are less likely to experience a reduction in spending (Brewer & Gardiner, 2020). Thus, they conclude that economic crises have more marked negative effects on the living standards of lower-income working-age families (Brewer & Gardiner, 2020). Espey et al. (2010) similarly report that the living standards of low-income individuals and families are impacted during times of crisis as they become increasingly isolated. It was noted that while poor people rely heavily on their social networks, these tend to be 'horizontal', or mostly consisting of other people in poverty. As a result, the help they can provide is limited during economic crises (Espey et al., 2010), so lower-income individuals might be forced to make social sacrifices. Other research shows that the quality of life of low-income individuals is impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic as lockdowns have restricted several services that low-income people rely on such as food banks and public transit. High costs of delivery and private transportation push their financial limits (“In Time of Crisis, Gaps in Disability Aid Exposed,” 2020), encouraging them to either make sacrifices or experience increased financial strain to continue accessing these services. Lower income individuals are also more likely to work longer hours or take on supplementary, risky work to make ends meet, demonstrating a sacrifice that can further exacerbate the work and household demands, stress, and health implications they experience (Espey et al., 2010).

WORKING POOR AND STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

The employment status of some groups of people is disproportionately impacted during times of economic crisis. Economic crises lead to historic reductions in income and earnings for vulnerable workers and families at the bottom of the job queue, who's work might be considered tenuous or lesser valued. This is evidenced by the fact that their jobs are harder hit during recessions (Hoynes et al., 2012; Sherman, 2013). Parrott et al. (2020) find that individuals who are low-income are more likely to see their earnings fall or experience unemployment during COVID-19 and Joyce and Xu (2020) suggest that low-earners are seven times as likely as high earners to have worked in a sector that is shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Groups severely disadvantaged are precarious workers in the gig economy or informal sector, or other groups of workers who face retrenchments or loss of wages and social benefits, including domestic workers in many countries (“Statement on the Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 2020).

Prior work on recessions show that the impacts are felt most strongly by men, Black and Hispanic workers, youth, and low-education workers. What is interesting in these findings is the impacts on men, which might be because men experience more cyclical labour market outcomes due to their employment in jobs related to construction and manufacturing (Bitler & Hoynes, 2015; Hoynes et al., 2012). Although unemployment has spiked overall during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bitler et al. (2020) report that unemployment rates for those with lower levels of education, and for Black and Hispanic individuals have risen even higher. These findings are important, considering how socially constructed categories of race and gender inform economic access and security. In a study on the patterns of economic exclusion in Canada's labour market from 2000 to 2010, Lightman and Good Gingrich (2010) found evidence of “persistent disadvantage tied to immigration status, race, and gender in Canada's labour market;

specifically, individuals identified as Black, South Asian and Arab, as well as recent immigrants and women, fare the worst” (p. 1). Further, they discuss that poverty rates and economic exclusion are inextricably linked to the organization and function of labour markets and social welfare systems. With Canada’s polarized labour market and insufficient social welfare programs, it creates the ideal conditions for economic exclusion of marginalized identities such as individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (Lightman & Good Gringrich, 2010). With that being said, it is understandable that immigrants, newcomers, Black people, and other racialized individuals disproportionately access the social assistance program.

These findings suggest that economic crises such as the Great Recession and COVID-19 exacerbate pre-existing experiences of systemic inequality as the effects are disproportionately felt by marginalized groups who experience disadvantage within intersections of racial/ethnic minority status, class, and occupation (Bowleg, 2020). Applying the theoretical framework of intersectionality can be used to understand this, and can be used to understand how Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities are impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic considering that they are overrepresented amongst low-income individuals. In particular, it can be used to understand the challenges that Black, sole support mother’s face in the midst of the pandemic, and how they might experience supplemental barriers navigating the Ontario Works program due to competing caregiving demands, racism and discrimination that impacts job obtainment, and even racism, discrimination and stigma accessing healthcare services during the pandemic. As described by Bowleg (2020):

Intersectionality, a critical theoretical framework, provides an indispensable prism through which to examine the intersectional effects of COVID-19. Intersectionality highlights how power and inequality are structured differently for groups, particularly

historically oppressed groups, based on their varied interlocking demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, etc.). COVID-19 reveals disproportionate risk and impact based on structured inequality at intersections of racial/ethnic minority status and class, as well as occupation. Many of the riskiest and most stressful frontline jobs deemed essential during COVID-19 offer low pay and are occupied by people at the most marginalized intersections: racial/ethnic minorities, women, and undocumented workers. These intersections contrast starkly with those of the predominantly White, middle-class, and rich people who hire, legislate, and direct the conditions under which the “essential” work and, in the COVID-19 era, live or die (p. 2).

Lankin and Pate (2020) discuss that individuals who are homeless or fleeing domestic abuse, and BIPOC communities — particularly Indigenous communities — are especially vulnerable and at increased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic due to minimal financial resources, unsafe shelter accommodations, decreased ability to follow public health measures, concentration in care work, etc.

URBAN VS. RURAL POOR

There is a distinction in the literature between the impact of economic crises on the urban versus rural poor. Friedman and Levinson (2001) find that although almost every household is impacted by economic crisis, the urban poor fare worse. Ruel et al. (2010) explain that the poor are vulnerable because they are generally net food buyers, they rely on cash income for food security, spend a large proportion of their total budget on food, and have little access to agriculture or land to increase their food access during economic hardship. In addition, the greater vulnerability of the urban poor is characterized by their reliance on employment and labor markets, greater labor force participation of women outside the home with potential consequences for child-care, the larger availability of services but larger inequalities in access,

and the changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns associated with nutrition transition (Ruel et al., 2010). The ability of poor rural households to produce food mitigates the consequences of inflation during economic crisis (Friedman & Levinsohn, 2001).

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS ON WOMEN

Findings suggest that women are especially vulnerable during economic crises. Espey et al. (2010) suggest that this is due to women's reproductive work and household duties and the nature of their paid work. Nandal (2011) reports similar findings and adds that women experience increased burden during economic crises because they are concentrated in vulnerable employment and are more likely to be unemployed than men, they tend to have lower employment and social security benefits, receive less pay, and have unequal access to control of economic and financial resources. In addition, Espey et al. (2010) suggest that demands on women's time increase under conditions of economic crisis due to deepening household poverty and increased domestic demands. According to Ruel et al. (2010), female-headed households suffer a larger proportional decline in welfare than male-headed households, potentially because they are often poorer to start with, they are primary caregivers for children, and they tend to spend proportionally more on food. Bitler et al. (2020) report that low-income families are more likely to be headed by a single mother and a higher share of women lose their jobs during recessions. Within the current context, Joyce and Xu (2020) report that women are about one third more likely to work in a sector that is shut down, as compared to men, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, women who are variably socially located experience these disproportionate impacts differentially, considering that dimensions of class, race, sexuality, and gender converge to create multiple, interlocking forms of subordination (Crenshaw, 2006; Collins, 2014). As such, some women might be at greater risk than others during economic crises, depending on their underlying, pre-existing vulnerabilities, and others might experience

protective factors such as racial privilege. Therefore, it is important to appreciate the nuances and heterogenous experiences navigating economic crises, between and amongst minority groups.

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

Children living in poverty are at increased risk during times of economic crisis. Of those impacted during economic crises, Friedman and Levinsohn (2001) argue that households with young children suffer the most. This may be because they experience increased expenditures and strain trying to meet children's needs (Friedman & Levinsohn, 2001; Suci, 2006). With increasing food prices during economic crises, families experience reduced purchasing power to obtain food and during COVID-19, closures of schools and childcare centres have meant that large numbers of low-income children have lost access to free- or reduced-price meals (Bitler et al., 2020). This demonstrates that economic crises aggravate monetary poverty among children and their families (Cockburn et al., 2014) and impact family's ability to meet children's nutritional needs (Friedman & Levinsohn, 2001; Suci, 2006). Espey et al. (2010) argue that the health and developmental outcomes of these children are at risk, owing to the lasting effects of malnutrition.

Children in poverty are also at risk of not having access to health services due to financial strain during economic crises, which can negatively impact health and development outcomes (Espey et al., 2010; Suci, 2006). In addition, Espey et al. (2010) discuss that during times of economic crisis, familial stress increases which impacts one's mental health and psychological well-being. As a result, this influences the quality of nurturance, care and protection parents can provide. Subsequently, Espey et al. (2010) suggest that educational outcomes and school attendance are negatively affected, and domestic violence, child abuse and neglect may also increase during economic crises which has widespread consequences for children.

CRITIQUES AND PRE-EXISTING GAPS IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN ONTARIO

This section reviews the critiques and gaps of the social assistance program in Ontario. These themes emphasize the gaps existing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with a brief focus on how COVID-19 has exposed additional pitfalls. Themes include: 1) Inadequate Income Payments and Counterproductive Policies; 2) Gendered Implications; and 3) ‘Individual Deficiency’ & Restricted Citizenship; and 4) Accessibility Issues, which includes a) Application Barriers; b) Strict Eligibility; c) First Nations Communities; d) Communication and Caseworkers; and e) Responsiveness to Individual Needs.

INADEQUATE INCOME PAYMENTS & COUNTERPRODUCTIVE POLICIES

One of the main critiques of the social assistance program in Ontario is that inadequate payments exacerbate and maintain experiences of poverty (Hamilton & Mulvale, 2019). Gazso et al. (2019) state that in 2019, the income received per month on Ontario Works fell below Statistic Canada’s after-tax low-income cut-off. Raphael (2002) and Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) also argue that ODSP payments are not sufficient to meet disabled people’s basic needs.

Smith-Carrier (2004) explains that shelter allowances and basic needs amounts have not been adjusted to meet inflation and market changes, and the increases in housing costs have outpaced social assistance rates (Kapoor, 2020; Greene-Sang, 1999; Smith-Carrier, 2017). Today, it is estimated that people on ODSP and OW receive income about 60% below the poverty line, forcing many to rely on community supports such as drop-in meal programs and foodbanks to survive (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020). The low remuneration provided by social assistance programs compromises recipients’ health and well-being (Smith-Carrier, 2017) and causes significant psychological stress and a resultant focus on basic survival (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020).

Counterproductive policies within social assistance programs in Ontario also contribute to the experience of poverty. For example, part of the needs test that forms the basis of Ontario Works requires applicants to deplete most of their liquid and fixed assets in order to qualify for assistance (Battle et al., 2006). While on social assistance, recipients are expected to complete onerous monthly reporting of any supplemental income they receive from paid employment or informal networks, and they are only allowed to keep approximately \$200 in earnings per month before claw backs kick in (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020; Hamilton & Mulvale, 2019; Greene-Sang, 1999; Smith-Carrier, 2004). It is hypothesized that Anglo-American countries have followed the principle of providing low levels of support to avoid disincentivizing people from labor market participation (Cooke, 2009), but by doing so, Smith-Carrier states that the social assistance system “reinforces the (de-gendered, de-racialized, classless) neoliberal agenda, which at its core, reproduces the systemic causes of poverty that create participants’ need for assistance” (p. 510, 2017).

GENDERED IMPLICATIONS

Inadequate levels of assistance and support create a gendered experience of welfare (Greene-Sang, 1999). According to Orloff (2002), gender-neutral social assistance policies conceal the systemic barriers that impact mothers. Cooke (2009) describes that women might experience a ‘welfare trap’ effect due to greater difficulty transitioning from welfare to employment because of this. Ontario Works recipients are often encouraged to take the first available job to them (Gorlick et al., 1998) which might be unrealistic for women considering their barriers to employment. For example, if affordable childcare is not accessible, the job is not flexible to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, it does not include health insurance benefits, it is precarious and low-wage, and overall insufficient to support women and their children, women might resign themselves to welfare (Cooke, 2009; Mahboubi & Ragab, 2020).

'INDIVIDUAL DEFICIENCY' & RESTRICTED CITIZENSHIP

The current work-fare model of social assistance frames unemployment as an individual deficiency and preserves the rights of citizenship to those who are employed. Battle et al. (2006) explain that social assistance is rooted in the 'residualist' model of social policy that views poverty as resulting from individual failings and disregards structural issues such as limited high-paying jobs, parental poverty leading to lower educational attainment, immigration status, and limited access to resources that contribute to unemployment (Peter & Polgar, 2020; Smith-Carrier, 2017; Gazos et al., 2019). The Ontario Disability Support Program also frames disability as a personal deficiency through its reliance on the medical model. Lightman et al. (2009) discuss that ODSP guidelines use the traditional medical model of disability to distinguish biologically driven impairments in the body that render individuals employable or unemployable. Through this lens, disability is conceived as a personal deficiency, labelling them as flawed, weak, or abnormal relative to the 'normal', non-disabled population (Hosking, 2008). Consequently, Couinard and Crooks (2005) propose that under this work-fare model, the state's primary role is to discipline individuals who fail to maintain employment and economic independence in the paid workforce.

The individual deficiency model of social assistance preserves the rights of citizenship to those who are employed. Rose (1999) explains that contemporary citizenship is realized through "active engagement in a diversified and dispersed variety of private, corporate and quasi-corporate practices, of which working and shopping are paradigmatic" (p. 246). According to Smith-Carrier, "the system ascribes some social actors as normative ("self-sufficient," "wage-earners"), while marking others as deficient ("sexually irresponsible," "lazy," "welfare mothers")" (p. 512, 2017). The rights or obligations of citizenship are conditional on paid work and being able to embody the 'contributing', 'productive' and employed citizen (Bhuyan &

Smith-Carrier, 2012; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005). Individuals deemed unwilling or unable to embrace this ideal (such as those on OW or ODSP) are subject to ridicule, disgust (Soldatic & Pini, 2009), marginalization, and social exclusion (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). Smith-Carrier (2017) argues that “engagement in paid work is then the marker of the self-governing market citizen, rendering other forms of labor (i.e., unpaid care work, volunteerism) less visible (Fuller et al., 2008) and less valuable” (p. 504).

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

All of the following represent various accessibility issues within OW, including application barriers, strict eligibility requirements, insufficiency in meeting First Nations Communities’ needs, poor communication and relationships with caseworkers, and failure to respond to individual needs.

APPLICATION BARRIERS

The complicated application process for OW and ODSP makes social assistance inaccessible for some. Chouinard and Cooks (2005) describes the application process as exceedingly onerous and propose that this is potentially purposeful to dissuade people from applying. Lightman, Vick, Herd and Mitchell (2009) advise that the dense and lengthy application forms, abstract and impersonal assessment measures, intrusive questioning of income, assets, and relationships, and the verification of diagnosable impairments through expert healthcare professionals all pose barriers to candidates seeking to access the program (Smith-Carrier et al., 2017; Kneebone & White, 2009).

STRICT ELIGIBILITY

Strict eligibility criteria illuminate social assistance as increasingly inaccessible as well. Lightman et al. (2009) discuss that the Ontario Disability Support Program is dependent on fixed categories of disability to determine eligibility, which winnows out those with difficult to

diagnose impairments or those with episodic conditions. As such, the program has become narrowly drawn and more disabled people fall outside the classificatory framework (Lightman et al., 'Not Disabled Enough', 2009; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005).

FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

The system has been criticized for not being accessible to First Nations recipients. Ontario Works is delivered on First Nation reserves by 101 First Nations delivery agents but only 43 reserves currently deliver the full Ontario Works program, which includes financial support and employment assistance. This is not sufficient as it means not all First Nations communities can access the full program (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012). Such gaps in service might be related to inadequate funding provided to First Nations communities, as Lankin and Sheikh (2012) explain that the federal government funds First Nations at a lower amount per “case” (individuals or families) for the cost of administration than is envisaged in the Province’s municipal funding model” (p. 112). In terms of eligibility, some First Nations people may qualify for the program but have barriers to access and enrolment if they do not utilize the tax system (The Income Security Reform Working Group et al., 2017). Lankin and Seikh (2012) add that ODSP is often inaccessible for First Nations communities as many people have undiagnosed disabilities and therefore must access Ontario Works instead. Employment-related activities within Ontario Works are not completely accessible for First Nations individuals either, as they currently do not integrate the use of cultural or community development activities (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012).

COMMUNICATION AND CASEWORKERS

Information regarding the program is difficult to access and relationships with caseworkers are often based on policing, leaving support inaccessible as well. Battle et al. describe the system as “a complicated, rule-burdened system that is secretive” as very little information is

made available to clients or the public (Battle et al., p. 13, 2006). Gewurtz et al. (2019) add that the system is also in constant state of change, but recipients often have poor communication with their caseworkers or have difficulty contacting them, which leads to a lack of awareness of what is expected of them and what the program entails (Smith-Carrier, 2004; Greene-Sang, 1999; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). The complex rules governing eligibility, definitions of employability, amount and type of benefits, reporting requirements and monitoring of clients (Battle et al., 2006) creates a culture of intrusiveness and policing (The Income Security Reform Working Group et al., 2017; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005). Prescriptive policies morally regulate recipients and puts them under pervasive scrutiny which create barriers to building supportive relationships with caseworkers. This is counterproductive because recipients experience challenges navigating the burdensome requirements and sometimes receive financial sanctions for failing to meet expectations (Hamilton & Mulvale, 2019) which could be avoided if they were able to access support rather than scrutiny from caseworkers. Stephanie Baker-Collins (2015) emphasizes how regulation and surveillance of welfare recipients is maintained through digital technologies and on-the-ground mechanisms performed by case workers, but she highlights how workers can use bureaucratic discretion in the administration of Ontario Works in favor of clients as well, demonstrating that it is possible for workers to support their clients within the confines of the program.

RESPONSIVENESS TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Literature shows that Ontario's income support program does not meet the unique needs of those in financial need. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is taken as all OW recipients have the same expectations – to find paid employment as soon as possible (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012). As such, recipients do not receive tailored services or supports (Lightman et al., 2010). This model pressures recipients to take the first available job regardless if it will meet their personal

employment needs (Mitchell et al., 2007; Smith-Carrier, 2017; Lightman et al., 2010). Findings show that those leaving social assistance in Canada enter a world of precarious and low-paid work and welfare cycling is significant (Mitchell et al., 2007; Lightman et al., 2010). Some research also shows that the program can have adverse effects if it does not consider individual employment needs. For example, Adams et al. (2018) find that being assigned to both a structured job search and training program (which are various employment assistance supports within OW) can actually add 4.6 months to an individuals' duration on welfare and being placed in a direct job or volunteer placement adds 16.6 months. This might be because recipients are receiving structured job search assistance when they would benefit more from education and training assistance, for example. In addition, because engagement in the paid workforce is the ultimate goal, the system does not consider self-employment as a viable option for those who might experience barriers to employment, such as those with disabilities or First Nations individuals where employment opportunities are limited (Lankin, 2012).

COVID-19 AND THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Ottawa responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy. The Toronto Star proposes that this was done to fill the gaps in the income support program that COVID-19 exposed as many Canadians were not covered under the pre-existing safety net at the time of the crisis ("Wilson," 2020). However, many Canadians were already negatively impacted by the crisis when the emergency benefit was implemented, showing that the response was too slow ("Wilson," 2020). Curry (2020) advocates that this could have been avoided, had the safety net been designed to respond and support citizens through crisis. Ståhl and MacEachen (2020) explain that a flexible labour market, while advantageous to employers, poses a problem for workers who have to

survive through employment in precarious or self-employed gig jobs as social security systems are not designed to support them. This results in many being unable to qualify for income supports such as Employment Insurance due to eligibility requirements (Ståhl & MacEachen, 2020), but when the rest of the social safety net (such as OW and ODSP) cannot adapt to meet these needs either, it highlights the gaps.

CERB is a monthly payment of \$2,000 for a four month period to any worker who earned \$5,000 in the past 12 months and lost their job due to the pandemic, but this was expanded to anyone earning less than \$1,000 a month and it was available past the four month period (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020). It is important to highlight that the Ontario government determined this amount to be sufficient to meet the needs of Canadians during the pandemic. In contrast, this payment is almost double that of monthly ODSP and OW payments and social assistance recipients did not see an increase in payments during the pandemic. This demonstrates that the lives of people on social assistance are devalued (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020) and it highlights the gaps and inadequacy of income payments for those on assistance as they are unable to meet their basic needs during the pandemic. Such gaps leave individuals on Ontario Works and ODSP on the margins during times of crisis, but as one ODSP claimant named Peter Martin states, "for people like us, this is not a crisis,"... “it is just 'another' crisis (“Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020).

CONCLUSION

Minimal literature on the impact of COVID-19 on low-income Canadians exist thus far considering how novel the topic is. However, plenty of research has been conducted to examine the impact that other economic crises, such as the Great Recession, has had on low-income

individuals around the globe. The research shows that those experiencing poverty prior to the crisis are often the hardest hit, as they lack financial cushion and material resources to adapt to increasing prices and strain (Devarajan & Kasekende, 2011; Espey et al., 2010; F Lankin & Sheikh, 2012; Parrott et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2008; “Statement on the Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 2020). Ruel et al. (2010) also discuss that of the poor, those in urban areas are at particularly higher risk as they are more likely to rely on cash income, employment and labour markets, with limited access to agriculture and land to increase access to food during times of crisis (2010). I contribute to this research by conducting qualitative interviews with case workers who work at Ontario Works to strengthen the available literature on the impact economic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic has on urban, low-income individuals living in the Greater Toronto Area.

Bitler & Hoynes (2015) and Hoynes et al. (2012) suggest that marginalized groups such as those from racialized communities are disproportionately affected by unemployment rates during the Great Recession. Bitler et al. (2020) indicate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, those with lower levels of education and who are racialized (such as those who are Black and Hispanic) are also more likely to become unemployed and be negatively impacted. Articles published by Bowleg (2020) and Lankin & Pate (2020) touch on intersectionality and how systemic economic inequality has made some of these groups more vulnerable during economic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these findings, very few of the articles examined within this literature review explore how individuals with multiple barriers to employment, such as single mothers and members of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) communities differentially experience economic crises, which represents a significant gap in research. As such, I hope to intervene in this body of literature by utilizing critical social work theory to

analyze the qualitative data gathered during interviews with case workers who work with welfare recipients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many critiques of social assistance in Ontario are discussed within the literature. Researchers such as Gazso et al (2019), The Income Security Reform Working Group et al. (2017), Smith-CARRIER (2004), Smith-CARRIER (2017), Kapoor (2020) and Hamilton & Mulvale (2019) speak of the inadequate income support payments that contribute to and maintain poverty. Greene-Sang (1999), Orloff (2002), Cooke (2009), and Smith-CARRIER (2017) speak to the gender implications of inadequate income payments and the possible ‘welfare trap’ that OW creates for women, considering the lack of acknowledgement of women’s multiple barriers to employment (Cooke, 2009).

Recommendations to improve social assistance in Ontario are discussed by many researchers and scholars. Models such as the Universal Basic Income are discussed as alternatives to the current system that could prove effective during times of crisis (Green et al., 2020; Johnson & Johnson, 2019; Frances Lankin & Pate, 2020; Lightman et al., 2010; “Opportunity Knocks for Basic Income Backers,” 2020; Smith-CARRIER et al., 2017; Standing, 2020). However, missing from this literature are the voices and recommendations of those who work within the system. I centre case workers’ perspectives due to their experience providing direct services to clients on the frontlines as this provides them with an understanding of the challenges low-income individuals face during the pandemic. Case workers have a unique positionality within this context because they also understand the organizational policies, practices and mandates that influence service delivery at the structural level. Because of this positionality, case workers have a valuable perspective on the effectiveness of the current income

support program that is used in Ontario and they might have recommendations to address any gaps they feel exist.

CHAPTER 3. FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overview of the major themes that emerged from using critical social work theory and elements of intersectional feminism to analyze the data garnered from seven semi-structured interviews with Ontario Works case workers. The goal of these interviews was to identify gaps in Ontario's social assistance program that have emerged due to implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions were used to guide this research: How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced case workers' perspectives of the effectiveness of Ontario's social assistance program? What gaps do case workers identify in this system and how do they think they would be best addressed? Major themes include 1) Challenges transitioning to virtual service delivery; 2) Inability to support complex needs: limits of universal service delivery approach; 3) CERB highlights OW's limitations; 4) Less stress and more flexibility/support could improve quality of case management services. Following this analysis and discussion is an overview of case workers' recommendations to address the gaps within Ontario Works, including a wraparound, wholistic, mixed-methods model that meets inflation, and consult welfare recipients and case workers.

CHALLENGES TRANSITIONING TO VIRTUAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Workers suggested that Ontario Works recipients faced challenges transitioning to virtual service delivery during the pandemic for many reasons, including lack of communication about the transition itself and a lack of transparency and system navigation support from their case workers. However, if clients were able to maintain positive relationships with their case workers during the transition, it is possible that these negative factors could be mitigated.

LACK OF COMMUNICATION REGARDING TRANSITION

Research participants felt a notable number of welfare recipients faced challenges transitioning to virtual service delivery during the pandemic because they were unaware that in-person services had ceased. Sally explained:

In the very beginning it was really tough, people were like trying to come into the office and we had to get security, um somebody had broken into the office and was apparently sitting up there... it was terrible. And um, it was just hard for people to adjust to us not being there.

Two participants shared that they believe communication regarding the transition to virtual service delivery was provided to welfare recipients through a mass newsletter that is available in predominantly English, highlighting that this information was not widely available or accessible by the diverse clientele that OW serves. Considering that Ontario Works case workers have caseloads ranging from 200 to 400 recipients and many welfare recipients face digital access barriers, it was not feasible for case workers to individually contact all of their clients either.

For some clients who continued to mail their documents to the empty office, Charlie explained that their files would be suspended and:

They think everything is good and well, but yet we are basically marking them down as they haven't supplied the documents that they require. And it's causing a bit of frustration between them because they call in and they don't understand what's going on, they did everything right.

This highlights the negative impacts of poor communication between case workers and welfare recipients (Gewurtz et al., 2019) as individuals faced unintentional financial

consequences (Hamilton and Mulvale, 2019) for not being aware of program requirements and expectations during the pandemic.

It appears that Ontario Works welfare recipients were not treated with empathy or sensitivity during the pandemic, as the program failed to ease worries or offer stability when the world experienced largescale uncertainty. Having to utilize financial sanctions, such as suspending files during the pandemic also demonstrates how top-down power is utilized to govern and manage welfare recipients (Battle et al., 2006; Maki, 2011), regardless if it creates additional stress, strain and barriers while they navigate a global crisis.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND SYSTEM NAVIGATION SUPPORT

Many welfare recipients face digital access barriers as they do not have access to internet/data, technological devices, or having computer literacy skills, which means they face considerable barriers fulfilling program requirements and communicating with their case workers during the pandemic. Charlie shared that the biggest gap he encountered during the pandemic was the “overwhelming belief that everyone has access to technology, and everyone knows how to use it.” Participants explained that there was a temporary discretionary benefit that recipients could access during the pandemic to assist with technology barriers, however protocol requires recipients to directly request these benefits from their case workers. Grace explained that discretionary benefits “are a little bit more hidden from our clients [...] because it’s not always readily available or they might not know where they can go to look” and Betty shared that the pandemic benefit “was only temporary and it was only if the clients asked. So, a lot of the clients weren’t even aware of it.” The lack of transparency regarding discretionary benefits and counterproductive policies that expect recipients to ask for these benefits exacerbate accessibility barriers during the pandemic.

These findings allude to the culture of regulation and policing Ontario Works case workers hold as they enforce rules and monitor clients to ensure ongoing eligibility is maintained (see also that Battle et al., 2006; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005; The Income Security Reform Working Group et al., 2017). Workers in this study indicated that recipients often do not receive system navigation support from their case workers due to time constraints and competing demands, while existing literature attributes this lack of support to the challenge of building supportive relationships due to the institutionalized authority workers hold (Battle et al., 2006; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005; The Income Security Reform Working Group et al., 2017). This study also exposes how counterproductive policies can restrict and limit the support that case workers can even offer their clients, despite their institutionalized authority.

POTENTIAL MITIGATING EFFECTS OF POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH CASE WORKERS

It seems that those who are able to maintain contact with their workers are able to establish a more meaningful, genuine relationship that is grounded in their shared experience of the pandemic. Elizabeth feels that this is because “people are just grasping for any kind of connection with other people” so “when we do have that opportunity to speak with them it just means a bit more for both parties.” Sally advises that because service delivery is now virtual, case management has shifted in ways that aids relationship building. For example, she shared that case workers are unable to go through bank statements for case reviews so, “it’s more trust based. It’s... you know, you tell me who you are, and I believe you. You tell me you need something, and I issue it to you.” This demonstrates that if clients are able to establish relationships with their case workers during the pandemic, they are able to access more support from them because Ontario Works surveillance mechanisms have shifted, and policing is forcibly de-emphasized. However, Sally also highlights ways that case workers can utilize their authority and empathy to positively impact clients and increase accessibility to discretionary

benefits during the pandemic. Sally shared that she offered pandemic relief benefits to all her clients and similarly, Sarah admitted that she “give[s] them whatever it is they need to get by because its hard – even harder with a pandemic.” Diva incorporates an Anti-Oppressive lens in her work as she does not:

Follow [policies] just because it’s a policy. Because if I look back at history, colonization was a policy and uh segregation was legal, and slavery was legal. So uh, just because it’s a policy doesn’t mean it’s right, so I’m one of those workers who break every Ontario Works policy to give what I need to give for my client.

As such, the negative impacts of counterproductive policies and authoritatively structured relationships can be mitigated during the pandemic if case workers adopt political stances that challenge the organization by bending rules for their clients.

These findings demonstrate the structural barriers that are created by counterproductive social assistance policies that discourage the development of authentic, supportive relationships. Even case workers recognize that welfare recipients face differential treatment and access to discretionary benefits depending on who their worker is and the case management style they uphold. This speaks to the limitations that exist when relationships are grounded in prescriptive policies that morally regulate and scrutinize clients (see also Hamilton and Mulvale, 2019). These findings offer alternatives to the current relational framework because it suggests that relationships with case workers can flourish when their role focuses less on regulation and monitoring, and more on support and understanding.

Ontario Works case workers have the opportunity to exploit Ontario Works’ lack of pandemic preparedness by taking advantage of de-emphasized surveillance mechanisms that resulted from the sudden shift to virtual service delivery and the lack of digital infrastructure to

support this. Case workers in this study utilized this de-emphasized surveillance as an opportunity to build on the shared experiences with their clients and operate from a more trust-based, understanding, and compassionate lens, for example by offering discretionary benefits to any and all of their clients. The different ways that case workers manipulate the system during the pandemic to meet their clients' needs also demonstrates how they use what Baker Collins (2015) refers to as "space in the rules," (p. 223) to use their bureaucratic discretion to positively impact their clients. A coping strategy that is adopted to overcome the gaps in the structure and administration of Ontario Works.

INABILITY TO SUPPORT COMPLEX NEEDS: LIMITS OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE DELIVERY APPROACH

Ontario Works' universal approach to service delivery does not take into account the multiple barriers that sole support parents, newcomers, individuals who are transient, BIPOC communities and those with mental health and addiction challenges face. Consequently, those with multiple barriers to employment face greater challenges navigating the program and fulfilling program requirements and expectations during the pandemic.

CHALLENGES FOR PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Participants defined individuals with multiple barriers to employment as sole support parents, newcomers, those who are transient, BIPOC communities and those with mental health and addiction challenges. Participants describe sole support mothers as facing increased barriers searching for jobs during the pandemic while also trying to navigate technology barriers and balance competing caregiver demands. Charlie mentioned that for sole support parents, COVID-19 restrictions pose additional challenges because:

Your kids now have to be home. So, if you are trying to find work, or you're trying to go to school or do things online, it's just extremely difficult to do at that point, right.

Because you don't have access to everything that you need support with, you can't put your kids in daycare so you can't focus on these kinds of things.

These findings suggest that single parents, who are more statistically likely to be single mothers, are forced to prioritize their children, leaving little time or energy to focus on OW program requirements during the pandemic. Charlie's reflection illustrates how women experience increased demands during economic crises due to deepening household poverty and increased domestic demands (see also Espey et al., 2010). Further, it also offers insight into how women's socially constructed roles as caregivers are not attended to by gender-neutral social assistance policies which do not consider women's multiple barriers to employment (Cooke, 2009; Mahboubi & Ragab's, 2020). This is an example of how gender-neutral social assistance policies negatively impact women and single mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as these expectations create more stress and fail to take into consideration their lived realities.

Newcomers were also identified as facing increased barriers trying to obtain employment as they encounter widespread delays in the processing of their immigration documentation, and they also deal with intersecting language and technology barriers. Diva explained that:

Our refugee claimant population, all of their hearings are on hold, so they haven't gotten their work permit yet to apply for work or for their student permits. They're just staying on assistance going to ESL, but we can't move them further than that.

Elizabeth stated that:

Immigrants are facing so many challenges. More than they were before COVID, right. They are coming to this country and they don't know the language, they don't have any resources, they don't have any connections...

On top of this, Sarah adds that, “Some of them had never touched a computer. They didn’t know, they weren’t computer literate.” Newcomers’ experiences during the pandemic highlight the inadequacy of utilizing an ‘individual deficiency’ lens (Battle et al., 2006) as it ignores structural issues that contribute to unemployment, and during the pandemic it ignores how competing demands of the immigration and social assistance system confine newcomers to living in poverty on OW as it is impossible to fulfil the requirements of both systems simultaneously.

Betty emphasizes that transient and homeless individuals lost informal and formal support networks during the pandemic due to social distancing measures and widespread closures of public spaces, forcing them to live in survival mode. With increased attention on meeting their basic needs and sometimes surviving on the street, this population faces additional challenges searching for and obtaining employment, challenges that individuals with fixed addresses may not encounter. Homeless individuals are at increased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic due to unsafe shelter accommodations and decreased capacity to follow social distancing measures (see Lankin and Pate, 2020), but these findings expose how Ontario Works puts homeless individuals at even higher risk during the pandemic. Expecting homeless individuals to fulfil program requirements such as searching for jobs and attending employment programs despite health and safety implications and their limited capacity to follow public health guidelines is careless, as available jobs are those that are considered “essential” which are predominately high-risk positions in health care or other service roles, and it takes their focus away from their basic needs.

Individuals with mental health and addictions challenges were also identified as experiencing increased stress and isolation during the pandemic, as informal and formal support

is limited due to service closures and lockdowns. This makes it very difficult for these individuals to simply manage their mental health and addiction challenges, let alone job search. As framed by Elizabeth, “If there aren’t any supports out there for them and if they are struggling with their mental health, then... you can’t expect them to be looking for work full-time, they’re only human too.” These narratives highlight the challenges that individuals dealing with addiction and diagnosed with mental illness face navigating the Ontario Works program when they either are not eligible for or are waiting to receive support from ODSP. Research participants also point to the ways that the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have produced and exacerbated mental distress and/or addiction, specifically due to the experience of social exclusion and global uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 virus. This extends beyond increased familial stress that is often experienced during economic crises (Espey et al., 2010) as these narratives suggest that it is the economic crises themselves that impacts the mental health of welfare recipients. Such findings can potentially be tied to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that has economic impacts, which portrays greater uncertainty and risk compared to economic crises such as the recession.

Racial minorities also experience greater barriers to obtaining employment. Diva notes that for BIPOC communities, racism, and discrimination “[impact] their mental health [...]and prevent them from accessing job opportunities.” With the rise in stereotyping, prejudice and racism that has occurred due to the stigma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic itself, it is also possible that BIPOC communities consequently face even greater difficulty securing employment during these conditions. Looking at the broader context that shapes employment experiences for BIPOC communities, statistics indicate that these groups are disproportionately represented within low-wage, precarious work. They have also fared worse during economic

crises (Bitler & Hoynes, 2015; Hoynes et al., 2012; Bitler et al., 2020) as forms of discrimination, like racism, inform their experiences (Espey et al., 2010). The findings in this study highlight the complexity of navigating neoliberal systems that ignore structural barriers and maintain unequal power relations as a minority, as BIPOC communities are cornered by interpersonal, institutional racism and structural racism.

Overall, it is evident that COVID-19 exacerbated underlying barriers to employment that sole support mothers, newcomers, those who are transient and those with mental health and addiction challenges and BIPOC communities face, however it also posed new challenges for these populations, further limiting their ability to navigate the program. Ontario Works disregards how members of BIPOC communities and women differentially experience COVID-19 as evidenced by the “one-size-fits-all” service delivery approach and continued expectation that marginalized communities fulfil standards that reflect the white, male, able bodied, independent citizen (Pinto, 2010).

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND UNIVERSAL APPROACH CREATE STRAIN DURING PANDEMIC

Case workers feel caught in the middle as they are encouraged by upper management to continue holding clients to the same requirements and expectations that they did prior to the pandemic. Elizabeth stated:

I think although supervisors will tell you, you know we have to encourage them to continue job searching and you know, trying to find ways to move forward...I think in the midst of a pandemic when you are home with multiple children trying to help them get through the day and teach them things, like there's no way you can focus on looking for work while juggling that. That's very challenging and I think sometimes the expectations that we have of our participants, especially during this time, are not realistic. And as a worker you have to fight for and advocate for your participants.

This creates strain for some workers, as mentioned by Elizabeth, because they are caught in the middle of empathizing with and understanding their clients, but they also have the expectation to uphold their responsibilities and follow policies. Diva spoke about “turning a blind eye” to inappropriate use of the program to cope with this and continue supporting her clients, suggesting that workers recognize the universal approach of social assistance and use their bureaucratic discretion to remediate this strain and tailor their approach based on the client’s situation and needs (Baker Collins, 2015). These supplemental efforts taken by case workers to try and meet their clients’ needs during the pandemic expose the limitations of universal social assistance policies that embody unrealistic expectations.

Charlie feels there is less space in the rules when it comes to policies about social assistance rates because they are fixed and set in legislation, but he recognizes that the universality of social assistance rates is limited in meeting some families’ needs during the pandemic, for example newcomers who are being taken advantage of by landlords. This reflects case workers’ limited ability to bend rules for their clients when the policies are rigid, strict, and legislated, compared to policies that are “fuzzy” and allow case workers to use their power and bureaucratic discretion to benefit their clients (Baker-Collins, 2015). This research highlights how this poses challenges, though, as some of these strict, rigid rules pose additional challenges and barriers for clients. Despite workers recognizing this, they are limited in being able to support their clients through it, as the authoritative, prescriptive, universal approach takes precedence. This mirrors existing literature that exposes a “one-size-fits-all” approach as inadequate (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012) but it offers an additional lens to understand how welfare recipients’ needs are fluid, complex, and influenced by larger societal and structural factors, demonstrating the need for more responsive services.

CERB HIGHLIGHTS OW'S LIMITATIONS

Ontario Works recipients were given minimal support during the COVID-19 pandemic and were still expected to fulfil program requirements of searching for and obtaining employment. In contrast to the implementation of CERB, which was easier for citizens to access and offered more financial stability, it demonstrates how Ontario Works recipients continue to be framed as undeserving.

INFLEXIBLE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND UNCHANGED ASSISTANCE RATES – A COMMITMENT TO ANTI-FRAUD

Despite more individuals facing financial need during the pandemic, Ontario Works eligibility and program requirements were maintained. As advised by Sarah:

I know for example some cases that I've worked on, these clients they... they had gotten laid off and they hadn't exhausted all of their resources before they came to OW um so I had to advise them to apply to EI and like this is a very tough conversation to have because you don't really want to turn anyone away when they need support but the policies that we have and the legislature that we have to follow, like this is what we are instructed to do.

Maintaining eligibility requirements that expect individuals to exhaust all resources during a global pandemic demonstrates the program's commitment to anti-fraud measures that ensure those who access the program "really need the help" or in other words, are deserving. Not only is this demeaning, but it puts recipients at increased financial vulnerability considering the amount of uncertainty surrounding the virus.

Social assistance rates remained stagnant and below the poverty line during the pandemic, but a new discretionary benefit called the Ontario Works Emergency Benefit was implemented, which offered \$100/month to single people and \$200/month to those with

dependents. This benefit was available for approximately 4 months, but recipients had to first be aware of it to request it from their case worker. Betty criticized that, “it really wasn’t a lot if you think about the cleaning supplies and wipes and all of the stuff that you needed to do, and everyone was so panicked and not knowing how it was spread.” Betty explained that as uncertainty and panic about COVID-19 spread, stores ran out of essential items, so people were forced to make multiple trips to purchase items that were sold at increased costs. From Sally’s experience, this benefit was “a big help for some folks also because for, you know, prior to the pandemic we used to cover transportation costs [...] and that was taken away and that was a big hit for a lot of people.” Charlie explained, “we took it away because there was no longer programs or buses weren’t running, things like that.” The act of retracting financial support during the pandemic demonstrates where priorities lie as anti-fraud measures are favored over recipient well-being, and it exposes how social assistance rates continue to be inadequate during global, economic crises. These findings indicate the ways that social assistance policies operate to maintain poverty, and sometimes even exacerbate it (Hamilton and Mulvale, 2019) as they are not flexible or responsive to inflation (Smith-Carrier, 2004) or the unanticipated rise in cost of living that occurs during economic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from this research study highlight how vulnerable individuals are ignored and undervalued during the pandemic and how rates are not adjusted to meet the economic reality of society. The fact that welfare recipients did not see sufficient support during the pandemic exposes how welfare recipients continue to be systematically marginalized and overlooked (“Opportunity knocks for basic income backers”, 2020; Grooms, Ortega, Rubalcaba, 2020; “Wilson”, 2020).

CERB MORE ACCESSIBLE AND FINANCIALLY SECURE

The Canadian Emergency Response Benefit was implemented by the federal government to aid Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants noted that this was more widely

available and easier to access during the pandemic. Sally advised that “no one was asking for an eligibility check” for CERB, but Ontario Works case workers were not given direction or information either, so they were unable to inform their clients. Sarah shared that regardless, “clients moved to that service and to those benefits because they were getting more money and that was something that they needed.” The implementation of CERB also encouraged Charlie to recognize how inadequate social assistance rates were as CERB amounts were significantly higher at \$2,000 a month.

Participants noted that for many welfare recipients, the social assistance rates offered during the pandemic were not sufficient to meet their needs, so they employed several strategies to navigate the system. Charlie advised that “you saw an increase and an uptake in fraud. I guess post-pandemic because clients were calling in with different uhm names and identification and applying across the board everywhere and getting money” as they were desperate for financial support. By providing individuals who were working or who lost their job during the pandemic support of \$2,000 a month while not increasing social assistance rates for welfare recipients shows who the government defines as deserving and undeserving of support, and it is clear that deservingness is attached to labour market participation. This speaks to how citizenship is restricted to those who are employed (Battle et al., 2006) but underscores how protection during a pandemic is also restricted to those who are employed.

LESS STRESS AND MORE FLEXIBILITY/SUPPORT COULD IMPROVE QUALITY OF CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Ontario Works case workers experience increased expectations and higher Key Performance Indicators during the pandemic but are not provided with adequate supports to manage the stress of their job. However, the flexibility of virtual service delivery offers case

worker's more work-life balance which positively impacts case management. The quality of case management services can be maintained if workers continue to experience this flexibility and if they receive more support from their employer.

LACK OF PRE-PANDEMIC PLANNING AND INCREASED EXPECTATIONS EXACERBATE CASE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Lack of pre-pandemic planning and increased expectations of case workers exacerbated case management challenges. Ontario Works did not have a digital system in place prior to the pandemic that would allow for seamless virtual service delivery, so workers faced several barriers while trying to adapt and provide case management services to their clients. Grace explained:

Some of the other limitations we have is we don't have the um consent yet to do a lot of emailing back and forth with our clients just because of fear of breach of privacy and also um... uploading documents. so, if say they have a benefit that they want to request where we maybe need proof of something, they can't always send us an electronic copy. So that's posed a bit of a challenge along the way.

The lack of digital infrastructure and organizational support negatively impacts engagement in some cases, and it makes managing large caseloads extremely challenging. Administrative demands are more complicated while working from home as workers have to rely on limited staff that are in-office for support with mailing letters, for example. Grace added that case workers "have the requirement to get back to people within 24 hrs and to make sure we are meeting our targets with how many appointments we are having in a day," but Sally indicated that Key Performance Indicators and targets actually increased during the pandemic, so they are expected to meet with more clients during one workday. In addition, Sally shared that workers are "constantly receiving new updates or new procedures during the pandemic because OW

didn't have a plan" so on top of managing large caseloads of 200-400 files, navigating supplemental administrative challenges, and receiving ever-changing directions, case workers are actually held to higher expectations while also trying to survive the pandemic themselves. It is important to highlight the experiences of Ontario Works case workers in this context as their voices are gravely missing from the discussion, and no empirical research has been conducted to date to determine how their work is impacted, so these findings are significant. Further research is needed to fully understand how case workers are impacted during the pandemic, because case management service delivery will be severely compromised, and clients will be negatively impacted if case workers are not provided adequate support to do their jobs.

VIRTUAL SERVICE DELIVERY OFFERS CASE MANAGERS MORE FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Some workers feel that working from home has positively impacted the quality of case management by offering more work-life balance. Charlie noted, "there has been some new technological updates to our system where clients can actually go in and manage some of the files themselves," suggesting that some of the workload is now streamlined to clients. Diva feels the pandemic nurtures more work-life balance by reducing commute time and many participants, such as Grace, spoke about crisis situations and unscheduled walk-in appointments that distract case workers in the office setting: "There's less interruption in the office, I personally find I can get a lot more work done in a day and connect with more people regularly." Some of the administrative burden has been reduced during the pandemic, for example by involving welfare recipients in the management of their own files through the online portal where they can upload files, change their address, etc. In addition, working from home during the pandemic offers case workers more flexibility with fewer distractions, which allows case workers to spend more time "having those heartfelt conversations without feeling like we have to rush appointments so

much.” Taken in totality, the changes that come with virtual service delivery appear to result in case workers feeling less stressed or rushed during the workday.

Literature that amplifies case workers’ perspectives in reimagining social assistance during economic crises is scarce. As such, these findings are significant as it outlines possibilities for change post-pandemic by centering on how case workers have experienced working from home during the pandemic. This research is at the forefront of the conversation within the current context of COVID-19, but it outlines the benefits of case workers serving a more supportive rather than punitive role. It is evident that barriers stem from prescriptive policies that shape and restrict the relationship between case workers and welfare recipients (Battle et al., 2006; The Income Security Reform Working Group et al., 2017; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005), but these findings suggest ways to overcome this. The implementation of more lenient, flexible policies that aim to reduce case worker stress and workload may increase worker capacity to provide high quality case management services to their clients, especially during unprecedented times.

INCREASED SUPPORT WOULD INCREASE STAFF PERFORMANCE

Some case workers feel they would be able to provide higher quality case management services if they received more training and support from the organization. Diva imagines this support to be in the form of increased access to responsive mental health services to minimize burnout and staff turnover, and in the form of Anti-Oppressive or cultural sensitivity training.

She explains:

There is a huge um immigrant population and um people of color, um but... the front-line case workers still continue to be predominantly white, and our supervisors maybe out of, I would say out of 20 supervisors, only 1 person of color right now as a supervisor. So, um... there’s definitely low-income clients coming in experiencing racism um or workers experiencing racism which was impacting the case management but there was not... there

was not proper support provided to us by management. So, um... and there was no cultural sensitivity training, or anti-racism or anti-oppressive approaches used in case management.

Diva suggests that workers are limited in the support they can offer clients because Ontario Works does not provide the tools needed to adequately support the diverse needs of clients and even staff. Elizabeth aligns with this critique as she feels she would benefit from increased knowledge regarding the immigration process so she can meet the needs of the newcomer population she works with. Sally shared that she would feel more supported by her employer if she received clearer communication regarding pandemic directives and expectations, as stress stems from competing demands from various levels of government and even different managers within the agency. In general, some workers feel the organization should have more resources to tap into to allow them to meet their clients' needs, because supporting clients in the areas of financial support and life stabilization is challenging when such support systems available to clients are limited.

The challenges case workers experience due to lack of support foreshadows the program's overarching goal of governing and surveilling welfare recipients, as emphasis is laid on determining ongoing eligibility, for example, rather than how to support and nurture clients' health, well-being, and strengths to aid employment obtainment. It also exposes how neoliberal policies that ignore sites of difference create tension for those enforcing these policies, as workers recognize their interventions are not responsive to clients' needs as the interventions ignore important issues of race, class, and gender. These findings expose Ontario Works' ignorance in failing to offer tailored services (Lightman et al., 2010) that would improve recipients' ability to obtain stable, secure employment that aligns with their interests, abilities,

passions, and lifestyles (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012). Finally, it also demonstrates the tensions that arise from utilizing a residualist work-fare model that ignores structural barriers to employment (Battle et al., 2006) as workers are consequently restricted to focus on individualized interventions, despite recognizing the systemic barriers to employment that their clients face.

RECOMMENDATIONS

During the interview process, research participants were asked to identify recommendations that they believe would address the gaps they feel exist within the Ontario Works program. The following section reviews the recommendations they proposed, which includes implementing a wraparound, wholistic, mixed-methods model that meets inflation, as well as consulting welfare recipients and case workers.

A WRAPAROUND, WHOLISTIC, MIXED-METHODS MODEL THAT MEETS INFLATION

Participants recommended changes to the administration and structure of Ontario Works in order to make it a wraparound, wholistic, mixed-methods model that meets inflation, which includes increasing social assistance rates and improving accessibility of supplemental benefits, implementing wraparound supports that recognize structural barriers to obtaining employment and the importance of social determinants of health, as well as integrating a mix of virtual and in-person services.

INCREASE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES AND IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF SUPPLEMENTAL BENEFITS

All participants recommended higher social assistance rates that are closer to the poverty-line, meet inflation and provide recipients with a livable income that does not force them into survival mode. Grace advocated:

I do think we need to be looking at increased funding across the board for our clients, especially in relation to housing supports. The amounts that we issue to our clients in a

month now to cover rent is not enough, it's not keeping up with the increased rate of market rent. It's just not attainable for most people.

Betty emphasized the inadequacy of discretionary benefits that are available during the pandemic, too, because:

The gap of what they're receiving to what's actually going out is bigger now because of the food costs and shelter. And I found that landlords and that weren't just asking for first and last months rent but 6 months rent at a time to secure housing and housing in York region is very like... no vacancy.

Although prices of essential goods and services, as well as shelter costs increased while vacancies dwindled, welfare recipients did not see an increase in their shelter allowances. Grace advised that if it is not possible to raise social assistance rates, then Ontario Works should improve the accessibility of supplemental benefits, specifically the digital access and transportation benefit. Other participants similarly recommended that benefits that are used to support recipients fulfil program requirements, such as the digital access and transportation benefit, should just be universal. These recommendations align with available literature that indicates that individuals in poverty are the hardest hit during economic crises (Devarajan & Kasekende, 2011; Espey et al., 2010; F Lankin & Sheikh, 2012; Parrott et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2008; "Statement on the Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," 2020), as case workers outline the challenges welfare recipients face in meeting their basic needs during the pandemic. However, the findings from this research shed light on the government's lack of response to welfare recipients during the pandemic, and it adds to available literature by centering case workers voices in discussions on how to improve the social assistance system taking into consideration the complexities of COVID-19.

WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS THAT RECOGNIZE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Participants noted that individuals with multiple barriers to employment, such as newcomers, sole support mothers, those with mental health and addiction or transiency challenges, are differentially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and differentially experience the gaps within the social assistance program. Participants recommended that Ontario Works stray from the individual deficiency model to appreciate structural barriers to employment and integrate a social determinants of health lens by implementing wraparound supports that address employment challenges holistically. Charlie recommended that Ontario Works have foundational pillars that ground clients with education, housing, mental health, and childcare supports to better assist them in becoming self-reliant:

Because if you don't meet certain needs, other needs fall. So, if you aren't housed correctly you can't focus on education, you can't focus on your kids, you can't even focus on employment. So there needs to be a focused, wraparound strategy that needs to assist with clients holistically.

Research indicates that marginalized groups such as racialized communities are disproportionately affected by economic crises (Bitler & Hoynes, 2015; Hoynes et al., 2012). The findings from this research study solidify the importance of using an intersectional lens to understand how systemic economic inequality contributes to these disproportionate effects and draws attention to how those from BIPOC communities and women are increasingly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bowleg, 2020; Lankin and Pate, 2020). Further, these findings present recommendations to address these disparities and develop more equitable social assistance policies.

MIXED MODEL WITH VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON SERVICES

Participants spoke about the positive and negative aspects of both in-person and virtual service delivery and outlined accessibility barriers within each approach. As named by Grace, it appears that a mixed-model approach that incorporates both in-person and virtual services would be desirable and beneficial as it offers engagement alternatives that meet clients' needs but also minimizes accessibility barriers. This would also provide case workers more flexibility to nurture work-life balance, and it represents a more tailored approach that addresses recipients' needs and barriers.

Ample literature points to the accessibility issues in Ontario Works, for example through the application process and strict eligibility criteria, and for First Nations communities as only 43 reserves deliver the full Ontario Works program (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017; Kneebone & White, 2009). Offering services through a mixed model approach would address some of these accessibility barriers, but it also addresses accessibility barriers that case workers identified during the specific COVID-19 pandemic context.

CONSULT WELFARE RECIPIENTS AND CASE WORKERS

Almost all participants recommended that policy makers consult welfare recipients when paving new ways forward for Ontario Works post-pandemic. Participants felt that it is imperative to hear the perspectives of those accessing the system as they are the experts in their lives and have the best understanding of what their needs are. So, including them in the decision-making process can help develop responsive, sustainable solutions.

Participants also recommended consultations with case workers or those who have front-line experience providing social assistance services to welfare recipients. Elizabeth rationalizes that, "I think it's very important to gather information from the people who are actually doing the job. Because you know, what [policy makers] may think is important isn't necessarily important

when doing the job.” Diva feels there is a significant disconnect between policies and the lived realities of service users because current legislation and policy fails to thoughtfully consider the perspectives and experiences of everyone involved:

If you are just getting your degree, you know your masters and going into policy and you have no experience working with the uh front-line population, this is the disconnect.

Front-line workers disconnected from the policy person, the frontline person disconnected from the politicians ... who are creating and implementing our policies and giving the funding, but they’ve never worked with these individuals (Diva).

Participants also emphasize the importance of preventing tokenistic inclusion of welfare recipients and case workers in the decision-making process. As Sally explained, “In a perfect world it would be nice if they would actually listen to what we have to say on the frontline, which they don’t...” Betty agreed that the consultation and involvement of welfare recipients should not be tokenistic, because they have complex needs that current policies do not acknowledge or address:

I think sometimes the clients are the best resources. And-I, there's just... there's some people that just, this is how they're going to live and they're not going to get a job and they might have mental health, but they don't acknowledge that they have mental health or disabilities or addictions even, and that... there has to be a place where they can go, too. So not everyone fits into the one box or two box or 3 boxes (Betty).

Ample literature reviews recommendations from researchers and scholars to improve social assistance in Ontario, but the findings from this research are significant considering the lack of literature that centres the voices, experiences, and recommendations of Ontario Works case workers. This research is also relevant considering it is at the forefront of the discussion

regarding possibilities for change within the current context of COVID-19. Recommendations to consult and involve case workers calls on governments to take them seriously by holding their perspectives and experiences with esteem, as they have valuable knowledge and experiences of the system during the pandemic. The direct involvement of case workers in the decision-making process could prove incredibly effective, as doing so would potentially improve program outcomes, given that services would be increasingly responsive to Ontario Works welfare recipients' needs.

CONCLUSION

In sum, it is evident that the findings from this research echo existing literature that critiques Ontario Works for maintaining and exacerbating the experience of poverty (Hamilton and Mulvale, 2019; Smith-Carrier, 2004; Smith-Carrier, 2017) through inadequate and inaccessible funds. These findings outline the limitations of universal, “one-size-fits-all” approaches to social assistance policies (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012; Pinto, 2010) and counterproductive policies (Battle et al., 2006) that sometimes inhibit welfare recipients from meeting program expectations.

These findings add to literature that outlines the gendered experience of Ontario Works by illuminating the differential experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and gaps within the OW program along intersections of race, gender, and class. These findings support the abandonment of the individual deficiency model that restricts citizenship (Battle et al., 2006; Peter & Polgar, 2020; Smith-Carrier, 2017; Gazos et al., 2019) and support to those who are attached to the labour force. It also challenges Ontario Works' standard that is synonymous with the white, male, able bodied, independent citizen (Pinto, 2010; Bhuyan & Smith-Carrier, 2012; Chouinard & Crooks, 2005) by advocating for a social assistance model that reflects the diversity and lived

experiences of welfare recipients, acknowledges multiple barriers to employment and complex needs, and is responsive rather than punitive.

Overall, the findings from this research study expose the pre-existing and emergent gaps within OW during the COVID-19 pandemic and unmask the governments' disregard and discrimination towards welfare recipients during this unprecedented time. It emphasizes the unrealistic expectations of welfare recipients during the pandemic, as well as the burden case workers face delivering quality case management services when they are overloaded with administrative work and unmanageable caseloads. It highlights the negative impacts of the systems lack of pandemic preparedness, and the ways that the system failed to support welfare recipients in transitioning to virtual service delivery during the pandemic.

Case workers who participated in this study pave the way forward by offering recommendations for policy makers, which should be given reverence considering their unique positionality in understanding the micro- and macro-level challenges within this context. The experience of case workers that is captured within this research envisions possibilities for change should OW de-emphasize surveillance and anti-fraud measures and instead prioritize wholistic, wraparound supports that appreciate structural barriers to employment and social determinants of health, as this would be a more equitable approach to support welfare recipients achieve independence and self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

The goal of my research was to explore case worker's perspectives of the effectiveness of Ontario's social assistance program during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly focusing on any gaps they identified within this system and their recommendations to address these gaps. My findings illustrate that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing gaps in the social assistance program, for example the lack of communication regarding the transition to virtual service delivery and the universal service delivery approach created even more obstacles for individuals with multiple barriers to employment who are trying to navigate OW. Inadequate social assistance rates are undermined by the generous and easily accessible (in comparison) Canadian Emergency Response Benefit, demonstrating how welfare recipients' needs are ignored during the pandemic. Case workers also face challenges supporting their clients during the pandemic due the system's lack of preparedness and increased expectations while working from home, but some participants do feel that the pandemic offers some flexibility and increases work-life balance. In response to these gaps within the system, case workers recommended that policy makers consult and involve welfare recipients and frontline workers during the decision-making process, and they would like the program to mimic a wraparound, wholistic, mixed-methods model that offers adequate financial amounts that meet inflation and the poverty-line.

This research provides significant contributions to critical social work as it offers an analysis of structural inequities that are embedded in Ontario Works, utilizing the current context of COVID-19 to do so. Findings from this study fill some of the gaps in existing literature on the impact of COVID-19 on welfare recipients and low-income individuals, as well as on pre-existing and emergent gaps within OW. These findings emerged by utilizing an intersectional lens, interrogating how sites of difference differentially impact how recipients experience the

gaps within social assistance. The findings also point to how frontline workers strategically work within the system, or as Stephanie Baker Collins (2015) would say, how they use “the space in the rules” to apply bureaucratic discretion in the administration of Ontario Works. This provides other frontline workers or social workers the opportunity to reflect on their own practice, to imagine new ways of practicing critical social work. Overall, this research aligns with overarching goals of critical social work by critiquing the existing social order and it is political in amplifying case worker’s voices calling for change.

LIMITATIONS

This research was intended to capture the voices of Ontario Works case workers, as well as Ontario Disability Support Program case workers, however the researcher was not successful in recruiting individuals from ODSP. Logistical and time constraints contributed to this; however, it is possible that the researcher was not successful due to lack of informal and formal connections with individuals working at ODSP, making the utilization of convenience and snowball sampling insufficient.

Various limitations of this research also stem from the parameters and scope of the Practice-Research Paper set by York University, as students are required to complete their research over the course of two semesters with only 4 months allocated to recruiting participants, conducting the study, and subsequently analyzing/summarizing the results. Due to these restraints, the sample size is small and localized to specific regions in Ontario, making the findings not generalizable. The fact that the research only reflects the perspectives of case worker’s is also a limitation of the study as it would have been beneficial to capture the voices of welfare recipients as they have lived experience navigating OW during the pandemic. It would also be interesting to interview upper management within Ontario Works as they would have a greater understanding of the policy implications during COVID and thereafter.

In terms of findings, it is important to note that the researcher was limited in the breadth of information that could have been discussed due to the scope of the project as well. Participants provided rich narratives about their work prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, however for the purpose of the study findings were restricted to focus on gaps specific to the pandemic context and to emphasize data that answered the predetermined research questions within the limited scope of the project. The data provided plenty of information regarding the gaps and issues within OW, but the researcher was also limited to highlight the largest themes. However, less significant themes such as governmentality and the surveillance of welfare recipients would have been fruitful to discuss, and it is of interest of the researcher to revisit this data in future studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to note that these recommendations are subjective as they are influenced by the researcher's personal and professional experience with the social assistance program and are built on the researcher's interpretations of the findings. On the largescale, the gaps that are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the importance of having alternative plans for delivering social assistance to adequately support welfare recipient's during economic crises. It is recommended that governments reflect on their lack of preparedness and the impact it has had on welfare recipients, case workers, and other low-income individuals who are in desperate need of financial support during the pandemic. The current context of COVID-19 and lack of available jobs illustrates the ineffectiveness of workfare models in supporting low-income individuals during global pandemics. Program requirements and expectations prove unrealistic when the province routinely moves in and out of lockdowns and when only "essential" jobs that put individuals at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 are available. In contrast to the \$2,000/month CERB payments, I critique who the government defines as "deserving" and

“undeserving” of support during these crucial times, as reasonable efforts to make welfare recipients aware of the meagre, temporary emergency relief benefit were not taken. In response to these critiques, I amplify the recommendation case worker’s make when they advocate for increased social assistance rates that meet inflation and the poverty-line, and further recommend that deservingness not be attached to labor market participation.

I call on governments and policy makers to re-examine neoliberal social assistance policies that ignore race and gender as they amplify barriers and restrict accessibility for BIPOC communities and other people with multiple barriers to employment, such as sole support mothers. It is imperative that race and gender be at the centre of policy development to address systemic inequalities that exist in Canadian society and microcosms such as Ontario Works. Welfare recipients should be thoughtfully included and consulted in ways that represent the diverse clientele to ensure that policies and practices adequately meet their needs and respond to their lived realities.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research that can accommodate large sample sizes and generate larger-scale data that is generalizable to Ontario is needed. Research that captures ODSP case workers’ and OW and ODSP recipients’ perspectives of the current system during COVID-19 is also needed to further understand the lived impacts, but it is imperative that this is done from a stance that appreciates intersectionality. It would be beneficial if future research could thoroughly examine the effectiveness of workfare models during economic crises, specifically focusing on responsiveness to needs, as this study is limited in doing so.

Another area of interest for future research would be to look at Maki’s (2011) discussion on surveillance mechanisms that are embedded in Ontario Works administration and interrogate

how these mechanisms have changed or expanded due to COVID-19. Maki (2011) discusses three digital surveillance mechanisms that were implemented with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s that are used to reduce fraud and govern welfare recipient's behavior. Ontario Works case management moved to virtual service delivery during the pandemic, and as such social assistance administration has become increasingly digital. With a decrease of in-person services and surveillance, future research is needed to explore how and if the government increases or decreases surveillance through the use of technology, especially as Canadians adapt to a new 'normal' that involves virtual engagement with their formal and informal support networks.

REFERENCES

- Baker Collins, S. (2015). The Space in the Rules: Bureaucratic Discretion in the Administration of Ontario Works. *Social Policy and Society*, 15 (2), 221-235. DOI: 10.1017/S1474746415000251
- Barbour, R. (2014). *Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Beckman, L. J. (2014). Training in Feminist Research Methodology: Doing Research on the Margins. *Women & Therapy*, 37, 164-177. DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2014.850347
- Brewer, M., & Gardiner, L. (2020). The initial impact of COVID-19 and policy responses on household incomes. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36(1), S187–S199.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa024>
- Brown, W. (2005). *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cole, E. R. (2009). Intersectionality and research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 64(3), 170–180. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014564>
- Cubrich, M. (2020). On the frontlines: Protecting low-wage workers during COVID-19. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12(S1), S186–S187.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1037/tra0000721>
- Devarajan, S., & Kasekende, L. A. (2011). Africa and the Global Economic Crisis: Impacts, Policy Responses and Political Economy. *African Development Review*, 23(4), 421–438.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8268.2011.00296.x>

- Espey, J., Harper, C., & Jones, N. (2010). Crisis, care and childhood: The impact of economic crisis on care work in poor households in the developing world. *Gender and Development*, 18(2), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2010.491348>
- Green, D., Kesselman, J. R., & Tedds, L. (2020). *CONSIDERATIONS FOR BASIC INCOME AS A COVID-19 RESPONSE*. 16.
- Gringeri, C. E., Wahab, S., & Anderson-Nathe, B. (2010). What makes it feminist? Mapping the landscape of feminist social work research. *Affilia. Journal of Women & Social Work*, 390–405.
- Grooms, J., Ortega, A., Rubalcaba, J. A.A. (2020). *The COVID-19 public health and economic crises leave vulnerable populations exposed*. Retrieved October 15, 2020, from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/results/6289554A979445B4PQ/1?accountid=15182>
- Gringeri, C. E., Wahab, S. & Anderson-Nathe, B. (2010). What Makes it Feminist?: Mapping the Landscape of Feminist Social Work Research. *Affilia*, 25 (4), 390-405.
DOI:10.1177/0886109910384072
- Guy-Sheftall, B. (Ed.) (1995). *Words of fire: An anthology of African American feminist thought*. New York: New Press.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., Leavy, P. & Yaiser, M. (2004). Feminist approaches to research as a process: Reconceptualizing epistemology, methodology and method. In. S. N. Hesse-Biber, M. Yaiser & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist perspectives on social research* (pp. 3-26). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Johnson, M. T., & Johnson, E. (2019). *Stress, domination and basic income: Considering a citizens' entitlement response to a public health crisis*.
<http://link.springer.com/10.1057/s41285-018-0076-3>
- Joyce, R., & Xu, X. (2020, April 6). Sector shut-downs during the coronavirus crisis affect the youngest and lowest paid workers, and women, the most. *Institute for Fiscal Studies*.
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14797>
- Lankin, F, & Sheikh, M. A. (2012). *Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario* (p. 177). Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario.
- Lankin, Frances, & Pate, K. (2020, April 1). Universal livable basic income in times of crisis and beyond. *The Toronto Star; Online*.
<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/04/01/universal-livable-basic-income-in-times-of-crisis-and-beyond.html>
- Lightman, E., Vick, A., Herd, D., & Mitchell, A. (2009). 'Not disabled enough': Episodic disabilities and the Ontario Disability Support Program. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 29.
<https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v29i3.932>
- Lightman, N., & Good Gingrich, L. (2018). Measuring economic exclusion for racialized minorities, immigrants and women in Canada: Results from 2000 and 2010. *Journal of Poverty*, 22(5), 398–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2018.1460736>
- Maki, K. (2011). Neoliberal Deviants and Surveillance: Welfare Recipients Under the Watchful Eye of Ontario Works. *Surveillance and Society*, 9 (1), 47-63.
- Naderifar, M., Goli, H & Ghaljaei, F. (2017). Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education*, 14(3), 1-7.

- Neuman, W.L. & Kreuger, L. (2003). The meanings of methodology. In Neuman, W.L. & Kreuger, L., *Social work research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 70-96). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Nicola, M., Alsafi, Z., Sohrabi, C., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C., Agha, M., & Agha, R. (2020). The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review. *International Journal of Surgery (London, England)*, 78, 185–193.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijssu.2020.04.018>
- Opportunity knocks for basic income backers: As Ottawa hands out \$2,000 emergency cheques to people forced out of work, experts say the pandemic may provide a golden moment to mend gaps in the Canadian social safety net. (2020, April 25). *Toronto Star; Toronto, Ont.*
- Parrott, S., Aron-Dine, A., Leachman, M., Stone, C., Rosenbaum, D., Pavetti, L., Bailey, P., Marr, C., & Romig, K. (2020). *Immediate and Robust Policy Response Needed in Face of Grave Risks to the Economy*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23735>
- Payne, M. (2017). APPLYING CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK THEORY IN PRACTICE. *Issues in Social Work*, 22 (3), 169-193. doi:10.4467/24496138ZPS.17.011.8006
- Powell, D. (2020). Filling the Gap: Emergency Funding Programs and Asset-Based Finance in Times of Economic Crisis. *Commentary - C.D. Howe Institute*, 569, 1-22
- Reid, C., Greaves, L. & Kirby, S. (2017). *Experience, research and social change: Critical methods*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Rigolini, J., Schiffbauer, M. T., & Kikoni, E. (2020, June 19). *Will COVID-19 create a new surge in poverty in the Western Balkans?* Future Development [BLOG]; Washington; The

Statement on the Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (2020). *International Human Rights Law Review; Leiden*, 9(1), 135–142. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131035-00901006>

Wilson: COVID-19 funding gaps widen existing inequalities in Canadian society. (2020, April 28). *The Ottawa Citizen (Online); Ottawa*.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/2395496295/citation/52108C51EE484483PQ/17>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. ETHICS FORMS

MRP PROTOCOL:

RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

INSTRUCTIONS:

A. Who should complete this Protocol Form?

This form should be completed by Graduate Students conducting research involving human participants for the purposes of a Major Research Paper (MRP). Research activities generally include- – but are not limited to - experiments, interviews, surveys, focus groups and participant observation.

Copies of approved protocols should be kept on file by the student researcher for a period of 2 years.

B. Who Should NOT complete this form?

- 1. Graduate or Undergraduate Students conducting research for a course in which everyone in the class is conducting the same research should NOT complete this form:**

For courses in which all students are conducting the same/similar studies, Course Instructors only should complete the:

[Generic Protocol: Course Related Research Involving Human Participants](#)

Please consult your Course Instructor for further information.

- 2. Graduate or Undergraduate students conducting individual projects as part of a course assignment should NOT complete this form:**

For courses in which graduate or undergraduate students are completing individualized research studies as part of a course assignment; or for the purposes of an undergraduate theses or individual projects, students should complete the:

[Individualized Protocol – Course Related Research Involving Human Participants](#)

- 3. Students conducting research that must be reviewed by the HPRC should NOT complete this form.** To determine whether **your research must be reviewed by the HPRC**, please answer the following questions:

- a. Is your research funded?**

Y

N

(Funded research refers to stand alone research funding and excludes student awards such as bursaries and scholarships.)

b. **Is your research more than minimal risk?** N

Y

(What is minimal risk research? If potential participants can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research then the research can be regarded as within the range of minimal risk)

c. **Does your research involve Aboriginal/Indigenous/Indigenous Peoples?**

N

Y

The following questions may assist in determining whether your research involves Aboriginal/Indigenous/Indigenous peoples:

- (i) Will the research be conducted on Aboriginal/Indigenous land (Canada; international) for which permission and/or approval from an authority (such as a band council, First Nations Research Ethics Board etc.) may be required? N Y
- (ii) Will recruitment criteria include Aboriginal/Indigenous identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup of the study? N Y
- (iii) Will the research seek input from participants regarding an Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage, artefacts, or traditional knowledge? N Y
- (iv) Will research in which Aboriginal/Indigenous identity or membership in an Aboriginal/Indigenous community be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data? N Y
- (v) Will interpretation of research** results refer to Aboriginal/Indigenous communities, peoples, language, history or culture? N Y

(NOTE: "Research" does not include literary criticism and/or history (excluding oral history) and/or primarily textual activities). If you have answered 'Yes' to any of the above noted questions, then your research involves Aboriginal/Indigenous/indigenous peoples and must be reviewed and approved by the HPRC.

d. **Does your research involve Clinical Trial(s)?** N Y

e. **Does your research involve Animals?** N Y

- Y
- f. **Does your research involve Biological Agents?** N
- Y
- g. **Does your research involve Invasive procedures?** N Y
- h. **Does your research involve collection of human bodily fluids?** N
- Y
- i. **Does your research involved radioactive material?** N Y

NOTE: If you have answered “yes” to any of the questions noted above, **then this is NOT the correct form.** You are required to complete the HPRC protocol form and submit to the HPRC for review. Please contact the Office of Research Ethics (ore@yorku.ca) or 416-736-2100 ext 55201 for further assistance.

C. Does this research require any other approvals?

Research involving another institution (such as a school, university, business, government agency) may require additional ethics review and approval or permissions if using institutional resources (such as internal listservs, or conducting interviews on the premises of the institution).

- a) Does the research involve another institution or site? N Y
If Yes: Specify the institution(s)/site(s):
- b) Do any of the institution(s)/site(s) require administrative permission? N Y
- c) Has any other REB cleared this project? N Y
If Yes, please submit the original application and provide a copy of the clearance letter.

NOTE: If the research is to be conducted at a site requiring ethics approval or administrative permission, please include all draft informed consent forms/administrative permission requests. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine what other means of clearance are required, and to obtain clearance prior to starting the project.

D. Who do I contact and where do I submit the MRP Protocol - Research Involving Human Participants?

To find the appropriate contact within your Department, Graduate Program and/or Faculty/School/College to submit the protocol, Researchers (Course Instructors or Students) must consult the “[Chart of Contacts – Delegated Ethics Review Committees](#)”.

Faculty and students conducting course-related research requiring ethics review in any of the units not listed in the chart should contact the Office of Research Ethics (ore@yorku.ca) or 55201 for further information.

E. How long will the review process take?

The average time to process minimal risk protocols is approximately twenty working days from the date of receipt by the Delegated Research Ethics Review Committee.

NOTE: INCOMPLETE OR ILLEGIBLE PROTOCOLS WILL BE RETURNED TO THE RESEARCHER, WHICH WILL DELAY THE ETHICS REVIEW PROCESS.

F. Research Ethics Guidelines:

Researchers are encouraged to review the various Research Ethics Guidelines to address any research specific questions they may have. Please visit the Research Ethics website to review [Research Ethics Guidelines](#) that may be relevant to your research.

MRP PROTOCOL FORM:

PART A – COURSE INFORMATION

Student Name:	Morgan Parnell
Student Number:	217836461
Program:	Master of Social Work
Email:	mparnell@yorku.ca
Phone Number:	289-251-7279
Faculty Advisor	Kendra Pitt
Email:	kpitt@yorku.ca
Office:	Ross Building South 831
Phone Number:	416-736-2100; EXT 66322

Title of Research Project*:	Social Worker's Perspectives of Ontario's Social Assistance Program (OW and ODSP) During the COVID-19 Pandemic		
Start date:	January 1, 2021	End Date:	December 31, 2021
<i>PRIVACY: Personal information in connection with this form is collected under the authority of The York University Act, 1965 and will be used for educational, administrative and statistical purposes. If you have any questions about the collection, use and disclosure of personal information by York University, please contact: Office of Research Ethics, Kaneff Tower, Fifth Floor, 416 736 5201</i>			

PART B – EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

In order to conduct research involving human participants, you are required to:

- Familiarize yourself with York University’s [“Senate Policy Research Involving Human Participants”](#) as well as the basic principles by which ethical research involving human participants is conducted. (E.g. lecture, case study, test etc.).
- Review the [“Student Researcher Responsibility Document”](#)
- Complete the [TCPS 2 Tutorial – Course on Research Ethics \(CORE\)](#)

Please confirm the following:

- I have reviewed and am familiar with the [“Senate Policy Research Involving Human Participants”](#)
- I have reviewed and am familiar with the [“Student Researchers Responsibility Document”](#)
- I have completed the [TCPS tutorial](#). TCPS Tutorial Certificate is attached

PART C - PROTOCOL DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

Please attach the following items, if applicable, to the **MRP Protocol: Research Involving Human Participants** application.

NOTE: Please ensure ALL fields in this application are filled out. For sections that apply please mark with an “x”; for sections that do **not** apply, please mark as “n/a”.

Incomplete forms will not be accepted for review.

1. ALL protocol forms must have the following documents attached:

- a) An informed consent form (or multiple consent forms and/or assent forms if relevant)
- b) Certificate of completion of the CORE (TCPS) ethics tutorial

2. Consent documents (check all that are applicable):

Written Informed Consent form

Substitute Consent form (Parental/Guardian consent) — required if your research participants are under 16 years of age or without capacity to consent.

Assent Form — required if your research involves substitute consent

x Verbal Consent Script — required if you plan to seek verbal consent for any of the research participants

On-line Consent Script — required if participants are asked to consent online

x Consent for Audio/Visual/ Taping Form — required if you plan to use audio recording or photographs of participants. This may be included in the regular consent form as an additional check box.

3. External permissions and approvals (if applicable):

Decisions Needed From Other REB Boards — required if your research requires ethics approval from an institution other than York University

External REB approval required – certificate attached

External institutional permission required – documentation provided

Internal institutional permission/approval required (e.g., OIPA) – documentation provided

Medical Directive

Research Agreement(s) – append all copies

Data Use Agreements (for use in secondary data analysis)

4. Test Instruments (if applicable):

Questionnaires and Test Instruments

x Draft interview questions, focus group questions

5. Recruitment (if applicable):

x Recruitment Materials: Posters, Letters, Participant Pool Advertisement, etc.

6. Debriefing (if applicable):

Debriefing Letter – required if your research involves deception (see section 10, Informed Consent form for details)

Debriefing Consent Document – required following administration of debriefing statement (if your research involves deception)

7. OTHER (if applicable):

Reviewed: Clinical Trial Research Guidelines

Provenance of Anonymous data

Research Team Member Confidentiality Agreement

Participant Images Informed Consent Addendum

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In layperson's terms, please provide a general and brief description of the research (e.g., hypotheses, goals and objectives, etc.).

Research illustrates that low-income individuals are the hardest hit during economic crises such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Plenty of research also critiques the effectiveness of Ontario's social assistance programs, specifically Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) in meeting low-income individual's needs, but there is a lack of empirical research on these programs during the current context of the economic crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic brings.

This research will explore social workers' perspectives on the services and interventions of Ontario's social assistance programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social workers working at OW and ODSP during the COVID-19 pandemic will be engaged in semi-structured interviews to determine if the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced their perspective of the effectiveness of the services and interventions they deliver, paying particular attention to potential gaps they identify and their recommendations to address these gaps. Social workers occupy a unique position considering their understanding of the challenges low-income individuals face by delivering direct services to this population during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they also recognize organizational mandates, policies and practices that influence service delivery at the structural level. Overall, this research hopes to offer policy recommendations that better meet the needs of low-income individuals during economic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic by centering social worker's voices for the aforementioned reasons.

2. PARTICIPANTS

a.) State who the participant(s) will be: *Describe the participants that will be recruited and about whom personal information will be collected (i.e., numbers, age, special characteristics, etc.). Describe the size of the group from which participants will be recruited and the estimated number needed for the research (minimum/maximum). Where active recruitment is required, please describe inclusion and exclusion criteria. Where the research involves extraction or collection of personal information, please describe from whom the information will be obtained and what it will include (include permission letters).*

There will be 5-8 participants interviewed in this study. Participants will be individuals who are social work trained (minimum BSW) who have worked or are currently working at Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic (starting December 2019 to present) in Ontario. Information that will be collected from participants includes the city in which they work, their job title, and the duration that they have worked at OW or ODSP.

b.) Please indicate if this study will be using a participant pool N Y

If 'Yes', please indicate which pool(s):

- URPP
- Schulich Marketing pool
- School of Administrative Studies participant pool
- KURE
- Glendon Participant Pool
- Other:

3. RECRUITMENT

a) **How will participants be recruited (e.g., snowball technique, random sampling, previously known to interviewer, telephone solicitation, etc.)?** Flyers will be posted on my social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) notifying potential participants about the study (APPENDIX A). I will also ask relevant Facebook groups if they can post flyers about the study. Once potential participants contact me, I will confirm that they meet the inclusion criteria and can be included in the study. I will also use snowball and convenience sampling to recruit participants. I will reach out to social workers that I know who meet the study criteria. Based on these initial contacts I will ask they connect me with other potential participants. I will email these potential participants a description of the study and invitation to participate (APPENDIX B), and then confirm that they meet the inclusion criteria if they are interested in participating.

b) **Will you be using any advertisements, flyers, posters, email scripts, social media postings, etc. for recruitment purpose?**

N

Y - *If 'Yes,' please attach a copy of each with your application.*

4. INDUCEMENTS:

a) **Will you be offering inducements to participate (e.g., money, gift certificates, academic credit, etc.)?**

N

Y - *If 'Yes,' please check all that apply:*

- Financial
- In-kind
- Draw
- Participant Pool Bonus Points
- Other: gift card of \$10

b) **If compensation is provided, please provide the source of funding for the compensation/incentive:**

Personal funds

5. METHODS:

a) Please indicate all the research methods that apply:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observation | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary/Filmmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experimental Lab Study | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oral/Life History | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Tissues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experimental Behavioural Study | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

b) Do any of the methods involve:

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Audio Recording | <input type="checkbox"/> N | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y |
| Still Recording | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N | <input type="checkbox"/> Y |
| Video Recording | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N | <input type="checkbox"/> Y |

NOTE: *Explicit consent is required to use these methods of recording. Please see Section 10, "Informed Consent" for details.*

- i) If you are using recordings, please account for how they will be safely stored, eventually destroyed or archived, and how, if used in research dissemination, confidentiality will be maintained: The audio recordings will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not the cloud-based services. Recordings of the interviews will be permanently deleted once the audio has been transcribed and all identifying information will be removed during the transcription process (pseudonyms will be used). The verbal consent process will be recorded separately from the interview recording in order to maintain confidentiality. These records will be kept in separate password protected files. Recordings of the verbal consent process will be kept for one year after completion of the study, and then they will be permanently deleted and overwritten. Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting/data collection session.

c) What will be required of the participant(s). *Clearly specify in a step-by-step outline exactly what the participant(s) will be asked to do in each methodology. A separate outline is required for each methodology. Include the settings, types of information to be involved, and how data will be analyzed. Include details about identifying participants, recruitment, procedures participants will undertake, etc. Include copies of study instruments. Please also include the estimated time commitment required of participants for each method.*

Participant eligibility will be confirmed via phone during a pre-screening. Participants will be told about the study, its aims and the researcher will confirm eligibility. This will take approximately 15 minutes. Participants will be asked to take part in an interview of approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom at a time that is convenient to the interviewee. The interviews will be recorded after verbal consent is obtained. Participants will be asked to share their experiences of how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced their perspectives on the effectiveness of Ontario's social support programs, OW and ODSP. The goal is to determine if social workers identify any gaps in this system, and their recommendations to address these gaps (See APPENDIX C for more information on interview questions). Supplemental information that will be gathered from participants includes the city in which they work, their job title and duration of work at OW or ODSP to determine differences in

perspectives within these various categories. The qualitative data gathered during the interviews will be coded and analyzed using Dedoose.

d) What is the experience of the researcher/research team with this kind of research? *Please provide a description of the individual team members' experience with the proposed methods, participant population, etc.*

The researcher has experience engaging in data collection (conducting semi-structured interviews), performing qualitative data analysis (using NVivo) and facilitating knowledge translation (peer reviewed journal articles, book chapter, presentations, posters, etc.) as a research assistant at McMaster University from 2017-2018. This researcher has supplemental experience conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups, engaging in data analysis (using Dedoose) and knowledge translation (infographics and reports) as a placement student at the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton from 2017-2018. In addition, this researcher has experience conducting semi-structured interviews, engaging in data analysis and knowledge translation (infographics, reports, presentations) as a Policy and Program Analyst student at the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services in 2018.

It should be noted that this researcher also has experience completing interviews within a social work setting from 2013 to present.

6. RISK:

Please indicate potential risks that the participants as individuals or as part of an identifiable group or community might experience by being part of this research project (**NOTE: Checking 'Minimal' indicates that the risk associated with the method meets the definition of minimal risk as set out in the TCPS-2**):

- No known/anticipated risks
- Y – If 'Yes,' please complete the following:

- a) Physical risks (including any bodily contact; administration of any substance)? N Y
- b) Psychological/emotional risks (feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed, anxious, upset)? N Y
- c) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and/or reputation)? N Y
- d) Data security (i.e., risk to participant from data exposure)? N Y
- e) Tied to deception involved in the study? (See DEBRIEFING section below) N Y
- f) OTHER:

Please describe how each of the potential risks described above will be managed and/or minimized: Participants may recall and discuss experiences that may have been

uncomfortable or upsetting for them. As a trained social worker, I am in a position to offer emotional support and/or debriefing as necessary. In addition, participants will be able to end the interview or withdrawal from the research at any time.

7. BENEFITS

What, if any, are the benefits to the participants?

Or, No benefits

- a) Discuss any potential direct benefits to the participants from their involvement in the project; these might include education about research methods, useful knowledge gained about self, etc.

The interviewees are given an opportunity to reflect on their experiences providing financial assistance and support to low-income individuals, which can be rewarding. Interviewees are also given the opportunity to reflect on better approaches to their practice and offer recommendations to improve the responsiveness of the OW and ODSP programs, which can be empowering.

- b) Comment on the (potential) benefits to the scientific/scholarly community or society that would justify involvement of participants in this study.

This work is of use to the scholarly community as it will contribute to knowledge about the effectiveness of OW and ODSP in responding to the needs of low-income individuals during times of crisis. This research is valuable considering the novel context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of empirical research conducted within this realm to date. The findings of this research can assist in providing policy recommendations to improve the responsiveness of OW and ODSP considering the unique positionality and perspective of social workers providing financial support to low-income individuals during the pandemic.

8. SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF DATA:

NOTE: Secondary Data Analysis is described as the analysis of data collected for a purpose other than that for which it was originally collected in order to pursue a research interest which is distinct from that of the original work. Researchers are advised to review the "[Secondary Data Analysis Guidelines](#)" for further information on requirements related to use of secondary data for research purposes.

- a.) Are you conducting secondary data analysis?

N – If 'No,' please go to Question 9

Y

If 'Yes,' please answer the following questions:

- i) Are you using **Anonymous Data**? (data which never included personal identifiers)
 N
 Y - **If 'Yes,'** please provide a description of the provenance of the data set:

NOTE: Research that relies **solely** on secondary analysis of anonymous data is exempt from ethics review.

- ii) Are you using **Anonymized data**? (Data which has been stripped of personal identifiers; no potential for data linkage.)
 N
 Y - **If 'Yes,'** please provide a description of the provenance of the data set:

- iii) Are you using **Identifiable data**?
 N
 Y - **If 'Yes,'** please provide a description of the provenance of the data set:

b.) If you are conducting secondary analysis using IDENTIFIABLE DATA, please address the following:

- i) Do you plan to link this identifiable data to other data sets?
 N
 Y - **If 'Yes,'** please describe:
- ii) What type of identifiable data from this data set are you planning to access and use?
 Student records (please specify in the space below)
 Health records/clinic/office files (please specify in the space below):
 Other personal records. Please specify:
- iii) What personally identifiable data (e.g., name, student number, telephone number, date of birth, etc.) from this data set do you plan on using in your research? Also, please explain why you need to collect this identifiable data and justify why each item is required to conduct your research.
- iv) Describe the details of any agreement you have, or will have, in place with the owner of this data to allow you to use these data for your research. (**You must submit a copy of any data use/access agreements.**)
- v) When participants first contributed their data to this data set, were there any known preferences expressed by participants at that time about how their information would be used in the future?
 N
 Y - **If 'Yes,'** please explain:

- vi) How will you obtain consent from the participants whose identifiable data you will be accessing? Please explain:

NOTE: *Consent of participants is required for research involving secondary analysis of data that includes personal identifiers. Waiver of consent may only be considered if researchers meet the additional criteria. Please consult the [Secondary Data Analysis guidelines](#) for further information.*

- vii) If you do **not** intend to seek consent of participants for use of identifiable data for secondary analysis, please provide a rationale as to why:

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

- a) **Is there a possibility of an apparent, actual or potential conflict of interest on the part of researchers, the University or sponsors? (e.g. commercialization of research findings; self-funded research)**

N

Y - *If 'Yes,' please elaborate and outline how the potential or real conflict of interest will be addressed:*

- b) **Do any members of the research team have multiple roles with potential participants (such as researcher and therapist, researcher and teacher, student/supervisor, etc.)**

N

Y - *If 'Yes,' please review [Research Involving Investigators' Students](#)*

- i) Describe the nature of the multiple roles between researcher(s) and any participants: Considering that this researcher is a social work student and social worker and the participants being interviewed are expected to be social work trained, it is possible that some of the interviewees will be the researchers' colleagues.
- ii) Describe how the potential conflict of interest that will emerge as a result of the dual roles will be minimized or managed:
It will be made clear to all participants during the pre-screening conversation before the interview that their participation is completely voluntary. Participants will be reminded that they will receive the honorarium regardless of whether they choose to withdraw from the study and they will be reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any time - before, after or during the interview. Participants will also be given their honorarium at the beginning of the interview so they do not feel pressured to complete the interview. The researcher will confirm that any such decision to withdraw participation will have no bearing on the relationship as colleagues.
- c) **Are there any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information/results/data at any point during the study including completion that the funder/sponsor has placed on the researchers?** (These include controls placed by sponsors, funding sources, advisory or steering committees.) *If 'Yes,' please describe:*No.

10. INFORMED CONSENT

a) Is there a relationship between participants and either of the following:

Person obtaining consent: N Y
Investigator(s): N Y

If 'Yes,' what steps will be taken to avoid the perception of undue influence in obtaining free and informed consent:

Considering that this researcher is a social work student and social worker and the participants being interviewed are expected to be social work trained, it is possible that some of the interviewees will be the researchers colleague. It will be made clear to all participants during the pre-screening conversation before the interview that their participation is completely voluntary. Participants will be reminded that they will receive the honorarium regardless of whether they choose to withdraw from the study and they will be reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any time - before, after or during the interview. Participants will also be given their honorarium at the beginning of the interview so they do not feel pressured to complete the interview. The researcher will confirm that any such decision to withdraw participation will have no bearing on the relationship as colleagues.

b) Ongoing consent is required if the research occurs over multiple occasions or over an extended period of time. Does the research occur over multiple occasions and/or over an extended period of time?

N
 Y

If 'Yes,' please describe the process of how you intend to obtain ongoing consent:

c) Is substitute consent involved (e.g., children, youths under 16, those without capacity to consent)?

N
 Y

If 'Yes,' please elaborate on how consent and assent will be obtained (an assent form/script must also be provided):

d) Is Deception involved? Specifically, do you intend to withhold any information from and/or intentionally mislead the research participants?

N – Please go to Question E
 Y

If 'Yes:'

- i) **Please provide a description of the nature of the deception and whether it is full or partial:**

Please provide a rationale as to why deception (in whole or part) is required:

- ii) **Please append a copy of the debriefing statement.**

The debriefing statement needs to explain three elements:

- (i) Why the experiment was developed and why the deception was necessary.*
- (ii) What the current research says about the topic, which includes providing two references (text, article, on-line reference) that the participants can reasonably access and understand (if you have an academic and non-academic population, you may need to provide more than one version of the debriefing statement or make sure that the references can be accessed by the least educated of the population).*
- (iii) Any additional resources that would be useful for the participant. Resources need to be appropriate and accessible for the participants. For example, if you are conducting a study on parenting, you could include community resources for parenting classes or recommendations for parenting guides. (Source: Univ. Virginia, IRB).*

Researchers must re-obtain consent from the participants once the debriefing statement has been provided. Participants shall be provided with and sign the **[“Debriefing Consent Form.”](#)**

- iii) **If a debriefing statement will not be provided to the participants, please provide a rationale as to why a statement will not be provided:**

- iv) **For studies that are not deceptive**, briefly describe the process and nature of any immediate post-study information that will be provided to participants and the rationale for providing this information (e.g., counseling or trauma resources, information links, etc.):

- e) **How will informed consent be obtained? (Please check all that are applicable):**

Informed Consent Form (please attach draft version) (and assent form if relevant)

Verbally* (please attach draft approximation of what participants will be verbally told)

Online Consent Form** (please attach draft version)

****If informed consent is being obtained verbally, please provide a rationale regarding why a written informed consent form is not being used:***

Due to the fact that the interviews are being conducted via Zoom and the researcher does not have access to encrypted email communication, in order to protect confidentiality, verbal consent is being used. See APPENDIX D for copy of Verbal Consent Script.

*****If online consent is being obtained, please indicate the website where the questionnaire/ survey will be hosted:***

11. DATA SECURITY:

Privacy refers to an individual's right to be free from intrusion or interference by others. It is a fundamental right in a free and democratic society. The ethical duty of confidentiality refers to the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information. Security refers to measures used to protect information. It includes physical, administrative and technical safeguards.

For a fuller description of researcher obligations surrounding confidentiality, privacy and data security issues, please consult the [Data Security Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants](#).

In light of the above, please address the following questions:

a) **Will the data be treated as confidential?** N Y
If 'No,' please provide a rationale as to why not:

b) **Will the participant(s) be anonymous?** N Y
If 'No,' please provide a rationale:

c) **Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity/confidentiality of participants or informants (where applicable) -or- the confidentiality of data during the conduct of research and dissemination of results.**

Participants will be identified by a pseudonym and not their name on any data collected. Consent will be obtained verbally so a separate recording will be made of the consent process, and a separate recording will capture the interview itself. These recordings will be kept in separate password protected files on a computer or device.

Verbal consent recordings will be stored securely for one year after completion of the study, and then they will be deleted and the data will be overwritten. Interview audio files will be destroyed as soon as the interview data have been transcribed. Any identifying data (e.g., names, places of employment) will be removed during the transcription process (pseudonyms used).

- d) **Explain how written records, video/audio recordings, artefacts, and questionnaires will be secured, how long they will be retained, and provide details of their final disposal or storage. Describe the standard data security procedures for your discipline and provide a justification if you intend to store your data for a longer period of time. If the data may have archival value, discuss this and whether participants will be informed of this possibility during the consent process.**

Audio files will be stored as password protected files on a password protected computer or device. Following transcription, the audio files will be permanently deleted from the device. Transcription will be completed by the researcher and the transcripts will be saved as password protected files on the researchers computer. The transcripts will be stripped of identified information - pseudonyms used.

If hard copies of transcripts are needed for data analysis, these will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. The data will be kept for one year following the completion of the study. Following this the transcripts will be permanently deleted and all hard copies will be destroyed using a cross-cut shredder.

- e) **Please describe how you plan to store hard copy data, i.e., consent forms and other written records.**

Locked filing cabinet

Other:

- f) **Please describe how you plan to store electronic data (such as video/audio recordings and document files)**

Encrypted and/or password-protected USB keys, laptops and/or other portable electronic data devices

Secure Server

Other:

- g) **Please describe how you plan to store other formats of data (if applicable):**
N/A

- h) **If you plan to destroy research data:**

a. Please provide a firm date by which the data will be destroyed:
April 30, 2022

b. Provide details of their final disposal:

- i. for hard copy data (e.g., cross-cut shredder, etc.):
Shred with cross-cut shredder
- ii. for electronic data (e.g., deletion and overwriting of drives; destruction of drives; etc.):
Deletion and overwriting of drive

i) **If you plan to retain data indefinitely, please provide a justification (e.g., data use for future research):**

N/A

j) **Describe any limitations to protecting the confidentiality of participants whether due to the law, the methods used, the nature of the sample population, or other reasons (e.g., duty to report).**

N/A

k) **Identify all parties who will have access to the data.**

Primary Investigator/student

Supervisor

Other (please specify):

l) **Uses of the data: Please describe all forms of output that are anticipated to result from this research (e.g., presentations, written papers, placing data in an archive, creative works, documentary films, etc.). Describe how any potentially identifying information will be handled in each form of output.**

Written papers and presentations for the purpose of my degree and with relevant organizations. Confidentiality will be maintained as all identifying information will be removed during the transcription process and pseudonyms will be used. The audio recordings of the interviews will be permanently deleted after transcription and the verbal consent process will be recorded separately from the interview recording. Recording of the consent process will be permanently deleted and overwritten one year after completion of the study.

m) **Subsequent use of data: Will the data potentially be used for other purposes in the future (e.g., teaching, future analysis, publishing of dataset, archiving in an institutional repository, etc.)?**

N Y

If 'No,' the data will be solely used for the purposes describe in this application and will not be used for other purposes in the future.

If 'Yes,' participants must be informed of this possibility during the consent process. Subsequent use of the data for new purposes may require additional review by the REB.

- n) **Please describe how the data will be prepared to make it suitable for future use (e.g., anonymization, storage, archiving, etc.). Please describe what future uses might occur (e.g., use within the PIs research group, transmission to other researchers, publication of the dataset, etc.). Please identify any known repositories to which data may be submitted. (The REB recognizes that all potential future uses cannot be anticipated; but does expect that data will be prepared in a manner for future uses that respects the conditions under which the data were originally collected).**

N/A

STUDENT RESEARCHER DECLARATION

I have reviewed and am familiar with the guidelines and principles detailed by the HPRC, the Delegated Ethics Review – [Student Researcher Responsibilities Information Sheet](#) and with the [Senate Policy on Research Involving Human Participants](#), and affirm that, to the best of my knowledge this research conforms thereto.

I hereby certify that the course-based research involving human participants is unfunded and minimal risk research, does not involve Aboriginal/Indigenous/Indigenous Peoples or Clinical Trials and that all information on this form and all statements in the attached documentation are correct and complete. I affirm that I am aware of my responsibilities as a researcher as it speaks to the conduct of research involving human participants and as outlined in [Senate Policy on Research Involving Human Participants](#). I am aware that all human participants in the research must have signed a written consent form or have provided oral consent for their participation in the research. I am aware that the approved protocol and signed consent forms have to be retained for two years following the completion of the research.

I hereby undertake to notify the Delegated Ethics Review Committee to which I am submitting this protocol in the event that I make any changes to the **approved MRP Protocol – Research Involving Human Participants**. I am aware that a further ethics review may be required as a result of such changes and that research shall be suspended pending clarification and/or resolution. I will also notify the Delegated Ethics Review Committee if any unforeseen risks not specified in the research proposal appear. In such a case, the study will be suspended pending clarification.

Signature, Student Researcher

Date

APPENDIX 2. ETHICS APPROVAL

Morgan Parnell - PRP **Ethics** package 2

CC Chris Chapman
Tue 2/23/2021 11:38 AM
To: Joelle Reid
Cc: Morgan Parnell; Chris Chapman; Kendra Pitt

Hi all,

please accept this email as my approval.

Thanks so much,

Chris

Chris Chapman, MSW, PhD
Graduate Program Director and Associate Professor
School of Social Work, York University
Co-Chair, SexGen York

Gender pronouns: they / them

[A Violent History of Benevolence: Interlocking Oppression in the Moral Economies of Social Working](#), by C. Chapman and A.J. Withers

[Disability, Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada](#), edited by L. Ben-Moshe, C. Chapman, and A.C. Carey

I live and work on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. I acknowledge the current treaty holders of this land as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)