

**THE RACIALIZED IMPACT OF
WELFARE FRAUD CONTROL
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND ONTARIO**

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**THE RACIALIZED IMPACT OF WELFARE FRAUD CONTROL
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND ONTARIO**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, *The Racialized Impact of Welfare Fraud Control in British Columbia and Ontario*, documents the experiences of people of colour who have been receiving government assistance (welfare). In 2002-2003, the authors interviewed twenty-four people of colour in two provinces – British Columbia and Ontario – regarding their views and experiences of the welfare system, particularly in relation to the enforcement of anti-fraud policies. With the help of various community agencies in both provinces, the researchers used a snowball sampling method and were able to document the impact of neo-liberal social policies on people of colour.

Racialized welfare recipients' experiences of accessing benefits in Canada are characterized by the perception that not only does the system fail to adequately help individuals in need, but there are also too many barriers to overcome when attempting to access welfare. Their experiences shed light on the consequences of decades of continued attack on the social assistance system; in the current era of neo-liberalism, governments are constantly seeking new ways of reducing welfare spending.

Some of the key strategies that provinces have embraced to reduce the number of people eligible for welfare benefits are: 1) establishing means-testing; 2) increasing waiting periods; and 3) strengthening enforcement measures. The policing of 'welfare fraud' is viewed by many provinces as an important means of saving money. Yet, often welfare overpayment – an administrative error on the part of the state – is recast as 'welfare fraud' perpetrated by the recipient.

People of colour, particularly women (who are more likely than men to live in poverty and typically care for young children), have borne the brunt of these neo-liberal policy

initiatives. This report highlights the state's failure to help poor people in need of assistance, while also blaming impoverished people for their lack of independence and self-sufficiency.

THE 'WAR AGAINST POVERTY'

In recent years, the criminalization and penalization of poverty through the increased surveillance and control of welfare recipients has led many poverty advocates to claim that a 'war against poverty' exists. This report argues that people of colour experience some of the sharpest casualties of governments' desires to roll back the welfare state. Relying on myths and stereotypes about racial difference, the enforcement and policing of welfare fraud policies constructs all people of colour as potential 'cheaters' and 'abusers' of the system. This has allowed the stigmatization and discriminatory treatment of people of colour to persist unchallenged within the welfare system.

In the name of fraud protection, people of colour are treated in dehumanizing ways and face surveillance and scrutiny that constructs them as criminals. Welfare policies ignore the structural racism faced by many immigrants and people of colour, which filters them into precarious and poorly paid employment, regardless of their qualifications. In line with Giroux (2003), the authors note that in the past few decades, racism has undergone a significant shift and now takes new forms. As Giroux argues, "In its current manifestation, racism survives through the guise of neo-liberalism, a kind of repartee that imagines human agency as simply a matter of individual choices, the only obstacle to effective citizenship and agency being the lack of principled self-help and moral responsibility" (2003, p. 191).

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

- The recent emphasis in welfare reforms on enforcement has resulted in more punitive and criminalizing practices, whereby people on welfare feel as though they are constantly under suspicion.
- Almost all the respondents interviewed mentioned the utter inadequacy of the welfare payments received, resulting in difficulties in making ends meet. Many welfare recipients regularly visited food banks and relied on community support agencies to supplement their welfare payments.
- Advocating for higher payments or attempting to ensure continuity of welfare payments was challenging for many recipients who did not have strong English language skills. Access to translation and interpretation services has been severely impacted by government cutbacks.
- Many respondents felt that access to welfare involved too many bureaucratic rules that created constant barriers. They also noted that case workers were quick to suspend or cut off recipients from benefits for minor transgressions, which often resulted in individuals facing dire consequences.
- Respondents faced many structural barriers to employment due to racism in the labour market. Regardless of their qualifications or education levels, people of colour were confronted by the expectation that they would be most suited to deskilled and precarious employment.

- Many respondents noted feeling depressed or ashamed about being on welfare. Rather than providing support, however, the systems and structures in place served to exacerbate these feelings.
- Much of the stress of being and staying on welfare was attributed to the interactions which individuals had with their case workers. Case workers are the frontline agents of the new policy regime and responsible for ensuring the active surveillance of recipients.
- Respondents noted that the dehumanizing treatment they received from their welfare workers was the result of the fact that they were both poor and people of colour. Recipients experienced both racial slurs and differential treatment from case workers.
- Case workers' treatment of people on welfare must be situated within the broader context of policy changes that have occurred in the Canadian welfare system over the past ten years; these have been guided by neo-liberal racism.

To date, few, if any, research studies in Canada have examined the effects of welfare enforcement policies on people of colour. This report gives voice to a marginalized population whose issues and concerns are often overshadowed by the rhetoric of scapegoating as a means of blaming poor people for their own misery. Using a feminist, anti-racist framework, the authors argue that the welfare system reinforces the social inequality of immigrants and people of colour by failing to recognize how race and ethnicity shapes their opportunities and relationships.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

I don't think people choose to be on social assistance. It is something that happens unfortunately and sometimes some people, more than others, have difficulty getting off the system without help, or maybe they have barriers such as racism, which permeates so much employment structures. You know people are always in denial that racism or privilege sometimes influences employment decisions.

It's just intrusive and it was making me think these people are just really racist. They are thinking that we're just a family smuggling into this country.... That is how they were treating me... it was an awful experience because it makes you feel like you're a criminal 'cause that's the way I was being treated. Like I am not supposed to be in this country, I'm doing something illegal.

-- Welfare recipient interviewees

Canadian welfare policy and anti-fraud measures in the 1990s have been characterized by many activists and researchers as representing a devastating 'war against poverty.' In October 2002, the National Anti-Poverty Association (NAPO) issued a press release in which they noted:

While the United Nations marks October 17th, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the relevance of such an occasion goes virtually unacknowledged by parliamentarians, governments and media in Canada... The concept of poverty elimination has been lost in Canada. Instead of attacking the root causes of poverty and establishing viable mechanisms which would lead to an end to poverty in Canada, federal and provincial/territorial governments advance treacherously towards the wholesale criminalization of poverty... "They are not the least bit interested in solving problems," said Linda Lalonde, NAPO President, "They're more concerned with making people afraid of poverty and blaming individuals for it."

This project serves to illustrate the ways in which the 'criminalization of poverty' mentioned in the NAPO press release is in fact not only a war against poverty but also fundamentally a war against people of colour. This research study examines the racialized effects of government policies on the policing of 'welfare fraud' in two provinces in Canada – Ontario and British Columbia. Through interviews with welfare recipients of colour, the researchers demonstrate how current welfare enforcement measures rely on racial stereotypes

and myths about recipients in order to refuse or suspend access to welfare benefits. By arguing that the enforcement of welfare fraud policies in Canada is racialized, it is important to clarify that the authors are not advancing a demographic argument about the racial characteristics of people on welfare. Indeed, there is no evidence indicating that people of colour have higher than average rates of welfare usage, and data on the demographics of the individuals who are accused of fraud is not collected in Canada (see Chan and Mirchandani, 2002). Studies show that immigrants, for example, have lower rates of receiving welfare than the general population (Shields, 2003, p. xx).

The researchers' focus is on the ways in which, through a series of mythologies, all people of colour are constructed as being fundamentally dishonest vis à vis the welfare system, while welfare policies and procedures serve the roles of specifically stigmatizing as well as allowing for ongoing discrimination against people of colour. The researchers seek to discover the process of criminalization through an examination of welfare enforcement, as well as the ways in which resistance is achieved, in order to bring about an understanding of this criminalization and resistance in striving for social justice.

In documenting the experiences of welfare recipients, this research highlights how issues of race, gender and class mediate society's understanding and application of social policies. To date, there is a paucity of research on the racialized impact of welfare control policies. In addition, while there has been research carried out about the effects of welfare reforms on women generally, few researchers have examined the impact of both race and gender in the context of welfare enforcement. An examination of welfare enforcement policies in British Columbia and Ontario shows how the rhetoric of 'welfare overpayment' is promoted and serves to further neo-liberal governance structures. Moreover, the research demonstrates the practices

and strategies these two provinces have adopted to combat welfare overpayment. For people of colour, the increasing tendency for provinces to criminalize welfare recipients through the pursuit of ‘fraudulent’ claimants has a significant impact on their ability to pursue employment opportunities as well as to participate fully in all aspects of social life. This project fills the gaps identified in this area and offers an opportunity to provide a rich source of data.

Conceptually, the authors approach this research with the view that the attack on the welfare state, the increasing impoverishment of people of colour in Canada and the social polarization between rich and poor cannot be understood without paying attention to issues of race. While old forms of racial hierarchies are no longer tolerated and popular culture sees racism as a thing of the past, the authors would argue that racism continues to characterize and shape the present. In particular, ‘welfare racism’ has played a significant role in the organization of public assistance attitudes, policies and practices (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2002). Within Canada for example, myths surrounding newly arrived immigrants or refugees routinely link them with thinly veiled racist terms like ‘welfare cheats’ or ‘welfare abusers’ (Wright, 2000). Women of colour have borne the brunt of this hostility since in the context of welfare, their gender and racial difference makes them particularly vulnerable to neo-conservative attacks. The researchers’ approach embraces both a feminist and an anti-racist perspective, thereby recognizing that issues of gender, race and class are fundamental principles upon which society is organized. The gendered and racialized nature of welfare entitlement highlights the necessity of examining how these interlocking systems of social organization exclude some social groups but not others. A central goal of this project is to increase awareness around issues of racism and social assistance policies as well as make suggestions for policy reform that are inclusive and will promote greater racial equality.

SECTION 2

**WELFARE FRAUD LEGISLATION IN
BRITISH COLUMBIA AND ONTARIO**

INTRODUCTION

The attempt to control welfare spending has had a disproportionate effect on people of colour throughout Canada; data show that 36% of members of racialized groups live under the poverty line – twice the level of the general Canadian population. The unemployment rate of people of colour, particularly women of colour, is also higher than that of the general Canadian population (Galabuzi, 2001). Immigrant poverty is particularly acute. As a result of barriers confronting immigrants in the labour market, many people are finding that they can barely survive on their earnings. Despite a relatively strong Canadian economy in the 1990s, Lee (2000, p. 32) notes that over half of immigrants (52.1%) who came to Canada as permanent residents in the mid-1990s and settled in urban areas were likely to live in poverty; this is more than twice the rate of Canadian-born residents living in the same cities. The poverty rate increases to 62.4% for the non-permanent population – three times the rate of Canadian-born residents (Lee, 2000). Immigrants' difficulties entering the labour force and the low wages received have meant that many have turned to the welfare system for assistance.

The over-representation of ethnic groups in poor neighbourhoods in many of Canada's urban centres has resulted in the racialization of poverty, wherein racial enclaves and a racial underclass are emerging. With this comes a host of social problems, such as higher health risks, barriers to social services and increased contact with the criminal justice system. Racialized women, for example, are routinely denied access to welfare benefits because entitlement is premised typically on full-time employment. Female employment is, both historically and at present, characteristically temporary, low-paying and piecemeal at best (Caragata, 2003). These labour market exclusions operate in conjunction with the greater policing of people of colour in Canada (Chan and Mirchandani, 2002). Crowther (2000) cites the surge in private policing as an

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example of the way in which the growing problem of worklessness has affected the nature of policing. The belief that the unemployed need to be under constant surveillance in order to keep crime and disorder to a minimum cements the association between criminality and unemployment. In poor immigrant neighbourhoods, this link is virtually axiomatic. The effect of this mindset, as Bauman (1998, p. 77) notes, is that the poor are banished from the universe of moral obligations since any impulse to take responsibility for those who are weak, unfortunate and suffering is extinguished if the poor are seen as actual or potential criminals.

Policies aimed at controlling access to welfare in both Ontario and British Columbia have relied on constructing the problem of welfare fraud as central to the high costs of welfare and also the site where savings can be found. Both Ontario and British Columbia now have punitive ‘anti-fraud’ policies in place to reassure the public that their tax dollars are being well spent. The following offers a brief overview of the current policy situation in the two provinces.

ONTARIO – THE “BATTLE” AGAINST WELFARE FRAUD

During the early 1990s, the Ontario government’s response to concerns about the rising expenditure on welfare resulted in the implementation of tighter controls on access to welfare and a declaration of ‘war’ on ‘welfare fraud.’ The authors have chosen to bracket the term ‘welfare fraud’ to signal a departure from accepting the criminalizing nature of the term and its problematic use by the Harris government. Policies defined ‘welfare fraud’ as a crime, parallel to other criminal activities such as robbing stores (Pratt and Valverde, 2002). A series of figures were produced to show how significant amounts of monies could be saved if controls over abuse and errors in the system were implemented. Fraud is said to occur when individuals on social assistance are found to have “undeclared income, multiple program claims, cross-jurisdictional

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claims, forged endorsement of stolen cheques, additional adult with income in the home, false declaration of lost-cheques/cash, false description of family size/structure, fraudulent needs declaration or verification, undeclared assets, multiple IDs and lending of client identification” (C. A. MacDonald and Associates, 1996). According to the 2001 Welfare Fraud Control report (Ontario, 2002), “the top three reasons for reduction or termination of assistance are people who are incarcerated, spouses not declared and undeclared income.”

The initiatives taken by the Harris government included a welfare fraud hotline for people to call to report cases of suspected fraud, information sharing agreements with other provinces to prevent multiple claims, procedures to prevent people who are incarcerated from collecting welfare, explorations of fingerprinting for welfare recipients and hiring more staff to review case files (Ontario, 2000). Since 1997, annual reports on welfare fraud control have been issued by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, detailing the numbers of convictions, terminated or ineligible claims, and future costs avoided as a result of their investigations. In January 2002, a news report from the Ministry claimed that costs of \$16 million had been avoided and \$58 million in welfare payments was uncovered in the past year alone, indications that the government was “winning the battle against welfare fraud” (Ontario, 2002). Evoking the symbol of warfare, the rhetoric constructs the interests of the ‘taxpayer’ in opposition to those of the welfare recipient. In addition, the Ministry noted that “between April 1, 2000 and March 31, 2001, assistance was reduced or terminated in over 17,700 cases, including thousands of people in jail, those who did not declare a spouse and people who did not declare another source of income” (Ontario, 2002). However, the validity of these data have been called into question; as noted by Michele Landsberg in *The Toronto Star* (2000):

In truth, the government made actual savings of only \$5 million in winning convictions against only 1.7 per cent of “cheats” who were investigated - that's just 0.43 per cent of

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the total welfare caseload. Hardly a story of runaway theft by welfare layabouts, although the Harris Tories will stop at nothing to make you believe that...Most of those turfed off welfare - almost all those 14,000 - lost their benefits because of the government's own administrative errors, like mistaken over-payments, that were not the recipients' fault.

These fraud enforcement practices were introduced in conjunction with other changes to welfare legislation during the Harris government's 'Common Sense Revolution.' In 1995, welfare allowances in general were cut by over twenty percent, and a number of previously included groups, such as post-secondary students, were deemed ineligible. As discussed in the previous section, changes were also made to the definition of 'spouse,' which disqualified many single women from assistance. In 1997, the Social Assistance Reform Act, which comprises the Ontario Works Act and the Ontario Disability Support Plan Act (Bill 142), replaced the General Welfare Assistance Act and the Family Benefits Act. Bill 142 marked the introduction of workfare and the increased the discretionary power of eligibility officers (Morrison, 1998b). In 1997, Ontario introduced the 'Business Transformation Project,' whereby new technologies were introduced to support welfare reform. These technologies often disadvantaged people with poor English language skills, physical and/or mental disabilities and/or low levels of education (Herd, 2002). Also, through the use of database technology, information on each recipient was collected; as Herd notes, "case reviews are no longer prioritized on the basis of need, but on the 'risk' of committing fraud... for example, anyone with a refugee or immigrant social security number is classified as a potential criminal" (2002, p. 4).

As a result of these measures, welfare roles have declined by about half since 1995 (Shields, 2003, p. xviii). Welfare recipients now receive 30% less money than when the Harris government was elected (Herd, 2002, p. 3). In 2000, a zero tolerance policy was implemented for recipients convicted of welfare fraud. Under this policy, those convicted after March 31,

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2000 were permanently ineligible to receive benefits (Welfare cheats, 2000). Legal experts have questioned the constitutionality of the policy, while welfare, poverty and human rights advocates argue the punishment does not fit the crime (Cracking down, 2000). Other family members, such as children of convicted claimants, will suffer equally from the consequences of having to live without social assistance; an individual who makes a mistake at the age of eighteen will find him/herself ineligible from assistance later in life.

The figures produced by government officials and their consultants regarding the savings resulting from changes in welfare fraud policies are often contradictory and vague. Data released by the Income Security Advocacy Centre (2002), for example, reveal that between April 1st 2000 and November 27th 2002, a total of 212 individuals were convicted of welfare fraud and deemed permanently ineligible for social assistance. As stated in the 2001 Welfare Control Report (Ontario, 2002), 60,000 fraud allegations were followed up by three hundred staff members, and the investigations led to 747 convictions for welfare fraud. This suggests that far more individuals were suspected of fraud and faced policing and surveillance than were actually engaged in welfare fraud. Similarly, the fraud hotline (1-800 number) instituted in Ontario in 1995 is said to have resulted in extensive savings. In fact, Morrison (1998a) notes that in the first two years of the hotline's operation, 26,214 allegations were made and only 36 people were actually prosecuted. Information in the Region of Waterloo Budget (2002, p. 1) also reveals that, “with respect to the Welfare Fraud Control Measures, when the charge is fully implemented in 2003, the Region would have to recover \$4.7 million in benefits during the year to break even.”

Social activists note that the overstatement of fraud rates and potential cost savings serve the purpose of criminalizing certain groups, especially when it is clear that the message repeatedly put forth by the Ontario government is that welfare fraud is widespread. This has

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been exacerbated by conservative think-tanks like the Fraser Institute, who have called for the elimination of social programs or, at the very least, a coordinated effort by all levels of government to develop a central database where it would be easier to track fraudulent claims. Furthermore, the implementation of snitch lines and finger-printing programs are strategies which clearly gain legitimacy by relying on negative assumptions about people on welfare. The alleged need for increased surveillance of welfare claims equates welfare overpayment with fraudulent behaviour and hence, criminal behaviour. It is rarely acknowledged that bureaucratic errors can also result in welfare overpayment. The rhetoric and strategies adopted by the Harris government to reduce welfare spending reflects mechanisms of control found within the criminal justice system. For the Harris government, welfare recipients and criminals are virtually synonymous, and hence, require similar treatment in terms of prevention and deterrence. The criminalization of welfare recipients through an increased use of the Criminal Code of Canada to punish fraudulent claimants is evidence of the hard-line approach adopted. Of those convicted of fraud, imprisonment is common (Martin, 1992). The high rates of imprisonment for convicted claimants not only reinforces the criminal label, but it also entrenches more conservative-minded beliefs that most welfare recipients are ‘undeserving’ and don’t really need assistance (Martin, 1992).

In the early 2000s, several reports, such as *Broken Promises: The Failure of Welfare Reform in Ontario*; *Discouraged, Diverted and Disentitled: Ontario Works New Service Delivery Model*; and *Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women's Experiences of Ontario's Welfare System* demonstrated the negative impact on recipients of Ontario's welfare policies. In early 2004, under great fanfare, the Ontario Liberal government reversed the Conservative policy of a lifetime ban on receiving welfare for those convicted of welfare fraud. Benefit rates were also

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increased by 3%, which was the first increase since 1993 (Ontario, 2004a). Another policy change was the removal of the automatic benefit reduction for sponsored immigrants, although this was accompanied by a policy of greater policing of sponsors, who now have incentive to force their dependents to remain in abusive or threatening relationships in order to protect their assets. In addition, recipients are now allowed to save for their children's educations without affecting their benefit rates (Ontario, 2004b). To date, few of the other policy measures have been repealed and as the data in this report reveal, welfare policy continues to criminalize and target poor Canadians, having a particularly negative effect on recipients of colour.

BRITISH COLUMBIA – THE ROAD TO PERDITION?

There is much less published information regarding welfare fraud control in British Columbia. The Liberal government has indicated that they intend to follow in Ontario's footsteps by banning those people convicted of welfare 'fraud' from receiving any benefits in the future (Amdur, 2002). While there is not yet a full-fledged public campaign to reduce welfare 'fraud' in BC, the number of people on income assistance has declined significantly in British Columbia over the past five years (British Columbia, 2001). As such, an assault against the poor (similar to the one that occurred in Ontario) has been predicted by many poverty advocates.

British Columbia's legislation and policies that pertain to welfare fraud and are relevant to this study are: 1) BC Benefits, a package of welfare initiatives in effect between 1996-2002 and 2) the BC Employment and Assistance Act (BCEA), which came into effect in April 2002. Both sets of welfare reforms addressed the need to maintain tight control of benefit distribution through the establishment of special branches to deal with issues of fraud and abuse.

SECTION 2 – Welfare Fraud Legislation in British Columbia and Ontario

Access to welfare benefits under the BC Benefits program was governed by three pieces of legislation: 1) the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act; 2) the BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act and 3) the Disability Benefits Program Act. Under this program, a separate branch, aptly named the Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement (PCE) Branch, was established for the sole purpose of ensuring a high level of compliance (British Columbia, 2000). Activities of the branch included conducting pre-eligibility reviews for high-risk clients through a process of data matching, conducting residency, identification and business license checks as well as carrying out enforcement investigations of suspected fraud.

Suspected cases of fraud are investigated by a ministry investigator or assistant ministry investigator. Annual reports by the Ministry between the years 1996-1999 suggest that the most common types of fraud committed relate to undeclared income, lost/stolen cheques, living with a common-law partner and providing a false address. Repayment agreements constituted the most common form of restitution; in a smaller number of cases, criminal charges were laid or civil court remedies (e.g. debt collection) were undertaken.

In April 2002, previous policies governing income assistance in British Columbia were consolidated under the BC Employment and Assistance Act. Under this Act, three types of welfare fraud are recognized; sanctions vary depending on the type of conviction. A criminal code conviction for fraud results in a lifetime ban on receiving public assistance whereas a conviction under the Employment and Assistance (BCEA) Act or the Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities (EAPWD) Act results in a one year ban for first offences, two years for the second offence and a lifetime ban for the third offence. Admitted fraud or fraud committed under a civil judgment carries the penalty of a three month ban for the first offence, a six month ban for the second offence and one year ban for the third offence.

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According to the Ministry of Human Resources, these sanctions, which took effect September 30, 2002, are aimed at “detering and preventing fraud to ensure income assistance is provided to those most in need” (British Columbia, 2004).

The policing of welfare fraud under the new Act continues to be carried out by the Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement (PCE) office; however, there has been a significant increase in daily surveillance of applicants and recipients as well as the implementation of a lifetime ban for those criminally convicted of fraud and for third-time offences under the BCEA legislation. Recipients of social assistance are now required to provide documentation regarding relationships, jobs, finances and volunteer work.

Activists and commentators have noted that the two new laws (BCEA Act and the EAPWD Act) will have a detrimental impact on British Columbians (Amdur, 2002; Klein, 2002; Reitsma-Street, 2002). Opponents of the new legislation point out that it emphasizes the increased use of surveillance and penalties for applicants and recipients and the withdrawal of appeals without providing adequate support for those seeking employment. Punishing applicants who provide incorrect, late or irregular information as well as those who fail to meet necessary conditions has been regarded by many as overly punitive, especially since there is no corollary plan to help people who are denied assistance. Furthermore, while the government claims that money will be saved by reducing the number of people eligible for benefits, administrative costs associated with constant eligibility assessments will likely result in increased spending. Organizations (such as the National Council of Welfare, 1997) question the extent to which a reduction in welfare caseloads is the result of more people finding gainful employment – rather, the decrease may be due to greater difficulties in obtaining social assistance due to more restrictive eligibility requirements.

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Klein and Long (2003) suggest that conditions similar to the above-mentioned contributed to the death of Kimberley Rogers in Ontario and could potentially have a similar effect in BC. The harsh conditions created by the new reforms combined with the unlivable income offered by social assistance leaves many with few options for survival (Klein and Long, 2003, p. 34). The effects of slashing welfare budgets have been well documented in Ontario and in the United States, where greater misery, increased poverty and homelessness and possibly death are just a few of the dire consequences facing those most in need.

SECTION 3

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This research study has been informed by both feminist and anti-racist writings about the welfare state. The importance of gender, race and class issues in the context of welfare ‘fraud’ cannot be understated since within Canada, racialized women are more likely to be poor and seek assistance from the state. This section begins by outlining the theoretical framework underpinning the project. A discussion of research methods follows.

FEMINIST ANTI-RACIST APPROACH TO WELFARE ENFORCEMENT

PRACTICES

Racialization refers to the historical emergence of the idea of ‘race’ and to its subsequent reproduction and application (Miles, 1989, p. 76). Racialization is part of a broader process whereby “categories of the population are constructed, differentiated, inferiorized and excluded” (Anthias, 1998b, p. 7). Conceptualizing racialization in this manner allows for an analysis of how “privilege and oppression are often not absolute categories but, rather, shifts in relation to different axes of power and powerlessness” (Friedman, 1995, p. 114). The criminalization of certain racialized groups within the Canadian context can be understood in two ways: 1) in light of the construction of white, majority groups as ‘race-less’ and 2) within the context of historical relations between First Nations People, early settlers, and recent immigrants and migrants.

Processes of racialization, economic inequality, gendering and criminalization are fundamentally interlocked and inseparable (Razack, 1998). While welfare is a ‘war against poverty,’ this war is systematically gendered and racialized. Drawing on feminist, anti-racist analyses, the authors highlight the relational and situated nature of inequality. As Anderson notes, “gender, race and class are social relations and exist only in relation to each other” (1996,

p. 736). Liu conceptualizes race as a “gendered social category,” arguing that “race oppression is predicated upon sex oppression” (1991, p. 265; also Anthias, 1998a). Razack notes that such an approach implies that “what happens to one group... is inextricably linked to what happens to another” (1998, p. 135). These approaches to the intersections of race, gender and class suggest a need to move away from demographic (trait based) understandings of these concepts, and towards their conceptualization as ‘processes.’ Glenn argues that such ‘processes’ take place through representation (symbols, images), micro-interaction (norms) and social structure (allocation of power along race/gender/class lines) (1999, p. 9). The focus on processes suggests that rather than a fixed, determinable relationship, the connections between race, gender and class are located in specific geographical and historical contexts. Razack argues that “it is vitally important to explore in a historically and site specific way the meaning of race, economic status, class, disability, sexuality, and gender as they come together to structure women in different and shifting positions of power and privilege” (1998, p. 12).

Feminist anti-racist analysis reveals that ‘class’ cannot be conceptualized apart from other forms of stratification, such as race and gender. Accordingly, far from being a homogeneous category, ‘the poor’ in Canada in fact consist of a large and diverse group. In a recent report entitled *Canada's Creeping Economic Apartheid*, Galabuzi notes that Canada's racialized groups experience “a persistent income gap, above average levels of poverty, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, overrepresentation in low income sectors of the economy and occupations, and under-representation in well paid jobs” (2001, p. 3). Across the nation, the poverty rate for racialized groups is higher than that of non-racialized groups. In British Columbia and Ontario in particular, the percentage of people of colour who are poor is twice the percentage of white Canadians living in poverty (Galabuzi, 2001, p. 81). Galabuzi's

report does not include Aboriginal people; however, other studies have revealed that Aboriginal people, too, have higher than average rates of poverty (Hadley, 2001).

Poverty is also a gendered phenomenon. Hadley's analysis (2001) reveals that one in five Canadian women live in poverty and that there is considerable diversity amongst poor women. For example, almost half of all Aboriginal women are poor, while more than one third of women of colour are poor. Female lone parents also have particularly high rates of poverty; more than half of all female lone parents are poor. The most pressing issue facing poor women is access to income assistance. Increased barriers, such as British Columbia's three week wait for social assistance and its two year independence rule, have created more hardships for women, particularly single mothers, and serve to further marginalize them (Vancouver Status of Women, 2003).

At the same time, it should be noted that while 'the poor' in Canada are not a uniform group, higher rates of poverty amongst certain groups do not correspond with proportionally higher welfare rates. Given the heterogeneity amongst those living in poverty, further sections of this report highlight the ways in which welfare control policies do not have uniform effects on 'the poor.' These policies are fundamentally racialized and gendered.

INTERVIEWING WELFARE RECIPIENTS OF COLOUR

This research on welfare fraud adopts a qualitative research approach, using interviews as the primary tool for data collection. A qualitative orientation is appropriate since the aim is to uncover deeper understandings of the impact that welfare fraud policies have on racialized welfare recipients. Specifically, given the topic of this project, a qualitative approach on 'race' and ethnicity was used to conduct the research. This approach recognizes that racial categories

are historically contingent, and that this is relevant for any contemporary research on ‘race’ and ethnicity. Rather than reifying ‘race’ and ethnicity as entities that individuals are born into and inhabit, ‘race’ and ethnicity are regarded as dynamic processes of being and becoming (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 19). Thus, ‘race’ and ethnicity are relational and socially constructed concepts – their specific effects both constitute and are negotiated through other social differences. Avoiding a reified and reductionist conceptualization of ‘race’ and ethnicity requires that researchers focus on examining processes of racialization (how racial and ethnic categories are produced and given meaning), since this approach offers a more effective and ethical way of recognizing how talk about ‘race’ can occur without implying that differentiation by ‘race’ is racist or unjustifiable (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 81). Taking this approach will help to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism while also recognizing that racial and ethnic categories are inadequate at best.

In the context of this research project, documenting the racialized effects of welfare fraud enforcement involves examining how myths and stereotypes about different racial groups are employed and allowed to persist through the process of accessing social assistance. It also involves recognizing that while there is a need to talk about different racial and ethnic communities, it cannot be assumed that they are homogenous communities. Therefore, whilst the desire for clear, generalizable knowledge about ‘race’ and ethnicity is strong, if the aim is to “produce different knowledge and . . . produce knowledge differently” (Lather, 2001, p. 200), then an approach which seeks to avoid simplistic categorizations of ‘race’ and ethnicity while recognizing the limitations of representing dynamic and emergent experiences is best suited to the task.

The research activities of this project involved carrying out twenty-four taped semi-structured interviews with welfare recipients of colour. Twelve interviews were conducted in each province, with respondents residing either in the greater Vancouver region or in the greater Toronto area. Through a snowball sampling procedure, respondents were approached with the offer to participate in the project; interviewees were provided with an honorarium of twenty-five dollars for a one hour interview. A consent form outlining the aims of the research, the role of the researcher and the nature of their participation was used to ensure that respondents were aware that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage of the research process. The respondents were asked about their experiences with the welfare system. Translators were used where necessary.

The sample consisted of individuals occupying a diverse range of social locations. Respondents ranged from 24 to 55 years of age; three-quarters of the sample had childcare and/or eldercare responsibilities. Individuals self-identified as Black, African, Chinese, Aboriginal, Somali, Sri Lankan, Caribbean and Mixed Race. One quarter of the sample was Aboriginal. The majority of respondents were female, although a few men were also interviewed. Some respondents were hesitant in their use of English while others were extremely fluent. Considerable overlap was found between the experiences of respondents from British Columbia and Ontario; therefore, findings from both provinces are discussed together.

The process of data analysis reflects the principles of qualitative analysis. Data gathered from interviews were subject to on-going analysis throughout the fieldwork phase and into the process of writing the report. In approaching the interview data, it is recognized that the data does not reflect an external reality of the interviewee, but is an internal reality constructed by both the interviewer and interviewee in order to produce an event that is recognizable to both

parties. Meanings that emerge from the interviews are the negotiated tensions between the research participants' and researcher's assumptions about reality (Fielding, 1993, p. 163). The mechanics of analyzing the data involved using a qualitative computer software package, NVivo, to code the interviews. The focus of the report now turns to the presentation of research findings.

SECTION 4

**THE EFFECTS OF THE WELFARE CONTROL
SYSTEM ON PEOPLE OF COLOUR**

INTRODUCTION

In order to provide a context within which people of colour are criminalized in their intersection with welfare fraud policies, a discussion of the ways in which the welfare system itself operates to maintain the oppression and subordination of people of colour is pertinent. An awareness of the ways in which policing, sentencing and imprisonment practices affect people of colour has been well documented by scholarly research. However, the racialized impact of welfare control, as a site of investigation, has remained largely unexcavated. Much of the Canadian literature on welfare fraud has focused on the ways in which recent social assistance program changes and fraud policies negatively affect poor women. As Carruthers (1995, p. 241) has noted, the “‘welfare cheater’ does not present a genderless face to the public.” Martin (1992) argues that women are significantly overrepresented in the prosecution of welfare fraud, and many receive sentences involving imprisonment. Women who are offered plea bargains often plead guilty to fraud, whether or not there is a convincing case against them. As Martin notes, “to a woman already traumatized by poverty, the added stigma of a criminal record is not worth disputing if failure means going to prison and leaving one's children without care, or in the hands of child welfare authorities” (1992, p. 68). The increased stigmatization of welfare recipients has not been accompanied by increasing levels of accountability or public confidence. Current policies on zero tolerance often have more drastic and tragic consequences than those reported by Martin in 1992.

A poignant example of the extremely negative and dangerous effects of fraud policies on women is evident in the case of Kimberly Rogers. Rogers was a pregnant Ontario woman convicted of welfare fraud and sentenced to six months of house arrest. Cut off from access to food, medicine and medical care, Rogers died in August 2001. An inquest into her death

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established that fraud policies played a key role in her death (Little, 2001). While Rogers was a straight A student in social work at a community college, she was depicted by defense lawyers as unstable, erratic and deceitful. Little argues that “these anti-fraud practices encourage an ideological discourse which is highly gendered, promoting the belief that poor women are morally suspect” (2001, p. 24).

Women accused of fraud are often required to produce unattainable forms of documentation, such as several years of bank records, paperwork held by a violent spouse or decade-old information (Little, 2001). The very request for such information ignores the conditions of poverty, which do not support the existence of stable, secure residences where paperwork can be carefully filed and organized. Anti-fraud policies also embody the nuclear family ideal, whereby women are persecuted for having a ‘spouse’ living with them. Little notes that the ‘spouse-in-house’ claim was the second most common reason for people reporting social assistance recipients to the welfare telephone hotline. Women accused of having a ‘spouse-in-house’ are required to produce evidence that they are not living in a spousal relationship (2001, p. 27; Little, 1999). The ‘spouse-in-house’ policy demonstrates the ways in which anti-fraud policies remain oblivious to current multi-faceted family structures (Eichler, 1997), and instead embody a heteronormative ideal of a nuclear family within which the presence of men is automatically taken to mean that they provide for women and children. The policies are also insensitive to the ways in which the threat of a phone call to the fraud hotline can be used by children’s fathers or others to extract money, food, access or sex from women. As Mosher et al. (2004) argue, women on welfare are often ‘trapped’ within situations of abuse.

Mosher (2002) traces the shifts in welfare policies in Ontario and the particular impacts these shifts have had on single mothers. Specifically, the 1995 reforms no longer adopted the

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common law definition of ‘spouse,’ even though this definition continues to be widely in use in all other spheres of Canadian society. Instead, any persons of the opposite sex residing in the same place as a single woman are now assumed to be a spouse. In 2000, same sex spouses were recognized, resulting in the scrutiny and surveillance of women who shared their residences with any individual. Eligibility review officers in Ontario have the right to enter a woman's house at any time, without a warrant, to collect evidence related to determining a person's eligibility for benefits. Review officers also often interview neighbours, children's teachers and landlords. In the context of the strong negative stigma associated with poverty and welfare, Mosher notes that it is “impossible to keep private the fact that one is in receipt of welfare” (2002, p. 48).

Only a few Canadian researchers and activists have attempted to document the specific affect of welfare fraud policies on people of colour, immigrants and Aboriginal peoples. Studies conducted have revealed that fraud policies are not only gendered but simultaneously deeply racialized. Little (2001) notes, for example, that Aboriginal women, especially those born on small reserves, may not always have documents such birth certificates and bank books. While it has been found that current social assistance regulations have a unique impact on Aboriginal women (Janovicek, 2000), there has been surprisingly little research on the specific impacts of welfare fraud policies on Aboriginal women.

Some attempts have been made to document the effect of social assistance programs on immigrants. The Ontario Social Safety Network documents the ways in which Bill 142 negatively impacts sponsored immigrants and refugees (Morrison, 1998b). Immigrants entering Canada as ‘sponsored’ family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents are deemed ineligible for social assistance for a period of ten years. Many sponsored immigrants are elderly. In cases where their sponsorship breaks down and they are deemed eligible for assistance, they

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receive allowances that are at least \$100 lower than other social assistance recipients. The discretion of review officers is often influenced by racialized depictions of immigrants and refugees from particular parts of the world. As Razack notes, “white citizens come to believe that they are overrun, and that their generosity is being abused because of the underlying notion that the crowds at the border are simply greedy Third World peoples out to take advantage of unsuspecting White Canadians...” (2000, p. 187).

The racialized impact of fraud policies on refugee communities has also been documented in studies of the Somali community in Toronto (Pratt and Valverde, 2002; Razack, 2000; Wright, 2000). The focus of anti-fraud measures on documentation has a particular effect on Somali Canadians, who often do not possess identity documents due to the circumstances of war that led to their migration. Research reveals that the label of ‘undocumented’ migrants serves to ensure that “an aura of criminality would cling to [Somali] people whose claims have been accepted and who are thus legally present in Canada” (Razack, 2000, p. 190). Somalis are constructed as nomadic, unreliable, shifting people who are diverting welfare money to Somali warlords, facilitating their enhanced surveillance (Pratt and Valverde, 2002).

These examples evidence the ways in which welfare fraud policies are racialized in significant ways; this structures the experiences of women and men of colour who receive social assistance. Specifically, the people interviewed in this study reported that the rules and procedures within the welfare system provided little support for the specific challenges they encountered, namely language barriers and harassment from case workers. Respondents also noted that they faced numerous barriers to employment and experienced depression and shame.

INADEQUATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Almost all the respondents interviewed mentioned the utter inadequacy of the welfare payments that they received, leading to difficulties making ends meet. Many regularly visited food banks and relied on community support agencies. Respondents noted:

You run out of money and, I don't know, it's like a cycle - always borrow money and then when you get money you don't even have it because it goes in one hand and out the other. (BC10F, translated)

When I started with welfare I was getting good allowances, three hundred dollars. And then they reduced it to two hundred and right now as we speak I only get one hundred and fifty dollars. (BC1F, translated)

The money they give me is not all that enough. Like, I have five children. My rent is nine hundred and sixty. And they give me six hundred and sixty. Where am I going to get the rest of the money for myself and five children? (BC4F)

That money - I was saving it towards my daughter's education. So being on welfare it's like really, really poverty. Whatever little that you have saved for a rainy day you have to get it out. (ON5F)

Given that funds received cannot to pay for all of their expenses, respondents noted that they could understand why some may choose to commit fraud in order to make ends meet:

Not if you have to buy your underwear and your socks and your bras and your shirts and your jeans, your shoes, you know all they don't take into consideration right. And that's why lots of people do crime when they are on welfare is because they can't handle it right and they're always begging right, not asking people for things and you know. They, no one wants to be a victim right and no one wants to live that way. Everybody has their pride you know and that's one thing I'm against welfare about is that they don't give you extra money when you need it. (BC8F)

Sometimes I'm actually for saying, all the credit to the people who can actually cheat the system out of a couple more dollars. Because people have to live, they have bills to pay and, really, Ontario Works just doesn't cut it. (ON3M)

As one woman respondent explains, not disclosing extra income makes it possible to make up the difference between what welfare provides and what is needed to survive:

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I mean I know people who if they do get a few shifts, or if they do get a job, they don't report it right away. Or they don't report all of what they make. Just to get by. And really that is what you are trying to do is to get by. It's not even to live above your means. It's just to get by. (ON9F)

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Advocating for higher payments or attempting to ensure the continuity of welfare payments was challenging for a large portion of recipients who do not have strong English language skills:

When I tried to apply for welfare, I had difficulties because it's only the educated people who know English. Like now to apply for welfare, you have to make an appointment through the phone first and you have to go through the process of applying for welfare over the whole... we didn't know any people who would actually help us to apply. (ON13M)

Forced to engage in self-advocacy and explain their circumstances in a language with which they are not always comfortable, respondents felt that they were under constant suspicion.

As one man noted:

Every time I go for the interview, they would ask me questions though I have actually told them but actually my details are they would ask me. But because of my inability to remember things, or comprehend things well, that I actually I don't say things. That is not my fault. They actually pick up on that. They give me a hard time on that as though I am lying again. (ON4M, translated)

NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS WITH CASE WORKERS

Much of the stress of being and staying on welfare was attributed to the interactions which individuals had with their 'case workers.' Respondents reported that workers were insensitive, not compassionate and often racist:

The more needs you require, the more they can stigmatize you. They get too much up here with all these drug addicts and alcoholics... That's why those people are trained to be very aggressive, very hard and very uncompassionate people. They are trained like that. Because they have so much up to here and they don't care about anyone. (ON10F)

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The worst thing is whenever I want to tell them my problems, they don't listen ... They don't bother if you get the rest of the money or is this money really enough for feeding, they don't care (BC4F)

In a few cases, respondents reported positive experiences with case workers:

I found this worker I got here – he took the time to talk to me and explain things to me. He gave me goals, told me by next time I saw him he needed that done and I basically did what was required of me. (ON11F)

The first welfare worker was actually very harsh and very strict with me. The second welfare worker was very warm and very understanding with me. (ON 4M)

Insufficient funds combined with an unsupportive case worker are not the only problems respondents encountered. Many women and men on social assistance also face numerous structural barriers to employment.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

A breadth of literature has documented that the lack of well-funded systems of early childhood education and eldercare poses significant barriers for people who have primary caring responsibilities. Respondents echoed these sentiments:

I think for me the easiest thing would be is if there were more resources for single parents to go to school or more childcare opportunities for us, they're quite hard to get. (BC3F)

I have to make some real serious decisions regarding my mother's care first and foremost. That is the biggest impasse I have right now is making decisions around that. (ON3M)

In addition, immigrants noted the significant barrier they faced in gaining Canadian experience:

It was hard for me to get a job... because whenever I applied they said that they need Canadian experience... where am I going to get the Canadian experience? (BC4F)

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Respondents of colour noted that regardless of their qualifications or education levels, they were confronted by the expectation that they would be most suited to deskilled and/or precarious employment:

Visible minority groups, more than any other, feel the pain and carry the burden of being on Ontario Works, of being in a sense harassed. I feel that there is a sense of oppression that people of visible minority groups, more than any other group, become squeezed out of finding meaningful employment unless they are willing to accept the bottom of the barrel things. (ON3M)

There's this cashier training course and business skills not only means cashier. But that's I guess what I'm supposed to do because I'm an immigrant. That's what they assume. Well you're an immigrant and that's what you're supposed to do. That's the only thing you can do and that's the only thing that all immigrants can do. So I'll just give you this information. You're an immigrant and there's a cashier that is not a computerized cashier training course but it's at Goodwill. And this is what you'll be doing for six weeks. You'll be folding clothes and putting bags of clothes away and work in labour. And yeah, you can do that for the rest of your life. (ON10F)

The education in your country is not good enough here. So they label you and they say, "well, we have cleaning positions, or we have retail positions or we have cashier positions." (BC10F, translated)

As Shields notes, "in the new labour market, immigrants... are coming to be used increasingly as a part of a new 'flexible' and disposable labour force suited to the demands of the globalized just-in-time economy" (2003, p. iii). In order to avoid the trap of precarious minimum wage jobs, many respondents reported turning to education in an attempt to gain more meaningful work:

I've held down steady jobs before but it's actually trying to find a job to actually pay my rent and support me at the same time plus have a little left over on the side. So basically to do anything like that I have to finish getting my GED [Grade 12] first. (BC12F)

I would love to get a job and support myself but at the same time we need to go to school. You can't go, you can't get a good job that you want or you can't pursue a career or anything unless you go to school. (ON1F)

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While for some respondents education was a means to a better future, it was also noted that forced training as a requirement of receiving welfare was often used as yet another intimidation tactic. As one man noted:

There is a certain amount of pressure that they put on people. They always want to keep them busy almost, so to speak, as to not keep them too comfortable on social assistance. So what they do is that we are always in constant workshops, or, that is fine but people need to look at the skills and take a sort of personal inventory, but they do it in a way to intimidate you, rather than to help you... They are supposed to help you with job leads and job development initiatives. That is what they do but overall I would say that these things, I don't think they are very effective and definitely they always seem to target visible minority groups... It's usually South Asians, Asians and Blacks that are the ones that are usually targeted for workshops, the ongoing workshops, the job development and so on. There is a certain amount of pressure to keep them going to all of these things because if they do not go, if they do not attend the workshops, they will be held in what is called non-compliance. They run the risk of then having their social assistance terminated. (ON3M)

One of the most significant barriers to employment mentioned was the racism within the Canadian labour market itself. As will be discussed in greater detail in Section Six of this report, employer racism was an important factor in excluding women and men from obtaining fulfilling jobs:

Well, people always assume that I'm Hispanic and I'm dumb. They always assume that well, she looks Latino or Latina, Hispanic, so she is a dumb immigrant... [About her supervisor] Why is he giving other people cashier positions and for me it's a food prep position and I'm much older than these students, these kids? They're actually kids, a lot younger than me. Already have been to one year college and I didn't understand why the misled information was towards me but I just assumed, well, it could be because I look Hispanic so maybe he thinks I should just work in food and to clean up and that's what I was doing in this job. I was food prep and cleaning up, and never was allowed to go near the cash register, touch it or help out or anything (ON10F)

Mostly in here even I have tried to work for the factory. For the light work. But whenever they see my veil, it's big and the way I wear it, "oh, it's inconvenient". You can't work for the machine and it could go through the machine and you know it could be harm on you and stuff like that. Some of them when I spoke over the phone they told me, "yes, there is a job available, come on in." And when I go there they just told me, "oh sorry, this job has been taken. You could just still fill out the application. I will call you." And they never call me. (ON2F)

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These experiences both within the welfare system and in society at large have a direct impact on the mental health of women and men on welfare.

DEPRESSION AND SHAME

Many respondents noted feeling depressed or ashamed about being on welfare. Rather than providing support, however, the systems and structures in place served to exacerbate these feelings.

The process is, it is difficult to, it is very impersonal first of all. It is a very impersonal process. You go in and you feel like utter crap first of all. It is very demoralizing. I don't care who says, it is very demoralizing to be on social assistance. (ON3M)

It's not a life to be on assistance. Especially when you have a worker like this, it's hell. Believe me. Every end of the month my heart is beating. Am I gonna get my cheque? Is my cheque gonna be suspended and all this for no reason? (ON2F)

There is a lot of not so good things which are, you know, the harassment, the needing to give up every aspect of your life, every dignified thing that you don't have to give up in your normal life if you weren't on assistance. Just the way that you are treated as not a human being but as a number. (ON9F)

I need to buy a pillow, a bed or whatever. People told me that you could make a list and take it to the welfare worker and they will give you some money about for that. So I did that and then a white worker actually interviewed me and said well, you have spent so much money to come to Sri Lanka, from Sri Lanka to Canada, so don't you have money to get these things? (ON14M)

In some cases, respondents reported that they complained to supervisors about the treatment they received and through their personal advocacy were able to receive better treatment:

I got this vibe, this kind of vibe off her [welfare worker] where basically she just didn't care. I complained and I got a supervisor on the phone... no, I got an intake worker actually on the phone and she said don't leave until I speak to a supervisor. Then I spoke to the supervisor and the supervisor was a nice lady and she directed me to another lady who was excellent. (ON12M)

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She was trying to tell me, oh no, I can't give you that. And it was something I know that everyone else got because I asked people in the office and when I told them that she got fired for it. (BC8F)

While many of the experiences reported above are a direct result of poverty, women and men of colour are particularly stigmatized. As discussed in the following section, the existing criminalization of people of colour (Chan and Mirchandani, 2002) facilitates the enhanced surveillance of women of colour who are on social assistance.

SECTION 5

CRIMINALIZING WELFARE RECIPIENTS OF COLOUR

INTRODUCTION

While there is no shortage of discussion and debate on the state of welfare systems, there have been remarkably few discussions both within and outside of Canada regarding the enforcement practices of welfare provisions and virtually none that address, in a sustained fashion, the racialized nature of welfare enforcement (with the exceptions Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001 and Quadagno, 1994). Within the literature, attention centres on recipients' views and perspectives regarding having their behaviour monitored and policed. Some writers have noted that the increased policing of welfare fraud continues to reinforce a negative view of people in need, thereby legitimizing their stigma and discrimination in the public eye. Moreover, while it is widely acknowledged that gender plays a significant role in determining persons who are more likely to be in need, and as a result, surveilled, there is less attention paid to the racialized nature of welfare provisions and enforcement.

The available literature on welfare control and enforcement highlights how practices and policies of surveillance and control are largely shaped by myths and stereotypes about welfare recipients. Within this body of literature, there is a clear sense that the need to manage welfare fraud is less about social or fiscal problems stemming from fraud than it is about maintaining legitimacy for governments unable to stem the rise of poverty and unemployment or create more equitable access to employment opportunities. Rachert's (1990) historical study of welfare fraud policies in British Columbia during the 1970s argues that the state relied on promoting the myth of welfare fraud in order to minimize the number of people on welfare, to redefine unemployed persons as being the cause of their own misfortunes and to minimize welfare spending by constructing welfare recipients as lazy and undeserving. A more focused study regarding the ways in which stereotypes influence understandings of fraud can be seen in Sabatini et. al.'s

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(1992) study of cohabitation or ‘spouse in the house’ fraud. This quantitative study discusses whether economic need best explains unauthorized cohabitation; it found that economic need alone could not fully account for why people may engage in this type of fraud. Moreover, the belief that massive fraud of this type is taking place because of economic need was not supported by this study’s findings, thus casting doubt on the prevailing assumption that all poor people commit fraudulent behaviour.

Two particular groups that have come under intense scrutiny for allegedly ‘cheating’ the welfare system are immigrants and refugees. Nowhere is the vilification of welfare recipients more vociferous than when it is directed at these groups. In both Europe and North America, they have become the lynchpin of those who believe that welfare recipients are criminals. The treatment of Somali refugees in Toronto (as noted in Section Four) and asylum seekers in Europe (Bloch and Schuster 2002; Jubany-Baucells 2002; Sales 2002) are just two examples of a situation where racism has fueled the demonization, marginalization and exclusion of people with varying citizenship statuses seeking assistance from their reluctant hosts. This has been possible through the construction of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly within the media, as persons who take but do not contribute to the public wealth (Bloch and Schuster, 2002). As a result of conflating welfare fraud and criminality with immigration, greater demands for tightening welfare eligibility and immigration controls have emerged.

THE IMPACT OF FRAUD ‘POLICING’

Government methods to combat the increasing ‘fraud problem’ have led several commentators to critically examine the social and political impact of surveillance and policing methods on welfare recipients. The implementation of finger-printing programs and mandatory addiction screening

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and treatment programs have raised concerns about the ways in which poverty and the need for welfare are being constructed. Murray (2000) claims that finger-printing welfare recipients sends a strong message regarding the connections between poverty and welfare dependency to deviance and criminality. He notes that the popularity of finger-printing programs (which are used primarily to deal with the problem of ‘double-dipping’) fail to recognize that they cannot address the non-reporting of earnings – the most common form of welfare fraud. While administrators argue that finger-printing is merely an administrative procedure, Murray convincingly highlights that it is difficult not to regard the process as a degradation ritual designed to send a message that welfare dependency and poverty is deviant, and that those in need will be subject to stigmatization and treated like criminals. Paul Bobier (1998) explores whether the problem of welfare fraud justifies the high costs of purchasing a biometric identification system to finger-print welfare recipients. He notes that in New York City, out of a million recipients, there were only 36 detected cases of ‘double-dippers’ in 1996. Canada’s experience with biometric identification also reveals that such programs have little cost-saving potential. Toronto, for example, introduced a Client Identification Benefits Program (CIBS); this program was operational between 1996-1999 and then cancelled due to the withdrawal of private sector consortium members (Barry, 2002, p. 98). Aside from the financial costs, there are also privacy considerations raised by the use of such programs as well as reservations about protecting the rights of people living in poverty. Philip Berger (2001) expresses a similar concern about the use of mandatory addiction screening and treatment for welfare recipients. Despite overwhelming objections from civil rights advocates and no solid evidence that welfare recipients are more likely to have drug or alcohol related problems, the Ontario Government has nonetheless singled out welfare recipients as particularly affected by substance abuse problems.

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As Berger (2001, p. 444) notes, the use of such a test “is an example of the state’s misapplication of science for the purpose of achieving ideologically motivated social change.”

While Canada continues to grapple with these concerns, in the United States, such measures and practices are commonplace. Charlotte Twight’s (2002) study of federal control and surveillance of ordinary Americans paints an Orwellian picture of a nation that no longer enjoys any privacy rights. Expanding the use of people’s Social Security Numbers (SSN) to a broad range of non-employment related transactions highlights a way in which the problem of welfare fraud can be used to shore up legitimacy for intrusive data collection and data sharing programs (Twight, 2002, p. 247). John Gilliom (2001) concurs with Twight’s analysis in his own study of welfare surveillance. He states that the emphasis of the American welfare state on deterring those who can fend for themselves, on adhering to strict eligibility requirements combined with a disdain for welfare recipients has resulted in a situation where “the welfare poor are subject to forms and degrees of scrutiny matched only by the likes of patients, prisoners and soldiers” (Gilliom, 2001, p. 28). The practice of shaming the poor into independence through the use of tactics such as surprise home visits, invasive questions and biometric identification may serve only to construct more barriers that prevent the poor from asking for help from the state (Gilliom, 2001, p. 40).

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Several writers have undertaken to understand the nature and functioning of the administrative state in the control of welfare fraud. In most developed countries, a large bureaucratic machine has been established in order to manage the distribution of welfare benefits and control problematic human behaviours. Yet, our understanding of the mechanisms of power within the

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administration of welfare is piecemeal at best. Pemberton (1990) and Moffatt (1999) seek to change that by demystifying the ways in which the control and surveillance of welfare fraud can be situated and understood within the wider context of the welfare office and the administrative state. Both writers conclude that the state's attempt to 'discipline' welfare recipients is fraught with contradictory and complex dynamics. Moffatt's (1999) study of a social assistance office reveals that the system of power relations within the office creates self-conscious autonomous clients on the one hand, while manufacturing the 'welfare cheat' on the other. In a slightly different vein, Pemberton (1990) questions the need for the apparatus of surveillance in the welfare system when the annual rate and cost of welfare fraud in Australia has not increased significantly in the past six years. He questions whether there is much 'disciplining' or 'pacification' of the welfare recipient taking place given the low incidence of fraud and, consequently, whether the concept of 'disciplinary technologies' is useful to an understanding of the modern 'Administrative State' (Pemberton, 1990, p. 138).

RECIPIENTS' VIEWS

Attempts to provide an understanding of the fraud issue from the perspectives of those using the welfare system have begun to emerge. Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, welfare recipients are more than aware that theirs is a no-win situation. Whether they rely on the state for assistance or attempt to make ends meet by taking on extra work to top up their inadequate benefits, they are confronted with a system that is confusing, degrading, full of hassles and one in which they are demonized as undeserving, lazy and stigmatized because they need help. Evanson and Woods' (1995) study of claimants' experiences in the social security system in Northern Ireland demonstrates that making ends meet requires dependency on family members

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and/or charity organizations or ‘doing the double’ (working while receiving benefits). They document the resentment that claimants have towards a system that leaves them with no choice but to ‘do the double,’ since real jobs are lacking and the benefits provided are wholly inadequate to meet basic needs. John Gilliom’s (2001) interviews with fifty welfare mothers in Ohio and Secombe, James and Walter’s (1999) stories of forty-seven women on welfare in Florida reveal a similar situation. These studies (as well as Zucchini, 1997) highlight the constant struggles these women experience while being under constant surveillance as they attempt to meet their family’s needs. Finally, Cherlin et al.’s (2002) study of welfare recipients’ experiences with sanctions and case closings points to the confusion many recipients experience while trying to understand the complex administrative rules they are required to adhere to and how easily people can lose access to their benefits for bureaucratic reasons, such as missing a meeting or failing to produce a document.

Our research study echoes many of the themes described above. In particular, the recent emphasis in welfare reforms on enforcement has resulted in more punitive and criminalizing tendencies. The impact of these policy changes are acutely felt by racialized people, particularly women. That a gap exists between welfare policies concerning enforcement and the realities of many welfare recipients should perhaps come as no surprise, since there are many indications that the provision of welfare for those ‘most in need’ is a politically loaded statement. The main themes associated with the enforcement of welfare provisions – welfare surveillance and dehumanizing treatment – will now be detailed.

WELFARE SURVEILLANCE

According to the twenty-four welfare recipients of colour interviewed, welfare surveillance occurred at two main sites in the system – during application for benefits, and in order to continue receiving benefits over a period of time.

ACCESSING WELFARE BENEFITS

At the time of application, respondents noted that welfare workers often demanded extensive documentation, which related not only to their financial situation, but to every aspect of their lives. Respondents reported that it was not uncommon for them to provide pay slips, birth certificates, letters from landlords, bank transcripts and landed immigrant papers in an effort to demonstrate need. Yet, for both first time applicants and those who had previously received welfare benefits, while they recognized the need to provide some of this information, they found the process demeaning:

I think it is almost their job to make you feel worse [laughs] by a very impersonal attitude, some bullying, a very almost hostile environment to people because you are regarded as less than nothing, and that is very hard. (ON3M)

They shouldn't make us feel as if we have to be begging and ask you. You know, because when you call the intake and everything like that, the stuff that they ask you for I think is really too personal. (ON5F)

They just, I allowed them to ask me the stupid questions and I answered. And they said, "we'll only allow you to do it this one time but you have to have your landed immigrant papers." And I said, "oh okay." I acted dumb and that was it. But it was an awful experience because it makes you feel like you're a criminal 'cause that's the way I was being treated. (ON10F)

The fact that many respondents had to go through several interviews and meetings with welfare workers left them feeling that their request for help was not genuinely believed. Respondents noted that documents were often requested in order to delay welfare payments, or as a form of legitimated harassment exercised by case workers:

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I did an annual review last week or the week before and she had already gotten these papers, I had handed them to her personally, then she asks for them again. I said, "I gave them to you." She says, "Well I don't know what happened to them but I don't have them in my file." This is about four times since I've had this worker she has done this to me, papers went missing and I had to go running around and do them again. (BC5F)

In these ways, while on one level the request for documentation serves to 'prove' applicant need, on another level, it serves to promote constant suspicion of the legitimacy of claims. Documents also serve as a form of moral control, forcing individuals to divulge their personal financial situations to strangers (landlords, employers, neighbours) on a continual basis. As the woman quoted above noted, the application process made her *feel* like she was a criminal.

ENSURING COMPLIANCE

The surveillance of welfare recipients also occurred while respondents were receiving assistance. The three main areas of surveillance were: 1) compliance with training and workshop obligations, 2) ensuring that there wasn't another adult living in the house with the recipient ('spouse in the house') and 3) reporting any income earned while receiving assistance.

Most provincial welfare programs require that recipients undergo training programs, attend workshops and actively seek employment. Respondents in this study noted that these demands were made on them by welfare workers, despite various difficulties in meeting these obligations:

Welfare wants me to go to work but I really can't work. I am afraid that they will cut me off. My doctor can't find any 'proof' that there is a real health problem. I am always anxious and sweating and that this has been for a year. (BC10F, translated)

The worker started talking to me about the training program and I said at that time my mind wasn't working well, I did not understand and secondly she cannot understand everything that I said in English. So I came home and I didn't know exactly what was going on until sometime when I phoned those people and get someone to read and translate for me and then when I found out, okay, I was supposed to go for training and I have not gone for the training so immediately the welfare closed my file. (BC1F, translated)

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In addition, welfare recipients are required to attend appointments with their case workers. Many respondents felt that these appointments were unnecessary, prevented them from meeting other obligations and were time consuming, as there were long waits to see their case workers:

Sometimes I have a test but I still have to go see him. And he will make me wait for two hours sometimes. There was a time my appointment was at, I think, 8:30, no no no, 9:30. It was very early in the morning. He made me wait for two hours and when I went and sat there I asked him, “why did you make me wait for all this time.” He goes, “oh I had more important things to do.” (ON1F)

Every other two months maybe he told me, “you have to have an interview.” For what interview? you have to do all over interview. My change, situation didn’t change. Still it’s the same thing. Every other month. (ON2F)

The worst thing about it is they have too much appointment and if you are late for it they give you hard time. They assure you and they say you’re not qualified for it. Things like that. And also if you have a hospital appointment and you have a welfare appointment, you can’t call up their appointment, the welfare appointment, and tell them, the worker, that you have an appointment for the hospital. They say, “we don’t care, you have to come to the appointment.” So the worker gives you a hard time. (ON8F, translated)

Respondents who failed to comply with all the necessary requirements for receiving assistance would sometimes have their cheques temporarily suspended, their files closed or benefits completely cut off:

When I was 18, I was on it for a couple months there. Two months went by and at this point they were saying if you don’t give us the information by this date, then we’re going to cut you off. At that point I got to be all over the damn place trying to get the information before they cut me off. They expect you to get all the information. (ON12M)

Any time they request something. They will suspend until you bring the papers. She says if you, if they give us advice almost a month ago, for me. They give you that so if you respond on time your cheque will not be suspended. If you delay, if you delay for any reason, that’s when the cheque will be suspended until you supply. (ON7F, translated)

Several respondents commented on the lack of respect they received in their requests for assistance. Their desire to be “treated like a human being” and not have their cheques

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immediately suspended or terminated because of missing information was a sentiment echoed by many.

A second area of intense scrutiny centred on the issue of welfare fraud with respect to respondents' living arrangements. Better known as the 'spouse in the house,' respondents spoke about the frequent home visits because their personal situation was viewed with suspicion and disbelief by welfare workers:

When I came to this country, I was actually married but last year I got separated; my husband basically got his stuff and then left. So, and where he's gone basically don't know his address ...but the welfare people, the people from the ministry have been sending somebody to the house to see if he is there or not and that is really very frustrating because that trust because you know they don't believe me. (BC1F, translated)

Twice they sent an investigator to my house for fraud because I was living...it was a man's apartment in both cases but like I wasn't going out with him but one guy I slept on his living room floor and the other guy in his bed right but we weren't having s...like we weren't going out together but welfare still came and checked and they questioned me and they questioned him and they questioned a woman I was living with. (BC8F)

Finally, respondents are also required to report any earnings while they are receiving assistance or provide documentation of the reasons they cannot look for work. Demands for pay slips, letters from employers and from schools outlining vacation times (in order to demonstrate that child care duties prevented the respondent from seeking work) were common requests, and if they were not provided, often resulted in suspension of cheques:

Welfare asked actually us to get the letter from the school where the school was on vacation, holidays, so I could not get a letter and then I tried to explain to the worker. She said, "that's no good. If you don't get the letter we're going to suspend the welfare." Though that I have actually submitted other things, which is the bank card, SIN card and bank documents and things like that. So welfare was stopped eventually for one month. For 15 days actually I did not have any money, so I really suffered. (ON14M)

I have to meet them and they need to see. They check my bankbook always. They think maybe I have other kind of income. They do that. They always, they want to know your attempts or if you tried to find a job or anything. (ON1F)

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They held my cheque last month. I'm waiting for it and just like that. Because I start working in June here part-time and she didn't get the stub. So she said she didn't get it and I sent it out and she just hold the cheque and I'm waiting, looking for it and I didn't have any food or whatever and then I call her. "Oh, I hold onto your cheque because I didn't get the stub," and I say, "so why didn't you call me" (ON5F)

Many of the respondents have had their welfare cheques suspended at one time or another because they failed to provide adequate documentation. Respondents noted that the documents they were asked to provide were often difficult to obtain, and that they were often given confusing and contradictory information about exactly which documents they needed to present. Since their main interaction with the welfare system was through their case workers, respondents attributed much of the dehumanizing treatment they received to the actions and attitudes of case workers.

DEHUMANIZING TREATMENT

The effects of being forced to comply with every regulation, often without any flexibility or consideration, left many respondents with a negative experience of the welfare system. Respondents reported being harassed by welfare workers and being placed under constant control and surveillance:

All he [welfare worker] wants is to give you hard time to be with him all the time. So every other month he could call you and every month he could leave a message with you and say I need to update, I need this and this, I need this and that. (ON2F)

I find that in operating the system, going through the system, that really the intake people or community and social services worker they have a tendency to, it is a mild form of harassment [laughs]. There is a certain amount of intrusion on your privacy and you know you go along with the agreement because otherwise you cannot access the service unless you provide all the information that is necessary. (ON3M)

People who are not able to work should not be harassed this much by the welfare people. They know that I don't speak English. They also know that I don't read Tamil also. So and yet they also know that what my medical condition is and things like that. They are

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not able to actually understand and comprehend what kind of issues I have and try to be sensitive to that. (ON4M, translated)

There is a lot of not so good things which are, you know, the harassment, the needing to give up every aspect of your life, every dignified thing that you don't have to give up in your normal life if you weren't on assistance. Just the way that you are treated as not a human being, but as a number. (ON9F)

Respondents also reported that welfare workers tended to assume that they were lying about their circumstances and the information they provided in order to receive assistance:

I felt particularly demoralized at one time where I was repeatedly asked, well, on two occasions - I was asked to provide a letter verifying that I was a part-time caregiver and that my mother was indeed sick with Alzheimers. The funny thing is that I was the one who produced the first letter of my own volition. Of my own volition, and then I was later told by my worker that the letter was outdated and that I needed another one [laughs]. So okay, I produced another one for her; however, it made me feel that, just the ridiculous situation of having to go through proving this. And that anyone would make up such a situation as having a parent with Alzheimers is pretty extreme not to believe. (ON3M)

Every time I go for the interview, they would ask me questions though I have actually told them but actually my details are they would ask me. But because of my inability to remember things or comprehend things well that I actually, I don't say things that are not my fault. They actually pick up on that. They gave me a hard time on that as though I am lying again. (ON4M, translated)

I think sometimes it appears to me that the welfare system seems to think that everybody is a liar, everybody is trying to fraud them, everybody is lazy and not wanting to do anything about their situation instead of taking each case as, you know, looking at each case individually. (ON9F)

In some cases, respondents noted difficulties in attempting to contact their welfare workers. Phone calls would go unanswered and respondents' attempts to set up meetings would be refused:

How she does her job and that...and when I try and call her and if she doesn't like a question I'm asking her she hangs up on me. She hangs up on a lot of people that I know that if she doesn't want to answer the question she just hangs up. And then she won't answer her phone after that. One day I phoned four times that I got through and she hung up on me four times and eight times I got the machine. I never got no response back. This was for a cab to go to the hospital, my surgery. (BC5F)

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He never answer the message. That's his habit. He's not going to answer. He's going to leave with the answering machine and then if he want it that time he's going to call you back. (ON2F)

Contacting your worker is made very difficult. Usually it is the worker who gets in contact with you and not the other way around. Don't even think about trying to phone your worker because really they don't want to be bothered with you until it is time. (ON3M)

Many respondents stated that they thought their welfare workers could have been a lot more helpful with letting them know about various programs they could have access to, the regulations regarding receiving assistance and other benefits associated with receiving assistance:

They do not mention those things that are helpful. I mean, I had to hear from talking to different people that you can get a free computer if you have children. You can get a start-up package if you are moving. All these things were not knowledge to me until I spoken with different people. (ON9F)

I'm trying to get into Trade Works, I was trying to get into that and she denied me that...and here she was pushing me to go into it and now she's denying it to me said I can't go there. And here I came up with two other programs to help me get...for a job thing sort of and she denied me that to. She said something about my age that's what she said. Here my mom went through that. My mom is sixty, I'm only forty-three. (BC5F)

The bad thing is that they don't give you information about welfare policies or what welfare can do for you. They don't tell you how much training courses are out there. They don't tell you so much advantages that you can do for yourself that the government can pay for your diploma for certain things or that you can volunteer and get \$100 for your TTC. I had no, it took a long time for me to know what a social worker knows. And to go through that is very horrible because while you're going through discrimination at school you're also going through this bad treatment from your worker. (ON10F)

That the workers definitely should inform the applicants of all, of everything that they need to know regarding their benefits and what they are entitled to and stop keeping things to themselves and acting as if it is their money, their personal money that they are doling out, you know. Not to be free handed with it but let the clients know what they are entitled to. (ON11F)

Some of the experiences discussed above may be shared by all people on welfare, regardless of 'race' or ethnicity. The people of colour interviewed for the present study,

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however, noted that the dehumanizing treatment they received from their welfare workers was the result of being both poor and racialized. One woman believed that the lack of access to programs was the result of being non-white:

Because my friend, she's white, and we have the same worker and she's the same age as I am and she gets a lot more things going for her than I do. (BC5F)

Another woman identified other concerns, such as health problems and abuse, which compounded their negative treatment:

And it's almost like they treat you like you don't have any rights, you don't have any human rights, because you have depression or because you're abused or because you're multicultural. Those three things are definitely, it's a stigma against me. So they feel not only are you a multicultural woman, you're a depressed, an abused multicultural woman. We can treat you however we want to treat you, and that's how I feel towards me. (ON10F)

The punitive treatment directed towards respondents by the welfare system is consistent with the literature. As various governments tighten access to the welfare system, those who fail to abide by the rules and regulations are either penalized or criminalized for their behaviour. The intense surveillance and control of welfare recipients also ensures that only a small proportion of those in need will actually receive assistance. For racialized people, the problem is exacerbated by racist comments and treatment within the welfare system. The next section discusses the effects of racism on respondents' interactions with the welfare system.

SECTION 6

RACISM AND THE CANADIAN WELFARE SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

An examination of welfare systems across North America and Europe reveals a similar pattern of stereotyping, scapegoating and marginalization of welfare recipients. The current political discourse of welfare entitlement highlights the prevalence of a neo-liberal agenda shaping public policy. The promotion of free markets and reduced state social responsibility has allowed governments to articulate the kinds of people that are entitled to assistance and protection. As many writers note, the dichotomy of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ person has played a significant role in shaping debates and policies for the last several decades (Mandell, 2001; Mosher, 2000; Sidel, 2000; Sales, 2002). Janet Mosher (2000) reveals that the Canadian government’s retreat from social programs has been made possible through the adoption of several strategies – one of which is the active construction of deeply negative stereotypes of welfare recipients, particularly welfare mothers. Fuelling and maintaining this stereotype is the state’s ‘anti-fraud’ campaign.

Racialized groups have historically been the targets of moral panic and continue to be stereotyped as the criminal ‘other’. Pratt and Valverde (2002) document the shift in the 1990s from the definition of refugees as ‘deserving victims’ to ‘bogus, welfare cheats.’ Facilitated by the rise in neo-liberal governmental policies guided by individualism and self-reliance, all social assistance recipients were seen to be “locked in a lifestyle of dependency” and undeserving of taxpayer resources (2002, p. 138 and 141). As Pratt and Valverde note, “the welfare-fraud campaign had made it possible to look at immigrant and refugee claimants as threats to the welfare system” (2002, p. 146).

Hayes (2000) suggests that welfare has never been about universal access, and that welfare policies are based on exclusion. Governments have been able to attack welfare by using

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vulnerable groups, such as single parents, criminals and immigrants to weaken the idea of universality. As more immigrants and refugees are denied access or are having their access to welfare challenged (Jubany-Baucells, 2002; Liedtke, 2002; Pratt and Valverde, 2002), it is difficult to ignore Hayes' claim that welfare and geographic location of origin are intrinsically linked. Racial hierarchies are central to notions of entitlement as they demarcate who belongs to the nation and who does not. Razack (2000) argues that in order for the scapegoating of immigrants and refugees to be believed, one has to also believe in the national story of white innocence and deceitful, treacherous immigrants. Marchevsky and Theoharis's (2000) analysis of the welfare state in the United States arrives at a similar conclusion, noting that welfare reform hinges on pitting the interests of the white citizenry against the delegitimized claims of an 'undeserving' and 'alien' underclass. One of the key myths that governments rely on in demonizing women is the belief that most of these impoverished, single, child-bearing women are black (Sidel, 2000, p. 76). The stigmatization of mainly low-income women of colour has allowed successive American governments to dismantle the welfare state and increase surveillance and policing of welfare recipients (Marchevsky and Theoharis, 2000).

In our interviews with racialized welfare recipients, racism was regarded as a problem both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, language barriers made it difficult for respondents to fill out application forms and communicate with welfare workers; finding interpreters was often difficult. This resulted in numerous delays and confusion. Direct forms of racism could be found in the belief many respondents held that they were treated differently because of their racial or ethnic background. Indirect and direct racism, experienced as language barriers and/or differential treatment, will now be explored in further detail.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Many of the respondents in this study required interpreters in order to communicate in English. In some cases, though deadlines needed to be met, the welfare system did not provide interpreters to help respondents complete tasks:

He say that they suggested that he has to apply for ODSP within 90 days, right. And they don't give him any kind of resources in a sense that they don't have an interpreter, they don't have a person who is actually able to help him because he doesn't know how to do that process itself. (ON8F, translated)

The need for translation services exacerbated the effects of the bureaucratic rules and mechanisms that people on welfare are expected to follow. Having to rely on a network of friends, community support workers and translators, the bureaucratic rules and regulations required in order to receive social assistance form yet another literacy barrier for people with limited English skills:

I also don't know English so I asked one of my friends... he took a day off and [I] took him to the welfare office. And they said, no, this is not the office, you have to go to another office which is at Finch. So then we went to that office. That office said no, this is not the office, you have to go to another office. And so we went to four offices and then the fourth office actually told [us] that you can't make an appointment here. You have to call these people first and make an appointment. (ON14M)

I can't even sign myself well. If I make one mistake they will send the forms back. (ON4M, translated)

The worst part was I don't know the language and I have to look for someone to interpret for me. The worst part is that. (ON8F, translated)

An inability to explain problems to their workers meant that respondents were unable to access their benefits quickly:

One thing is that I would say language because it is very hard to get the welfare worker on the phone or to meet them. When you meet them you can't tell everything all at once. So if you don't tell everything at once you don't get the services properly. So I would prefer that opportunity to be utilized well. In order to utilize well you need a person who can speak English also. (ON14M)

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Many respondents noted the frustration they felt at not being understood or not being able to communicate adequately with their workers. The provision of translation services is constructed as an individual rather than a state responsibility, and this policy forms one example of the systemic discrimination prevalent in the welfare system. In Ontario, for example, organizations that provide settlement and translation services have been systematically closed, and programs such as the Multilingual Access to Social Assistance Program (MASAP) has been eliminated (Shields, 2003, p. xxii). The negative consequences that emerge from communication barriers and the failure to rectify them by providing translators underscore the racist treatment experienced by the respondents. As one woman respondent comments:

For me I think maybe because of my color that is why they don't respond because if it was not like that she should respond to everybody. (BC4F)

DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT

In addition to the subtle, indirect forms of racism experienced by respondents, more direct forms of racism and sexism were noted by respondents, who were aware that not everyone received the same type of treatment within the welfare system:

They come and they investigate and then they leave and that was it...but I mean, you're native, you're either an alcoholic or you're a drug addict or you're [] which not everybody is. (BC3F)

I think there are some workers that tell you no because you are black. I think that. I mean prejudice is prevalent in this society. (BC8F)

I think it's really unfair for a lot of women in my situation because I don't understand how someone who's a crackhead can get so much favouritism and so much money, or someone whose very well speaking English and someone whose Caucasian getting more. I just don't understand this. I see that a lot. (ON10F)

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The problem is compounded by the recognition that being on welfare already carries its own stigma. As one male respondent notes, the harsh treatment can be the result of several factors:

Yeah, I think so I think it's just my nationality, that's what I think or I think it's just because people are on welfare right. They might not be prejudiced, I'm just saying it might be because I'm on welfare. (BC11M)

Another respondent explains that racism fuels the belief that people of colour are not entitled to welfare benefits. Stereotypes and prejudices make it difficult for people of colour to assert their rights:

See a lot of people, a lot of white society, the way they look at it is that welfare is basically for those who are refugee status who basically, people who are new to the country and don't have education when it comes down to being Toronto-educated or Ontario-, Canadian-educated, North American-educated. They feel basically that people of colour, because Orientals are people of colour too. They think basically it's, we're taking advantage of that, we're wasting tax paying money, you know. Like Black folks and Orientals don't pay taxes either? (ON12M)

According to the respondents, overt racist treatment by welfare workers was not uncommon:

I know some of the ladies that they told me, we had the same worker. They told me they don't know that much the language. They told me whenever we came to interview while he was sitting in the chair he start dropping our bag and throw it and say, what's this, what's this, what's this [dumping the contents of their bag, going through their bag]. . . Because of the way I dress, because of my religion, because of my colour, because I'm a minority and everything. Otherwise, if there was a white people, he wouldn't do that. (ON2F)

I noticed immediately that there were more visible minorities that were often forced into Community Placement situations – Blacks, South Asians in particular were forced into those positions. I found overall there wasn't a commitment from organizations to actually really training people or to actually matching their skills or actually helping them find employment after the Community Works Placement. (ON3M)

Hm. People, minority people and not just Black people. People with second language and stuff like that too. 'Cause I have this Somalian friend. She said to me once that her worker, the worker say to her, "oh you people, you all look alike and you come to this office and then go to six others." You know what I mean. She say she felt so bad

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because she came here with her husband. Her husband was an engineer and Canadian immigration they come here. And then their marriage break down and whatever have you not, and that is how she end up there. And this is what she gets told. That day she said she didn't feel like a human being, humiliated. (ON5F)

The differential treatment of people of colour is further compounded by the stigma surrounding welfare, thereby ensuring that equitable treatment remains elusive. The next section describes the ways in which neo-liberal Canadian society promotes and sustains a situation in which people of colour are more likely to live in poverty.

SECTION 7

RACISM AND NEO-LIBERALISM IN CANADIAN SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

A close examination of who is most likely to be disadvantaged in the labour market and thus live in poverty highlights the centrality of race to the issues surrounding welfare. Since racial politics are deeply embedded in the disenfranchisement of the poor, welfare reform is not just an attack on the poor, but importantly, an attack against people of colour. Faulty assumptions that have their roots in racial stereotypes are used to demonize the cultures and values of people of colour, and, in turn, serve to blame welfare recipients are for their own situation; generally, people of colour are seen as holding substandard work ethics or failing to take personal responsibility for their lives. This practice has made it possible to define ‘deserving’ as white mothers and everyone else as threats to the national community (Marchevsky and Theoharis, 2000; Razack, 2000). By framing the welfare debate through the use of words such as ‘fraud’, ‘welfare queens’, ‘benefit cheats’ and ‘lazy’, and by suggesting that welfare and its culture has harmed the poor, both the media and the state are fuelling economic policies that maintain, if not exacerbate, racial hierarchies. As Razack argues, “no one of colour is free from the possibility that he or she will be considered illegitimate, fraudulent, and out to get more than is her due” (2000, p. 789).

A ‘RACISM-CENTRED’ PERSPECTIVE OF WELFARE POLICY

The need to challenge welfare debates that routinely exploit the use of racist stereotypes has led Neubeck and Cazenave (2002) to argue that only a ‘racism-centred’ perspective of welfare policy and its consequences will shed light on the nature of welfare reforms and the effects they have on communities of colour. They use the term ‘welfare racism’ to refer to the various forms and manifestations of racism associated with means-tested programs of public assistance for poor

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families (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2002). The authors argue that public assistance attitudes, policymaking and administrative practices are racialized, and it is only by uncovering and naming the racism that occurs that perceptions surrounding welfare entitlement and welfare fraud may change (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2002).

CANADA'S 'NEW' RACISM

The analyses found in the previous sections provide vivid illustrations of the racism that pervades the welfare system in Canada. In the name of fraud protection, people of colour are treated in dehumanizing ways and face surveillance and scrutiny that constructs them as criminals. Welfare policies ignore the structural racism faced by many immigrants and people of colour, which filters them into precarious and poorly paid employment, regardless of their qualifications. Giroux argues that in the past few decades, racism has undergone a significant shift and now takes new forms: "In its current manifestation, racism survives through the guise of neo-liberalism, a kind of repartee that imagines human agency as simply a matter of individual choices, the only obstacle to effective citizenship and agency being the lack of principled self-help and moral responsibility" (2003, p. 191). In this context, neo-liberal racism manifests itself through the shift from welfare to workfare, in the construction of welfare recipients who face language or labour market barriers as 'cheats' and in the distinction made between the so-called 'deserving poor' and the 'undeserving poor.'

The criminalization of poor, racialized people is but one dimension of the way in which neo-liberal ideology has reshaped our lives. The dismantling of the social state and the erasure of the economic state work in concert with the strengthening of the penal state to manage poverty in an era of mass joblessness and precarious employment (Wacquant, 2002, p. 3). The intense

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pursuit and surveillance of welfare recipients is, Wacquant (2002) argues, part of a broader trend by the state to warehouse, through criminalization and penalization, those who refuse to accept the precarious nature of wage labour. The public campaign against welfare fraud in Ontario is an example of how governments, in an era of neo-liberalism, no longer feel any discomfort in placing blame on targeted groups like immigrants and single mothers for their misfortune. Their poverty is blamed not on structural inequalities of the new marketplace, but on their own personal shortcomings in being unable to overcome the racism and sexism of the marketplace.

CASE WORKERS: THE AGENTS OF NEO-LIBERAL POLICIES

As frontline agents of the welfare system, case workers are often identified as the perpetrators of the racism which exists within the welfare system. The discussion of the changes in welfare policy in Section Two of this report, however, suggests that case workers' treatment of people on welfare must be situated within the broader context of policy changes that have occurred in the Canadian welfare system over the past ten years. Guided by neo-liberalism, state policy has focused on reducing social spending and challenging welfare 'dependency.' As Shields (2003, p. xxxi) notes, "welfare policy has been reshaped to encourage market dependence, while de-emphasizing any nurturing roles for the state." Studies have indicated that welfare workers themselves struggle with unreasonably high caseloads, poor resources and unstable work environments. Morgen's interviews with welfare workers show, for example, that "workers commonly shared stories about themselves or coworkers who were on antidepressants or medications for anxiety, had taken unpaid 'stress leaves' or early retirement, or were seeking other jobs to escape the burdens of welfare work" (2001, p. 756).

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Neo-liberal racism privatizes the discourse about race and focuses on individuals rather than groups. As a result, individual case workers are put in positions where they can exercise discretion and their racism appears to be merely an expression of their individual prejudice rather than of institutional discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Giroux argues that "racial discourse is not simply about private speech acts or individualized modes of communication... racist discourses and expressions should alert us to the workings of power and the conditions that make particular forms of language possible" (2003, p. 204-5). Through interviews with racialized welfare recipients, this report serves to provide a systematic understanding of the ways in which racism structures welfare enforcement and control in Canada. As one respondent noted:

The reason why I wanted to be part of this project is that I hope it gets written up in such a way that it is going to be used to confront the provincial government with some of their problems, or the problems with these systems. To actually show perhaps how visible minority groups, more than any other, feel the pain and carry the burden of being on [welfare], of being in a sense harassed.(ON3M)

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