

Child poverty: How poverty shapes children's patterns of participation in occupations, their potential and wellbeing

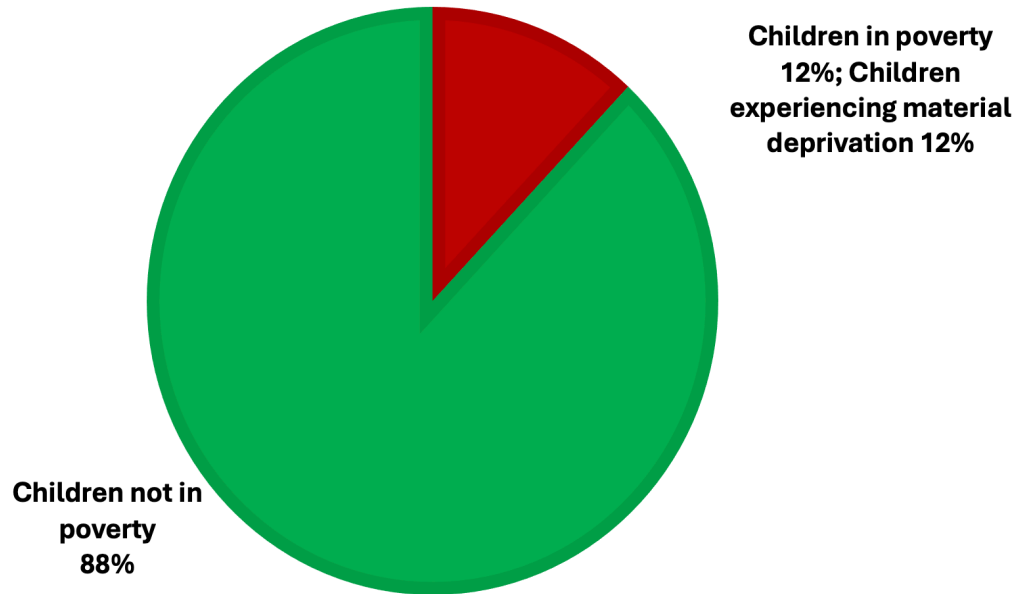
Dr. Simon Leadley. Lecturer, Occupational Therapy Department,
Monash University, VIC, Australia. Em: simon.leadley@monash.edu

Supervisors: Professor Clare Hocking, and Dr Margaret Jones,
Auckland University of Technology, NZ.

Introduction

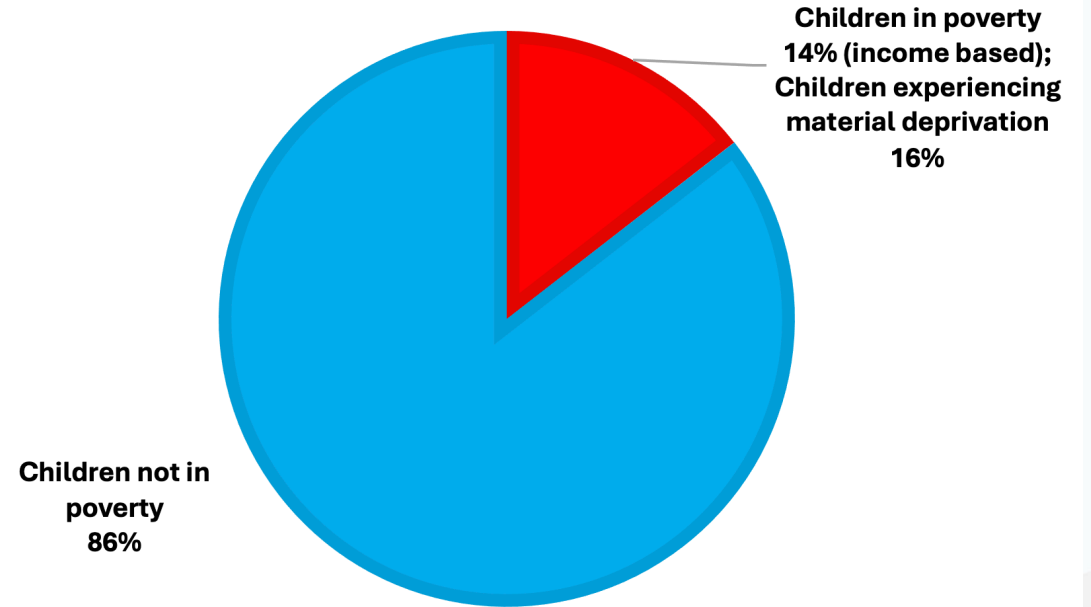
CHILD POVERTY IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

■ Children in poverty ■ Children not in poverty



CHILD POVERTY AUSTRALIA

■ Children in poverty ■ Children not in poverty



- No Australian Child poverty data beyond 2022 (Duncan & Twomey, 2024).
- Child poverty increased in NZ to 13% (2024) (Stats NZ, 2025).



Study Aim



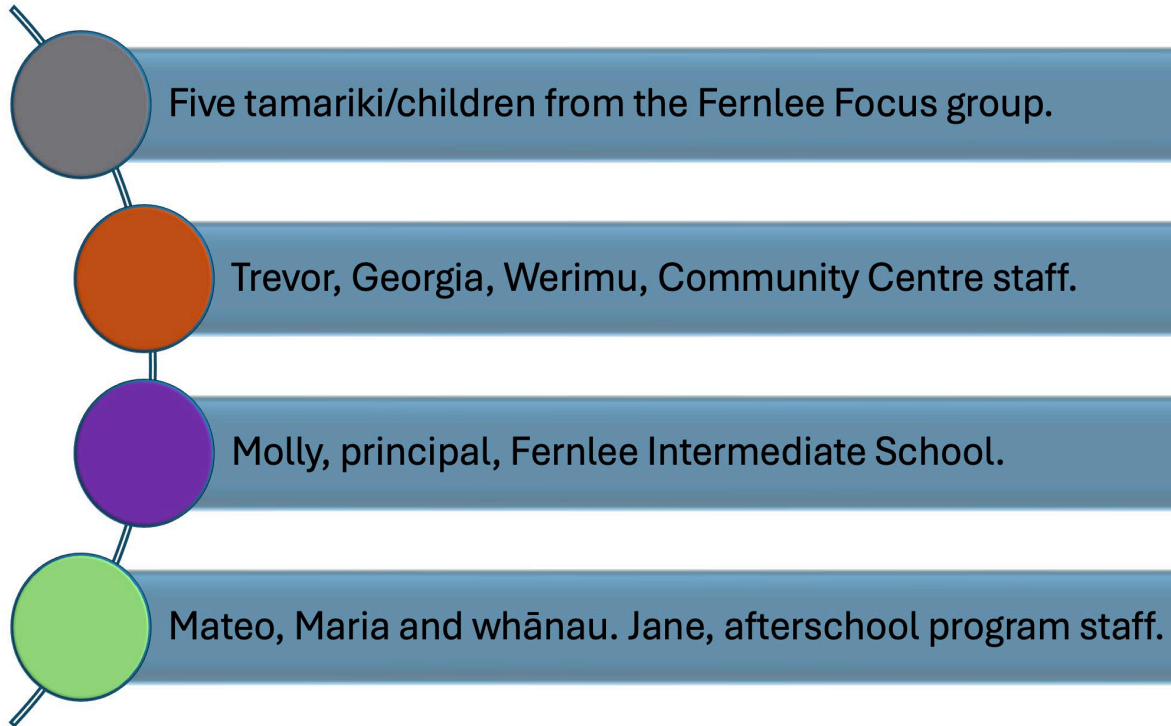
- To better understand how poverty influences children's patterns of participation in occupations, their wellbeing, and potential for future participation in occupations.

A word cloud of research-related terms is displayed against a dark blue world map background. The words are in various sizes, colors, and orientations. The most prominent word is 'Study' in large, bold, red letters. Other significant words include 'Case' in red, 'research' in white, 'data' in blue, 'knowledge' in white, 'validity' in white, 'single' in white, 'theoretical' in light blue, 'choice' in yellow, 'focus' in yellow, 'framework' in white, 'decisions' in white, 'weaknesses' in white, 'quantitative' in white, 'multiple' in white, 'studies' in blue, 'sampling' in blue, 'might' in white, 'circumstances' in white, 'test' in white, 'examinations' in white, 'selecting' in white, 'collection' in white, 'chosen' in white, 'lines' in white, 'causation' in white, 'historical' in white, 'retrospective' in white, 'strengths' in white, 'based' in white, 'offer qualitative' in white, 'records' in white, 'object' in white, 'cases' in white, 'descriptive' in white, 'information' in white, 'criteria' in white, 'subject' in blue, 'approach' in white, 'evidence' in white, 'research' in white, 'participants' in white, 'methods' in white, 'reliability' in white, 'evaluate' in white, 'views' in white, 'protocols' in white, 'case' in white, 'made' in white, 'analysis' in white, 'set' in white, 'might' in white, 'circumstances' in white, 'test' in white, 'examinations' in white, 'selecting' in white, 'collection' in white, 'chosen' in white, 'lines' in white, 'causation' in white, 'historical' in white, 'retrospective' in white, 'strengths' in white, 'based' in white, 'offer qualitative' in white, 'records' in white, 'object' in white, 'cases' in white, 'descriptive' in white, 'information' in white, 'criteria' in white, 'subject' in blue, 'approach' in white, 'evidence' in white. A hand in a white shirt sleeve is visible at the bottom, holding a pen and pointing towards the word 'Study'.

- Qualitative case study methodology (CSM) (Stake, 1995).
- Cases: Two NZ neighbourhoods, high levels of socioeconomic deprivation
- Participants: (n=26); children (aged 10-13 years), parent/s, community supports
- Multiple data collection methods.
- Analysis followed CSM approach.
- Cultural consultation; with Ethics approval from AUTECH.



Fernlee Participants



Riverfield Participants





Findings: Living my Best Life–Occupations I Love Doing



*“Studying.
Definitely studying
[helps me achieve
my dreams].” Ofa*

[Photo by Ofa’s mother, Monū]



*“Playing... with
my sisters... my
cousins... and
chilling out with
my family.” Jarad*

[photo by Jarad’s mother, Tui]

*“Time with
family... In the car
[with my sister]
...getting the
groceries.” Mateo*

[photo by Mateo]



*“We were having a
late-night snack
...watching a scary
movie with dad.”*

Miriama [photo by Miriama’s
father, Hemi]





Children's Coping and Agency Sustains Participation

Helping my family: household chores; tuakeina-teina (role modeling/support).

Oh yeah I [tidy my room]...I still do that...[and] like cleaning up the lounge and washing the dishes, drying. That's usually it...and vacuuming. [Jarad's interview].

Maximising my occupations: participating in school/learning, social time at school and incidental social activities with peers (i.e., to and from school), sustaining hopes and dreams for a bright future.

Yeah...I want to learn...I do wish to finish school...[During my school breaks] I usually play basketball...rugby with my mates...after school...I'll walk down [to] the...underpass...we hang out there...play...songs...I'm [also] like a helper down here at the Community Centre...I'm a junior helper. [Mateo's interview]



Importance of Family Support

- Instilling cultural values: *“Definitely respect one another...Manaakitanga [kindness] ...Got to be love...and patience...listen to your kids”*
- Fostering development: *“I’ll...teach them how to put the washing on...folding clothes... mowing the lawn”*
- Recognising their talents: *“My father tries to teach Mateo Māori and whakapapa... Mateo’s got a good ear for that sort of stuff.”* [Mateo’s mother, Maria’s interview].

Crucial Role of the Community Organisations

- School bus run
- After-school programs: *“This community centre has...lots of things here...cheap after-school care...we’ve got a youth programme...mentoring our young people... we allow young people to come for free. Our holiday programmes are cheap.”* [Fernlee youth worker]



The Experience of Child Poverty: Occupational Perspective

- ❖ Children sustain their aspirations to participate in a wide variety of occupations; “*[I want to play] league...soccer...playing netball...join my basketball team...join a music class and art class...play games with friends...[go to] the mall, shops...travel and get a job.*”
- ❖ Poverty limited opportunities to experience these occupations.

[Tamariki/children in Fernlee & Riverfield Neighbourhoods Focus groups]



Poverty is Multidimensional

High risk neighbourhoods:

“A big challenge is the environment...there’s a high rate of unemployment...it’s full of gang members and drug dealers and stuff... the community’s deprived, you know, is in poverty.”

[Nikau, Riverfield East Community Centre manager]

Lack of community facilities:

“You have a look at this space...been on the map for a long time and they haven’t got the facilities for our children...there’s not much for them to do here...if we could create things more for them I believe that it will be less stress for the community...There’d be more smiles in the community.”

[Miriama’s father, Hemi]

Low income/Resources/Time:

“It would definitely be financial [for sports]...Fees were expensive...Time is definitely a big one. Trying to work, you know...yeah, my availability as well.”

[Mateo’s mother, Maria]



Poverty Constrains Children's Patterns of Occupation

- **Disrupted habits/routines**
- **Sedentary occupations**
- **Constrained roles**
- **Restricted family rituals**
- **Risks wellbeing.**

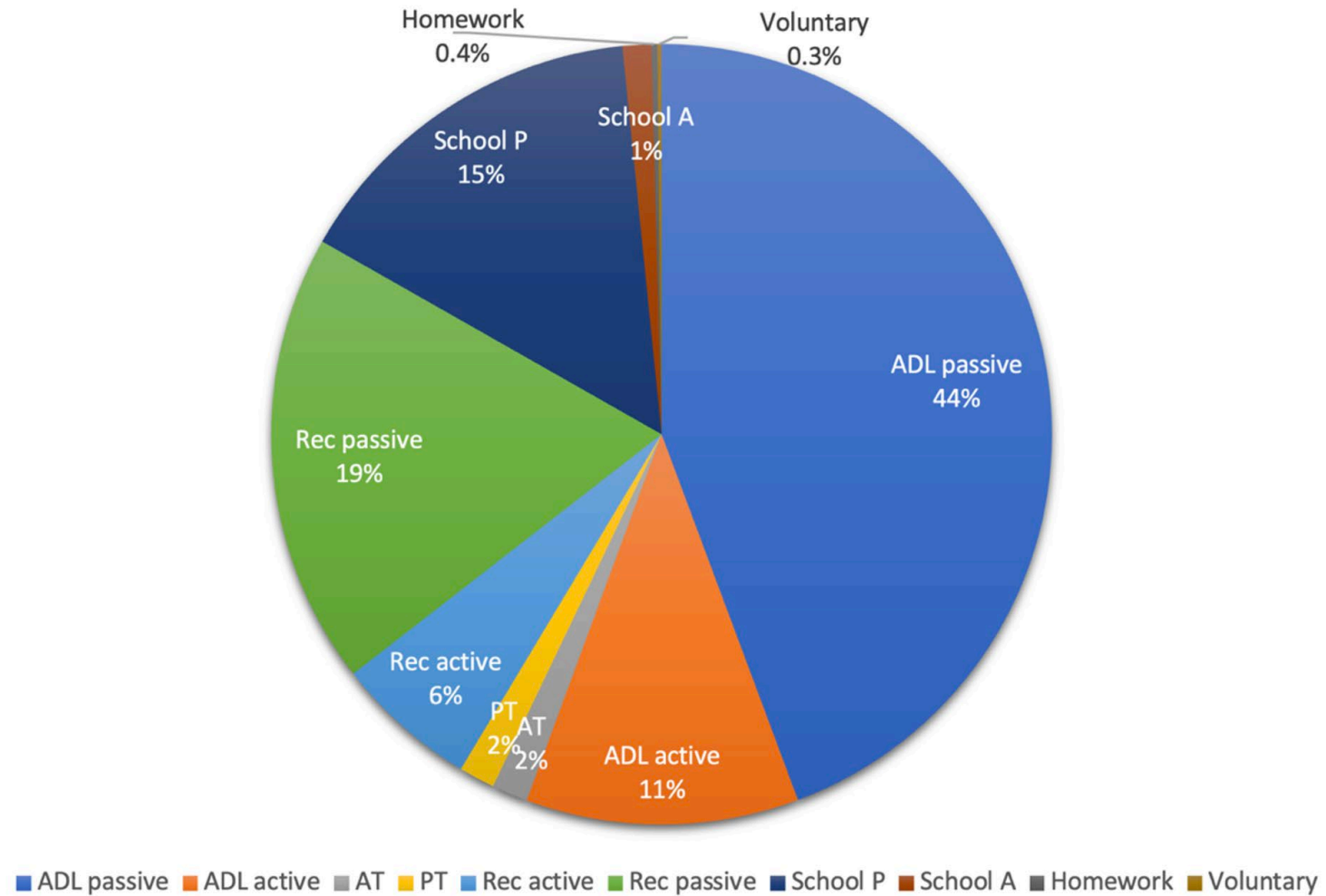
“[In the evenings] we play on our phones, play a game and then we go to bed...Well, at 12o'clock, I'm like I need to go to sleep, but as soon as it hits 1am, I'm like, shall I just stay up? Just stay up until morning...I'm just tired as all the time.” [Mateo]

“We don't do nothing [in the weekend], we just sleep...I don't...go to the park.”

[Miriamama]

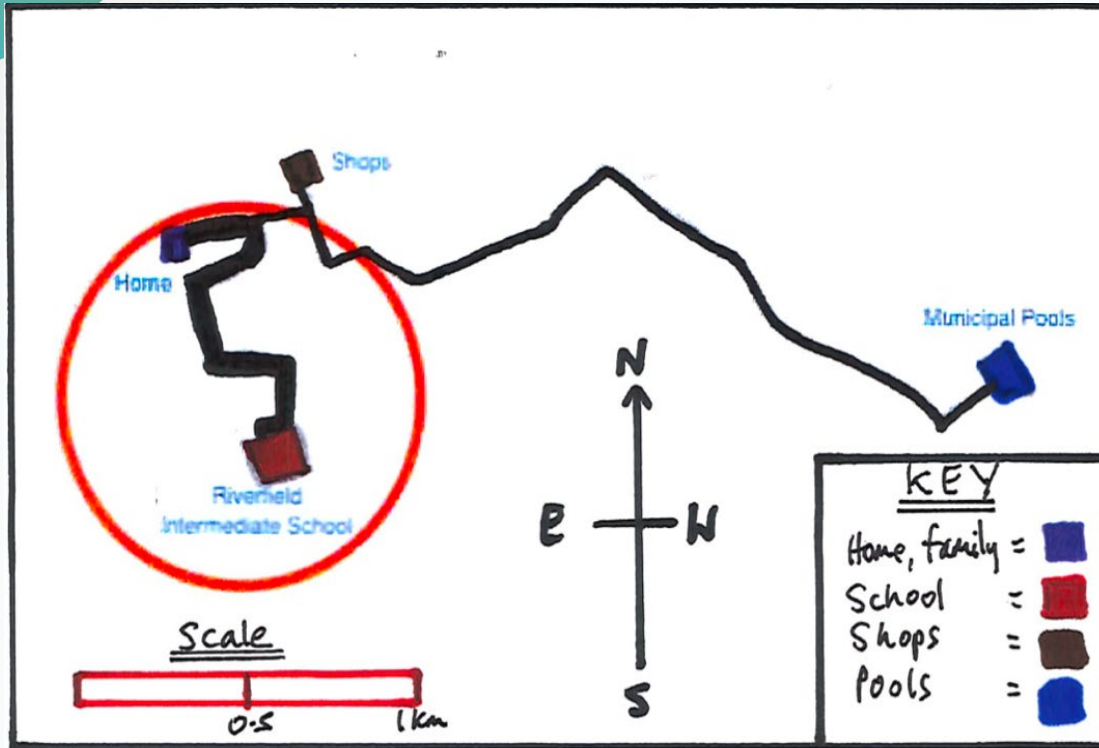


Pie Graph Showing Time Spent in Occupations for Tamariki in Case Study 1 and 2 Focus Groups.





Mapping Jarad's Occupations



Key: Thicker black lines indicate regular, daily access and the thin lines indicate occasional access. The red circle shows a 1km radius around his home.

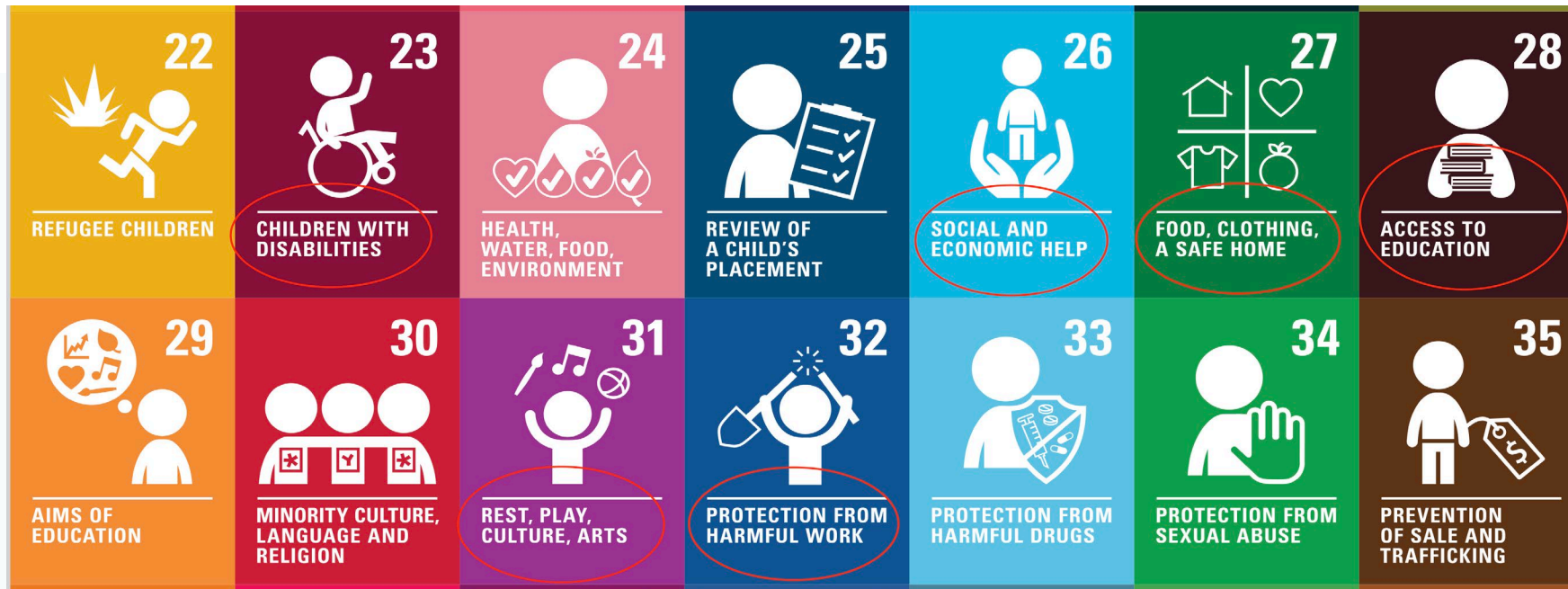
Restricted Participation in Occupations

- Recreational & cultural occupations
- Social occupations
- Productive occupations

“There’s nothing for him to do...There are things like the community centre...just across the road...for young teens... they’re the only ones that I really know of.”

[Tui, Jarad's mother]

- ❖ **Child Poverty is a breach of children's rights – UNCRC:** Right to participate in education, recreational, social, and cultural activities (UN, 1989; Hocking et al, 2022).
- ❖ **Child Poverty is an occupational injustice and a form of occupational deprivation:** unfair socioeconomic factors constrain children's participation in a range of occupations; and consequently creates risks for their wellbeing and future potential (Leadley et al., 2020; Leadley, 2023).





Bringing an Occupational Perspective to Child Poverty

- ✓ **Collaborate, Connect, Consult:** Listen to the voices of children, families, communities experiencing poverty – occupations, rights, hopes
- ✓ **Advocate:** Sustainably resource local communities to eliminate poverty
- ✓ **Collaborate & Connect:** Transdisciplinary and public health tiered approach
- ✓ Tier 1 – Child poverty elimination policy
- ✓ Tier 2 – Child poverty elimination strategies with community, groups
- ✓ Tier 3 – Child poverty: collaborate, connect, advocate, educate/coach, adapt - with individual children and families.

Bintley & George,. (2023); Hocking et al. (2022); Lysack, et al. (2024); Reitz & DeLany, (2024).



Dreams & Aspirations of Tamariki/Children in this Study

*My goal is to be a basketball star...make my family proud...
graduate from school and get a job...own a business...
be a plumber...be a social worker.*

What helps me achieve my dreams

*People encouraging me...others believing in me...support...
family, friends...learning.*

[Tamariki/children in Fernlee & Riverfield Neighbourhoods Focus groups]



<https://images.app.goo.gl/iYJVK8moMc5Khqe89>



Reference List

- Bintley, H., & George, R. E. (2023). Teaching diversity in healthcare education: Conceptual clarity and the need for an intersectional transdisciplinary approach. In D. Nestel, G. Reedy, L. McKenna, & S. Gough (Eds.), *Clinical education for the health professions: Theory and practice* (pp. 795-813). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3344-0>
- Duncan, A., & Twomey, C. (2024). *Child poverty in Australia 2024: The lifelong impacts of financial deprivation and poor-quality housing on child development*. <https://bcec.edu.au/publications/child-poverty-in-australia-2024/>
- Hocking, C., Mace, J., & Townsend, E. (2022). World Federation of Occupational Therapists position statement: Occupational Therapy and Human Rights (Revised 2019)–the backstory and future challenges. *World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin*, 78(2), 83-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14473828.2021.1915608>
- Leadley, S., Hocking, C., & Jones, M. (2020). The ways poverty influences a tamaiti/child's patterns of participation. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 27(3), 297-310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1738263>
- Leadley, S., Jones, M., & Hocking, C. (2024). Case study methodology. In S. Nayar & M. Stanley (Eds.), *Qualitative research methodologies for occupational science and occupational therapy* (pp. 105-126). Routledge.



Reference List

- Leadley, S. (2023). *Tamaiti/child poverty: The ways in which poverty shapes tamariki/children's patterns of participation in occupations, their potential and wellbeing* [Doctoral thesis, Auckland University of Technology]. Tuwhera. <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/17730>
- Lysack, C. L., Adamo, D. E., & Galvaan, R. (2024). Social, economic, and political factors that influence occupational performance. In G. Gillen & C. Brown (Eds.), *Willard & Spackman's occupational therapy* (14th ed., pp. 224-242). Wolters Kluwer
- Reitz, S. M., & DeLany, J. V. (2024). Health promotion theories. In G. Gillen & C. Brown (Eds.), *Willard & Spackman's occupational therapy* (14th ed., pp. 647-666). Wolters Kluwer.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE.
- Stats NZ / Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2022, March 23). *Child poverty statistics: Year ended June 2022*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/child-poverty-statistics-year-ended-june-2022/>
- Stats NZ / Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2025, February 20). *Child poverty statistics: Year ended June 2024*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/child-poverty-statistics-year-ended-june-2024/>
- United Nations [UN] General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Treaty Series, 1577, 3. <http://www.un-documents.net/crc.htm>
- UNICEF Innocenti. (2023). *Child poverty in the midst of wealth: Innocenti Report Card 18*. <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/report-card-18-child-poverty-amidst-wealth>

Connect with us

If you would like to hear more about, or become involved in research with, the Monash Occupational Therapy Department, please email researchwithOT@monash.edu or use this QR code to connect with us:

