



**UNIVERSITY OF  
STIRLING**

# **Exploring the impacts of the UK government's welfare reforms on lone parents moving into work**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## Glossary of terms

<b>Lone parent</b>	Unless otherwise stated, a lone parent can be taken to imply an individual not co-habiting with a partner, and living with their own dependent children (children under 16, or between the ages of 16 and 18 without a partner or child in the household).
<b>Non-resident parent</b>	A parent who has dependent children that do not reside mainly (or at all) with them.
<b><i>Households Below Average Income statistics</i></b>	Statistics produced by the UK Department for Work and Pensions containing information on the standard of living of the household population of the UK, focusing on the lower part of the income distribution. Derived from the Family Resources Survey (see Appendix 1).
<b>Full-time employment</b>	Paid employment of 30 hours per week or more.
<b>Part-time employment</b>	Paid employment of less than 30 hours per week.
<b>Economically active</b>	In employment, or actively seeking and available for work.
<b>Income Support</b>	Means-tested benefit available to those who are on a low income, working less than 16 hours per week, and not required to actively seek work.
<b>Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)</b>	Contribution-based or means-tested benefit available to those actively seeking work.
<b>Child Tax Credit</b>	Means-tested benefit available to parents with dependent children.
<b>Working Tax Credit</b>	Means-tested benefit payable to those working a required number of hours and on a low income. Includes a childcare element to compensate up to 70% of approved childcare costs, up to a maximum of £175 per week for one child and £300 per week for two or more children.
<b>Working Families' Tax Credit</b>	Means-tested benefit for families that was replaced by Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.
<b>Universal Credit</b>	New benefit that will eventually replace existing benefits including Income Support, Income-related Jobseeker's Allowance, and Child and Working Tax Credits.
<b>Lone Parent Obligations (LPOs)</b>	Lone parents cease to be eligible for Income Support solely on the grounds of being a lone parent when their youngest child reaches five years old, and can claim either Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (if eligible) instead.

<b>New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP)</b>	Voluntary programme for lone parents aimed at improving their job readiness and supporting them into employment, which ran between 1998 and 2011.
<b>Work Programme</b>	Programme replacing all New Deal programmes including the NDLP, and mandatory in some cases (e.g. after a period of time on Jobseeker's Allowance).
<b>Work-Focused Interview</b>	Lone parents on Income Support with a child over the age of 12 months old must attend an interview at the Jobcentre every six months to discuss the possibility of returning to work (although they are not obliged to seek or take up work).
<b>Sanction</b>	The partial or complete withholding of a benefit for failing to uphold the obligations of receiving it.

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## **Executive summary**

This literature review represents the first stage of a research project, commissioned by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH), which explored the experiences of lone parents seeking and moving into work in a context of increasing benefit conditionality and welfare reform.

The objective was to review the literature on lone parents, with a particular focus on demographic trends including changing household structures, inequalities (e.g. social, economic, health, gender), contemporary discourse (e.g. public, media, political) and policy responses.

This review presents a structured critique of both published peer-reviewed literature and grey literature, identified from a range of databases and published sources.

### **Lone parents and poverty**

- Although lone parents are a heterogeneous group, a substantial proportion experiences poverty, and they are more likely to do so than couple families. Using a measure of poverty as having an equivalised household income of less than 60% of the median after housing costs, 43% of individuals in the UK living in a lone parent household are in poverty, compared with 21% of those in couple families. Lone parents are also more likely than couple families to experience persistent spells of poverty.
- Poverty is experienced by lone parents both in and out of work. Seventeen per cent of children with a lone parent working full-time are in poverty.
- Financial security is difficult to obtain for lone parents in the context of an income that is not only low, but also complex and insecure. Lone parents receive a variety of benefits from multiple agencies, and there is a constant possibility that these will be delayed, overpaid, or sanctioned. Lone parents who enter work are liable to move out of work again, because they fail to sustain the arrangements they have made for childcare, or because they cannot obtain permanent work.

### **Lone parents and employment**

- The proportion of lone parents not in employment has been falling steadily since 1996, when it was 52%, to 37% in 2012. This compares with 5% of couple parent households that have nobody in work.
- Lone parents experience a number of barriers to work: employability (skills, qualifications and confidence); poor health (of lone parents themselves and their children); a lack of job opportunities offering the reduced and flexible hours that lone parents require; a lack of affordable childcare; and a high reliance on public transport.

## **Lone parents, health and wellbeing**

- There is an association between lone parenthood, and the health outcomes and behaviours of lone parents and their children. However, the literature is not clear on the extent to which this is caused by the relatively higher levels of deprivation experienced by lone parent families. Some studies find the association disappears after controlling for financial factors, others find it is reduced but still present. There also seems to be an association between behavioural, cognitive and emotional development in childhood and into adolescence, and family type, parenting style, and income, although again the direction in which these effects operate is not clear.

## **Policy responses to lone parents**

- The prevailing policy context can influence lone parent employment rates, by providing support and financial incentives, although the effect is small and concentrated ‘at the margin’ (i.e. on those already most likely to move into employment).
- Employability initiatives that have been successful in getting lone parents into work share a number of key features: they offer tailored, holistic support that responds to the needs of the individual; they are delivered by a well-trained and sympathetic advisor; they help parents to secure affordable childcare; and they demonstrate effective working between agencies and with employers. The current mainstream service provision for out of work lone parents, through Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme, does not appear to be meeting their needs. There is an opportunity to learn from the evaluation literature, and to develop education, training and employability services that meet lone parents’ needs.
- The stage at which lone parents cease to qualify for Income Support has been brought forward considerably in recent years. At the start of 2008, lone parents could claim Income Support until their youngest child turned sixteen; by 2012, this had been reduced to age five. Lone parents’ experiences of being transferred from Income Support onto the Jobseeker’s Allowance regime vary, and their experience seems to depend on their closeness to the labour market, and on the quality of the service provided by individual Jobcentres and advisors.
- Successive UK and Scottish governments have targeted sometimes very intensive support on particular families, but the benefit of this is not clear, particular in relation to the high cost of such interventions. However, there is some evidence that employing the principle of early intervention in policy-making can yield long-term benefits.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background, rationale and aims

This literature review formed the first stage of a research project that aimed to explore lone parents' experiences of being on out-of-work benefits and moving into work, in light of a number of recent UK government welfare reforms. The second stage, reported in a separate report, involved in-depth empirical research into lone parents in Glasgow.

The obligations upon lone parents who are not in paid work and receiving state support have increased over the last decade or so, from the introduction of mandatory 'Work-focused interviews' in 2001, to the progressive reduction of the stage at which lone parents cease to be eligible for Income Support. Before 2008, a lone parent could receive Income Support until their youngest child turned sixteen; in 2008 this was reduced to twelve, and then to ten in 2009, seven in 2010 and five in 2012. After Income Support eligibility ceases, unless entitled to another out-of-work benefit such as Employment Support Allowance due to a disability, lone parents can only claim Jobseeker's Allowance. Jobseeker's Allowance is accompanied by a set of obligations to seek and accept work, and the requirement to prove fortnightly that these obligations are being met. These changes have occurred alongside other changes to the welfare system that are likely to have affected out-of-work lone parents, such as restrictions on housing benefit, freezes and cuts to child benefit and tax credits, and a cap on the total amount payable to an out-of-work household.

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) commissioned a research project to understand how these changes are affecting lone parents. The first part of the project comprised this literature review, which provided the basis for a second stage; an in-depth mixed-methods empirical study around these issues (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). The focus of the empirical work was on lone parents who were, or had recently been, in receipt of out-of-work benefits and subject to a transfer onto Jobseeker's Allowance because their youngest child had turned five years old. The scope of the literature review was somewhat broader, looking more generally at lone parents and the inequalities they experience, and policy responses to these inequalities.

The objective was: ***"To review the literature on lone parents with a particular focus on demographic trends including changing household structures, inequalities (e.g. social, economic, health, gender), contemporary discourse (e.g. public, media, political) and policy responses."***

## **1.2. Methodology**

The remit of the work was to conduct a wide-ranging summary and structured critique of the literature, but not a systematic review.

The review considers a wide range of academic and grey literature, also drawing on key statistical publications and policy documents where appropriate. Literature was sourced through a series of database searches using relevant keywords, as well as from cross-references within the literature, recommendations and the authors' previous work in this area.

The search process aimed to identify original empirical work (qualitative, quantitative, or both), meta-analyses and reviews, pertaining to the appropriate: population (lone parents); geography (principally UK, ideally Scotland specifically, and with some international studies for comparison); and outcomes (poverty, employment, job characteristics, living conditions, health and wellbeing).

Literature that fell within the scope of the search was appraised for quality, to establish that the methodology was robust and appropriate to the research question, and that the conclusions drawn from the data and results presented were valid. Suitable literature was then categorised by type and organised around key themes, along which the review was structured.

For more detailed information about search strategy, terms used, databases searched and so on, see Appendix 2.

## **1.3. Structure of the report**

The remainder of this review is split into three sections. Section 2 considers the characteristics of lone parents and the inequalities they experience. Section 3 considers policy responses and the impact of policy upon lone parents, as well as political and public discourse around lone parents. Section 4 summarises the key findings and their implications for policy and practice.

Three appendices contain additional material. Appendix 1 provides some basic information about the datasets referred to in the review. Appendix 2 expands upon the brief methodology presented above, with further detail about the search strategy and organisation of material. Appendix 3 summarises the methodology and key contributions of the empirical literature.



## 2. Key inequalities facing lone parents

This section of the review addresses the issue of lone parents, employment and the wellbeing of themselves and their children. It examines the key inequalities facing lone parents, and the barriers they face to labour market participation.

### 2.1. Demographic/household trends

#### 2.1.1. Trends in lone parenthood

In the UK in 2011, there were nearly two million lone parents with dependent children<sup>1</sup>, with 92% of the parents being women (Office for National Statistics, 2012a). Some modest changes in the prevalence and demographic profile of lone parents occurred between 2001 and 2011, and these are summarised in Table 2.1.

**Table 1. Changes in the lone parent families 2001-2011**

	2001	2011
Number of lone parent families	1.75m	1.96m
Lone parent families as percentage of all families with dependent children	24%	26%
Average age of lone parents	35.8	38.1
Percentage never married	42%	51%
Percentage with:		
<i>One child</i>	53%	56%
<i>Two children</i>	32%	32%
<i>Three or more children</i>	14%	12%

Source: Office for National Statistics (2012a)

Although the number of lone parent families has increased, the proportion of families with dependent children who are lone parent has increased only slightly. Lone parents are on average slightly older, and more likely to have never been married. The proportion with one child has increased, while the proportion with three or more has decreased. Average family size in 2012 was 1.59 for a lone parent family, compared with 1.62 for a cohabiting couple family and 1.79 for a married couple family (Office for National Statistics, 2013a). Some 35% of male lone parents have never been married (although they may have been in a stable, long-term relationship), compared with 52% of female lone parents (Office for National Statistics, 2012a).

The above statistics are produced by the Office for National Statistics at the UK level only; comparable figures are not available specifically for Scotland. The General Register Office for

<sup>1</sup> Dependent children are those aged under 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Scotland's household projections suggest that, in 2010, there were 165,760 lone parent households<sup>2</sup>, which represented 28% of all households with dependent children (General Register Office for Scotland, 2012).

### 2.1.2. Non-resident parents

It is difficult to estimate the number of children living in a household with a non-resident parent, as this relies on survey rather than population data<sup>3</sup>, and whether a child is classified as having a non-resident parent will depend on the specific wording or definitions used in the survey. Extrapolation from the 2008 ONS Opinions Survey suggested that there were an estimated 2.1m households (in Great Britain at the end of 2008) containing at least one dependent child with a non-resident parent, and results from the 2009 Labour Force Survey would suggest that there are 3.8m children in this position, or 30% of dependent children (Wilson, 2010). Data from the Growing Up in Scotland survey, which contains information on two particular age groups (three year olds and five year olds) in Scotland, suggests that 21% of three year olds and 26% of five year olds<sup>4</sup> having a non-resident father (Marryat *et al.*, 2009).

There is some limited large-scale survey data available on frequency of children's contact with their non-resident parent. The ONS Opinions Survey suggests that 42% of children stay overnight with their non-resident parent; of this, 43% stay at least once a week (Wilson, 2010). Growing Up in Scotland data suggests that 65% of three year olds and 67% of five year olds had contact with their non-resident father, and of those who have contact, three quarters see their father face to face at least once a week (Marryat *et al.*, 2009). Maintained contact is less likely when the mother has re-partnered, and more likely if the father was happy about pregnancy, the father pays maintenance, and the child has siblings (Marryat *et al.*, 2009).

Estimates of the degree to which frequency of contact changes over time vary hugely. Around a quarter of non-resident parents have declining frequency contact over time, according to analysis of the UK Families and Children Study (Peacey and Haux, 2007) and the US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (Cheadle *et al.*, 2010), although the figure may be as high as 38% according to the ONS Omnibus Survey (Peacey and Hunt, 2008). Reports of contact frequency and how it changes over time are also found to vary depending on whether they are reported by the resident or non-resident parent (Peacey and Hunt, 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this is not quite the same as lone parent *families*, who may live in a household with others and therefore not be classified as a lone parent household in these statistics.

<sup>3</sup> 2011 Census data on this topic was unavailable at the time of the study.

<sup>4</sup> This is slightly lower than the Labour Force Survey estimate; this might be expected, as some households will become lone parent households when children are older than this, although equally some lone parents may subsequently find a new partner. We are not aware of any existing research that systematically examines these trends over time.

### **2.1.3. Ethnicity**

There are variations among ethnic groups in the prevalence of lone parenthood, although not necessarily in its consequences. Data from the Labour Force Survey suggests that 9% of White British households are lone parent, while prevalence among ethnic minorities ranges from 6% of Chinese to 28% of Black Caribbean households (Platt, 2010). However, the economic experiences of lone parents in different ethnic groups is characterised by a great deal of similarity. Examining administrative data on all lone parent benefit claimants in a particular city (Slough), Mokhtar and Platt (2009) find that, controlling for basic demographic characteristics, there is little evidence to suggest that ethnicity affects the chances of benefit exit, even between groups where rates of lone parenthood are very different.

Black Caribbean children are the most likely to live in a lone parent household; 65% do so (Platt, 2010). Children of mixed ethnic origin are also more likely to live in a lone parent household than most children of single ethnic origin; 51% of mixed White/Caribbean children live in lone parent households, and 37% of mixed White/African, compared with 23% of White children (Platt, 2010). The impact of ethnicity on children's outcomes becomes highly complicated in the case of mixed ethnicity children. Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study suggests that young children in these categories sometimes do better than their single ethnicity counterparts; households of non-mixed White children had poorer economic profiles than households of both mixed White and mixed Indian children, with multivariate analysis attributing much of this to differences in the educational profile of these groups, and relative rates of lone parenthood (Panico and Nazroo, 2011). Race, lone parenthood and economic factors thus seem to be intertwined in a complex manner.

The impact of ethnicity on lone parents' experiences also has a non-economic dimension. Qualitative research with lone mothers of mixed race children (Edwards and Caballero, 2011; Harman, 2010) has suggested that they experience racism, and in a uniquely multidimensional way; being the target of both external hostility from strangers, and in the way that their status affects their relationships with their own family and the family of their child's father. Some experience the loss of relationships with family and friends due to the effects of racism, and some report struggling to maintain good relationships with paternal grandparents and other family members from a different background, doing so primarily for the sake of their child.

## **2.2. Lone parents and poverty**

Lone parent households are more likely to be in poverty than couple households. The Department for Work and Pensions' *Households Below Average Income* statistics show that 22% of individuals in lone parent households have a household income below the threshold of 60% of the median income before housing costs, and 43% after housing costs, compared with 15% before housing costs, or 21% after housing costs, in couples with children (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a, Table 3.5db). This widely-used poverty line is a low bar for estimating the extent of deprivation. Research

on a minimum income standard (Hirsch, 2011) has established that a lone parent with one child has a minimum income after housing costs of £230.09 per week – currently benefit income covers 64% of this, and it is 73% of the median income. Currently 41% of lone parents fall below 70% of the median before housing costs (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a).

For some lone parents this poverty is a temporary phenomenon. Partnership dissolution has a poverty-triggering effect, which is found in all educational and social strata, although the most vulnerable feel the effects of poverty-triggering events more strongly (Vandecasteele, 2010). However, for many lone parents, the disadvantage persists. Panico *et al.* (2010), looking at outcomes across the first five years of children's lives using the Millennium Cohort Study, find that almost 60% of those who remained lone parents throughout this time experienced poverty throughout it as well. Those who subsequently partner are less likely to experience persistent poverty; only a fifth of those who transition to marriage and a third who transition to cohabitation experience persistent poverty, although this is still far higher than for continuously married (4.1%) or continuously cohabiting (8.5%) couples (Panico *et al.*, 2010).

Qualitative research with lone mothers has suggested that the problem is one not just of low income, but of an income source that is complex and insecure, and the difficulties of achieving financial security in this context (Millar, 2011; Ridge and Millar, 2011). Low pay and job insecurity limit the extent to which lone parents feel secure and better off in work. The complexity of the tax credit system is confusing, and where this leads to overpayment, debt is generated, the repayment of which can have a severe impact on family finances. Being in work itself can also facilitate debt by opening up access to credit, which is used most commonly to smooth transitions between work and unemployment, and at changes of housing and partnership status, but again the repayments create subsequent financial difficulties. A survey of 200 callers to the lone parent helpline run by advocacy group One Parent Families found benefits and debt to be a significant worry, with a third of respondents reporting that issues with benefits or debt had caused them a substantial problem (Moorhead, Sefton and Douglas, 2004). This does not necessarily reflect the proportion of lone parents in the population experiencing such problems – a more representative survey of lone parents puts this at around 8% nationally (Moorhead *et al.*, 2004) – but it demonstrates the extent to which these financial issues are significant among the drivers of lone parents needing to seek help.

The child maintenance system in the UK has little substantial impact on lifting children in lone parent families out of poverty. Estimates vary of the extent to which it reduces the poverty rate of lone mothers in receipt of payments; Skinner and Main (2013), using data from the Families and Children Study estimate that it reduces poverty by 14%, while analysis of the Luxembourg Income Study by Hakovirta (2011) suggests that it is 30%. Its aggregate impact is limited by its low coverage of 22% of non-widowed lone parent families, which is particularly low in an international context; in Finland and Germany it is 77%, and in Sweden it is 100% because it is guaranteed by the state (Hakovirta, 2011). Qualitative research suggests that it is not perceived by lone parents as a reliable source of income; those that receive it report low levels of support, unreliable payments and a feeling of

'trading off' lack of money for other kinds of support (Ridge and Millar, 2011). However recent research (Bryson *et al.*, 2012), conducted since the introduction of changes to the child support system in 2008, paints a slightly more positive picture, albeit one still in need of some improvement. This suggested that receipt of maintenance had increased to 36%, and resulting poverty reduction to 19%<sup>5</sup>; however, the research also highlighted the difficulty in making and sustaining the private arrangements that the new system is trying to encourage, as well as continuing failure within the statutory system, with 22% of users of the Child Support Agency receiving no money at all (Bryson *et al.*, 2012).

Results from the Financial Capability Survey have suggested that lone parents are particularly likely to have poor financial capability; they are disadvantaged with respect to access to financial products, being less likely to have a bank account, savings or life insurance (Peacey, 2010) or to remain well-informed about financial issues (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007; McQuaid and Egdell, 2010). Evidence of a disadvantaged position of lone parents with respect to financial capability has also been found in analyses of data from the British Household Panel Survey (Taylor, 2009) and the Financial Services Authority baseline survey (Atkinson *et al.*, 2006). Interestingly, in the latter case, the data suggested that lone parents, although lacking access to financial products, were among the best at managing their money. However, a survey of lone parents by the charity Gingerbread reported a strong demand for budgeting advice from banks to help them manage their limited incomes (Peacey, 2010).

There is little evidence that lone parents differ systematically to other family types in their spending priorities; analysis of the Expenditure and Food Survey suggests that non-working lone and couple parents both prioritise food spending, as their food expenditure is similar to working families despite their lower total income, and lone parents spend if anything less on cigarettes and alcohol than couple parents (Peacey, 2010).

## **2.3. Lone parents and employment**

The previous section suggested that instability of employment and the wages from employment were a feature of lone parent households experiencing poverty and income instability. Lone parents are less likely than partnered parents to be in employment, and this section will examine some of the reasons for this, and the link between poverty and employment patterns.

### **2.3.1. Employment**

Lone parent households are more likely to have no one in work than couple households with children – for the UK as a whole, 37% of lone parent households have nobody in employment, compared with 5% of couples with children – although the proportion of economically inactive lone parents has been falling steadily since 1996, when it was 52% (Office for National Statistics, 2012b).

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<sup>5</sup> Note that this study takes a definition of poverty of a household income below 50% of the median, rather than the more commonly employed 60% level.

Data from the 2001 Census suggested that the proportion of lone parents not in work in Glasgow was higher than the Scottish average – 61.4%, compared with 52.5% for Scotland as a whole – but updated figures using the 2011 Census have not yet been produced, so it is not possible to say whether anything has changed in this respect. Recent analysis of Labour Force Survey data has suggested that Glasgow has the highest proportion of workless households<sup>6</sup> in the UK, at 30.2% over the period January to December 2012, which represented a slight increase from 28.7% over the previous year, and is considerably higher than the UK average of 18.1% (Office for National Statistics, 2013c). However, no analysis has specifically considered lone parent employment in Glasgow.

Economic inactivity is strongly correlated with poverty for lone parents; figures from the UK Government's *Households Below Average Income* series show that 65% of non-working lone parent households fall below the poverty threshold of a household income below 60% of the median after housing costs, compared with 31% of lone parents who work part-time and 17% who work full-time (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). However, these figures still show a high prevalence of in-work poverty in lone parent families, and thus employment is not a guaranteed route to an adequate income. The same figures suggest that the link between economic activity and poverty is also strong in couple families, with a poverty rate of 69% in couple households where nobody is in work, 30% where one adult is in full-time work, 10% when one adult works full-time and the other part-time, and 5% when both adults work full-time. Thus, the higher prevalence of poverty among lone parent families than couple families is strongly related to their higher economic inactivity rates, although lone parents are also more likely to experience in-work poverty.

This static measure of the proportion of lone parents out of work at any given time disguises the phenomenon of unstable employment trajectories; a larger proportion of lone parents are experiencing a cycling between low-paid, unstable employment and unemployment, with no permanent improvement in their standard of living (McQuaid *et al.*, 2010; Harkins and Egan, 2013). A study of lone mothers in Australia (Baxter and Renda, 2011) found that their low employment rates could be attributed to the high rate of employment exit compared with couple mothers. Lone parents do move into work, but they are highly likely to move out of it. Half of the lone mothers in the British Household Panel Survey were found to follow an unstable employment trajectory, moving in and out of work over the 15 year period that they were observed (Stewart, 2011). Analysis of a cohort of British lone mothers suggested that stable trajectories were more likely to be accomplished by women with post-secondary qualifications, who own their own house, and are work-orientated and egalitarian in their views<sup>7</sup> about the gendering of the division of work and care in a household with children (Stewart, 2009). In effect, this more 'successful' group is potentially a very specific group of lone parents; older divorcees in higher-level occupations, as opposed to never-married young mothers.

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<sup>6</sup> This is defined by the Office for National Statistics as households with at least one person aged 16-64 and no-one aged 16 or over in work.

<sup>7</sup> These views were expressed in the abstract – e.g. 'it is the mother's job to look after the children' – rather than in relation to their own domestic context, in which there is no partner with whom to share work and care.

There is not a great deal of literature available about the specific characteristics of jobs held by lone parents, as opposed to low income parents more generally. Descriptive analysis has suggested that over two thirds of lone parents enter personal service occupations, such as caring and childminding (Gingerbread, 2012a). Furthermore, lone parents are disproportionately likely to enter low-skilled occupations compared with couple mothers; 27% of lone parents enter elementary jobs such as cleaning, shelf-stacking, kitchen and catering work, compared with 10% of mothers in couples (Ibid). However, such analyses do not take into account potentially differing characteristics between lone parent and couple mothers; the situation of lone parents could be on a par with that of a similarly qualified couple mother, and without controlling for these characteristics, no firm conclusions can be drawn about the impact of single parenthood itself.

Although there has been to date no direct examination of lone parents' experiences of poor working conditions, and how this compares to other groups and the population as a whole, there is some indirect evidence that, by virtue of the kind of jobs they are likely to do, they are more likely to experience phenomena such as underemployment and the instability of zero hours contracts. For example, among those most likely to be underemployed are those in low-skilled jobs such as cleaning (31%) and those who work part-time (24%) (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). Similarly, with zero hours contracts, although estimates of the prevalence of this type of contract in the workforce as a whole range from 0.8% to 4%, Skills for Care estimated that 61% of domiciliary care workers in England are employed on this type of contract (Pyper and McGuinness, 2013).

An interesting, but slightly dated, study, using data from the UK Workplace Employee Relations Survey conducted in 1998, found that access to work-life balance practices in the workplace differed between lone parents and other employees, although this seems to be related to the individual characteristics that lone parents commonly share and the types of workplaces that they are employed in, rather than lone parenthood itself (Budd and Mumford, 2003). The most recent Maternity Rights Survey suggests that little has changed in this respect; lone mothers are less likely to report the availability of family-friendly provision in their workplace, with some link between this and their wider labour market position (Chanfreau *et al.*, 2011).

### **2.3.2. Barriers to employment**

The literature suggests a number of barriers to employment for lone parents (see Figure 2.1 for a summary of these barriers). The fact that most are female means that most will be affected by broader gender inequalities in the labour market; occupational segregation, discrimination, a lack of childcare and flexible working, and the resulting gender pay gap (Close the Gap, 2013). However, a number of studies have looked specifically at lone parents; the specific characteristics of this subgroup and how this relates to their labour market outcomes, and the particular difficulties of reconciling work and care as a lone parent.

Haux (2011) uses the Families and Children Study to look specifically at lone parents whose youngest children are aged five to six; that is, those who have been affected by the recent change in benefit

rules that has reduced the age of the youngest child at which lone parents are required to move onto Jobseekers' Allowance from seven to five. The key barriers for lone parents with children this age are found to be: large families (three or more children); poor employability (low qualifications and experience); poor health (work-limiting impairment); low work orientation (not expecting to move into work); and high unemployment in the local labour market. This therefore suggests a range of personal and structural factors that might prevent lone parents from engaging with the requirements of the Jobseekers' Allowance regime.

Coleman and Lanceley (2011) conducted a specific survey of 2,779 lone parents affected by the previous change of benefit rules in 2010, which moved lone parents onto JSA when their youngest child reached seven. In this group, 98% of those not in work reported two or more barriers to employment. The most common of these was the lack of available jobs that allowed short notice time off; 64% said it was a big barrier and 24% said it was a small one. Prevalence of other potentially problematic issues was relatively high: 28% of respondents in this survey said that they had a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity, and 30% had at least one child with one; 31% had no formal qualifications; and only 29% had both a driving licence and access to a car. The survey also found that factors affecting ability to stay in work are different from those affecting ability to get work; mostly these are concerns over not being better off, unanticipated costs and childcare.

The requirement to seek work when the youngest child is five coincides with that child starting school, which might be expected to facilitate employment and have an impact on employment behaviour. However, the impact of youngest child's eligibility for full-time education has a small and delayed effect on lone parents' employment behaviour. Brewer and Crawford (2010), analysing administrative data from the DWP on Income Support recipients, found that having a youngest child eligible for full-time primary school increased the proportion of lone parents moving off welfare and into employment by a statistically significant but relatively modest 2 percentage points, and that this effect does not emerge until four to six months after school entry, peaking at eight to nine months. The authors of the study speculate that the impact is small because, although a return to work is possible in principle, there are few jobs that fit around the still limited hours of full-time primary school, but the study itself cannot explain the reasons for the small impact. There are potentially other explanations, such as the difficulty of re-entering a competitive labour market, particularly after several years out of the labour market.

Many of these barriers are not unique to lone parents, but are experienced by parents, and particularly mothers, more generally. However, lone parents face particular difficulties in their role as both sole carer and sole (potential) earner in the household. Qualitative research has explored in more depth the difficulties of reconciling these roles as a single individual, and how this can create a barrier to entering employment. A concern of lone parents about moving from benefits into work is trepidation around being solely responsible for financially supporting the household, and the comparative security of benefit income (Bell *et al.*, 2005). These concerns are likely to be amplified by the problems of employment instability, low pay, and low child maintenance receipt already discussed in this review. Another problem reported by lone parents is a lack of jobs that they can

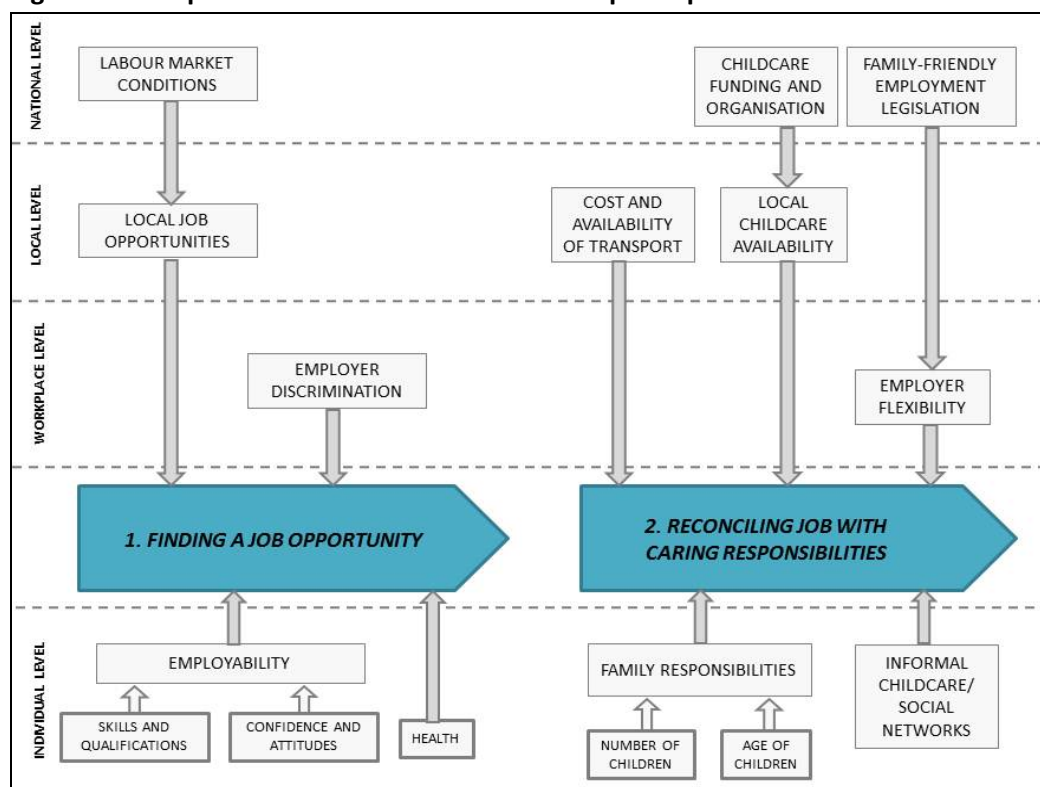


satisfactorily reconcile with their responsibilities as the sole carers of their children; for some, no job can offer this as parental care is prioritised above work (Baker, 2010; Brown and Joyce, 2007), while others would accept a sufficiently flexible job but find that none exist (Smith, 2013). The kind of flexibility required by lone parents is not institutionalised across the labour market, and lone parents rely on *ad hoc* arrangements with individual managers and colleagues in order to sustain the balance between work and care (Gingerbread, 2012b). These findings suggest the importance of promoting part-time and flexible working; perhaps encouraging 'mini' jobs (less than 16 hours per week) as a work-care reconciliation strategy or as a step towards working more hours (Bell *et al.*, 2007). A longitudinal study of Australian parents suggests that part-time employment can function as a highly effective stepping stone in this respect (Fok *et al.*, 2012).

A lack of formal childcare is a barrier that occurs in many studies that have examined lone parents' attitudes and barriers to work (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010; Gingerbread, 2012a; Gloster *et al.*, 2010; Whitworth, 2013). Some would like to use it but find that there is insufficient affordable care available, while others express a reluctance to use formal care, either because they do not trust it, or because they perceive it as potentially damaging for children who have recently experienced a family split. Lone parents with both a low orientation towards work and an unfavourable attitude towards childcare are unlikely to move into employment (Bell *et al.*, 2005).

A recent survey of 1,689 parents (including 270 lone parents) found lone parents to be quite similar to couple parents in the extent to which they use childcare to facilitate work (55% of lone parents, 56% of couple parents), and in their relative use of formal and informal sources (Borg and Stocks, 2013). Of those who used informal care only (28% of lone parents, 27% of couple parents), lone parents were more likely to cite reasons of preference or greater trust in their relatives and friends, while couples were more likely to say this was for reasons of cost. However, couple families are marginally less likely to say that childcare is difficult to afford (47% say this, compared with 50% of lone parent families). Just over a fifth of both types of family said that they would be very likely to use more childcare to start work or increase their hours if the additional cost was covered by the government, and just under a fifth of both types said this was very unlikely; this suggests little difference in intrinsic motivations towards work and attitudes to using childcare between lone and couple parents.

**Figure 1: Lone parents' barriers to labour market participation**



## 2.4. Social networks and support

The presence or absence of social support networks is crucial to the wellbeing of lone parent households, and can make or break lone parents' abilities to sustain employment. Grandparents are a key source of support for lone parents. A substantial minority of lone parent families have a resident grandparent; in a cohort of ten month olds from the Growing Up in Scotland survey, 21% of those in lone parent households had a resident grandparent, compared with 3% of those in couple households (Bradshaw, 2013)<sup>8</sup>. Grandparents also play an important role in kinship care of looked-after children, representing the majority of relatives who take on this role in Scotland (42%), although siblings are also an important source (39%) (Kidner, 2012). However, the issue of informal kinship care is not explored in this review as kinship carers are not necessarily lone parents, and the children they care for do not necessarily come from lone parent families, thus it falls beyond the scope of the review.

Children in lone parent families in general have more contact with a grandparent; in the GUS cohort referred to above, 63% of children in a lone parent family saw a grandparent most days, compared

<sup>8</sup> The children in this cohort are still young, and it is likely that the proportion living with a grandparent will decrease as they get older; indeed, data on older cohorts in this study suggests that the proportion is 14% at the age of nearly three, and 11% by the time they are nearly five (Marryat *et al.*, 2009).

with 40% of children in a couple family (Mabelis and Bradshaw, 2013). However, children in this cohort who lived in lone parent families were also much less likely to have contact with all of their grandparents; 41%, compared with 73% of those in couple families (Mabelis and Bradshaw, 2013). The same data also suggests that lone parents are less likely to engage with wider sources of informal support than couple mothers, such as mother and child groups, and therefore miss out on the opportunity to expand their support network and share advice (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2008).

Qualitative research has explored the role of support networks in lone parents' lives, and what these networks mean to them, as a source of both practical and emotional support. Working lone mothers have stressed the importance not just of their own mother, but of multiple social relationships; complex arrangements that draw on a network of support, sometimes incorporating both sets of grandparents including their ex-partner's parents as well as other family and friends, is central in being able to reconcile work and care responsibilities, especially in emergencies, and can even act as a source of help in finding family-friendly employment (Millar and Ridge, 2008). Conversely, poor social relationships can be a source of stress, such as having employers and colleagues who are not understanding and are hostile towards allowing them the flexibility they need to reconcile work and care (Millar and Ridge, 2008).

Findings from a survey of 1,515 secondary pupils in England and Wales stress the importance of grandparental involvement for child adjustment in lone parent families (Attar-Schwartz *et al.*, 2009). Grandparental involvement is associated with fewer emotional problems and more pro-social behaviour across all family types, but this effect is stronger in lone parent families, showing the important role that grandparents play in lone parent families.

Harper and Ruicheva (2010) argue from their interviews with mothers and grandmothers that grandmothers take on two distinct 'surrogate' roles: the replacement parent, providing care, resources, discipline, and so on, to the children; and the replacement partner, providing a source of support for the mother herself. Taking on these roles can create some tensions, particularly around negotiating authority and boundaries, and a conflicted sense of the grandmother not having what any party – mother, grandmother or children – might have envisaged as a 'grandmother' role. However assuming these roles is both a source of support for lone mothers, and for the grandmothers themselves, particularly if they are experiencing increasing isolation as they age.

This idea that social support is to some extent a mixed blessing is echoed across a number of qualitative studies from the UK and the wider English-speaking world (Cook, 2012). Although social networks are a key source of support in allowing lone mothers to return to work, it represents a shift in lone mothers' dependence from state to family, rather than independence. It also assumes that such social ties exist, and if so that the people within the lone parent's social network themselves have the resources to take on this support role, which they may not.

## **2.5. Parental health and wellbeing**

This section examines the literature on the link between lone parenthood and health outcomes and behaviours. Although such an association is identified in the literature, it is also strongly linked to the material deprivation and non-employment that lone parents experience. Indeed, some studies find the association to be insignificant once material factors are controlled for.

### **2.5.1. Health outcomes**

The literature suggests an association between lone parenthood and health outcomes; lone parents are more likely than couple mothers to report poor mental or physical health. However, it is not entirely clear the extent to which this is independent of the socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by lone parents, and thus the extent to which this association is causal.

Official health statistics (for example on diagnoses, deaths or hospital admissions) do not record whether the patient is a lone parent. Therefore, information about the health inequalities experienced by lone parents comes from survey datasets, which contain measures of self-reported health, obtained by either directly asking respondents how they perceive their physical or mental health, or through instruments designed to detect symptoms of poor health, such as the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) or Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS).

#### ***Mental health and wellbeing***

Longitudinal data from the Growing Up in Scotland study has been used to examine mothers' mental health outcomes over a five-year period. Lone mothers were more likely to report both brief mental health problems (23% versus 16% of couple mothers) and repeated mental health problems (27% versus 11% of couple mothers); however the data also showed a strong link with material circumstances and social support, and in fact in a multivariate model these were significant while family type was not (Marryat and Martin, 2010).

Harkness (2013), using British Household Panel Survey data, found that paid work was strongly associated with improved mental health outcomes for lone mothers. However, work that allowed the mother to achieve a satisfactory balance between work and childcare responsibilities had a much greater impact on reducing the risk of depression than did earnings. She concluded that supporting lone mothers into work that allowed a balance between work and childcare responsibilities is important, in addition to any financial gains from employment.

Data from the Surveys of Psychiatric Morbidity in Great Britain also suggests a primary role of material factors, showing that, although lone mothers were twice as likely to report a Common Mental Disorder than other women, this was not significant after controlling for financial strain and social support (Cooper *et al.*, 2008). Interestingly, this association was both considerably stronger for lone fathers – who were four times as likely to report a Common Mental Disorder than other men –

and it did not disappear after controlling for age, income, debt and levels of support. The authors suggest that this may be due to sociodemographic differences between lone mothers and fathers, or because of the potentially more extreme circumstances under which fathers are awarded custody in a context of the norm of awarding custody to the mother, but the research itself cannot answer this question. A larger, Canadian study of the relative prevalence of psychiatric disorders among lone and couple parents (Wade *et al.*, 2011) broadly supports the findings of Cooper *et al.* (2008), although using a more detailed measure of social support it finds that this can be a protective factor for lone fathers.

Any relationship between lone parenthood and mental distress could be related to the separation that preceded their lone parenthood, if this is their route into lone parenthood. Longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey shows some interesting associations between separation and divorce, and mental distress, as measured on the GHQ12 scale (Blekesaune, 2008). Elevated levels of distress are seen both before and after separation; this could be interpreted as the distressed selecting out of marriage, or alternatively that relationship breakdown is not a single event and should include the period immediately preceding it. After separation, mental distress returns to pre-breakdown levels for mothers, which suggests that the elevated mental distress they experience is perhaps a temporary response to a stressful life situation rather than an elevated risk of a lifelong mental health problem. Interestingly, the fathers in the sample do not experience the same return to lower distress levels after a separation. The authors do not explore this association, but it could perhaps be due to the asymmetry in custody outcomes, with mothers more likely to retain primary responsibility for children.

### ***Physical health***

The data from a cohort of ten month old children from the Growing Up in Scotland study suggests that, although the majority of lone parents have good health, they are more likely to experience poor health than partnered parents; eight out of ten of the respondents in lone parent families reported their health to be good or better, compared with nine out of ten in couple families (Hill, 2013). The lone parents were also more likely to report a long-standing illness than parents in couple families (17% compared with 13%), and to report a lower health-related quality of life, as measured by a number of indicators that assess the impact of physical and mental health problems on their day to day activities (Hill, 2013)<sup>9</sup>. A larger and more representative sample for the whole of the UK (from the General Household Survey) confirms this pattern; lone mothers were found to have significantly worse health than couple mothers, and to be more likely to have a limiting longstanding illness and to report less than good health, across all occupational classes (Burström *et al.*, 2010).

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<sup>9</sup> The Growing Up in Scotland study surveys the main carer of the cohort child; in a handful of cases this is a lone father, therefore in this case the category of lone parents will include some fathers, but the vast majority are mothers. The other studies referred to in this section on physical health focus exclusively on lone mothers, and we are not aware of any studies about the physical health of lone fathers.

The dual impact of lone parenthood and non-employment can have a particularly devastating impact on health; not only is being non-employed worse for lone mothers' health than it is for couple mothers, the experience of both lone motherhood and non-employment creates a 'synergy effect', producing a total impact that is larger than the sum of the individual effects (Fritzell *et al.*, 2012). The authors find these effects occurred not only in the UK, based on data from the General Household Survey, but also in Italy and Sweden, based on similar social survey datasets.

The reason for such synergy effects is suggested in qualitative research by Casebourne and Britton (2004), whose interviews with lone mothers on Income Support suggested that the isolation and lack of resources associated with both states reinforce both the health problem itself and the barriers to finding employment. Although the lone mothers said that their health problem was not their key constraint to work, it added to, and interacted with, other constraints common to all lone parents; principally, a lack of childcare and a feeling of not being ready to work because their child was still too young.

### **2.5.2. Health behaviours**

In addition to physical and mental health outcomes, there may be differences between lone and couple mothers in their health-related behaviours. Lone mothers are more likely to smoke during and after pregnancy, although pregnancy increases the chances of quitting for all mothers, including lone mothers. Growing Up in Scotland data suggests that lone parents are far more likely to smoke than those in couple families – 49% compared with 18% (Hill, 2013). Data from the UK-wide Millennium Cohort Study suggests that those who enter early or lone motherhood are more likely to smoke before pregnancy, but also that first pregnancy uniformly increases the odds of quitting across mothers of all backgrounds (Graham *et al.*, 2010). However, the same data also shows an ongoing link between the experience of disadvantage such as lone parenthood over the early years of the child's life and smoking at nine months and three years (Hawkins *et al.*, 2010).

Reliable information about lone parents' alcohol and drug-taking behaviour is harder to obtain, as the problem is often a hidden one (Adamson and Templeton, 2012). A review of the evidence on problem drinking in Adamson and Templeton (2012) suggests that 6% of all children live with a dependent drinker, and 2.5% with a harmful drinker, and that children in lone parent families may be slightly over-represented among children living with parents who misuse alcohol, but that no safe generalisation in this respect can really be made from the evidence. Analysis of Growing Up in Scotland data comes to a similar conclusion – that lone parents are around twice as likely as couple parents to report 'binge' drinking – although they are also half as likely to drink at all (Hill, 2013). Although no multivariate analysis was carried out in this study, bivariate associations between drinking and other variables such as age and socioeconomic status, combined with the higher proportions of young motherhood and deprivation among lone parents, would suggest that many of the differences between couple and lone parents can be explained by the different profile of the two groups in these respects (Hill, 2013).

There is no specific information available about problem drug use among lone parents. In the Growing Up in Scotland study, 6% of the most recent cohort reported drug use during their pregnancy, with half stopping in the early stages and half continuing (Warner, 2013), and 3% reported some use in the previous year (Hill, 2013). However, this analysis did not break down drug use into single and couple families. Hay and Bauld (2008) have estimated the proportion of different types of benefit recipients with problem drug use, using Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions data and a survey of drug treatment outcomes. For female Income Support Recipients, of whom 60% are lone parents<sup>10</sup>, an estimated 4% are problem drug users. However, not all of these recipients are lone parents, and not all lone parents receive Income Support, so this is still a very crude estimator.

Qualitative research with lone and low-income parents and professionals working with unemployed parents has suggested that drug or alcohol problems in the family can restrict the ability to find, and stay in, employment (McQuaid *et al.*, 2010). However, the statistics presented above on the low prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse, even if they are potentially a slight underestimate, suggest that this does not represent a widespread barrier to employment for lone parents as a whole.

## **2.6. Child health and wellbeing**

A fairly substantial body of literature over the last 30 years has suggested a link between parental separation and a range of outcomes for the children, such as educational achievement, behaviour, mental health, self-concept, social competence and long-term health (Mooney *et al.*, 2009). However, these effects, although generally negative and sometimes significant, tend to be small, and the correlation is far from perfect. Furthermore, it is difficult to get an overarching sense of what the literature says because there are such huge variations between studies in the target population, data sources and methods of analysis. This section will review some of the most recent literature on these issues.

### **2.6.1. Health outcomes**

The literature suggests, at a bivariate level at least, a link between growing up in a lone parent family and a number of physical and mental health outcomes, compared with children who grow up in a couple family. However, as with the associations discussed in the previous section with parental health outcomes, there appears to be a strong economic dimension to the health inequalities, with some studies finding this to be the driver of inequalities, although not all.

As with the previous section on parental health, the health outcomes here pertain to self-reported health in surveys, rather than statistics on diagnoses or hospital admissions. For younger children, these health outcomes are reported by an adult in the household, while outcomes for adolescents may come either from parental reports or from directly administered questions depending on the

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<sup>10</sup> Source: DWP Tabulation Tool: <http://tabulation-tool.dwp.gov.uk/100pc/tabtool.html>

survey.

## ***Mental health and wellbeing***

This section begins by considering mental wellbeing in a more narrow sense of depression and life satisfaction, before broadening out a little to incorporate children's wider emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive development, and the impact of this into later childhood, adolescence and later life. Studies from the UK will be addressed first, before bringing in some examples of similar work from other countries.

### **Evidence from the UK**

#### ***Depression and life satisfaction***

Analysis of data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), which has collected data on a cohort of people since their birth in 1991, has suggested an association between father absence in early life and depressive symptoms in adolescence (Culpin *et al.*, 2013). The study found that father absence in early life (the first five years) was associated with depressive symptoms at age 14, and that this impact remains after adjusting for a range of socioeconomic, maternal and familial confounders assessed prior to the father's departure, and is stronger for girls. There was however found to be no association with father absence that occurred in middle childhood (5-10 years). The fact that this dataset is able to establish temporal ordering and control for prior differences provides some evidence that the impact of father absence is indeed causal. It is interesting that this only appears to operate if the absence occurred in early childhood; this could suggest that there are systematic differences between couples who separate early and those who separate later.

A survey of 6,102 11-15 year olds in Scotland suggests a negative impact of living in a single parent household on adolescents' self-rated life satisfaction. This impact, however, is limited to boys at a certain stage (age thirteen) after controlling for other explanatory variables such as family affluence and parent-child communication; indeed, these other covariates seem to have a much stronger association (Levin *et al.*, 2011).

Comparing this and the previous paper highlights one of the difficulties with representing the findings of this literature; there are considerable differences in how family structure is operationalised ('father absence', as per Culpin *et al.* is not the same as 'single parenthood') and which outcomes are measured, across different datasets. This heterogeneity makes it difficult to compare the magnitude and significance of effects, and to come to any overarching conclusions about the impact of lone parenthood on child outcomes.



### *Cognitive and behavioural development*

Data from the Millennium Cohort Study suggests that family structure has no direct impact on children's cognitive development; rather it is the higher propensity of lone parent families to experience poverty that drives any such link<sup>11</sup>. Kiernan and Mensah (2009) find that the strongest predictor of the intellectual and behavioural development of three year olds from the Millennium Cohort Study is poverty, with some weaker associations with maternal depression; no significant differences were found between lone and couple families after controlling for these variables. Looking at the cognitive outcomes of the same children two years later at age five, Schoon *et al.* (2011) also find that it is persistent economic hardship that undermines cognitive functioning, and not family instability, which is insignificant when controlling for family poverty, demographics, housing and child characteristics. This idea of poverty rather than family structure as the key correlate of children's subsequent outcomes is at odds with much of the policy discourse around the use of 'early intervention' measures; this is discussed in Section 3 below.

There is a longstanding debate, over the issue of whether maternal employment has an impact on children's behavioural and emotional adjustment and cognitive outcomes, which is particularly important considering the policy emphasis on getting lone parents into work (see Section 3). The evidence suggests that being in a household with no working parent at all is associated with the worst outcomes for children, both in couple and lone parent families. Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study has suggested that children in households where no parent is in work are much more likely to have behavioural difficulties at age five; this became insignificant for boys after fully adjusting for factors such as household income and maternal education and age, but remained significant for girls (McMunn *et al.*, 2011). The reasons for this difference cannot be explained by the study itself, and are not explored by the authors.

Data on older cohorts suggests that maternal education may at one time have had a negative impact on children; for a cohort of children born in 1958, there is some evidence of maternal employment affecting child outcomes, although the relationship is concentrated on the most low-skilled women (Verropoulou and Joshi, 2007). However, by the 1970s, this relationship seemed to have disappeared, with analysis of a cohort of children born in 1970 showing no significant impact of maternal employment on child outcomes (Cooksey *et al.*, 2009). Gregg *et al.* (2005), analysing data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (children who were born in 1991) find some negative impact of maternal employment on cognitive outcomes in couple families, but no significant effects for lone parent families. The authors hypothesise that mothers' earnings are particularly beneficial when income from other sources is low, and therefore the benefits of this income outweigh any negative impact of the employment, even though the latter may be present.

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<sup>11</sup> This data source is particularly well-suited to understanding these issues, as it can compare outcomes between the same children over multiple time periods, thus eliminating any 'unobserved heterogeneity' that might be driving differences in outcomes between children.

There is also some interesting qualitative work exploring the impact of lone parent employment with the children of lone parents themselves. Children see both positives and negatives to having a working lone parent; although there are benefits such as a higher income, they feel the loss of family time, and although they do not like or want to return to the poverty of Income Support, they are unhappy with the impact of work on their mother and unhappy with having to use childcare such as breakfast clubs (Ridge, 2009). Walker *et al.* (2008) found little evidence of direct, overt stigma against the children of single parents, but children and young people are aware of their poverty and how it influences exclusion from friendships, play, leisure and community activities. Interestingly, they seem to hold a belief that their family unit is tighter than in two-parent families, because of their experience of adversity and having to stick together.

Looking beyond early cognitive development, some research has considered the impact of lone parenthood on later economic outcomes, as children reach young adulthood and leave school. Lampard (2012), using data from the 2005 General Household Survey, finds that those who live in lone parent families as teenagers are less likely to have a salaried occupation in adulthood. However, the impact of family structure is negligible after controlling for parental worklessness, and the negative impact of living in a lone parent family “may not exist... among working lone-mother families with no financial problems” (Lampard, 2012, p1,034).

Marsh and Vegeris (2004) investigate the impact of family structure on a number of outcomes in later life, using data from the British Lone Parent Cohort, a ten-year longitudinal study of a representative sample of lone parents between 1991 and 2001. They find that family structure is associated with early school leaving, but not gaining advanced qualifications or subsequent jobs or benefit receipt. The study found a lack of association between family structure and the ‘big things’ like subsequent employment and general health; rather, it was the ‘little things’ (such as vandalism, truancy, and low self-esteem) that were found to be significantly associated with living in a lone parent family.

### **Evidence from beyond the UK**

Research from other countries has also suggested some association between child outcomes and family structure. There may well be a mediating effect of the economic and policy context on the extent to which lone parenthood has a negative impact on child outcomes, and this cross-national variation is considered in Section 3.1.4, which summarises some of the comparative work in this area. This section considers single-country studies from a number of other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and does not attempt to compare effect sizes between different countries, due to the wide variation in data, definitions and the variables considered in the analyses.

#### *Depression and life satisfaction*

Two Swedish studies demonstrate a strong impact of both single parenthood itself and parental mental health on children's mental health. Hjern *et al.* (2010) examine the association between children's consumption of medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and single parenthood, using data from the Swedish Prescribed Drug Register. They find this association to be strong, with maternal education and social welfare receipt also found to be significant in a multivariate model. All three also remained significant controlling for parental psychiatric health, which was itself found to have an impact as well. Von Borczyskowski *et al.* (2011) examine the association between growing up in a single parent household and suicide in adulthood, using data on three million Swedes from the multi-generation population register. Growing up in a single parent household was found to be the most important socioeconomic risk factor for suicide in adulthood, with parental mental health also having a significant impact, even in adopted children, suggesting both an environmental and genetic component to the impact of living with a parent with poor mental health outcomes.

In the USA, the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, a study of 4,046 children aged two to seventeen, suggests elevated rates of child victimisation (maltreatment, physical assault, property crime, witnessing family violence, exposure to community violence and sexual victimisation) in single and step-parent families relative to couple families (Turner *et al.*, 2013). The factors associated with this elevated risk were found to be parental conflict, drug or alcohol problems, family adversity and community disorder; these factors were found to be more prevalent in single and step-parent families, and thus driving the association between family structure and child outcomes.

#### *Cognitive and behavioural development*

There is also some mixed international evidence on the impact of family structure on children and young adults' educational and cognitive outcomes. As with the UK, there appears to be a complex association between family type, employment, poverty and children's outcomes.

A study that followed a cohort of 1,364 US elementary school children (aged from five to ten years old) found that family instability over the first seven years of the children's lives was associated with poorer social adjustment at the end of this period (Cavanagh and Huston, 2008). This was found to be true even after controlling for maternal characteristics such as age, education and mental health, although the multivariate model did not control for household income, thus missing out the economic dimension that has been identified as crucial in the UK studies discussed above.

Shriner *et al.* (2010) analyse data from the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which tracked over 10,000 children from when they started kindergarten in 1998 (aged five) until they were in the fifth grade (aged ten), to investigate the impact of family structure on how the children progressed in reading and maths. Family structure was found to have no significant impact; the key explanatory factor was the amount of social and resource capital in the family; aspects such as whether the child visited the library with their parents, or had a parent who acted as a school volunteer.

From a smaller US study, Mokrue *et al.* (2011) suggest that there may be some variation in the impact of family structure on behaviour problems depending on the gender of the child and the lone parent, with girls in single-mother households showing higher externalising behaviour and hyperactivity than those in couple families, but no such difference was found for boys in single-mother households. The small and non-random sample on which this is based makes it difficult to draw any robust generalisations, although it raises an interesting point that might be worthy of further investigation.

Looking at the Spanish context, Oliva *et al.* (2012) find that it is not family structure itself that affects children's adjustment, as this becomes insignificant after controlling for sociodemographic and contextual variables. This is, however, a small survey of just 214 families, and the multivariate modelling in the analysis is limited as a result.

However, some persistent effects of family structure have been found in Germany, based on data on almost 3,000 young people from the German Socioeconomic Panel (Francesconi *et al.*, 2009). A negative impact of growing up in a single parent family was found on a number of schooling outcomes; gaining qualifications, being at the top or bottom of the distribution of secondary school scores, and repeating a year. This effect persisted even after controlling for factors such as mother's education and age at birth of child, but only in East Germany. This illustrates the relevance of the context within which the family finds itself, as well as its form. Cross-national research using data from the Program for International Student Assessment, which compares educational outcomes across the OECD countries, has also suggested that context matters (Hampden-Thompson, 2013). Attainment gaps in maths, literacy and science between children from lone and couple families are smaller in countries with a policy environment that is favourable to single mothers, such as the presence of generous and universal family benefits. These results suggest that any detrimental impact of lone parenthood on educational outcomes is not inevitable, but can be ameliorated or even eliminated with suitable policy response.

Looking beyond early schooling to total years of schooling and earnings differentials in later life, a negative impact of family structure has also been found to be present at the bivariate level in both the USA (based on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth) and Sweden (based on a random sample from population register data) (Björklund *et al.*, 2006). However, in both countries the impact of family structure became non-existent after the introduction of controls. Although coming from a lone parent family is negatively associated with schooling and earning outcomes in both countries, when sibling composition and parental income are controlled for, this effect disappears, suggesting that the key causal mechanism seems to be the amount of resources per child in the household.

Data from the USA also suggests that maternal employment can be beneficial for children in lone parent families, but that this may depend on the type of job that the mother has. A meta-analysis (Lucas-Thompson *et al.*, 2010) of 69 studies published over 40 years in the USA investigating the impact of early maternal employment on children's achievement and behaviour, finds these effects

to be mostly insignificant; the only notable finding is a potential negative effect of employment in child's first year of life. There is also some evidence from the 2004 Growing Up in Australia study that children and lone parents both feel more strongly the negative impact of a parent being in a poor quality job, and this is reflected in poorer emotional and behavioural outcomes (Strazdins *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, data from the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics suggests that they fail to capture the benefits when their parent does work in a better quality job; occupational complexity is positively associated with child cognitive outcomes, but not in lone parent families, perhaps because other time and emotional stresses in lone parent households overwhelm the benefits of any additional skills or dispositions learned in the workplace (Yetis-Bayraktar *et al.*, 2012).

### ***Physical health***

The literature suggests that there may be an association between lone parenthood and poor physical health in children in the UK. However, as with other associations explored in this review, it may be driven largely by the difference in the socioeconomic profiles of different family types. Data from the Millennium Cohort Study showed that children in lone parent families are at an increased risk of poor physical (as well as mental) health at age seven (Pearce *et al.*, 2013). However, adjusting for poverty removes this impact, which suggests that poverty reduction is the key to good health outcomes in lone parent families.

Taulbut and Walsh (2013) use data from a number of cohort studies including the Millennium Cohort Study to compare health outcomes and their correlates between the three city regions of Glasgow, Manchester and Merseyside. Glasgow was found to have the lowest rate of child poverty of the three regions, and a rate of lone parenthood that lay between the other two, and also to have the lowest rates of limiting long-term illness among children. This might suggest that lone parenthood is a driver of poor health; however, the report analysis is at an aggregate and descriptive level only, and does not directly relate family structure to outcomes at the individual level.

Less ambiguous is the association between lone parenthood and child disability. Data from the Family Resources Survey suggests that a third of disabled children live in a lone parent household, compared with a quarter of non-disabled, and that this association between child disability and lone parenthood persists when controlling for social disadvantage (Blackburn *et al.*, 2010). However it is not clear why this association exists; whether it is because parents are more likely to split up if a child is disabled, or because a higher proportion of lone parents have disabled children.

Child disability is not itself a cause of poverty, but the kind of family in which disabled children live is more likely to be poor. Data from the Families and Children Study suggests that, although families with a disabled child are more likely to enter and less likely to escape poverty, this is because they are more likely to be characterised by other risk factors for poverty, such as worklessness, low education and smoking (Shahtahmasebi *et al.*, 2010). Transitions into poverty, hardship and financial strain were also found to be significantly associated with lone parenthood, in models that also controlled for socioeconomic factors and child disability. There are plausible reasons why

households with a disabled child may be more likely to be workless: if a child has severe care needs; lives in a single parent household; and if the stress of caring for a disabled child makes relationship dissolution more likely. In this way, child disability might be thought of as an indirect cause of poverty, by influencing the factors that are associated with it.

## 2.6.2. Health behaviours

### *Child eating habits, activity and weight*

Although there is evidence of an association between socioeconomic disadvantage and children's eating habits and physical activity (and by extension, their weight), it is not clear whether lone parenthood plays a distinct role in this. Data from the Growing up in Scotland study suggests bivariate associations between lone parenthood and obesity, and with attitudes towards family meal times, for five year old children (Marryat *et al.*, 2009); however, no multivariate analysis was conducted in the report to establish whether this can be explained by the age and income levels of lone mothers. In fact, a subsequent multivariate model with the next sweep of the data (when the cohort was six years old) suggests that the impact of lone parenthood does indeed operate through the disadvantage experienced by lone parents; Parkes *et al.* (2012) find that lone parenthood is not significantly associated with obesity, low activity or screen time at age six.

Two studies drawing on two different Scottish datasets suggest a link between family structure and breakfast consumption, although neither tackles the issue of how this is related to economic differences between family structures. Levin and Kirby (2012), using data from the Scottish Household Survey, find differences by family structure in irregular breakfast consumption, and that some factors (low socioeconomic status, unfair parenting) are particularly strong risk factors in single mother households. However, the models do not enter both family structure and these other covariates in the same model, so it is difficult to untangle whether family structure exerts an impact independent of this. Similarly, data from the Scottish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey has suggested an increasing polarisation of breakfast consumption between couple and lone parent families; children in lone parent families have a lower probability of eating breakfast daily than those in couple families, and this difference has been increasing over time (Levin *et al.*, 2012a). However, the analysis does not explore whether there has been increasing polarisation in factors such as income, and if so, whether this might play a role.

One study suggests that differences in parenting style are more strongly associated with adolescents' diets than family structure (Pearson *et al.*, 2010). Those who described their parents as 'authoritative'<sup>12</sup> ate more fruit per day, fewer unhealthy snacks per day, and ate breakfast on more days per week than those who described their parents as neglectful, but only breakfast was

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<sup>12</sup> Authoritative' parents seek to direct their child's activities in a rational, issue-orientated manner, 'authoritarian' parents use force to direct their child's activities, and 'permissive' parents do not attempt to shape their child's behaviour.

significantly associated with family structure. However, this was a small study of just 328 school pupils in the East Midlands, therefore caution should be exercised in generalising the results.

Some qualitative work has suggested an association between family structure and participation in, and attitudes towards, exercise (Quarmby *et al.*, 2011; Quarmby and Dagkas, 2010). Although all children understand the value of exercise, children in single parent families report less parental encouragement to participate in exercise, and children in couple families are more likely to report that their parents participate in exercise with them. These differences between parents with respect to their children's exercise habits may circumscribe their children's opportunities to participate in exercise, and shape their attitudes towards it. These findings emphasise the problem of time as well as income poverty facing lone parent families; although access to sports and leisure will be constrained for all low income families, lone parent families experience a double constraint because they have less parental time available as well.

### ***Risky health behaviours in adolescence***

#### **Evidence from the UK**

Research into the impact of family structure has also considered whether growing up in a lone parent family is associated with a higher propensity towards risky health behaviours in adolescence, such as drinking, smoking, and early sexual activity.

The 2006 Scottish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey asked almost 6,000 young people in Scotland about such behaviours. The results suggested that family structure was associated with a number of these; drinking, smoking, cannabis use, fighting and sexual activity (Levin *et al.*, 2012b). The study also suggested that eating a family meal was associated with a substantially reduced likelihood of such behaviours, and that the impact of family structure was nullified by the practice of having a family meal for some outcomes (drinking alcohol and cannabis use) and reduced for others (sexual activity and smoking).

The Twenty-07 Study, which was another study of a cohort of Scottish youth (although it is somewhat dated now, having been conducted in the late 1980s), also showed an association between family structure and risky behaviours (Green *et al.*, 2013). Children from lone parent families were more likely than those from couple families to start smoking earlier and more heavily, and to display higher levels of psychiatric distress, after controlling for factors such as household income, although the association with high levels of alcohol use was not significant after the addition of control variables.

The association between family structure and adolescent behaviours could potentially be driven by differences in parenting style. Taking data on 15 year olds interviewed for the British Household Panel Survey Youth Panel, Chan and Koo (2010) find that parenting style is associated with family structure, even controlling for social class. 'Authoritative' parenting is more prevalent in two-parent

families, while 'permissive' parenting is more common in single parent and step-families. The authors also find that it is these distinctions in parenting styles – rather than social class itself – that is associated with a range of youth outcome variables such as subjective wellbeing, self-esteem and risky health behaviours; thus, the association between these outcomes and family structure may well be driven at least partly by differences in parenting styles. However, as the authors themselves admit, causality may not flow simply from parenting to behaviour, as the behaviour of the young person may itself affect the style of parenting adopted.

Others have questioned the association between parenting style and problematic adolescent outcomes. Collishaw *et al.* (2012) compare data on young people from the British Cohort Study when the cohort was 16 years old (in 1986), and the 2006 Health Survey for England. This suggests that there has been an increase in conduct disorders, but a convergence in parenting quality between different family structures. This casts some doubt on the parenting quality explanation, and the idea that youth conduct problems will be tackled by widespread parenting initiatives.

### **Evidence from beyond the UK**

International evidence has also suggested a link between family structure and later health behaviours. Using data from a longitudinal youth cohort study from the USA, which followed nearly 21,000 young people from the ages of twelve to fourteen between 1994 and 2002, Ryan *et al.* (2009) found that those who experienced transitions in family type when growing up were more likely to enter into adult unions before the age of 20. This is also associated with transitions on a number of dimensions such as the number and type of unions and their duration. Particularly salient to these outcomes are those adolescent years that included spending time in a single mother family.

Reneflot (2009) examined the factors associated with early childbearing and entering parenthood outside marriage, using a large sub-sample (almost 300,000) from Norwegian register data. These outcomes were found to be associated with family disruption during childhood. The effect only operates partially through differences in educational outcomes, as it controls for the educational status of both the respondent and their parent. However, the model does not control for household income, as this information is not held in this dataset. Therefore, it potentially fails to account for one of the key differences between lone and couple families, namely income, which has been shown in other studies to eliminate the impact of family structure.

## **2.7. Summary: the characteristics and wellbeing of lone parents and their children**

The literature has identified a number of key features of lone parents.

*Lone parents are more likely to experience poverty:*



- There is an association between lone parenthood and poverty.
- Lone parent families experience the problems of both low income and income insecurity, caused by moving in and out of work and benefits, and the complex system of government support that comes from multiple sources.
- Almost two thirds of lone parents on benefit receive no maintenance, and the average amount received is low (£23.01 per week for a single parent on benefit), such that its impact on poverty reduction is limited.
- Lone parents are restricted in their access to financial products such as bank accounts, savings accounts and life insurance.

*Lone parents are less likely to be in employment:*

- There is an association between the poverty experienced by lone parents and the extent to which they are not in employment; two thirds of non-working lone parents have an equivalised income below 60% of the median. However in-work poverty exists as well, affecting a quarter who work part-time and a fifth who work full-time.
- The proportion of economically inactive lone parent households is higher than couple households – 37% compared with 5% – although this proportion has fallen considerably since 1996, when it was just over half.
- Descriptive analysis suggests that 27% of lone parents enter elementary jobs such as cleaning, shelf-stacking, kitchen and catering work, compared with 10% of couple mothers, although these figures do not take into account potential differences between these groups.
- Underemployment and zero-hours contracts are particularly prevalent in jobs such as cleaning and care work, and among those who work part-time; this potentially affects a large proportion of lone parents in work.

*Lone parents experience a number of barriers to work:*

- There may be a lack of suitable jobs in the (local) labour market that offer suitable hours and the required flexibility, the availability of which often relies on *ad hoc* arrangements and employer discretion.
- There is a lack of affordable childcare, which would help some lone mothers into work, although some are reluctant to use it (this attitude is found with similar prevalence among couple mothers).
- Other barriers to employment include: having a large family; poor health; having a lack of qualifications, experience and confidence to enter the workplace; and a low expectation of wanting or being able to move into work.
- Many of these issues affect couple families, but the difficulties are amplified for lone parents, as both the sole earner and the sole carer in their household.

*Social networks are important:*

- The practical and financial support of extended family and friends is important to helping lone parents survive and to balance work and care, and is appreciated by lone parents and their children.
- However, not all lone parents have access to such networks, and where they do, a considerable burden may be placed on those providing the support.

*Lone parenthood has an impact on maternal health:*

- Lone mothers have, on average, worse health and more mental distress than couple mothers.
- Although poor health is associated with (and intensified by) non-employment, the association is found across occupational classes.
- It is impossible to draw robust generalisations from the existing literature about the prevalence of harmful behaviours (such as drug-taking and excessive drinking) among lone parents, because these are small and hard-to-reach groups.

*Lone parenthood may be associated with negative outcomes for children, although this link seems to be indirect and not necessarily causal:*

- The literature examines the impact of family structure on a number of child outcomes, such as cognitive and behavioural development, physical and mental health. Some studies suggest that the association with family structure disappears after controlling for material and other deficits, while others find that it persists. It is difficult to get a coherent picture of these associations when different studies are using different definitions and variables, across different datasets of varying sizes.
- Being in poverty or living in a household where no adult is in work has a negative impact on children's cognitive and emotional development, and lone parents are more likely to be in these categories.
- Parenting style and parenting practices seem to matter, such as the level and type of discipline in the household, and the practice of eating family meals together. These are associated with adolescent outcomes such as delinquent behaviour or risky health behaviours such as smoking and drinking. There is potentially a link with lone parenthood insofar as parenting is associated with family structure, for which there is some evidence.
- Differences in parenting style, as well as differences in the available time and resources to spend time on healthy activities as a family (of which lone parents have less), have been linked with children's eating habits, exercise habits and weight.
- Disabled children are more likely to live in a lone-parent household than non-disabled children. There is an inter-relationship between child disability, lone parenthood and hardship, with various potential mechanisms – it could be that the child's disability affects that parent's ability to work, or that child disability puts a strain on relationships and leads to dissolution.

### **3. Responses of policy-makers and other stakeholders to lone parenthood poverty and economic inactivity**

This section of the review will analyse the literature on the responses of policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders to lone parent economic poverty and economic inactivity. It will examine the extent to which initiatives aimed at getting lone parents into employment have been successful, both from the point of view of economic outcomes and other wellbeing outcomes. As well as the policies themselves, the review will consider the political discourse that has surrounded these policies, and how this may have changed. It will also consider the prevailing public opinion discourse surrounding lone parents.

#### **3.1. Policy responses to single parents and evaluations of their effectiveness**

This section will consider the policy environment pertaining to lone parents – how and to what extent the government supports them financially, and attempts to help or encourage them into employment – and the impact of this on their employment and financial situation. It will begin by considering the approach of the previous UK New Labour government, and the literature evaluating the initiatives from this period, such as the New Deal, tax credit reform and the move towards a stronger focus on early intervention and increasing conditionality. It will then go on to consider the approach of the current UK coalition government, and the more limited information available about the impact of their approach to lone parents. Local and devolved issues over this time period will also be considered. The section will conclude with a consideration of the cross-national literature on policy responses to lone parents, and the different approaches taken in different countries; how these different approaches may be categorised, and the impact of these on lone parent employment and poverty.

##### **3.1.1. The New Labour government (1997-2010)**

###### ***The discourse on lone parents***

The New Labour government elected in 1997 were committed to increasing the employment rate of lone parents, setting a target of 70% in work by 2010 (Evans *et al.*, 2003). Although committed to the aim of eliminating child poverty by 2020, the strategy for achieving this did not lie solely in income transfers, but in a three-pronged approach that promoted paid work and tackled early and long-term disadvantage, alongside altering income levels directly through the tax and benefit system (Piachaud and Sutherland, 2001). Lone parents were a key focus of the New Labour ‘enabling state’; the state that provided people not with direct support by providing necessities, but with the tools that gave them the agency to choose to support themselves and buy these necessities for themselves (Redmond, 2010). These ‘tools’ took the form of training, employment support, childcare, minimum wage and in-work subsidies. Early policy discourse (for example the preliminary policy proposals found in the government’s Green Papers) and policies showed a clear commitment

to a welfare state built around work, and the need for a change of culture among benefit claimants in this respect (Prideaux, 2009).

Employment was central to New Labour's mantra of 'social inclusion'; the dual and mutually reinforcing states of being in paid employment and subscribing to mainstream moral values (Gillies, 2005). Single parenthood was antithetical to both of these; thus, although policy discourse paid lip service to tolerance of different family forms, for example in the 1998 Green Paper *Supporting Families*, the social inclusion agenda was in fact quite a hostile stance on such deviation, albeit in a different way to the more explicitly moralistic overtones of the 'back to basics' discourse of the preceding Conservative government led by John Major (Lister, 1996).

### ***Getting lone parents into work: the New Deal for Lone Parents***

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was a first step towards orientating the system of social support towards 'social inclusion' and self-reliance. This voluntary programme offered information and advice to lone parents via meetings with advisers, with the aim of encouraging them to take up or increase their hours of paid work (Evans *et al.*, 2003). The programme was initially piloted in eight areas in 1997, and rolled out nationally to all new or repeat benefit claimants in 1998, and all lone parents not in work in 1999.

The programme underwent a number of developments over time, with additional elements piloted in selected areas, and in some cases rolled out more widely<sup>13</sup>; Table 2 gives some examples of these. These developments could be seen as a response to some of the issues identified with existing provision. For example, Childcare Tasters paid for a week's worth of childcare in the week before starting work, to build trust and confidence in formal childcare, in recognition of some lone parents' reluctance to use it (Brewer *et al.*, 2007).

The NDLP and these additional elements have been subject to a considerable amount of evaluation. Evaluation of the initial pilots (Hales *et al.*, 2000; Hales *et al.*, 2000; Hasluck *et al.*, 2000) suggested that they had a small positive impact on employment outcomes, although the economic returns were calculated to be slightly less than the cost of the prototype. At this time, contracts were also awarded to voluntary sector organisations to run their own innovative pilots aimed at getting lone parents into work (Woodfield and Finch, 1999). Although all quite different, the key factor for success seemed to be that the service provided a holistic, tailored service that linked up well with other agencies and employers (*Ibid.*).

The evaluation of the national roll-out of the NDLP suggested that 24% of lone parents participating had found work who would not otherwise have done so, and that participants exited more quickly

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<sup>13</sup> Some initiatives, such as the In-Work Credit and the In-Work Emergency Discretion Fund, still exist under the present policy regime, although the New Deal for Lone Parents itself no longer does (it was subsumed into Flexible New Deal in 2009, which was replaced with the Work Programme in 2011).

from Income Support than non-participants (Lessof *et al.*, 2003). Unlike the pilot, the scheme proved to be value for money, constituting a net saving (Evans *et al.*, 2003). However, qualitative findings suggested that the programme did not change lone parents' perceptions of the barriers they faced to employment (Lessof *et al.*, 2003).

**Table 2. Initiatives aimed at helping lone parents find and sustain employment.**

<b>Childcare Tasters</b> (piloted 2004-2006)	Tasters offer up to one week childcare placement to lone parents who are considering entering employment but are apprehensive about using formal childcare. The aim is to increase the parents' willingness to use childcare. Allows for the payment of formal childcare during the week immediately before the customer starts work.
<b>Work Search Premium</b> (piloted 2004-2006)	Weekly payment of £20 that is available to NDLP participants on satisfactory completion of job search activities, payable for up to six months.
<b>In-Work Credit</b> (piloted from 2004, rolled out nationally from 2008)	Weekly payment of £40 that is available to lone parents leaving Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance and moving into paid work of at least 16 hours per week, payable for up to 12 months.
<b>In-Work Emergencies Fund</b> (piloted 2004-2006, rolled out nationally as the In-Work Emergency Discretion Fund from 2008)	Fund provides financial help for first 26 weeks of employment, to overcome unexpected financial barriers which might prevent them from remaining in the job.
<b>Employment Retention and Advancement</b> (piloted 2003-2007)	Post-employment support for up to two years; meetings with an Advancement Support Adviser, an employment retention bonus of £400 three times a year for two years for staying in full-time work, assistance with in-work training (£1,000 tuition fees plus £1,000 for completing) and emergency payments.
<b>In-Work Training Grant</b> (piloted 2000-2001)	Grant of £750 made available to lone parents returning to work, paid to an approved training provider for training undertaken to meet the specific needs of the lone parent's new employer.

Sources: Brewer *et al.*, (2009); Brewer *et al.* (2007); Hendra *et al.* (2011); Lakey *et al.*, (2002).

Most quantitative evaluation of the NDLP and its associated add-ons have found these to have a positive but modest impact on lone parents' entry into employment and exit from benefit (Brewer *et al.*, 2009, 2007). Dolton *et al.*, (2006) revisited the initial evaluation, and found a positive impact, although they questioned whether it was as large as stated by Evans *et al.* (2003), putting the employment increase attributable to the programme at 14% rather than 24%. Dolton and Smith (2011) also question whether the impact would continue at the same size over time, or whether it might weaken after an initial, rapid activation of clients who were previously close to the labour market anyway. The impact of in-work support was also found to affect outcomes only for as long as it was provided; the effects disappeared after the end of the eligibility period (Griffiths, 2011; Hendra *et al.*, 2011).

There is also a body of qualitative evaluation evidence on how these initiatives affected lone parents' decisions about, and attitudes and motivation towards, working. Reactions to participating in the NDLP varied among lone parents; some found it helpful, others felt anxious and 'under scrutiny' (Smith, 2013). The impact of such programmes may vary depending on the distance from the labour market of the particular lone parent. The strongest effect can be found 'at the margin'; among those closest to the labour market anyway (Hosain and Breen, 2007). Staff administering the programmes have reported that financial incentives can be the tipping point for lone parents who are unsure or undecided about working (Hosain and Breen, 2007; Jenkins, 2008). However, this perspective differs from that of the lone parents themselves, who do not necessarily perceive themselves as being incentivised to move in to work by financial inducements (Griffiths, 2011; Sims *et al.*, 2010).

This disparity between staff and lone parent perspectives occurs across a number of issues. Programme staff have reported not only that financial inducements are effective, but also that they perceive a lack of willingness to work and a 'culture' of wanting to remain on benefits (Brown and Joyce, 2007; Griffiths, 2011; Kelleher *et al.*, 2002; Ray *et al.*, 2007; Sims *et al.*, 2010). This is in contrast to lone parents, who report that they do wish to work, albeit under certain conditions (Brown and Joyce, 2007; Gloster *et al.*, 2010; Griffiths, 2011; McQuaid *et al.*, 2013), and that they feel stigmatised on benefits (Casebourne and Britton, 2004; Gingerbread, 2012a).

### ***Financial support for lone parents: Tax credit reform***

In parallel to the NDLP employment initiatives, New Labour made changes to the financial incentives to work, by topping up wages through the tax credit system and offering greater subsidies towards childcare. The Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC), introduced in 1999, was more generous than the Family Credit system it replaced; the credits and earning thresholds were higher, the income taper was lower, child maintenance payments were disregarded, and parents could reclaim up to 70% of childcare costs (Brewer *et al.*, 2006). This system was restructured slightly in 2003, into two separate elements, one for working households – the Working Tax Credit – and one for households with children – the Child Tax Credit, which also encompassed the childcare element of WFTC (Brewer, 2003). These changes represented an increase in child-contingent support, from £24.13 per child in 1997 to £38.92 in 2006, a total expenditure increase of 61% (Daly, 2011a).

In an attempt to improve the childcare infrastructure, the government also launched a National Childcare Strategy, which was a number of policy initiatives including increased funding to expand the number of places available, as well as schemes more targeted on deprived areas and children most in need, such as Sure Start, Early Excellence Centres and the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (Bell *et al.*, 2005). Between 1997 and 2006, £21 billion was invested in childcare (Daly, 2011a).

These reforms had a small but significant impact on the lone parent employment rate. Cebulla *et al.*, (2008) look at eight quantitative estimates of the impact of tax credits over this period, and find that

these are broadly similar; an increase in lone parent employment of between 3.4 percentage points and 4.8 percentage points, which represents an increase of between 50,000 and 60,000 employed lone parents.

The impact of tax credit reform may be even bigger, taken in conjunction with other employment-promoting policies such as the NDLP. Data from the British Household Panel Survey and Labour Force Survey suggests that the policy package as a whole raised employment rates of lone parents by around 5 percentage points, as well as increasing the proportion who are working more than 16 hours per week (Gregg *et al.*, 2009). This analysis also identified a number of other policy benefits in addition to purely employment-related outcomes, such as a smaller decline in income and mental health after partnership breakdown, and better mental health among adolescents in lone parent families.

However, Brewer *et al.* (2006) argue that the impact of WFTC was in fact undermined by other concurrent policy changes. Modelling the impact of WFTC using data from the Family Resources Survey, they find that WFTC had a positive impact on lone parent employment of 5.1 percentage points, but that the net effect was in fact 3.7 percentage points due to other changes in the tax and benefit system that offered greater support to parents regardless of their employment status (such as Child Benefit and the Child Tax Credit).

Although the consensus in the literature seems to be that tax credit reform had some impact on lone parent employment rates, this impact is still relatively modest. Smaller scale and qualitative studies might suggest some reasons why the implementation of the tax credit reforms may not have occurred in the most helpful and straightforward way for lone parents.

A telephone survey of 100 lone parents suggested that there was a great deal of confusion and uncertainty surrounding the entitlements (Griggs *et al.*, 2005). Respondents reported being unsure about reporting requirements when their circumstances changed, and many were unaware that the Inland Revenue can impose penalties for incorrect reporting. Failure to report correctly can also lead to overpayments, and the subsequent reclaiming of these overpayments by the Inland Revenue; this created a great deal of hardship, and not all were aware of the top-up payments designed to assist in such circumstances. Another difficulty identified was that although childcare costs vary over the year, tax credit claims are based on average childcare costs, which had to be calculated and budgeted across the year.

Another study of 50 lone parents who were working and claiming tax credits has echoed complaints about the complexities of the support available and the procedures for accessing it, and the harsh consequences of not correctly following this complex procedure (Millar, 2008). However, what they did find useful was advice and support in the transition to tax credits; those who had some assistance from a NDLP adviser when they started work reported that this was extremely helpful.

Despite these problems, tax credits seem to be popular among lone parents. They are regarded as a hugely important source of income, because they are much more reliable than wages or Child Support (Millar, 2008). They are also helpful in providing lone parent families with a sufficient income without the lone parent having to work long hours, thus allowing them to reconcile some earning with their caring responsibility; this ability to care is congruent with their understanding of appropriate parental responsibility (Wiggan, 2010).

### ***Conditionality: introducing obligations for lone parents***

As well as the 'carrots' of employment support and financial incentives, the policy environment at this time was also characterised by an increasing use of the 'stick' of conditionality. Mandatory Work-focused Interviews (WFIs) to discuss the individual's employment possibilities were introduced for benefit recipients who were not JSA clients. For lone parents, these were piloted in 2000 (Green *et al.*, 2003), and then rolled out to all new or repeat Income Support claimants from 2001, with phased incorporation of existing claimants completed by 2004 (Knight *et al.*, 2006). The Lone Parent WFI (LPWFI) was compulsory, and took place with a view to encouraging and facilitating a move into employment. Looking for work or participating in NDLP, however, was not compulsory (Knight and Lissenburgh, 2005). These interviews were required on a six-monthly basis for most lone parents, although quarterly interviews were introduced for lone parents with a youngest child over 14 in 2005, over 11 in 2007, and in the last year of Income Support receipt in 2008 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b).

Sanctions for lone parents on Income Support were introduced in 2003; failure to attend a LPWFI could result in Income Support being suspended (Joyce and Whiting, 2006). The proportion of claims being sanctioned has increased from 2.7% in the year 2004-05, to a peak of 7.8% in 2008-09 following a tightening of the sanctioning regime and an increase in the frequency of WFIs; in 2012-13 it was somewhat lower at 5.4% (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b).

In the latter part of the New Labour era, two independent reports (Freud, 2007; Gregg, 2008) precipitated the start of a period of welfare reform, in which, among other things, more restrictive conditions were imposed for lone parent benefit recipients. From November 2008, the age of the child for which lone parents were no longer entitled to Income Support (as lone parents) started to be reduced, from sixteen to twelve, then to ten in October 2009. The process was continued by the next government, who further reduced the age threshold to seven in October 2010, and five in early 2012 (Whitworth, 2012).

Early pilots of compulsory LPWFIs suggested that they could potentially be an effective tool for encouraging parents back into work. The quantitative evaluation of the initial pilot of mandatory LPWFIs suggested that lone parent employment participation was higher in the pilot areas than in the control areas by around five percentage points (Green *et al.*, 2003). Some qualitative evaluation also took place, with both providers and lone parents. Providers identified a number of issues with the implementation of the scheme, although to a large extent these could be thought of as 'teething



problems', such as staff not understanding the scheme, possibly due to a lack of training, and the underestimation of the required workload and resources (Kelleher *et al.*, 2002). Lone parents, having been apprehensive, reported being pleasantly surprised, feeling that the service was responsive to their needs and that the specialist advisers were valued – although the work focus of the scheme may not have been effectively conveyed (Osgood *et al.*, 2002).

Evaluation of the national roll-out of LPWFIs suggests that it did have some positive impact on lone parents' exits from Income Support and entry into employment. The quantitative evaluation suggested that a third of respondents reported increased motivation to find a job, however the Personal Adviser meetings did not necessarily change participants' underlying culture or mindset about work; its main impact was to help those who wanted to find work similar to what they had done before, rather than engaging those furthest from the labour market, or raising aspirations (Coleman *et al.*, 2003). Analysis of administrative data held by the Department of Work and Pensions suggested that there was no significant impact on new or repeat claimants, but for lone parents with ongoing claims, the LPWFI extension was found to raise Income Support exits by 1 percentage point at six months, and 2 percentage points after 12 months (Knight and Lissenburgh, 2005). Another analysis of administrative data over a longer period of time, considering the combined impact of LPWFIs and the NDLP, suggested that the impact may have started small but subsequently increased, peaking at 18 months, when benefit exit was 4 percentage points higher for new and repeat claimants, and 10 percentage points higher for existing claimants, when compared with non-participants (Knight *et al.*, 2006).

In a meta-analysis of the evidence on LPWFIs, Hasluck and Green (2007) find that the LPWFI was a critical element, not necessarily leading directly to employment, but to increased participation in the NDLP, from which Income Support exit and employment entry is more likely. Reported positive elements of the scheme were useful advice, boosted confidence and the motivation of seeing that it was possible to be better off in work. Three quarters of participants found the meetings helpful, although the response was more negative among those furthest from the labour market, and the delivery of the programme was not always consistent, with some crucial elements such as childcare only covered around a third of the time (Thomas, 2007).

In terms of applying sanctions to lone parents who failed to attend WFIs, the actual experience of lone parents is that the sanctioning process was approached quite flexibly by advisors, who used some discretion in applying and following through on sanctions (Joyce and Whiting, 2006). However, communication of sanctions appeared to be lacking in some way, with many lone parents who had received sanctions unaware that they had been sanctioned until they noticed the loss of benefit (Goodwin, 2008). Nor was it always clear to lone parents why they had been sanctioned (Lane *et al.*, 2011). For some lone parents, the loss of benefit was a source of financial stress, and there was a strong reliance on family and friends during these times, although some did not notice the loss at all (Joyce and Whiting, 2006). Given these findings, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is little evidence of this sanctioning regime promoting job-seeking behaviour (Goodwin, 2008).

Some research has also considered the impact of the reductions in the age of the youngest child for which lone parents must move onto Jobseeker's Allowance. As the change to age five (from seven) is relatively recent, there is no work yet that has examined this, but work has been carried out investigating the impact of moving the threshold from ten to seven in 2010. A survey of 2,770 lone parents whose eligibility for Income Support had recently ended showed that 55% had moved onto Jobseeker's Allowance, while 24% had moved straight into work, of whom about half had done so before their eligibility for Income Support ended<sup>14</sup> (Coleman and Riley, 2012). Those who had moved onto Jobseeker's Allowance reported mixed experiences of this. Sixty-three per cent found the obligation to attend meetings at the Jobcentre fairly easy, and 62% said looking for work was fairly easy; however only 45% said they felt their personal circumstances had been taken into account, and were more likely to agree than disagree that they felt pushed into things they didn't want to do. Qualitative research suggested that those least happy with the transition to Jobseeker's Allowance and who found it most unhelpful were those furthest from the labour market and least orientated towards work; this is perhaps a reflection of the fact that the early stages of the JSA regime are designed for those who have just lost their job, rather than those who have been out of work for some time (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

The survey of lone parents referred to above also suggested that, of those who moved into work, the type of work was likely to be low-skilled and low paid (Coleman and Riley, 2012). Forty per cent of respondents had moved into elementary occupations, and 23% into personal service occupations, with the majority (57%) earning around the minimum wage or less<sup>15</sup>. Respondents were not asked whether they liked the job they had moved into, although 52% said they hardly ever or never had enough time to give to their children, and 55% had tried to negotiate with their employers on pay, hours, or flexibility, or had tried to find another job. A survey of lone mothers in Australia suggested that those who had moved into work because they had been obliged to look for it had a lower level of job satisfaction than was found in the population as a whole (Cook and Noblet, 2012).

Lone parents are supposed to be entitled to some flexibility in the conditions imposed on them in order to receive Jobseeker's Allowance, such as the right to restrict their job search to part-time work only. However, qualitative work with lone parents about their experiences of this conditionality regime suggests inadequate knowledge of these flexibilities on the part of both lone parents and advisors, and inconsistencies in their application (Gingerbread, 2012a; Lane *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, not only are advisors sometimes insensitive to lone parents' caring responsibilities, some fail even to identify that their clients are lone parents on their initial Jobcentre Plus visit (Lane *et al.*, 2011). Some advisors also report some resistance to these flexibilities, arguing that it is too easy for lone parents to get out of having to take part in activities designed to improve their employability, or address other barriers, because their childcare responsibilities absolve them from having to do so, thus weakening the effectiveness of the scheme (Gloster *et al.*, 2010).

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<sup>14</sup> This group may have been participating in employment programmes while on Income Support to help them move into work once their entitlement ended, but this information is not available from the survey.

<sup>15</sup> Thirty-three per cent of respondents reported an hourly wage of less than the minimum wage at the time, although this may be partly due to the reporting of net instead of gross pay.

### ***Early intervention and supporting vulnerable families***

As a final point on the New Labour government's policy environment, it is worth mentioning the expansion of initiatives that provide intensive support to the most vulnerable families, in particular Sure Start and the Family Intervention Projects. Although these were not targeted solely or directly at lone parents, lone parenthood was understood to be both an indicator of deprivation in Sure Start areas, and a risk factor in families involved in the Family Intervention Projects. This brief discussion draws on some key evaluations of the outcomes of early intervention projects in England. The implementation and outcomes of the early intervention approach in the Scottish context are discussed in Section 3.1.3.

The creation of the Sure Start initiative was the result of a government spending review on services for young children in 1998, which considered the evidence on early intervention programmes and concluded that these could help children's development and early life experiences (Lewis, 2010). The aims and nature of Sure Start can be summarised thus:

"The aim of Sure Start is to work with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – to make sure they are ready to thrive when they get to school... In each Sure Start locality, locally-based programmes, building on what already exists, will ensure the integrated delivery of a range of core services... In addition local communities may provide additional services according to local needs." (Glass, 1999, p258).

The policy was targeted towards the most disadvantaged areas, and made available to all families within these areas, rather than being targeted to particular types of family or existing service users (The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) Team, 2005).

The national evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) has compared outcomes between children in areas where SSLPs were operating, and those in areas where these programmes did not operate (The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) Team, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012). The evaluation has considered outcomes pertaining to the children themselves – their physical health (general health and BMI), educational development, behaviour and social development – as well as considering aspects of maternal wellbeing and parent and family functioning (e.g. discipline and the home learning environment). The main methodology employed is to compare data on Sure Start participants with a matched sample of non-participants from the Millennium Cohort Study.

The results of the evaluation have suggested a mixed impact, and where it has been positive it has been principally in relation to the parental and family outcomes, with little impact on children's own health, cognitive or behavioural outcomes. The largest difference in child outcomes was identified at age three, but by age five any advantage seems to have been eroded, possibly because all children will have had the opportunity to participate in free nursery education between these ages. There may be some differential impact by family type; the evaluation of outcomes when the children were

aged seven found greater life satisfaction reported only in lone parent and workless households (The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) Team, 2012). No such differences however, were observed at age five (The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) Team, 2010).

While Sure Start was aimed at families with children under four, a different, more intensive kind of support was expanded for families with older children, in the form of Family Intervention Projects (FIPs, later renamed to 'Intensive Intervention Projects'). These projects are characterised by "an intensive and persistent multi-agency approach to supporting the whole family and helping them overcome their problems, coordinated by a single dedicated 'key worker'" (Dixon *et al.*, 2010, p5).

Evaluations of the success of these projects have tentatively suggested that they can have a positive impact. However, these results are usually presented with considerable methodological caveats by authors, particularly regarding the small, unrepresentative and potentially biased samples on which they are based. Caution should therefore be taken in accepting at face value what seems overwhelming evidence for the 'success' of such initiatives (Gregg and McMahon, 2010).

White *et al.* (2008), looking at outcomes of FIP participation between 2005 and 2007, found a reduction in a number of outcomes between the start and end of participation. Involvement in antisocial behaviour (ASB) was 92% at the start of the intervention, and 35% at the end, although the evaluation criticises the scheme for focusing too heavily on families with ASB issues, when there are those without who would still benefit from intensive help. There was also a reduction in the proportion of families experiencing at least one 'risk factor' (for example, problems with health, parenting, domestic violence and so on), from 99% to 80%, and a reduction in the experience of educational problems (for example, truancy or exclusion from school), from 37% to 21%. Key success factors were found to be:

"...recruitment and retention of high-quality staff, small caseloads, having a dedicated key worker who manages a family and works intensively with them, a whole-family approach, staying involved with a family for as long as necessary, scope to use resources creatively, using sanctions with support, and effective multi-agency relationships" (White *et al.*, 2008, p2).

A study of participation in intensive intervention between 2006 and 2010 across 150 local authorities finds effects of a similar magnitude; Dixon *et al.* (2010) find a 59% reduction in ASB (compared with a 62% reduction found by White *et al.*, 2008), and a 48% reduction in poor educational outcomes (compared with a 43% reduction found by White *et al.*, 2008). An evaluation carried out between 2009 and 2011 across five intervention projects found that 'hard' transformative outcomes (including a reduction in ASB and poor educational outcomes) were achieved in two thirds of cases (Flint *et al.*, 2011).

### 3.1.2. The current UK coalition government

There a number of recent or impending policy changes under the coalition government that are likely to affect single parents, particularly the shift to Universal Credit, and the obligation to participate in the work programme. There is little evaluation literature around these reforms to date, as they are still unfolding, and there is inevitably some lag in the implementation of policy, and then a further lag as good quality data on their impact is collected. However, there have been a number of projections as to the expected impact of the changes. This literature will be discussed in this section.

#### *The discourse on lone parents*

While in opposition prior to 2010, the Conservative party signalled their approval of the direction of welfare reform, but pledged to take it further (May, 2009; Davies, 2012). For example, under the UK coalition government reforms, lone parents with a child aged five must now seek work (Whitworth, 2012). In setting out the course for (continuing) welfare reform, the discourse is dominated by the concepts of 'worklessness' and 'dependency', and the idea that the origins of poverty lie in the poor choices of the individual (Wiggan, 2012).

One such 'poor' choice is to raise children outside of marriage. The construction of 'family breakdown' as a major social problem and the discourse of a 'broken society' has underpinned the Conservatives' approach to social policy since they were in opposition (Kirby, 2009). A married couples' allowance was pledged in the 2001 Conservative Party manifesto, and this was reiterated with a promise to remove the 'couple penalty' in the tax credit system in the 2010 manifesto (Davies, 2012).

What has changed in the Conservative party's approach on this issue in recent years is the ostensible rationale for adopting such a stance; a shift towards basing this position on 'evidence' that family breakdown is harmful for society, rather than basing their stance on morality *per se*, as with John Major's 'back to basics' campaign (Kirby, 2009). Such evidence comes from think tanks such as the Centre for Social Justice – founded by Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith – which has produced papers arguing that single parenthood is a root cause of social ills, both while the Conservatives were in opposition (Centre for Social Justice, 2006) and since they have been in power (Centre for Social Justice, 2011).

## ***Welfare reform and lone parents***

### **Financial support for lone parents: benefit reforms and Universal Credit**

Since 2010 there have been a number of reductions and freezes to key benefits for lone parents, such as Housing Benefit, Child and Working Tax Credits, and Child Benefit. There are as yet no evaluations of the impact of these changes, but there are a number of projections of their impact on lone parents. These should be interpreted with some caution. Such projections rely on departing from information about what is happening, to make a number of assumptions about what will happen, which may not turn out to be correct. Furthermore, such modelling necessarily considers the impact of only a subset of policies; there may be other changes, policy and non-policy based, which moderate their impact. Different projections will also differ in their chosen subset, making any definitive estimate of impact difficult to establish.

What these projections suggest is that lone parents stand to lose out from the changes that are occurring to the benefits listed above. One projection suggests that lone parents will lose the largest proportion of their income over the five-year period between 2010 and 2015; lone mothers will lose around 8.5%, and lone fathers around 7.5%, compared with couples with children who will lose around 6.5%, and an average loss for those without children of 5.5% (Fawcett Society, 2011). Another estimate of the impact of changes to indexation suggests that a lone parent working 16 hours per week at minimum wage in 2006 would be 19% above the poverty line. By 2012 however, they would be 7% above the poverty line, and by 2026 they would be 19% below it. By 2026, assuming current indexation conventions, a lone parent on minimum wage will have to work 42 hours per week to achieve an income equivalent to the poverty line (Sutherland *et al.*, 2008).

The impact of the planned move to Universal Credit is even more hypothetical at this stage, as it is currently operating only in pilot areas and will not be fully rolled out until at least 2017. The Department for Work and Pensions' own impact assessment estimates that, of the 2.2 million lone parent households that will receive Universal Credit, 27% will see no change in their personal finances, 32% will be better off and 41% – the biggest group – will be worse off (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012). Young single parents (under 25) will be particularly hard hit, as they will no longer be entitled to the higher rate of personal allowance, and will receive the same as an under 25 year old without children; this is £15 per week less (£780 per year) than under the current system (Gingerbread & The Children's Society, 2013). Universal Credit will not necessarily enable households to reach a minimum income standard<sup>16</sup> (Hirsch and Hartfree, 2013). Lone parents on modest wages will struggle to exceed three quarters of the minimum standard, and the optimum scenario for them is working just ten hours per week; any more than this, and their gains will be eroded by falling levels of Universal Credit and higher childcare bills.

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<sup>16</sup> The Minimum Income Standard for the UK shows how much money people need, so that they can buy things that members of the public think that everyone in the UK should be able to afford. The methodology behind the calculation is outlined in Bradshaw *et al.* (2008).

## **Getting lone parents into work: the Work Programme**

The Work Programme is still in its infancy, but early evaluations suggest that lone parents participating in the programme have experienced some problems. The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has noted that job outcomes for lone parents in the first 14 months of the Work Programme were particularly low; 2.6% moved into employment, compared with 3.5% across all groups, and only disabled people had a lower success rate at 2.3% (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2013).

One early qualitative evaluation of single parents' experiences of the Work Programme (Whitworth, 2013) has suggested that a key lesson from the previous era of employment services for lone parents has not been learned; that single parents are still receiving advice that is insufficiently tailored to their needs as sole carers. Participants also report evidence of being 'parked' by the service; that is, little attention is paid to them, in favour of clients closer to the labour market, in order for providers to meet targets (Ibid.). This may take the form of long gaps between meetings with advisers, or short meetings, or a lack of initiative on the part of advisers to help them find and apply for vacancies.

Another qualitative study of lone parents participating in the Work Programme (Dewar, 2013) identified a number of concerns about the suitability of the services provided on the Work Programme for lone parents. Participants found that the requirements of the programme were arbitrarily and inconsistently drawn up, inflexible with regard to their children's care needs, unrealistic, and poorly explained. They also expressed frustration that for the programme providers, short-term employment targets took precedence over helping them into a job that in the longer term was compatible with their caring responsibilities or would allow them to progress and increase their earnings.

## **Conditionality: stepping up the obligations on lone parents**

The coalition government continued the progressive lowering of the age of the youngest child at which lone parents are obliged to seek work. This had begun under the previous government, bringing the age down to seven in 2010 and five in 2012. However, the Gregg report that had influenced New Labour's approach to welfare reform (Gregg, 2008) had recommended that this age be reduced only as far as seven, so the coalition government, although moving in the same direction, took the policy further than their predecessors.

There is some doubt regarding the feasibility of obliging lone parents with a child aged five to seek work. Although this may be based on a perception that mothers are ready to return to work when their youngest child starts school, analysis of mothers' behaviour at this transition point suggests that in practice the return to work is more likely to occur several months after this, when the child is settled, and that limiting work to during school hours may in fact make it difficult to find a suitable opportunity (Brewer and Crawford, 2010). Analysis of the Labour Force Survey suggests that only

around a third of economically inactive lone parents with children under the age of seven are seeking work, but this rises to 44% of those with a child aged between seven and twelve (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011). Economically inactive mothers are also more likely to have other chronic employment barriers such as poor health, which do not cease to exist when their children reach a particular age (Ibid.). These quantitative findings are consistent with the body of qualitative evidence presented in the previous section, which suggested that lone parents face considerable barriers to employment, and prioritise the care of their children over finding a job (see Section 2.3.2).

### **Early intervention and supporting vulnerable families**

One area in which continuity has been seen is in government interest in early intervention. The UK government has commissioned reports on the importance of children's early years and the potential benefits of intervening early in children's lives to prevent poverty from having a lifelong impact on their outcomes (Allen, 2011; Field, 2010). However, others have questioned the way in which emergent and tentative findings from neuroscience have been used in policy discourse as an absolute justification for a particular policy direction (Wastell and White, 2012).

So far, the initial interest in early intervention has not translated into large-scale, systematic policy initiatives, but there has been a targeted £448m initiative to help the 120,000 most 'troubled' families in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012), underpinned by reports about the 'chaotic' lifestyles of these families (Casey, 2012) and further exploration of the benefits of early intervention (Lloyd *et al.*, 2011).

#### **3.1.3. Devolved and local initiatives**

Governments at the devolved and local levels may have their own strategies in place to assist lone parents, in addition to the UK-wide initiatives described in the previous sections.

#### ***The Scottish Government and welfare reform***

Welfare policy is a 'reserved matter' (one on which only the UK Parliament can make laws), and therefore the Scottish Government cannot alter the conditionality regime that lone parents in Scotland are subject to. However, there are a few elements of the welfare system that are devolved to the Scottish Government, or that have been as a result of welfare reform, and a number of devolved policy areas are relevant to the wellbeing of lone parent families.

Although most benefit administration is carried out by the UK Department for Work and Pensions, the Scottish Government is currently responsible for the administration of 'passport' benefits; those for which entitlement is determined through the receipt of other benefits such as Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance. Therefore, the current challenge for the Scottish Government is to devise a way to implement these when the current entitlement benefits are replaced with



Universal Credit (Berry *et al.*, 2012). There is also the requirement to manage the replacement of the Social Fund and Council Tax Benefit with locally-administered arrangements, which has happened as a result of UK welfare reform (Ibid.).

There is also a role for the Scottish Government to mediate the impact of welfare reform through policy areas that are devolved, such as education and training, local government, social work, housing, health, environment, planning and transport. Lone parents in Scotland have shorter commuting times than other parents and so are likely to have fewer job opportunities available to them (McQuaid, 2009). Currently there are a number of strategies in place for using these policy levers to help tackle poverty and improve child wellbeing. The child poverty (Scottish Government, 2011a) and wider anti-poverty (Scottish Government, 2008a) strategies focus on income maximisation by helping people overcome individual and external barriers to escaping poverty, drawing on services such as training, social work, and housing. The Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008b) also aims to build family capacity through health, education, social and early years services.

### ***Employability and working families***

The Scottish Government's Working for Families Fund (WFF) is particularly interesting, as many of the target group of disadvantaged families were lone parents; almost three quarters of participants (McQuaid *et al.*, 2009). The programme operated in Scotland from 2004-08, and invested in initiatives to remove childcare barriers and improve the employability of disadvantaged parents, specifically to help them move towards, into, or continue in employment, education or training. The programme was administered by 20 local authorities (which covered 79% of Scotland's population), operating through around 226 locally-based public, private and third-sector projects with a total budget of £50m (£46m actual spend).

The evaluation of this initiative (McQuaid *et al.*, 2007; McQuaid *et al.*, 2009) found it to be highly successful – 53% of participants achieved 'hard' outcomes, such as employment, and a further 13% achieved other significant outcomes – and suggested a number of reasons for this. Success factors include: the integration of employability and childcare support; the Key Worker approach, which was perceived as a good model for clients to make real progress through an individualised, holistic approach; and the importance of effective partnership working, between agencies and also with employers. The evaluation also stressed the importance of including targets both for 'hard' outcomes (e.g. employment) – to substantively improve participants' positions and provide a clear focus for staff – but also for 'soft' outcomes (e.g. self-confidence) as valuable both in themselves and as an intermediary step towards hard outcomes.

Projects at the local level are rarely resourced to include the same level of evaluation that accompanies UK or Scottish Government initiatives, but there are a couple of recent evaluations of

projects conducted in Glasgow<sup>17</sup> that can further contribute to our understanding of what works in helping lone parents into employment (Kellard *et al.*, 2007; Scott and Lindsay, 2004). Although these projects had not helped all of their participants into work, the participants had valued the specific and more neutral type of support than was offered by other services aimed at lone parents. These evaluations also stressed the importance of programmes that can help build soft skills, as a step towards employment, and the value of in-work support in helping lone parents to sustain employment.

### ***Early intervention and supporting vulnerable families***

The Scottish Government also has an ongoing interest in the kind of early intervention approaches in which the current and previous UK governments have been interested in. The independent review of early years provision, commissioned by the Scottish Government, stressed the importance of, among other things, early intervention for children who need it most (Deacon, 2011). The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services argued for a strong focus on the principle of prevention in public services, as an approach that is both evidence-based and provides the best value for money (Scottish Government, 2011b). In terms of early years policy, the Scottish Government responded to this by introducing an Early Years and Early Intervention Change Fund, to fund evidence-based targeted interventions (Scottish Government, 2011c).

Early intervention already has some history in Scotland. The model of Family Intervention Projects deployed in England (as outlined in Section 3.1.1 above) evolved from the Dundee Families Project, set up in 1996, which pioneered this intensive approach to supporting families vulnerable to homelessness due to a history of antisocial behaviour (White *et al.*, 2008). Drawing on the Dundee model, the Scottish Government funded three similar schemes in Falkirk, Perth and Kinross, and South Lanarkshire, from 2006 to 2008 (more of a pilot scheme), and Aberdeen City Council set up the Aberdeen Families Project in 2005. Pawson *et al.* (2009) evaluated these schemes using internal data and 78 interviews with 51 families participating in the projects. They found that, by the time the case had closed, participation had lowered the risk of eviction in 80% of cases, and reduced involvement in antisocial behaviour in 94% of cases, with a smaller but positive balance of change across a number of physical and mental health outcomes. Respondents typically (although not universally) reported that their participation had been helpful and positive for them.

Scottish health policy has also sought to capture any potential benefits of early intervention; a review of the evidence base around this approach has tentatively suggested that it can have long term benefits (Hallam, 2008). The application of this approach has been exemplified by initiatives such as targeted health screening (e.g. Health for All Children), National Health Demonstration Projects (e.g. Starting Well) and a Nurse-Family Partnership pilot; however, at present, there is little robust evaluation evidence about the impact and relative costs and benefits of these projects as

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<sup>17</sup> The projects evaluated were the Wise Group's 'Next Steps' project, the 'Sustainable Employment' project run by One Plus, and a mentoring scheme run by One Plus and One Parent Family Scotland.

they operate in Scotland, and where evaluation evidence is used to justify these projects, it tends to come from elsewhere (Geddes *et al.*, 2010).

### **3.1.4. The cross-national literature on policy and lone parents**

The poverty rate of single parent families varies markedly between countries; for example it is less than 6% in the Nordic countries, and as high as 21% in the USA (Gornick and Jäntti, 2012). This demonstrates the important role of government policy in mediating the negative effects of lone parenthood on household income.

#### ***A typology of welfare regimes***

In comparative research, typologies of government approaches are often used in order to understand commonalities and differences between approaches. In understanding governments' approaches to supporting families, feminist scholars (Lewis, 2002; Orloff, 1993; Pfau-Effinger, 2005) drawing on the work of Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), have conventionally distinguished between:

- a liberal model (e.g. UK, USA, Canada) – characterised by low expenditure, limited parental leave and low childcare subsidy.
- a Scandinavian model (e.g. Sweden, Norway, Denmark) – generous assistance to families (lone and couple), long and well-compensated parental leave but also extensive childcare provision to enable mothers to return to work full-time.
- a Continental model (e.g. France, Germany, Belgium) – government support is relatively generous, but towards supporting mothers in a caring role rather than facilitating their return to work.
- a Southern European model (e.g. Spain, Italy, Greece) – government expenditure is very limited, the expectation is that families will make their own arrangements, with extended families providing the necessary childcare.

However, there has been some convergence in recent years across these different types of arrangements towards an 'adult worker' model. This treats all citizens as individual workers regardless of characteristics such as gender or parental status. In addition, it features a rise in the use of activation policies, enabling or compelling labour market participation (Daly, 2011b). This approach to policy puts the onus on the individual to be in work. Requirements on lone parents receiving benefits to seek work are now almost universal across the OECD countries<sup>18</sup>, while they existed in only seven of these countries in 2000 (Finn and Gloster, 2010).

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<sup>18</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a forum of 34 developed and newly industrialised countries, which aims to promote policies to improve economic and social wellbeing.

This trend interacts with the typology of welfare regimes to create conditions for lone parents that are highly supportive in some contexts, and highly punitive in others. In Sweden, it has long been the norm that all parents – including lone parents – should be in employment; the institutional conditions are in place for them to do so (childcare, flexible employment), and Sweden invests heavily in active labour market policies to facilitate employment (Finn and Gloster, 2010). Meanwhile, for countries such as the UK and USA, although programmes are ostensibly in place to help jobseekers prepare for work, the institutional support is not in place, and lone parents are unlikely to move out of poverty. However, it should be noted that approaches to lone parent conditionality have varied within the USA, and states that have seen the most success in long-term economic outcomes for lone parents are those that have looked beyond a ‘work first’ approach (prioritising entry into any job) and sought to develop participants’ skills and encourage them to ‘hold out’ for a higher paid and more stable job opportunity (Ibid).

### ***The empirical association between welfare states and lone parent outcomes***

Analysis of cross-national sources of data suggest that differences in lone parent poverty rates can be ascribed, at least partly, to the different welfare regimes found in different countries; variables pertaining to the individual countries, or a cluster to which they belong, have been found to be significant in models controlling for other demographic and economic factors (Chzhen and Bradshaw, 2012; Gornick and Jäntti, 2010; Gornick and Jäntti, 2012). These studies tend to find that predictors of poverty that are significant at the individual level, such as family structure, have been found to be insignificant at the cross-national level. Countries such as Sweden can have both comparatively high levels of single parenthood and comparatively low rates of child poverty, thanks to the mediating impact of the welfare state.

The literature suggests that the strengths of the model in Scandinavia, where child poverty is lower, lie in managing to be both redistributive and successful at facilitating maternal employment (Burström *et al.*, 2010; Gornick and Jäntti, 2012). Promoting employment as a poverty reduction strategy does not work in every country, as the overlap between worklessness and poverty varies, but in the UK it is comparatively large, and therefore this is a strategy that is potentially worth pursuing (de Graaf-Zijl and Nolan, 2011). The availability of childcare prescribes the work and care options available to parents, and it is particularly generous in the Scandinavian countries, although it is still not sufficient to completely meet the needs of lone parents in any country (Kröger, 2010). Låftman (2009) also cautions against accepting an explanation of child poverty rates based entirely on welfare state arrangements. Although the correlation is considerable, it is imperfect, and the true explanation is most likely to be found within a number of political, economic and cultural factors.

Case studies of particular countries can also generate potential lessons on what has been found to be effective in helping lone parents into work. UK Treasury working papers suggest that New Labour’s approach to increasing the employment rates of single parents was informed by a similar set of reforms that were implemented in the USA during the 1990s (Taylor, 1998). The employment rate of lone parents did increase in the period following these reforms, and although the strong

economy may partly explain this, a concomitant increase was not seen in the employment rates of married mothers, or among women without children (Greenberg, 2003). It is hard to be certain which of the policies within the package of reforms had the greatest effects, but the mixture of requirements and support available to lone parents did seem to reduce the welfare caseload and increase employment, although not all of this reduced caseload entered employment, raising some concerns about the wellbeing of such families (Ibid.).

Case studies can also demonstrate what does not work, and the lesson on the need to be responsive to the needs of the client arises again with respect to (failure in) the Netherlands. Here, a lack of institutionalised involvement of clients in the activation process resulted in a variable quality of service delivery, depending on the extent to which the individual staff member administering the programme happened to be receptive to these needs (Knijn and Van Berkel, 2003). Around the same time, New Zealand was taking a different approach. This was much more individualised, and softer and more holistic, than the provision for lone parents in the UK (Hutten, 2003). However, there is a key difference between New Zealand and the UK – population size – that makes it much more feasible on a practical level for New Zealand to run individualised programmes that require a lot of record keeping and data sharing (Ibid.). This illustrates some of the limitations of policy learning; not all policies successful in one country can be transferred to another.

A recent study has also conducted a comparison of the sanctioning regimes<sup>19</sup> in different countries, and the extent to which these have an impact on employment behaviour. Thirty-four evaluation studies from around the world were reviewed, but with a particular focus on Australia, Sweden, Netherlands and the USA (Finn and Casebourne, 2012; Finn and Gloster, 2010). Although sanctioning regimes are very common, there is considerable cross-country variation in the size of the sanctions, and the reasons why they are applied. The reason for the sanction may simply be a failure to meet requirements to seek or accept work, or it may extend to co-operation with other agencies (e.g. child support) or require additional behavioural change (e.g. drug or alcohol treatment, parent education, child school attendance or immunisations, or income management). There is also variation in how well the sanctioning regime is communicated to those who are subject to it, and in the willingness on the part of staff to use sanctions, which varies not just between countries but also between types of provider (i.e. public sector, not-for-profit or profit-making). The availability and quality of evaluation is inconsistent, so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about their impact. Some studies find impact on benefit exit and employment (including anticipation effects before a new regime is introduced), others find no impact at all.

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<sup>19</sup> A sanctioning regime is the name given to a set of rules about which penalties should be imposed and under what circumstances.

### 3.2. Discourse and stigma around lone parents

Opinion polls have suggested that single parents both feel, and are in reality, subject to stigma because they are single parents. A 2008 survey of 800 single parents found that 89% felt that the media portrayed them in a negative light, as 'scroungers', 'bad mothers' or both (Gingerbread, 2009). A poll of 1,050 adults, also in 2008, found that the public overestimates the proportion of single parents who are teenagers – their estimate is 15 times higher than the actual figure. The public also underestimates the proportion in employment by 16 percentage points (Ibid.).

This is consistent with survey data that has suggested that attitudes in general towards welfare recipients and those in poverty are both negative and hardening. The British Social Attitudes Survey has tracked attitudes towards welfare spending and recipients since 1987. There is a degree of ambivalence; on the one hand, the majority of the population, even among older age groups who are more likely to hold negative views, do not agree that "many welfare recipients do not deserve help" (Clery *et al.*, 2013). However, agreement that "if welfare were less generous recipients would stand on their own feet" is the majority viewpoint, ranging from 50-60% depending on age group (Ibid.). There are also widespread perceptions that "most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one" (55%), and that "most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another" (37%) (Ibid.).

There has also been a substantial increase in the proportion agreeing that unemployment benefits are too high and discourage work, from 27% in 1991 to 62% in 2011 (Park *et al.*, 2012). It is not clear exactly why this hardening of attitudes has occurred, although Clery *et al.* (2013) find that there are associations over time between attitudes and the prevailing government approach to tackling welfare. Both government rhetoric and public attitudes hardened over the New Labour period, and the current attitudes that favour an individualistic explanation of poverty are in line with current government thinking (Ibid.).

Qualitative research has attempted to uncover the motivations behind anti-welfare attitudes, particularly among people who are poor themselves. Hoggett *et al.*, (2013) find anti-welfare populism to be driven by feelings of resentment about one's own situation attached to a localised perception of injustice. For example, a failure to secure social housing is perceived to be because the housing has been allocated to a 'less deserving' other, such as an immigrant or a single parent. Respondents expressed little sympathy, and directed their resentment horizontally towards their neighbours rather than upwards to elites, as "people used social comparisons based upon the individuals they encountered in their immediate lifeworld" (Hoggett *et al.*, 2013, p576). Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) also find a large degree of othering and blaming within the poor; that is, that those who are objectively living in poverty deny their own poverty and distance themselves from 'the poor', because they wish to distance themselves from this category of people they see as blameworthy for their own difficulties, and stigmatised by the non-poor.

Public attitudes to the welfare state have also been studied from a cross-national perspective. International social survey datasets, such as the International Social Survey Programme and the European Social Survey, have been used to investigate what factors might be associated with differing levels of support for income redistribution in different countries. The demand for redistribution seems to be inversely related to growth and prosperity, and positively related to levels of income inequality (Dallinger, 2010; Jaeger, 2013). However, Busemeyer *et al.* (2009) find that a person's position in the lifecycle is more important than their position in the economy for explaining their preferences for redistribution. Others have investigated the impact of ethnic minority populations on support for redistribution. Burgoon *et al.* (2012) find that exposure to foreign-born populations in one's own occupation reduces support for redistribution, but not the proportion of foreign-born people in the population as a whole. Finseraas (2012) finds that the well-off are less likely to support redistribution when the proportion of ethnic minorities among the poor is high, although this is not explained by negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities; rather it is a lower perception of the risk of downward social mobility. Thus there are a range of economic, social, cultural and demographic factors that are likely to influence attitudes towards the size and scope of the welfare state.

### **3.3. Summary: what is the impact of policy and what works?**

This section of the review has explored the response to lone parents of policy-makers and other stakeholders, and what has been helpful in getting lone parents into work and ameliorating poverty and other negative outcomes.

*Employment programmes and increased work incentives have had a small but positive impact on lone parent employment:*

- Initiatives such as the New Deal for Lone Parents have tried to help address barriers to employment and offer support to get into work.
- Tax credit reform also attempted to increase incentives to work by boosting in-work income and offering greater support for childcare; the claiming process is somewhat complex but tax credits are an important source of income for lone parents.
- Changes to the tax credit system had a small positive impact – evaluation estimates were around 4-5% – although this was most likely concentrated on those most 'on the margin' (i.e. lone parents who were the most work-ready and work-orientated).
- In helping lone parents into employment, 'what works' seems to be: tailored, holistic support that responds to the needs of the individual, and is delivered by a well-trained and sympathetic advisor; more affordable childcare and the integration of childcare and employability support; and effective working between agencies and with employers.
- The effectiveness of the Work Programme in helping lone parents into employment, and the impact of Universal Credit on lone parents' incomes, remains to be seen.

*Successive governments have targeted sometimes very intensive support on particular families, but the benefit of this is not clear:*

- Both the New Labour and present coalition governments have been favourable towards targeting the most 'problematic' families, using a key worker model to bring together a range of services.
- This kind of intensive intervention has achieved some success with the families it has worked with, although it is a very expensive service to provide.
- Sure Start was intended to provide a better early years experience for those in some of the most deprived areas, but its achievements are unclear; where a positive impact has been found, it seems to have been on the parents using the service, rather than the health or educational outcomes of their children.

*The extent to which lone parents are subject to conditionality and sanctions has increased over the last decade:*

- Lone parents have been obliged to attend a work-focused interview since 2001 (for new and repeat claimants – roll-out to all lone parents was completed by 2004), although these do not necessarily oblige them to look for work.
- The age of the child at which point lone parents have been obliged to look for work has been progressively lowered since 2008; it had been sixteen, but by early 2012 it was five.
- Lone parents on Jobseeker's Allowance are entitled to some concessions regarding the hours they are expected to be available for work, although there is some evidence that not all are aware of, or receiving these.
- Lone parents have given mixed reports about the experience of being on Jobseeker's Allowance, some finding the regime manageable or even helpful, while others have been less positive. As with all initiatives, the positivity of the experience seems to depend on individual advisors and centres as much as the policy itself.

*As well as being subject to increasing conditionality, other aspects of welfare reform are expected to have a detrimental effect on lone parents.*

- A number of other reforms are likely to affect lone parent incomes, including changes to housing benefit, the introduction of a cap on total benefits, and freezes and reductions in child benefit and tax credit.
- The projected impact of Universal Credit is that two-fifths of lone parents will be worse off.

*Lone parents are a stigmatised group:*

- The hardening of government attitudes to lone parents is reflected by public attitudes, which began to toughen under the period of New Labour government and have continued to do so.



- Lone parents feel stigmatised because of their status. The public is poorly informed about the characteristics of lone parents, and they are a target of resentment.

*The association between lone parenthood and poverty varies between countries:*

- There is huge variation between countries in the extent to which lone parents experience adverse outcomes such as poverty.
- The extent to which lone parenthood influences outcomes is due to a complex mixture of socioeconomic and cultural factors, and these factors are not necessarily transferable. However, the evidence suggests that welfare state arrangements, and the ease with which lone parents can work, seem to play a large part in the most 'successful' countries.
- Many countries have some kind of conditionality or sanctioning regime for lone parent benefit recipients, but the impact of these is not clear and there is a lack of comparable evaluation evidence.

## **4. Discussion and conclusions**

### **4.1. Key themes and findings**

#### **4.1.1. Lone parents' lived experience**

The prevalence of lone families in the population has remained fairly stable over the last decade, at around a quarter of all families with dependent children. Although lone parents are a heterogeneous group, they are, on average, disadvantaged relative to other family types, experiencing higher levels of poverty, unemployment and poor health (all of which are inter-connected).

Lone parent families are twice as likely as couple families to experience poverty; taking a measure of an equivalised household income below 60% of the median after housing costs, 43% of those in lone parent families are in poverty, compared with 21% of those in couple families with children (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). Their higher poverty rates are in part due to their lower employment rates; 37% of lone parent households have no adult in employment, compared with 5% of couple households with children, although this inactive proportion has been falling steadily from a high of 52% in 1996 (Office for National Statistics, 2012b). However, lone parent families are also more likely to experience in-work poverty; 17% of children with a lone parent working full-time are in poverty, compared with 5% of children in couple-families where both parents work full-time (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a).

Financial security is difficult to obtain for lone parents in the context of an income that is not only low, but also complex and insecure. Lone parents receive a variety of benefits from multiple agencies, and there is a constant possibility that these will be delayed, overpaid, or sanctioned. Two thirds of lone parents receive no child maintenance from the non-resident parent, and the average amount paid is £23 per week for a lone parent on benefit (Bryson *et al.*, 2012). Lone parents who enter work are liable to move out of work again, because they fail to sustain the arrangements they have made for childcare, or because they cannot obtain permanent work.

There is an association between lone parenthood and parental and child health, although the literature is not clear on the extent to which this is caused by the relatively higher levels of deprivation experienced by lone parent families. Some studies find the association disappears after controlling for financial factors, others find it is reduced but still present. There also seems to be an association between behavioural, cognitive and emotional development in childhood and into adolescence, and family type, parenting style, and income, although again the direction in which these effects operate is not clear.

#### **4.1.2. Looking for and being in work**

Lone parents experience a number of barriers to finding employment, and to the successful reconciliation of work and caring responsibilities. Lone parent employment increased substantially in the strong labour market of the late 1990s and early 2000s, but it is not certain that such gains can be sustained in a context of weak labour demand, and the growth of underemployment and zero-hours contracts, particularly in the low-skilled/low-paid occupations into which lone parents are disproportionately likely to move.

Having sole caring responsibilities for children means that lone parents require a particularly high level of flexibility, as the only adult in the household available to manage both the day-to-day logistics of getting between home, their children's nursery or school, and their place of work. They also require additional flexibility to deal with emergencies, such as when children are sick and cannot attend school or nursery. There are few jobs offering this kind of flexibility, or hours that might fit around school hours; such arrangements are informally negotiated rather than institutionalised across the labour market. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of affordable childcare, although there is also some reluctance to use it even where it is available.

A lack of opportunities in the labour market and poor childcare provision interact with personal employability factors that make lone parents less likely to find a job; a lack of qualifications, poor health, and low confidence and expectations.

#### **4.1.3. Impact of the welfare regime**

Lone parent families' income (and potentially wellbeing) is likely to be affected by recent cuts and freezes in benefit levels. Although these affect all low-income families, lone parents are disproportionately reliant on these sources of support, and therefore disproportionately affected by any changes to it; lone parents are projected to lose more from the current and ongoing welfare reforms than any other group.

Specifically, lone parents have been affected by increased conditionality. The stage at which they cease to be eligible for Income Support has been progressively brought forward, and is now when their youngest child turns five; at this point, unless they are eligible for another out-of-work-benefit, they must transfer onto Jobseeker's Allowance and actively seek work. Research on their experiences of this transition to date suggests that lone parents' experience of the JSA regime depends on their closeness to the labour market, and on individual Jobcentres and advisors; some lone parents fare reasonably well, while others struggle.

There are currently, and have been in the past, a variety of employment programmes, provided by the public and voluntary sectors, aimed at helping lone parents move into work. Evaluations of such programmes give a clear indication of the factors that make a programme successful: tailored, holistic support that responds to the needs of the individual, and is delivered by a well-trained and

sympathetic advisor; more affordable childcare and the integration of childcare and employability support; and effective working between agencies and with employers.

## **4.2. Gaps in the literature**

This review demonstrates that there is a large body of literature on the subject of lone parents, but some gaps have nonetheless been identified.

There is a lack of research about the characteristics and experiences of lone fathers. Quantitative studies tend to eliminate them from analyses, because their numbers in social survey datasets are so small, and robust conclusions cannot be drawn. Qualitative studies have either not sought out lone fathers, or failed to find them.

There is not a great deal of information available about the type and quality of jobs that lone parents do; and, crucially, how this relates to their employment-relevant characteristics such as their qualifications and employment experience.

It is very difficult to untangle the effects of lone parenthood and the associated deprivation when considering health outcomes. There is perhaps a need to explore more directly the mechanisms by which lone parenthood might lead to poorer parental and child health.

Due to lags in data collection, analysis and publication, there is little evaluation of the effect of any policy changes that have happened since 2010; currently there is little more than projections of what the effect of these changes will be. As data and research becomes available, it will be important to see how changes to welfare policy since the election of the coalition government have affected lone parents. It is currently difficult to get a sense of the effect of these policies, and how this compares with previous policy arrangements.

## **4.3. Implications of findings for provision of services in Scotland**

It is clear from earlier programmes 'what works' in helping lone parents move into work (see above), but programmes that have survived or that have been introduced since have not necessarily followed these principles. The Work Programme in particular has been accused of being unsuited to lone parents' needs. There is an opportunity to learn from the evaluation literature, and to develop education, training and employability services that meet lone parents' needs.

Increasing the supply of affordable, good quality childcare would help lone parents to move into work. The literature has demonstrated the importance of arranging childcare as a key element of lone parent employability services, and the impact of affordable and readily-available childcare can

be seen in international comparisons. Although the funding of approved childcare through the tax credit system is a reserved matter, free provision is devolved to local authorities, and there is perhaps scope to make improvements, and to integrate provision more effectively with employability services.

Not enough is understood about the mechanisms by which lone parenthood is related to poor health. However, what is clear is that there is a link between lone parenthood, poverty, and ill health; therefore there should be strong links between health and employability services. Providers of these services should not see their role as tackling one and ignoring the other, but should have sufficient knowledge to understand the mutual impact of these issues and make cross-referrals where appropriate.

Finally, there are widespread negative attitudes towards lone parents in the media and among the public, which can only further erode lone parents' confidence and make them less likely to seek help. There is perhaps a role for government in challenging these negative perceptions, to help tackle the stigma of lone parenthood and improve the wellbeing of lone parents and their children.

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## Appendix 1: Key datasets used in the literature.

<b>Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children</b>	<i>Type:</i> Cohort study <i>Time period:</i> 1990-present <i>Sample size:</i> 14,000 <i>Unit:</i> Individual <i>Geography:</i> Avon
<b>British Household Panel Survey</b>	<i>Type:</i> Longitudinal panel survey <i>Time period:</i> 1991-present <i>Sample size:</i> 5,000 <i>Unit:</i> Household, individual <i>Geography:</i> United Kingdom
<b>British Lone Parent Cohort</b>	<i>Type:</i> Cohort study <i>Time period:</i> 1991-2001 <i>Sample size:</i> 940 <i>Unit:</i> Family <i>Geography:</i> Great Britain
<b>British Social Attitudes Survey</b>	<i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (annually) <i>Time period:</i> 1983-present <i>Sample size:</i> 3,311 (in 2011) <i>Unit:</i> Individual <i>Geography:</i> Great Britain (excluding north of the Caledonian canal)
<b>Expenditure and Food Survey</b>	<i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (annually) <i>Time period:</i> 2001-2007 (replaced with Living Costs and Food Survey) <i>Sample size:</i> 6,141 (in 2007) <i>Unit:</i> Household <i>Geography:</i> United Kingdom
<b>Families and Children Study</b>	<i>Type:</i> Longitudinal panel survey <i>Time period:</i> 1999-2008 <i>Sample size:</i> 4,659 <i>Unit:</i> Household, family, individual <i>Geography:</i> Great Britain
<b>Family Resources Survey</b>	<i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (annually) <i>Time period:</i> 1993-present <i>Sample size:</i> 20,759 (in 2011-12) <i>Unit:</i> Household, family <i>Geography:</i> United Kingdom
<b>Financial Capability Baseline Survey</b>	<i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, one-off <i>Time period:</i> 2005

	<p><i>Sample size:</i> 5,328  <i>Unit:</i> Household, family, individual  <i>Geography:</i> United Kingdom</p>
<b>General Household Survey</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (annually)  <i>Time period:</i> 1971-2006  <i>Sample size:</i> 9,731 households (in 2006)  <i>Unit:</i> Household, family, individual  <i>Geography:</i> Great Britain</p>
<b>Growing Up in Scotland study</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cohort study  <i>Time period:</i> 2005-present  <i>Sample size:</i> 5,217  <i>Unit:</i> Household, individual  <i>Geography:</i> Scotland</p>
<b>Labour Force Survey</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (quarterly), with longitudinal element  – individuals surveyed on five consecutive quarters  <i>Time period:</i> 1992-present  <i>Sample size:</i> 98,531 (in Q1 2013)  <i>Unit:</i> Individual  <i>Geography:</i> United Kingdom</p>
<b>Maternity Rights Surveys</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (less than annually)  <i>Time period:</i> 1980-present  <i>Sample size:</i> 2,031 (in 2009-10)  <i>Unit:</i> Individual  <i>Geography:</i> Great Britain</p>
<b>Millennium Cohort Study</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cohort study  <i>Time period:</i> 2001-present  <i>Sample size:</i> 18,819  <i>Unit:</i> Individual  <i>Geography:</i> United Kingdom</p>
<b>ONS Omnibus/Opinions Survey</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (monthly)  <i>Time period:</i> 1990-2007 (Omnibus), 2008-present (Opinions)  <i>Sample size:</i> 1,031 (in April 2013)  <i>Unit:</i> Individual  <i>Geography:</i> Great Britain</p>
<b>Scottish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional, repeated (every 4 years)  <i>Time period:</i> 1986-present  <i>Sample size:</i> 6,771 (in 2010)  <i>Unit:</i> Individual (Primary 7, and Secondary 2 and 4 pupils)  <i>Geography:</i> Scotland</p>
<b>Survey of Psychiatric</b>	<p><i>Type:</i> Cross-sectional</p>

**Morbidity in Great Britain:** *Time period:* 2000  
**Psychiatric Morbidity** *Sample size:* 8580  
**among Adults Living in** *Unit:* Individual  
**Private Households, 2000** *Geography:* Great Britain

Note: Where study is longitudinal/cohort, sample size refers to original obtained sample size

## **Appendix 2: Methodology.**

This Appendix contains a more detailed account of the methodology of the literature review than that provided in Section 1.3, setting out the strategy employed in searching for and filtering the material.

The remit of the work was not to conduct a systematic review of the literature, but a 'structured critique of both published peer-review literature and grey literature identified from a range of databases and published sources'.

### **Search strategy**

Studies were sought on three main criteria:

1. Population; is it about lone parents (or other types of families but with directly relevant implications for lone parents)?
2. Geography; is about the UK (national or sub-national) context, or a case or comparative study of other similar countries (e.g. EU, OECD)?
3. Outcomes; is it about lone parents' experiences of the outcomes of interest – employment, job characteristics (e.g. hours, pay, conditions, career prospects, stability), income, housing and living conditions, physical and mental health or child wellbeing – or inequalities in these respects?

Table A2.1 shows the search terms employed. A typical search string would consist of [population] + [geography] + [outcome] + [mediating factor] (optional). Searches were delimited by date (2008-present) in order to contain the scope of the review, although key references from earlier years have been included where appropriate.

**Table A2.1: Search terms used**

	<b>Search terms</b>
<b>Population</b>	lone parent, single parent, lone mother, lone father, single mother/mum, single father/dad, low-income family, poor family, benefit recipients (+ plural of all of these e.g. lone parents)
<b>Geography</b>	UK, United Kingdom, Great Britain, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, EU, OECD
<b>Outcomes of interest</b>	employment, work, income, pay, poverty, in-work poverty, benefit, housing, health, illness, mental health, wellbeing, child health, child wellbeing
<b>Optional - Mediating factors</b>	gender, sex, education, qualification, employability, urban, rural, deprived, debt, drug, alcohol, policy, New Deal, Working Family Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, sanction, jobseeker, childcare, policy, attitudes, media, newspapers, television

Searches were carried out in the following databases: Google Scholar, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, British Humanities Index, Education Resources Information Center, Expanded Academic ASAP, Social Sciences Citation Index and Sociological Abstracts.

In accumulating material, the authors also drew on their previous work in this area, references recommended by the Advisory Group, and further references in the bibliographies of items returned from searches.

### **Filtering search results**

Details of the studies that fell within the criteria were entered into a framework, which consisted of: question addressed; geographical area covered; methodology employed; key findings; and policy relevance.

#### *Quality appraisal*

Each study was appraised to establish whether quality criteria were met where appropriate (some criteria are more relevant to some types of literature than others), and only where these criteria were satisfied were studies included in the review.

The quality criteria were:

- The research question is clearly defined;
- The chosen methodology is appropriate to the question;
- The chosen methodology is robust
  - for quantitative work, this meant good quality data source, adequate sample size, appropriate analysis and modelling of data.

- for qualitative work this meant suitable subjects with the appropriate knowledge or experiences, suitable depth of presentation and analysis.
- The conclusions drawn are appropriate and any inferences are valid.

### *Categorising studies*

A threefold distinction was made between: pieces that constituted original empirical research<sup>20</sup>; meta-analyses and review pieces; and those which fell more into the category of policy documents, editorials, opinion pieces, and so on.

Empirical research fell into the category of quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods studies. Quantitative studies were those that had either conducted a survey of lone parents, or conducted analysis of an existing dataset (key datasets used in this research area are outlined in Appendix 1), in order to present a generalisable picture of the experiences of lone parents and how they fare in comparison to other family types. Qualitative studies used methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, in order to build up a detailed understanding of the experiences of a smaller and non-representative group of lone parents. Mixed methods studies employed both of these techniques to provide both general and specific information about lone parents. Appendix 3 provides more information about the specific methodology employed in each of the empirical studies; the study design and setting, and the data collected or used, including sample sizes.

The source of the material was also considered, to make a distinction between the academic, peer-reviewed, literature and the 'grey' literature (although the latter includes material from many well-respected institutions such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Institute for the Study of Labour).

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<sup>20</sup> Empirical research in this case was defined as an endeavour to answer a research question either by undertaking primary data collection – such as a qualitative study or quantitative survey – or by analysing secondary data such as a large social survey, or employing a mixture of these methods, and that these methods are clearly set out in the article or report, including detail such as sampling procedures and size.

### Appendix 3: Empirical studies used in the review.

**Table A3.1: Details of the empirical studies cited in the literature review**

Reference	Type	Geography	Data
Adamson & Templeton (2012)	Review	Mostly UK, England main focus	156 studies (from 2001-2012)
Allen (2011)	Review	International	72 evaluations
Atkinson, Mckay, Kempson & Collard (2006)	Quantitative	UK	Financial Capability Baseline Survey, 2005
Attar-Schwartz, Tan, Buchanan, Flouri & Griggs (2009)	Quantitative	England and Wales	Survey of 1515 secondary pupils aged 11-16
Baker (2010)	Qualitative	New Zealand	Interviews with 120 lone mothers
Baxter & Renda (2011)	Quantitative	Australia	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (N=approx. 2000), 2002-2008
Bell, Finch, Valle, Sainsbury & Skinner (2005)	Qualitative	England and Wales	Interviews with 78 lone parents
Bell, Brewer & Phillips (2007)	Quantitative	UK	Labour Force Survey, 2005-2006
Björklund & Sundström (2006)	Quantitative	Sweden and USA	USA - National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (N=9729) and Panel Survey of Income Dynamics (N=2308) Sweden - random sample from population register (35,911), mid 1990s
Blackburn, Spencer, & Read (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Family Resources Survey, 2004-2005

Blekesaune (2008)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Household Panel Survey, 1991-2005
Borg & Stocks (2013)	Quantitative	UK	Survey of 1,689 parents.
Bradshaw (2013)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2012
Bradshaw, Jamieson & Wasoff (2008)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2005
Brewer, Browne, Chowdry & Crawford (2009)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Brewer, Browne, Crawford, & Knight (2007)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Brewer & Crawford (2010)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Brewer, Duncan, Shephard, & Suárez (2006)	Quantitative	Great Britain	Family Resources Survey, 1995-2003
Brown, & Joyce (2007)	Qualitative	UK	5 focus groups with lone parent advisers, 20 observations of Work Focused Interviews, 80 interviews with lone parents
Bryson, Skipp, Allbeson, Poole, Ireland, & Marsh (2012)	Mixed methods	Great Britain	Telephone survey of 760 lone parents, qualitative interviews with 40 lone parents
Budd & Mumford (2003)	Quantitative	Great Britain	Workplace Employee Relations Survey
Burgoon, Koster & van Egmond (2012)	Quantitative	17 European countries (incl. GB)	European Social Survey (N=24,544), 2002-2008
Burström, Whitehead, Clayton, Fritzell, Vannoni & Costa (2010)	Quantitative	UK, Italy, Sweden	UK - General Household Survey; Sweden - Swedish Survey of Living Conditions (N=2,755); Italy - National Health Survey (N=2,686)
Busemeyer, Goerres & Weschle (2009)	Quantitative	14 OECD countries (incl. GB)	International Social Survey Programme (N=18,500), 1996
Casebourne & Britton (2004)	Qualitative	England	112 interviews and 6 focus groups with lone parents



Casebourne, Davies, Foster, Lane, Purvis & Whitehurst (2010)	Qualitative	Great Britain	Interviews with 202 lone parents and 30 Jobcentre Plus staff
Cavanagh & Huston (2008)	Quantitative	UK	Survey of lone parents (N=2779)
Cebulla, Flore & Greenberg (2008)	Review	UK	17 evaluations
Chan & Koo (2010)	Quantitative	UK	British Household Panel Survey (Youth Panel), 1994-2001
Chanfreau, Gowland, Lancaster, Poole, Tipping & Toomse (2011)	Quantitative	UK	Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey, 2009
Cheadle, Amato & King (2010)	Quantitative	USA	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (N=12,686), 1979-2002 and Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (N=11,340)
Chzhen & Bradshaw (2012)	Quantitative	EU	EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (N=9,335 lone parents), 2009
Clery, Lee & Kunz (2013)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Social Attitudes Survey, 1987-2011
Coleman & Lanceley (2011)	Quantitative	Great Britain	Survey of 2,779 lone parents, 2010
Coleman & Riley (2012)	Quantitative	Great Britain	Survey of 1,088 lone parents, 2012
Coleman, Rousseau & Laycock (2003)	Quantitative	UK	Survey of 3,043 lone parents, 2002-2003
Collishaw, Gardner, Maughan, Scott & Pickles (2012)	Quantitative	England	British Cohort Study (N=9,766), 1986 Health Surveys for England (N=716), 2006
Cook (2012)	Review	UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Israel	62 studies

Cook & Noblet (2012)	Quantitative	Australia	Survey of 155 lone mothers, 2007
Cooksey, Joshi & Verropoulou (2009)	Quantitative	Great Britain, USA	British Cohort Study (N=2,083), 2004-05 US National Longitudinal Study of Youth (N=1,413), 2000
Cooper, Bebbington, Meltzer, Bhugra, Brugha, Jenkins & King (2008)	Quantitative	Great Britain	Survey of Psychiatric Morbidity in Great Britain, 2000
Culpin, Heron, Araya, Melotti & Joinson (2013)	Quantitative	England	Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, 1991-2006
Dallinger, U. (2010)	Quantitative	23 countries (incl. GB)	International Social Survey Programme (N=26,017), 1999
De Graaf-Zijl & Nolan (2011)	Quantitative	EU (23 countries incl. UK)	EU Labour Force Survey (N=1.5m), 2006 EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (N=273,000), 2006
Dewar (2013)	Qualitative	UK	Interviews with 5 lone parents, 189 online forum posts.
Dixon, Schneider, Lloyd, Reeves, White, Tomaszewski & Ireland (2010)	Quantitative	England	Administrative data from the Family Intervention Information System
Dolton, Azevedo & Smith (2006)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Dolton & Smith (2011)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Edwards & Caballero (2011)	Qualitative	England	Interviews with 21 lone mothers
Evans, Eyre, Millar & Sarre (2003)	Review	UK	DWP Administrative data, evaluation data (interviews, case studies, survey data)
Finn & Gloster (2010)	Review	International	34 studies
Finseraas (2012)	Quantitative	14 countries (incl. GB)	European Social Survey (N=22,790), 2008

Flint, Batty, Parr, Fowler & Nixon (2011)	Mixed methods	England	Interviews with 15 young people and roughly 40 stakeholders Administrative data from the Family Intervention Information System
Fok, Jeon, & Wilkins (2012)	Quantitative	Australia	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (N=approx. 2000), 2002-2008
Francesconi, Jenkins & Siedler (2009)	Quantitative	Germany	German Socio-economic Panel Study (N=2,934), 1984-2005
Fritzell, Vannoni, Whitehead, Burström, Costa, Clayton & Fritzell (2012)	Quantitative	UK, Italy, Sweden.	UK General Household Survey (N=6,866), 2000-2003 Italian National Health Survey (N=42,872), 1999-2005 Swedish Survey of Living Conditions (N=5,127), 2000-2005
Geddes, Haw & Frank (2010)	Review	International	27 studies
Gingerbread (2012a)	Mixed methods	England	4 focus groups and 3 interviews with a total of 34 single parents Survey of 1,076 single parents 5 interviews with employment support providers/recruitment agencies and 8 interviews with employers
Gingerbread (2012b)	Qualitative	England	15 interviews with lone parents
Gloster, Casebourne, Culshaw & Mavra (2010)	Qualitative	UK	203 interviews with lone parents and 75 interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff
Goodwin (2008)	Qualitative	UK	71 interviews with lone parents and 3 focus groups with Jobcentre Plus staff
Gornick & Jäntti (2010)	Quantitative	20 high-income countries (incl. UK)	Luxembourg Income Study, 2004
Gornick & Jäntti (2012)	Quantitative	20 high-income countries (incl. UK)	Luxembourg Income Study, 2004

Graham, Hawkins & Law (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2002
Green, Marsh, Connolly, Payne, Kasparova, Kirby & Riley (2003)	Quantitative	England	Survey of 4,854 lone parents
Green, Leyland, Sweeting & Benzeval (2013)	Quantitative	Glasgow	Twenty-07 Study (N=1,515), 1987-1990
Gregg, Harkness & Smith (2009)	Quantitative	UK	British Household Panel Survey, 1991-2003
Gregg, Washbrook, Propper & Burgess (2005)	Quantitative	Avon	Avon Longitudinal Survey of Parents and Children, 1991-1998
Griffiths (2011)	Qualitative	England	23 interviews with lone parents and 43 with couple parents
Griggs, Mcallister & Walker (2005)	Quantitative	UK	Survey of 100 lone parents
Hakovirta (2011)	Quantitative	UK, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden and USA	Luxembourg Income Study (N=18,414), 2004-05
Hales, Lessof, Roth, Gloyer, Shaw, Millar, and Green (2000)	Review	UK	Evaluation data - qualitative interviews, surveys, administrative data, labour market data
Hallam (2008)	Review	International	
Hampden-Thompson (2013)	Quantitative	18 countries (incl. UK.)	Program for International Student Assessment data (N=112,404), 2000
Harman (2010)	Qualitative	UK	30 interviews with lone parents

Harper & Ruicheva (2010)	Qualitative	UK	Interviews with lone mothers and grandmothers in 32 families
Hasluck & Green (2007)	Review	UK	
Hasluck, McKnight & Elias (2000)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Haux (2011)	Quantitative	UK	Families and Children Study, 2005
Hawkins, Law & Graham (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2003
Hay & Bauld (2008)	Quantitative	England	DWP Administrative data Home Office drug use prevalence estimates Drug Treatment Outcomes Research Study
Hendra, Riccio, Dorsett, Greenberg, Knight, Phillips & Smith (2011)	Mixed methods	Great Britain	Survey of 6,787 claimants Qualitative interviews (N unknown)
Hill (2013)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2011
Hjern, Weitoft & Lindblad (2010)	Quantitative	Sweden	Swedish Prescribed Drug Register, 2006
Hoggett, Wilkinson & Beedell (2013)	Qualitative	UK	17 focus groups with 64 people
Hosain & Breen (2007)	Qualitative	UK	194 interviews with managers and administrators
Jaeger (2013)	Quantitative	31 countries (incl. UK)	European Social Survey (N=2680), 2002-2010
Jenkins (2008)	Qualitative	UK	90 interviews with managers and administrators
Joyce & Whiting (2006)	Qualitative	UK	30 interviews with lone parents and 1 focus group with advisers

Kellard, Francis & Mitchell (2007)	Mixed methods	Glasgow	20 interviews with project clients (lone parents) Interviews with managers and case workers (N unknown) Organisational monitoring data
Kelleher, Youll, Nelson, Hadjivassiliou, Lyons & Hills (2002)	Qualitative	UK	72 interviews with staff 175 meetings observed 3 focus groups with training providers Group interviews with managers
Kiernan & Mensah (2009)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2003
Knight & Lissenburgh (2005)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Knight, Speckesser, Smith, Dolton & Azevedo (2006)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data
Kröger (2010)	Qualitative	UK, Finland, France, Italy, Portugal	111 interviews with lone parents (23 in UK)
Lakey, Parry, Barnes & Taylor (2002)	Quantitative	24 countries (incl. UK)	Health Behaviour in School Aged Children study (N=95,335), 2001/02
Lampard (2012)	Quantitative	UK	General Household Survey, 2005
Lane, Casebourne, Lanceley & Davies (2011)	Qualitative	England and Scotland	60 interviews with lone parents
Lessof, Miller, Phillips, Pickering, Purdon & Hales (2003)	Quantitative	UK	DWP Administrative data Survey of 2,500 claimants
Levin, Dallago & Currie (2011)	Quantitative	Scotland	Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (N=6102), 2006
Levin & Kirby (2012)	Quantitative	Scotland	Scottish Household Survey, 2002-2010
Levin, Kirby & Currie (2012a)	Quantitative	Scotland	Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (N=6102), 2006
Levin, Kirby & Currie (2012b)	Quantitative	Scotland	Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (N=6102), 1994-2010

Lloyd, Wollny, White, Gowland & Purdon (2011)	Quantitative	England	Administrative data from the Family Intervention Information System
Lucas-Thompson, Goldberg & Prause (2010)	Review	USA	69 studies
Mabelis & Bradshaw (2013)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2011
Marryat & Martin (2010)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2005-2006
Marryat, Reid & Wasoff (2009)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2005-2008
Marryat, Skafida, V & Webster (2009)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2008
Marsh & Vegeris (2004)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Lone Parent Cohort, 1991-2001
McMunn, Kelly, Cable & Bartley (2011)	Quantitative	USA	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2005
McQuaid, Fuertes & Richard (2010)	Mixed methods	Scotland	Focus groups with 33 lone parents and 27 professionals Administrative database of 120,000 disadvantaged parents
Millar (2011)	Qualitative	UK	Interviews with 34 lone mothers and 37 children three times over a 5 year period
Millar & Ridge (2008)	Qualitative	UK	Interviews with 44 lone parents, 12-18 months apart
Mokhtar & Platt (2009)	Quantitative	Slough	DWP Administrative data
Mokrue, Chen & Elias (2011)	Quantitative	USA	Survey of 515 children
Mooney, Oliver & Smith (2009)	Review	UK	
Moorhead, Sefton & Douglas (2004)	Mixed methods	UK	5 focus groups with lone parents, advisers and solicitors Survey of 200 lone parents

Oliva, Arranz, Parra & Olabarrieta (2012)	Quantitative	Spain	Survey of 214 families
Osgood, Stone & Thomas (2002)	Qualitative	England	60 interviews with lone parents
Panico, Bartley, Kelly, McMunn & Sacker (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2007
Panico & Nazroo (2011)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000
Park, Clery, Curtice, Phillips & Utting (2012)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Social Attitudes Survey, 2012
Parkes, Sweeting & Wight (2012)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2010
Pawson, Davidson, Sosenko, Flint, Nixon, Casey & Sanderson (2009)	Mixed methods	Scotland	48 interviews with service users and 15 former service users Interviews with project staff Monitoring data
Peacey (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Expenditure and Food Survey, 2007 Financial Capability Baseline Survey, 2005 Survey of 1,017 lone parents
Peacey & Haux (2007)	Quantitative	UK	Families and Children Survey, 2004
Peacey & Hunt (2008)	Quantitative	UK	ONS Omnibus Survey, 2006-2007
Pearce, Lewis & Law (2013)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2007
Pearson, Atkin, Biddle, Gorely & Edwardson (2010)	Quantitative	East Midlands	Survey of 328 pupils
Platt (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Labour Force Survey, 2004-2008
Quarmby & Dagkas (2010)	Qualitative	England	34 interviews with secondary pupils
Quarmby, Dagkas & Bridge (2011)	Mixed methods	England	Survey of 381 secondary pupils and 62 interviews



Rafferty & Wiggan (2011)	Quantitative	UK	Labour Force Survey, 2006-2007
Ray, Vegeris, Brooks, Campbell-barr, Hoggart, Mackinnon & Shutes (2007)	Qualitative	UK	70 interviews with lone parents (40 followed up 3-4 months later) Visits, interviews and focus groups with staff
Reneflot (2009)	Quantitative	Norway	Norwegian register data (N=293,387), 1974-2003
Ridge (2009)	Qualitative	England	61 interviews with children of lone parents
Ridge & Millar (2011)	Qualitative	England	37 interviews with lone mothers (three interviews, 1-2 years apart)
Ryan, Franzetta, Schelar & Manlove (2009)	Quantitative	USA	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (N=20745), 1994-2002
Schoon, Jones, Cheng & Maughan. (2011)	Quantitative	UK	Millennium Cohort Study, 2000-2005
Scott & Lindsay (2004)	Qualitative	Scotland	Interviews with 19 lone parents and 22 mentors
Shahtahmasebi, Emerson, Berridge & Lancaster (2010)	Quantitative	UK	Families and Children Study, 2001-2005
Shildrick & MacDonald (2013)	Qualitative	England	60 interviews
Shriner, Mullis & Shriner (2010)	Quantitative	USA	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (N=10,886), 1998-2002
Sims, Casebourne, Bell & Davies (2010)	Qualitative	England	126 interviews with lone parents 3 focus groups with Jobcentre Plus staff
Skinner & Main (2013)	Quantitative	UK	Families and Children Study, 2008-2009
Smith (2013)	Qualitative	England	Interviews with 18 lone parents and 27 children
Stewart (2009)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Lone Parent Cohort, 1991-2001
Stewart (2011)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Household Panel Survey, 1991-2007
Strazdins, Shipley, Clements, Obrien & Broom (2010)	Quantitative	Australia	Growing up in Australia (N=5399), 2004

Taulbut & Walsh (2013)	Quantitative	Scotland and England	Various large scale survey datasets (incl. National Child Development study, British Cohort Study, Millennium Cohort Study, British Crime Survey, Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, Labour Force Survey, Administrative data)
Taylor (2009)	Quantitative	Great Britain	British Household Panel Survey, 1991-2006
Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby & Shattuck (2013)	Quantitative	USA	National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (N=4046), 2008
Vandecasteele (2010)	Quantitative	13 European Countries (incl. UK.)	European Community Household Panel Survey (N=86,886), 1994-2001
Verropoulou & Joshi (2007)	Quantitative	Great Britain	National Child Development Study (N=1129), 1991
Von Borczyskowski, Lindblad, Vinnerljung, Reintjes & Hjern (2011)	Quantitative	Sweden	Subgroup from the Swedish Multi-generation Register (N=3 million), 1987-2001
Wade, Veldhuizen & Cairney (2011)	Quantitative	Canada	Canadian Community Health Survey (N=13,578 parents), 2002
Walker, Crawford & Taylor (2008)	Qualitative	England	40 interviews and 4 focus groups with children of lone parents 4 focus groups with children in couple families 4 focus groups with couple parents Interviews with professionals
Warner (2013)	Quantitative	Scotland	Growing Up in Scotland, 2011
White, Warrener, Reeves & La Valle (2008)	Mixed methods	England	44 interviews with staff and 9 site visits Interviews with 18 families 18 focus groups with local service providers Administrative data from the Family Intervention Information System

Whitworth (2012)	Quantitative	England	DWP Administrative data
Whitworth (2013)	Mixed methods	England	27 interviews with lone parents DWP Administrative data
Woodfield & Finch (1999)	Qualitative	UK	Interviews with 95 lone parents and 14 scheme organisers
Yetis-Bayraktar, Budig & Tomaskovic-Devey (2012)	Quantitative	USA	Panel Study of Income Dynamics (N=1343), 1984-1996