Choices and Barriers Faced by Lone Parents in Accessing Employment and Learning

Contract: 257/2007/08

Final Report

for

Welsh Assembly Government



LE Wales

LE Wales is an economics and policy consultancy based in Wales and is a part of the Indecon - London Economics Consulting Group. The Group also has offices in London, Dublin, Budapest and Brussels, and associated offices in Paris and Valletta.

We advise clients in both the public and private sectors on economic and financial analysis, policy development and evaluation, business strategy, and regulatory and competition policy. We are able to use a wide variety of analytical techniques to assist our work, including cost-benefit analysis, multicriteria analysis, policy simulation, scenario building, statistical analysis and mathematical modelling. We are also experienced in using a wide range of data collection techniques including literature reviews, survey questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.

Further information about LE Wales is available at www.le-wales.co.uk.

Acknowledgements

This report has benefited from the helpful comments and suggestions provided by the Welsh Assembly Government Economic Research Unit and from the insights provided by a wide range of stakeholders who were interviewed as part of this research. They are listed at Annex 2 of this report.

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Research Summary

Introduction

LE Wales was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a study of the relative importance of the various choices and constraints faced by lone parents in Wales; and to establish a comprehensive list of the barriers faced by lone parents who wish to access work or learning.

The research was carried out in two distinct phases, incorporating (i) a review of the existing literature to establish broad findings and (ii) engagement of stakeholders to provide a deeper understanding of the practical barriers faced by lone parents in Wales.

Policy Background

Lone parents have been the focus of a number of policy initiatives in recent years, particularly in the context of the UK Government's commitment to halve child poverty by 2010; and to eradicate it by 2020.

Support for lone parents can be split into two major strands: financial support (through benefits and tax credits) and the provision of childcare. Increasingly, however, the support provided is focused on allowing (and encouraging) lone parents to enter (or re-enter) employment, with the Government targeting a 70% lone parent employment rate by 2010.

The main form of financial support available to lone parents is Income Support, which, until recently, could be claimed by any lone parent with a dependent child aged under 16 and working fewer than 16 hours per week. However, under the benefit reforms, which began to come into effect from November 2008 (the reforms are phased, and so will not be completely in place until April 2011), eligibility for Income Support among lone parents will be restricted to those with a dependant child aged under 7. Instead, lone parents that are not working will be required to apply for the Jobseekers' Allowance – and hence be required to seek work.

The narrowing of eligibility in Income Support reflects a more general policy commitment to increase the number of lone parents in employment. In particular the National Childcare Strategy has sought to significantly increase the availability and enhance the quality of childcare throughout the UK – with the explicit aim of increasing parents' potential to work.

There is also some financial support available for lone parents to enter further and higher education, through "Special Support Grants" which are available to supplement student loans to enter higher education.

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In general, policy towards lone parents appears similar between England and Wales. Welfare policy is reserved for the Westminster parliament, and while this is not true of either education or (to an extent) childcare policy, there do not appear to be any major differences between the two approaches.

Lone parents in Wales

As part of the research, data from the 2001 Census was analysed to form a picture of lone parents in Wales, and identify whether their characteristics differ from those in England.

The main findings of this analysis were as follows:

- Lone parents comprise 8% of all households in Wales, and 24% of households with dependent children. This compares to 7% and 22% respectively within England.
- The vast majority (around 90%) of lone parents are female.
- Around one third of children in Welsh lone parent households are aged under 5 (33%), with 39% aged 5-11, 19% aged 12-15 and 9% aged 16-18.
 - o This is slightly different to the distribution of all dependant children in Wales, a higher proportion (37% versus 33%) of whom were aged under 5, with a lower proportion (54% versus 58%) aged 5-15.
- More Welsh lone parents are aged under 24 than those in England (13.4% versus 10.6%) whilst there are correspondingly fewer Welsh lone parents in the 35 49 age band (44.8% versus 48.7%).
- A higher proportion of Welsh lone parents have no academic or professional qualifications (33.8% versus 29.1%)
- Under half of lone parents (46%) in Wales are employed, and those that are tend to be in lower socio-economic groups (based on occupation) than other parents of dependent children.

There appear to be few major differences between lone parents in England and Wales. Those differences that do exist seem to reflect more general differences between the two countries.

Overall, stakeholders felt that this provided a reasonably accurate characterisation of lone parents in Wales, but noted that since 2001 more lone parents are likely to be in employment as a result of benefit reforms and that, over time, lone parents are getting older.

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Employment choices and constraints

Both our review of the literature and our consultations with stakeholders about the choices and constraints faced by lone parents suggested a similar set of key issues for lone parents. We have classified these into three types of barrier: those relating to individual choices and constraints; those relating to institutional and market factors; and those that are informational. A summary of the key barriers is provided in Table 1.

The categorisation of barriers in this way is useful for the purposes of describing the barriers, but the experience of lone parents is usually of several constraints all interacting with each other. It is also important to remember that the experiences of lone parents can be very different and vary considerably with the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

Individual choices and constraints

Not all lone parents necessarily wish to work. The reasons for this are mixed.

Some want to be full time parents because they believe that this is the best outcome for their children. These feelings may be particularly strong where they believe that available childcare, formal or informal, is of insufficiently high quality. For some young lone parents, producing a child might be the only thing they feel that they have been successful at in their lives (after a poor school record, no employment etc). This can make them very reluctant to allow someone else to care for the child.

Some lone parents live, and have grown up in, communities where not working is the norm. Some may not know anyone who has ever worked in their life. Unemployment can go back generations. Reactions to this situation vary. Some may not see why they should work when nobody else they know works either. Some wish to work and have the internal resources to break out of the cycle of non-work. Others are severely lacking in confidence, motivation, family and peer support and basic and life skills. For some of the latter group they may believe that there are many insurmountable barriers to work, though this may at least in part be perception rather than reality.

Lone parents who are entrenched in their own communities can be frightened of leaving familiar territory and travelling elsewhere to work, even if it is not very far away. Lack of social skills and confidence is a real barrier – many lone parents suffer from social isolation particularly in rural areas when their children are young

Some lone parents have few aspirations. Lone parents from some communities have never experienced support from their own parents – negative attitudes from family and peers can be the norm for some. In these circumstances lone parents can find it very difficult to keep motivated.

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Low confidence and motivation is often associated with, and compounded by, very limited life skills and basic skills and limited or no educational qualifications and work experience. Some lone parents in minority ethnic groups may face an additional language barriers and may be poorly educated even in their own language. A number of stakeholders also pointed out that mental health problems, such as depression, are more common amongst lone parents.

Institutional and market barriers

The availability of suitable childcare is a barrier that tends to rank highly in surveys of lone parents and was also one of the main barriers mentioned by stakeholders in Wales. The key characteristics of childcare that are important in this context are the quality of the care; accessibility, e.g. by public transport; opening hours, especially during school holidays, but also in the evenings and at weekends; and the availability of care for older children and for children with particular physical or behavioural needs. The cost of childcare is also an important factor.

The availability of suitable job opportunities is important. Many stakeholders mentioned that lone parents will face particular problems in the current economic downturn. Many lone parents are trying to juggle childcare and/or school and employment. This means they need a certain amount of flexibility from employers when children are ill or when childcare arrangements fall through. Many lone parents look for work hours that enable them to take their children to school in the mornings and to pick them up when school finishes. Jobs that provide the same holiday periods as schools would also be seen as ideal by many.

Closely related to the availability of childcare and job opportunities is the **availability of public transport**. With the perception that a relatively large proportion of lone parents do not own a car, this was felt by stakeholders to be a barrier for many lone parents, though particularly for those living in rural areas. There is also some support for this in the literature.

Alongside childcare issues, perhaps the barriers mentioned most frequently in the literature and by stakeholders, were **financial barriers**. A key issue is that the gap between lone parent income in employment and benefit income when unemployed can be insufficient to act as an incentive to take up employment. There are a number of contributory factors including the low wage nature of many jobs that meet other requirements, such as school-friendly hours; the poor skills and experience of some lone parents; and low levels of motivation amongst some lone parents. This gap may be a particular issue in Wales as wages are relatively low, but the benefit system is common across England and Wales. Fear and uncertainty relating to the extent to which benefits are withdrawn when lone parents enter employment is another factor. Some have heard stories of incorrect Working Tax Credit calculations being made and of the need to make repayments.

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Informational barriers

Closely related to the institutional and market barriers, and those barriers relating to self-confidence, are barriers related to information for lone parents about the way in which institutions work. Information barriers appear to be particularly strong in relation to the impact of employment on benefits. Lone Parents can be confused by the complexity of the benefits system and by the changes in entitlements when they enter employment. They are often not sure, for example, whether they will still be entitled to housing benefit. A particular issue seems to be that the Jobcentre Plus 'better off' calculations do not include all of the indirect income effects of working (e.g. concessionary rates for the unwaged or loss of entitlement to free school meals), though Jobcentre Plus aim to ensure clarity about what the calculations do and do not include.

Table 1: Key employment choices and barriers for lone parents

Individual choices and barriers	Institutional and market barriers	Informational barriers	
Childcare responsibilities;	Lack of affordable and available childcare;	Lack of simple, clear information about	
Cultural/social values that restrict job search;	Additional net income to be gained from employment is too low;	the rules concerning working while or benefit;	
Lack of motivation;	Lack of local jobs with adequate wages;	Lack of information about net income at work; and	
Low levels of confidence & self esteem	Lack of suitable type of work that matches education	Provision of incorrect information.	
Lack of educational qualifications;	background;		
Lack of work experience; and	Inflexible employment conditions; and		
Lack of basic skills and life skills.	Inadequate public transport provision.		

Learning choices and constraints

The choices and constraints relevant to learning are very similar in nature to those relevant to employment. As before, we have classified these into three types of barrier: those relating to individual choices and constraints; those relating to institutional and market factors; and those that are informational. A summary of the key barriers is provided in Table 2.

The categorisation of barriers in this way is useful for the purposes of describing the barriers, but the experience of lone parents is usually of several constraints all interacting with each other. It is also important to remember that the experiences of lone parents can be very different and vary considerably with the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

Individual choices and constraints

For many lone parents, their only previous experience of education is their school years and, for some, that experience was not a positive one. This can lead to both a lack of confidence in the education system as well as a lack of basic skills.

The point was also made that in some communities in Wales there is a culture of not valuing learning that acts as a significant barrier for some. This can also lead to a lack of family support for access to learning – this can have a significant effect as family are often an important source of informal and trusted childcare.

A lack of confidence and experience in the education system can make the choice of course subject and level, as well as the choice of institution, seem very daunting.

Once lone parents have taken up a learning opportunity, their experience of learning can be very different to the experience of other students. Childcare responsibilities mean that they tend to just turn up for classes, and so are unable to participate in the wider student experience. This can lead to feelings of social isolation.

Institutional and market barriers

As with employment, key barriers are the availability of childcare, financial issues, flexibility in provision and transport.

Childcare availability is a problem, particularly for those courses requiring attendance outside normal working hours, e.g. in the evenings. Onsite childcare tends to be limited.

There is a view amongst stakeholders that available student finance is insufficient to compensate for the loss of benefits on entering education; and that the benefits system makes insufficient recognition of education as a valid pathway to employment in the longer term.

As with employment, lone parents' childcare responsibilities mean that they need education provision to be flexible. There are institutional practices which could ease some of the constraints faced by lone parents. These practices include:

- Modular approaches to learning through building up credits over a long period of time;
- Avoidance of last minute timetabling changes (last minute changes to childcare and transport arrangements can be very difficult to make);
- Study schedules, including placements, e.g. for social work, need to be flexible and parent-friendly. Need to ensure that deadlines don't all come at once. Need timetabling coordinated around the school day (taking account of time need to pick up/drop off at school).
- A more flexible academic year it can be easy to lose motivation if there is a need to wait most of an academic year before starting a course.

The availability (and cost) of public transport is a problem for lone parents in the education system, particularly those living in rural areas, as it is for lone parent who are seeking employment.

Informational barriers

The main informational barriers relating to financial issues and relevant to education are the complexity of student finance options and the impact that becoming a student has on benefit eligibility.

Lone parents, particularly those with either poor or limited experience of the education system, can also find the range of courses and institutions available daunting.

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Table 2: Learning choices and barriers for lone parents

Individual choices/barriers	Institutional and market barriers	Informational barriers
Childcare responsibilities;	Lack of reliable and affordable childcare;	Lack of information about financial support system;
Lack of familiarity and confidence in the educational system;	Withdrawal of benefits;	Lack of information about entitlements and how to organize help; and
	Costs of education (tuition fee, books,	
Lack of family support; and	travel, etc.);	Large number of courses and institutions, but lack of detailed information about practical aspects of being
Discrimination against students with caring responsibilities.	Inflexible education programme structures (class schedule, deadlines for evaluation, etc.); and	a student (e.g. timetables).
	Poor public transport provision.	

Section 1 Introduction

1 Introduction

This is the final report for contract 257/2007/08 on the choices and constraints faced by lone parents in accessing employment and learning.

LE Wales was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a study of the relative importance of the various choices and constraints faced by lone parents in Wales; and to establish a comprehensive list of the barriers faced by lone parents who wish to access work or learning.

The research was carried out in two distinct phases, incorporating (i) a review of the existing literature to establish broad findings and (ii) engagement of stakeholders to provide a deeper understanding of the practical barriers faced by lone parents in Wales.

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 briefly outlines the policy background in respect of the benefits system and childcare;
- Chapter 3 presents data on the numbers and characteristics of lone parents in Wales, in comparison with lone parents elsewhere in the UK and with other parents in Wales and elsewhere in the UK;
- Chapter 4 reviews the relevant literature; and
- Chapter 5 summarises the outcome of our consultation with stakeholders.

A number of annexes include supporting material.

2 Policy background

2.1 The benefit system in the UK

The UK Government has been very active in recent years in respect of policies to increase lone parent participation in the labour market and reduce child poverty. We provide a brief overview of the major types of financial support available to lone parents below.

Income Support

Income Support (IS) provides financial assistance for groups of individuals that are not obliged to seek work (i.e. they do not have to sign on as unemployed). Until recently, this included lone parents with a youngest child aged under 16, that were not working more than 16 hours per week, and that did not have savings of £16,000 or more. Recipients had a personal allowance of £60.50 per week (£47.95 for those younger than 25), with the exact level of payment adjusted to account for other factors such as disability and any non-dependants in the same household.¹

Most lone parents who claim IS and whose youngest child is aged at least six, are required to take part in Work Focused Interviews (WFI). The purpose of a WFI is to discuss the availability of assistance for lone parents who want to take up employment or training or prepare for employment in the future. Although taking part in WFI is mandatory in order to be entitled to IS, looking for paid work or for work-related training is voluntary.

Another measure designed to assist and support lone parents who are in receipt of Income Support to find employment is the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). The programme was launched in 1997 and from 2001 all non-working lone parents and lone parents working fewer than 16 hours are eligible and are invited to take part in the programme. Participation is on a voluntary basis and lone parents do not have any obligation to take up any of the support measures proposed.

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¹ Level of benefits based on:

http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/WorkingAgeBenefits/Dev_015271.xml.html, on 2nd January 2009

The UK Government goal is to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020.² If successful, these measures, urging lone parents to go into full-time employment and leaving Income Support, may be an effective way to reduce child poverty. In fact, 58% of children in non-working lone parent families live in poverty, compared to 19% of children of lone parents working part-time and only 7% of those working full-time (DWP, 2008a, p3).

Although the lone parent employment rate has increased from less than 45% to over 57% since 1997, the target set out in 2004 by the UK Government of a 70% lone parent employment rate by 2010 is still some distance away (DWP, 2007).

To try and increase lone parent participation in the labour force, the Government has reduced the eligibility for Income Support amongst lone parents. In particular, individuals claiming IS (either for the first time or as a repeat claim) solely on the grounds of being a lone parent:

- will not be entitled to IS if they have a youngest child aged 12 or over, from 24 November 2008;
- will not be entitled to IS if they have a youngest child aged 10 or over, from October 2009;
- will not be entitled to IS if they have a youngest child aged 7 or over, from October 2010.³

For lone parents currently claiming IS the staggered changes will be introduced with a delay, with the equivalent changes being made in December 2009, September 2010 and in April 2011 respectively.

Once these reforms take effect, lone parents with children older than 6 years old will only be able to receive financial support if they are actively looking for work (through the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)) or if they are unable to work due a health condition or disability (through the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)). As JSA support is only available (to any individual) to those actively looking for a job (and is withdrawn if a job offer is refused without good reason), it is anticipated that this system will incentivize lone parents to find a job hence and increase the lone parent employment rate.

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² This refers to the PSA target to halve the number of children living in relative low income households by 2010. Relative low-income households are defined as those with income below 60% of median income before housing costs. The Government has also set a target (not enshrined in a PSA) of there being fewer than 1 million children living in absolute low income by2010/11; and has committed to halve the number of children suffering a combination of material deprivation and relative low income (at 70% of median income before housing costs). (Harker, 2006)

³ There are some exceptions to these measures. Lone parents may still be able to receive IS until their youngest child reaches 16 under certain circumstances: for example if they are a foster parent with a foster child living with them, if they are receiving Carer's Allowance, if they have a dependant child in receipt of middle or higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance or if they receive incapacity benefit or credits.

According to an estimate from the Department for Work and Pensions, these reforms could lead to a net reduction of 90,000 in the number of lone parents across the UK on out of work benefits by 2011, rising eventually to around 120,000 from 2013 onwards. This would also imply an increase in the number of lone parents in paid work of at least 75,000 and around 70,000 fewer children in poverty. The total estimated cost of these measures is around £75m over the period 2008-2011, while savings are estimated to be between £200m - £400m over the same period.⁴

Child benefit

Lone parents are also eligible (as are all parents of dependant children) to receive child benefit. This amounts to £18.80 per week for the eldest child and £12.55 per week for younger children.

Tax credits

Parents, including lone parents, are also eligible to receive some support through the Working Tax Credit (WTC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC). The WTC is available to individuals on low incomes that usually work more than 16 hours per week. Eligibility for those without children is restricted to those aged 25 or older; but all (working) parents aged over 15 are eligible to receive support. The Working Tax Credit also includes a childcare element, which makes a contribution to the costs of childcare where a lone parent is employed.⁵

The CTC, on the other hand, is available to all families earning less than approximately £50,000.⁶ The CTC consists of a family element (paid to any family responsible for at least one child) and a child element (paid for each child or young person in the family). The maximum family element is £545 per year, while the maximum child element is £2,085 per year (although this can be higher in the case of disability).

2.2 Childcare policy in England and Wales

In addition to financial support for lone parents, Government throughout the UK has been actively involved in supporting access to childcare, through direct provision, enhancing childcare quality, and making childcare more accessible for all parents.

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See the Explanatory Memorandum to the Social Security (Lone Parents and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2008, page 11.

⁵ The childcare element is also available to two-parent families, where both parents work more than 16 hours per week.

⁶ The exact amount depends on family income, the number of children, their ages and any disabilities, the number of hours worked and childcare costs.

Since devolution, responsibility for childcare within the UK has rested at two levels, with the devolved administrations holding responsibility for issues such as childcare quality, while other issues such as tax credits and maternity leave have been reserved to Westminster. As a result, while there are important differences between Wales and the rest of the UK, there are also many policy overlaps.

Childcare is defined in the Childcare Act 2006 as "any form of care for a child", which includes education and any other supervised activity for a child, excluding "education provided by a school during school hours for a registered pupil who is not a young child, or any form of health care for a child".

National Childcare Strategy

The National Childcare Strategy, setting out a commitment to achieving accessible, affordable and quality childcare for children aged 0 to 14 across the UK, was initially launched in 1998. It has since been updated, with the policy document "Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare" published in December 2004. The strategy covers both reserved and devolved issues, with responsibility for delivery of the strategy thus shared between the UK Government and the appropriate devolved administrations.

The strategy recognises the importance of childcare in influencing parental labour market decisions identifying the "the need to respond to changing patterns of employment and ensure that parents, particularly mothers, can work and progress their careers". Further, childcare is explicitly recognised as an important mechanism to facilitate lone parents moving in to or returning to the labour market.

The vision set out in the ten year strategy is formulated around four main strands, listed below.

- Choice and flexibility: parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life.
- Availability: for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it, an
 affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their
 circumstances.
- Quality: high quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce, among the best in the world.
- Affordability: families to be able to afford flexible, high quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs.

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⁷ Childcare Act 2006 (c. 21), section 18

Several of the measures identified as part of the strategy are focused on helping working parents through making childcare more affordable (through changes to the Working Tax Credit discussed above) and providing parents with more flexibility regarding maternity and paternity leave.

In addition however, the Childcare Strategy also lays out the Government's vision for the extension and enhancement of childcare to ensure that all parents have access to high-quality childcare options. The document sets outs several measures through which these goals are to be achieved, with local authorities (as the key agents in the planning, coordinating and supporting and delivering childcare services) given responsibility to ensure that they are enacted and that as a result, each community has sufficient childcare provision to meet local needs.⁸

The specific measures suggested include:

- establishing Children's Centres (which link childcare providers and provide information and advice to help parents find appropriate childcare places for children under 5) in every community by 2010;
- an entitlement to 15 hours free early education and childcare for 38 weeks a year for all three and four year olds;
- all parents of three and four year olds to be offered access to wrap around childcare linked to the early education offer and available all year round from 8am to 6pm weekdays;
- all parents with children aged 5-11 to be offered affordable school-based childcare on weekdays between the hours of 8am to 6pm, all year round;
- all secondary schools open from 8am to 6pm weekdays providing extended services for children aged 11-14; and
- a Transformation Fund of £125 million a year to support investment by local authorities in high quality, flexible, affordable and sustainable childcare provision.

As well as extending the availability of childcare, the document also commits to the improving the *quality* of provision, through reforming the qualification and career structure for the early years and childcare workforce; providing professional support and continuous professional development for childminders and home-based childcarers, and through a reformed regulatory framework and inspection regime.

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As enshrined in the 2006 Childcare Act local authorities "must secure...that the provision of childcare (whether or not by them)...is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare in order to enable them—(a) to take up, or remain in, work, or (b) to undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work." (Paragraphs 8(1) and 22(1)).

Welsh childcare strategy

Following the 2006 Childcare Act, the responsibility for childcare provision in England and Wales has been given to local authorities. However, The Act provides that the National Assembly for Wales has the power to require Welsh unitary authorities to assess the availability of childcare provision in their own area. However, there is also the recognition that the Welsh authorities must take into account guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government. As such, it is possible to discern differences between the provision of childcare between Wales and England.

The first childcare policy elaborated specifically for Wales is contained in the 2002 Childcare Action Plan. The implementation of the principles of the Childcare Action Plan is presented in the document "The Childcare Strategy for Wales: Childcare is for Children" published in 2005. There are seven Core Aims outlined in the document, all aiming to protect and enhance the overall safety and development of children and young people.

Some of the actions directly affect the potential for parents to take up work, either through financial incentives or easing the availability of a carer:

- the "Flying start" initiative, which includes the provision of free part time good quality child care for two year olds in the most deprived areas⁹;
- a proposal for the registration of carers working at home with the Care Council for Wales, in order to give parents assurance on child protection and safety and that the carer meets some minimum standards;
- ensure that parents who use registered childcare workers within their home can access the childcare tax credit;
- ensure that parents can access adequate information on childcare and help with childcare costs from the tax benefit system;
- an enhanced role for unitary authorities to secure sufficient childcare in their areas, both providing services directly and through partnership with local partners;
- a plan to support workforce development;
- the Genesis Wales project, funded under the European Structural Funds, providing a comprehensive package of advice, guidance, support and childcare for individuals wishing to access work, training and learning opportunities.

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⁹ In particular the programme is available in three specific school catchment-areas in Gwynedd: the Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla catchment-area in Caernarfon, the catchment-area of Ysgol Gynradd Glancegin, Bangor; and the catchment-area of Maenofferen and Glanypwll, Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Within Wales, Cymorth (the Children and Youth Support Fund) has been established through the amalgamation of Sure Start in Wales, the Children and Youth Partnership Fund and the Childcare Strategy, to provide a network of targeted support. This has included the coordination of the establishment of Integrated Children's Centres in Wales, and the provision of grants (in disadvantaged areas) for a number of projects.

2.3 Student finance

Lone parents in both England and Wales are classed as "vulnerable" groups, and so have access to additional financial support to help them undertake Higher Education courses. In particular lone parents are likely to have access to Special Support Grants which (unlike maintenance grants) do not reduce the amount of support available through student loans.

Where childcare costs are a barrier to training that moves lone parents closer to the labour market, support for these costs is available for lone parents under the Jobcentre Plus New Deal programmes.

In addition to these national systems, universities and colleges also provide individual bursaries for students that may not be able to study otherwise.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the key areas of policy concerning lone parents in England and Wales, seeking in particular to highlight specific differences between the two. Of particular interest is the changing face of the welfare support available to lone parents, with the expectation from Government that (within the next two years) parents of children older than 7 will be required to seek work in order to receive welfare payments.

Overall, this review has suggested that the main elements of policy towards lone parents are similar between England and Wales. Welfare policy is reserved for the Westminster parliament, and while this is not true of either education or (to an extent) childcare policy, there do not appear to be any major differences between the two approaches. Further, responsibility for childcare provision is at local authority level, and so a national comparison may not be entirely appropriate.

3 Numbers and characteristics of lone parents in Wales

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we present data on the number and characteristics of lone parents in Wales, using information from other areas of the UK (predominantly England) as a reference point. Wherever possible, data is also presented for the 22 Welsh unitary authorities.

In carrying out this analysis, we considered a number of different data sources, including the 2001 Census, household surveys, and surveys of lone parent families. Of these sources, the Census provides the most comprehensive and reliable information, as it is necessarily representative of the full population of lone parents within Wales. Other surveys can, at best, provide an estimate of the size of the lone parent population. Further, when focusing on Wales, rather than the UK as whole, sample sizes are comparatively small precluding a detailed analysis (such as comparing characteristics across the Welsh local authorities).

The drawback of the Census data is, however, that the information is not fully up-todate, and this should be noted when considering the findings. As such, while the Census data forms the main basis of the analysis in this chapter. wherever possible it is supplemented with additional information from other data sources.

3.2 Lone parent households as a proportion of all households

3.2.1 The number of lone parent households in 2001

Based on data from the 2001 Census, there are over 87,000 lone parent households with dependent children in Wales, comprising 8.3% of all households in the country. This varies between the unitary authorities from as high as almost 11% in Merthyr Tydfil and over 10% in Newport and Blaenau Gwent to less than 6% in Powys and Ceredigion (as displayed in Table 3).

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¹⁰ A discussion of some of the major data sources is contained in the annex.

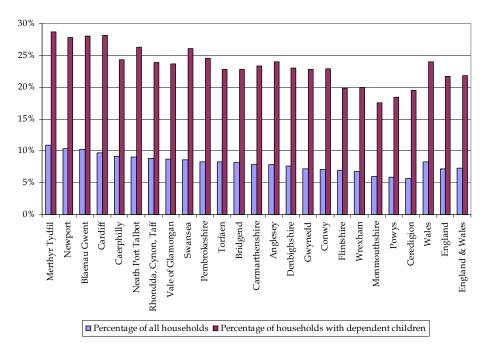
¹¹ Brewer and Shaw (2006) also make the point that the Census is the most reliable source of data on the numbers of lone parents. They also note a significant discrepacny between offical statistical estimates of the number of lone parents living in the UK, and the number receiving the child tax credit or equivalent out-of-work benefits.

Lone parent households make up 24% of households who have dependent children in Wales. Between the different unitary authorities this figure ranges from almost 29% in Merthyr Tydfil to less than 18% in Monmouthshire. This is displayed in Figure 1.

Interestingly, lone parent households represent a greater fraction of all households in Wales than in England. In England, lone parent households with dependent children account for just 7% of all households, and 22% of households with dependent children.

However, as noted above, there is significant variation among the unitary authorities. Six out of 22 Welsh unitary authorities have a lower proportion of lone parent households than England (as a percentage of all households)¹². On the other hand, some unitary authorities have considerably higher proportions of lone parent households. For example, the number of lone parent households in Merthyr Tydfil is 3.6 percentage points higher than in England and Wales as a whole.

Figure 1: Lone parent households with dependent children in Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities



Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

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¹² These unitary authorities are Conwy, Flintshire, Wrexham, Monmouthshire, Powys and Ceredigion.

Table 3: Lone parent households with dependent children in England, Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities

Region	Proportion of all households	Proportion of households with dependent children	
England & Wales	7.3%	21.8%	
England	7.2%	21.7%	
Wales	8.3%	24.0%	
Merthyr Tydfil	10.9%	28.7%	
Newport	10.3%	27.9%	
Blaenau Gwent	10.3%	28.0%	
Cardiff	9.7%	28.2%	
Caerphilly	9.1%	24.4%	
Neath Port Talbot	9.1%	26.3%	
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	8.8%	23.9%	
Vale of Glamorgan	8.8%	23.7%	
Swansea	8.6%	26.1%	
Pembrokeshire	8.3%	24.6%	
Torfaen	8.3%	22.8%	
Bridgend	8.2%	22.8%	
Carmarthenshire	7.9%	23.4%	
Anglesey	7.8%	24.0%	
Denbighshire	7.6%	23.0%	
Gwynedd	7.2%	22.8%	
Conwy	7.1%	22.9%	
Flintshire	7.0%	19.9%	
Wrexham	6.8%	19.9%	
Monmouthshire	6.0%	17.6%	
Powys	5.9%	18.4%	
Ceredigion	5.6%	19.5%	

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

3.2.2 The number of lone parent households since 2001

There are a number of sources of that provide data on lone parents since 2001. Estimates from StatsWales show that there have been significant increases in the number of lone parent families in Wales in recent years reaching 99,239 in 2007, as illustrated in Figure 2. Over the same period the proportion of Welsh households who are lone parent families has increased from 4% to 8%, as illustrated in Figure 3.

120,000 80,000 40,000 20,000 20,000 ,59³,59³,59³,59⁵,59⁵,59⁵,59⁵,59⁵,59⁵,59⁵,70⁵,

Figure 2: Lone parent households in Wales

Source: StatsWales.13

Note: Based on households with one adult and one or more children.

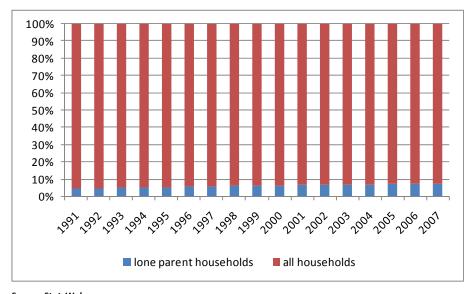


Figure 3: Household composition in Wales

Source: StatsWales.

¹³ The household estimates in both figures are based on mid-year population estimates for Wales produced by the Office for National Statistics. The new methodology (July 2009) has been developed in conjunction with the Wales Sub-national Household Estimates and Projections Working Group (WASHP). Members of WASHP include representatives with experience of demographic and housing data from Welsh local authorities, the Data Unit and the Welsh Assembly Government.

More up-to-date estimates have tended to rely on the Quarterly Labour Force Survey. For instance, the DWP has estimated that in 2008 there were 104,000 lone parent families in Wales with a dependent child aged less than 16 (or 28.0% of all households with dependent children), using Q2 2008 LFS data ⁽(DWP, 2008). This suggests that the number of lone parents may have remained relatively stable over the past five years, although this figure should be treated with appropriate caution, given that it is based only on one quarter of LFS data, and so may be subject to considerable error.

As outlined in Chapter 2, lone parents who work less than 16 hours per week and who have dependent children aged under 16 have been entitled to claim Income Support. In contrast to the data presented in Figure 2, there is a clear downward trend in the number of lone parent recipients of this benefit as shown in Figure 4 below. The reasons for this are not clear, though they may include an increase in the numbers of lone parents taking up employment for more than 16 hours a week. That would be consistent with the Government's policy focus in this area. The UK Government has set a target of 70% of all lone parents being in work by 2010, and this is intended to contribute to the longer term goal of eliminating child poverty in Britain by 2020. The proportion of lone parents in work in 2006 stands at approximately 57% (Ray et al., 2007), an increase of 11 percentage points compared to the 1997 rate. However, the gap between lone parent employment rates and those of partnered mothers remains large (Ray et al., 2007).

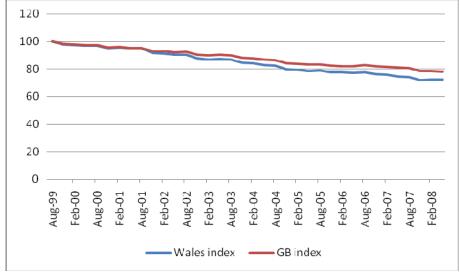


Figure 4: Lone parent Income Support recipients

Note: Lone parents with one or more dependents aged under 16. **Source DWP.**

3.3 Gender and number of dependents

Based on the 2001 Census data around 90% of lone parents in both England and Wales are female, as shown in Table 4. There is some variation in this fraction across the Welsh unitary authorities, from 85% in Ceredigion to around 93% in Merthyr Tydfil and in Rhondda, Cynon, Taff.

The data also indicated that a higher proportion of female lone parents have more than one dependent child, in comparison to male lone parents. Across Wales, almost half (49%) of female lone parents have two or more dependent children, compared to only 35% of male lone parents. This pattern is repeated in each unitary authority, although with some variation in the actual proportion of parents with more than one dependent child between local authorities.

Table 4: Lone parents in England, Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities by gender and number of dependents

	% lone parents that are female	% lone parents with two or more dependent children			
Region		Female	Male	All lone parents	
England	90%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
Wales	91%	49%	35%	47%	
Merthyr Tydfil	93%	49%	28%	48%	
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	93%	48%	29%	47%	
Cardiff	92%	52%	37%	51%	
Swansea	92%	48%	32%	47%	
Neath Port Talbot	92%	48%	29%	46%	
Newport	92%	52%	37%	50%	
Blaenau Gwent	92%	49%	31%	47%	
Bridgend	92%	49%	34%	48%	
Torfaen	91%	47%	22%*	45%	
Conwy	91%	48%	33%	47%	
Wrexham	91%	44%*	31%	43%*	
Caerphilly	91%	49%	36%	48%	
Vale of Glamorgan	91%	50%	35%	48%	
Flintshire	90%	52%	36%	50%	
Carmarthenshire	90%	47%	39%	46%	
Pembrokeshire	89%	47%	42%	47%	
Denbighshire	89%	48%	32%	46%	
Anglesey	88%	47%	41%	46%	
Gwynedd	87%	47%	37%	46%	
Monmouthshire	87%	46%	31%	44%	
Powys	87%	47%	44%	46%	
Ceredigion	85%*	48%	42%	47%	
MIN	85%	44%	22%	43%	
MAX	93%	52%	44%	51%	
RANGE	8%	7%	21%	7%	

^{*} More than two standard deviations from the average value across Wales as a whole. Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

3.4 Age of lone parents

Table 5 displays the age distribution of lone parents and all families with dependant children across England and Wales. As this indicates, the largest single category of lone parents across both England and Wales are aged between 35 and 49 (accounting for 49% and 45% respectively) while a sizeable number are aged between 25 and 34 (32% and 34% of all lone parents respectively).

Table 5: Age distribution of lone parents in England & Wales					
	Lone p	arents	All families		
	England	Wales	England	Wales	
Under 24	11%	13%	4%	5%	
25 to 34	32%	34%	26%	27%	
35 to 49	49%	45%	59%	56%	
50 and Over	8%	8%	12%	12%	

Note: Includes lone parents and families with dependant children only.

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

Notably, in comparison to parents in all families with dependant children, a higher proportion of lone parents appear to be aged under 24. In Wales, 13% of lone parents are aged under 24 compared to 5% of all parents, while a lower proportion of lone parents are aged over 35 (53% compared to 68%).

In addition, the census data suggests that, overall, lone parents in Wales tend to be slightly younger than those in England, with 47% of Welsh lone parents aged under 35, compared to 43% in England.

3.5 Age of youngest dependent child

The great majority of lone parent households in Wales have a young child of age 11 or less in their care. These households account for 72% of all lone parent households in Wales. Thirty-three per cent have a youngest dependent aged 4 or less, and 39% have a youngest child aged between 5 and 11 years old (Figure 5).

This suggests that we might expect the changes in Income Support (discussed in Section 2) to affect a significant proportion of lone parent families in Wales. Under the changes, Income Support eligibility for lone parents is being progressively

withdrawn, based on the age of the youngest child, with all lone parents with a child aged 7 or over becoming ineligible by October 2010. 14

As such these estimates suggest that around 50%-60% of Welsh lone parent families will become ineligible for Income Support as a result of these changes. However, this estimate should be treated with extreme caution given that the figures represent the cohort of children in 2001 – and the current age profile of children in lone parent families may be considerably different. Further, it should also be noted that lone parents that are currently in work – or seeking work – will not be affected by the changes.

A more up-to-date estimate of the proportion of lone parents that will become ineligible for Income Support can be obtained from Labour Force Survey data (although the caveats discussed earlier must be taken into account). Based on the past nine quarters of LFS data (from January 2007 to March 2009), around 45% of Welsh lone parents have a youngest dependent child aged six or under, and so would be eligible for Income Support. (This figure is approximately the same as for lone parents across the whole of the UK.) This is similar to the estimates based on the Census data.

The age distribution of the youngest child varies between unitary authorities. In three unitary authorities (Monmouthshire, Powys and Ceredigion) two thirds of lone parent households have a child aged 11 or less, whereas in other unitary authorities (Newport, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff and Blaenau Gwent) this percentage rises to 75%. This suggests that the impact of the Income Support changes may vary across different areas of Wales – however this conclusion is subject to the same caveats as above.

¹⁴ This will progress in three steps, with those with a youngest child aged 12 or over will become ineligible in November 2008, those with a child aged 10 or over will become ineligible in October 2009, and those with a child aged 7 or over will become ineligible in October 2010.

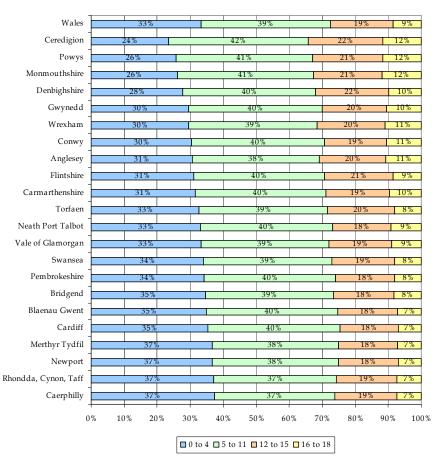


Figure 5: Lone parent families in Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities – Age of youngest dependent child

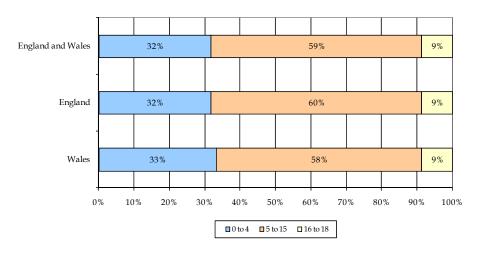
Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

It is also interesting to compare the distribution of children in lone parent households to all households with dependent children as in Figure 6. Among all Welsh households with dependent children (lone parents or otherwise) the proportion with very young children (i.e. aged 4 or less) is 37%, slightly higher than for the subgroup of lone parent households (33%). On the other hand, the proportion of households with youngest dependents between 5 and 15 years old is 54% for all households with dependent children, compared to 58% for lone parent households.

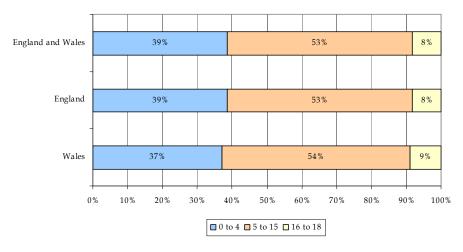
Further, Figure 6 also illustrates that the distribution is similar across England and Wales. In both countries, around one third of the youngest dependents in lone parent households are aged 4 or less, around 60% are aged between 5 and 15 and the remainder (9%) are aged 16 to 18.

Figure 6: Families with dependent children in England and Wales – Age of youngest dependent child

Lone parent families:



All families with dependent children:



Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

3.6 Rurality

In comparison to England, a much lower proportion of lone parents in Wales live in urban areas (71% of Welsh lone parent households, compared to 88% of English lone parent households), as indicated in Table 6. However, a similar pattern is reflected across all households, with 81% of English households located in urban areas in comparison to 64% of Welsh households, suggesting that this finding is not a feature of lone parent behaviour.

As would be expected, given the characteristics of the Welsh unitary authorities, there are substantial differences in the proportion of lone parents living in urban areas between authorities. Notably, however, a higher proportion of lone parent households are located in urban areas in comparison to all households. This is true both across England (88% compared to 81%) and Wales (71% compared to 64%) in aggregate, and also in all but three of the Welsh unitary authorities.

Further, the data also suggests that a higher proportion of female lone parents live in urban areas in comparison to male lone parents. Again this is true both across England and Wales, and in all but three of the Welsh unitary authorities.

Table 6: Proportion of households in urban areas in England and Wales.

Region	Female lone parents	Male lone parents	All lone parents	All households
England	88%	84%	88%	81%
Wales	72%	64%	71%	64%
Blaenau Gwent	28%	24%	27%	17%
Bridgend	16%	9%	15%	12%
Caerphilly	65%	61%	64%	58%
Cardiff	61%	54%	60%	51%
Carmarthenshire	72%	70%	72%	65%
Ceredigion	78%	73%	77%	69%
Conwy	22%	16%	21%	14%
Denbighshire	21%	13%	20%	20%
Flintshire	28%	23%	28%	23%
Gwynedd	53%	43%	52%	44%
Isle of Anglesey	93%	92%	93%	89%
Merthyr Tydfil	74%	67%	73%	72%
Monmouthshire	68%	69%	68%	68%
Neath Port Talbot	90%	85%	90%	81%
Newport	72%	77%	72%	73%
Pembrokeshire	77%	77%	78%	79%
Powys	75%	78%	76%	78%
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	88%	84%	88%	87%
Swansea	92%	88%	92%	91%
The Vale of Glamorgan	58%	53%	57%	44%
Torfaen	93%	87%	93%	88%
Wrexham	98%	97%	98%	97%

Note: All households includes all household spaces with residents.

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

3.7 Employment status

Under half of lone parents in Wales are in work. In total 46% are employed, with 22% in full-time employment and 24% working part-time. Six per cent of lone parents in Wales are unemployed, whereas the largest proportion (48%) is economically inactive. This data is presented in Figure 7 below, which shows the employment status of lone parents in England and Wales as a percentage of the total, both in aggregate and separately by gender.

The percentage of lone parents in work is lower in Wales than in England and Wales as a whole (across both countries about half are in work). Conversely the percentage of economically inactive lone parents is more in Wales than for the two nations combined. This suggests that in order to improve prospects for lone parents in

Wales the most important factor is to encourage greater participation in the labour market. Importantly, however, it appears that the lone parent employment rate has increased significantly since the census. Estimates from the Labour Force Survey show that the percentage of lone parents in employment increased from just under 48% to almost 57% between 2000-2002 and 2005-2007. 15

There are significant differences in employment status between male and female lone parents for both England and Wales. For both countries more than half of male lone parents are in full-time employment. In Wales, 58% of male lone parents are in work (52% full-time), whilst this figure is 63% for England and Wales as whole (56% full-time).

In contrast, just 45% of female lone parents in Wales are in work, and only 19% are employed full time – noticeably less than any other category (Figure 7). On the other hand, Welsh female lone parents have the highest incidence of economic inactivity, a status which applies to around half of this group.

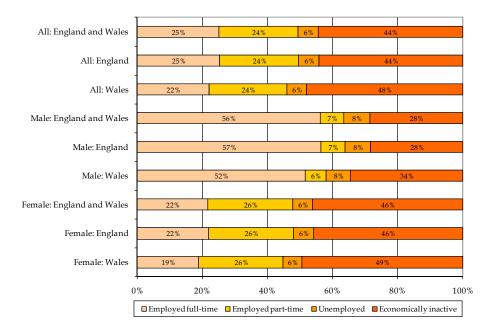


Figure 7: Employment status of lone parents by gender and country

 ${\it Source: LE\ Wales\ calculations\ using\ 2001\ Census\ data}.$

The employment figures for lone parents presented above are put into context by comparison with the same data for reference persons from all families with dependent children from the 2001 Census. This data shows that the percentage of lone parents in work is considerably less than for the wider population.

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¹⁵ Figures are based on three-year averages. Based on Welsh Assembly Government (2008), Table 10.3.

For both England and Wales more than half (55%) of the reference persons¹⁶ from families with dependent children are employed full-time (Figure 8), compared to a just quarter or less of lone parents (Figure 7 above). With those that work part-time, the percentage of reference persons from families with dependent children in Wales who are in work is just over three quarters, compared to less than half for lone parents.

For males, the striking difference between lone parents and others with dependent children is the proportion who works full-time. Over 80% of male reference persons from families with dependent children work full-time, compared to just over 50% of male lone parents in Wales.

For females, the differences between the proportions who work full-time and part-time are both significant. In Wales, 30% of female reference persons from families with dependent children work full-time, compared to just 19% of female lone parents. In terms of part-time employment, the difference is 38% versus 26%.

All: England and Wales All: England All: Wales Male: England and Wales Male: England Male: Wales Female: England and Wales Female: England Female: Wales 30% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% ■ Employed full-time ■ Employed part-time ■ Unemployed ■ Economically inactive

Figure 8: Employment status of reference persons in families with dependent children by gender and country

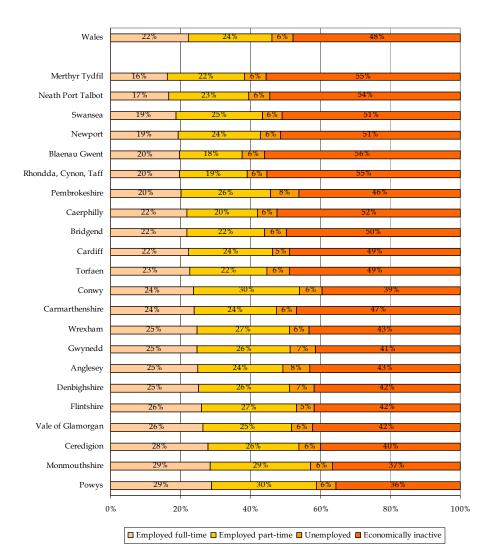
Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

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¹⁶ The concept of Household Reference Person (HRP) was new in the 2001 Census. For a person living alone this person is the HRP. Otherwise, the household contains multiple adults, the HRP is selected based on economic activity, then age, then order on the census form).

There are significant variations between the Welsh unitary authorities in terms of employment status of lone parents. Although in aggregate a lower proportion of Welsh lone parents are in work, for 10 of the 22 unitary authorities this percentage is higher than or equal to that for England and Wales combined. The highest levels of employment (full or part time) for lone parents in Wales are found in Monmouthshire and Powys (58%-59%), whilst the lowest rates occur in Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot and Merthyr Tydfil (38%-39%).

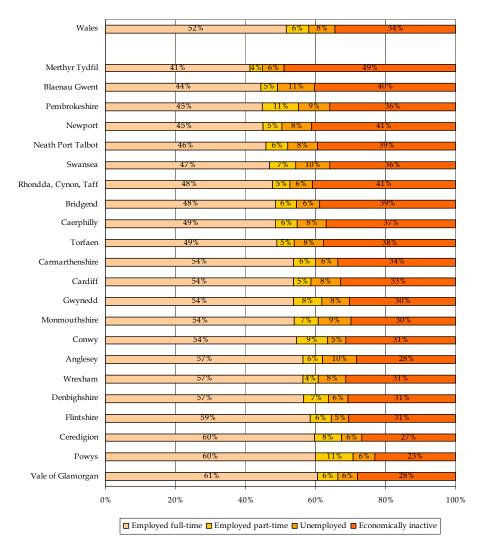
Figure 9: Employment status of lone parents in Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities



Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

As noted above, overall a lower proportion of female lone parents are in work relative to their male counterparts. Considering this disparity across the Welsh regions, for all unitary authorities the fraction of male lone parents who are in employment (full or part time) is greater than the fraction of female lone parents (Figure 10 and Figure 11).

Figure 10: Employment status of <u>male</u> lone parents in Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities



Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

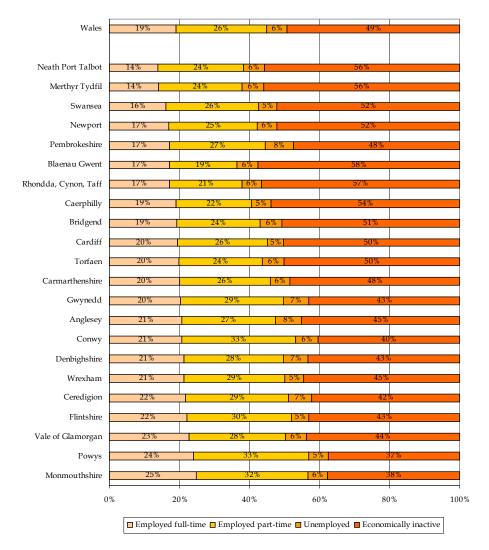


Figure 11: Employment status of <u>female</u> lone parents in Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

This pattern is repeated across the unitary authorities, as displayed clearly in Table 7, although the extent of the difference varies across unitary authorities. In Ceredigion and the Vale of Glamorgan, the differences in the fractions of male and female lone parents in work are as high as 16 percentage points, whereas in Monmouthshire the difference is only 4 percentage points (attributable to a very high rate of employment amongst female lone parents).

Table 7: Percentage of individuals employed in England & Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities

Region	Female lone parents	Male lone parents	All lone parents	Male - Female	Whole population
England & Wales	48%	64%	50%	16%	61%
England	48%	64%	50%	15%	61%
Wales	45%	58%	46%	13%	55%
Powys	57%	71%	59%	14%	62%
Monmouthshire	57%	61%	57%	4%	61%
Conwy	53%	63%	54%	10%	55%
Ceredigion	51%	67%	54%	16%	50%
Flintshire	52%	64%	53%	13%	63%
Vale of Glamorgan	50%	66%	52%	16%	60%
Gwynedd	50%	62%	51%	12%	54%
Denbighshire	50%	64%	51%	14%	57%
Wrexham	50%	61%	51%	11%	59%
Anglesey	47%	62%	49%	15%	53%
Carmarthenshire	46%	60%	47%	14%	53%
Cardiff	45%	59%	46%	14%	56%
Pembrokeshire	45%	55%	46%	11%	54%
Torfaen	44%	54%	45%	10%	56%
Bridgend	43%	55%	44%	12%	56%
Swansea	43%	54%	44%	12%	52%
Newport	42%	50%	43%	8%	57%
Caerphilly	41%	55%	42%	14%	54%
Neath Port Talbot	38%	52%	39%	14%	51%
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	38%	53%	39%	15%	51%
Merthyr Tydfil	38%	45%	38%	7%	49%
Blaenau Gwent	37%	49%	38%	13%	50%

Note: For lone parents percentages are as a proportion of all lone parent families. For total employment, percentages are as a proportion of 16-74 population. Individuals classed as employed if in full-time employment, part-time employment or self-employed. Employed includes full-time employment and part-time employment for lone parents, and full-time employment, part-time employment and self-employment for all individuals. "Male – female" column may not always exactly equal to the difference in employment rate between "male lone parents" and female lone parents" due to rounding.

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

In comparing the employment rates of the unitary authorities, it is important to consider the general labour market conditions in those areas. As shown in the final column of Table 7, in fact the differences in lone parent employment rates seem to reflect the broader pattern of employment rates. As observed above, however, a lower proportion of lone parents tend to be employed than in the total population.

3.8 Socio-economic classification

Further to the data on employment status presented above, the 2001 Census also provides information on individuals' socio-economic class, based on occupation and employment status. Occupations are recorded as belonging to one of nine categories: 1) higher managerial and professional occupations; 2) lower managerial and professional occupations; 3) intermediate occupations; 4) small employers and own account workers; 5) lower supervisory and technical occupations; 6) semiroutine occupations; 7) routine occupations; 8) never worked or long term unemployed; and 9) not classified.

As shown in Figure 12, the most common groups for lone parents in Wales are "not classified" (21%), and "semi-routine operations" (20%). Around 13% of Welsh lone parents are engaged in "routine" operations, with a similar proportion in "higher managerial positions". There is also a significant proportion (12%) who have never worked or are long term unemployed.

Comparing these figures to the data for either all households or households with dependent children suggests that, based on occupation, lone parents are in lower socio-economic groups. The percentage of Welsh lone parents in (either higher or lower) managerial positions is much lower than other groups – accounting for 16%, as compared to 25% of all households, or 35% of households with dependent children. Conversely, the lone parents group contains a higher proportion of workers engaged in "semi-routine operations" than the other groups (20% compared to 11% for each of the other groups), while a higher proportion are long-term unemployed (12% compared to 3% and 2% respectively).

Interestingly however, these differences appear to reflect the position of lone parents as a whole, rather than Welsh lone parents in particular. Looking at the socio-economic classification for England (and for England & Wales) reveals similar disparities between lone parents and other groups as within Wales, with higher levels of long-term unemployed and lower levels of workers engaged in managerial occupations.

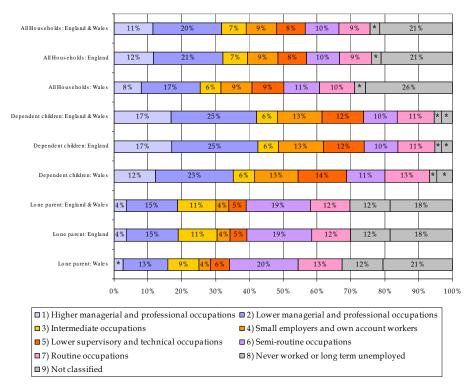


Figure 12: Socio-economic classification of household reference person: All households, households with dependent children and lone parent households

' * ' Signifies 3% or less

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

There are significant differences across the Welsh unitary authorities. In some unitary authorities (Monmouthshire, Vale of Glamorgan, Powys and Cardiff) 20% or more of lone parents are in managerial or professional positions (categories 1 and 2 combined) (Figure 13), similar to the percentage of Welsh households in general (second bar of Figure 12). In contrast, in several Unitary authorities this percentage is only just over 10% (11% for Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent and 12% for Rhondda Cynon Taff and Neath Port Talbot).

Employment in routine occupations (categories 6 and 7) also varies, but is not related to the level of employment in professional positions. For example, the percentage of lone parents employed in routine occupations is very similar for Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire, even though these are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of professional employment.

Blaenau Gwent Merthyr Tydfil Neath Port Talbot Rhondda, Cynon, Taff Caerphilly Torfaen Bridgend Anglesey Pembrokeshire Wrexham Newport Swansea Gwynedd Flintshire Carmarthenshire Conwy 24% Denbighshire Ceredigion Cardiff Vale of Glamorgan Monmouthshire 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100% □ 1) Higher managerial and professional occupations □ 2) Lower managerial and professional occupations ■ 3) Intermediate occupations \blacksquare 4) Small employers and own account workers ■ 5) Lower supervisory and technical occupations ■ 6) Semi-routine occupations ■7) Routine occupations \square 8) Never worked or long term unemployed ■9) Not classified

Figure 13: Socio-economic classification of lone parents in Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities

Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.

^{&#}x27;*' Signifies 3% or less

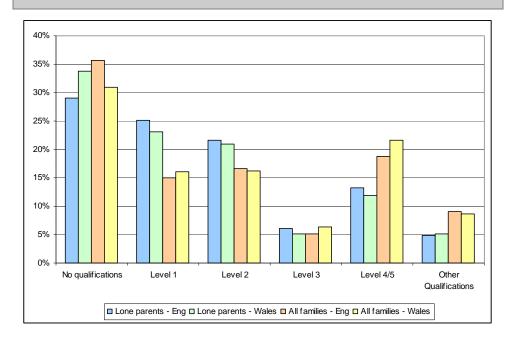
3.9 Highest qualification

The findings above have indicated that, as a group, lone parents achieve worse employment outcomes than all individuals in families with dependant children. Given this, it is important to examine whether there are corresponding differences in qualification attainment as this may be a key determinant of the labour market differences identified above.

As indicated in Figure 14, a much lower proportion of lone parents have a highest qualification above NVQ Level 3 in comparison to all households with dependant children. Within Wales, for example, 22% of lone parents have a highest qualification at level 3 or above, in comparison to 37% of individuals in all households.

The results also suggest that a higher proportion of lone parents in Wales hold no qualifications than lone parents in England (34% compared to 29% in England). However, this difference relates largely to low level qualifications – the proportion of lone parents holding qualifications at Level 3 or above is similar in England and Wales (24% and 22% respectively).

Figure 14: Highest qualification of lone parents and family reference person in all households in England and Wales



Note: Level refers to NVQ level. Other qualifications includes qualifications where the NVQ level is unknown. **Source: LE Wales calculations using 2001 Census data.** While these differences are significant, it is important to consider that in part they may reflect the difference in the age distribution between lone parents and all families with dependant children. In particular, as discussed above, lone parents tend to be younger — and as such may have had less opportunity to gain formal qualifications at a high level.

3.10 Conclusions

The information presented in this chapter has allowed us to develop a picture of the characteristics of Welsh lone parents, and understand how this compares to lone parents within England.

Overall, it appears that (as of 2001) the proportion of lone parents within Wales is higher than within England, accounting for around 8% of all households and 24% of households with dependent children, in comparison to 7% and 22% within England. Further, estimates from up to 2004 suggest that the number of lone parent households (and to some extent the proportion) has continued to increase.

The vast majority (around 90%) of lone parents in both England and Wales are female. Further, female lone parents are more likely than men to have more than one dependent child. Lone parents tend to be younger than all families with dependant children, and there is some evidence that Welsh lone parents may tend to be slightly younger than lone parents in England. A smaller proportion of children in lone parent families are aged under 5, in comparison to children in all households.

The census data indicated that, in line with Wales as a whole, Welsh lone parents are more likely to live in rural areas than their English counterparts. However, within Wales, lone parents (particularly female lone parents) are more likely to be located within urban areas than other households.

Only around 50% of lone parents across England & Wales are employed, with the figure for Wales alone slightly lower at 46%. However, the number of Income Support recipients has fallen since 2001 (when the census data was collected), suggesting that this picture may now have improved. Notably, the proportion of women employed is much lower than men, reflecting trends in across the labour force. Where lone parents are employed, they tend to have be engaged in "less prestigious" occupations, with a lower proportion in managerial positions.

The data also indicated that a much lower proportion of lone parents in both England and Wales have qualifications at level 3 or above in comparison to all households. This is likely to be important in understanding the difference in employment outcomes between lone parents and all households.

In summary then, there is little evidence, based on the 2001 Census data, that Welsh lone parents have significantly different characteristics than those in England. The exceptions – particularly in terms of rural location, and (slightly) lower employment rates, appear to reflect more general differences between the two countries.

The differences that do exist, may however have implications for the likely effect of the current welfare reforms discussed in Chapter 2. To the extent that fewer Welsh lone parents are employed, the withdrawal of eligibility for Income Support may have a more widespread impact than in England. Further, the higher proportion of lone parents situated in rural areas may make it more difficult to those currently receiving Income Support to search for jobs, as will be required once the welfare reforms are in place.

4 Review of Literature

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Scope of the literature review

In this Chapter we summarise what the literature has to say on issues relating to the choices lone parents make about entering the labour force or about entering into education, and the factors that influence those decisions.

The review of literature is in six parts. First we summarise the literature on female labour force participation generally. Approximately 90% of lone parents in Wales are female and so this section gives some relevant context to the female labour force participation decision.¹⁷ The remaining parts of the review cover the literature relating to lone parents specifically as follows:

- attitudes towards work and learning;
- barriers to work;
- barriers to learning;
- · employment and learning outcomes; and
- evaluations of policy initiatives.

In recent years the Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned a number of pieces of research that consider issues relating to welfare to work reforms. We have taken those reviews as the starting point for our review of literature on barriers to work and supplemented them with other pieces of research where relevant. We have focussed on research since 2000, though sometimes refer to earlier work where this is particularly relevant.

In the remainder of this introductory section we discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the decision to participate in the labour force and draw some parallels for the decision to enter education.

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¹⁷ Whilst this material provides useful context, it is important to remember that not all females are lone parents and that not all lone parents are females.

4.1.2 The decision to enter the labour force

In this section we develop a simple model of the decision about whether to enter the labour force for a lone parent. ¹⁸

Models of the decision on whether or not to enter the labour force are based on the idea that a person weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of being in the labour force and compares them with the advantages and disadvantages of not being in the labour force. This can be modelled through utility maximisation subject to a budget constraint.

A parent's utility increases with leisure time and purchased goods and services. The parent's utility U is given by:

$$U = g(X, L) \tag{1}$$

where,

L denotes the amount of leisure time a parent chooses to spend, and

X the level of goods and service consumed.

The parent faces a budget constraint during each period of

$$w(T-L)+Z+S = X + dFC$$
 (2)

where,

w is the parent's wage rate in paid employment

T is the total amount of time available to the parent during the period,

Z is non-labour income,

S is welfare benefit payment,

p is the market price of time for childcare, and

FC is *fixed costs* of employment (e.g., travel-to-work costs, fixed elements in childcare costs, etc.).

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¹⁸ This is based on the model of the lone parent's employment decision developed in Ermisch (1991).

The parent maximizes utility by choosing X and L given budget constraints and comparing the maximum utility in employment with the maximum utility out of employment.

A lone parent needs to spend additional amounts on children, XC and to spend leisure time with children LC. The parent also needs to spend on childcare, unless other family members will care for the children whilst the lone parent is in work. The lone parent's utility function is the same as (1), but the budget constraint now becomes:

$$w(T-L-L_C)+Z+S = X_C + X + pM + dFC$$
 (3)

where,

p is the market price of time for childcare, and

M is the amount of time for childcare purchased on the market.

The lone parent maximizes utility by, choosing X, M and L given the budget constraints and comparing the maximum utility in employment with the maximum utility out of employment.

From this it can be seen that there are a number of factors that this model suggests may be important in a lone parent's decision to enter the labour market. They include the price of childcare and the amount of childcare time required (which will be influenced by working hours, including the full-time versus part-time employment decision); the amount of time the lone parent wishes to spend with their children, which will be influenced by a number of things including views on the quality of available childcare and the age of the child; wage levels; the availability and amount of welfare benefits; other expenditure on goods and services; and the need for other leisure time.

Other labour market models also incorporate directly the concept of the reservation wage, which is the wage rate at which the jobseeker is just indifferent between employment and unemployment. Aside from personal characteristics, (e.g. gender, skills etc) these models often suggest that previous wage rates in employment and also the level of benefits when not in employment are factors that determine the level of the reservation wage for each individual.

4.1.3 The decision to enter education

The decision to enter education has many parallels with the decision to enter the labour market. The underlying principles discussed above, relating to maximising the utility function subject to a budget constraint remain the same. The main difference is that the inter-temporal element of the model becomes more significant as the decision-maker needs to weigh the time spent in education now against the longer term wage and other advantages of additional training/education.

4.2 Female labour force participation

4.2.1 International trends in female employment

In recent decades a myriad of factors have brought about a significant increase in female labour force participation in most countries. Formal policy changes, as well as more general changes in attitudes and cultural norms, have facilitated this large shift in labour market participation. Burniaux et al (2003) have identified female labour force participation as the most important factor in explaining aggregate increases in participation rates. The authors have also noted that it is also the single most important factor in explaining cross-country variation of aggregate participation rates.

The experience of increased female labour force participation has occurred at different times for different countries. Considering women of prime working age (aged 25-54), Jaumotte (2003) finds female participation rates of close to or below 60 percent in Turkey, Korea, Mexico and many Southern European countries. The countries with the highest values, Nordic and some Eastern European countries, have recorded female labour force participation rates of well above 80 percent. Jaumotte also notes that over the last two decades, the largest increases have been recorded in lower income countries in Europe, as well as some Northern European countries.

Despite these advances, further research in OECD countries (summarised in Jaumotte 2003 and OECD 2004) indicates that levels of female labour force participation are below their desired levels. As part of an EU wide survey in 1998, women expressed a strong preference for being part of the labour force. Just one in ten women indicated they preferred the traditional male bread-winner model of household behaviour, however four in ten households were found to practice it.

4.2.2 National variations in female labour force participation

The level of female education, overall labour market conditions and cultural attitudes are the determinants of female labour force participation trationally indicated by research, as outlined by the OECD (2004). These factors contribute to overall participation but also to cross-country variation. As well as these traditional determinants, this research has also identified new determinants (policy determinants) of female participation, including; policies promoting the flexibility of working-time arrangements, the system of family taxation, and the supports offered to families by the State in the form of child benefits, child subsidies and paid parental leave.

In a survey of OECD countries, Jaumotte (2003) found that, to a large extent, it is a combination of these factors that leads participation rates to vary between 60 and 80 percent of prime-age women.

In more recent work, Steiber (2007) undertook a survey of the relevant literature on studies of female labour force participation and concluded that these studies, "suggest that female labour force participation tends to be higher, is less likely to be interrupted during child-rearing phases and is more likely to take the form of full-time employment in countries, which have developed a 'family friendly' policy framework and where we find a modernised gender culture." However, the author goes on to note that this is somewhat of a generalisation as it fails to explain the situation in certain labour markets in Europe (Portugal, Baltic States), where levels of female participation are high but where the system is relatively poor in terms of policy support.

Although anomalies to the general framework appear frequently in the literature, there is general agreement that for many countries the principal determinants female participation are as outlined by the OECD (2004) and Steiber (2007).

Of these general trends Steiber (2007) has found, female employment tends to be higher where part-time work is common. The availability, cost and quality of childcare are all important factors in determining female participation in a family or lone parent situation.¹⁹ The author also notes the apparent role played by education in female's decisions to participate in the labour market, employment levels are generally higher in countries with better educated women (see van Ham and Büchel, 2004). Furthermore, the more human capital women accumulate prior to motherhood, the faster they re-enter the labour market.

In a family setting, the higher occupational status of the man, has been found to decrease female activity. While the presence of young children has mixed effects on female labour supply (Steiber, 2007). The author notes that this may be for different reasons across countries. Marriage and motherhood were found to have significant impacts on women's decisions but these vary across countries. In many of the Mediterranean countries, marriage was found to have a greater effect on female's decisions to participate, reducing the potential impact of having small children. Elsewhere, policies such as parental leave and the availability of childcare were important while in other countries (Portugal and Baltic States) the participation rates were high and relatively unexplained by the general determinants.

In practice, observed patterns of female employment behaviour is likely to be the result of different factors in different countries. In an attempt to provide a characterisation of the environment for female participation, the OECD (2004) has classified countries into three groups. The basis for the grouping is the level of support to families, the share of part-time in female employment, and the relative taxation of second earners (although this in included with slightly lesser weight). For countries with the highest rates of prime-age female participation (close to or greater than 80%), mainland Nordic countries and France, these were characterised

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¹⁹ Both employment opportunities and the availability of childcare are discussed in the subsequent sub-sections and are not expanded here.

by high childcare subsidies, low part-time share of female employment and favourable taxation regime in relation to spousal income.

The second group of countries were found to have low childcare subsidies and a high proportion of part-time female employment. These countries, most of Northern Europe and the Pacific, were found to have participation rates of between 65 percent and 80 percent. There was not found to be a consistent approach to the tax treatment of second earnings between the countries in this group. Finally, the last groups were characterised by low childcare subsidies and a low proportion of part-time female employment. The income levels of these countries differed considerably as did the tax treatment of second earners but these combined to give different participation rates between the countries in this grouping. North America and Portugal were found to have rates of close to 80 percent, while Spain, Mexico and Korea were found to have rates of 60 percent or below.

The presence of national variation and attempts to understand these through an assessment of different variables has been found to be problematic (Daly, 2000 and Crompton and Lyonette, 2006). At a very fundamental level, Daly (2000) criticises the use of participation rates, per se, and considers these to be a relatively poor guide to female labour market activity. Also the author contends that conventional human capital is not a good measure of female labour force participation. More generally Crompton and Lyonette (2006) conclude that, "[W]hile we would certainly not wish to dismiss variable-orientated comparisons of women's employment out of hand, the very complexity of gender means that adequate explanations of particular phenomena will, inevitably, need to have recourse to case-orientated comparative work."

4.2.3 The Role of Childcare Availability

The availability, affordability, flexibility and overall quality of childcare have all been found effect women's decisions to participate in the labour market. In relation to the availability of childcare, there is an important distinction to be made between the formal and informal provision of childcare in the respective countries. Ray et al (2007) note that informal childcare, (childcare provided by extended family and friends) is more prevalent in the UK than in other countries and as a result, issues relating to the availability of formal childcare (crèche, pre-school and after-school clubs), is relatively less important in the UK. Similarly the affordability of formal childcare is also relatively less important.

For the majority of other countries where formal childcare provision is prevalent, availability is found to be a determinant in female participation. Of course, the availability of childcare is only an important determinant for women with children, and more precisely for those women with children who are seeking to participate in the labour market (van Ham & Büchel, 2004).

In a review of the relevant literature, Steiber (2007) concludes that the availability of childcare plays a crucial role in women's decisions in relation to work. This is based

on the results of a number of studies that exploit regional variation in the supply of formal childcare. Also important to women in their decision was the quality and flexibility of the childcare offered. It is indicated that such flexibility may be purchased in the private market but this is likely to be at a premium. Interestingly, it is noted by the author that there is a current debate relating to the importance of the cost of childcare and whether this matters to a woman's decision to participate in the labour market. It is suggested by research in this area that the availability of formal childcare is more important than the price of the childcare, especially where slots are strongly rationed.

In research on West Germany undertaken by van Ham and Büchel, the authors found that the probability of being in paid employment increased with increasing numbers of childcare slots. They also found that although mothers with young children did not state they do not want to work more often than other women, they were less successful in finding suitable paid employment. The study also found that age did not have a significant effect on the probability of being employed but that the presence of children under 7 strongly decreased the probability of a woman's employment. Similar to previous findings the probability of a woman being employed increased with years of education.

More generally, OECD research (2004) indicates that certain policies in relation to childcare are more successful than others in stimulating female participation. Childcare subsidies have been found to boost female participation. Additionally, more generous the childcare subsidies (and paid parental leave) translates into higher full-time participation in women, and not higher part-time. In relation to facilitating and increasing female participation, childcare subsidies appear to be preferable to child benefits. The reasons for this are relatively straight-forward, childcare subsidies are targeted supports whereas child benefits are effectively transfers for the maintenance of children that have the effect of increasing household income. Furthermore, OECD research has found child benefits have been found to be potentially detrimental to part-time female participation rates.

4.2.4 Availability of Employment Opportunities

Within the literature on female labour force participation, the availability of employment opportunities is often cited as a central determinant for women in their decision to participate. As part of research into female participation in West Germany, van Ham and Büchel (2004) consider the issue as a spatial model of participation with a discouraged worker effect.

The discouraged worked hypothesis is that, people with poor labour market expectations become discouraged in their job search and leave or fail to enter the labour force because the probability of finding a suitable job after a certain period is too low. Also, poor access to employment opportunities may lead people to become discouraged in their search for jobs. The results of their research found that the probability of being in the active labour force decreased with increases in the regional rate of employment. The probability of being employed decreased with

increased travelling time to the nearest central employment agglomeration. Women were found to be less tolerant of commuting times.

Furthermore, the authors found that mothers with very young children often wanted to work but could not because it was difficult to combine caring for a young child with a paid job. This finding introduces a further dimension in relation to employment often cited in the literature, the work-family balance and the availability of part-time work. As previously noted, Steiber (2007) found evidence of studies indicating a positive relationship between female participation and the availability of part-time employment opportunities. Part-time employment is thought to provide females with children the opportunity to return to work while remaining available to care for their children and perform household tasks.

However, a number of reports (Jaumotte, 2003; OECD, 2004 & Steiber, 2007) have highlighted potential issues in relation to policy that attempts to promote part-time work with a view to increasing female participation. Some of the criticisms also relate to the part-time sectors in respective countries. An issue raised by Jaumotte and repeated in the OECD report is the risk that part-time work may marginalise women in the labour market. This is the case in countries where the part-time sector is characterised by poor wages and benefits, asocial or excessively flexible hours, low job tenure, absence of training, or few prospects of promotion may marginalise women in the labour market. Furthermore certain sectors, typically services, may look to expand the part-time share of employment to avoid restrictive employment protection legislation which usually does not extent to part-time work (OECD, 2004).

Overall, OECD research indicates that countries with a higher share of part-time in female employment tend to have higher female participation, after controlling for other factors (OECD, 2004). However, it is somewhat unclear from the literature whether there is a causal link between these two characteristics of domestic labour markets and will in all cases depend on women's preference to undertake part-time work. In summation of the relevant literature Steiber (2007) concludes, "to date, little is known about how part-time opportunities (or other forms of non-standard employment) affect women's employment decisions with comparative work at the individual level completely lacking."

Daly (2000) offers a more general criticism of studies attempting to understand the determinants of female labour market participation. Firstly, the author considers participation rates, per se, to be relatively poor guides to the extent of women's involvement in and the nature of their relationship with the labour market. On the demand side, there is an important distinction to be made between women in full and part-time work as one third of all women are in part-time employment, compared to just 5 percent of men. One should also be wary in drawing conclusions based on the number of part-time jobs in the economy as there is no automatic or necessary relationship between the volume of part-time employment and the female employment ratio.

On the supply side, Daly contends that conventional human capital factors are not predictive of women's labour force participation in the same way they are of men. Of central importance to women's decisions to enter the labour force are social and economic policies, especially those relating to the family. In general, the greater the choice offered to women through policy, the greater the level of female participation. Relatively little choice equates to maternal employment that is heavily dependent on the availability of part-time work. However, choice is not enough to ensure women are no longer largely dependence on part-time work, the structure of the service sector, wage rates, wage differentials and non-wage costs, as well as taxation of spousal income are all considered important factors in relation to women's involvement in the labour market.

4.2.5 Female Labour Participation in the UK

In the UK, the proportion of women who are economically active has increased steadily since the 1950s. Research by the European Commission showed that, in 1997, the activity rate for women in the UK was 53.2%, surpassing the EU average of 45.6% and placing the UK among the countries with the highest women's activity levels in the European Union (Commission of the European Communities (1997)). By 2005, 70% of working age women in the UK were in paid work (see Labour Force Survey (2005)). However, almost all of this increase can be accounted for by an increase in part-time work.

Research by the OECD (2004) indicates that of the women (aged 25-54) in employment, the share in part-time jobs is significantly greater than the average of all OECD countries. On average one quarter were found to be in part-time employment, compared to almost 40 percent in the UK. However, the research also indicates that in the two decades prior to 2001, the proportion of women in part-time employment in the UK has fallen.

Focussing on the change in female labour market participation in the UK over the period 1984 to 2002, Domènech & Bell (2004) econometrically estimate the extent to which the observed change was due to evolving characteristics or changes in behaviour. Over this period female participation of those aged between 16 and 59 rose from 62% to 73%. The opposite trend was observed for men.

Analysing the data the authors observed that 80 percent of the increase in female participation that occurred over the period occurred in the years 1984 to 1994. During this period changes in behaviour contributed significantly to the participation growth, whereas changes in characteristics were found to have driven growth in the 1990s. Of the characteristics found to be statistically significant, education was found to have a positive effect on participation. Married women were found to have lower levels of participation, as were those with dependent children. Interestingly, in light of the previous two findings, women aged between 30 and 39, ceteris paribus, were found to be more likely to participate in the labour market. Partner's income, proxied by partners education/highest qualification, was found to reduce the likelihood of female participation. Finally, the models indicated that for

women, especially mothers, family and taxation policy were important factors in female's participation.

4.3 Lone parents' attitudes towards work and learning

4.3.1 Evidence for the importance of attitudes

Studying attitudes is important in understanding lone parents' decision making process upon employment and education. Asking attitudinal questions about lone parents' attitudes towards work and learning, prior to asking them about their incentives to work and factors affecting the decision to work and learn, could provide a context for researcher to consider such factors and provide parents lacking incentives to work and to learn with an opportunity to express their views on parental care and childcare.

The Families and Children Survey (FACS) asked a series of attitudinal questions of parents (both lone parents and those living in couple families). Findings from the 2001 survey showed that lone mothers who worked fewer than 16 hours per week, or did not work at all, were more likely to hold 'traditional' views on the role of women in the family and the workplace than lone mothers who worked 16 or more hours a week (Kasparova et al, 2003). In particular, the former group is more likely to hold the view that motherhood is a 'full-time job' in its own right than the latter group.

Qualitative evidence indicates the importance of attitudes, values and norms in shaping lone parents' decisions about whether to work or not. For instance, studies by Bell et al. (2005), Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) and Duncan and Edwards (1999) have all indicated that attitudes play a key role in decisions about work. In particular, Duncan and Edwards (1999) argue that decisions about whether to undertake paid work are primarily driven by what lone mothers think is best and 'morally correct' for them as well as for their children. For these authors, economic barriers are secondary: the decision to work is primarily seen as being a moral/ethical one which is shaped by institutions (such as the media and the family) and structures (such as neighbourhoods).

4.3.2 Analytical Frameworks for Lone Parents' Attitudes

Within the literature two distinct approaches to analysing the attitudes of lone parents to work and parental childcare have been identified. The first is based on the interaction between work and childcare orientation of lone parents. This framework provides a typology of orientations and is based on the work of Bell et al (2005). The second approach is based on the theory of planned behaviour, a topic developed by social psychologists in the 1980s that grew out of the theory of reasoned action. This framework assumes that people act in an economically rational way and therefore act based on their perceived payoff from a course of action vis-à-vis the alternatives.

LE Wales

Work/Parental Care Orientation Typology

In considering the issues of balancing work and childcare for lone parents, Bell et al (2005) identified four generic types of lone parent based general attitudes towards work and childcare. Within the research, lone parents were considered to possess either high or low orientations towards both work and childcare. Using these characteristics the authors developed the following typology of lone parents' work/parental care orientations.

Type 1 High work Type 2 High work Type 3 Low work Type 4 Low work and low and high parental and low parental and high parental parental care orientation care orientation care orientation care orientation Aspire to work More likely to View motherhood Not motivated to work use non-parental as a fulltime job in and stay at home to look after children. Want to provide a childcare in order its own right to be able to great deal to childcare work Some would work It is not clear the decision (for financial or to stay at home is related social reasons) if it to a desire to provide fulldoes not impinge time parental childcare on their desire to care for children Source: Bell et al. (2005)

Figure 15: Work/Parental Care Orientation Typology

Within this research, the Type 1 lone parent was seen to stand out from the remaining types. This 'type' of lone parent was thought to face a considerable level of tension in attempting to reconcile their high work and high parental care orientations.

The authors offer a myriad of different reasons as to why the orientations of lone parents differ. Past and current circumstances such as the parent's own upbringing, their educational background, their work history, as well as the characteristics, personality and age of their children, may all affect the parents' orientations. The event of becoming a parent and/or becoming a lone parent is also identified as a potential determining factor in what 'type' of lone parent one could be classified as. The parents' attitude to formal childcare will also be important.

As advanced in Bell et al (2005), the classification of lone parents into these 'types' is important from a policy perspective. In addition, the authors also stress that the orientations of parents towards both work and childcare are not static, they are dynamic and may change over time due to changes in personal circumstances or simply as the child (children) grow older.

LE Wales

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Frameworks that focus on theoretical models of peoples cognitions and behaviour, wherein these people are assumed to be economically rational, describe an area of social psychology referred to as the theory of planned behaviour. Applying this approach to try and predict the work behaviour of lone parents, Houston and Marks have (2000; 2002; 2003; 2006) have used qualitative and quantitative data to further the understanding of the behaviour and barriers faced by lone parents in relation to work.

Using cross sectional data on women's attitudes, their perception of how those important to them view them, their beliefs in relation to work and childcare, Houston and Marks have demonstrated that a woman's intention to work can be predicted. Furthering this work, the authors have also found these intentions to be strong predictors of actual work behaviour in longitudinal studies. Houston and Marks (2003) found that the birth of a first child did little to alter a women's ability to return to work in line with their preferences. However, of the women that expressed a preference to return to work, 24 percent either did not do so or returned to work less than they had previously intended to.

For lone parents, the research indicated that the perceived and actual barriers to returning to work from maternity leave are more complex and varied. Interestingly, the research indicated that the role of partners and family were not causal factors on determining whether women acted in accordance with their intentions to return to work. Instead the amount of planning and the support offered by their workplace were found to be important causal factors.

Houston and Marks (2005) highlights the dynamic nature of parents' behaviour and the strong beliefs typically held by woman who give up paid work upon the birth of their children. Of those who chose to give up paid work to care for their child, the authors found these women to have a strong belief that this was the 'right' thing to do and was best for their child. Qualitative data indicated that morality, and occasionally sacrifice, played a strong role in women's decision making. Considering the dynamics of women's decisions to work, the authors found that approximately 20 percent of first time mothers in the UK made an active decision not to return to work. In situations where a second child is born and the first child is 3 years old, this figure was found to increase to approximately 35 percent. The authors also note that around half of women with preschool children in the UK do not work.

Considering the attitudes of lone parents to work and childcare, Hoggart et al (2006) have shown that social and cultural factors, and the perception of what characteristics determine a 'good mother', produce different orientations towards work and childcare. These were found to potentially differ based on class, ethnicity and locality. Also, substantial differences were found among lone parents and their orientation to both work and childcare.

4.4 Specific barriers to work for lone parents

4.4.1 General Picture

The list of potential barriers is vast and vary in importance according to an individual's circumstances, be that related to age, duration of unemployment, personal constraints or family responsibilities. Millar and Ridge (2001) summarise Gardiner (1997), who produced a list of potential barriers, grouped according to what stage an individual is along the process of gaining employment. The authors list four stages: being economically inactive, desiring to have a job, searching for a job, and securing employment.

The list, shown in Figure 16, covers individuals' skills (educational qualifications, work experience), attitude (values, motivation) and requirements to enable them to work (childcare, transport); labour demand (lack of suitable jobs, employer prejudice); the welfare system (benefits, employment services); information failures (job opportunities, benefits rules); and uncertainty (income, job satisfaction).

Millar (2000) explored the relative importance of barriers to different groups of individuals in the context of the New Deal and found that the most influential factors for lone parents were childcare and money issues. However, individuals may fall into several groups, experiencing several concurrent sets of barriers. In contrast to lone parents, for example, the long-term unemployed were more hindered by a mismatch of their (possibly, outdated) skills with labour demand and lack of transport, whilst disabled people found their special needs and employer attitudes the most inhibitive.

There is a high prevalence of low or no hours of employment among lone parents. Data for 2007 from the on-going UK's Family and Children Survey shows that 41% of lone parents did not work at all, compared with one or both partners being workless in about 30% of couples with children (Philo et al, 2009). However, in both instances, around 55% of families had all adults working at least 16 hours per week, with the difference primarily stemming from partnered mothers taking part-time work (1-15 hours per week). A very small proportion (4%) of lone parents worked 1-15 hours per week.

Millar and Ridge (2001) report that even as far back as ten years ago, research (Finlayson et al., 1999) showed that lone parents tended to either be in at least part-time employment (40% at least working 16 hours a week, 20% in part-time jobs) or intending to seek work in the near future (20%). Only 10% of lone parents felt they would never look for work, and these tended to be older, with less work experience and were more likely to have health problems, which was also a finding of Hales et al (2000), and which reinforces the finding of different barriers for different types of people even within lone parents.

Figure 16: Potential barriers to securing employment

Economically inactive							
Individual		Benefits system and employment services					
1	Lack of educational qualification	1	Benefits levels are too high				
2	Lack of work experience	2	Benefits levels are too low				
3	Lack of basic skills	3	Difficulties and delays in payment of benefits				
4	Lack of practical skills /access to facilities	4	Disincentives for couples				
5	Long term sickness/disabilities	5	Disincentives to work while on benefits				
6	Caring responsibilities	6	Treatment of housing costs				
7	High living costs	7	Loss of passported benefits				
		8	Lack of suitable training				
		9	Lack of assistance with job search				
		10	Lack of flexibility and responsiveness of the system to people's needs				
Desire for a job Individual attachment to the labour market Lack of information							
1	Culture/social values that restricts job search	1	Job opportunities				
2	Lack of flexibility about work one would consider	2	Benefits				
3	Lack of motivation	3	Take-home pay				
4	Unrealistic wages	4	Training another [sic] employment services				
5	Insufficient job search	5	Rule concerning working while on benefits				
Job search							
Job	Job market and employers		Uncertainty				
1	Lack of jobs at national or local level	1	Net income in work				
2	Lack of suitable kinds of work	2	Managing financially during transition				
3	Lack of jobs with adequate wages	3	New job				
4	Prejudice of employers	4	Need to reclaim benefit				
5	Employment conditions						
Securing employment							
1	Childcare						
2	Travel, clothing and tools						

Source: Millar and Ridge (2001), based on Gardiner (1997)

A variety of research has arrived at similar conclusions on the relative importance of factors affecting lone parent employment. There have been two main approaches used to reach these. One identifies the socio-economic characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of being employed, by comparing lone parents according to whether they are employed or not (using either as a cross-section snapshot or following individuals across time). The other uses the perceptions of lone parents about the problems they face in moving into work (either prospectively or retrospectively, depending on employment status).

Likelihood of lone parent employment

Lone parents are less likely to be employed if they have young children (particularly pre-school age) and several children (three or more) (Bradshaw & Millar, 1991; Holterman et al, 1999).

They are more likely to be employed if they face a favourable transition into employment. Miller and Ridge (2001) report the collected findings of several studies that employment is more likely is for lone parents with higher predictive wage rates, higher educational qualifications, owner-occupier status, available childcare and higher housing benefit entitlement. Formerly married lone parents were also found to be more likely to be employed than (always-)single lone parents.

One particular set of studies (Programme of Research Into Low Income Families; PRILIF), which follows people over a period of time, showed employment, for lone parents, "to be associated with receipt of maintenance, relative lack of hardship out of work, access to in-work benefits, and attitudes to work and family responsibilities" (Millar & Ridge, 2001).

The authors quote (Holterman et al, 1999) as a good summary of the PRFIL studies' conclusions:

"Combinations of seven key variables - housing tenure, prior marital status, experience of benefits, education and training, family composition, receipt of maintenance payments and family health - can together statistically explain large fractions of the variance in lone parents' chances of getting and keeping paid work. Typically, poorly educated and occupationally inexperienced lone parents, who are social tenants, who have young children and who cope with persistent ill-health will participate little in the labour market. In contrast, well-educated lone parents who are owner-occupiers and who have older children, participate a great deal in paid work..."

Reasons for not seeking work

The reasons that lone parents (employed and not) give for not seeking employment are quite similar to those identified in the socio-economic characteristic studies, according to Millar and Ridge (2001). Their summary is based on three surveys: one specifically on lone parents (Bradshaw & Millar, 1991), one as part of an evaluation

of the New Deal for Lone Parents (Hales et al., 2002) and one a Survey of Low-Income Families (Marsh et al., 2001).

Factors related to their children are the most commonly cited reasons, but other reasons were given by similar proportions. Child-related reasons were some combination of an unwillingness to leave children in others care and unavailability of appropriate childcare. The other important reasons were a lack of skills or uncertainty about the financial net benefits of taking employment. Other concerns related to self-confidence, prospective employers' attitudes and the lack of job opportunities. About half of lone parents expecting never to work cited (their own or somebody else's) ill-health as a reason (Hales et al, 2000; Marsh et al, 2001), and this again shows the importance of overlapping characteristics, since this would not be a factor particular to lone parents, but may be more prevalent amongst lone parents.

In-depth interviews of lone parents have been used, as well as surveys, to discover the reasons for working or not. Whilst the findings have been broadly the same, the interviews allow for more nuanced explanations, which are more revealing. Millar and Ridge (2001) cite three particular studies of lone mothers (Finch et al, 1999; Lewis et al, 2000; Dawson et al, 2000), listing for each the reasons given in favour of work and those given as barriers to work. There is a high level of agreement between the three studies in these respects.

Work was found to be desirable for its financial reward, but also for social and personal reasons related to self-esteem (independence and confidence), setting an example for their children and interaction with other people.

Barriers to work most commonly revolved around childcare, as in previously mentioned studies, with the parent either being unwilling or unable (due to cost). Other barriers commonly reported were lack of skills (qualifications and experience), issues of low self-confidence, unavailability of suitable job opportunities (quality and flexibility) and unfavourable or uncertain financial implications compared to not working. There were some other reasons reported by the studies which do not relate specifically to being a lone parent, though some may be symptomatic of being a lone parent. These were the personal preferences and moods of the individuals with regard to work, health problems, ethnicity, homelessness, harassment and debt.

4.4.2 Childcare

Issues related to childcare are frequently found to be the most commonly cited barrier to work, with problems arising both from an unwillingness and an inability to utilise childcare services (Lessof et al, 2001; Dawson et al, 2000).

Bell et al (2005) note that lone parents' attitude to work primarily stems from their relative attitudes to work and to parental childcare. Disposition to work appears to be the overriding factor in most cases, though a high disposition to work and

parental childcare can cause internal tensions and sometimes requires compromises to be practicable.

Primarily, unwillingness stems from lone parents wishing to look after their children themselves and inability stems from a lack of affordable childcare. These were reported to be the reasons by about half of the almost 34,000 respondents to a postal survey conducted by Lessof et al (2001). Dawson et all (2000) note that these problems tended to be exacerbated for the parents of children who required round-the-clock supervision because of health issues, which, as alluded to above, can be a reason for relationship breakup as well.

There is interplay between childcare and other factors, such as the flexibility of employment and adequacy of transport to make use of the available childcare at convenient times and affordable prices.

4.4.3 Financial transition

There are a series of financial considerations for a lone parent deciding between working and not working. Income in work is not certain, and must cover the additional costs of childcare and transport before being considered against benefit payments received through the welfare system.

If a lone parent has large outgoings, the risk and uncertainty in employment may present considerable barriers to seeking it.

Ray et al (2007) report the trial of extra income of £40 per week (In Work Credit) to provide an incentive for the transition. This was found to work for some participants, but was not enough to overcome barriers to work in general (Corden and Nice, 2006) and the system meant transfers were made to those who would take a job even without the payment.

The incentive effectively increases income for any given job, meaning that jobs with lower wages potentially become attractive. One criticism is that there is also potential to reduce the incentive to take higher paid work as lower tax credit will reduce the effect of higher earnings (Brewer, 2001; Adam et al, 2006).

Gregg and Harkness (2003) found that the impact of reforms introduced in the UK since 1997 increased the proportion of lone parents working at least 16 hours a week by seven percentage points between 1998 and 2002, from 46%. They did not identify any substitution effect (from work to leisure) in those already employed or that the extra employment taken was at lower wage rates.

This finding contrasts with evidence on the impact of similar initiatives in North America, where lower-paid jobs were taken in America (Earned Income Tax Credit; see Gregg & Harkness, 2003) and Canada (Self Sufficiency Project; see Foley & Schwartz, 2003).

The longevity of the effectiveness of such schemes are also questionable: Ray et al report that the impact of the Self Sufficiency Project on individuals peaked after 15 months (diminishing rapidly thereafter) and achieving little long-term effect on employment participation (Card and Hyslop; 2005).

The net effect on entitlement to benefits of taking work is a concern that can work as a barrier to employment. The issues here are losing entitlement to benefits received when not working and not being aware of the entitlements that are gained or can be retained when taking employment. Housing Benefit in particular is highlighted by Ridge and Millar (2001). More recently the DWP has sought to address this issue by providing more advice to jobseekers on their benefits position after they have entered employment (including 'lone parent work focussed interviews' and the 'better off' calculation) and by providing some in work support.

The demographic characteristics of claimant groups may influence the pattern of barriers that most concerns them. Evans et al (2003) point out that changes to welfare system entitlements and changes over time can affect these. The authors cite studies by Lessof et al (2001) and Pettigrew et al (2001) as showing that amongst lone parents, new claimants of Income Support differed from existing claimants in the barriers to work that concerned them. New claimants were more likely to be able and willing to go to work, but feel they were inhibited by having young children and associated concerns about childcare arrangements. Existing claimants were more likely to perceive a variety of barriers, with a lack of skills and self-confidence being more pronounced, whilst also being more likely to be individuals suffering from health problems or disabilities.

4.4.4 Psychological barriers

Extended periods away from work and financial hardship even whilst on benefits can all contribute to low morale, confidence and self-esteem, which then becomes a barrier to work (Marsh et al, 2001). Millar and Ridge (2001) report that in-depth interviews revealed psychological barriers more so than survey data did.

The link between hardship and low morale has been found in several studies, with Finlayson et al (2000) estimating that the likelihood of lone parents suffering from low morale was four times as much amongst those in severe hardship as others.

Evan et al (2003) cite several studies, which describe how contemplating work is hard to do whilst living on a low-income, as everyday life can be "very difficult, very time-consuming and can create anxiety and stress". The reasons given in in-depth interviews with lone parents reveal goals that would alleviate the difficulties of non-employment: financial gains, social interaction, independence, self-confidence.

Causality in the relationship between hardship and morale is not clear. Millar and Ridge (2001) note that less hardship and better morale may make it easier to move into work quickly, but that low morale may make it difficult to get work, which then leads to or reinforces financial hardship.

Issues of self-esteem may arise from the reasons for the relationship break-up: Marsh et al (2001) found, in interviews of lone parents in 1999, that about a third had reported experiencing physical violence in the last year of their relationship.

Financial hardship was found to be common among lone parents who were not employed, with about two-thirds having debts and half having deductions from their benefits to repay loans from the UK Social Fund, which provides emergency lending to ease budgeting problems (Marsh et al, 2001).

4.4.5 Supply of suitable employment

There is a lack of suitable employment for lone parents, with regard to jobs that provided the combination of flexible hours, a feasible location and sufficiently high income to make it financially preferable. Dawson et al (2000) report that most lone parents found this lack of supply problematic and that this led to "fierce" competition for such jobs.

In contrast to partnered parents, lone parents (who are predominantly female) are particularly unlikely to take work of between one and 15 hours per week ("minijobs"). The gap in (paid) employment rates was 15 percentage points in 2005/6 and half of this was accounted for by differences in employment rates for mothers in couple families working such "mini-jobs" (Hales et al, 2008). The authors cite lacovou and Berthoud (2000) as suggesting that mini-jobs might serve as stepping-stones to full-time work further down the line.

Hales et al (2008) recommend that participation in mini jobs should be encouraged by targeting those who live in social rented accommodation. They found that differences in residential tenure status appeared to explain most of the difference in employment status between lone parent mothers and mothers in couple families. Employment was strongly associated with owner-occupier status, regardless of whether the mother was partnered (79%) or not (91%). In contrast social renters were much less likely to be employed, again regardless of partnered status (40% of mothers in couples and 38% of lone parents). The aggregate difference in employment rates between the two groups arose from the difference in relative likelihood of being social renters (44% of lone parents versus 12% of couple families).

4.4.6 Geography and transport

Minimising the time required for travelling between childcare and work presents a further constraint in finding employment. Dawson et al (2000) report that the majority of lone parents do not have their own car, so rely on public transport, as do those who live in urban areas, where driving is impractical. Navigating between locations (using public or private transport) tends to be more difficult in rural areas, where transports networks are sparser. However, reasons such as family support and reluctance to further disrupt their child's life can prevent lone parents moving to cities for work opportunities.

Hales et al (2000) found that lone parents working at least 16 hours a week were more likely to have a driving licence (62%) and access to a car (85% of licence-holders) than those on Income Support (44% and 72% respectively), but both groups reported good public transport with similar frequency (68% and 70%).

4.4.7 Health concerns

In a piece of research focused on the role of health in lone parent employment, Casebourne and Britton (2004) found that poor health was not a sufficient reason not to work for most lone parents in their sample, but it complicated matters on top of other constraints common to lone parents without health problems, such as childcare and sustaining employment (which was reported in some cases to exacerbate and in others to improve existing health problems).

Nevertheless, Clarke and McKay (2008) found that disability in the parent or (to a lesser extent) the child was associated with a lower rate of employment. Further, they note that "fluctuating or unpredictable impairments may place families at particular economic risk", in such ways as maintaining employment.

4.4.8 Summary

The literature suggests that lone parents may face multiple barriers when they are seeking to work. Many barriers interact with each other, and the relative importance will vary according to the personal circumstances and attitudes of the lone parent themselves.

Childcare issues are clearly the biggest concern, but, illustrating the complexity faced with all the barriers, the problem may be financial (too expensive), logistical (too far away) or personal (the parent may be uncomfortable with the idea of someone else looking after their child).

The availability of flexible and appropriate employment (paying enough to cover additional costs such as childcare); the proximity of home, work, school and childcare; the ease of and risk involved in financial transition; psychological concerns; and complicating health factors can each be a barrier alone, but are more likely to combine with the others to form an impasse.

The model of the decision to enter the labour market that was developed at the start of this chapter directly addresses some of the key issues such as the decisions about leisure time to spend with children, the cost of childcare and the net financial benefits of working, though it does not address directly important issues such as willingness to work, self-confidence and the availability of suitable employment opportunities.

4.5 Specific barriers to learning for lone parents

4.5.1 General picture

The types of barriers faced by lone parents in taking (further and higher) educational courses are broadly the same as those faced in taking employment, but their relative influence differs.

Research into barriers to education has not historically been as common as research into barriers to employment. However, recent changes in demographics and policy emphasis have been accompanied by some research into the subject.

The Scottish Executive commissioned a study (St Clair et al, 2005) into the recruitment and retention of lone parents into Further Education (FE), conducted by a combination of a literature review, a survey sent to all Scottish FE colleges and case studies on three colleges. Although focused on Scotland, the research highlights universal issues that would equally affect lone parents in Wales.

St Clair et al's (2005) list of barriers and the possibility of inter-linking between barriers illustrate the high level of overlap between barriers to employment and barriers to education. They list "attitudinal barriers; physical and material barriers, such as finance and time; and structural barriers concerning the way in which education and training is delivered". As with employment, the main issues were found to revolve around childcare and finance.

However, they also mention that the barriers for any individual comprise a complex mix on interacting factors, of which being a lone parent may not be the salient one. For example, they cite the finding that "lone parents with no educational qualifications are far more likely to identify themselves as uninterested in future study than those who had educational qualifications" (One Parent Families Scotland,2003). The important point here is that those uninterested have little education, not that they are lone parents.

A recurring problem appears to be a lack of awareness of the support that is available, in terms of finance and childcare, as well as the potential benefits of taking education on future income. St Clair et al (2005) report that individuals from lower social classes tend to be less aware compared with the rest of the population regarding these issues (Callender, 1999).

Hinton-Smith (2008) interviewed 20 lone parents who were currently or recently engaged in a broad range of types of education or training in order to discuss barriers to education, finding that the main three barriers related to childcare, finances and time constraints. Other barriers mentioned were health related issues, lack of entry qualifications, lack of course information and transport/mobility problems.

The National Audit Office (Hands et al, 2007) recently reviewed the factors that affect the retention of students in higher education in England. Unfortunately, family structure or lone parent status were not amongst the factors that were reviewed in the research. A number of factors were found to affect retention rates including previous qualifications, degree subject, institution type and full-time/part-time status. All other things being equal, retention rates were lower for part-time students but higher for women overall.

4.5.2 Childcare

The requirement for (formal or informal) childcare is a defining problem for lone parents, in that responsibilities cannot be shared with a partner to allow for other pursuits. This acts as a barrier to any activity in which the child may not participate, so applies equally to education as it does to employment. Again, the problems revolve around availability and cost.

In order to contribute to overcoming these concerns, a Lone Parent Childcare Grant (LPCG) was introduced in Scotland for the academic year 2001/02. LPCG provided a £1,000 grant per annum towards the cost of registered childcare for lone parents in full-time higher education. At the same time, more funds were made available to higher education institutions and local authorities in Scotland in order to fund childcare provision. Nearly 1600 lone parents claimed the grant in its first year. The first year performance of the grant was assessed by Ballantyne et al (2003), based on a survey to which around 1100 lone parents in education responded and on further focus groups.

LPCG was welcomed by the majority of respondents, though some problems were reported. The fixed nature of the grant made it difficult for those parents with several children and those with younger children; some lone parents in HE felt that they were still disadvantaged relative to lone parents in FE because the latter still had access to more social security benefits and also were more likely to receive free childcare provision.

Concerns were also raised in respect of the availability of childcare provision. Those in rural areas reported a lack of provision of formal childcare in these areas; and those with children of secondary school age noted the limited availability of formal after school care for children of this age.

St Clair et al (2005) note that lone parents may miss (parts of) classes due to needing to take their children to or from school, or may not be able to set aside time to do their own homework because of the demands of looking after children in the evening.

Hinton-Smith (2008) reported nearly three quarters of respondents (from a sample of 20) not wanting to place children into formal care.

4.5.3 Financial support

Taking education can involve financial outlay, both directly, for course fees and materials, and indirectly, to pay for childcare, for instance. Hinton-Smith (2008) lists childcare, course fees, travel costs, course equipment, college lunches, and lack of home PC, phone or an internet connection.

Thus, the first barrier presented by financial factors is the affordability of taking a course. If individuals cannot find the resources to pay for all the associated costs, or judge the financial risk to be too heavy, then they will not be willing and able to undertake study.

St Clair et al (2005) note some examples from their case studies of students worried about and struggling with existing debts, which would be further complicated by course costs. They also note that there may be difficulties in maintaining the same standard of living when returning to education, particularly if the lone parent has previously been working, and that this can put people off taking courses. The worry and risk involved concerns not only the immediate changes in participating in education, but future prospects in terms of employment and income, following completion of the educational course.

The authors note that the benefits system may not be well suited to assisting individuals in the transition back into education, as is the case particularly for advanced education in Scotland. Students enrolling in advanced (higher) education will tend to lose entitlement to a range of benefits (particularly income support and housing support) that they would otherwise receive, even if they enrolled in non-advanced (further) education. However, such decisions appear to be made on a local basis, which generates inconsistency and further confusion. St Clair et al (2005) found that the system appeared to work best when colleges and social services had a good working relationship, which allowed for better tailored solutions.

Public funding support may be available to lone parents (for a variety of reasons), which may allow them to overcome the financial hurdle. Consideration should be given to whether the support is dependent upon the level of education being taken. In Scotland, higher education students will get whatever funding support to which they are entitled (subject to a national limit on the number of funded places available paid for by the funding council), whereas further education students may be entitled to more, but the amount they receive is discretionary (subject to the financial means of the college at which they attend).

However, the financial barrier may remain an obstacle if lone parents were not aware of their eligibility for such financial support, which appears to be a considerable problem in Scotland (St Clair et al, 2005, cite several pieces of research by the Scottish Funding Councils). The different sources of support can be confusing, and may present obstacles if not tailored to suit lone parents. For instance, bursaries available from FE colleges may be conditional upon attendance, but this could result in lone parents being financially penalised if they have to take time off to look after

their sick child. A bursary under more lenient or flexible attendance conditions could address this potential barrier, and was indeed used by some colleges (St Clair et al, 2005).

4.5.4 Managing demands on time

Even with financial support, it is not always possible or easy to set aside time to dedicate to studying. Lone parents are likely to face strong pressures on their time, due to the dual needs of looking after children and securing an income being concentrated on one person.

If foreseen, this may prevent lone parents from enrolling in courses. If not, this may cause lone parents to drop out after enrolling, which would leave them worse off than not starting at all.

Flexible courses and appropriate timetabling can help lone parents cope with the obstacles of time pressure (Hinton-Smith, 2008). For example, time management can be eased considerably and a large portion of childcare can be circumvented by scheduling classes within a children's school day, including an allowance for dropping off and collecting.

St Clair et al (2005) and Hinton-Smith (2008) both found that lone parents place value on having approachable teaching staff, who are aware and understanding of the additional pressures faced by lone parents. For example, negotiating more lenient assessment deadlines can be a boon if parents face a significant time demand, such as a sick child.

Self-study can be problematic, in that a balance must be struck between the demands of keeping a home and setting aside time (and space) to concentrate in relative quiet.

Each individual will have a preference, but the availability of study space (library, study rooms, or computer rooms) at convenient times is helpful, as is funding for childcare to cover self-study as well as classes. One particular help noted in St Clair et al (2005) was being given time between (before) the end of class and picking up children from school to go to the library to pick up books.

4.5.5 Self-confidence

As when starting new employment, an individual's lack of confidence may prevent them from applying for courses, and persisting through the initial few weeks of a course, when everything is new and daunting.

Although a general problem, this can be a particularly acute one for individuals returning to education after a break, as lone parents are likely to be. St Clair et al (2005) quote comments from both a staff member and a lone parent student from FE colleges alluding to the problems.

Lone parents may feel out of place, feeling like everyone else is sure of what they are doing. Furthermore, they will tend to be out of the habit of learning, with the academic attitude that this requires. They may also have been out of the system long enough that they are unfamiliar with research tools, such as using the internet.

4.5.6 Informal support

Support from family and friends can be important, both practically in helping to manage time, and psychologically, in giving individuals confidence to take on the challenge of studying. The degree of family support varies considerably between individuals (St Clair et al, 2005), which is likely to depend on the strength of relationships and geographic proximity amongst other factors.

St Clair et al (2005) mention informal childcare to allow for study time and for irregular events, such as socialising with other students as being beneficial.

In terms of psychological support, some families may be sceptical, and hence discourage lone parents from enrolling. Persisting with the course was shown in one case to change the (perceived) attitude that the family had of the student.

4.5.7 Summary

The barriers faced by lone parents to learning are very similar to those faced to employment. The main factors relate to childcare and to finances, though there are various schemes for funding support available, which can include the costs of childcare.

As well as the childcare factors common to barriers to employment, learners will need time to study out of class hours, in which they will need quiet times, something particularly hard as a lone parent. The flexibility demanded by education in terms of study time means that informal support will tend to be more important than in employment, when hours are more likely to be set ahead of time.

4.6 Employment and learning outcomes for lone parents

4.6.1 Job retention and advancement

Lone parents face continuing pressures from the obstacles that might prevent them from entering work, even when they are in work (Riccio et al, 2008). These can make it relatively more difficult for them (compared with the general population) to sustain employment and can lead to a cycle between low-paid employment and no pay (potentially mitigated by claiming benefits).

The majority of lone parents who left work and returned to receiving Income Support (IS) reported "voluntary" reasons for doing so, citing the very barriers that might prevent them from entering employment in the first place: "unexpected problems with the cost and reliability of childcare and transport, difficulties balancing work and childcare responsibilities and employers who are unwilling to accommodate their employees' family responsibilities" (Riccio et al, 2008).

Even if lone parents on low wages can continue to overcome these barriers, the nature of the UK labour market makes it unlikely that they will be able to progress to better paid jobs. Low paid jobs offer fewer prospects in terms of training, promotion and negotiation of better conditions, and workers in such jobs are more likely to return to benefits than increase their earnings (Riccio et al, 2008 cite Machin, 1999; Dickens, 2000a; Dickens, 2000b; and Dex & Smith, 2001). A patchy employment history in itself may make it harder to gain better paid employment.

Returning to work as a lone mother, unless having taken an absence on maternity leave, appears to resign women to occupational segregation. Riccio et al (2008) quote Nunn et al (2007), that '...the UK labour market severely punishes those who, at any point in their lives, sacrifice career for family", whilst noting that few lone parents "had a real career to sacrifice", including a minority who had "never had a proper job".

A similar story is painted by Ridge and Millar (2008), who, in a series of interviews with lone mothers in employment supported by tax credits, found that the tax credits had played a key role in encouraging them into employment and in sustaining them in employment. Difficulties, changes or delays in awards could be highly destabilising and there were anxieties because payments were uncertain and could even be revised at the end of the year. The interview group tended to consist of mothers with school age children. They relied mainly on informal childcare arrangements, reporting a lack of quality and affordable formal childcare. Stability and flexibility in employment conditions was vital, but it was felt that opportunities for advancement were restricted by caring responsibilities.

4.6.2 Benefits from education

The potential benefits from education in the short term could be better employment prospects, including higher earnings. In the long term, there may be more chance of career advancement, and more chance of the child of the lone parent being more academically focused and achieving better academic and employment outcomes.

Evans and Gardner (2005) attempt to qualify the association between training and outcomes in relation to a welfare initiative specifically for lone parents (NDLP, described in more detail below). However, their results suggest that the more prominent effect of training is as a signal to employers that the individual has skills, rather than as an investment in improving the individual's prior skills, though they express the opinion that the "investment" may be seen as a positive outcome in its own right.

They found that participating in education or training on NDLP was associated with negative job outcomes. They attribute part of the reason as being the identification that those receiving NDLP training have a low level of skill. They also suggest that participation in training or education precludes concurrent employment.

Ermisch and Francesconi (2001) found, using five waves of the British Household Panel Survey (1991-95), that living in a lone parent family is correlated with poor outcomes for young adults, and that most poor outcomes are associated with a disruption when the child is young (under five years old).

Walker (2003) describes some US research investigating the effect on children's academic performance of increasing the level of a mother's education (Magnuson & McGroder, 2002). Walker (2003) reports that the authors "found that the educational programme significantly increased offspring's readiness for school, measured two years after assignment into the programme (when the children's age averaged three and a half) and reduced the academic problems reported".

4.6.3 Summary

The barriers faced in taking employment continue when trying to sustain a job, and help may be needed to overcome them still. Taking a job or engaging in learning may not always enable progression past the first step of low paid work towards better paid employment or career advancement.

4.7 Evaluations of policy initiatives

4.7.1 General picture

There is a wide range of evaluation evidence available for policy initiatives aimed, wholly or in part, at lone parents. The evidence suggests that, overall, the effect of the welfare to work initiatives since 1997 has been positive.

Hasluck and Green (2007) offer an overview of what works for encouraging lone parents into employment, whereby they state that the impact of the main welfare-to-work programme, New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), is impressive, but that is not clear that its effectiveness would extend beyond the less than 10% of lone parents on Income Support at which it has been aimed.

They come to their conclusions primarily by considering the (compulsory) Lone Parent Work Focused Interview (LPWFI) and the (voluntary) New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP; which could be introduced at the LPWFI). They find that most support manifests itself as advice and guidance, whilst other forms of support are modest in scale and designed to reinforce the central advisory process.

Yeo (2007), in a piece that suggests job retention is a major problem for all groups targeted by welfare-to-work programmes, reports that "since the introduction of NDLP, the lone parent employment rate has risen from 45.3 per cent in 1997 to 56.5 per cent in spring 2006", with most of that growth occurring in the first two years of the programme.

Two recent studies offer overviews of welfare reforms since 1997, both of which come to similar conclusions to each other (Cebulla et al, 2008; Gregg et al, 2007).

Gregg et al. (2007) estimate, using difference-in-difference analysis, that of the 5.8% increase (to 50.9%) in lone mother employment between 1998 and 2003, over two thirds were due to welfare reforms. They cite several other estimates, made prior to and subsequent to reforms as illustrating the narrow range of estimates which suggest consistent findings.

The long-term gains of welfare reforms may have dwindled more recently, as the employment rate of lone parents was 54% in 2007 (Philo et al, 2009), during which time the economy was continuing to flourish.

Despite the benefits derived from the various welfare reforms, UK Government targets for 70% of lone parents in employment by 2010 seem unlikely to be met. There have been very many different initiatives aimed at lone parents, some with particularly low participation rates or in small-scale use, such as Employment Zones (Griffith et al, 2006; Hirst et al, 2006) and a series of pilot projects (Brewer et al., 2007), which we will not describe in detail here.

In what follows, the recent studies that evaluate the success of five policy measures are reviewed: New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP); a New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilot (NDP+LP; in Wales and Scotland); employment retention and advancement (ERA); Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC); and Options and Choices Events.

4.7.2 Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews

Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (LPWFI) were intended to raise awareness in lone parents that they are likely to be better off in paid work than receiving benefits. They support and inform the lone parent in making the transition into work, and encourage them to volunteer to participate in NDLP, introducing them along the way to a Jobcentre Plus personal adviser, with whom there will be review meetings if the lone parent continues to receive Income Support. These are also referred to in item 6 (Personal Adviser meetings, in the NDLP section below).

The LPWFI were introduced into the system between 2001 and 2004, starting with lone parents with new/repeat claimants of Income Support, and progressively moving toward long-term (more than 26 weeks) claimants.

Thomas (2007) produced a synthesis report of the extensive evaluation of the LPWFI programme (see, for example, Knight & Thomas, 2006; Knight et al, 2006; Thomas & Jones, 2006). He notes that the lone parent population is diverse and that few generalisations can be made, whilst the time period for judging gains is quite short, and further complicated by the phased roll-out.

His overarching conclusion is that lone parents may face a similar set of adverse circumstances, but that their relative importance as barriers varies so much that individually tailored solutions are required. He found that the LPWFIs worked best for those closest to work, and that there was considerable deadweight (many successful participants in the programme would have entered work without it). He did not see evidence that the structure of the programme and its operation is effective at targeting individuals who are further from being job-ready.

This is particularly problematic, considering that responses from participants suggested that between 12% and 50% of them were not inclined to take work in the near future. Whilst he thought that repeated contact showed good signs of getting lone parents into work, Thomas (2007) cautioned against too frequent mandatory contact, for fear of overwhelming personal advisers and undermining the effectiveness of the contact time with caseload.

4.7.3 New Deal for Lone Parents

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was designed to make lone parents more willing and able to take up work (or increase their hours), by increasing their employment opportunities, with the overall aim of improving their future prospects and living standards. Although national in scope, the management of it became devolved to a local level, allowing Personal Advisers a high level of autonomy and flexibility to better tailor their services to participants.

NDLP began in October 1998 and has been evaluated in several reports. There have been two reports synthesising these evaluations: Evans et al (2002) and Evans et al (2003), and a further quantitative study by Dolton et al (2006), all of which judged NDLP to have been a success. We concentrate on the second synthesis report, which builds on the first, and note the findings of Dolton et al (2006) at relevant points.

Cebulla et al (2008), reviewing the various evaluations together, note that Dolton et al (2006) effectively applied a "much stricter benefit exit condition" to their sample, which reduced the proportion of exits, but which also leads to more defendable conclusions.

Participation in NDLP is voluntary and, is structured as a series of activities, ranging from recruiting participants, through developing the range of services offered in the programme, to delivering services (Evans et al, 2003):

1. Marketing at both national and local levels. Local marketing is conducted within Districts or even at individual Jobcentres.

- **2. Recruitment**, primarily through personal letters from NDLP. The letter invited lone parents to attend an NDLP Initial Interview, at which they would be introduced to the programme, and invited to participate. Referrals (either self- or from agencies) were the other main means of recruitment.
- **3.** Collaboration and networking, to propagate the programme by establishing potential service providers. This would include referrers, specialist support agencies to help lone parents overcome specific barriers to employment, employers and training/education providers.
- **4. NDLP Initial Interviews** are conducted by NDLP personal advisers. The interviews tend to take place at the Jobcentre, last for just over an hour, and are supposed to introduce the potential participant to the whole programme, the reasons for and help available in finding work, discussions of how to arrange childcare, and making the 'better-off' calculation to illustrate the potential benefits.
- **5. Personal Adviser Meetings** are compulsory meetings scheduled at various times (initially six-monthly and annually thereafter) to discuss paths into work. The meetings are intended to be work-focused, though assessment of these revealed that NDLP participants (lone parents) perceived little difference between these meetings and NDLP interviews or other voluntary interviews with NDLP PAs.
- **6. Training** is useful to lone parents looking to change career and get up-to-date skills and experience. As well as those who perceived their skills set to be in need of refreshing, lone parents who needed to cope with (their own or their child's) health problems sometimes found a change of career was necessary.
- **7. Ongoing support** was found to be much less formalised. It varied in its delivery from a weekly chat to a one-off discussion on particular issues depending on the needs and attitude and availability of the NDLP PA. The most common topics of conversation were found to be job search, training opportunities and assistance with benefit claims (GHK, 2001). Follow-up rates by PAs were best in relation to jobs, and worst in relation to information and training applications, though PAs stated that mandatory PA meetings had forced them focus more on caseload clients and less on ad hoc meetings (Lessof et al, 2003; Thomas & Griffiths, 2002).
- **8. In-work support** came in the form of a grant to help in the transition into work and contact from the NDLP PA ahead of the job starting, and, possibly, soon afterwards as well (variously found to happen in a quarter to over half of cases). The grant had initially been intended to help with costs of starting work (upfront costs for clothes, travel and childcare, primarily), but has since been replaced by one that is intended to help in associated search costs. Lone parents reported poor timeliness in the first incarnation of the grant, and found the second to be more flexible.

Non-participation in NDLP, reflecting the interrelationship between barriers, also showed signs of inter-linkage. Brown and Joyce (2007) list the main reasons given, most of which are to do with personal circumstances and attitudes, which were found to preclude consideration of the content or potential gains from the NDLP programme (also resulting in low levels of awareness).

The reasons were very similar to the list of barriers described above: attitudes toward parenthood and non-parental childcare; family circumstances, cultural factors (to "living on benefits") and personal confidence; financial concerns; logistical considerations; and lack of awareness of the programme.

Impact in Great Britain

The participation rate in NDLP was found to be low, but increasing, over the evaluation period. About 317,000 lone parents participated in NDLP over the four year period from October 1998 to September 2002, with participation rates doubling over the period, according to Evans et al (2003).

The authors found that participation in the programme in late 2002 had reached about a tenth of lone parents on Income Support (IS), and was positively associated with individuals more likely to reap rewards from the programme (readier for work and with better qualifications). Factors that appear to be linked with low participation were multiple (two or more) children, young children (under three years old), and those with health problems or disability.

Evans and Gardiner (2005), looking at data from 1999 to 2004, found that the personal characteristics associated with getting a job through NDLP are the same as for finding work more generally. Lone fathers, (self-reported) disability, some ethnic minorities, older parents, younger and more children are all negatively associated with finding work.

Although the programme is voluntary, the introduction of mandatory Personal Adviser meetings for lone parents on IS increased participation rates, which increased especially for older, and short-term, participants.

Just over half of all leavers from NDLP took jobs. The likelihood of entering employment (and hence exiting benefits) was twice as high for participants in NDLP as (otherwise similarly characterised) non-participants.

Employment found through NDLP tends to be of a better quality and more sustainable, with better job satisfaction, than employment achieved outside of the programme. The jobs, reflecting the skill level of participants, tend to be in lower-skilled occupations.

Nevertheless, returning to claiming benefits is quite common, with almost a third of participants doing so within a year of taking work. Repeat participation is allowed in the programme and a small proportion of participants (7%) were found to be on at least their third spell in NDLP.

NDLP has low unit costs and Evans et al (2003) found that each additional job generated net benefits to society (£4,400, including a net saving of the exchequer of £1,600). NDLP participants generally value it and their Personal Adviser, as well as the information and support made available through it.

Cebulla et al (2008) report that the exit rate from benefits for lone parents was about 20 to 25 percentage points higher for participants in NDLP than for non-participants (with similar characteristics to participants) in the short term (three to nine months), and that this rate was sustained in the longer term (17 and 19 percentage points at three and four years, respectively; Dolton et al, 2006). The decline in the difference is partly due to exit not due to NDLP becoming more likely over longer periods of time, but NDLP was still found to contribute to a quarter of all benefit exits (amongst the sample: defined as those with similar characteristics to NDLP participants) after four years.

Dolton et al (2006) found that, amongst NDLP participants, the effectiveness of the programme appeared greater for relatively recent benefit claimants compared with long-term benefit claimants. However, the authors also found that the programme was more successful in achieving benefit exit than achieving sustained employment for participants.

Impact in Wales

Evans and Gardiner (2005) consider the performance of NDLP in Wales, compared with the performance across the rest of Great Britain, over the five-year period 1999-2004.

NDLP appears at first look to have been more effective in Wales than in England, with the proportion of participants finding jobs being 51.4% (50.8% in Scotland and 48.7% in England). However, the main difference between these three regions appeared to derive from low rates in London heavily influencing the England results.

There were small differences in the association in Wales, compared with Great Britain, between personal characteristics and positive outcomes. There was not as much of an association for disability, a greater one for having multiple children, and some slight differences in the strength of associations for some ethnicities.

Within Wales, increased success in finding jobs was associated with more urbanised (and accessible) areas. It was also positively associated with living in a more deprived ward (scored according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation). Evans and Gardiner (2005) suggest that the vacancies available in poorer areas of Wales may be better suited to lone parents, that the composite effect of policies targeting deprived areas may have improved job opportunities, and that the lone parents in the more deprived areas are for some reason (not captured) more "job ready".

4.7.4 New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) Pilot

A pilot project extension to New Deal for Lone Parents, named New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) was launched in 2005 (England) and 2006 (one district in each of Wales and Scotland). The pilot aims to focus more on individual needs and aspirations in relation to the workplace and involves raising levels of confidence, identifying employment barriers, improving skills, job search, financial support and assistance with childcare. Advisers were given enhanced training, and there were more staff resources dedicated to the pilot. The pilot was originally intended to last until 2008, but has since been extended to last until 2011.

Hosain and Breen (2007) evaluated the pilot in England, whilst Jenkins (2008) did so for the extension of the pilot to Wales and Scotland. The overall findings were similar in the two studies, with the comprehensiveness of the package being thought to be the major enabling factor.

Jenkins (2008) notes that many lone parents are "several steps" away from being job-ready, and that becoming aware of the volume of support made them "more enthusiastic and confident in their ability to return to work".

Hosain and Breen (2007) found that the pilot was most effective for lone parents who were job-ready or undecided. They found that the combination of financial support, training opportunities and support offered by advisers were good at overcoming the barriers to work for these groups. However, for those less inclined or ready to take a job, the pilot was only found to be helpful as part of a process toward work and did not accelerate the process.

Financial support was the most useful tool, with childcare-related support being not very well-suited to the needs of parents in terms of design or provision. Training was offered to lone parents, but was found to be useful mainly to those who were job-ready, building on existing skills.

4.7.5 Employment Retention and Advancement demonstration programme

Whereas the New Deal programmes helped lone parents to find work, the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration programme sought to support people in low-income jobs who might otherwise find it difficult to sustain employment. It did so through offering financial incentives and job advisory services subsequent to participants' entry into work.

ERA was aimed at three groups: lone parents who had previously entered into the NDLP programme; lone parents who were already working part-time (16-29 hours per week) and who received Working Tax Credit (WTC); and long-term unemployed people over the age of 25, who are mandated to enter the New Deal 25 Plus programme.

The overall assessment was that ERA was a successful programme. Riccio et al (2008) evaluated the programme with regard to its effectiveness for lone parents. ERA followed a very similar process to NDLP prior to job placement for those not already in work. Once in work, whether through NDLP or independently (those in the WTC group), the ERA programme moved into an "in-work" phase, which was intended to last at least two years, meaning the NDLP group were expected to be in the programme for about 33 months.

In the "in-work" phase, Advanced Support Advisers (ASAs) aimed to increase participants' (known in the programme as customers) levels of job security, pay and conditions (with their current employer or a new one), by helping them to avoid the problems that can prematurely curtail employment placements. Help was also given to get re-employed if customers left their jobs or jobs ended.

Riccio et al (2008) list the resources available through the programme:

- an employment retention bonus of £400 three times a year for two years for staying in full-time work (at least 30 hours per week for 13 out of every 17 weeks, which is about 75 per cent of the time);
- training tuition assistance (up to £1,000) and a bonus (also up to £1,000) for completing training while employed; and
- access to emergency payments to overcome short-term barriers to staying in work. (Riccio et al, 2008, p3)

Customers for ERA from the target groups were randomly invited to participate in ERA, with half of volunteers receiving the benefits of the programme, and the other half (the control group) continuing as before.

For the NDLP group, the priority was job retention, whereas for the WTC group, the priority was job advancement. The reason for this was structural differences between the two groups, with NDLP participants more likely to have been out of the labour force for an extended period. Those in the WTC group, furthermore, tended to be better skilled and "more advantaged" at their entry into ERA.

Riccio et al (2008) found that "within the first two years after beginning ERA, lone parents earned substantially more than they would have without the programme". They estimate the average difference to have been £1,550 (over two years), excluding ERA bonuses. This was an increase of 24% over the control group's average earnings, the share of which was experienced slightly more in the first year than in the second, but statistically significantly in both.

The gain in earnings derived mainly from a (statistically significant) shift into full-time employment, with relatively little effect on job retention. The proportion of the NDLP group in full-time employment was 38% (compared with 28% in the control group) and 42% for the WTC group (30% in the control group).

The quality of jobs, however, was not seen to be particularly improved by the programme.

The authors found that the impact was apparent in almost all of the districts in which ERA was run, and that there were small but statistically significant savings in benefit payments arising from participation in the programme.

The effects were felt across most types of lone parent, with few systematically higher gains for any particular group. The main differences were that ethnic minority participants appeared to benefit much more from higher earnings, and NDLP customers with no formal educational qualifications appeared to benefit less from the programme.

4.7.6 Working Families Tax Credit

Cebulla et al (2008) in a review of policy evaluations on a range of welfare-to-work programmes, summarise the findings of studies regarding Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC).

They state that the effect of WFTC was found to be large, especially considering that the effects are measured against the whole population of lone parents, rather than just the participants in the programme, as with the NDLP evaluations.

The proportion of all lone parents in paid work increased by between three-and-a-half and five percentage points from initial levels, over the evaluation periods of two and three years.

This amounted to between a third and a half of the total rise in lone parent employment in the period, respectively, though it does not strip out the complementary effects of concurrent programmes, such as NDLP.

There was found to be an even larger specific effect of WFTC on its target population (lone parents who worked more than 16 hours per week), the share in lone parents of which increased by about seven percentage points.

The main beneficiaries of WFTC appear to have been lone parents whose youngest children were under 11 years old.

4.7.7 Options and Choices Events

Options and Choices Events are voluntary small-scale group events targeted at lone parents who are due to become ineligible for Income Support (IS) within a year. Jenkins and Lloyd (2008) explain that the aim is to help such lone parents move closer to the job market, by explaining the rules regarding benefit, the resources made available through Jobcentre Plus and its partners, and the opportunities afforded by entering work, either via Jobcentre Plus or otherwise.

The evaluation by Jenkins and Lloyd (2008) considers the effect of the programme in two Trailblazer districts, which were chosen for a pilot programme ahead of a national roll-out.

The evaluation found that setting up the events was resource-intensive, but expected that more familiarity would make this less so in the future. The combined presence of potential employers and of Jobcentre Plus was thought to be valuable, as was the choice of location being at employers' premises (or at least away from the Jobcentre Plus premises).

As with other evaluations, this one revealed that lone parents appear to be ill-informed as to the high level of support available through Jobcentre Plus, and welcome this to the extent that they were "often more motivated and enthusiastic about looking for work after the event". Having a lone parent currently in employment give their experience was found to be a more powerful method of conveying the message of the event.

Reasons for not accepting invitations to events were mainly for personal reasons: preference for one-to-one dialogue rather than group meetings (for reasons of nervousness, relevance and privacy), inconvenient timing or constrictions because of caring responsibilities. Underlying reasons for failing to show after booking into an event appeared also to revolve around misgivings about group events, as opposed to one-to-one contact, although more "official" personal reasons were given, such as short notice hospital appointments and child's illness.

4.7.8 Summary

Evaluation evidence to date suggests that the welfare reforms introduced since 1997, including the New Deal for Lone Parents, have contributed to improving employment rates for lone parents across the UK. Positive outcomes are also found for lone parents in Wales. Nevertheless, the UK government's target of a 70% employment rate for lone parents by 2010 seems unlikely to be met. Whilst the welfare reforms include training elements, and individual education institutions and other organisations have introduced measures to encourage lone parents, there has been a less systematic approach to government intervention in the education sector and there is correspondingly less evaluation evidence.

5 Stakeholder views

5.1 Introduction

Representatives of twenty one stakeholder organisations were interviewed in February, March and April 2009. A list of these stakeholder organisations is provided at Annex 2. Interviewees were sent a topic guide and a draft research summary in advance – see Annex 3.

The main aim of these interviews was to contribute to the interpretation of the evidence in the socio-economic context of Wales. Much of the literature does not focus on evidence from Wales (though there are exceptions to this), but there is plenty of evidence from the UK. The stakeholder interviews have enabled us to gain a fuller understanding from relevant stakeholders of the practical issues relevant for lone parent employment and learning experiences in Wales.

We did not talk directly to lone parents and that could be a further avenue to explore if further research were required in this area. The stakeholders we did talk to were not intended to be representative in a statistical sense, but they included a wide range of organisations active in Wales with links to overcoming barriers to employment and learning for lone parents and others.

The remainder of this Chapter summarises the views expressed to us by stakeholders, first on the characteristics of lone parents in Wales, second on terminology in this area, third on employment choices and barriers, and then on learning choices and barriers. Finally we summarise the outcome of a survey on employment barriers undertaken by Jobcentre Plus of their lone parent advisors across Wales.

5.2 Characteristics of lone parents in Wales

Overall interviewees felt that the summary of the characteristics of lone parents in Wales, based largely on Census data from 2001, presented a reasonably accurate description. Some of the changes since 2001 that were highlighted were:

The benefit reforms in November 2008.²¹

²⁰ Much of the research that is reported in the literature review in the previous Chapter does however involve direct consultation with lone parents.

²¹ See Section 2.1 for an overview of these reforms.

 The impact of the current economic downturn. This is reducing employment opportunities and there is higher entry into education, particularly further education. Funding cuts however may reduce provision for lone parents in further education.²²

- An increased incidence of mental health problems amongst lone parents.
 This can be a particular problem for lone parents who are asylum seekers, particularly those that face the constant threat of deportation.
- Increases in the number of BME immigrants and asylum seekers since 2001 were reported. These lone parents were felt to have very different problems

 they tended to be better educated with higher skill levels but were not allowed to work.
- Over time, across the UK, lone parents are getting older.
- Across the UK, more lone parents likely to be in employment as a result of Government policies in this area, including the wider availability of childcare.
- Rising living costs since 2001 have had a big impact on lone parents.
- In Wales, increased funding since 2001 means that it is easier for lone parents to return to education.
- Less family support for lone parents due to increasingly fragmented families.

Other comments included:

- A larger proportion of lone parents have physically impaired children because lone parenthood can often result from relationship breakdown associated with the stresses caused by having a child with a physical impairment.
- A large proportion of SMEs in Wales such employers less likely to be able to be flexible.
- Numbers of BME lone parents are important in some parts of Wales.
- Transport is a bigger issue for lone parents in Wales because of the higher proportion of lone parents in rural areas and poor public transport provision. This combines with low childcare availability in rural areas to compound the effect.

²² In one example of this, one stakeholder told us that funding cuts had meant that several Welsh FE colleges had stopped offering creche facilities since Autumn 2008.

• Limited availability of Welsh medium childcare is an issue specific to Wales.

5.3 Terminology

One of the stakeholders we interviewed felt that "barriers" was an inappropriate term for what we were seeking to investigate. They felt that barriers can imply something that cannot be overcome and could also imply that if a barrier were overcome, there would be no more problem. Their view was that neither is the case for lone parents' access to employment and learning and that the term "constraints" was more appropriate.

Another stakeholder, however, felt that the terms "choices" and "constraints" could lead to criticism of "lazy" lone parents. In this stakeholder's experience, lone parents also preferred the term "barriers".

The circumstances in which lone parents find themselves are very varied. In our view, and we believe that this is clearly reflected in the literature and in the responses of many of the stakeholders with whom we discussed these issues, some lone parents do choose not to enter employment or learning in some circumstances. An example of this is when the lone parent has one or more very young children and they believe that the children are better off being looked after by the parent than by someone else at this time. In this sense, we think that it is reasonable to refer to an element of choice for some lone parents.

There seems to us to be very little difference in implication between the terms "barriers" and "constraints". We use both terms interchangeably in this report. Much of the literature refers to "barriers" and so we make particularly frequent use of that term in our review of the literature. Our intention is that these terms reflect a continuum of issues that make it difficult to enter, and remain in, employment and learning. They do not necessarily make it impossible, though in some cases they may in practice mean that entering employment or learning is not possible.

5.4 Employment choices and barriers

We discuss below stakeholder views on each of the main types of choice and barrier to employment faced by lone parents. The categorisation of barriers in this way is useful for the purposes of describing the barriers, but the experience of lone parents is usually of several constraints all interacting with each other.

It is also important to remember that the experiences of lone parents can be very different and vary considerably with the particular circumstances in which they find themselves.

An example of the interaction between barriers

Consider a lone parent with one pre-school child and one school child living in a semi-rural area. The parent may have nearby family who agree to look after the pre-school child for a few hours a week, but they have their own health problems and are well-meaning but unreliable. The nearest available formal childcare is an hour away by public transport (a change of buses is required to make the journey) and the parent has heard mixed reports about the quality of this childcare. Part time retail work is available which is half an hour away from home, and close to the school, but forty minutes away from the available childcare. The work is mostly during school hours, but one evening shift per week is required. There is no formal childcare available in the evening. The parent doesn't fully understand how her benefits will be affected by starting work, though she thinks that she will be a little better off financially. If her children are ill, or if the childcare arrangements fall through, or if a bus is late so that she misses her connection, the parent isn't sure how the potential employer will react. If she loses her job, or if she resigns because work is too difficult to juggle with her parental responsibilities, then she may be unable to claim benefits for 6 weeks.

Many of the barriers faced by lone parents are similar to the barriers faced by other groups - a parent couple who are both trying to work, for example - but often the options available to lone parents for dealing with problems when they are arise are more limited. One stakeholder suggested that the barriers that are particularly hard for lone parents are: childcare over holiday periods (and when the child is ill); lack of self esteem through social isolation; and more limited suitable job opportunities (i.e. that provide flexibility in respect of child care).

5.4.1 Childcare

Childcare is seen by a number of stakeholders as the main barrier to employment for lone parents. The availability of suitable childcare is generally seen as being at least as important as the cost of childcare.

Some funding support for childcare is available for those entering work (e.g. childcare tax credits). Cost remains an issue however, particularly for those on low incomes, those with childcare needs outside normal working hours and for those with specialised needs, e.g. where children have behavioural problems or physical impairments.

The problem of availability tends to relate to timing, location or specialisation. The key timing problems are the lack of availability outside normal school hours, i.e. in

the evenings, at weekends and during school holidays. Location is a particular problem in rural areas and combines with limited availability of public transport to make access difficult. Many lone parents do not have their own cars. Specialisation is a problem in that there is little available childcare for those aged seven and above, for children with behavioural problems or for children with long term illness or physical impairments. Whilst statutory childcare is available for the under threes for two hours, either mornings or evenings, during the week, once the time has been chosen it cannot be changed – causing problems for shift workers. Also it is not always available close by.

Some lone parents are unwilling to entrust their children, especially if they are very young, to a stranger in a formal childcare setting. For these parents, family support can be an important enabler. In some communities negative attitudes to employment can mean that support is not forthcoming. In others there can be a culture of childcare being provided by the extended family.

5.4.2 Financial issues

There are two key financial issues that act as a barrier to employment for lone parents. First, is uncertainty about the financial effects of employment; and second, is the potential for income when in employment not being sufficiently greater than income when unemployed (through the benefits system) to act as an incentive to take up employment.

Many stakeholders suggested that there was a great deal of uncertainty for many lone parents about the impact of employment on their benefits. This is attributed to various factors including lack of information, complex information and also to lack of trust on the part of lone parents.

Jobcentre Plus provides lone parents with a calculation of whether or not they will be better off in employment taking account wage and benefit effects – the 'better off' calculation. This does not take full account, however, of the loss of some indirect benefits such as free school meals and concessionary rates for the unwaged for many services,²³ though Jobcentre Plus aims to make clear where this is the case.

Tax credits are available to assist the transition from benefits to wages, but they are complex and difficult to understand for lone parents. This can limit the impact they have on employment incentives. A widely reported problem is the fear that tax credits will be calculated incorrectly and that the money will have to be repaid after it has already been spent. Delays in administration of benefits are also reported, particularly in relation to working tax credit.

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²³ An element of the cost of free school meals is taken into account through the calculation of tax credits.

Debt can be an important barrier – debt can be easier to manage on benefit because payments are fixed and are made regularly. Income in work can be more variable, e.g. when have to take time off to look after a sick child.

Negative experiences of losing employment and then going back on benefit are not just a deterrent to finding employment for the individual in question. Witnessing these experiences also influences their peers. It generally takes around 6 weeks for benefits to be paid after employment has terminated, which creates financial hardship, if not debt, for the lone parent with all the attendant personal stress that causes. Jobcentre Plus, however are seeking to address these issues through a range of initiatives, including In Work Support.

5.4.3 Availability of suitable jobs

Lone parents with children at school generally need to find employment that is consistent with the parent being available to take the child to school and pick them up from school and for the parent to be available during school holidays.²⁴ The availability of such jobs is limited.

In order for employment to be practical for lone parents it also needs to be accessible and in a location that does not make the logistics of travelling between home, school/childcare and work impractical

There is a perception amongst lone parents that many employers are unwilling to be flexible e.g. when a child is sick or childcare arrangements fall through. Stakeholders also suggest that this is a reality in many cases and, understandably, is a particular problem for small businesses which are particularly prevalent in Wales. A number of stakeholders suggested that some form of incentives for employers to employ lone parents might contribute to overcoming this problem.

Many suggested that in the current recession suitable employment would be much harder to find for lone parents, at a time when the welfare reforms put more pressure on more lone parents to find work.

5.4.4 Transport

Access to transport was a frequently cited barrier – it was suggested that lone parents often do not have their own cars. The main point being made was the limited availability and frequency of public transport services. Often, lone parents need to use a complex combination of services to reach their destination. This is a particularly important factor in rural areas where it can combine with limited childcare and employment opportunities to make employment very difficult in practice for lone parents.

²⁴ The alternative is to find someone else who is able to do this, either a friend or member of the family or a more formal childcare service. The problems of childcare availability are discussed above.

Affordability of public transport was also mentioned by some stakeholders. There are also additional practical problems. On many buses, for example, there is only space for one or two pushchairs and so parents may sometimes have to wait for the next bus if there is no more room.

5.4.5 Attitudes towards work

Not all lone parents necessarily wish to work. The reasons for this are mixed.

Some want to be full time parents because they believe that this is the best outcome for their children. These feelings may be particularly strong where they believe that available childcare, formal or informal, is of insufficiently high quality. For some young lone parents, producing a child might be the only thing they feel that they have been successful at in their lives (after a poor school record, no employment etc). This can make them very reluctant to allow someone else to care for the child.

Some lone parents live, and have grown up in, communities where not working is the norm. Some may not know anyone who has ever worked in their life. Unemployment can go back generations. Reactions to this situation vary. Some may not see why they should work when nobody else they know works either. Some wish to work and have the internal resources to break out of the cycle of non-work. Others are severely lacking in confidence, motivation, family and peer support and basic and life skills. For some of the latter group they may believe that there are many insurmountable barriers to work, though this may at least in part be perception rather than reality.

Lone parents who are entrenched in their own communities can be frightened of leaving familiar territory and travelling elsewhere to work, even if it is not very far away. Lack of social skills and confidence is a real barrier – many lone parents suffer from social isolation particularly in rural areas when their children are young

Some lone parents have few aspirations. Lone parents from some communities have never experienced support from their own parents – negative attitudes from family and peers can be the norm for some. In these circumstances lone parents can find it very difficult to keep motivated.

Low confidence and motivation is often associated with, and compounded by, very limited life skills and basic skills and limited or no educational qualifications and work experience. Some lone parents in minority ethnic groups may face an additional language barriers and may be poorly educated even in their own language. A number of stakeholders also pointed out that mental health problems, such as depression, are more common amongst lone parents.

5.5 Learning choices and barriers

The main issues in relation to access to learning opportunities that were raised by stakeholders were childcare, financial issues, the flexibility of education provision, attitudes towards education and transport problems.

5.5.1 Childcare

Childcare availability was viewed as one of the key barriers, especially for courses that required attendance outside of normal hours, such as evening classes. Onsite childcare is limited, as is provision for older children (e.g. over 8 years old).

The cost of childcare was also viewed as a barrier, but perhaps less so than availability.

5.5.2 Financial Issues

Fear and uncertainty about the potential impact of entering education on eligibility for social security benefits, and fear of debt and financial hardship were mentioned as barriers by many stakeholders. Linked to this was the view that there are informational barriers related to the complexity of student finance options.

In addition to the issues around fear, uncertainty and lack of information, there was also a view that available student finance was insufficient to compensate for the loss of social security benefits on taking up a learning opportunity.²⁵ The availability of student finance is a particular problem for part time students, which is the group that most lone parents find themselves in.

There was a feeling that benefit schemes managed by Jobcentre Plus did not recognise sufficiently that further and higher education courses are a valid pathway to employment and that the terms of Jobseeker's Allowance effectively prevent this. Support for those participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents was available up to level 3 (equivalent to A level) if the qualification is achieved within one year. Many lone parents cannot meet the time criterion or need higher qualifications in order to reach their employment goals. It was suggested that a much higher degree of coordination between the benefits system and the student finance system was required and that lack of communication was the core of the current problem.

For those lone parents who have not been resident in the UK for the qualifying period of 4-5 years, overseas fee rates are payable for some education courses. These fees are much higher than the fees for residents and are a major barrier for non-qualifying lone parents.

²⁵ For those lone parents in work, this point was also made in resepct of the potential for loss of tax credits on entry into education

Given the financial issues raised here, part-time employment whilst they are studying is a potential option for lone parents. However they also face the barriers to employment outlined in the previous section.

5.5.3 Flexibility in education provision

Most lone parents need education provision to be flexible in order for learning to be a feasible option for them. Lone parents need to be able to arrange for transport to and from their children's schools and/or other childcare arrangements. Sometimes the problem is one of a perception of lack of flexibility, but many respondents also felt that this was often a reality.

There are institutional practices which could ease some of the constraints faced by lone parents. These practices include:

- Modular approaches to learning through building up credits over a long period of time;²⁶
- Avoidance of last minute timetabling changes (last minute changes to childcare and transport arrangements can be very difficult to make);
- Study schedules, including placements, e.g. for social work, need to be flexible and parent-friendly. Need to ensure that deadlines don't all come at once. Need timetabling coordinated around the school day (taking account of time need to pick up/drop off at school).
- A more flexible academic year it can be easy to lose motivation if there is a need to wait most of an academic year before starting a course.

One respondent felt that there was scope for learning to be more family friendly and hence more accessible for lone parents than employment opportunities.

5.5.4 Attitudes towards education

For many lone parents, their only previous experience of education is their school years and, for some, that experience was not a positive one. This can lead to both a lack of confidence in the education system as well as a lack of basic skills.

The point was also made that in some communities in Wales there is a culture of not valuing learning that acts as a significant barrier for some. This can also lead to a lack of family support for access to learning – this can have a significant effect as family are often an important source of informal and trusted childcare.

²⁶ One respondent felt that there was a particular problem with healthcare courses in this respect.

A lack of confidence and experience in the education system can make the choice of course subject and level, as well as the choice of institution, seem very daunting.

Once lone parents have taken up a learning opportunity, their experience of learning can be very different to the experience of other students. Childcare responsibilities mean that they tend to just turn up for classes, and so are unable to participate in the wider student experience. This can lead to feelings of social isolation in addition to those that can arise in any case from the position of being a lone parent.

5.5.5 Transport

Transport availability and cost is a problem for lone parent students, probably more so than in England. Lone parents often live on council estates on the edge of towns with poor transport access to colleges.

5.6 Survey of Jobcentre Plus Lone Parent Advisors in Wales

5.6.1 Introduction

In December 2008, Jobcentre Plus undertook a survey of their lone parent advisors in Wales. The main purpose of the survey was to understand advisors' views on whether withdrawal of free school meals on entering employment acted as a barrier to the take up of employment opportunities for lone parents. Responses were received from 63 lone parent advisors from across Wales.

One of the questions asked of the lone parent advisors was their view on the three most important barriers to employment for lone parents. We summarise here their responses to this question. Specifically, the question was "What would you consider to be the top 3 barriers to work identified by lone parent customers?"

5.6.2 Overall results

Overall, the four types of employment barrier most commonly suggested by respondents were: availability of suitable childcare [25%]; financial barriers [19%]; availability of suitable employment [18%]; and availability of transport [16%]. Other barriers mentioned with much lower frequency included attitudes to work (both confidence and willingness to work) [8%]; ill health and other caring responsibilities [4%]; and a desire not to put children into formal childcare [6%].²⁷

²⁷ Lone parents didn't want to put their children into formal childcare for various reasons, including because the chidren were too young, because they felt that they would be better looked after by the parent, and because of feelings of mistrust of childcare providers.

A geographical breakdown of responses, between four regions of Wales, is possible. The four regions are: North and Mid Wales; South East Wales; South West Wales; and South Wales Valleys. The pattern of responses is very similar across North and Mid Wales, South West Wales and South Wales Valleys. The pattern for South East Wales is a little different however. In South East Wales, lone parent advisors placed much less emphasis on availability of suitable employment (7%), but more emphasis on attitudes to work [14%]; ill health and other caring responsibilities [9%]; and a desire not to put children into formal childcare [11%].

5.6.3 Availability of suitable childcare

Some of the responses refer to a general lack of childcare places, but many are also more specific, highlighting in particular lack of childcare at weekends, in the evenings and during school holidays. These comments match many of the comments made about lack of suitable employment opportunities (see below) which cite the difficulty of obtaining work during school hours in school term time only. Lack of availability of suitable childcare is also highlighted for disabled children and for children in secondary school who are too young to look after themselves, e.g. in the 11-14 age range.

5.6.4 Financial barriers

Many different types of financial barrier are mentioned, but in essence these barriers all relate to the limited extra income lone parents can achieve from working relative to not working. Some of the issues mentioned that relate to this gap included uncertainty about financial impacts, fear of getting into debt and unwillingness to disrupt their and their children's lives for only small weekly financial gains. Specific factors that were felt would or could lead to limited or no financial gains from moving into work were: loss of free school meals; loss of housing benefit; payment of council tax; travel costs. Childcare costs were also mentioned by a very small number of respondents. As noted above the focus of the survey was free school meals. In answer to the separate question "Do you feel that the loss of free school meals is a barrier to work for lone parents?", 85% of lone parent advisors responded Yes.

5.6.5 Availability of suitable employment

The key issues raised by the lone parent advisors were lack of employment opportunities for work within school hours, particularly locally, and concerns about the willingness of employers to be flexible, e.g. when children were ill or during school holidays.

5.6.6 Availability of transport

Particular transport problems raised were the lack of public transport in rural areas and the problem of coordinating work, school and childcare when transport options

were limited. Lack of childcare in rural areas was also reported as a factor which made this coordination problem more difficult.

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Annex 2 List of stakeholders interviewed

Representatives of twenty one stakeholder organisations were interviewed in February, March and April 2009. Most interviews were conducted by telephone, though some were also conducted face to face. Interviewees were sent a topic guide and a draft research summary in advance – see Annex 3.

The twenty one stakeholder organisations were:

- West & Mid Wales Widening Access Partnership
- Track 2000
- Swansea Women's Centre
- Sure Start Family & Creche Programme (Newport)
- Student Support Centre, Cardiff University
- National Union of Students Wales
- Minority Ethnic Women's Network
- Llanion Communities First Partnership (Pembroke Dock)
- Life Support Programme (Gurnos, Merthyr Tydfil)
- Learning Brokers Programme (Bridgend)
- JobCentre Plus
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- Gingerbread
- Genesis
- Fforwm
- Fairyland Learning Community Account (Port Talbot)
- Department of Adult Continuing Education, Swansea University
- Citizens Advice Bureau Cymru
- Basic Skills Cymru
- Chwarae Teg
- Women's Workshop (Cardiff)

Annex 3 Material used for stakeholder interviews

Topic guide for LE Wales discussions with stakeholders on the barriers to learning and employment faced by lone parents in Wales

Stakeholder interviewees to have been sent a copy of the LE Wales research summary in advance.

The research summary provides a summary of existing literature on the employment and learning choices and barriers faced by lone parents. It also highlights the main differences between the characteristics of lone parents in Wales and lone parents in England, based on data from the 2001 Census. Much of the research evidence is more closely linked to the experience of lone parents in England.

- 1. Introduction to LE Wales and contract with WAG
- 2. Interviewee's role in respect of lone parents
 - a. Expertise in any specific group of lone parents?
- 3. Brief overview of material in research summary
- 4. Discussion of characteristics of lone parents in Wales
 - a. RS provides a fair picture?
 - b. Likely changes since 2001?
 - c. Differences between England/Wales
 - d. Impact of policy developments
 - 1. UK policy (e.g. tax and benefits)
 - 2. Welsh policy (e.g. childcare)
- 5. Discussion of employment choices/barriers
 - a. Which are most significant?
 - b. Any missing or irrelevant?
 - c. Which factors are particularly important in Wales?
 - d. Do some lone parent groups face higher barriers or more difficult choices?
 - e. Are there any policy developments that are likely to have significant impacts on choices/barriers?
- 6. Discussion of learning choices/barriers
 - a. Which are most significant?
 - b. Any missing or irrelevant?
 - c. Which factors are particularly important in Wales?
 - d. Are there any policy developments that are likely to have significant impacts on choices/barriers?
- 7. Other comments
- 8. Thanks and close

Draft Research Summary: Barriers faced by lone parents in accessing employment and learning

Introduction

LE Wales was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a study of the relative importance of the various choices and constraints faced by lone parents in Wales; and to establish a comprehensive list of the barriers faced by lone parents who wish to access work or learning.

The research is being carried out in two distinct phases, incorporating (i) a review of the existing literature to establish broad findings and (ii) engagement of stakeholders to provide a deeper understanding of the practical barriers faced by lone parents in Wales and to explore more detailed policy-relevant conclusions for Wales.

This research summary outlines the findings of the literature review and analysis of the secondary data that formed Stage 1 of the research.

Policy Background

Lone parents have been the focus of a number of policy initiatives in recent years, particularly in the context of the Government's commitment to halve child poverty by 2010; and to eradicate it by 2020.

Support for lone parents can be split into two major strands: financial support (through benefits and tax credits) and the provision of childcare. Increasingly, however, the support provided is focused on allowing (and encouraging) lone parents to enter (or re-enter) employment, with the Government targeting a 70% lone parent employment rate by 2010.

The main form of financial support available to lone parents is Income Support, which at present can be claimed by any lone parent with a dependent child aged under 16 and working fewer than 16 hours per week. However, under the benefit reforms, which have begun to come into effect from November 2008 (the reforms are phased, and so will not be completely in place until April 2011), eligibility for Income Support among lone parents will be restricted to those with a dependant child aged under 7. Instead, lone parents that are not working will be required to apply for the Jobseekers' Allowance – and hence be required to seek work.

The narrowing of eligibility in Income Support reflects a more general policy commitment to increase the number of lone parents in employment. In particular the National Childcare Strategy has sought to significantly increase the availability and enhance the quality of childcare throughout the UK – with the explicit aim of increasing parents' potential to work.

There is also some financial support available for lone parents to enter further and higher education, through "Special Support Grants" which are available to supplement student loans to enter higher education.

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In general, policy towards lone parents appears similar between England and Wales. Welfare policy is reserved for the Westminster parliament, and while this is not true of either education or (to an extent) childcare policy, there do not appear to be any major differences between the two approaches.

Lone parents in Wales

As part of the research, data from the 2001 Census was analysed to form a picture of lone parents in Wales, and identify whether their characteristics differ from those in England.

The main findings of this analysis were as follows:

- Lone parents comprise 8% of all households in Wales, and 24% of households with dependent children. This compares to 7% and 22% respectively within England.
- The vast majority (around 90%) of lone parents are female.
- Around one third of children in Welsh lone parent households are aged under 5 (33%), with 39% aged 5-11, 19% aged 12-15 and 9% aged 16-18.
 - This is slightly different to the distribution of all dependant children in Wales, a higher proportion (37% versus 33%) of whom were aged under 5, with a lower proportion (54% versus 58%) aged 5-15.
- More Welsh lone parents are aged under 24 than those in England (13.4% versus 10.6%) whilst there are correspondingly fewer Welsh lone parents in the 35 – 49 age band (44.8% versus 48.7%).
- A higher proportion of Welsh lone parents have no academic or professional qualifications (33.8% versus 29.1%)
- Under half of lone parents (46%) in Wales are employed, and those that are tend to be in "less prestigious" occupations than other parents of dependent children.
- There appear to be few major differences between lone parents in England and Wales. Those differences that do exist seem to reflect more general differences between the two countries, and also tend to be associated with it being more difficult to find suitable employment (e.g. matching of skills and jobs).

Employment & learning choices

As part of the research, we undertook a review of the available literature regarding the issues facing lone parents in their decisions to enter work or education. This indicated that in many cases it is inaccurate to discuss "barriers" to work or education – as the decision not to return to work (for example) can be a consequence of individual choice.

While this should be borne in mind, it is still possible to identify some of the key choices and constraints that are faced by lone parents²⁸. These are summarised in the tables overleaf.

Commentary

The fact that more Welsh lone parents are economically inactive suggests that some of the important issues in Wales may include:

- the choice not to seek employment, based on the importance of caring for the child;
- limited work experience and/or education and skills;
- a lack of affordable and available childcare;
- low wage levels relative to benefit levels.

As benefit levels are set at the UK level, and wages in Wales tend to be lower than the UK average, the barrier deriving from benefit levels relative to wage levels may be more of a factor for lone parents in Wales.

The tendency for lower status employment in Wales may derive from both supply and demand factors. On the supply side, limited work experience and/or education and skills could contribute to this. On the demand side, there may be just fewer opportunities for higher status employment in Wales and/or these posts may be less suitable for lone parents.²⁹

As lone parents in Wales tend to be younger than their counterparts in England, then the issues associated with limited work experience and/or education and skills will be exacerbated.

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²⁸ The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) highlighted that the term 'barriers' may not accurately describe the situation facing lone parents, and suggested the use of 'choices and constraints' as an alternative.

²⁹ If they are associated with longer working hours, for example.

Table 8: Employment choices and barriers for lone parents

Stages	Individual choices/barriers	Institutional barriers	Informational barriers
Inactive → willing to work	Childcare responsibilities; Lack of educational qualifications; Lack of work experience; Lack of basic skills and practical skills;	Lack of affordable and available childcare; Welfare benefit levels are too high compared with potential wage from work;	Lack of information about jobs; Lack of information about the rules concerning working while on benefit; Lack of information on child care lack of information around general support available
Willing to work → active job search	Cultural/social values that restrict job search; Lack of motivation; Insufficient job search;	Lack of available and affordable childcare; Benefit levels are too high compared with potential wage from work;	As above
Active job search → gaining employment	Lack of educational qualifications; Lack of work experience; Lack of basic skills and practical skills	Lack of jobs at national or local level; Lack of suitable type of work that matches education background; Lack of work with adequate wages; Inappropriate employment conditions.	Lack of information about net income at work; Lack of information about how to manage financial issues during transition from welfare to employment; Lack of information about how to reclaim benefits.
Gaining employment → Sustaining employment	Prejudice of employers; Lack of appropriate training to sustain the job. Moving frequently between welfare and work creates negative reputation.	Lack of available and affordable childcare; Wages too low (benefits too high) to motivate lone parents staying in employment rather than switching back to benefit. Subsequently, lone parents may be trapped in a 'low-pay, no-pay cycle', in which they shift repeatedly between low-wage work and unemployment.	Lack of information about support available

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Table 9: Learning choices and barriers for lone parents

Individual choices/barriers	Institutional barriers	Informational barriers
Childcare responsibilities	Lack of reliable and affordable childcare;	Lack of information about financial support system.
Lack of familiarity and confidence in the educational system;	Costs of education (tuition fee, books, travel, etc.);	Lack of information about entitlements and how to organize help.
Lack of family support; Discrimination against students with caring responsibilities.	Inflexible education programme structures (class schedule, deadlines for evaluation, etc.)	Lack of information about courses available (inc. part-time courses)

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Annex 4 Sources of data relating to lone parents

Labour Force Survey (LFS)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a quarterly sample survey of households living at private addresses in Great Britain. The survey is focused on experiences of the labour market and includes questions related to educational attainment, employment and income. Information on relationships within different households is collected, allowing lone parent families to be identified.

Although the LFS is a rich source of information for the UK as a whole, analysis by London Economics indicated that the sample of lone parents in Wales is relatively small. Within a pooled dataset of nine quarters of LFS data, around 700 Welsh lone parents were identified, with only approximately 250 having reported information in relation to income. This limits the extent of the analysis that can be undertaken. Further it is not clear the extent to which those individuals that did provide income data are representative of the full population of Welsh lone parents.

Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

The MCS follows the lives of a sample of around 19,000 babies born between 1 September 2000 and 31 August 2001 in England and Wales, and between 22 November 2000 and 11 January 2002 in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Information has been collected from parents when the children were aged nine months, at around three years of age, when the children were starting primary school and at around age seven.

In total, the sample to date has included 3,194 responses from single mothers across the UK, and 590 from single mothers in Wales. The survey includes questions related to parent's health, childcare, employment and time spent with the baby.

Family and Children Study (FCS or also known as "SOLIF" - Survey of Low Income Families)

The FACS is a panel study of approximately 7,000 families in Britain running from 1999. The initial waves focused on lone parent families and low-income couple families, but since wave 4, the survey has been based on a representative sample of all families with dependent children. In the first three waves (up to 2000).

Administrative data

A further source of information regarding lone parents is the administrative data collected by the Government, as part of the provision of benefits, tax credits and other forms of support.

The primary information available related to lone parents is that related to Income Support information. As "being a lone parent" is a criterion for eligibility, the Department for Work and Pensions, tracks the number of lone parent recipients of support, at both a national and a sub-national level. This is not true however of other types of benefit. Following the recent changes in eligibility for Income Support, the DWP has begun to estimate the number of lone parents receiving JSA (based on the characteristics stated on the claim application). However, this is currently available only at a UK level. Further, at present the methodology used to generate the statistics is experimental, and so the figures may be subject to revision.

The HMRC provides information on income-contingent child-related benefits, such as tax credits with provisional statistics are published twice a year. These figures separate families with couples from single parent families. However, a consistent historical breakdown at Wales level is not available (data prior to 2007, in particular, are subject to heavy rounding).



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