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# Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context

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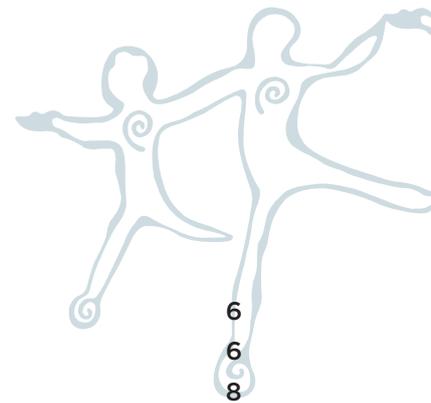
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# Table of Contents

## List of Tables

## List of Figures

### 1.0 Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 Aims and Objectives	8
1.3 Labour Market Activation	9
1.4 Lone Parents and Labour Market Activation	10
1.5 Methodology	12
1.6 Ethics	17
1.7 Limitations	17
1.8 Structure of Report	18

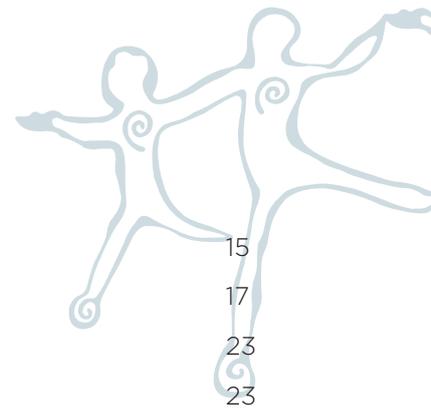
### 2.0 Irish Context

2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Profile of Irish Lone Parents	20
2.3 Irish Lone-Parent Families and Poverty and Social Exclusion	20
2.4 Child Well-Being in Lone-Parent Families	21
2.5 Irish Lone Parents and Employment	21
2.6 Active Labour Market Policy and Lone Parents	22
2.7 Supports to Lone Parents	24
2.8 Effectiveness of Employment Supports	26
2.9 Conclusion	27

### 3.0 The View of Key Stakeholders

3.1 Introduction	28
3.2 Views on Activation	28
3.3 The Process of Activation	30
3.4 Supports	32
3.5 Childcare	34
3.6 A Broader Perspective on Activation	36
3.7 Participants' Recommendations on Improving Lone-Parent Activation	38
3.8 Conclusion	39

<b>4.0 Lone Parents: Attitudes, Barriers and Experiences of Paid Employment</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 A Cycle of Determinants Affecting Lone Parent Employment	40
4.3 Attitudes and Motivation to Work	42
4.4 Childcare Determinants and Barriers	43
4.5 Lone Parents' Experiences of Paid Employment	44
4.6 Conclusion	45
<b>5.0 Employment Supports for Lone Parents</b>	<b>46</b>
5.1 Introduction	46
5.2 Pre-Employment Supports	46
5.3 Education and Training	48
5.4 Caseworkers' Views and Practices in Relation to Employment Supports	49
5.5 Financial Supports and Subsidies	51
5.6 Childcare Supports and Subsidies	53
5.7 Conclusion	54
<b>6.0 Employment Outcomes of Lone Parents' Participation in Activation Programmes</b>	<b>55</b>
6.1 Introduction	55
6.2 Outcomes of Voluntary Activation Programmes	55
6.3 Outcomes from Mandatory Programmes	57
6.4 Comparative Studies	59
6.5 Conclusion	60
<b>7.0 Lone-Parent Labour Market Activation and Well-Being</b>	<b>61</b>
7.1 Introduction	61
7.2 Economic Well-Being	61
7.3 Subjective Well-Being	62
7.4 Child and Adolescent Well-Being	64
7.5 Conclusion	66
<b>8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>73</b>



### List of Tables

Table 1: Record of Research Sites	15
Table 2: Interview Participants by Representation and Gender	17
Table 3: Changes to OFP 2012-2015	23
Table 4: Expected One Parent Family Transitions 2015	23

### List of Figures

Figure 1: Search Results	15
Figure 2: A Cycle of Determinants Affecting Lone Parent Employment	41

# 1.0

## Introduction to the Study

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the aims and objectives of this report, the methodology utilised and the layout of subsequent chapters. This work was conducted from January to December 2015 at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway, and was funded by a Department of Social Protection (DSP) Research Innovation Award administered by the IRC (Irish Research Council). This research arose in the midst of significant welfare reform for One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) recipients in Ireland. While an activation policy has been the focus of Irish policy debates since 2006, it was introduced in 2013 as a condition of the Troika bailout of Ireland in terms of savings to be made in social welfare spending and wider reform of social welfare. The policy intention is that this activation process is a solution to tackle the levels of poverty experienced by those parenting alone and their children, by improving their living standards and well-being.

These changes to the OFP mean that when the recipient's youngest child reaches the age of seven, they will no longer qualify for the OFP and would instead claim Jobseeker's Allowance<sup>1</sup> (JA) and must be genuinely seeking work. Prior to now, OFP recipients could claim the payment until their youngest child was aged eighteen. There are many barriers preventing lone parents taking up paid employment. Acknowledging the difficulties such a change in social welfare arrangements will have for recipients, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) has introduced a JA Transitional Arrangement, under which individuals will be obliged to engage with the DSP's activation services.

### 1.2 Aims and Objectives

This research aims to investigate best practice and innovative approaches to the labour market activation of lone parents in Ireland and internationally. It seeks to discover those policies, programmes and practices which enable lone parents to engage in employment which will lead to adequate living standards and improved well-being for them and their children. This evidence is grounded in its application to the Irish context, by giving due consideration to the profile of Irish lone parents and the barriers to paid employment they experience, as well as the relevance and applicability of such approaches to the Irish policy landscape.

The primary aim of this research is what is referred to in policy studies as 'policy learning' and 'lesson drawing' (Rose, 1993). The common theme among studies in this field is the concern with 'knowledge about how policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting' (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000: 5). This approach involves the examination of particular issues or phenomena in other countries with the express intention of comparing their manifestation in different socio-cultural settings. Essentially, the study seeks to explore what works in the labour market activation of lone parents, and why it worked. Policy-learning research attempts to find solutions to policy issues in other countries while taking into account current policies, practices and reforms to establish the applicability and relevance of approaches employed elsewhere to the case at hand. In this study the policy learning involves a comprehensive literature review of those policies, programmes and practices nationally and internationally which have enabled lone parents to engage in

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<sup>1</sup> Jobseeker's Allowance is the main benefit for people of working age who are out of work and are available for and actively seeking work.



employment which ultimately provides adequate living standards, improved individual and family well-being and better societal outcomes.

### 1.3 Labour Market Activation

In recent years, the role of paid work has come to the fore in social protection; however, the policies and programmes, benefits, work requirements and sanctions that have been introduced have varied widely. Labour market activation emerged in the 1970s, and the 1996 welfare reforms in the US mark the beginning of the current wave activation. Although there is no common definition and no 'one best way' (OECD, 2013), activation policies are based on the premise that being in paid employment is the responsibility of all citizens and that paid employment is the most effective way to deal with poverty. Moreover, looking for work is a requirement of receiving social protection. Barbier defines labour market activation as:

*An increased and explicit dynamic linkage introduced in public policy between social welfare, employment and labour market programmes, which implies critical redesigning of previous income support, assistance and social protection policies in terms of efficiency and equity, as well as enhancing the various social functions of paid work and labour force participation. (Barbier 2001: 5)*

Labour market activation policies are also differentiated as being Labour Force Attachment (LFA) or Human Capital Development (HCD) in their orientation. LFA policies involve a 'work first' approach grounded in the belief that swift entrance into paid employment is the most effective way of ensuring financial independence for lone parents. The HCD approach is centred on the view that involvement in education and training will improve the employability of lone parents and in the long term lead to higher-quality, sustainable employment. LFA and HCD approaches are ideal types, and activation programmes often contain a mixture of these approaches (Gibson et al., 2012).

The OECD (2013), in its review of seven countries, highlights a number of general lessons for activation strategies:

- Countries with a well-developed system of income support for unemployed people can gain from an employment-focused activation system which aids job search, reducing barriers to employment and providing employment and training programmes, backed up by mandatory referrals and enforced by benefits sanctions.
- Activation of welfare recipients who were not previously subject to employment conditions 'require care' not to overload the employment services, and it may take time and result in higher unemployment rates.
- The reform of institutions involved in employment assistance and social protection administration has been an essential part of activation strategies.
- The effectiveness of public and private employment services can be improved by utilising performance measurement (OECD, 2013: 128-130).

Welfare-to-work policies involve elements of compulsion to ensure that individuals make the transition to paid employment, and this requires support services to help welfare recipients in making the transition. Rowlingson and Millar (2002) identify three main types of policies to support lone parents into employment: the introduction of strict work requirements or participation in activation programmes; changes to welfare payments and taxes to improve the financial incentive to work; and the provision of childcare services or subsidies. How each of these elements has been implemented varies from country to country.

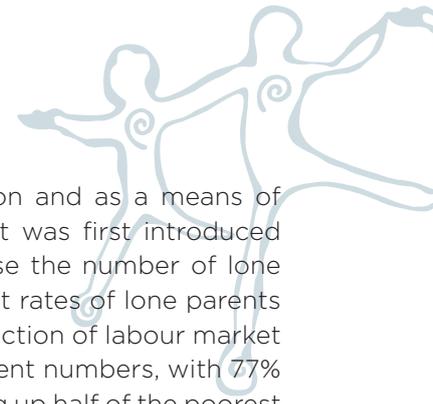
The role of employment services of the state is crucial in the implementation of activation policies; they intervene with welfare recipients, and encourage and compel them to make the transition from welfare to work. Dewar (2012) argues that welfare to work involves intervention, persuasion and compulsion through institutional means. Employment services play a key role in translating the contents of an activation programme and their actual implementation. Furthermore, in many countries reform of employment services has been necessary due to the demands of implementing activation programmes as well as the entrance of new actors to the social welfare arena, specifically private firms (Bode and Sandvin, 2012).

## 1.4 Lone Parents and Labour Market Activation

The proportion of lone-parent families has increased significantly in many countries. The OECD (2011) reports an increase in the employment rate of lone parents from 67% in the 1980s to 71% in the 2000s, but there has not been a subsequent decrease in poverty levels. In 2008, 28% of families in New Zealand were headed by lone parents, in the USA 33% in 2006, in the UK 25% in 2004, and in Australia and Canada 22% in 2006 (Ministry of Social Development, 2008, cited in Patterson, 2008). Since the 1980s, the number of lone-parent families in the Netherlands doubled due to an increase in mothers who have never married and in those separating and divorcing. As a proportion of all families with dependent children, lone-parent families rose from 8% in 1981 to 16% in 2002, and 88% are headed by women (Duyulmus and van den Berg, 2014).

The pathway to lone parenthood is increasingly one of divorce and separation. Lone-parent families are predominantly headed by women, and such families tend to experience poverty at a disproportionate level compared to other family forms. In Norway the main pathway to lone parenthood is the dissolution of marriage or a consensual union, yet the view of them as different from other mothers persists: they are regarded as having low education and work skills and low motivation to engage in paid employment (Kjeldstad and Rønsen, 2004). In Germany, 90% of those parenting alone are women (Zabel, 2012). The Netherlands is something of an outlier, with high employment rates for lone mothers, but much of this is concentrated in part-time employment. However, the poverty rate of lone-parent families more than doubled from 14.4% in the mid-1980s to 31.2% in 2008 (Duyulmus and van den Berg, 2014).

Prior to the current wave of activation, social protection for lone-parent families was based on the assumption of a male breadwinner model of society (Lewis, 2006). Such policies assumed that those parenting alone were not expected to connect to the labour market. For example, in Australia the government extended welfare support to unmarried and separated mothers in 1973; this was grounded in the assumption that mothers were financially dependent on their partners and the pre-eminence of their caring role (Walter, 2002). However, in the USA activation has also been concerned with promoting family based on marriage and as a deterrent to teenage pregnancy. Commentators such as Henderson et al. (2005) argue that the rationale behind the USA welfare reforms was centred on the aspiration of increasing family stability by compelling welfare recipients to accept personal responsibility for their lives and return to a traditional family structure. Much public discourse surrounding lone parents in the USA centred on never-married teenage mothers (Ezawa and Fujiwara, 2005).



Employment as a solution to increased public expenditure on social protection and as a means of tackling poverty levels for lone-parent families has gained momentum since it was first introduced in the USA in 1996. In the UK, since 1997, policymakers have sought to increase the number of lone parents in employment as a means of reducing child poverty levels; employment rates of lone parents have increased from 12% in 1997 to 57% in 2009 (Gloster et al., 2010). The introduction of labour market activation for Australian lone parents stemmed from a rapid increase in lone parent numbers, with 77% of lone parents receiving social welfare payments in 2001 and lone parents making up half of the poorest 20% of the population (Walter, 2002). In the Netherlands, lone mothers in receipt of welfare have much lower levels of education than those in employment, and labour market activation of lone parents aimed to tackle poverty levels and reduce expenditure on social welfare (Knijn and Van Wel, 2001).

One of the first comparative studies of welfare-to-work policies for lone parents was overseen by Millar and Evans (2003) for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in the UK. They note that such activation measures involve financial incentives to work, the expansion of childcare provisions, the introduction of employment supports, targeting of policy to lone parents based on the age of children, varying degrees of compulsion and varying levels of discretion in the implementation of measures. They point to great diversity in policy, with countries pursuing similar goals but with distinct policy approaches and levels of investment, and they suggest that common lessons can be drawn:

1. Policies to increase employment among lone parents are to some extent 'pushing at an open door'. This is due to more women participating in paid work, availability of jobs, and changes in attitudes and aspirations towards employment. However, it is evident that not all lone mothers wish to transition to paid employment and want their identity as mothers to be acknowledged by service providers.
2. Some unemployed lone parents had been working but lost their jobs, and there seem to be a portion who move in and out of work. Supports are required to ensure lone parents can sustain employment.
3. There are a significant number of lone parents with severe and multiple barriers to employment, including little work experience, low skills, lack of confidence, and health problems. These parents will require significant supports to take up employment and remain in it. Others will need time to deal with the breakdown of their relationship. Policy measures need to be flexible and diverse to recognise and deal with the varied circumstances and needs of lone parents.
4. Effective activation policies cost money and may involve a shift in total welfare expenditure rather than a reduction. Income derived from work in isolation might not ensure an adequate income for working lone parents' families. Many lone mothers require significant in-work benefits and help with the cost of childcare to avoid becoming working poor.
5. The most effective way to assist lone parents into paid employment is a mix of provision, assistance with job search, access to suitable education and training, in-work cash transfers, individual advice and support, access to affordable good quality childcare, and ready availability of secure employment. It is difficult to isolate the independent effect of each measure; rather, it is the combination of measures that are necessary to make an impact.
6. There is significant diversity in the impact of compulsion and work requirements. The evidence suggests that some small degree of compulsion can be helpful. Compulsion is costly in terms of staff resources and time, organising interviews, dealing with non-participation and applying sanctions. Evidence from the USA shows that sanctions will affect the most disadvantaged, as lone parents who experience multiple barriers are the ones most likely to fail to adhere due to their difficulties.

7. The way policies are implemented on the ground is significant, specifically in the role of front-line workers in assisting lone parents to become workers rather than carers. This transformation requires a cultural shift in the welfare services of many countries (Millar and Evans, 2003).

Millar and Evans (2003) point to what was not known at that time about welfare-to-work policies for lone parents: the impact on children living in lone-parent families. However, in the intervening years a body of research has grown which focuses on the subjective and non-subjective well-being of the children living in lone-parent families whose parents have undergone activation.

Activation policy towards lone parents is predominately but not exclusively predicated on the age of the youngest child. As such, Haux (2008, 2010b) puts forward six different types of activation approaches in relation to selection criteria for lone parents and employment:

1. General activation – all lone parents in receipt of welfare are activated.
2. Age of the youngest child.
3. 'Transition': eligibility for social protection is based on the age of the youngest child and by self-reported relationship status.
4. 'Employability': lone parents are profiled according to their readiness for work.
5. Caseworker: Caseworkers make independent assessments rather than judgements arising from employability checklists alone.
6. 'Voluntary': lone parents regarded as poor mothers with dependent children, and as such are not required to participate in Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) but may do so voluntarily (Haux, 2008, 2010b).

## 1.5 Methodology

This study took place over a twelve-month period. The methodological approach to this research encompassed two parts: a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part consisted of a thorough review of the literature, to identify best international and Irish practice and innovative approaches in the activation of lone parents, taking account of good outcomes. A systematic approach to the literature review was utilised in order to enhance transparency, rigour, reliability and validity. Time and logistical constraints in conducting the review meant that a scoping review was the most feasible option for this study. The scoping review consisted of four stages.



## Stage 1

Stage 1 was to review the scope, questions and protocol, with final results listed below:

### Define the Review Question

*Identify best practice and innovative approaches to activation for lone parents, nationally and internationally*

### Define the Intervention

*Activation, Welfare to Work, Employment*

### Population under Investigation

*Lone Parents, Single Parents*

### Outcomes

*Well-being and child well-being*

### Inclusion Criteria

*This review included all types of evidence available to meet the aims and objectives of the study. It focused on evidence pertaining to activation of one-parent families only, and takes account of all categories of one-parent families.*

### Exclusion Criteria

*We excluded any studies that were not available in English. Studies not pertaining to the activation of one-parent families and studies with inappropriate or insufficient quality were also excluded from the analysis.*

## Stage 2

Stage 2 of the review involved searching for and selecting evidence: specific search criteria were defined and a search strategy was developed to locate all relevant evidence. After a comprehensive search of one of the largest social science research databases, the following 15 search terms were decided upon, based on the results of the test search:

- (1) Lone parents or single parents + activation
- (2) Lone parents or single parents + employment
- (3) Lone parents or single parents + welfare to work
- (4) Lone parents or single parents + activation + wellbeing
- (4b) Lone parents or single parents + activation + well being
- (5) Lone parents or single parents + employment + wellbeing
- (5b) Lone parents or single parents + employment + well being
- (6) Lone parents or single parents + welfare to work + wellbeing
- (6b) Lone parents or single parents + welfare to work + well being
- (7) Lone parents or single parents + activation + child wellbeing
- (7b) Lone parents or single parents + activation + child well being
- (8) Lone parents or single parents + employment + child wellbeing
- (8b) Lone parents or single parents + employment + child well being
- (9) Lone parents or single parents + welfare to work + child wellbeing
- (9b) Lone parents or single parents + welfare to work + child well being

Stage 2 also consisted of searching for a wide range of academic, grey and specialist organisation literature, which was sourced through a series of database searches using the relevant pre-determined search terms and from cross references within the literature, in addition to recommendations from key authors published in this area. A total of 11 academic databases were searched using each of the search terms (Table 1). In addition, four other search sites were utilised to ensure complete and comprehensive saturation of the subject area; see Table 1.

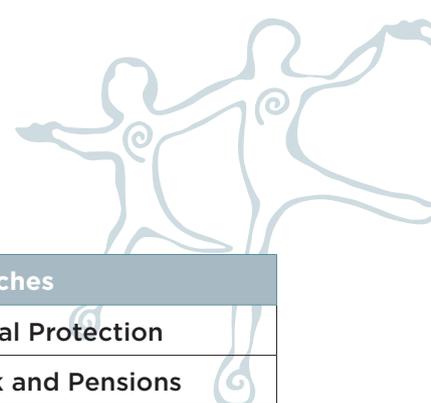


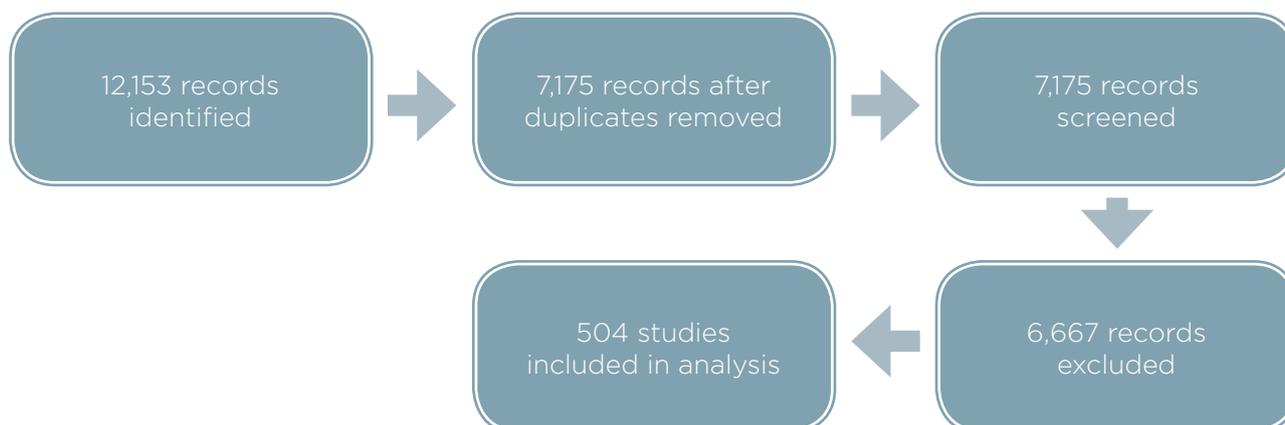
Table 1: Record of Research Sites

Database Searches	Other Searches
Academic Search Complete	Department of Social Protection
Sociological Index	Department for Work and Pensions
COPAC	Open Grey (to take account of all grey literature in the area)
OECD I Library	Google
Project Muse	
Pro Quest	
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts	
Sociological Abstracts	
SCOPUS	
Science Direct	
Web of Science	

### Stage 3

Stage 3 pertained to quality appraisal. Literature that fell within the scope of the search was appraised for quality, appropriateness to the research question, and to ensure that the conclusions drawn from the data and results presented were valid. A total of 12,153 results were generated from the 15 search terms across 15 search sites, all of which were recorded in literature search logs: 4,982 were duplicates, and a total of 6,667 were deemed ineligible at this stage. Grounds for ineligibility included: not pertaining to lone parents, and irrelevant and outdated material. This resulted in 504 results being included in the review. Suitable literature was then categorised by type, organised around key themes and recorded according to the same criteria.

Figure 1: Search Results



## Stage 4

Stage 4 of the review consisted of data extraction and syntheses, the results of which are presented in this report.

### **Presentation of the Literature**

As is evident from Figure 1 above, the systematic approach undertaken in the literature search produced a substantial amount of evidence pertinent to the research. Much of the evidence reviewed was contained within sizable report documents which took a holistic approach to examining the issue of lone parents and activation. Therefore, it was decided that each report would be divided into pertinent themes and placed, along with all other evidence, within the relevant chapters in this study. Although this method of review has resulted in a significant amount of time spent, the detail contained in the report is valid and necessary to provide readers with a comprehensive, all-inclusive account of both the national and international literature on lone parent activation.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

The empirical part of this study targeted organisations, projects and stakeholders delivering activation supports to lone parents, identified by the data gathered in the literature review. The research team selected national policy actors to be interviewed; in addition, other state bodies were approached and asked to contribute to the research. It was felt that it would also be prudent to interview actors from organisations representing those parenting alone. The research team identified a number of service organisations, at both local and national level, whom it was felt would have significant experience in working with those parenting alone. These organisations spanned both the community and voluntary sectors.

Data collection consisted of 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews, which were informed by the findings of the literature review and focused on capturing the participants' knowledge and expertise with regard to activation of lone parents, as well as their views on what activation measures and supports work best for lone parents in the Irish context. By engaging with organisations that work with lone parents, the completed research is grounded in tangible evidence from those with the knowledge and expertise to consider activation in the Irish context. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and the participants' names were changed to protect anonymity.

### **Profile of the Interview Participants**

Of the 20 participants interviewed, six represented advocacy groups that work with lone parents on a continuous basis, eight were speaking on behalf of voluntary organisations that have direct experience of the issues facing lone parents, as well as drawing from their own personal experiences in some cases, and six were representatives of state departments involved in the activation of lone parents. Interviews were labelled according to the groups to which the participants belong, and their gender breakdown is as follows:

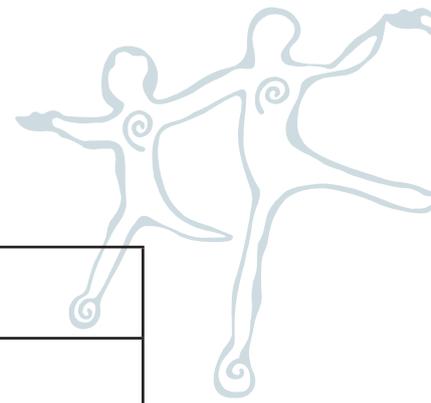


Table 2: Interview Participants by Representation and Gender

<b>Advocacy = (A)</b>	<b>1 Male</b> <b>5 Female</b>
<b>Voluntary = (V)</b>	<b>1 Male</b> <b>7 Female</b>
<b>State = (S)</b>	<b>2 Male</b> <b>4 Female</b>

NVivo software was utilised to code the responses into thematic areas aligned with the interview questions, and this data was used to generate a nuanced analysis of the themes that evolved, which is presented in Chapter 3 of this report. The conclusions and recommendations from this report are derived from the thorough review of the national and international evidence, in conjunction with the Irish expert evidence obtained through the analysis of the empirical data. Consolidation of all three components has allowed for considered conclusions and recommendations to be developed.

## 1.6 Ethics

The research was guided by key ethical requirements of doing no harm. Initially, all respondents were contacted by email with detailed information about the research and an invitation to participate in the interview process. For respondents who indicated their willingness to participate, anonymity was guaranteed, and therefore names and identifiable personal details throughout the report have been changed.

## 1.7 Limitations

While this research has been wide-ranging in its aims and its achievements, there were certain methodological limitations to the study. While every effort was made to review activation approaches, procedures and processes from a range of countries, and although studies have been conducted in many countries, the USA and the UK offer the most extensive bodies of evaluation evidence on lone-parent work-related requirements as associated services; this was also noted by Finn and Gloster (2010) in their review of lone-parent employment interventions. Although this study intended to take account of all categories of one-parent families, as noted in the inclusion criteria, and specific consideration was given to the gender dimension of the research in both the theoretical and empirical parts of the study, there is a lack of research on the characteristics and experiences of lone fathers. They tend to be eliminated from quantitative studies, as their numbers are too small to allow for strong conclusions to be drawn, and qualitative studies have failed to either recruit them or seek them out (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). In addition, while very effort was made to include both genders in the empirical part of the research, the area of investigation is such that more women than men seem to be active in policy and welfare fields, which is evident in the gender breakdown of the interviews undertaken. This study does not consider the impact that the policy reforms will have on lone-parent families in Ireland. While some lone parents were interviewed for the empirical part of this study, they were interviewed on the basis of their representation of advocacy and voluntary groups. The impact of the policy reforms on lone-parent families in Ireland is something that needs to be considered in future research.

## 1.8 Structure of Report

**Chapter 2** provides the context to labour market activation of lone parents in Ireland. It presents a profile of lone parents in Ireland as a disadvantaged group in comparison to married parents: they have lower levels of education, are more likely to be situated in the lower manual social class, and have higher unemployment rates (Millar and Crosse, 2014). It explores poverty and child well-being; those parenting alone and their children are the biggest group at risk of living in poverty in Ireland, and have been for some time. The current situation for lone parents and employment is considered, taking account of barriers to employment, the likelihood of being a non-working OFP recipient, and childcare issues. Social policy pertaining to lone parents in Ireland provides an historical overview of the activation policy and presents the current structure of supports and services provided to lone parents in Ireland.

**Chapter 3** presents the findings from the empirical part of this research. It presents participants' knowledge and expertise with regard to the activation of lone parents, as well as their views on what activation measures and supports work best for lone parents in the Irish context. It reports views on the reality of the lives of lone parents and barriers that currently exist to activation, and it presents recommendations to ensure increased success in lone parent activation.

**Chapter 4** considers the evidence in relation to lone parents' attitudes towards, barriers to, and experiences of employment. There is a growing body of qualitative research which explores how labour market activation has impacted on lone parents' attitudes and motivation towards paid employment. Barriers to employment are strongly associated with the characteristics of lone parents, and both combine to impact on lone parents' 'readiness to work'. Lone parents' experiences of looking for employment when they participate in activation programmes is dependent on their 'work readiness'.

**Chapter 5** looks at the evidence in relation to employment supports provided by government, which constitute a significant element of activation, and the literature presents information on how best to deliver employment supports to meet the needs of lone parents. Employment supports vary from country to country, but most include individualised support from caseworkers in the public employment service, education and training, access to affordable childcare and financial support, and subsidies to assist lone parents in their transition from welfare to paid employment and to remain in employment. Employment supports that have been successful include support from caseworkers that is individualised, all-inclusive and delivered by staff who have been highly trained in the needs and attitudes of lone parents and continues after the individual enters employment. Financial supports are imperative in 'making work pay' for many lone parents who enter part-time, low-paid employment and remain in it. It is extremely difficult in any one country to say which intervention was most effective in helping lone parents make the transition to employment; rather, it would appear that it is the combination of supports that are necessary to make an impact.

**Chapter 6** reports on the employment outcomes of a labour market activation for lone parents who participated in an activation programme as reported in the literature. It is important to note that early evidence from the UK is based on the NDLP, which was a voluntary, opt-in activation programme, and as such we differentiate between the outcomes of voluntary and mandatory activation programmes. Mandatory participation in the UK is reporting lower levels of transition to employment among lone parents, and those who are moving into work have more 'job-ready' characteristics than those who are not. Mandatory programmes in other countries also report mixed outcomes dependent on the characteristics of the lone parents.

**Chapter 7** considers maternal and child well-being for lone parents and low-income families who participated in activation programmes. There is evidence that work contributes to maternal well-being and economic stability, but this is mixed, and there is little to suggest that it leads to improved child development. The age and gender of the child appear to be important determinants in how employment



of a lone parent impacts on their well-being. However, it is only in recent years that researchers have begun to question and consider the impact of welfare reforms on children, with particular concern that the impact of labour market activation on children is rarely considered prior to the implementation of policy.

**Chapter 8** presents conclusions and recommendations from this report, both of which are derived from the thorough review of the national and international evidence, in conjunction with the Irish expert evidence obtained through analysis of the empirical data. The consolidation of all three components presented here has allowed for considered conclusions and recommendations to be developed.

# 2.0

## Irish Context

### 2.1 Introduction

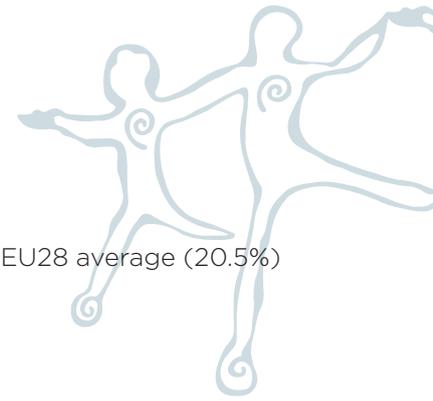
This chapter provides the context for the labour market activation of lone parents in Ireland. It presents a profile of lone parents in Ireland as a disadvantaged group in comparison to married parents: they have lower levels of education, and are more likely to be situated in the lower manual social class and to have higher unemployment rates (Millar and Crosse, 2014). The chapter considers the current situation in relation to lone parents and employment, taking account of barriers to employment, the likelihood of being a non-working OFP recipient, and childcare issues. Supports for lone parents returning to employment and education or training are presented; these include income support, in-work benefits, assistance in job searching, support for education and training, subsidised employment schemes and childcare assistance. Finally, the effectiveness of current supports is considered.

### 2.2 Profile of Irish Lone Parents

An individual who parents alone is someone who is raising their children alone and can be single (never married), divorced, separated, no longer living with their civil partner, a surviving civil partner or widowed. This family form is varied, and their numbers are growing. Irish lone parents are a heterogeneous group in terms of pathways to lone parenthood, age, children's ages, social status, education and employment status (Crosse and Millar, 2015). In comparison to married parents, lone parents are a disadvantaged group in Irish society, with only 2.4% reported as professional workers and 27.3% skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers (CSO, 2012a). The principal economic status of lone parents is also diverse; the largest group, 42.5%, are in paid employment, compared to 69.3% of heads of two-parent households, and 14.4% are unemployed compared to 11.8% of heads of two-parent families (CSO, 2012b). Education levels for lone parents also vary: 2011 census figures show that 2.54% of all lone parents have no formal education or training, 17.1% have primary level and 21.24% have some secondary education. Therefore, 40.8% of all Irish lone parents have very low levels of education and have not completed second-level education. In terms of third-level qualifications, 9.63% have a degree and 3.85% have a postgraduate qualification; indeed this corresponds with the economic status of lone parents.

### 2.3 Irish Lone-Parent Families and Poverty and Social Exclusion

Those parenting alone and their children are the biggest group at risk of living in poverty in Ireland. In 2013 the rate of consistent poverty was 23% for lone parents compared to 8.2% for the general population, and the at-risk-of-poverty rate was 31.7% for lone parents compared to 15.2% for the general population. For lone parents the deprivation rate was 63.2% in 2013 compared to 30.5% for the general population; the deprivation rate for lone-parent families has significantly increased over time, up from 35.5% since 2009 (CSO, 2015). Explanations for such high levels of poverty in lone-parent households tend to centre on the fact that so many of these households have no adult in paid employment. Given the fact that lone parents tend to have lower levels of educational attainment, those who are attached to the labour market tend to work in low-skilled areas with consequent low pay (Watson et al., 2011), with high childcare costs being a significant barrier to progression (Richardson, 2012). This is evident in figures pertaining to the in-work poverty rates of lone parents in Ireland. The in-work poverty rate among single persons with children was more than twice that of households with two or more adults



with dependent children (9.2% vs. 4.2%), although the rate is still half that of the EU28 average (20.5%) for lone-parent households (CSO, 2015).

## 2.4 Child Well-Being in Lone-Parent Families

The well-being of children in Irish lone-parent families has been extensively reported in the 'Growing Up in Ireland' data (Corrigan, 2014). This data highlights the dependency of lone-parent families on social protection, as well as the high levels of depression and stress lone mothers experience in comparison to married mothers. Children in lone-parent families are more likely to be reported as suffering from some type of long-term illness or disability (20%) than those in married or cohabiting families (15%). In relation to emotional development, children of lone parents had significantly higher levels of social difficulties. In terms of obesity and being overweight, the gender of the child was the main determinant of difference; however, there were differences in dietary habits based on marital status. Lone-parent families were more likely to engage in unhealthy dietary habits and to give their child unhealthy food (Corrigan, 2014).

For the nine-year-old cohort of the 'Growing Up in Ireland' study, the well-being of the children (Fahey et al., 2012) was analysed on reading and mathematical ability at aged nine, social-emotional adjustment and presence or absence of chronic illness. Family type was not significant; the educational level of the mother was the strongest predictor of children's well-being, particularly of reading and mathematical ability. Therefore, the resources the parents have, measured by how educated they are and whether they can avoid living in poverty, are of greater importance for the child's well-being than the family type (Fahey et al., 2012).

## 2.5 Irish Lone Parents and Employment

Although the number of Irish women entering paid employment has grown substantially in recent years, the experiences for lone parents has not mirrored that of other women. While women's educational attainment is higher than men's in Ireland, 43% of lone parents in the 25-44 years age group have less than full second-level (secondary or vocational school) education, compared to 27% of married mothers (Watson et al., 2011). For the 40.8% of lone parents who have no formal education qualification, this will impact on the type of employment available to them.

Difficulties with cost and availability of childcare have been repeatedly acknowledged as an issue of concern for those parenting alone returning to paid employment (Crosse and Millar, 2015; Murphy, 2012; Millar et al., 2007, 2012; Hayes et al., 2005; Richardson, 2012). Indeed, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Report (IHREC) (2015, p.25) states:

*The IHREC recommends that the State reverse the reforms to the OFP in the absence of an adequate and affordable childcare system being in place. While these reforms remain in place, their effect should be closely monitored by the State, in particular in relation to the poverty and deprivation rates for single parent headed households. Any negative effects that are detected should be dealt with as a matter of priority and effectively remedied by the State.*

Ireland's free-market approach to childcare and the resulting high costs interfere with parental decision-making in the context of reconciling work and family life (Hodgins et al., 2007) and afford limited choices for employment (particularly for women), in that costs are a real disincentive to women remaining in the labour force, principally in cases where there are two or more children (Immervoll and Barber, 2006).

OECD analysis indicates that full-time day care for two preschool children is 40% of the family income for an Irish lone parent on an average income, in comparison to the OECD average of 13% (Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis, 2014). Due to the limited and costly options of childcare services available, reliance on informal, free sources of childcare is a common feature of family life in Ireland, particularly for lone-parent families (Millar et al., 2007).

## 2.6 Active Labour Market Policy and Lone Parents

Boucher and Collins (2003) argue that since the late 1980s there has been a shift from passive to active labour market policies within the Irish welfare state, mainly targeted at the unemployed. Activation was first introduced to Ireland in 1998 through the National Employment Action Plan, and was implemented nationally in 2003 (OECD, 2014). The first policy document to raise concerns about lone parents was the OECD's 'Babies and Bosses Report' (2003), which examined reconciling work and family life in Ireland and strongly recommended that Irish policymakers engage in 'a more forceful assistance in employment support policy' for lone parents taking up employment, and provide the relevant training or educational resources required for securing employment (Millar et al., 2007).

The dual concerns of poverty rates among one-parent families and civil service disquiet about the amount of exchequer funds being spent on the payment prompted the drafting of compulsory activation proposals for OFP recipients (Millar et al., 2007). The proposals (DSFA, 2006) posited the replacement of the OFP with a Parental Allowance until the youngest child reaches seven, at which time the parent would take up employment, education or training. In addition, the proposals posited that lone parents would need to participate in activation engagement when their youngest child reached five years of age. One important qualification in the 2006 proposals was the redefinition of employment to 19 hours per week. This reflects what Murphy and Millar (2007) described as some compromise in the policy between the role of carer and worker. The proposals were not implemented initially, as there was concern over the age of the youngest child criteria and there was a change in Minister.

A pilot scheme of the non-income recommendations of the proposals in relation to those parenting alone and qualified adults was initiated in 2007. The findings of the pilot indicated that lone parents are not a homogenous group and they have differing needs. The participants had low levels of education and had low earnings in their previous employment. The Minister explained that the findings of the pilots were feeding into the development of the operational details of the policy (Dáil Debates, 21 October 2008).

In 2008, Minister Hanafin stated she intended to overhaul the OFP in an attempt to re-assert family values. By February 2010, there appeared to be agreement on the age of the youngest child, and Minister Hanafin announced that she was considering removing the OFP when the youngest child becomes 13.

The Minister believed that six or seven was too young, and the fact that a 13-year-old would be in school until 4pm would facilitate the mother in working.

Mary Hanafin departed the DSFA in March 2010 following a cabinet reshuffle, and was replaced by Minister Éamon Ó Cuív. It was renamed the Department of Social Protection (DSP), which published the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2010 in May. This was passed into law on 27 July 2010. The Act brought about significant changes to the OFP for new recipients: from 27 April 2011 OFP would be paid until the youngest child reaches the age of 14 (originally the Bill stated 13). In addition, eligibility for entitlement to the OFP for new entrants was also dependant on the youngest child being 14.

The Fianna Fail/Green Party coalition government collapsed following the withdrawal of the Green Party, a general election was held in February 2011, and a Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition government was formed. For the Budget 2012, it was announced in December 2011 by the Labour Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, that further changes were to be made to OFP: a phased introduction of



change in the age of the youngest child from 14 to 12 in 2012, to 10 in 2013 and to 7 in 2014. For entrants to the scheme from 2 May 2012, transitional arrangements were put in place, as follows:

**Table 3: Changes to OFP 2012-20**

	Payment of OFP ceases when the youngest child reaches these age limits:			
	From 3 May 2012	From 4 July 2013 <sup>2</sup>	From 3 July 2014	From 2 July 2015
<b>If OFP payment commenced before 27 April 2011</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>If OFP payment commenced between 27 April 2011 and 2 May 2012</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>If OFP payment commenced on or after 3 May 2012</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	

These changes meant that the age threshold of the youngest child would be reduced from eighteen to seven over a phased period of years, and those recipients who no longer qualified for the OFP would instead claim Jobseeker’s Allowance (JA) and must be genuinely seeking work – or if in sufficient employment could claim the Family Income Supplement<sup>2</sup> (FIS). However, in acknowledgement of the difficulties such a radical change in social welfare arrangements would have for recipients, the DSP introduced the Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment (JST) in 2013. At present, those with children aged 7-13 years inclusive are exempt from having to be available for and genuinely seeking full-time employment. Under the JST, individuals will be obliged to engage with the DSP’s activation services.

In July 2013, approximately 2,500 OFP recipients were moved to the JA, 460 were moved to JST and 1500 were moved to FIS. In July 2014, approximately 1300 OFP recipients were moved to JA, 1300 were moved to JST and 1100 were moved to FIS. In July 2015, all those in receipt of the OFP with a child aged over seven were transitioned to alternative income supports. Expected figures are as follows:

**Table 4: Expected One-Parent Family Transitions 2015**

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Estimated Numbers</b>
<b>Jobseeker’s transitional payment</b>	<b>19,800</b>
<b>Jobseeker’s Allowance (JA)</b>	<b>4,100</b>
<b>Family Income Supplement (FIS)</b>	<b>5,500</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,400</b>

<sup>2</sup> Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with children. It gives extra financial support to people on low pay.

## 2.7 Supports to Lone Parents

The supports provided to lone parents in their transition from welfare to work include social protection income supports, assistance in finding employment, in-work benefits, education and training supports, subsidised employment supports and childcare support<sup>3</sup>. The Irish social protection system is complicated, and research has highlighted that lone parents have experienced difficulty in understanding the complexity of the system (Millar et al., 2007); much of this has been due to the requirement to deal with different state bodies for various allowances and supports.

In 2012 the government unveiled its labour force activation strategy 'Pathways to Work' and launched the Action Plan For Jobs initiative. Since then, there has been major reform and reorientation of activation supports and services. The cornerstone has been the National Employment and Entitlements Service 4(NEES), which aims to integrate the employment support service provided by the DSP and FÁS5 into a single service. The aim is to provide a 'one-stop shop' for individuals to claim benefits and look for employment and advice on training options. The training element is to be delivered by a new training agency, SOLAS6. NEES was renamed INTREO7 in 2012 (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2011).

INTREO involved the integration of FÁS and the Community Welfare Services8 (CWS) previously provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and staff transferred to the DSP in 2012 (Murphy, 2012). Pilot programmes were launched, and national rollout has now been finalised. The 'Pathway to Work' followed by INTREO includes: signing on for Jobseeker's payments, participation in a group engagement session, one-to-one sessions, monitoring appointments, information and training support grants (TSG). The Solas element of INTREO oversees the Further Education and Training (FET) courses, which are provided by the Education Training Boards9 (ETB).

In addition to the services provided by INTREO, lone parents are entitled to a range of other supports and services, such as social protection supports which include one-parent family payment (OFP), Jobseeker's Transition Payment (JST) and Jobseeker's Allowance (JA), support in finding employment through measures such as JobPath10..

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3 All information about social welfare supports and services have been taken from the Citizens Information website unless otherwise stated.

4 The National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES) was established is to integrate the provision of employment services and benefit payment services within the Department of Social Protection. Its aim was to ensure that the payment of income supports to people who do not have a job is directly linked to the equally if not more important task of supporting such people in their pursuit of employment and related opportunities and improving their life chances. As part of this approach, the Department changed its focus from the passive provision of transaction-based services (claims-processing and payments) to the active case management of clients. All such services are provided by INTREO.

5 FÁS was formerly Ireland's training and employment authority, and was dissolved in 2013. The Department of Social Protection has taken over responsibility from FÁS for Community Employment and Employment Services.

6 SOLAS Ireland's Further Education and Training Authority was established in 2013 to develop and give strategic direction to the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland. SOLAS operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills and is responsible for funding, planning and co-ordinating a wide range of training and further education programmes.

7 INTREO is a new service from the Department of Social Protection. INTREO is a single point of contact for all employment and income supports. Designed to provide a more streamlined approach, INTREO offers practical, tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers and employers alike.

8 Community welfare services are provided by community welfare officers (CWOs). This service used to be provided by the HSE, but is now part of the Department of Social Protection. Community welfare officers now work for the Department of Social Protection but provide clinics from HSE health centres.

9 ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes.

10 JobPath is a new labour market activation programme for job seekers introduced on a phased basis in mid-2015, to be rolled out nationally at the end of the year. JobPath will provide support to those in need of intensive employment supports. It will be delivered by private companies contracted to deliver the service, and their payment is outcome based.



Lone parents can also avail of a wide range of educational and training services and supports, which include Further Education and Training (FET) courses, the Back to Education Allowance<sup>11</sup> (BTEA) and the Student Grant Scheme (SUSI).

For those who make the transition from welfare to employment, there are a number of supports available. They are categorised as In Work income supports, are administered by government departments and state bodies, and include Family Income Supplement (FIS), the Back to Work Family Dividend<sup>12</sup> (BTWFD) and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance<sup>13</sup> (BTWEA), which encourages those on welfare to become self-employed. All are administered by the DSP. The Single Person Child Carer Credit<sup>14</sup> (SPCCC) is administered by the Revenue Office, and the medical card is administered by the HSE<sup>15</sup>.

For those who have been assessed as needing support with the cost of housing, there are a number of schemes available depending on individual circumstances. These schemes, administered by both city and county councils or the DSP, include social housing, rent supplement<sup>16</sup> (RS), the rental accommodation scheme<sup>17</sup> (RAS) and the housing assistance payment (HAP)<sup>18</sup>. Childcare is seen a fundamental issue in welfare-to-work transitions, and affordable childcare aims to provide childcare for families on low incomes and to assist lone parents in returning to work or education. Schemes available under the umbrella of affordable childcare include the community childcare subvention programme (CCS)<sup>19</sup>, early childhood care and education<sup>20</sup> (ECCE), early start programme<sup>21</sup> (ESP), childcare education and training support programme<sup>22</sup> (CETS), after-school

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<sup>11</sup> The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is an education scheme for people in receipt of certain social welfare payments who wish to pursue a full-time second-level or third-level course of education. The Student Grant Scheme is divided into two components – maintenance grants and fee grants. You cannot get the BTEA and the maintenance component of a student grant together. The only postgraduate courses recognised for BTEA are a higher diploma (H.Dip) in any discipline or the professional master's in education.

<sup>12</sup> The Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) scheme aims to help families to move from social welfare into employment. It gives financial support to people with qualified children who are in or take up employment or self-employment and as a result stop claiming a jobseeker's payment or a one-parent family payment on or after 5 January 2015. The BTWFD is a weekly payment of €29.80 for each qualified child (up to a maximum of four children) for the first year in employment. Half that amount will be paid in the second year.

<sup>13</sup> The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme encourages people getting certain social welfare payments to become self-employed. If you take part in the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme, you can keep a percentage of your social welfare payment for up to two years.

<sup>14</sup> The Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC) is a tax credit available to a parent or to a person who has custody of and maintains a child who is living with him or her. It is available to the primary carer of the child(ren); the carer may, if he or she so wishes, relinquish the tax credit to a secondary claimant.

<sup>15</sup> The HSE provides all of Ireland's public health services, in hospitals and communities across the country.

<sup>16</sup> The purpose of Rent Supplement is to provide short-term income support to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation who are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources and who do not have accommodation available to them from another source.

<sup>17</sup> The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was introduced to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of rent supplement, normally for more than 18 months, and who have a long term housing need as determined by local councils. Under the scheme, local authorities draw up contracts with landlords to provide housing for an agreed term for people with a long-term housing need. The local authority pays the rent directly to the landlord. Tenants pay their rent to the local authority.

<sup>18</sup> HAP was introduced in 2013 and aims to allow individuals to enter into a private tenancy and the DSP who will pay the rent to the landlord. The individual entering the tenancy will be responsible for paying a percentage of their rent, which will be paid weekly to the Department. This percentage is based on the individual's income. A significant change from RS is that people receiving HAP can enter employment without losing their payment; instead the contribution that they pay to their rent can be increased according to their increase of income. HAP is still being rolled out nationally.

<sup>19</sup> Low-income parents in education, training or low-paid employment can avail of childcare for children under the age of 15 in a community-based not-for-profit facility at reduced rates. This programme is based on a reduction system, and parents can receive a reduction in the cost of their childcare.

<sup>20</sup> This provides a free year of ECCE for children of preschool age. The State pays a capitation fee to community and private preschools that participate in the scheme.

<sup>21</sup> This is an alternative programme to ECCE, which is specifically targeted at disadvantaged children for whom there is concern that they may not reach their full potential in education. Parents whose children qualify for the ESP must decide between it and ECCE, as their child cannot avail of both.

<sup>22</sup> This scheme provides subsidised childcare to qualifying parents who are attending education or training.

childcare<sup>23</sup> (ASCC) and community employment<sup>24</sup> childcare programme<sup>25</sup> (CEC).

## 2.8 Effectiveness of Employment Supports

In terms of the effectiveness of supports to those transitioning from welfare to work in Ireland, there has been a significant reform and reorientation of labour market supports in recent years, and a review of the DSP Employment Support Schemes suggests that the post programme outcomes of temporary work programmes<sup>26</sup> remain disappointing. However, it is thought that with reform, some<sup>27</sup> of the schemes could increase their contribution as activation measures. In relation to RSS and JI, the review finds that neither of these schemes currently contributes to activation policy in terms of leading on to other sustainable employment outside the confines of the scheme itself. It is recommended that the future of these schemes be considered in the context of their contribution to service delivery rather than activation (DSP, 2012).

In relation to internship and work placement programmes<sup>28</sup>, there have been a number of reports on JobBridge, which has been subject to criticism; some commentators have called for its abolition, arguing that it displaces paid entry-level employment and needs regulation and monitoring (Murphy, 2015). Other evaluations of the JobBridge suggest that the scheme has been successful, with 51.4% of interns in current employment following participation in the programme. The data indicates that 35.9% of participating interns hold qualifications below primary degree level, highlighting a positive feature of the scheme, which is that it is not simply a graduate internship scheme (Indecon, 2013) and therefore may be appropriate for some lone parents.

Evaluations of programmes to support education and training report concern that some support schemes – particularly the BTEA – are producing a ‘locked-in effect’ on participants, whereby participation is essentially maintaining dependency on SW payments for long periods of time where no job search is required. It is suggested that expanding BTEA to include shorter courses may be one way to reduce this effect and make DSP clients job-ready over a shorter period of time, which should subsequently realise savings for the Department (DSP, 2012).

In-work benefits such as FIS are particularly pertinent to lone parents returning to employment. However, it is argued that FIS, as it currently operates, might not be suitable for all individuals, particularly those in precarious employment (Murphy, 2012). The annual review of FIS payments can cause difficulties in situations of changing hours. In addition, zero-hours contracts are not conducive to proving hours worked, and the involvement of employers in completing application forms raises questions over privacy. Furthermore, it is argued that there is a low take-up of the benefit by eligible families, with estimates that only 40% of those eligible are in receipt of the benefit (End Child Poverty Coalition, 2013).

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23 This scheme is aimed at qualifying parents with children in primary school who are returning to employment. It provides the parent with a maximum 52 weeks of subsidised after-school care, including a pick-up/drop-off service from their school to their care provider. The places are provided by a community and commercial childcare provider.

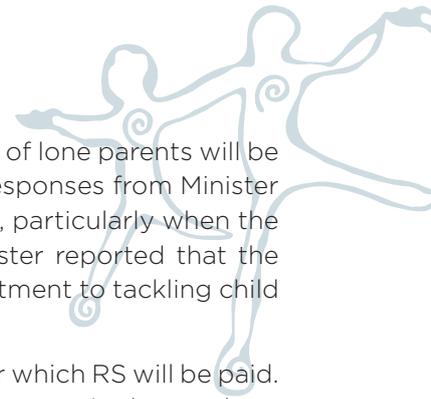
24 Community Employment is an employment programme which helps long-term-unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return-to-work routine. The programme assists them to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills, which can then be used in the workplace.

25 Provides part-time childcare places for CE Scheme applicants with children up to five years of age, and after-school care for children aged up to 13. There can be a limited charge of up to €15 per week for this service, and childcare is provided 50 weeks of the year.

26 Community Employment (CE), Tús, Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and Job Initiative (JI).

27 CE and Tús.

28 The Work Placement Programme is a government-supported programme that brings employers and the unemployed together for a nine-month work experience placement. The placement is unpaid and voluntary. However, those already in receipt of certain social welfare payments may be allowed to retain such payments while on a placement.



Advocacy and support groups of lone parents have raised concern that a number of lone parents will be financially worse off due to their move from OFP to JA, JST and FIS. However, responses from Minister Burton suggest that new FIS recipients are now financially better off than before, particularly when the BWFD is taken into account (Oireachtas Debates, 18 February 2015). The Minister reported that the DSP will work with lone parents on an individual basis and maintained her commitment to tackling child poverty and supporting lone parents into employment.

In relation to RS, Budget 2012 saw the introduction of new maximum rent limits for which RS will be paid. According to the Rent Limits Review Report (DSP, 2010), there has been a 61% increase in the numbers claiming the allowance over the last six years. There is a significant supply problem in urban areas, and rents are rising. For some families this has led to homelessness and being placed in emergency accommodation, which tends to be a hotel room and can last for considerable periods. Threshold, in its Rent Supplement Advisory report (2014), outlined a number of difficulties with the scheme, including a shortage of affordable rented accommodation, RS limits that are out of line with market rents, the practice of topping up rents out of social welfare payments to avoid homelessness, and the administration of RS being not fit for purpose (Threshold, 2014). Budget 2015 saw an investment of €2.2 billion to provide 10,000 social housing units over the next three years; no measures were announced to address the issues with the RS scheme. However, it is thought that the introduction of the HAP scheme will, when rolled out nationally, address some of difficulties faced in relation to housing and income for low earners (Savage et al., 2015).

## 2.9 Conclusion

Irish lone parents are a heterogeneous group in their pathways to lone parenthood, age, children's ages, social status, education and employment status. Lone parents and their children constitute the largest group in Irish society living in poverty, and the numbers have been increasing over time. Explanations for the high levels of at-risk poverty, consistent poverty and deprivation experienced by lone parents centre on the fact that so many of these households have no adult in paid employment. Labour market activation proposals for lone parents have been in existence since 2006, and it is believed that labour market activation will bring Ireland's social protection provisions for lone parents in line with international practice, tackle child poverty and end passive income support. The supports provided to lone parents in their transition from welfare to work include social protection income supports, assistance in finding employment, in-work benefits, education and training supports, subsidised employment supports and childcare support. The next chapter considers the views of state agencies involved in the delivery of the labour market activation of lone parents, as well as those of advocacy groups and voluntary organisations that assist lone parents.

# 3.0

## The View of Key Stakeholders

### 3.1 Introduction

This section of the report provides an overview of the findings and explores the themes that arose in the interviews. Overall, there is a strong consensus among the participants that labour market activation for lone parents in Ireland is, in principle, a policy development which could bring out about increased income and well-being for this cohort. However, this is tempered by concern about the capacity of current supports and services to deliver such outcomes. Participants working in public organisations argue that labour market activation has the capacity to lift lone parents and their children out of poverty, and point to education and training, HAP and FIS as being key policy instruments in enabling this to occur. However, advocacy and voluntary organisations believe there is a lack of awareness of the distinctive and diverse needs and challenges experienced by lone parents. Participants raised concern about the impact of activation on the well-being of children in terms of care and the demands that paid work can place on an individual parenting alone. However, it is believed that activation which acknowledges the caring role provided by lone parents would increase well-being for parents and their children due to the benefits of being in employment. Moreover, the absence of the other parent in this policy measure is called into question, specifically the lack of legislation in relation to JSB and maintenance payments.

There are also concerns about information pertaining to the changes, despite efforts by the DSP, about the organisational capacity of INTREO to deal with the increased caseload, and about caseworkers' knowledge and awareness of the barriers to employment experienced by lone parents. In relation to childcare, policymakers point to the importance of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Childcare as an opportunity to provide interdepartmental supports for working parents and their children. In terms of maintenance payments, policymakers are aware of and intend to address the current vacuum.

### 3.2 Views on Activation

There is no opposition to the notion of activation in principle. Indeed, there is acknowledgement of the possible positive effects that labour market participation could have on both finances and emotional well-being. However, many are of the view that activation in the current climate of reduced resources, services and supports will ultimately lead to failures in the operationalisation of the policy:

*I think the policy directive in general, if you look at the policy, is fair and good. It's just not being operationalised appropriately. I think that's the issue. It's not about having parents on a passive payment. But there has been no realisation about the operational impact and how that needs to be done. (A1)*

The perception that the activation policy would be unsuccessful in achieving its goals of facilitating paid work to assist with removing lone parents from poverty was grounded in the participants' knowledge of previously activated lone parents. Moreover, recent increases in the consistent poverty rates of lone parents in Ireland are, for many participants, further evidence that activation measures to date have not dealt with lone parent and their children's poverty rates:

*This perfect storm at the moment is going to lead to huge poverty in lone parents and their children. Already, consistent poverty rates are 23%. That has gone up from 17; it's a shocking increase in one year. We know it's going to go up and up. So the evidence is there that the policy is failing, yet they're still pursuing it. (V1)*

The cumulative effect of cuts already sustained by lone parents over successive budgets is an issue raised by some of the participants. There is also concern that activation might result in a further reduction in income for some, particularly those who are already working part-time and in receipt of the OFP who are eligible for FIS and the Back-to-Work Family Dividend (BWFD):

*The first thing is the loss of income, meaning that initially when the changes were announced we all could see how much we were going to be down, ranging from €40 to €60, and I think that's kind of even unfair, because if you take into account the income, disregard cumulative effect, it's actually higher. (V1)*

For many participants working in state bodies, there is an acknowledgement of some loss of income in certain cases. FIS payments and increasing the number of hours worked are presented as possible solutions to this issue:

*I suppose some people are going to fall through the cracks. But I know that the jobseeker payments teams and the FIS teams are looking at; I suppose that was costed when it was, when those policy decisions were made, but I suppose there will be some people who would lose out marginally. I think they're saying to those people, Can you increase your hours slightly and still get your FIS. Where feasible. (S2)*

Contributing to the debate on poverty in relation to the activation of lone parents is the issue of housing. It is highlighted that some families are living in temporary accommodation due to the housing crisis. The issue of rent supplement reflects the problems of housing and poverty. Due to the means-tested nature of the payment, any increase in income results in a reduction in rent supplement, which will have significant consequences for those who return to employment. In addition, rental rates have increased significantly in recent times but rent caps are not in line with those increases, resulting in deficits being bridged by taking money from social welfare payments:

*People are illegally topping up in situations like that, so if they're cut further it will cause people to come into homelessness. It will. I fear for myself with homelessness. It's a huge big thing. (V3)*

Problems with the system of rent supplement are acknowledged by representatives of state departments. The purported solution to this issue is HAP, a housing assistance payment made to those on low incomes. However, this payment is not without current difficulties:

*Rent supplement is a particular problem for us here. It is a poverty trap in that you can't work more than thirty hours per week. Now the answer to it is the housing assistance payment. Well I'm not sure is it being rolled out nationally, but it will be rolled out nationally by the end of the year. (S1)*

Views on activation extend beyond concern over loss of income and poverty. They also pertain to what is viewed as a distinct lack of awareness of the reality of the lives of lone parents in Ireland in the present day. Some articulate the view that the welfare system is designed to support two-parent families, and absorbing lone parents as jobseekers is a continuation of that practice. While the transitional arrangement is meant to address some of the issues faced, for some it's 'neither one thing nor the other'. For others the cyclical effect of the barriers faced by lone parents is an issue that needs to be acknowledged. Despite efforts to improve their own situations, many lone parents are caught in a cycle from which they cannot manoeuvre, and as a consequence they feel trapped:

*I want to work but I'm trapped by all these activation policies and these benefits. I'm really, really trapped and I'm not going to give up; I'm still trying to find a way but I'm really, really trapped by it. I found it hard to cope. Having done the study, having done the work and really wanting to be able to work and just actually feeling no matter what you do you are trapped. (V3)*

Recognising the security that a consistent state payment gives to those who do it all on their own without the support of others is important for some, and moving to a new form of income support creates a sense of fear for some lone parents. In addition, there is the view that for older women who have not engaged in paid employment for many years, the repercussions of such fear and anxiety are stark:

*The experience I have with lone parents, I mean my heart goes out to them. I'd two ladies come in and their youngest had just turned 18 and they had been on it [OFP] 24 years and the two of them were signed into psychiatric; they weren't able. So that upset me. This is what's out there. They were two that came in, so now they're being told that this is happening so it's going to have a huge effect mentally and every way. (S5)*

### 3.3 The Process of Activation

Confusion over what activation means for individual circumstances is, according to some, adding to the fear and anxiety felt. This is despite efforts by the DSP to inform those affected, by sending general information by post and running information sessions:

*Now in the run-up to each of those in July, letters would have been issued usually about six to eight weeks in advance, inviting the lone parents in for information sessions and seminars to explain to them what is happening. (S1)*

Some spoke about how the information is unclear, and generally there is a perception of conflicting information being given, depending on who was providing information. This uncertainty is attributed to gaps in the knowledge of front-line staff; however, some are of the view that this is a consequence of staffing cuts, the volume of changes that have occurred in recent years, and the volume of scenarios that have to be dealt with. Moreover, misunderstanding may be attributed to rates of attendance at information sessions. This is of concern to some advocacy and voluntary organisations, who purported attendance rates to be around 55–60%. However, responses from those involved suggest that attendance rates are higher, ranging from 66–80% and up to 95% in some areas:



*The combined averages is looking around 80% attendance at an information session. But that's because the information sessions are still going. Tallaght reported 90% attendance rate when the first letter goes out, and then once the second letter goes out 95% attendance rate in total. (S1)*

A fundamental part of the activation process for all lone parents affected by the changes will be to engage on a one-to-one basis with an appointed case officer. There are however some concerns over the number of caseworkers available, the time given to each case, and difficulties in accessing such caseworkers for those who had already transitioned. While the increase in clients is acknowledged as a 'challenge', overall, the role of caseworker is seen as a fundamental part of the activation process. There are, however, strong views that due to the unique position of lone parents, case officers would need to have an awareness of the specific issues and challenges they faced. There is also the view that they would need to be knowledgeable of all areas pertaining to the activation of lone parents: they would need to have knowledge of the payment aspects as well as the activation aspects facing lone parents in transition. And while this is acknowledged somewhat by statutory agencies, not all front-line workers are confident in their ability to present such information:

*The secondary benefits, I would never get into the secondary benefits because like it's a community welfare background, and I think one of my colleagues would have had definitely a lot more information on the secondary benefits side of things. I would tend to refer them up to a community welfare officer if they presented and they had some concerns about those issues. (S6)*

Encompassing the need for awareness and knowledge is the view that case officers also need to be supportive and engaging. For many, the need for a relationship to develop between the case officer and the lone parent is essential in the process of activation. Some participants believe that all of these concerns require training and awareness for caseworkers so that they can be effectively addressed, rather than having a singular focus on activation. Offers of such training have been made by advocacy groups:

*If you look at it even in the UK, but when they did this New Deal for lone parents, Gingerbread went in and trained all of job plus staff. Nothing has happened here, and we've offered to go in and do that, we've offered to go in and do presentations, never went. No, nothing like that has happened. (A1)*

Given the issues faced, it is the view of one state representative that the LES is better placed than the INTREO service to deal with the activation of lone parents, primarily because they are better equipped:

*I feel the lone parents shouldn't come in here first. I really, really feel they should go to the mentors in the LES, who have a shorter case load and a bigger budget. They're a mentoring service, and lone parents will need that. (S6)*

In order to ascertain whether activation would achieve its aims of lifting lone parents out of poverty and improve their well-being and that of their children, it is necessary to determine the types of supports available to accomplish activation.

### 3.4 Supports

Given the diverse mix of supports available, and the diverse views of supports articulated, for ease of reading this section will be subdivided and take account of income supports, training supports, education supports and employment supports. One of the most referred-to income support payments spoken about in the interviews is the FIS payment. Most participants working in state organisations are of the view that the FIS payment, while it may not be a long-term solution, is the best option for working lone parents. However, some are unsure whether people would sustain income losses as a consequence of the changes to the OFP, and others spoke of income losses as a result of the work/FIS solution. There are also other issues spoken about; a difficulty in proving hours worked is a problem for some. There is a sense of humiliation for those who have to request that welfare forms be signed by employers, and some feel that this creates a barrier in the working environment. A number of participants highlighted difficulties in securing the required weekly 19 hours of employment needed to qualify for the FIS payment. This issue is also highlighted by others who were of the view that CE may be a solution:

*But I think having CE access to FIS would boost FIS for any, you know. Boost FIS for many families, two-parent family or not. And if you look at some areas in Ireland, the economy survives on social welfare transfers; CE is about the only thing that's in town for people. So it's a huge issue. The local economy would be spending, because the element there, if you're on social welfare you spend your money, you don't save it. (A1)*

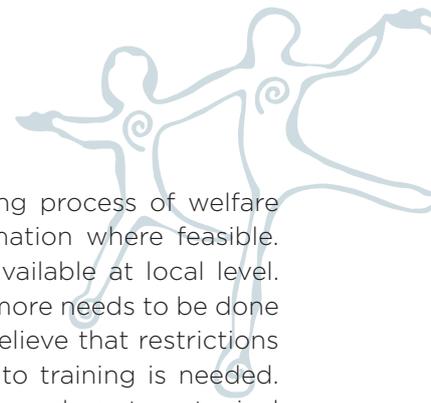
The loss of the earnings disregard upon transition to other payments is the most significant issue spoken about in relation to this payment. Most view this as a complete disincentive to work, contrary to the aim of the activation programme:

*My point on the income disregard: If you want incentives, there is one. Why did you get rid of it? There has to be some sort of incentive instead of the other way round, like you're being de-incentivised, disincentivised to work. (V1)*

While the introduction of the BWFD is generally well received, this is tempered by the fact that its impact is not quantifiable yet, and by the view that any income gain would be countered by childcare expenses:

*I mean one thing that we've I suppose come across is the Back-to-Work Family Dividend and the impact that's having now. I suppose we would have heard anecdotal evidence that for parents of children who are a bit older that is a helpful payment, but then for anyone who is needing childcare for the slightly younger children. So I suppose from that group, seven to fourteen, it's not really that much of a help because obviously their childcare costs are in excess of that. (A2)*

In relation to training supports, there are diverse options available for those in receipt of social welfare payment. In addition, there is scope for funding specific types of training courses depending on local



need, which are outcome related. Possible need is also identified in a mapping process of welfare recipients undertaken annually by local ETBs, which then act on such information where feasible. Furthermore, there are a number of community and voluntary programmes available at local level. However, the majority of the participants interviewed are of the view that much more needs to be done to make training a viable option for lone parents. Firstly, there are those who believe that restrictions to certain options should be lifted and that a much more inclusive approach to training is needed. Secondly, there is a belief that more options are required, particularly those not based on stereotypical views of what people may consider because of their gender or status, for example. Resources are an issue flagged by a couple of participants, particularly in relation to the number of places available and tutors to run courses. In addition to resources, collaboration between different groups is suggested as an ideal scenario, and one which is being worked on. For many, the key to successful training is motivation and in this regard they feel that the perceived compulsory aspect of the policy and the approach taken need to be considered more. Encompassing the issue of motivation is the issue of confidence and self-esteem, which are identified as possible barriers to progression. While certain types of courses are available that may address some of these issues, the view is that these issues need to be more widely acknowledged and catered for at the very beginning, in order for participants to progress in their lives before being able to progress elsewhere:

*When people do present with self-esteem (issues), it's to get them to that next step. It's to get them in the door, which is a huge step for them. I guess if you spend so long in a kind of home environment and they have structures around their family that the spotlight comes back on them again. That takes huge support, it takes huge courage for them to get back in into that mainstream, to build the self-esteem, and it's that first step. (S4)*

Overall difficulties faced in the area of training pertain to lack of flexibility, childcare (which is dealt with later in the chapter), and differing supports available depending on the region, resources, reductions in community-based options and often a lack of viable options.

A number of income supports are available for lone parents returning to education. Those on JTA can avail of the SUSI grant and retain their full payment, up until their youngest child reaches 14 years of age. However, for those with children 14 years or older in or returning to education, they cannot retain a jobseeker's payment due to the conditions attached, and must therefore apply for BTEA. But they will not be allowed to claim the SUSI grant; this is a source of contention for some of the participants interviewed. The issue of education income supports and rent supplement seems to be generating some confusion. Public sector respondents are of the view that there shouldn't be any difficulty in this area. However, those working in advocacy organisations with lone parents have direct knowledge of the impact of educational income supports on rent supplement, for example. Despite the availability of a number of education options open to lone parents, participants identified several barriers to education for this group. A lack of part-time options that would facilitate caring responsibilities is identified as an issue, as is childcare, which is seen as particularly problematic for those trying to progress in all areas. Barriers to further education options is of significant concern for some, who feel that the diversity of lone parents needs to be taken into account. The problem of financial security while in education is flagged by some, who believe that this is already producing negative effects on the uptake of further educational opportunities in certain areas. Encompassing the issue of financial security is the issue of cost, particularly with part-time options. Fundamentally, investment in education and training strategies aimed at lone parents and early-years provision for children is seen as key to tackling low income and poverty:

*In terms of low income and poverty cycles, one of the critical drivers is low levels of educational attainment, and that can be very much transformed. And we know how to, collectively we know how to transform that, but that requires time and it requires investment, so you invest in education, adult education training strategies first. Alongside that, you invest in quality early-years provision. Those are the first pillars of your parental activation strategy, and if you're going to target lone parents you're talking about the most vulnerable community of children in the country that you're targeting. (V5)*

While a number of employment schemes are referred to in the interviews, the CE programme is viewed as an attractive option for lone parents. There are, however, doubts over the scheme due to certain eligibility criteria required. There are a number of difficulties in relation to the employment of lone parents; the cost of employment is identified as one, particularly where earnings are low. The issue of flexible employment featured quite strongly as a difficulty faced by lone parents in entering employment. From the State's perspective, this is an issue that is being examined. It is actively trying to promote the matter of lone parents in employment to employers, particularly in terms of sustaining 19 hours per week so that lone parents can qualify for FIS, which is high on their agenda. However, many on the ground believe that more needs to be done in securing more flexible, family-friendly employment opportunities. Furthermore, in relation to the issue of flexible employment, there is a view that zero-hour contracts and precarious employment will trap lone parents. Local employment is considered necessary for lone parents to be able to fulfil both roles as workers and carers. Another difficulty raised by one of the interview participants is the issue of older lone parents and problems they may face in entering the workforce after a long absence.

There are a number of views on issues that need to be addressed in the area of employment in order for employment to be a real and successful option for lone parents. Firstly, there is the view that an accurate account needs to be taken of joblessness nationally, using appropriate statistics. Tracking employment needs to be undertaken: by identifying who works where, more suitable interventions can be put in place. For others the issue of employment opportunities for lone parents needs to be addressed, particularly problems of low-paid, insecure options. The development of an ethos on family-friendly work practices in local communities is highlighted as necessary to facilitate the dual roles of lone parents:

*I go back to those employment policy and family-friendly working hours, and you know? Policy imperatives that are placed on employers that they must show, that they pay due regard to the actual welfare issues of staff and by extension their dependants, you know, those things can't just be summarily disregarded. I think employment policy has a role to play in making it safer for lone parents returning to work. (V5)*

### 3.5 Childcare

Childcare is the most prominent issue identified by all of the participants interviewed, and is an issue which traversed all aspects of lone parent activation. Participants identified a number of problems which pose difficulties in obtaining and maintaining suitable childcare solutions for those parenting alone. The first is a lack of information on options for childcare. A lack of knowledge on childcare by front-line staff in the DSP is also identified, in terms of the schemes generally and particularly of the processes required to avail of such supports. Access to childcare schemes and afterschool places is seen as a major barrier generally. The number of afterschool places available in the ASCC scheme, according to some, has been reduced in recent times due to what has been described as low take-up. This issue is acknowledged by several of the participants, who all maintained that the reason has to do with availability. Some spoke about the fact that many of the childcare service providers do not



participate in the schemes, and if they do, then often the locations are not suitable or places are already filled. Public sector employees acknowledge issues with availability of childcare places generally, which is attributed to possible funding caps. The general eligibility criterion for the ASCC scheme in particular is viewed by some as a possible barrier to uptake.

*Firstly it doesn't apply to you if you're already working, so the people who are being very, the ones who have worked all along and who are being cut can't access; so it's a pure cut for them, no access to it. Secondly it's only available for one year, so you're asking a lone parent to take up a job. A child is for life, not for 12 months, you know! If you're sitting there weighing it up and you're saying OK, great, I have childcare for one year, but what happens in year two? I've to pay €110 for my afterschool childcare. People aren't stupid; they work it out and go: It's not worth it. (V1)*

Cost and affordability of childcare feeds into the issue of availability; for those who have accessed some form of subvention scheme, cost is still an issue in terms of paying the balance owed. For those who cannot access any of the available schemes, the cost is regarded as prohibitive – as is the fluctuating amount to be paid when changing between schemes and supports, according to some. Flexibility of childcare arrangements is seen as being necessary to accommodate work patterns of lone parents, particularly the problem of school pick-ups – transporting children from school to childcare is a difficulty referred to by a number of the participants who were in employment. As with all difficulties faced, the issue of school pick-ups is more prominent for those living in rural locations. Quality of childcare is raised as a concern by some of the participants. Quality of services and staff education levels are flagged as requiring investment, and that investment could create employment in childcare settings. Referring to the issue of quality, policymakers spoke about a significant focus on shifting funding towards improving quality in childcare services:

*There was the big cry out, more so in relation to the quality of childcare services, so the funding was shifted from that to focus on a big, quality intervention programme in relation to mentoring and getting the learner fund, staff members qualified to working in it. And then the focus has been very clearly that we actually need the current, so in the last year or so the budget, the funding has been spent in actually getting the quality. (S3)*

The classification of the ECCE as childcare is highlighted as an issue for a number of the participants. The general view on this is that the ECCE could not be classified as childcare, as it focuses on early childhood education. In addition there is the view that the ECCE was neither free childcare nor for a year. In response to this issue, policymakers are of the view that you cannot make a separation between care and education in the scheme, as the two are combined and the scheme does assist towards cost, as it reduces the amount of paid childcare hours required. One of the biggest problems spoken about in relation to childcare is the overall lack of services in this area, which is creating a barrier to progression for many lone parents, even those who are highly educated.

There are numerous references to the view that care is still required for children over the age of 14. Participants spoke about managing teenagers and the challenges faced at this stage of development, which can be difficult. They said parental support is still needed and often all the more pertinent. Worries over child safety and security and the consequences of 'latchkey' kids are to the forefront of concerns raised, particularly in cases where hours of employment are precarious:

*It's developing latchkey kids and self-management. And when you do that, that's the most important time that kids that boundary pushing can get involved in X, Y and Z. And if you're one parent dealing with that, then that's a problem, a challenge I should say. (A1)*

There are a number of references made to the lack of services available to those who may require supervision in the 14+ age group and a number of suggestions as to how this issue may be resolved, many of which involve collaboration between state and community. The response of policymakers to childcare issues is that the interdepartmental group on childcare is discussing all issues and options with a focus on best interests:

*I suppose the main aim of it as well is joined thinking across departments, because childcare affects social protection, education, finance and it's about, well, at least rather than just one department making a decision in relation to the budget that only affects their scheme, it's actually looking at best interests of childcare and parents across all different departments and coming up with very clear goals, that they're all moving together any future plans within that. (S3)*

There are a number of suggestions as to what would be required for the childcare situation to be improved for lone parents being activated. Firstly, there is the view that the difficulties faced by this particular cohort need to be recognised, particularly at governmental level, and that childcare should be organised to suit those needs. Investment in services is for many a fundamental necessity in addressing issues of childcare, particularly when overall Irish investment is approximately a quarter of the average OECD spend on childcare. Encompassing the issue of investment is the issue of funding. Collaboration is identified as being pivotal in identifying possible solutions to difficulties in this area, particularly collaboration between state departments and community organisations. Assistance with costs is important for a number of the participants; ways that this could be achieved referred to a possible tax credit system, even as a short-term solution. The perceived expense of such a system is highlighted by others, and it is therefore not seen as the best solution to the issue of affordability. For the participants, investment in services is seen as a more viable long-term solution. Flexibility in a number of areas in the whole system of childcare is highlighted as a need; in the payment of subsidies, in terms of more than once a year to encourage more provision, commencement dates and starting times for childcare schemes need to be more flexible to accommodate different situations, as do work practices generally. Sessional childcare is also raised as an issue requiring flexibility. In-school site care is identified as a possible area where afterschool care needs could be met. Overall, integrated policy between departments is viewed as being necessary to achieve workable solutions to the issue of childcare, and within that policy the development of one childcare support budget is advocated. For others, working on the process of implementation is seen as necessary prior to the development of any additional strategies in the area of childcare:

*All the implementation, sorry, the lack of implementation, it's all the strategies, the plans, the action plans, all these things, but there's no implementation or the implementation is really, really weak. Like we've been waiting for how many years for an early-years strategy; it's been promised regularly and it hasn't appeared. And again, what use is another strategy without implementation plans? (A4)*

### 3.6 A Broader Perspective on Activation

A number of the participants think these policy changes need to be viewed from a broader context, firstly in terms of how such changes will impact the lives of both parents and children. One participant spoke about how children could fare better through the more formalised arrangements that childcare can provide, particularly in relation to overall development. Others however are of the view that such



changes would have a negative impact on the lives of children living in lone-parent families. Issues of risk and safety were raised particularly in relation to older children; increases in responsibilities on children is a concern for some. In addition, reduced interaction time with a parent and reduced quality of that interaction is raised as an issue by those already in employment, as is the reality of employment in lone-parent families. The impact of these changes on the lifestyle of parents is also spoken about, and again had both positive and negative implications. In relation to the positive effects, some participants believe that transitions to education, training or employment can have a beneficial effect on self-worth in most cases. A number of the working participants interviewed spoke about the negative impact that employment has on their daily lives: high levels of stress and exhaustion as a consequence of trying to combine two roles; in situations where work is not paying, levels of social exclusion are high. In addition, the majority spoke about experiencing feelings of guilt:

*Even though you're trying to do things to further yourself and look to protect yourself in your future and to protect your kids and give them good guidance and example, you still feel that maybe you're neglecting them or maybe they have too much time to themselves and get themselves into trouble. (V8)*

In response to a question regarding whether or not the participants thought activation would increase the well-being of lone parents and their children, a number of views were postulated. Some thought the measures could have that effect on lone-parent families, whereby increases in parent well-being would filter down to children. While the majority of participants could see the logic of how well-being may improve as a consequence of such measures, many are of the view that without the services and supports required, no such aim could be achieved. In addition there are those who spoke about an absence of measures needed to improve well-being, and at a basic level there are those who are of the view that work needs to pay for well-being to increase, and one size will not fit all families:

*You can't thrive if you're living at a level, if you're working to subsist rather than to thrive and develop. And certainly your kids can't. I don't know how you would say that, how you could say that a one-size-fits-all approach would increase the well-being of everybody in a family. (A4)*

In relation to whether or not participants thought activation would improve social inclusion, some believe that this policy may assist in reducing status-based provisions, which is viewed as positive. However, the majority view is that social exclusion will increase without supports being tailored to individuals to take account of all dimensions of the lives of lone parents, and the fact that income is going to be cut in some cases.

Embodying the issue of well-being is the wider issue of how the caring roles of parents are valued in policy. Overall the view is that more value needs to be given to caring roles. In addition to and encompassing the issue of value around caring roles is the issue of stigma around one-parent families. This is a significant concern for some of the participants interviewed, many of whom spoke about how attitudes need to change in a top-down approach. In addition, there are those who are of the view that there needs to be more acknowledgement of the responsibility of the other parent, not just the one in

the full-time caring role. The lack of legislation in relation to maintenance provision and JSA is an issue of considerable concern and consternation for some of the participants:

*The whole issue about maintenance is something that really is freaking us out, because firstly in other States when they brought this type of legislation in, they brought in complementary statutory legislation to enforce maintenance. They haven't done it here; they've just abandoned children. (V2)*

The state's response to the question over maintenance and JSA assured that this will be dealt with, and that timing is what caused the delay in addressing this issue:

*Well that's something we're aware of and that's something we will address, but it was mainly done because to get the JSAT in at the time, the maintenance legislation is very complicated and we just couldn't get it in time in 2013. We definitely need to put that tool in the toolkit, you know, and it's something we're very much aware of. (S1)*

### 3.7 Participants' Recommendations on Improving Lone-Parent Activation

There are numerous views on what would be required to make activation successful for lone parents. Firstly, a number of the participants spoke about there being a lack of a clear integrated policy approach to the activation of lone parents as a specific group. Many think a more structured approach which encompasses interdepartmental cooperation is required, fundamental to which should be a focus on supports and on the well-being of both parents and children. Impact assessments published prior to any change in policy is key for a couple of the participants interviewed – particularly if impacts are negative and pertain to children, then there is an opportunity to rethink such policy. Leadership and a champion of lone parents are identified as being needed at political and departmental level, according to some; responsibility needs to be given to one individual who can advocate on behalf of lone parents. There are a number of references to the removal of barriers, which for many is essential for the successful activation of lone parents; geographical locations and consistency in the availability of supports are particular barriers identified. The removal of barriers in other areas is viewed by many as essential to the progression of lone parents and in some cases to the progression of low-income families in general. Childcare is singled out as a barrier to all low-income families and one of the biggest barriers that needs to be addressed. In relation to employment, it needs to be acknowledged that there is only one income available to meet all costs in lone-parent households, and in order to achieve financial independence lone parents need to be employed in high-level jobs, which needs to be reflected in any activation strategy. For many, housing is just as significant as childcare in terms of problems that need to be addressed in the immediate term.

Flexibility in the activation approach to lone parents for many needs to be considered. Flexibility will facilitate recognition of the particular challenges they face, the minimum amount of hours required to qualify for FIS, the age of the children and the procedures for those with youngest children aged 14 or over are of particular concern for some. Having the appropriate skill set to deal with lone parents is seen as fundamental to the overall process of activation; many are of the view that caseworkers need to have specific skills to successfully move lone parents forward. Encompassing the need for appropriately developed skills is the need for engagement at a different level than may traditionally have been the



case. Overall, the majority see a package of supports as being the most suitable way of activating lone parents, income support, childcare, housing, employment, education and training opportunities, with the role of the caseworker being fundamental to deal with these and other issues that may arise:

*To make it any way successful, we need to be in the one office. That's number one. We need to be all singing off the same hymn sheet in our office and our side of things. We need to make sure that the jobseekers are in payment, that rents are reviewed, if there is a change in circumstances that it's reviewed efficiently, it has to be done for peace of mind for the lone parent. We have to make sure there's a mentor in place. Then we need to make sure what options that are available that they are there, the courses are there, that the jobs experience or work experience if they need it is there, and that if they are CV and job-ready that we are, I'm in place to get their CVs and get it in. If they do find a job, again the rents come into it again; we have to make sure that we're up to date, that we are efficient with the payment of emergency money, we're efficient with the review of the rent supplements - that has to be done so that the money is in their account every week. That is where I'd be at. We have to be there for them, and then once they get used to the system it'll be easier. (S6)*

### 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the views of organisations and stakeholders involved in the delivery of activation supports to lone parents, as well as advocacy groups and voluntary organisations who work with lone parents. Overall, there is a strong consensus among the participants that labour market activation for lone parents in Ireland is, in principle, a policy development which could bring about increased income and well-being for this cohort. However, this is tempered by concern about the capacity of current supports and services to deliver such outcomes, and about the capacity of some lone parents to either enter paid employment or transition to full-time employment and the impact of this on their children. Subsequent chapters report on international evidence on the activation of lone parents.

# 4.0

## Lone Parents: Attitudes, Barriers and Experiences of Paid Employment

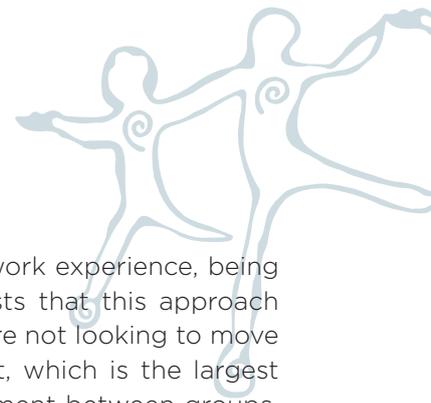
### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the evidence in relation to lone parents' attitudes towards, barriers to and experiences of employment. There is a growing body of qualitative research which explores how labour market activation has impacted on lone parents' attitudes and motivation towards paid employment. Barriers to employment are strongly associated with the characteristics of lone parents, and both combine to impact on a lone parent's 'readiness to work'. Lone parents' experiences of looking for employment when they participate in activation programmes is dependent on their level of 'work readiness'. From a policy perspective this literature is significant when designing activation policies and programmes for lone parents.

### 4.2 A Cycle of Determinants Affecting Lone Parent Employment

Studies that specifically concentrate on barriers to paid employment for lone parents differentiate between what Millar and Ridge (2001) term 'characteristics of lone parents not in work' and 'actual barriers to work'. Those studies that emphasise the characteristics of lone parents not in work report that this group have low levels of education, a lack of work experience, transport difficulties, health problems, younger children and three or more children. The barriers to employment then stem from the characteristics, that is, it is the very characteristics of the lone parents not in employment that generate the barriers. For example, having low levels of education is a significant barrier to attaining and sustaining paid employment. Childcare is the most frequently cited barrier to employment, and this is directly related to the age of children.

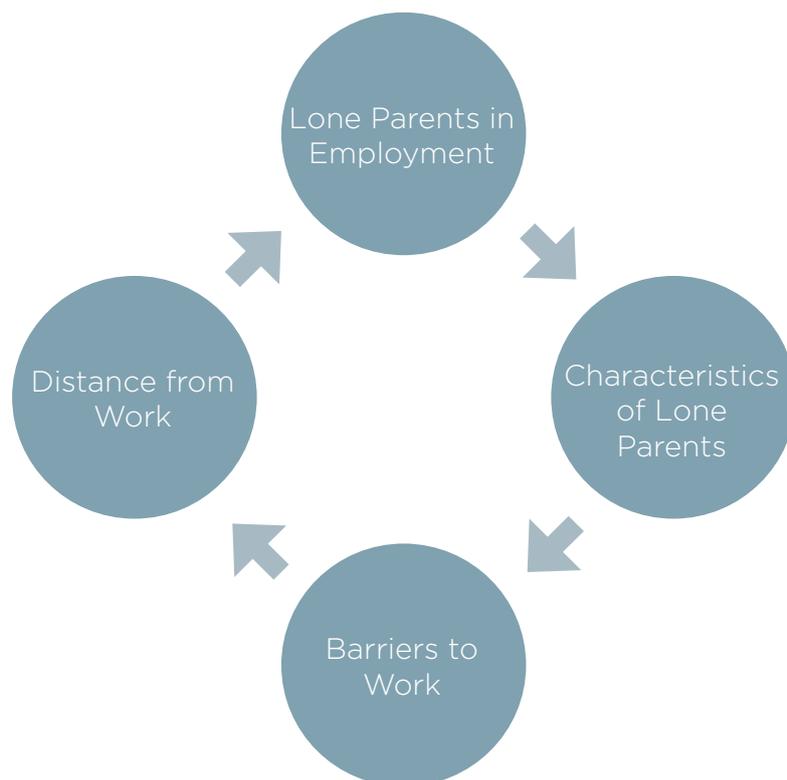
According to Carnochan et al.'s (2005) literature review of activation research in the US, research on barriers to employment for welfare recipients identifies that many current and former recipients experience barriers which may affect their ability to find and sustain employment. The barriers include lack of education or work experience, incidents of workplace discrimination, lack of transport, physical or mental health problems, alcohol or drug dependency, a child under one and an absence of English fluency. Other barriers reported in the literature include a shortage of jobs offering the flexible part-time employment that lone parents prefer (Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010; Gloster et al., 2010), concerns about being financially worse off in employment (Coleman & Lanceley, 2011), a lack of confidence (Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010) and transport difficulties. While all lone parents experience some barriers to employment, those parents with multiple barriers find entering employment even more difficult. Haux (2010a) adds a third dimension to this argument: 'distance to work', which considers lone parents' 'readiness to work', which impacts significantly on the characteristics and barriers put forward by Millar and Ridge (2001). Haux (2012) argues that the characteristics of those lone parents remaining unemployed reported in previous research are: having a child under five, having three or more children,



having a health problem, not having any qualifications, not having any recent work experience, being a social tenant and not looking to move into paid employment. Haux suggests that this approach identifies three groups of lone parents: those who are 'work ready', those who are not looking to move into work, and those who wish to 'postpone' the move into paid employment, which is the largest group. In addition, Haux suggests that this type of ordering may explain movement between groups. By analysing the findings of quantitative and qualitative research, Haux compiled the characteristics of these three groups in relation to their distance to work.

Haux (2010a) refers to Millar and Ridge's (2001) review of existing research in relation to lone parents not in paid employment, which examined the characteristics of lone parents not in work, and barriers to work. The 'work ready' group of lone parents wish to move into work now or in the next six to twelve months, and they are more likely to: have one child, have children aged 5-10 years, have better qualifications, have recent work experience, be in receipt of maintenance, identify a lack of affordable childcare as the primary reason for not working. The 'never work' group of lone parents were the most negative about work and did not perceive themselves entering paid employment; they were inclined to: be older, have older children, be experiencing ill-health, have low levels of qualifications, have little and typically no recent work experience, have low incidence of receipt of maintenance, and identify their own ill-health as the main barrier to returning to employment. The 'work postpone' group valued work, and wanted to work but not at the moment; this is the largest group identified in the studies considered by Haux. They were more likely than the other two groups to: have a child aged under five, have more than one child, be social tenants, and identify wanting to look after their children as the main barrier in moving into work (Haux, 2010a).

Figure 2: A Cycle of Determinants Affecting Lone Parent Employment



### 4.3 Attitudes and Motivation to Work

Research shows mixed degrees of motivation for entering paid employment. The primary reasons for doing so include: financial independence, being a good role model for their children, personal benefits and improved social standing (Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010, Gloster et al., 2010). UK research (Coleman & Lanceley, 2011) with lone parents in the UK whose youngest child was approaching the LPO<sup>29</sup> threshold reports the lone parents to be very employment focused. Quantitative research suggests that the youngest child entering school has a very small effect on lone parents moving from welfare to paid employment (Brewer and Crawford, 2010). Casebourne, Bell and Davies (2010) report that the timing of a lone parent going back to work was frequently related to an individual 'tipping point' in their life; the respondents often became more inclined to work as their children got older. However, some lone parents are likely to experience difficulties in moving into employment due to the length of time they have been out of paid employment. This is balanced with concerns about being in employment, such as missing their children, balancing work and care, a reluctance to use formal childcare and being unsure if they would be financially better off in work (Gloster et al., 2010, Haux, 2010a; Standing, 1999).

Attitudes to care influence lone parents' attitudes and motivation to paid employment, and the age of the child is interconnected to attitudes towards care. Considerable variation exists in what parents understand to constitute 'good parenting' in relation to decisions balancing paid work and family life. The propensity towards general welfare-to-work policy, which demands lone-parent labour market activation by dependent child age, effectively constrains an aspect of self-determination regarding what good parenting entails. Qualitative evidence suggests that some lone parents have a strong work orientation, particularly those with higher levels of education and those whose children are of school age (Edwards and Duncan, 1997). However, for others, entrance to school by the youngest child and the age of the child are irrelevant to their decision-making around employment, as their caring responsibilities take precedence (Lane et al., 2011, Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011). There is a perceived risk for older children, in the absence of supervision and the impact of the parent being away from home more, teenagers would or could be more susceptible to negative peer influences such as drugs, gangs and crime (Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010; Gloster et al., 2010). Children's views on childcare highlight general dissatisfaction with formal out-of-school care. Concerns raised were: childcare being inappropriate, unsuitable and stigmatised; poor service provision; badly mixed age groups; and a lack of stimulation, resulting in boredom with high resistance to the idea of breakfast and afterschool clubs (Ridge, 2009a, 2009b).

Research shows that personal choice is an issue in welfare-to-work activation, whereby ideological and cultural constructs of motherhood are at odds with welfare reform expectations (Henderson et al., 2005, Manoogian et al., 2015, McArthur et al., 2013). Individual motivation to work is related to the importance attached to caring as opposed to work and the problems anticipated in combining both (Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Haux, 2010a; Gemelli, 2008; McMullin et al., 2002; Frits and Knijn, 2001). Lone mothers place a high value on care, and their comprehension of what good mothering involves determines how they think about family life and employment (Manoogian et al., 2015; Henderson et al., 2005). The mothers identified care as requiring effort and time, and this was recognised as one of the main issues when considering if work pays (Blaxland, 2008). Indeed, some mothers regarded themselves not as unemployed but as engaged in a non-negotiable activity: parenting (Davies, 2012). It is argued that prolonged labour market inactivity that strengthens a set of attitudes that appear to discourage lone mothers from seeking employment, where parenting is seen as a job in its own right, decreases the perceived need to look for employment outside of the household (Tomaszewski et al., 2010).

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<sup>29</sup> Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) is a change to entitlement conditions for lone parents claiming Income Support in the UK, whereby lone parents are no longer eligible for Income Support solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. It was introduced from November 2008 for those with a youngest child aged 12 or over, with the age threshold reducing to 7 by 2010.



## 4.4 Childcare Determinants and Barriers

Examination of the literature in this area highlights a number of factors that influence both the use of childcare by lone and low-income parents, and the types of care favoured. These include availability of childcare, family and individual characteristics, employment hours, and a preference for informal childcare. Issues with childcare availability range from out-of-school childcare (Newis, 2012) and a dearth of accessible, affordable childcare (Hung and Fung, 2011; Siegel and Abbott, 2007; Lightman et al., 2005b), whereas childcare that was accessible and available in desired locations led to benefits for children and satisfaction for parents (Breitkreuz and Williamson, 2012). Childcare-related constraints are also reported for parents of children with a disability (Gloster et al., 2010), living in a rural area, parents with a disability, and those in financial difficulty (Coleman & Lanceley, 2011). Family and individual characteristics also determine childcare use, particularly formal childcare with family structure, that is, the ages and number of children (Huston et al., 2002; Jenkins and Symons 2001), mother's level of education (Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2013; Huston et al., 2002), and personal beliefs about family and work impacting usage (Bell et al., 2005; Huston et al., 2002).

Complex arrangements and elaborate care strategies are identified as enabling parents to combine work and family obligations (Fagnani, 2011); such strategies tend to combine a number of sources of formal and informal childcare (Abbott and Wallace, 2011). Studies highlight lone parents' beliefs and preferences about various forms of childcare with strong preferences for the use of informal childcare (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011; Bell et al., 2005). Formal childcare in the form of afterschool or holiday clubs is also valued (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011; Lane et al., 2011), and older children are thought to benefit from environments that offered opportunities for socialising and stimulation (Bell et al., 2005). Employment hours influence decisions about childcare. In the US, working full time necessitates more use of relative childcare, but less use of school-based childcare (Brandon and Hofferth, 2003). In the UK, hours worked were also important in influencing decisions about childcare, while lone parents were more likely to use informal childcare over formal childcare; those working more hours per week were more likely to use a combination of formal and informal childcare arrangements (Coleman and Riley, 2012; Lane et al., 2011). Wraparound childcare (for example, between 8am and 6pm to cover journeys to and from school) and provision at atypical times can also be problematic (Finch et al., 2005). Indeed, obtaining part-time employment which suits childcare commitments and school hours is of greater concern to the parents than the type of work they do (Lane et al., 2011; Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010).

Informal childcare has been shown to increase lone mothers' intentions to work – but also, in combination with formal childcare, contributed to job retention (Tomaszewski et al., 2010). Such informal childcare arrangements are often reciprocal (Coleman and Riley, 2012). Cook (2012b) argues that activation programmes transferred dependence from state support to private sources of support, and there is a social cost to such support, specifically in relation to damaged care and supportive relations. While employment was assumed to increase income, due to the low-paid jobs the lone parents found themselves in, they could not afford childcare and transport. Lone parents coped with this by drawing on family and friends providing low-cost childcare. However, such supports came at a cost for some lone parents, who are dependent on such support to remain in employment – specifically time and emotional costs, which sometimes caused conflict and obligations to reciprocate, resulting in increased demands on lone parents.

Millar and Ridge (2009) explore how social relationships inside and outside the family are central to lone parents sustaining employment. Drawing on data from an ongoing longitudinal qualitative research project, following a sample of lone mothers leaving income support and taking up paid employment, they found that employment sustainability requires the active input of a number of different actors. Sustaining work and care requires active input from both mothers and children, in terms of managing changing time-use and income levels, and managing changing social relationships; such relationships – at home, in work, in care settings and at school – are a key element in employment sustainability.

## 4.5 Lone Parents' Experiences of Paid Employment

The research on lone parents involved in activation and employment has considered levels and methods of job searching, routes into employment, the motivation behind looking for work, and the types of work they look for and enter into. Studies which engaged with lone parents who had not yet been involved in an activation process report low levels of job searching among respondents, whereas studies of lone parents who were involved in activation report that most had been looking for work. Routes into employment after activation differ depending on the characteristics of the lone parent and how 'work ready' they are. Lone parents predominantly look for part-time work which suits their childcare responsibilities and circumvents the need for paid childcare, and they tend to be concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled employment as a consequence of low levels of education and the desire to balance employment and care. However, this type of employment is very often precarious, with non-standard working hours and impacts on the lone parent's capacity to sustain employment and maintain an adequate income.

Lone parents searching for work use an eclectic mix of job search strategies (Lane et al., 2011; Gloster et al., 2010), with job search intensity being stronger in cases where supports and assistance are available (Coleman & Lanceley, 2011). In the UK, Casebourne, Bell and Davies' (2010) study reported WFIs<sup>30</sup> in Jobcentre Plus as the most frequent source of work search and support used. Routes to employment are dependent on distance from the labour market. Those classified as work-ready move quicker into employment than others (Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010), with previous work experience (Coleman & Lanceley, 2011) and education being determining factors in quick employment uptakes. Those who are more distant from the labour market require more support and assistance.

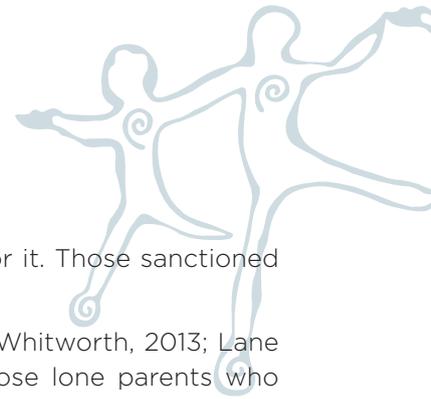
Types of employment that lone parents participate in are often predicated on the level of education that they have. Lone parents with low levels of education generally participate in low-wage, low-skill service industry jobs, typically on a part-time basis (Hung and Kin Fung, 2011; Gloster et al., 2010; Riccio et al., 2008; Evans et al., 2003; King, 2003; Stephenson and Emery, 2003). Hours of work that lone parents engage in are generally dictated by childcare arrangements (Lane et al., 2011; Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010). Part-time employment negates the need for childcare, reducing expenses. The ability to work part-time is more important to lone parents than the type of work undertaken (Coleman and Riley, 2012; Coleman & Lanceley, 2011; Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010).

Being unable to sustain employment is a feature of lone parents' work trajectories. The process of moving between work and benefits (Evans et al., 2003; Walter, 2002) is known as cycling, and research attributes cycling to lone parents participating in unsustainable, low-wage, part-time service industry jobs (Yeo, 2007; Evans et al., 2004). This results in no lasting improvement in their living standards (Graham and McQuaid 2014; Ray et al., 2010). Although there is a dearth of research on non-participation in activation programmes, existing research suggests that non-participation may be a consequence of concerns about caring for children (Brown and Joyce, 2007; Henderson et al., 2005) and personal circumstances which impede motivation and job readiness (Lightman et al., 2005b).

Non-participation and non-compliance can result in sanctions being imposed. Sanctions play a significant role in reinforcing benefit conditionality and work obligations, and are often imposed on those who experience more barriers to employment than other lone parents. Often, those who are

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<sup>30</sup> This is a mandatory interview for engaging with claimants on a regular basis. It involves a face-to-face interview with a Jobcentre adviser. The aim is to encourage and assist claimants to address barriers to work and move towards sustainable employment, by accessing a range of support options. As part of the WFI, lone parents are expected to agree an action plan with their adviser.



sanctioned are unaware of either the sanction being imposed or the reasons for it. Those sanctioned tend to be the most deprived lone parents.

The research shows that most lone parents are aware of the sanction regime (Whitworth, 2013; Lane et al., 2011) but there appears to be a small group who are unaware, and those lone parents who experience sanctions tend to be the ones who face the most barriers to employment, and have financial problems, health problems, literacy difficulties and a lack of awareness of having been sanctioned (Finn and Casebourne, 2013; Gloster et al., 2010; Goodwin, 2008; Joyce and Whiting, 2006; Carnochan et al., 2005). The evidence also suggests that the financial impact of being sanctioned is alleviated by help from family and friends for some lone parents (Joyce and Whiting, 2006). Little evidence exists that mandatory requirements increase outcomes; much of the evidence involves the experience of those lone parents who actually experience a sanction (Finn and Casebourne, 2013).

## 4.6 Conclusion

In understanding the barriers to paid employment, we must consider the characteristics of lone parents who are not in work, such as low levels of education, a lack of work experience, transport difficulties, health problems, younger children and three or more children. The barriers to employment stem from these characteristics. Those lone parents who experience multiple barriers find entering employment more difficult, and this has led researchers to consider the concept of 'readiness to work'. This is also impacted by lone parents' attitudes and motivation to work, central to which is their personal identity as a mother and their views on childcare. While studies identify lone parents' aspirations to work, this is tempered by their concerns about balancing work and care. The age of the youngest child, specifically entering school, can be a factor in lone parents' decisions around work; this is not the case for all.

The research dealing with lone parents involved in activation programmes and subsequent employment highlights a tendency for part-time work which fits in with care responsibilities, and those who are 'work ready' move quickly into employment. The motivations to work for this group of parents include financial reward, improved social standing, and being a good role model for their children. The nature of the employment tends to be low-paid, low-skilled, part-time employment, and many lone parents are unwilling to work when their children are not in school. Consequently, this type of employment can be precarious and can result in 'cycling' between work and benefits. Little is known about those lone parents who consciously decide not to engage with activation measure, but their decision appears to be based on parental responsibilities, personal circumstances, and not wanting their children in childcare. Non-participation and non-compliance with activation programmes can result in sanctions, and research points to some lone parents being unaware they had experienced sanctions. Studies highlight that those lone parents who are sanctioned tend to have multiple barriers to employment and are among the most deprived lone parents.

# 5.0

## Employment Supports for Lone Parents

### 5.1 Introduction

Employment supports provided by government constitute a significant element of activation, and the literature presents information on how best to deliver employment supports to meet the needs of lone parents. Employment supports vary from country to country, but most include individualised support from caseworkers in the public employment service (Intreo being the Irish equivalent), education and training, access to affordable childcare and financial support, and subsidies to assist lone parents in their transition from welfare to paid employment and to remain in employment. Employment supports that have been successful include support from caseworkers that is individualised, all-inclusive and delivered by staff who have been highly trained in the needs and attitudes of lone parents and that continues after the person enters employment. Research on education and training reports on the benefits of engagement, including increased earnings and self-esteem, and financial supports, are reported as imperative in 'making work pay' for many lone parents who enter part-time, low-paid employment and remain in it. It is extremely difficult to say which intervention was most effective in any one country in helping lone parents make the transition to employment; rather, it would appear that it is the combination of supports that are necessary to make an impact: in other words, the 'sum is greater than the parts' (Millar and Evans, 2003).

### 5.2 Pre-Employment Supports

Pre-employment supports constitute the government support provided by case officers to lone parents as they move from the equivalent of the OFP to JSA. They involve assisting lone parents with job searching, training and education opportunities, looking for childcare and calculating the financial impact of being in work. Such support is regarded as a simple and effective option for policymakers to help in finding employment. It is also the less costly policy option, and meetings with caseworkers appear to be associated with job retention (Rosholm, 2014).

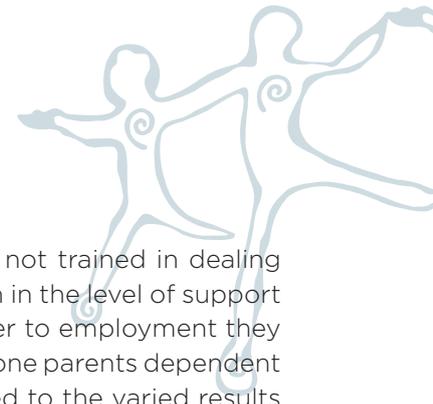
In the UK both the Lone Parent Work-Focused Interviews (LPWFI)<sup>31</sup> and the New Deal for Lone Parent (NDLP)<sup>32</sup> interventions had generally positive results, which were in part attributed to continuous contact with Personal Advisers (PAs). In addition, evaluations on the effectiveness of In-Work Credits<sup>33</sup>

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31 In 2001, the Lone Parents Work-Focused Interviews (LPWFIs) required some lone parents to meet with their Case Worker to discuss returning to employment. The LPWFIs intensified the level of personalised support and were the primary means by which lone parents engaged with Jobcentre Plus services. They aimed to encourage lone parents to enter sustainable employment, to ensure they were aware of the help and supports available, and to enable them to make informed choices about the future for themselves and their children. During an LPWFI, lone parents on IS are given job searching advice involving Better Off Calculations (BOCs), benefit entitlement advice as well as a range of personal supports through a Lone Parent Adviser (LPA) (Gloster et al., 2010; Zaidi, 2009). Since 2001, sanctions have been applied to lone parents who fail to attend LPWFIs (Finn and Casebourne, 2013).

32 The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was initially launched in eight pilot locations in 1997. Participation was voluntary and it claimed to offer a flexible approach to activation. Participants were provided with an Action Plan tailored by a case worker to the needs of the individual lone parent. This was regarded as a 'personalised' welfare-to-work support (Zaidi, 2009). It was rolled out nationally in 1998, and by 2002 about 317,000 lone parents had participated. By 2004, it had reached 9% of lone parents claiming Income Support (IS), with participation increasing for older and short-term claimants (Evans et al., 2004). Evaluations have shown that lone parents most likely to participate in NDLP were those with the highest qualifications, shortest history of claiming benefits, those who had worked in the previous year, those who believed they would be financially better off in work, and those willing to work for the minimum wage. Those less likely to participate had two or more children, had a child aged under three, or had health problems or a disability (Evans et al., 2003).

33 In-Work Credit (IWC) is a tax free, non-means-tested payment of £40 a week (£60 in London) which eligible lone parents can avail of for 52 weeks after they leave benefits for paid employment of 16 hours per week or more (Griffiths, 2011). Payment would also be stopped if the lone parent left employment. They had to provide payslips as evidence of remaining in employment; the employer had no role and would not normally know if a worker was in receipt of IWC. Payments are made weekly in arrears, and they did not count as income when applying for other means-tested welfare



(IWC) were also associated with sustained contact with PAs. Where PAs were not trained in dealing with lone parents, supports are not as effective and there is a perceived reduction in the level of support offered. However, as discussed, the characteristics of lone parents and the barrier to employment they experience also impact on how effective employment supports are for individual lone parents dependent on their characteristics. As such, lone parent characteristics have been attributed to the varied results reported in outcome evaluations and are significant in the effectiveness of activation measures.

The role of the caseworker in supporting lone parents into employment is extremely important. This encompasses the practical matter of good service delivery, such as practical and specific assistance with searching for work, accessing training, making the transition to work and maximising in-work incomes (Evans et al., 2003). More significantly it entails how effective the PA is in engendering an aspiration to look for and accept a job and then develops their relationship with the individual by providing appropriate support and encouragement (Hasluck and Green, 2007). The success of caseworker involvement is dependent on their awareness and knowledge of issues facing lone parents (Griffiths, 2011), specific training in lone parent issues for the PAs (Lane et al., 2011), the level of discretion and flexibility available to them, caseload management skills (Hasluck and Green, 2007; Evans et al., 2003) and the client's distance from the labour market, with more positive results achieved for those who are work-ready.

Central to this success is the importance of an individualised, sustained and consistent relationship between the caseworker and clients (Gloster et al., 2010; Ray et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Knight et al., 2006), specific training for the caseworker (Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010), and the caseworker's capacity to provide practical assistance in job searching, help in calculating whether or not they would be better off financially taking a job, and help in dealing with barriers to employment such as childcare (Evans et al., 2003). Support from PAs in the initial weeks of work was found to be pivotal in job retention for those lone parents in receipt of IWC, and again when managing the transition off IWC (Ray et al., 2010).

Lone parents who are closest to the labour market benefit most from the assistance provided by the caseworker (Rosholm, 2014; Cebulla et al., 2008; Thomas, 2007). Indeed, individualised employment supports do not assist all lone parents in making the transition to employment. The disparity in the characteristics of lone parents and the subsequent barriers to work they experience impact on the effectiveness of employment supports for individual lone parents entering employment (Ray et al., 2010; Knight and Kasparova, 2006). Jobcentre Plus staff believe the effectiveness of LPWFIs in getting lone parents to consider and prepare for work depends on the lone parent and their attitude to work (Gloster et al., 2010).

Qualitative investigations of lone-parent activation in the UK report that some lone parents believe that Jobcentre Plus did not address their needs or assist them in moving into quality employment that would lift them out of poverty; rather, the participants perceived that Jobcentre Plus staff wanted them to take any job (Haux et al., 2012). Others report the activation process as stressful due to uncertainty and a lack of information (Dewar, 2012). Some felt under pressure that their benefits might be cut or stopped if they did not find work quickly (Peavey, 2009). Parents discussed the 'invisible costs' involved in attending Jobsearch review meetings and activities such as public transport (Whitworth, 2013). Indeed, Graham and McQuaid (2014) state that current mainstream provision through Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme does not appear to be meeting the needs of lone parents not in paid employment. Lone parents in a Canadian study describe the securing of a 'good' or 'bad' caseworker as comparable to 'pulling the handle of a slot machine' (Good Gingrich, 2008: 121). Australian lone parents reported how difficult it was for them to get what they wanted from services; they described

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payments (Brewer et al., 2012b).

some encounters as humiliating and felt that they were under constant scrutiny from Centrelink<sup>34</sup> and other services to make sure they did not receive something they were not entitled to. This resulted in many lone parents not getting what they needed or asking for assistance. The parents felt as though service providers believed they did not deserve help; they felt judged, unsupported in their aspirations and their concerns disregarded (McArthur et al., 2013).

Research has also considered caseworker discretion in terms of powers to enforce participation in activation, based on available evidence from different countries. Zabel (2012) explains that caseworkers in Germany are allowed to use their discretion regarding which lone parents are assigned to activation programmes, and she investigated how this discretion is implemented. Her analysis found that lone mothers with young children participate in activation measures as frequently as childless single women. The opposite appears to have happened in the Netherlands, where there has been substantial resistance among lone mothers and caseworkers to labour market activation (Knijn and Van Wel, 2001) highlighting possible differing ideologies of caseworkers compared to Germany. Caseworkers in the Netherlands were found to opt for the 'easier option' of exempting lone mothers from being obliged to look for employment when they considered childcare supports and the fact that part-time employment would not lead to higher incomes.

### 5.3 Education and Training

Because low levels of education are a significant barrier to employment for lone parents in most countries, participation in education and training is a prerequisite prior to moving into paid employment. Educational attainment is persistently identified as a significant factor in reducing welfare dependency and providing a sustainable income (Forste and Jacobsen, 2013). Western et al. (2008) studied inequality among children, using family income data from the US Current Population Survey from 1976 to 2006. The findings show that educational inequality and lone parenthood are linked to increased income inequality; however, the effects were counterbalanced by rising educational attainment and women's employment. Cheung and McKay (2010) report that government-funded training is associated with a faster rate of return to employment, but this did not result in systematic differences in wages. The findings did report an important association between receiving training and moving into work and retaining employment.

In relation to future 'pay-off' of investing in higher education, Forste and Jacobsen (2013) report that only the completion of at least an undergraduate degree was associated with increased future employment income. They report no difference in income for those with a certificate or diploma and those without an undergraduate degree. Research from Canada by Good Gingrich (2008, 2010) examines lone mothers' experiences of the design, delivery and enforcement of workfare in Ontario. In relation to mandatory employment training and job preparation programmes, the mothers report that some of them were useful; for example, developing basic computer skills and learning stress management gave them an opportunity to expand their social support networks. However, this was tempered with a view that university or college education was not made available to them as opposed to the sometimes irrelevant training provided by Ontario Works.

Research that considers education and training supports in the USA and UK specifically is concerned with participation of low-income mothers in third-level education. While mothers report difficulties (Osborne et al., 2004) in remaining in education, the benefits derived include increased earnings (Deprez et al., 2004) and improved self-esteem (Hinton-Smith, 2008; Coccia, 1997). Challenges faced by lone parents in training include transport, childcare, ill-health, substance abuse, low self-esteem, and caring for their children combined with the demands that training places on them – all of which

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<sup>34</sup> Centrelink is the Australian social security organisation providing a one-stop shop on a contractual basis for government departments. It determines who is eligible for social assistance and provides referrals to the Job Network Agencies (Chenoweth, 2008).



reduce their inclination to participate in training (Guenther et al., 2008). The measures that help lone parents continue in education were: time-related strategies, including their ability to balance time with their child and themselves; support systems, including formal campus support and family and friends; attitudes and beliefs; and a strong sense of self-worth and value (Hayes Nelson, 2009).

## 5.4 Caseworkers' Views and Practices in Relation to Employment Supports

There is a small body of research which looks at the views and work practices of caseworkers in relation to supporting lone parents into employment. Research conducted with caseworkers in the UK highlights the importance of staff training and management support for caseworkers who had previously worked with unemployed people and subsequently provided post-employment supports. Gloster et al. (2010) report on the perspectives of the Jobcentre Plus staff on moving parents from Income Support to LPO<sup>35</sup>. The staff were given communications, guidance and training on LPO to inform them of the changes and processes in implementing it, and on the whole they were satisfied with this process. The staff reported that they raised awareness of the LPO changes with lone parents during LPWFIs, Options and Choices Event and letters and leaflets. They believe the LPWFIs are very useful for getting lone parents to focus on the LPO changes. Staff believed the implementation of LPO had gone well and that this was due to thorough guidance and training of staff, effective organisation and management of the changes, and good communications with the lone parents.

Evaluation of the ERA<sup>36</sup>, a post-employment intervention, indicates that while implementation was initially difficult, it improved considerably as Jobcentre Plus staff grew more competent and confident in delivering the programme. Staff who had previously worked to help unemployed people find jobs had to adjust to the demands of building a partnership with claimants that would extend to the lone parents entering employment and two years after job placement. This transformation of work practices required extensive staff training, increased management supports to motivate staff, and input from the DWP (Riccio et al., 2008).

Brady's (2011) Australian study with employees in JN<sup>37</sup> agencies delivering employment support programmes for lone parents concludes that many service providers acknowledge lone mothers as 'mothers' and have produced 'spaces' where they can discuss and wrestle with ways they can combine 'mothering work' and paid work. The JN agencies interpret activation as focusing on what claimants had to do as opposed to how new programmes could assist them, and employees viewed the welfare-to-work message for clients as 'harsh, punitive and often scary'. The majority of JN agencies regarded the 'big stick' approach about rules and sanctions for non-compliance as unproductive. Instead, they concentrated on promoting compliance by understanding clients' wishes and aspirations. This manifested in staff placing parents' identity as mothers and mothering practice to the fore. Therefore, while the official policy discourse does not create a space for mothering identities and responsibilities, the JN advisers recognised the importance of creating such a space and responded to this by working with the mothers to negotiate the relationship between mothering and paid work.

UK research also reports the difficulty PAs experience in mobilising some lone parents, and PAs being hesitant to impose sanctions due to concerns about financial hardship. Thomas and Jones's (2006) analysis of WFIs reports that the PAs were satisfied with how the programme was operating and were

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<sup>35</sup> Lone Parent Obligations (LPOs) are changes to entitlement conditions for lone parents claiming IS, implemented from 24 November 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration programme provided a combination of post-employment advisory support and financial incentives to help all low-income people who moved into employment to sustain and progress.

<sup>37</sup> Job Network (JN): the delivery of employment services was tendered out to Job Network organisations whose primary responsibility was to assist people into work. It was renamed Job Services Australia in 2009.

positive about working with lone parents, believing the package to be positive. However, PAs found that the annual review meetings – particularly the 24- and 36-month reviews – were less effective, as they face a residual hard core of lone parents attending these meetings who are difficult to mobilise. In the UK, sanctions have been attached to lone parents since 2001. In Casebourne, et al.'s study (2010a), PAs reported that they remind lone parents about JSA conditionality, but few had direct experience of imposing them. Some were hesitant about imposing sanctions, as they were concerned that this would damage their relationship with the lone parent, place financial hardship on them and their children, and create adverse publicity.

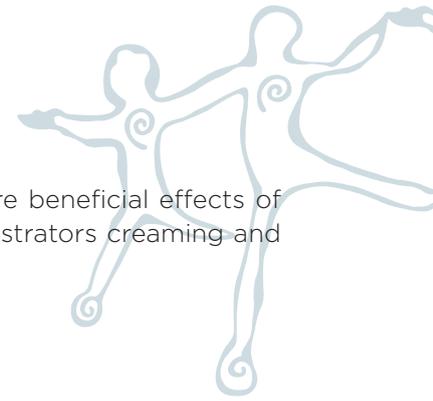
Drew et al. (2014) report on a study commissioned by the UK government of how PAs conduct mandatory interviews with unemployment benefit claimants. They found that calculating how much better off a claimant would be working part-time and retaining some benefit was ineffective. They also report that the way lone parent claimants are asked by PAs about their goals for returning to employment during WFIs affects how conducive the claimant is to progressing towards work. They report that asking 'Have you got any plans to go back to work in the future?' was responded to much more positively than 'Are you looking for work at the moment?' The authors conclude that PA training is important for the effectiveness of WFIs.

In the US, Handler (2008) argues that caseworkers are overworked, undertrained and under pressure to provide favourable statistical results, and as such they focus their energy on the most employable who require the least amount of their time. Hasluck and Green (2007) in their review and meta-analysis conclude that while there is a significant amount of very positive evidence on the role played by Pas, there is also extensive evidence that PAs' behaviour, decisions and morale are frequently directed by considerations of Jobcentre Plus performance targets and performance-related payment structures, in some cases to the detriment of the customer. Rees, Whitworth and Carter (2014) note that:

*International literature has consistently raised fears that in such outsourced, payment by results welfare-to-work schemes (particularly private) providers would respond to financial pressures and incentives by 'creaming' off easier to serve claimants whilst 'parking' harder to service clients. (Rees et al., 2014: 222).*

In exploring evidence of such 'creaming' and 'parking' in the UK, the authors analyse published 'Work Programme' data and qualitative research on providers' experiences. In their analysis the authors provide evidence of 'creaming' and 'parking' driven by extreme cost pressures and ambitious performance targets combined with dealing with a diversity of claimants and non-standardised differentiated payment levels. In relation to lone parents, the authors report that younger lone parents fare consistently less well than younger people who aren't lone parents in the Work Programme. They posit that this might be because younger lone parents have younger children, a scarcity of job opportunities and a lack of affordable childcare, and as such, younger lone parents face greater barriers to employment. Older lone parents, by contrast, tend to have stronger support networks and to have been employed previously (Carter and Whitworth 2015; Rees et al., 2014).

Kim (2009) argues that welfare reforms in the USA have limited job training opportunities for women in receipt of social welfare; as such, she examined which women obtained training and whether it was linked to a higher probability of entering employment and of improved individual outcomes. Using the Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2004, she found that women who appeared to be most job-ready were most likely to obtain training. This has significant implications, as the study also reported that the odds of women on social welfare getting a job was 14.6 times higher when they obtained training, and it was associated with a 72% increase in individual income among those in employment. Compared to women who had not been given training, those who had were younger and were more likely to be racial minorities, to have higher levels of education, to have not been unemployed for a long



time, and to have good health and more children. Kim concluded that there are beneficial effects of job training for some women, but this could be an effect of programme administrators creaming and skimming the most job-ready participants or an effect of self-selection.

## 5.5 Financial Supports and Subsidies

Financial supports and subsidies form an important element in supporting lone parents into employment. In many countries this has resulted in changes to welfare payments and taxes to improve the financial incentive to work and the provision of childcare services or subsidies (Rowlingson and Millar, 2002). Grants, loans, tax credits and in-work benefits (IWBs) are all examples of financial supports and subsidies. In relation to labour market activation, tax credits have been introduced to make work more financially attractive than benefits and to improve the income adequacy of low-income families and therefore reduce poverty levels among the working poor. Canada, the UK and the USA have been at the forefront in the introduction of such tax measures, where they are viewed as important policy instruments to make work pay. There are various policy instruments employed to make work pay, such as combining IWBs with income from paid work (e.g., in France, Belgium and Portugal), reducing employee contributions to social security for those on a low income (Germany and Belgium) and reducing tax for low-income workers (Denmark). In recent years many countries have introduced tax credits as part of more widespread tax reforms, including France, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany and Belgium. Much of this has been in response to the European Employment Strategy (2003) 'making work pay' guidelines (Verbist et al., 2007).

In the UK in 2003, the ERA<sup>38</sup> programme introduced in-work supports including the Emergency Discretion Funds (EDFs) to help those moving from benefits to employment to manage short-term financial emergencies that might prevent them from remaining in work. Riccio et al.'s (2008) evaluation of the ERA in relation to lone parents reports that 23% of NDLP and 18% of WTC customers in employment received EDF assistance, arguing that it is an important element of in-work support. Most of these customers received just one payment, which was used to deal with minor emergencies of childcare, transport and rent. However, in relation to lone parent transition loans (LPTLs), Jobcentre Plus staff report low uptake of loans among parents they were working with. The lone parents in the study explained that they did not avail of the LPTL, largely because they did not want to incur more debt; rather, they would bridge the gap by borrowing from friends and family or by budgeting for the change (Gloster et al., 2010).

Tax credits and IWBs are significant in assisting with the transition from welfare to work; overall the research suggests that IWBs are a successful way to improve quality of life and reduce child poverty in lone-parent families (Brewer et al., 2012b; Carnochan et al., 2005). Conventional in-work benefits (IWBs) are means-tested, available to all workers on a low income, and tend to have no time limit. Ray et al. (2007) report on a qualitative evaluation of the lone-parent pilots the Work Search Premium (WSP) and IWC.<sup>39</sup> They conclude that IWC was overwhelmingly supported by staff, who perceived it to be an important incentive to work. Furthermore, the lone parents interviewed were all positive about IWC, using it for day-to-day living expenses. It was very important to those who had debts; high childcare, housing or transport costs; and those with low or unreliable incomes.

The impact of the IWC on lone parents' retention and advancement in paid employment in the UK was explored by Casebourne, Bell and Davies (2010). The respondents reported IWC as being effective

<sup>38</sup> Launched in 2003, the ERA was regarded as the next step in the UK's developing welfare-to-work policy. It provided a combination of post-employment advisory support and financial incentives to help all low-income individuals who moved into employment to sustain it and progress (Riccio et al., 2008).

<sup>39</sup> The IWC is a non-conventional IWB, as it was aimed specifically at lone parents, it had a 12-month time limit, and entitlement was conditional on previous receipt of welfare (Brewer et al., 2012b).

in supporting them through the initial move from benefits to employment during the first year by ensuring a reliable weekly income while they adapted to budgeting on a monthly wage and by offering additional income. When they were no longer entitled to the payment, they missed the extra money but managed by reducing their spending. Moreover, the expiration of their IWC payment did not lead to lone parents leaving employment: most were still in work three to seven months later, usually in the same job. However, the authors report little evidence of the parents advancing in their jobs through promotion or pay rises. Those lone parents who had advanced tended to have received job-related training and taken on additional responsibility as opposed to formal promotion or pay increase. The authors demonstrated the positive role a wage supplement can have in supporting lone parents into paid employment. IWC did this as part of a wider suite of supports that made work pay but also delivered a significant reliable weekly payment, which acted as a safety net for those parents adjusting to being paid monthly and dealing with work-related costs. The evaluators conclude that if the objective of wage supplements is to improve quality of life and reduce child poverty by increasing work incomes for lone parents, then a supplement such as IWC is a way of doing this (Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010).

Greenwood (2000) reports on two randomised experiments using financial incentives to encourage labour market participation among the unemployed in Canada. Although about a third of long-term lone-parent welfare recipients targeted by SSP left welfare for work full time, not all lone parents made the move, suggesting that earnings supplements in isolation will not support lone parents in moving to employment and remaining in it.

Dale et al. (2010) describe in-work benefits (IWBs) as politically attractive because they seem to fulfil both employment and distributional goals at the same time and take a variety of forms, such as tax credits, wage-related transfers or lump-sum payments; the choice of which to use will depend on the target group involved. They argue that in New Zealand, while IWTC is there to incentivise lone parents to work at least 20 hours on the minimum wage, it is the MFTC that 'makes work pay'. The MFTC is reduced by 100c for each extra dollar earned, so there is no incentive to work an extra hour until the MFTC is halted, which tends to be 38–40 hours a week on the minimum wage. Calculating this is further complicated when secondary benefits such as childcare and rent subsidies are considered.

Millar (2008) describes tax credits as a 'major innovation' in UK social protection policy because they bring the tax system directly into the role of assessing and delivering social protection, bringing many more families into the domain of 'income-tested support'. Tax credits form a substantial addition to the wages of low-paid individuals and make part-time work a financial option for many lone parents. Millar (2008) draws attention to the tensions between family and employment change, and to tax credit rules about reporting changes in circumstances and wage. She reports that it is the lower-income families where most of the difficulties with tax credits have been experienced, due to the 'complexity' of their income packages and the 'volatility' of their circumstances. Overpayments were built into the design of the tax credit system, however; the lone mothers in her study stated that repaying them can be a significant problem, as they depend on the payments to make work financially viable.

Millar (2011) uses the case study of one family over several years to explore and demonstrate the experiences of being in the tax credit system in the UK. She shows the importance of tax credits to family income and also the negative experiences the family had, including late and incorrect payments, changes to payments, reductions for overpayments and an absence of detailed information about the payment. Millar argues that a system based on a fixed tax credit payment for a set period of time would negate the difficulties the family experienced, as it would provide stability and security of payment, but this would also remove flexibility to deal with changing circumstances. Tax credits did assist the lone mother in the study to work, they helped make work pay and they kept her family above the poverty line – but at the cost of stress, insecurity and uncertainty. After several years of being in paid employment, the family was not much better off financially and still experienced financial insecurity.



## 5.6 Childcare Supports and Subsidies

One issue that traversed the literature on childcare was the issue of funding; significant investment is required in order to facilitate mothers' labour market participation (Williams, 2010). In addition, it is argued that investment in childcare is necessary not just for employment purposes but for the longer-term outcomes of children in lone-parent families (Zagel et al., 2013). Childcare expansion can play a major role in poverty reduction, can have an impact on the quality of life of both parents and children, and can produce sustainable jobs and contribute to long-term employability (Scott et al., 2002). Affordable childcare is seen as a critical prerequisite for employment for many single mothers, yet the literature highlights how the cost of childcare has a significant disincentive effect on the employment of lone parents. Cost is problematic for parents with children of all ages, but particularly for those with younger children, and the high burden of childcare costs can prevent some women from seeking employment (Ahn, 2012). Lone mothers with very young children pay significantly more than families with school-age children, mothers receiving regular maintenance have higher costs (linked to higher-quality childcare), and costs are higher in inner city/suburban areas, with greater state provision being associated with lower care costs (Jenkins and Symons, 2001). However, lone parents with older children also report the high cost of childcare for school-age children as a concern, reporting costs for breakfast and after-school clubs as prohibitive, particularly when schools want commitment for whole terms (Rabindrakumar, 2013; Newis, 2012).

Studies on childcare subsidies report their significant positive effects on the use of childcare services by lone parent and low-income families (Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2013; Ahn, 2012; Evans et al., 2006; Gennetian et al., 2004; Michalopoulos and Robins, 2002). Others, however, have highlighted factors that can mediate positive effects. Lack of information, complexities of subsidised systems, possible stigma (particularly where subsidies are focused in disadvantaged areas), and significant issues with lack of supply were all highlighted as reducing the positive effects of childcare subsidies (Adams et al., 2006). It has been argued that the success of subsidisation is very much dependent on how systems of subsidisation operate, particularly on the way government investment in childcare is allocated to families with children (Moodie-Dyer, 2011; Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2011; Basta, 2007; Meyers, 1997). The level of subsidies given is also crucial in that the highest participation levels are in countries with the most generous funding levels (Evans et al., 2006). In addition, there are arguments put forward for a subsidy for informal care which could expand childcare choices and improve employment options for lone parents (Skinner and Finch, 2006; Bell et al., 2005).

The provision of early-years services is extending, and many countries provide a universally available part-time year of early education prior to participation in formal education. The impact of this provision has been explored by a number of researchers to determine its effect on the uptake of maternal employment. The research indicates mixed results. Some found that transition to preschool resulted in an increase in employment rates of mothers, particularly into part-time work (Brewer et al., 2014). But it was entry into full-time primary education that increases the proportion of lone parents who move off welfare and into employment (corresponding to a relatively large childcare subsidy). This however does not precipitate a large increase in labour market activity among this group (Brewer and Crawford, 2010). In addition, research from Argentina suggests that transition from preschool to primary education had larger persistent effects on employment for older, less educated mothers (Berlinski et al., 2009, 2011).

Others maintain that policy responses to work incentives need to be multifaceted and carefully tailored to the situation in each country, in order for care and employment to be successfully reconciled. Other social and fiscal policies (in conjunction with the cost of childcare) need to be examined, as all are influential in determining outcomes; a package of supports that takes account of the effects of all such

policies is required for successful outcomes (Immervoll and Barber, 2006). These include paid-leave entitlements, cash benefits and service provision (Letablier et al., 2009), a mix of provision-assistance with job search, access to suitable education and training, in-work cash transfers, individual advice and support, access to affordable good quality childcare, and ready availability of secure employment (Millar and Evans, 2003). In relation to child benefit packages for working families and their contribution to tackling in work poverty, how and whether childcare costs are subsidised makes a big difference to the income package, especially for lone parents (Van Mechelen and Bradshaw, 2013). Albelda (2001a, 2001b) maintains that the work of care needs to be equal to that of employment, and that without significant changes in what we expect of lone parents, the strategy of putting mothers to work – even with ancillary supports and wage supplements – may not work.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the available literature on employment supports as they pertain to lone-parent families. The role of the caseworker in supporting lone parents into employment is fundamental to successful transitions. Being trained in the challenges faced by lone parents, empathic, accommodating and flexible are all important characteristics needed in order to effectively support lone parents. Caseworker discretion varies depending on the country examined. The research highlights that while levels of job readiness and education are key determinants of a successful outcome, the approach taken by caseworkers is also key and is often dependent on work practices and structures, particularly at management level. Moreover, moving between social protection programmes is challenging, and the role of the caseworker is invaluable in smoothing such transitions. Evaluations of experiences regarding interaction with employment support staff highlight how attitudes of staff can have an impact on outcomes. Overall the research shows that using caseworkers is an economically viable option for support. There is substantial evidence to suggest that education and training, particularly to third level, are the key to sustainable employment and income levels which are sufficient to support lone-parent households. In relation to in-work supports, the research shows that while some financial supports for those participating in employment are a valuable source of assistance, and for many led to increased well-being and reductions in child poverty, temporary loans were generally unsuccessful. Furthermore, the conditions attached to supports and the complexity of systems of support in general can have negative impacts and are adding to difficulties that need to be overcome.

According to Scott et al. (2002), childcare expansion can have an impact on the quality of life of both parents and children and can produce sustainable jobs and contribute to long-term employability. Childcare is a significant structural problem in the welfare-to-work solution to poverty, and securing childcare is particularly problematic for lone parents and low-income earners; cost, limited availability and non-flexibility are prohibiting access. While subsidies and increases in funding do help with these problems, they do not address the more fundamental issues of choice and the value of care. The propensity of mothers to favour part-time employment and informal care in order to fulfil both roles, combined with issues of in-work poverty and non-sustainability in employment, shows that much more needs to be done to facilitate lone-parent employment, and it needs to be acknowledged that lone parents only have half the time resources available to them compared to coupled parents.

# 6.0



## Employment Outcomes of Lone Parents' Participation in Activation Programmes

### 6.1 Introduction

The primary aim of activation or welfare-to-work programmes is to move welfare recipients into paid employment. As such, this chapter considers the employment outcomes of lone parents who participated in an activation programme as reported in the literature. Mandatory activation programmes report mixed outcomes dependent on the characteristics of the lone parents: those who are moving into work have more 'job-ready' characteristics than those who are not. A wide range of factors affect the prospect of lone parents transitioning to work. 'Job-ready' lone parents in the UK tend to have recent work experience, be looking for employment, have high levels of education, have access to a vehicle and use informal childcare when they are not working. Financial supports or IWBs are more likely to be taken up by lone parents who are more 'job-ready'.

The economy plays a significant role in employment outcomes, and during the recession there has been a decline in 'welfare leavers' entering employment. There are mixed outcomes in terms of the suitability of LFA or HCD approaches to activation. Not all lone parents will exit welfare. Australian research reports that after welfare reform two thirds of the exits were from welfare and one third were to other welfare payments. Part-time employment can provide an important stepping stone to full-time employment for lone parents. Comparative studies report mixed results in employment outcomes from activation programmes; of particular concern is cycling between benefits and employment. Some point to the fact that those who remain on employment support programmes are the least employable, and they question the effectiveness of activation programmes in terms of the suitability of supports provided to this group.

### 6.2 Outcomes of Voluntary Activation Programmes

It is important to note that early evidence from the UK is based on the NDLP, which was a voluntary opt-in activation programme, and as such we differentiate between the outcomes of voluntary and mandatory activation programmes. London Economics' (2007) cost benefit analysis of the NDLP with parents suggests that the overall effect of welfare changes since 1997 has been rather mixed. Gregg et al. (2005) report that the lone parent employment rate in the UK increased by 12 percentage points from 1996 to 2005, and Harker (2006) reports that child poverty decreased by 23% from 1999 to 2006. Lessof et al.'s (2003) evaluation of the NDLP reports that 24% of lone-parent participants found work who would not otherwise have done so, and they withdrew from IS more quickly than non-participants.

However, how much of any change can be attributed to government policy intervention has been questioned. Evaluations of the NDLP have shown a positive impact on exit from IS into work, yet the evaluations identify that causal effect is problematic, as NDLP was voluntary. As such, it may be that those lone parents most motivated to work engaged in such a programme (London Economics, 2007). Indeed, Dolton and Smith's (2011) evaluation of the NDLP reports that the NDLP 'modestly reduces benefit receipt' among lone parents, results at odds with the official evaluation of NDLP, which reported it to have a sizeable impact on benefit exit. They question whether the impact of NDLP might

weaken over time and describe what happened as a 'one-time windfall' for the government, in their view reflecting the historically low rates of lone-parent employment levels, the absence of effort to encourage lone parents on IS into employment in the past, and coexisting policy measures to 'make work pay'.

Studies have highlighted that a wide range of factors affect the prospect of lone parents transitioning to work. 'Job-ready' lone parents in the UK tend to have recent work experience, be looking for employment, have high levels of education, have access to a vehicle and use informal childcare when they are not working. Below-average employment outcomes were reported for lone fathers, teenage and older parents, those with ill health or disabilities, and ethnic minorities who participated in the NDLP (Evans et al., 2003). The least educated lone parents were not more responsive to the reform, while those who were not working were less skilled and predominantly tenants and a group for whom work incentives were weak (Gregg et al., 2003). As participation was voluntary, the evidence suggests that if lone parents were to benefit from NDLP they needed to recognise the potential benefits of being in paid employment and of the employment supports they would be provided with (Hasluck and Green, 2007).

Hasluck and Green's (2007) evidence found that once participating in NDLP, the probability of a lone parent entering paid employment is roughly doubled. This has been largely associated with the flexibility and customised nature of NDLP. Furthermore, PAs believe that the overall package of employment supports, rather than individual elements of provision, has been key in the success of NDLP. However, the authors caution that NDLP participants were the most motivated of all groups to move into paid employment, and many were close to being job ready; as such, this type of provision might not be as effective for the remaining 90% of lone parents on IS.

In relation to the ERA, an early evaluation on its implementation reported that levels of engagement had varied greatly, and raised concern about whether Jobcentre Plus can deliver ERA in the manner required by the design of the experiment (Hall et al., 2005). It is suggested that the ERA might not have been cost-beneficial for lone parents, because of childcare responsibilities, and as such they may have opted for part-time employment (Greenberg et al., 2013). However, the evidence of the ERA increasing employment rates and retaining a 'hard-to-help' group is regarded as encouraging, and points to the effectiveness of combining improved incentives and caseworker support in employment retention (Dorsett, 2014).

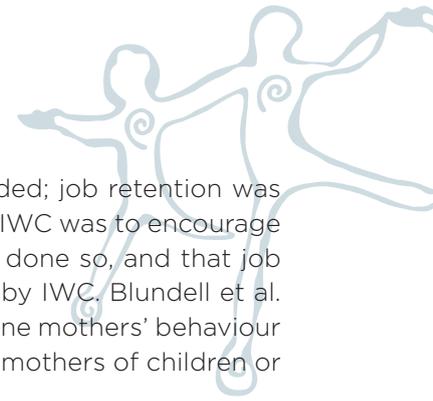
In relation to Work-Focused Interviews (WFI), Hasluck and Green's (2007) meta-analysis of activation measures and supports reports the introduction of the LPWFI as a critical element of the supports, as it increased the take-up of NDLP. They suggest that if the LPWFI is conducted in a 'sympathetic manner', its compulsory nature might lead some lone parents – who had previously disregarded the possibility of taking up paid employment – to do so by beginning a process with the support of NDLP, and lead eventually to a job. Later data derived from administrative benefit records do not suggest that the compulsory WFI helped increase labour market participation for lone parents (Kirby and Riley, 2004).

Some studies have looked specifically at the impact of financial supports on lone parents' decision to enter paid employment, and report that those who are more 'work-ready' are more likely to take up such supports.

Ray et al. (2010) conducted an evaluation of a pilot programme of the IWC called the In-Work Retention Pilot<sup>40</sup> (IWRP) to test the effectiveness of using the IWC as an aid to job retention and progression. The authors reported that the distinctive payment structure of the IWRP had little impact on the take-up of IWC by lone parents. Those parents who did partake tended to be non-disabled, had shorter periods on benefits, were looking for high-skilled employment and had fewer children – all characteristics associated with higher rates of work entry. However, Brewer et al. (2012b) report that the IWC increased

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<sup>40</sup> The IWRP is part of a series of policy interventions designed to encourage greater numbers of lone parents to take up paid work.



flows from welfare to work, and this did not diminish when the supplement ended; job retention was good, but that cannot be accredited to IWC. They report that the main impact of IWC was to encourage more lone parents to start work and leave benefits than would otherwise have done so, and that job retention among recipients was high but that these are not particularly caused by IWC. Blundell et al. (2011) report that the announcement and implementation of the WTC changed lone mothers' behaviour in relation to taking up paid employment, and that this was especially strong for mothers of children of preschool and primary school age, who benefited most from the WTC.

### 6.3 Outcomes from Mandatory Programmes

The evaluation of mandatory participation in activation programmes in the UK report lower levels of transition to employment among lone parents, and those who are moving into work have more 'job-ready' characteristics than those who are not. Mandatory programmes in other countries also report mixed outcomes dependent on the characteristics of the lone parents. Casebourne, Davies et al. (2010) evaluated, for the DWP, whether and for how long lone-parent activation measures, combined with an effective package of supports, provide an effective incentive to lone parents to search for, enter into and sustain paid employment. A significant finding that emerged from this research is the journey many lone parents take before arriving at their destination of employment. In addition, lone parents with similar circumstances had very disparate experiences, particularly those with medical conditions who were found fit to work (Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010). Lone parents were more likely to have worked if they had recent work experience or were looking for employment when they were on IS, had higher qualification, had access to a vehicle and lived in a rural area, and had used informal childcare when they were not working. Lone parents with a long-standing illness, particularly those with mental health difficulties, were less likely to work. There were also differing attitudes to work; lone parents who were more family-focused were less likely to have worked. The authors conclude that a wide range of factors affect the prospect of lone parents transitioning to work (Coleman and Riley, 2012). Avram et al. (2013) conducted an Impact Assessment on the LPO and report that it had a much greater impact in moving lone parents into work than previous DWP employment programmes and measures targeted at lone parents. The authors qualify these findings, stating that the cost of LPO is not considered, nor is the effect on the lone parents involved.

Canadian research points to the impact of age, education levels (Myles et al., 2009) and attachment to the labour market and earnings. Lightman et al. (2005a) use a follow-up survey with former welfare recipients in Toronto to assess the quality of employment in the period directly after exiting welfare, to explore the issues that affect the quality of that employment. This report includes all welfare recipients, of whom lone parents are but one group. The participants had low levels of education; as education levels rose there was stronger attachment to the labour market, and earnings were positively associated with education. The findings also show that recipients with larger families were less likely to return to social welfare, and singles and lone parents were more likely to return than couple families; however, the number of young children did not affect returns (Lightman et al., 2005a). Lightman et al. (2005b) engaged in a second round of qualitative interviews and report that the lives of most remain marked by poverty, hunger and uncertainty; the experiences of the respondents suggest the need to recognise that there are different routes to sustainable employment and that for some people paid employment will not be realised.

As with other countries, evidence from the US suggests that the characteristics of the parents impact on returning to or remaining on welfare, with returns to welfare linked to high unemployment, limiting welfare policies, being in receipt of Medicaid and food stamps, having low skills and being Hispanic. The mothers likely to achieve financial independence experienced generous government assistance programmes, received housing assistance, gained full-time employment, possessed operative job skills and a college education, and were married (Cheng, 2010). There are mixed outcomes in terms

of the suitability of LFA or HCD approaches to activation. In the US, studies suggest that moving welfare recipients into employment without education or training wherever possible enabled 'rapid employment' for those who could find jobs quickly, preserving the costs of education and training for those who could not. However, large numbers of participants remained without a job and continued to receive welfare after five years (Friedlander and Hamilton, 1996). Carnochan et al.'s (2005) literature review of USA activation reports two primary findings: programmes that used mixed initial activities with a strong emphasis on employment had the best results, and only those programmes that included financial supports to those who entered employment led to increases in the income of participants (Bloom and Michalopoulos, 2001, cited in Carnochan et al., 2005).

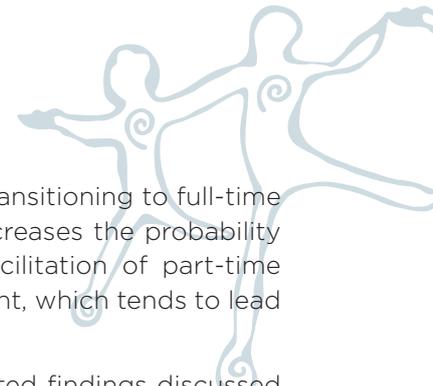
Jagannathan and Camasso (2006a, 2006b) report that the LFA was the most effective, as it helped participants to get low-skilled and low-paid jobs with little or no training expenses, whereas HCI involves significant training costs with little or no impact on employment. They note that they have little to report that is encouraging in terms of the efficacy of welfare-to-work strategies, as their results show that these do little to make welfare recipients financially better off or self-sufficient. However, Kim (2012) found there was a higher probability of obtaining and maintaining employment for participants of HCD programmes than for participants in LFA programmes, and this runs counter to the work-first strategy of welfare reform. Looking specifically at mothers: those who took part in HCD programmes were younger, better educated, had fewer children, were more likely to be White and had higher family incomes. The analysis also found that a combination of LFA and HCD programmes was significantly associated with a higher probability of entering employment, and that participation in HCD programmes was linked to longer employment periods.

Evaluation of ERA programmes in the US found that RFS services were distinguished from regular PES services by intensive outreach customer service, flexibility and individualised attention. However, fewer participants than expected were engaged in RFS despite encouragement to do so, and over two years it did not lead to greater employment or higher earnings (Anderson et al., 2009).

Studies have reported the major role the economy plays in moving welfare recipients to employment, and time-limited welfare might not be necessary; rather, attention needs to be paid to how to assist the hardest to employ (Kwon and Meyer, 2011; Albert, 2000). Indeed, Finn and Gloster's (2010) review of the evidence from US studies reports that welfare reforms introduced in 1996 have had significant impact on the reduction of lone parent numbers in receipt of welfare, household poverty, and employment rates. However, the employment rate for lone-parent mothers and child poverty has since deteriorated, while the numbers in receipt of welfare continue to decline. It is estimated that tax credits were responsible for one third of the change, welfare for 25% and the economy for 25%.

Fok and McVicar (2013) analyse the impact of reform on single mothers and low-income couple families after 2007 in Australia. They report that two thirds of the exits were from welfare and one third were to other welfare payments. The impacts were larger for partnered parents than for lone parents, but not statistically significantly so. The authors acknowledge that they cannot report on labour force participation after welfare. Summerfield et al. (2010) modelled the combined impact of welfare-to-work reforms on the level of child support and the resident parent's disposable income, as well as the effective marginal tax rates. Their modelling suggests that the reforms may act to increase the incidence and extent of poverty in Australian lone-parent households, as the resident parent with below-average earning is significantly worse off after the reforms than before.

An Australian longitudinal study reports that part-time employment can function as a highly effective stepping stone to full-time employment. Fok et al. (2012), using the HILDA survey, analysed lone mothers' labour market participation and report clear differences in the characteristics of lone mothers compared to coupled ones. Lone mothers have a more dispersed age distribution, are less educated on average, are more likely to be immigrants or indigenous and to have fewer dependent children. The



authors conclude that part-time employment is 'more help than hindrance' to transitioning to full-time employment, while part-time employment at early waves of data collection increases the probability of full-time employment. They argue that the Australian welfare system's facilitation of part-time employment of lone parents in receipt of welfare promotes part-time employment, which tends to lead to full-time employment in the future.

As most German evaluations were not written in English, an overview of reported findings discussed in English documents is presented. As Zabel (2013a) notes, however, very few German studies focus exclusively on lone mothers but on unemployed people in general. The classroom training programmes and the '€1 Jobs' are reported as having positive employment effects on women in general (Zabel, 2013a). The findings show that participation in activation programmes increases lone mothers' entry rate into employment. This is strongest for medium-length further vocational training programmes. Subsidised employment programmes and classroom training programmes had a positive effect, but not for all groups of lone mothers. The '€1 Jobs' were found to do little to improve job searching skills but were important in getting participants to adjust to paid employment (Zabel, 2013a, 2013b).

In the Netherlands, during the early stages of the reform process, the number of lone mothers exiting welfare was lower than expected. One of the main reasons suggested for this was that the 60% of all lone mothers in receipt of welfare who were not exempt from activation on the basis of their child's age were deemed exempt from the full obligation of looking for work by their caseworkers: 36% were fully exempted and 25% had a part-time work obligation (Knijn and Van Well, 2001). In 2009, the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Inland Revenue reported a statistically significant increase in the employment of lone parents by 2007. However, the methodology has been called into question, and commentators note that it captured a period in which unemployment was falling sharply. Moreover, a 2008 MSD survey of living standards highlights that after full implementation of the WFF, 19% of New Zealand children remained in what was described in the report as 'unacceptable serious hardship' (Dale et al., 2010).

## 6.4 Comparative Studies.

Tergeist and Grubb (2006) examine the activation strategies and performance of employment services in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK who implemented a 'mutual obligations' approach. This is where welfare recipients were obliged to engage in job searching and improve their employability in order to receive benefits and employment support services. The authors conclude that the implementation of activation programmes requires organisational capacity to deliver intensive assistance and provide individualised supports. Knijn et al. (2007) compare welfare reforms for lone parents in France, the Netherlands and the UK and explore whether the common focus on activation has led to policy convergence. They contend that there has been a one-sided implementation of activation: work obligations have been introduced in the absence of paid leave, quality childcare, training programmes and income protection in between precarious jobs. Lone-parent families are at increased risk, as they lack the protection of a second wage or a second adult who can share the burden. The authors conclude that given the increases in the working poor in all three countries, such policy has a distance to go before it can be viewed as one that is effective in tackling child poverty.

Daguerre and Etherington (2009) review AMLPs across the OECD, which endorses a 'Work First approach', employability programmes which promote a quick re-entry into paid employment based on the notion that welfare recipients should accept any job as opposed to unemployment and strict conditionality based on mutual obligations to enforce this. All OECD countries implement AMLPs with

sticks (financial sanctions for non-compliance) and carrots (financial incentives to return to employment and support services). They report that a one-size-fits-all policy is not working, as activation reforms in western Europe have had mixed results in employment outcomes; of particular concern is cycling between benefits and employment. Support services need to be staffed by motivated and highly trained staff who are best suited to provide a mentoring and coaching role, particularly with those in need of intensive support. The fact that those who remain on employment support programmes are the least employable calls into question the effectiveness of AMLPs in terms of the suitability of supports provided to this group.

Crisp and Fletcher (2008) explore the impact of workfare programmes in the USA, Canada and Australia and conclude that there are few systematic evaluations that isolate the impact of workfare programmes. The limited evidence available suggests that the dramatic reductions in welfare caseloads in the USA and Canada cannot be credited to workfare alone; rather, time limits, compulsory job searching and economic growth enabled participants to enter employment. Moreover, workfare deters people from claiming and persuades them to leave welfare before activation, and the proportion of welfare claimants involved in workfare is low in all three countries. They report little evidence that workfare increases the likelihood of getting a job and is least effective in moving people into employment when unemployment is high. Workfare is least effective for welfare recipients with multiple barriers to work; they often fail to meet obligations and they experience sanctions, in some cases the complete withdrawal of benefits, resulting in no work and no income. Some US states have introduced more flexible models with intensive support to those with multiple barriers, including the introduction of subsidised jobs that pay a wage rather than benefits.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The primary aim of activation or welfare-to-work programmes is to move welfare recipients into paid employment. The overall effect of activation programmes on employment for lone parents appears to be mixed. In the UK, both voluntary and mandatory programmes report that it was those lone parents who were more 'work-ready' who moved quickly into employment. Those who were not working were less skilled, and tenants and those in work tend to work part-time. Financial supports seem to have the greatest impact on the 'work-ready' lone parents; these resulted in high levels of job retention. Many lone parents experience a journey into employment, and not all will move immediately into employment: a significant portion will move to another welfare payment first. Once again it is lone parents who are most 'work-ready' who will move into work first. Indeed, in Australia, after the welfare reforms, one third of recipients moved into employment and two thirds moved to another welfare payment. USA and Canadian studies report decreases in welfare recipients, but recent studies point to the impact of the recession on employment levels and activation. Comparative studies suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to activation has not worked, as is evident from the fact that some people have remained on employment supports; the studies question the suitability of the employment supports provided. Others highlight the importance of intensive assistance and provision of an individualised activation support to lone parents in any activation programme.

# 7.0



## Lone-Parent Labour Market Activation and Well-Being

### 7.1 Introduction

Well-being is made up of various dimensions, including economic elements such as income, and non-economic elements such as subjective well-being, which refers to how people experience the quality of their lives; this includes job satisfaction, the time parents spend with their children, and mental health. The Learning for Well-Being Consortium of Foundations Europe defines child well-being as 'realising one's unique potential through physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development ... in relation to self, others and the environment' (EPAN, 2013). This chapter considers maternal and child well-being for lone parents and low-income families who participated in activation programmes. There is evidence that work contributes to maternal well-being and economic stability, yet there is little to suggest that this leads to improved child development. The age and gender of the child appear to be important determinants in how employment of a lone parent impacts on their well-being. However, it is only in recent years that researchers have begun to question and consider the impact of welfare reforms on children, with particular concern that the impact of labour market activation on children is rarely considered before policy is implemented (Dale et al., 2010).

### 7.2 Economic Well-Being

A primary aim of labour market activation policies for lone parents has been to reduce the prevalence of poverty experienced by these families, based on the assumption that entering paid employment would lead to an increase in income and protect against poverty. The evidence of activation improving the economic well-being of lone-parent families is mixed, and much of the research questions the effectiveness of activation to reduce poverty in lone-parent families (Grant et al., 2011). Poverty rates in much of the OECD have stagnated and in some cases increased in lone-parent families despite a rise in employment rates (Jaehrling et al., 2014; Cantillion, 2011) and policies to reduce poverty levels (Ugreninov et al., 2013). Indeed, the structure of poverty has changed, with higher poverty risks for the young and very high poverty levels in lone-parent families (Förster, 2004). Younger mothers and mothers of young children are the least employed groups of parents, and this is intensified for lone mothers. Lone mothers in part-time employment are much less likely to be in professional occupations and more likely to be in low-skilled jobs compared to all other groups of mothers (Ruggeri and Bird, 2014).

While activation may increase lone parents' participation in the labour market and reduce the numbers in receipt of welfare assistance, a substantial number of lone-parent households remain in poverty; this is attributed to low levels of earnings. In the US, welfare reform did not enable poor lone-mother families to catch up with other families (Kaushal et al., 2007). Although more low-income single mothers are working, the earnings are low and they remain concentrated in low-paid employment, and many families have seen little improvement in their overall economic well-being (Meyer and Sullivan, 2008; Jones DeWeever et al., 2003). Similar findings are reported in Canada: while the number of lone-parent welfare recipients has significantly decreased and employment rates have increased, the relative economic disadvantage of lone mothers remains unchanged (Evans, 2008, 2009; Townson, 2009).

Walter (2002) analysed the Australian Negotiating Lifecourse Study data 1996–97 on lone and married mothers and material well-being, and found that lone-mother households were \$18,100 worse off than those who were partnered; this was independent of educational level, number and age of children, and employment status. The author concludes that the results indicate that paid employment and material well-being are not necessarily the same thing for lone parents, and that comparison of lone and married mothers is a ‘false dichotomy’, as the real difference between them is that one has the financial support of a partner and the other doesn’t. In Norway, reforms brought about a decrease in disposable income and an increase in poverty for ‘persistent lone mothers’, as a large proportion of them were unable to offset the loss of welfare benefits with earnings. The results are in keeping with what is known about persistent lone mothers: they have weak employment history and lower levels of education (Mogstad and Pronzato, 2012).

In the UK, evaluation of the ERA programme highlights that while it has shown positive effects in areas such as movement from part-time to full-time work and engagement in education and training, this has not led to ‘better jobs’ with higher wages (Riccio et al., 2008). Lone parents who entered work or increased their hours were less likely to experience material deprivation, and the rate fell from 65% to 39%; however, that implies that in-work poverty has persisted for two in five households where the lone parent entered paid employment (Coleman and Riley, 2012). Indeed, lone parents in the UK find it difficult to find employment that is secure, well paid, and compatible with their care responsibilities, because family-friendly employment is low paid and because childcare costs are high (Haux and Whitworth, 2014).

However, policies have managed to improve the economic well-being of lone parents. Lone- and two-parent households are less likely to be poor in those countries that have longer parental leave, a smaller proportion of unpaid leave and higher amounts of family allowance – and such policies reduced poverty to a greater extent among lone-parent households (Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis, 2014). Millar and Evans (2003), in their international review of labour market activation for lone parents, note that tax credits ensure that in most cases lone parents are financially better off in work than out of work. In the US, tax credits are apportioned as being responsible for one third of the change in the employment rate for lone-parent mothers (Finn and Gloster, 2010). A meta-analysis of 29 welfare reform initiatives in the US reports two primary findings: programmes that used mixed initial activities with a strong emphasis on employment had the best results, and only those programmes that included financial supports to those who entered employment led to increases in the income of participants (Bloom and Michalopoulos, 2001, cited in Carnochan et al., 2005).

In Canada, the introduction of a wage subsidy for lone parents to take up full-time employment increased the length of time parents remained off social assistance and decreased the time spent on social assistance (Lacroix and Brouillette, 2011). In New Zealand, labour market activation policies have facilitated some to improve their income through paid work, but this is linked in a complex way. Income adequacy and security were not stable, and engaging in paid work meant that lone parents were dependent on a combination of income sources. For most lone mothers, work alone did not pay; rather, the IWP, tax credits and child support, combined with wages, provided income adequacy (Patterson, 2008).

### 7.3 Subjective Well-Being

Many of the negative aspects associated with employment are thought to be as a consequence of the type of employment that lone parents were engaged in. Low-paid employment is seen to have no positive effects on the lives of lone parents, with precarious employment leading to precariousness in all aspects of the lives of lone parents and their children. Lone parents’ views on whether or not they are financially better off in work are mixed. There were a number of positive aspects to employment,



such as increases in self-esteem, feelings of independence, higher levels of social integration, being a good role model (Casebourne, Bell & Davies, 2010; Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010; Ray et al., 2010; London et al., 2004) and less negative parenting styles (Jackson et al., 2008). However, some lone parents report financial strain (Cook, 2012c; Breitzkreuz and Williamson, 2012; Good Gingrich, 2008, 2010; Carnochan et al., 2005; Lightman et al., 2005b; Gyamfi et al., 2001), and employment participation resulted in increases in parenting stress, depression (Gyamfi et al., 2001), exhaustion and overburden (Good Gingrich, 2010; Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010; Bulanda and Lippmann, 2009; London et al., 2004), and less satisfaction with the way they allocate their time (Le and Miller, 2013). Others report not being better off financially due to expenses they had not incurred when they were in receipt of benefits but now had to pay for because they were in work (Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010; Ray et al., 2010). Working part-time is marginally more beneficial, provided that in-work supports are adequate, with housing support seen as a significant advantage, particularly as employment expenses can often reduce the financial gains (Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010). Low-status jobs have been shown to negate the benefits of work and often reduce well-being (Cook and Noblet, 2012).

Transitions from welfare to work can exacerbate physical and mental health issues, and low-paid employment can contribute to decreases in well-being. Studies report high rates of mental health difficulties and question whether mental health problems were a factor in their becoming lone mothers or staying as lone mothers, and whether living in poverty contributes to the health problems (Baker and Tippin, 2002). Lone mothers participating in activation programmes in Australia reported significantly lower quality-of-life scores (Cook et al., 2009) and lower levels of subjective well-being (Russell, 2012). Further analysis by Cook (2012a) considered the longitudinal subjective well-being of the single mothers making the compulsory transition, and found that as work hours increased, subjective well-being did not improve; indeed, in some cases it worsened. In the US, studies on the subjective well-being of lone mothers reports no improvement in physical health, and their mental health worsened slightly after full implementation of welfare reform (Herbst, 2012). Canadian research by Janzen and Kelly (2012) compared levels of psychological distress in employed lone fathers to coupled fathers. Lone fathers reported greater work-family conflict, poorer-quality work and lower family-to-work facilitation.

Cook's (2012c) meta-synthesis of qualitative research, on the health of single parents participating in welfare-to-work schemes in liberal welfare regimes, reports that single mothers experienced a combination of health and economic issues which made their move from welfare to work problematic. In the US, the health issues of lone parents were in some instances exacerbated by a loss of health benefits. In those countries where the transition was mandated prior to children reaching school age, an absence of affordable and appropriate childcare – particularly for children with health difficulties – compounded the problem. Lone mothers in receipt of benefits and those in work relied frequently on food banks due to a lack of money. Cook (2012c) concludes that the results of the study reveal that low-paid employment does not successfully increase the social resources accessible to lone mothers as the proponents of activation would suggest.

High levels of work and family strain are often reported as a consequence of lone-parent employment (McLoyd et al., 2008). Such strains are associated with atypical work hours and low-status precarious employment and the difficulties they bring about in balancing employment and care for children (Baxter and Alexander, 2008; Gemelli, 2008). Such work-family conflict is exacerbated when lone mothers experienced an unexpected episode of illness (Spencer-Dawe, 2005). However, mothers in part-time employment perceived less work-family conflict, provided more learning opportunities for their children and were more involved in their children's primary schooling (Buehler and O'Brien, 2011).

For low-income families, employment-based anti-poverty interventions can have positive effects on children (Epps and Huston, 2007) but decreases in the amount of time spent with children (Bulanda and Lippmann, 2009; Cheng, 2006; Callister, 2005; Carnochan et al., 2005). Coupled with childcare difficulties this can have adverse effects (Carnochan et al., 2005; Qu and Wise, 2005, cited in Cortis

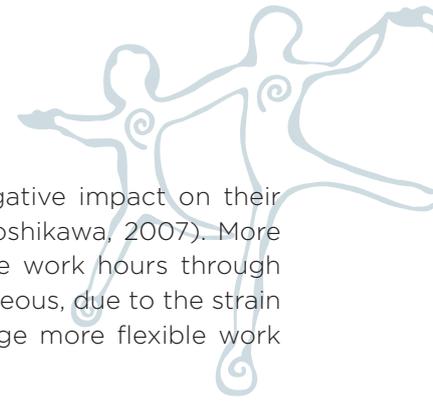
et al., 2008), with effects shown on children's levels of academic achievement (Newman and Chin, 2003). Part-time and higher-status occupations are associated with increases in parenting quality for less-educated women but not for more-educated women; non-employment for less-educated women was associated with the lowest levels of parenting quality (Augustine, 2014). However, research with adolescents suggests that activation is associated with poorer school performance and behavioural difficulties (Carnochan et al., 2005). One study reported that adolescents whose families had recently exited welfare were more likely to have been suspended or expelled from school than those of welfare recipients, while children of existing recipients were more likely to have a disability than families who exited (Tout et al., 2002, cited in Carnochan et al., 2005). Indeed, lone parents' perceptions of the impact of their employment on children are mixed; the positive effects spoken about pertain mostly to having extra family income, with negative effects pertaining to risk and safety concerns around reduced supervision of adolescents (Casebourne, Davies et al., 2010; Sarre, 2010).

## 7.4 Child and Adolescent Well-Being

While the research shows that welfare programmes and support services have the capacity to promote child well-being, work-poor families need continuous and focused support. There is a dearth of direct evidence on the impact of activation on the well-being of children (Duncan and Chase-Lansdale, 2001). Graham and McQuaid (2014) note that there is a longstanding debate on whether maternal employment has an impact on children's behavioural and emotional adjustment and cognitive outcomes; this is particularly pertinent in the policy debate on the activation of lone parents. O'Brien and Salonen (2011) argue that 'active citizenship' or welfare-to-work programmes do not precede an improvement in the rights for all children; many are left in poverty because policy is directed on the lives of adults. Family policy transfers are linked to lower child-poverty risks, with increased levels of support – particularly around income – being the most effective in lone-parent households (Janta and Henham, 2014; Bäckman and Ferrarini, 2010). As such, it is argued that 'working poor families' need to remain linked with supports such as job advancement and ongoing education and training to safeguard adequate resources for children. Welfare and other income supports need to continue to assist parents after they find a job, to help them increase their earning and escape poverty (Shields and Behrman, 2002). Indeed, well-being is reported to be significantly decreased for both parents and children who live in jobless households, with persistent unemployment being associated with persistent poverty and poorer educational outcomes in children (Hadzic et al., 2013; Gray and Baxter, 2012; Cusworth, 2007; Gregg et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2000).

Moving from welfare to work does not guarantee improvements in the circumstances or well-being of children. Adequate childcare and income are the most significant factors that improve the circumstances of children, highlighting the fact that it is a package of supports that has the most positive effects (Caragata, 2008; O'Brien, 2005). In the UK and US, welfare reforms have positively impacted on the material well-being of children in low-income families (Waldfogel, 2007; Gregg et al., 2005). However, the impact of New Zealand welfare reforms on family well-being on specific family types is that lone-parent families fared worst (Cotterall et al., 2008). In Germany, labour market activation of parents is not alleviating child poverty levels (Hübenthal, 2010), as it is argued that the government underestimates the importance of material redistribution and focuses predominately on social services and education (Olk and Hübenthal, 2009). In Australia, when parents – both mothers and fathers – had poor-quality jobs, children displayed more emotional and behavioural difficulties, independent of income, parent education, family structure and hours worked (Strazdins et al., 2010). In Norway, the educational performance of lone mothers' children was unaffected by welfare reforms; however, children of younger lone mothers perform worse than children of younger married mothers after the reforms (Løken et al., 2014).

Research has also explored the impact of non-standard work schedules and hours of parental



employment on child well-being. Non-standard schedules did not have a negative impact on their children's well-being as long as their work schedule was stable (Hsueh and Yoshikawa, 2007). More behavioural problems were associated with no paid employment and full-time work hours through less warm parenting practices. Full-time paid employment may not be advantageous, due to the strain of balancing work and family demands; there is therefore a need to encourage more flexible work arrangements (Hadzic et al., 2013).

Graham and McQuaid's (2014) literature review reports on child well-being data from the USA, which suggests that maternal employment can be advantageous for children in lone-parent families, but this is dependent on the type of job. Employment gains rarely affect child outcomes unless the mother's income and broader economic security also improve (Fullera et al., 2002). Hamilton et al.'s (2001) MDRC national evaluation of welfare-to-work programmes in the US looked at five-year impact for children and adults. They report few impacts of programmes when children were of primary school age, and where impacts were found they varied over time. HCD and LFA approaches to activation did not produce different outcomes for children. The authors conclude that impacts on outcomes for children, including stable maternal employment, adequate family income and supportive environments, were too few, occurred for too short a time, or were of an inadequate scale to lead to widespread impacts on primary school children. Moreover, even though there were positive outcomes, the children remained at risk of poor academic achievement and school progress. Other US reviews also report few effects on children either positive and negative (Morris et al., 2001).

Activation reforms have more negative effects on adolescents than on any other child age group. Some reviews point to the fact that school-aged children benefit, but the evidence for infants and toddlers is inconclusive. Adolescents had negative academic outcomes when their parents participated in mandatory employment, had earnings supplements or had time-limited social protection (Schaefer, 2002). It is argued that older children and female children might have to shoulder more household responsibilities and experience more unsupervised time when their mothers transition from welfare to work (Neblett, 2007; Gennetian et al., 2002). There are increases in school problems (Tout et al., 2002; Gennetian et al., 2001) and in risk-taking behaviour (Duncan and Chase-Lansdale, 2001), and possible indirect effects on delinquency (Vander Ven et al., 2001) and adverse effects on school outcomes, with hours worked related to delinquency (Vander Ven et al., 2001) and non-standard working hours having a minor effect on the mental health of adolescents (Dockery et al., 2009).

Cycling between work and benefits has negative effects on children, with high levels of child insecurity, uncertainty and stress in such cases; supports are needed to address the issue of insecure and unstable employment. In the US, it has an effect on older children finishing high school, attending and completing college, and experiencing depressive symptoms as young adults – suggesting that older children are more sensitive to incidents of social stigma and relative deprivation (Brand and Thomas, 2014). Ridge (2009b) draws on three waves of a qualitative longitudinal study with children and their mothers in the UK to explore the impact of movement between employment and unemployment on children's lives. This research is known as the 'Family Work Project'. Employment was an important issue in the children's lives in terms of income and security, but there were other issues too, particularly a fear of return to poverty and disadvantage. For the children of mothers who don't remain in employment, the transition to unemployment led to experiences of extreme economic and social consequences; this type of cycling results in insecurity for children and their families. The children's insecurities stemmed from the low-skilled, low-paid, unstable employment their mothers had entered (Millar and Ridge, 2013).

## 7.5 Conclusion

The evidence on activation improving the economic well-being of lone-parent families is mixed. While earlier reports of activation showed increased employment levels of lone parents, recent poverty data demonstrates that the implementation of activation programmes has not led to a decrease in poverty levels among lone parents in the EU and OECD. Much of this is reported to be a consequence of the economic downturn. However, the evidence suggests that financial supports such as tax credits are imperative to ensure income adequacy for lone parents who do transition to employment as a consequence of the low-paid employment many enter, and indeed in-work poverty becomes a reality for some. From a qualitative perspective, lone parents appear to be unsure whether they are financially better off in employment, much of which stems from the fact that they are in low-paid employment and dependent on financial supports. Subjective well-being moves beyond income and poverty, and the results are also mixed. Some lone parents report no improvement in well-being due to the additional stress they experience combining work and family life. Part-time employment appears to alleviate this stress for some, and being in work is associated with improvements in self-esteem and confidence.

It is important to note the uncertainty in the research on child well-being in lone-parent families in comparison to other family forms. The impact of labour market activation on child well-being has only recently gained attention from researchers, and as with maternal well-being the evidence is mixed and improvements are dependent on the type of job the lone parent enters. However, the research suggests that children in jobless households have more negative child outcomes than those in living in a home with a parent in employment. Qualitative studies which explore lone parents' perceptions of the impact of employment on their children focus on the positives of having an increased income, but negatives centred on leaving older children home alone. US evaluations of demonstration programmes could not provide conclusive evidence on child well-being outcomes and welfare reforms. While reports on child well-being for younger children are mixed, there is a growing body of evidence that points to the negative impact of activation on school outcomes for adolescent children, particularly those with younger siblings. Qualitative research also reports on the negative impact of cycling between work and benefits for children, and highlights the important role of children in lone-parent families in supporting their parent in employment.

# 8.0



## Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

The literature reveals that effective activation for lone parents is dependent on a package of supports; indeed as Millar and Evans (2003) denoted, it is the combination of measures that is required to make an impact, as the ‘sum is greater than the parts’. Reviews of activation measures indicate that it is difficult to isolate the independent effect of each measure. The interviews conducted as part of this study show a consensus among participants on labour market activation of lone parents in receipt of the OFP as a means to lift lone-parent families out of poverty. There is a strong consensus among the participants that labour market activation for lone parents in Ireland is, in principle, a policy development which could bring about increased income and well-being for this cohort. However, this is tempered by a concern about the capacity of supports and services to assist lone parents in moving into employment.

International evidence suggests that a well-developed system of employment supports, reform of institutions involved in employment assistance and social protection administration have been an essential part of activation strategies. Activation of welfare recipients who were not previously subject to employment conditions ‘require care’ and the use of performance measurements require careful monitoring (OECD, 2013). The supports provided to Irish lone parents in their transition from welfare to work include social protection income supports, assistance in finding employment, in-work benefits, education and training supports, subsidised employment supports and childcare support. In recent years there has been reform and reorientation of the delivery of employment supports in Ireland which aims to provide a ‘one-stop shop’ for claimants. However, there is little evidence to date on how this new system is operating. The interviews conducted for this study highlight concern about the capacity of employment supports to deal with the volume of lone parents being activated and to deliver an effective activation programme.

One of the greatest concerns of those interviewed in relation to the policy changes is the reduction in the combined income of those OFP recipients who were in part-time employment prior to the change. With the exception of those countries that introduced a time limit on welfare payments, there is no evidence of activation resulting in lone parents in receipt of welfare being financially worse off as a result of policy change. Policy often has unintended consequences, but if the premise of activation policy is to reduce poverty levels by increasing the number of lone parents in paid employment, then a policy which results in lone parents in paid employment being financially worse off has evidently created an unintended consequence and needs revision. This neither encourages welfare recipients to enter into employment, nor will it result in an increase in the income of the household; rather, it has the perverse effect of encouraging welfare dependency and reducing household income.

It also important to note what we do not know. Perhaps the most significant gap in the existing evaluation evidence concerns the impact of these policies on children living in lone-parent families. Poverty rates have fallen for some lone-parent families in these countries, but not for all, and not always by very much. The time costs of parental employment are high, and so the quality of the alternative care is important. This may be variable, with some children probably benefiting from good-quality formal care but others not. Older children may be receiving less parental time and supervision, which could help them towards greater independence or could mean more risk-taking behaviour.

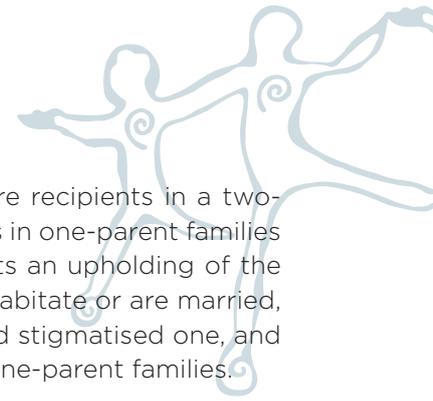
Comparative studies suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to activation has not worked, as is evident from the fact that some individuals have remained on employment supports and question the suitability of the supports provided. Others highlight the importance of intensive assistance and provision of an

individualised activation support to lone parents in any activation programme. These lessons highlight that it is essential to be aware of the differences in labour market and demographic context, and also that different emphasis is given to different goals. In the UK there are two related targets – one to increase lone-parent employment and the other to eliminate child poverty – and this means that policy must tackle both simultaneously. In the US, by contrast, the main goal has been to reduce welfare dependency among lone parents, and there has been no specific anti-poverty goal. In New Zealand the main goal was also to reduce benefit dependency through paid employment, but now it is to help lone parents into employment only when their individual circumstances and parental responsibilities allow. In Norway, the policy towards lone parents is part of a wider family policy that seeks to reconcile increased women’s employment with time for parental childcare, by allowing mothers with young children to spend some time as full-time carers. In the Netherlands, the policies for lone parents are part of a wider activation strategy, which includes a commitment to helping all parents combine parenting and paid work through an increase in opportunities for part-time employment. Thus, while all these countries are seeking to increase lone-parent employment, they do not necessarily share other aims (Millar and Evans, 2003).

The international evidence highlights a strong preference on the part of lone parents for part-time employment, and also that it can be a stepping stone to full-time employment in the future. In Ireland, income disregards have been in place for those in receipt of the OFP since 1994, yet no longitudinal data has been analysed about this very significant cohort of lone parents. These are lone parents who voluntarily entered paid employment with no conditionality or sanctions. Analysis of such data would inform policymakers if, over the last 21 years, part-time employment of OFP recipients was a stepping stone into full-time employment, and indeed if their time in receipt of social protection varied in any way from those recipients who did not engage in employment. It could also provide important information about the characteristics of this cohort of lone parents – their age, the age of their children and the stability of their employment patterns. Analysis of the new database in the DSP, the Jobseekers Longitudinal Dataset (JLD), which tracks individuals’ social welfare claims and employment history since 2004, could also provide significant information on lone parents’ employment trajectories. Such analysis would give policymakers relevant and pertinent evidence about Irish lone parents and their social protection and employment histories. Many lone parents experience a journey into employment, and not all will move immediately into employment; a significant portion will move to another welfare payment first, and once again it is lone parents who are most ‘work-ready’ who will move into work first.

Views on activation in the interviews extended beyond concern over loss of income and poverty and pertained to what was seen as a distinct lack of awareness of the reality of the lives of lone parents in Ireland in the present day. Some said the welfare system was designed to support two-parent families and that absorbing lone parents as jobseekers is a continuation of that practice, which highlights a lack of recognition of the distinctive challenges faced by lone parents. While the transitional arrangement was meant to address some of the issues faced, for some it’s ‘neither one thing nor the other’. For others the cyclical effect of the barriers faced by lone parents is an issue that needs to be acknowledged. Despite efforts to improve their own situations, many lone parents are caught in a cycle from which they cannot manoeuvre and as a consequence feel trapped.

Absent from the debate in Ireland is the gendered nature of the impact of this activation policy and the parenting responsibility involved in parenting alone. In the interviews it was felt that choice of care was not an option for lone parents; in addition, some felt that the role of parents in building and promoting strong parent-child relationships needs to be acknowledged as an important buffer against adversity. The capacity of a lone parent to work and care cannot be equated to that of a two-parent family; lone parents have only half the time resources available to them that coupled parents have. The original policy proposals of 2006 extended activation to lone parents, predominantly female, and recipients of the Qualified Adults Allowance, also predominantly female; this has not transpired.



As such, the current activation policy does not treat all families equally; welfare recipients in a two-parent household have work requirements placed on one of the parents, whereas in one-parent families the welfare recipient now has work requirements placed on them. This suggests an upholding of the traditional male-breadwinner approach to social protection for parents who cohabitate or are married, and a different one to those parenting alone. This family form is a vulnerable and stigmatised one, and such an approach runs the risk of exacerbating the difficulties experienced by lone-parent families.

Moreover, there is a deafening silence over the 'other' parent, in relation not just to the financial responsibility they have for their children but also to the wider need for society to acknowledge the parental and financial responsibility some (but not all) lone parents experience in bringing up their children alone. Some of the interview respondents felt there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the responsibility of the other parent, not just the one in the full-time caring role. The lack of legislation on maintenance provision and JSA was an issue of considerable concern and consternation for some of the participants.

Finally, as reiterated throughout this study, Irish lone parents are a heterogeneous group. Many are already in paid employment, either full-time or part-time, and some have high levels of education and are therefore more work-ready than others. Lone parents with lower levels of education are the group that will experience difficulty in making the transition from welfare to paid employment. The link between low levels of education and the failure to attain and sustain paid employment in other countries sends a clear signal of the need for education and training supports for a significant proportion of Irish lone parents. For all lone parents, consideration needs to be given to the other barriers to employment they face, such as childcare, income adequacy and the availability of flexible employment. Moreover, the importance of effective employment supports cannot be underestimated. Overall, the research suggests that a package of supports is the most effective way to assist lone parents into sustainable employment and ensure that income levels are sufficient to lift lone parents out of poverty. In addition, attention needs to be paid to whether jobs are 'mother-ready' rather than making mothers 'job-ready'; and integrated, coherent policies need to be directed towards alleviating the work/family bind in lone-parent households.

## **Recommendations**

Combining the findings from the literature and the qualitative interviews, and considering the Irish context, we put forward the following recommendations.

- The aim of activation policy in Ireland is to increase the number of lone parents in paid employment and tackle child poverty. Any unintended consequences of this policy which could result in a decrease in income for lone-parent families should be rectified to ensure that being in work leads these families to being better off.
- This activation of lone parents represents a major change in how social protection policy has viewed lone parents. Such a change requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation to measure the impact of the programmes on employment outcomes, employment supports, poverty levels and well-being, to ensure that the policy aims of increasing paid employment and tackling poverty levels in lone-parent families is achieved.
- Consideration should also be given to analysis of historical information on recipients of the OFP who had an income disregard, and on the characteristics of this particular cohort of lone parents such as age, the age of their children and the stability of their employment patterns, thereby informing policymakers of the journeys Irish lone parents experience from welfare to work.
- The research suggests that a package of supports is the most effective way to assist lone parents into sustainable employment and ensure income levels are sufficient to lift lone parents and their

children out of poverty. This includes employment supports, financial supports, education and training, and support towards the cost of childcare.

- A significant element of the literature examined the issue of choice of care in welfare-to-work activation. The desire of parents to care for children themselves is a prominent theme, with culture, gender and location influencing such desires, the issue of choice is a difficult one for policy to address. Full-time employment often necessitates the use of formal and informal combinations of care. Working during school hours may be a feasible option for lone parents. The ability to work part-time may address issues of choice and provide balance to work/family commitments. In addition it is a way of acknowledging the fact that lone parents have only half the time resources available to them, and of acknowledging the value of parental care. Adequate financial supports would enable lone parents to balance work/family commitments and ensure income adequacy.
- Policymakers have yet to legislate for maintenance for those lone parents who have been moved from OFP to JA. This requires attention.

We recommend that the package of supports in Ireland should encompass the following pre-employment supports, employment supports, financial support and childcare support:

### **Pre-employment Supports**

- In relation to education and training: Given the characteristics of OFP recipients not working, an education and training-first approach will be required in order to increase their capacity to attain and sustain paid employment. In most countries, participation in education and training is a prerequisite prior to moving into paid employment. There is an important association between receiving training and moving into work and retaining employment.
- Job-preparation programmes are required, for example, in basic computer skills and stress management. More education and training options are required, in the choice of courses and in their flexibility: part-time options and later start times to facilitate school hours need to be examined.
- For other lone parents with higher levels of education who are not connecting with the labour market, consideration needs to be given to the barriers to educational progression that are in place. Funding for progressive studies that include assistance with fees, educational costs and living costs are required in this area.
- Caseworkers: The relative success of activation, particularly in the UK, has been largely attributed to continuous contact with caseworkers (PAs). The literature reviewed suggests that the role of the caseworker in facilitating the progression of lone parents is fundamental both at the pre-employment stage and continually thereafter.
- Their role at the pre-employment stage involves assisting lone parents with job searching, training and education opportunities, looking for childcare and calculating the financial impact of being in work. Having the appropriate skill set to deal with lone parents is seen as fundamental to the overall process of activation; many are of the view that caseworkers need to have specific skills to successfully move lone parents forward.
- Caseworkers require specific training on the challenges faced by lone parents in their everyday



lives. The research shows that caseworkers who take an empathetic approach to dealing with lone parents and build a relationship based on mutual respect and trust are more effective in their role. Training is required to achieve this approach.

- In addition, caseworkers need to have a broad knowledge of all services that lone parents may be eligible for and require to progress: knowledge of education and training options and supports, income supports, childcare supports and options, as well as housing supports and options and in-work benefits.

### **Employment Supports**

- While activation programmes have been successful in increasing lone-parent participation in employment, particularly for 'work-ready' lone parents, those more distant from the labour market require more intensive support. Many lone parents will require ongoing contact and support from caseworkers when they are in employment.
- The international evidence suggests the importance of monitoring private companies and sanctions. It is recommended that both be monitored appropriately by the DSP, particularly as it is the most vulnerable who are liable to sanctions.

### **Financial Supports**

- The literature in this study has highlighted how activation can lead to in-work poverty. Such lone parents require higher amounts of in-work financial support, which has been proven to reduce poverty in this group of lone-parent households. Financial supports should ensure income adequacy for lone parents and their families in order to make work pay. Given the tendency for lone parents to work in low-skilled, low-income employment and for some to favour part-time work which is often low-paid, this is a pertinent issue. In-work benefits require flexibility and responsiveness to the lived labour-market experiences of lone parents.
- FIS is a form of financial support that has the potential to ensure income adequacy in lone-parent households while facilitating their care requirements. But it has many shortcomings, so we recommend that the hours criteria need to be more flexible and that issues around proving hours worked, lack of consistency in documents required for proof of employment, and the problem of employer power, need to be addressed.
- The Back-to-Work Family Dividend will assist in this area; however, it is subject to a reduction in the second year of employment and a timeline of two years. Careful monitoring of the effect of both the reduction and cessation of the BTWFD will be required to assess the impact on income post-receipt, and may require extension.
- In-work tax credits have been proven to successfully reduce in-work poverty, as they form a substantial addition to the wages of low-paid individuals and make part-time work a financial option for many lone parents and ensure income adequacy. The introduction of such credits should be explored as part of an overall investigation of the in-work benefits the DSP provides to all low-paid individuals.
- While it is hoped that the roll-out of the HAP will address issues of rent supplement and substantial increases to rent contributions, it is recommended that increases in income earned from employment are not negated by consequent increases in housing costs for low-paid workers.

## Childcare Supports

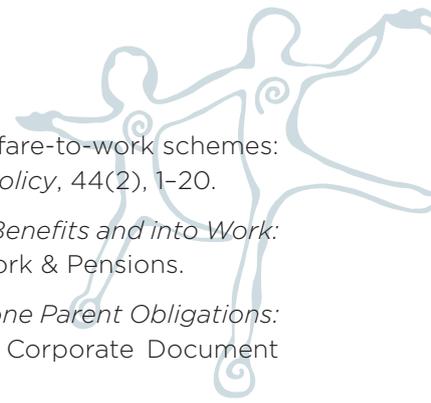
- Childcare is a significant factor in lone parents' desire and ability to participate in any form of education, training or employment. The cost of childcare is a significant disincentive to lone-parent employment. The literature has shown that subsidies have significant positive effects on the use of childcare in lone-parent and low-income families and are proven to contribute to sustainable employment.
- It is recommended that there be increases to the subsidy system in Ireland, and that issues of complexity, eligibility, information and consistency in the system of subsidisation need careful consideration.
- How systems of childcare are operationalised and delivered impacts on childcare usage and success rates of employment participation. Integrated systems are required with the means to provide continuing care in facilitating parental transitions and continued subsidisation to facilitate parental employment and reduce episodic employment.
- Availability is a significant factor in the use of childcare services. There is a disjoint between childcare availability and work requirements contained within activation policy, which can lead to unstable, precarious employment situations for lone parents. The issue of childcare availability needs to be addressed, ensuring that there are adequate childcare places available in localities where they are required. A needs assessment would highlight areas lacking in provision.
- Flexibility in childcare provision is seen as an important factor in determining childcare usage for lone parents. Services for children with disabilities, rural childcare, school pickups and sessional childcare, as well as services to facilitate atypical work hours, are regarded as necessary to enable lone parents to meet work requirements. Flexibility in childcare provision needs to be explored with service providers in order for the needs of lone parents to be met.
- Funding and investment in childcare services are seen as fundamental in facilitating lone-parent employment and achieving greater equity in educational outcomes for children. Such investment will contribute to the overall well-being of children and produce long-term savings to government exchequers. Ireland's childcare sector requires significant investment to meet the needs of all working parents.
- The literature highlights that in many cases care is still required for children over the age of 14. Managing teenagers and the challenges faced at this stage of development can be difficult, and parental support is still needed and often all the more pertinent. Worries over child safety and security and the consequences of 'latchkey' kids are to the forefront of concerns raised, particularly in cases where hours of employment are precarious. This issue may be resolved by collaboration between state and community sectors: Youth services and schools could, with the assistance of state funding, increase the availability of homework clubs and structured afterschool programmes that enhance cognitive and social development and ensure safety.

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