



# One Parent Families –A Profile

Aug 2009

## Lone Parent Families

**While families in Britain come in many shapes and sizes, the proportion of families headed by a lone parent appears to have stabilised over the past ten years, refuting suggestions that tax and benefit policies in recent years have favoured or created more lone parent families.**

**What hasn't changed for lone parents is that they remain the poorest family type. Half of children growing up in a one parent family are poor - even though nearly sixty per cent of lone parents are now in work.<sup>1</sup>**

### Becoming a lone parent

- There are an estimated 1.9 million lone parents in Britain today caring for 3.1 million children. Lone parents now make up one-quarter of all families.
- Over half of lone parents were previously married, and only 16 per cent of births are to parents who are neither married nor cohabitating.
- Thirteen per cent of lone parents come from black or minority ethnic communities.
- Twenty-seven per cent of lone parents have a long-standing health problem or disability as do 19 per cent of children living with a lone parent.
- The fastest growing group of lone parents is now single or never-married lone parents (however, this includes ex-cohabitees best described as separated).

### The children

- More than one in five children is now cared for in a one-parent family – this equates to approximately 3 million children;
- A third to a half of children will spend some time in a one-parent family;
- Approximately 25% of children were under five years old, and seven in ten were under ten years old.

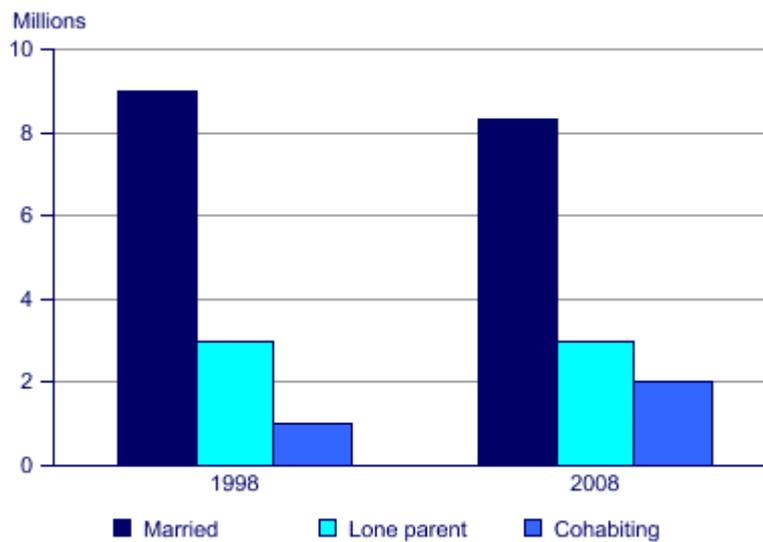
### Demographics

- nine out of ten lone parents are women;
- The median age for a lone parent is 36, and only 2 per cent of lone mothers are teenagers
- At any one time, less than three % of all lone parents are teenagers.
- Only 15% or one in seven lone mothers have never married or lived with their child's father;
- A one-parent family is now viewed as a 'stage' in family life that lasts on average about five and a half years;

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<sup>1</sup> One Parent Families : The Facts 2008 [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

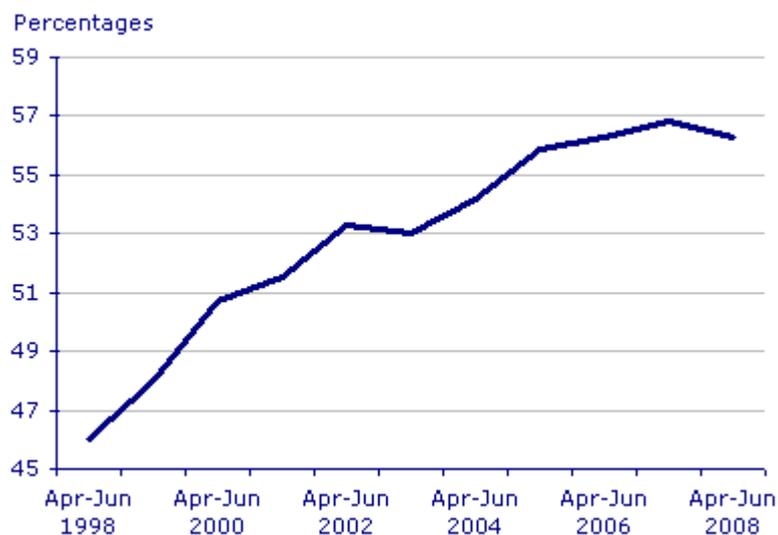
## Families and household Fewer children live in married couple families



Number of dependent children: by family type, UK

The number of dependent children living in married couple families in the UK fell by 1.0 million between 1998 and 2008. This was equivalent to a fall of 7 percentage points in the proportion of dependent children living in married couple families, from 70 per cent to 63 per cent. In contrast, the number of dependent children living with cohabiting couples and lone parents both increased, by 0.6 and 0.1 million respectively. The proportion of dependent children living with cohabiting couples rose from 8 per cent to 13 per cent, and the proportion of dependent children living with lone parent families rose from 22 per cent to 23 per cent. These changes were driven by changes in family formation and separation, as well as an increase in the proportion of births outside marriage.<sup>2</sup>

## Lone parents in employment Rate at 56.3%



Employment rate for lone parents with dependent children

<sup>2</sup> ONS 2009: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=2193&Pos=1&ColRank=2&Rank=224>

Labour Force Survey estimates for the three months to June 2008 show the employment rate for lone parents was 56.3 per cent, down 0.5 percentage points from the previous year and up 3.4 percentage points from five years earlier.

In comparison, the employment rate for married and cohabiting mothers was 71.7 per cent, up 0.2 percentage points from the previous year and up 0.7 percentage points from five years earlier.<sup>3</sup>

## Low income by family type

All the statistics in this indicator relate to numbers of individuals rather than numbers of families or numbers of households<sup>4</sup>

- A half of all people in lone parent families are in low income. This is three times the rate for couples with children.
- Working-age couples without dependent children have the smallest risk of being in low income, with this risk being less than half that for working-age singles without dependent children.

## Lone Parent Poverty

Lone parents under the age of 25 account for just one in eight of all young adults in poverty and just a fifth all the lone parents in poverty. The stereotypical image of a lone parent in poverty as a young, teenage mum, is quite wrong. Rather, most lone parents in poverty are aged 25 or over and there are as many over 40 as under 25.<sup>5</sup>

## Child Poverty

There were 3.8 million Children living in poverty in 2005/06. This fall, of some 600,000 compared with the Government's 1998/99 baseline, leaves the overall number of children still 500,000 above the Government's 2004/05 target.

Among children in poverty in 2005/06, half live in working families and half in workless ones. Three-fifths live in couple families while two-fifths live with a lone parent.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, many families are now headed by a lone parent and millions of children live in a one parent family. However, the negative portrait of lone parenthood painted in the press and media is based on the fiction rather than the facts around being a lone parent. Nevertheless, lone parents need specific types of support in order to ensure that they do not experience exclusion from employment and training opportunities. Support for lone parents is also key to the Government's pledge to cut child poverty.

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<sup>3</sup> ONS 2009: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ci/nugget.asp?id=409>

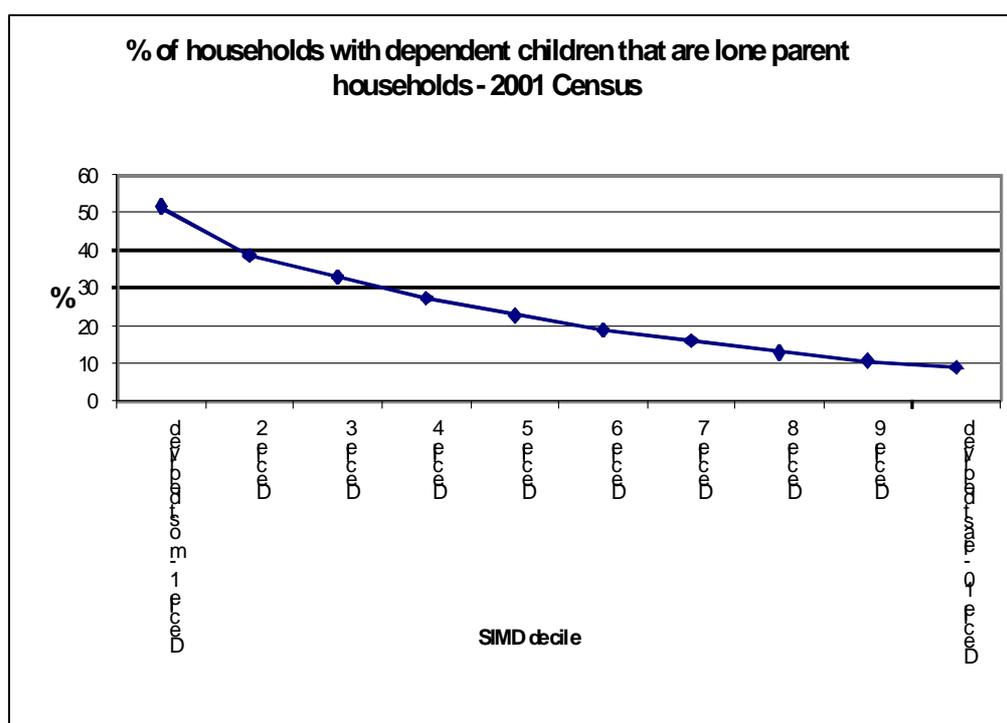
<sup>4</sup> Low income by family type, The Poverty site 2009 <http://www.poverty.org.uk/05/index.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Household Below Average Income, DWP; the data is the average for 2003/04 to 2005/06; UK <http://www.poverty.org.uk/reports/mpse%202007%20findings.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Source: Households Below Average Income 2005/06, DWP; UK

## In Scotland

- It is estimated that there are over 174,000 lone parents with 295,000 children in Scotland. Just below half are on income poverty<sup>7</sup>
- Nine out of ten lone parents are women.
- Over half of lone parents were previously married, and only 16 per cent of births are to parents who are neither married nor cohabitating.
- The median age for a lone parent is 36, and only 2 per cent of lone mothers are teenagers.
- Twenty-seven per cent of lone parents have a long-standing health problem or disability as do 19 per cent of children living with a lone parent.
- Recent data from the Scottish Household Survey<sup>8</sup> suggests that:
  - 22% of all households with children are headed by a lone parent, with 90% being headed by a female lone parent;
  - among lone parent women of working age, 35% are looking after home and family, 26% work part time, 20% work full time, 2% are self-employed, 8% are unemployed and seeking work, 4% are in higher or further education, and 4% are sick or disabled;
  - 84% of households headed by a lone parent have a net income of less than £20,000, with 66% below £15,000; 19% have experienced homelessness;
  - 20% have savings or investments, compared with 51% of the population
  - 54% of lone parent households do not have home internet access compared to 26% of other households containing families.
- In 2007 there were 77,440 lone parents claim Income Support or Incapacity Benefits. Of these, 13,530 are in receipt of IB or SDB
- In 78% of the 200 most deprived areas across Scotland lone parent families make up over 50% of families living in these areas. Lone Parents are 52% of families in the poorest 10% of areas in Scotland but are only 9% in the 10% least deprived. See chart 1 below<sup>9</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2005, Palmer, G. & Carr, J. New Policy Institute, December 2005. <http://www.npi.org.uk/publications/poverty.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Scotland's People: Annual Report 2005/6, Scottish Government, 2/8/07. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/01084217/0-2>

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government, "Scotland's People Annual Report, SHHS 2005", (2006) and GROS, 2001 Census

## Glasgow

Glasgow has the largest number of families headed by a lone parent as well as the highest percentage of one parent families. The data below gives a snapshot of the lone parent profile in the city.

- There are 27,900 Lone Parents, 46.4% of families <sup>10</sup>
- Scottish Government analysts have ranked areas of Glasgow where more than 50% of all families are lone parents families. There are 113 data zones in Glasgow where lone parents make up 50% or more of all families. 88 (78%) of these 113 data zones are within the 200 most deprived areas of Scotland as measured by the SIMD. <sup>11</sup>
- Over 18,500 of Glasgow's Lone Parents claim Income Support or Incapacity Benefits. Of these around 4,100 claim IB or SDB <sup>12</sup>
- Lone parents are 61.7% of all households with dependent children in Glasgow (GHA) social housing. <sup>13</sup>

## Poverty in One Parent Families

### Poverty Outcomes for Different Family types

The following data reflects the poverty outcomes for different family types in Scotland. Most of the workless households in income poverty are sick, disabled or lone parents.

Household work status	Household type	Individuals in income poverty	Proportion who are in income poverty
"Workless" households	Unemployed	90,000	75%
	"Workless" long-term sick or disabled	200,000	55%
	"Workless" lone parent	180,000	75%
Working, but low-paid, households	Part-time work only	130,000	35%
	Some full-time work	150,000	5%
Pensioners	Not claiming Pension Credit	60,000	60%
	Claiming Pension Credit	140,000	15%
Total		950,000	20%

Almost half of all (both workless and working) lone parents are in income poverty, almost three times the rate for couples with children. <sup>14</sup>

There are 1 million individuals, including children, in income poverty in Scotland of whom 200,000 are in lone parent families.

<sup>10</sup> GCC (Dec 04) Glasgow's Housing Strategy Investment Priorities 03-08

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Government, "Scotland's People Annual Report, SHHS 2005", (2006) and GROS

<sup>12</sup> DWP Information Directorate, (Aug 2007) Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 100% data.

<sup>13</sup> GCC (Dec 04) Glasgow's Housing Strategy Investment Priorities 03-08

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Government, "Scotland's People Annual Report, SHHS 2007", and GROS

## Income Levels & Deprivation

- In terms of income level, 66% of lone parent families in Scotland live on an income of less than £15,000 compared to 11% of two parent families.<sup>15</sup>
- The Growing Up in Scotland Study<sup>16</sup> which involved interviews with the main carers of 5,217 children aged 0-1 years old and 2,859 children aged 2-3 years old, found that compared to mothers in couple families, lone mothers (particularly those who did not live with other adults, such as their own parents) were:
  - more likely to be living in lower income households and to be in receipt of state benefits (88% of lone mothers who were not living with other adults were in one of the two lowest income groups compared with 30% of couple families)
  - less likely to be employed (28% of lone mothers who did not live with other adults were employed compared with 65% of mothers in couple families)
  - more likely to have fewer educational qualifications (78% of mothers in couple families were educated to at least Higher grade level compared with around 46% of lone mothers in each lone parent group)
  - more likely to be renting their home from the local authority (51% of lone mothers who were not living with other adults compared with 13% of couple families)
  - less likely to live in an area of low deprivation (20% of mothers in couple families lived in an area in the least deprived quintile of the deprivation index compared with just 2% of lone mothers who did not live with other adults).

## Financial Security of Lone Parents

Results from the SHS which have just been published show that lone parents are significantly less secure financially than other family or household types.<sup>17</sup> For example:

- **Managing Financially:** 27% of lone parents are not managing well financially compared to 10% overall
- **Savings/investments:** 75% of lone parents have no savings or investments, compared to 42% overall.
- **Credit cards:** 31% of lone parents have credit cards, the lowest proportion of all households except single pensioners.
- **Borrowing:** For lone parents the main sources of credit are bank overdrafts (15%), loans from friends or relatives (12%) and Social Fund loans (11%)
- **Internet Access:** Lone parents still have less access to the internet, with 35% never using it, double the proportion of other families.
- **Location of Internet Access:** For the lone parents who do use the internet, they are least likely of all households to have access to it in their own home (77%), with 20% accessing it at someone else's house and 9% at libraries (the largest proportion of library users)

## Lone Parent Employment Sustainability

- Lone parents are twice as likely to 'cycle' between work and welfare. Around 20% who left Income Support returned within 6 months, over 25% within 1 year, 33% within 2 years and 40% within 3 yrs. One in ten working lone parents leave work in any one year, which

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<sup>15</sup> Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2005, Palmer, G. & Carr, J. New Policy Institute, December 2005. <http://www.npi.org.uk/publications/poverty.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Growing Up In Scotland Study: GUS Exploring the Experience and Outcomes For Advantaged and Disadvantaged Families, Scottish Centre for Social Research March 2008

<sup>17</sup> Scotland's People SHHS 2007/8 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/282618/0085510.pdf>

is more than double the rate of job exit compared to non-lone parents, and 60% of lone parents entering work go into low paid jobs with poor earnings prospects.<sup>18</sup>

- Lone parents now enter employment at the same rate as comparable groups; the real challenge lies in their ability to maintain jobs. Research suggests that if lone parents' job retention rate could be raised to that of other groups, the Westminster Government's target for 70 per cent of lone parents to be in employment by 2010 could be met without further increasing job entry rates.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, many families are now headed by a lone parent and millions of children live in a one parent family. However, the negative portrait of lone parenthood painted in the press and media is based on the fiction rather than the facts around being a lone parent. Nevertheless, lone parents need specific types of support in order to ensure that they do not experience exclusion from employment and training opportunities. Support for lone parents is also key to the UK and Scottish Government's pledge to cut child poverty.

#### **Contact for Further Information**

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<sup>18</sup> Evans, Harkness & Ortiz, Lone Parents Cycling Between Work and Benefit, DWP, Research Report 217, 2004. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep217.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Yeo Alisdair (2007) Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: evidence review, DWP Working Paper No 37 DWP.