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Lone parents, employment and wellbeing – what does the evidence tell us?

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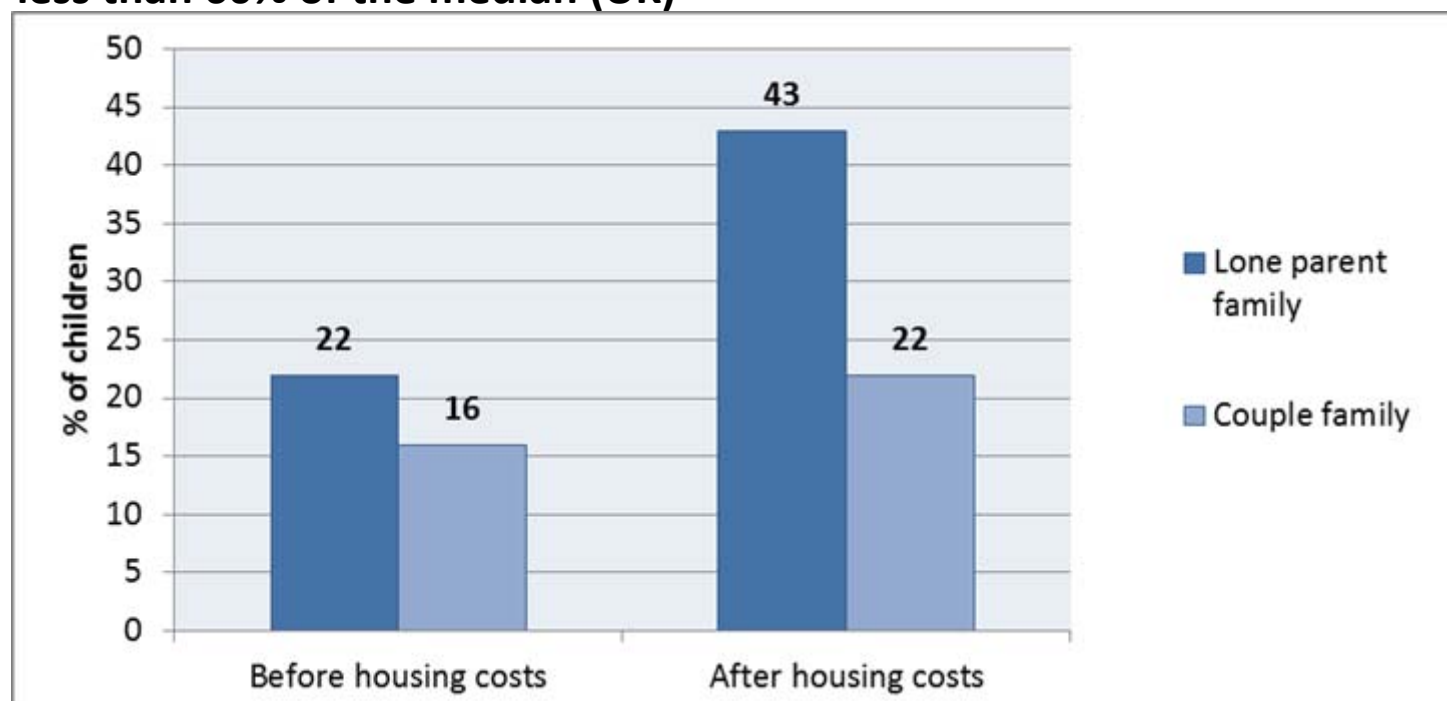
Reviewing the literature

Remit: a structured critique of both published peer-reviewed literature and grey literature identified from a range of databases and published sources.

- c. 200 studies
- Original empirical research
- Roughly even split:
 - Academic vs. grey
 - Quantitative vs. qualitative, mixed or review

Lone parent families are more likely than couple families to experience poverty

Proportion of children living in a household with an equivalised income of less than 60% of the median (UK)



Source: Households Below Average Income series, Department for Work and Pensions (2013)

Child poverty is lower in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK

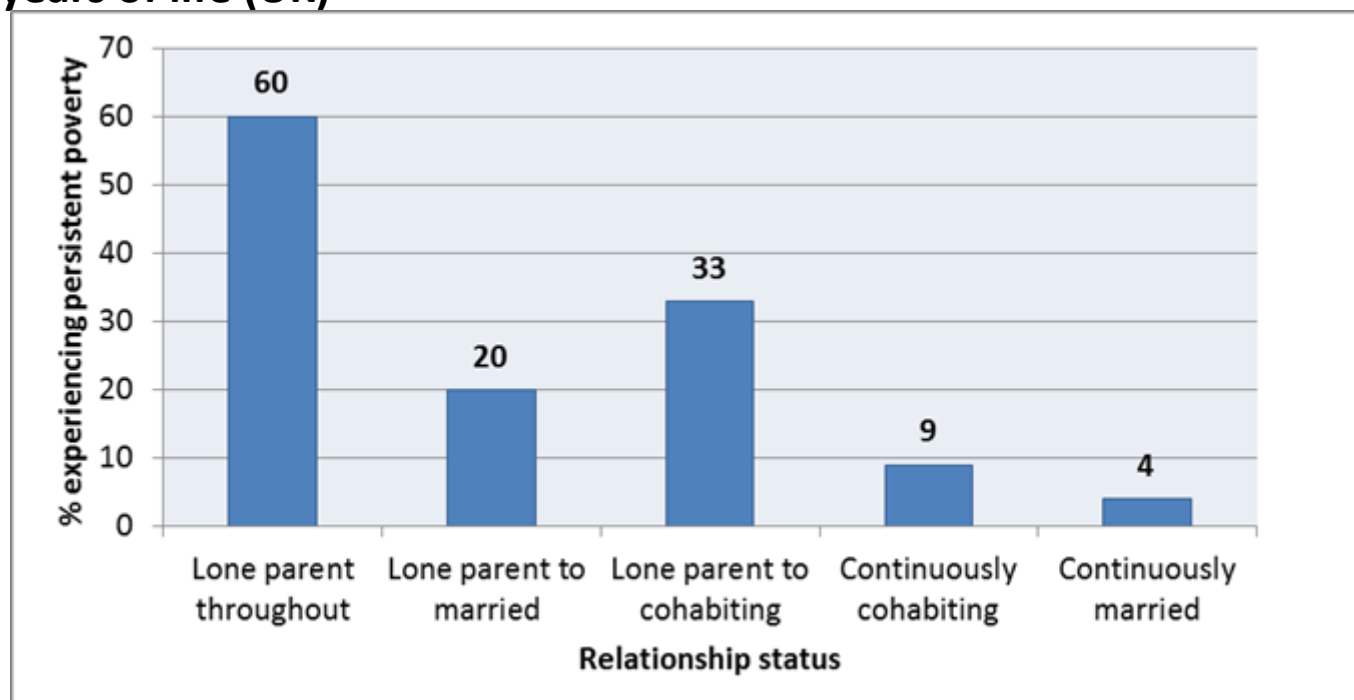
Proportion of children living in a household with an equivalised income of less than 60% of the median (UK)

UK Region	Before housing costs	After housing costs
Scotland	17%	22%
England	18%	28%
Wales	23%	33%
Northern Ireland	23%	27%

Source: Households Below Average Income series, Department for Work and Pensions (2013)

Lone parent families are more likely to experience *persistent* poverty

Proportion of children experiencing persistent poverty¹ over first five years of life (UK)



¹ Defined as equivalised parental income below 60% of the median every year

Source: Millennium Cohort Study, Panico, Bartley, Kelly, McMunn, & Sacker (2010)

Living on a low, complex and insecure income

- Low pay and job insecurity
- Income from many sources
- Debt; in and between jobs, non-payment and overpayment of tax credits
- Lack of maintenance
 - 64% of lone parents on benefit receive no maintenance
 - Average payment to those who do is £23 per week

(Source: Survey of Relationship Breakdown, Bryson et al. (2012))

Lone parent households are less likely to have someone in employment

- 36% of lone parent households have no adult in work, compared with 5% of couple households with dependent children

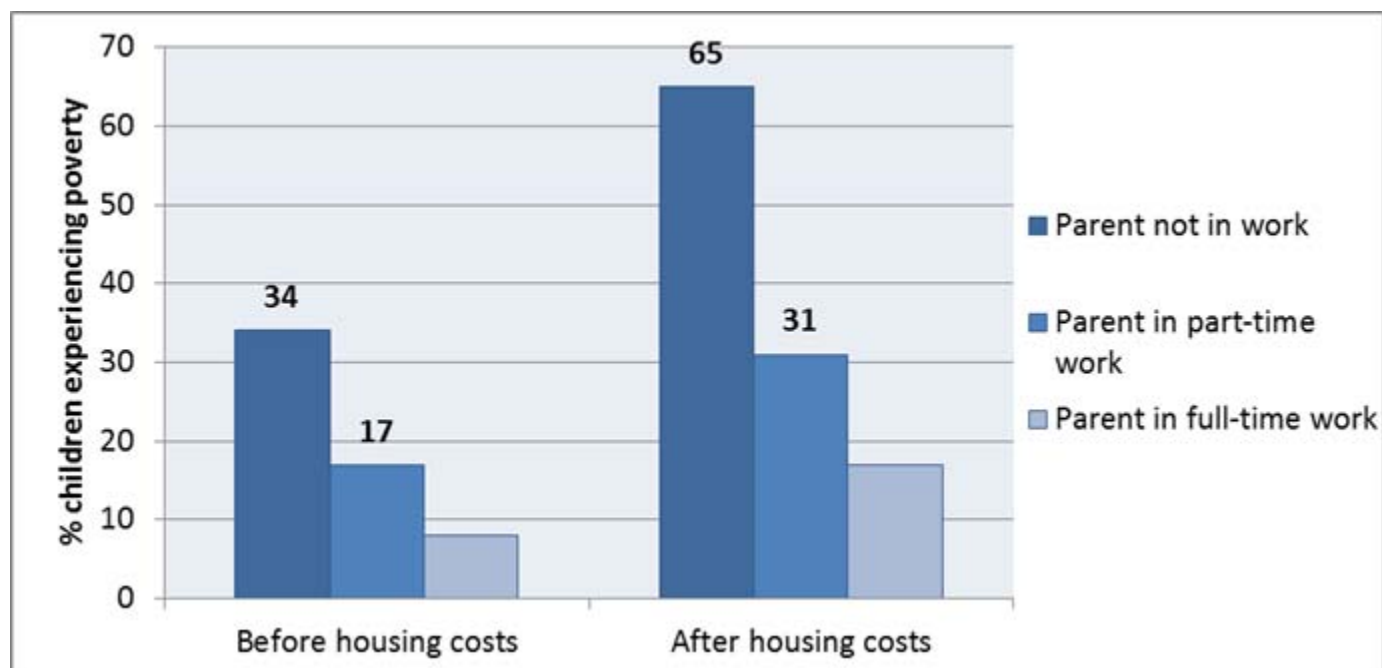
(Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics (2013a))

- Glasgow has the highest proportion of working-age households with no adult in work in the UK
 - Glasgow: 30.2%
 - Scotland: 20.6%
 - UK: 18.1%

(Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics (2013b))

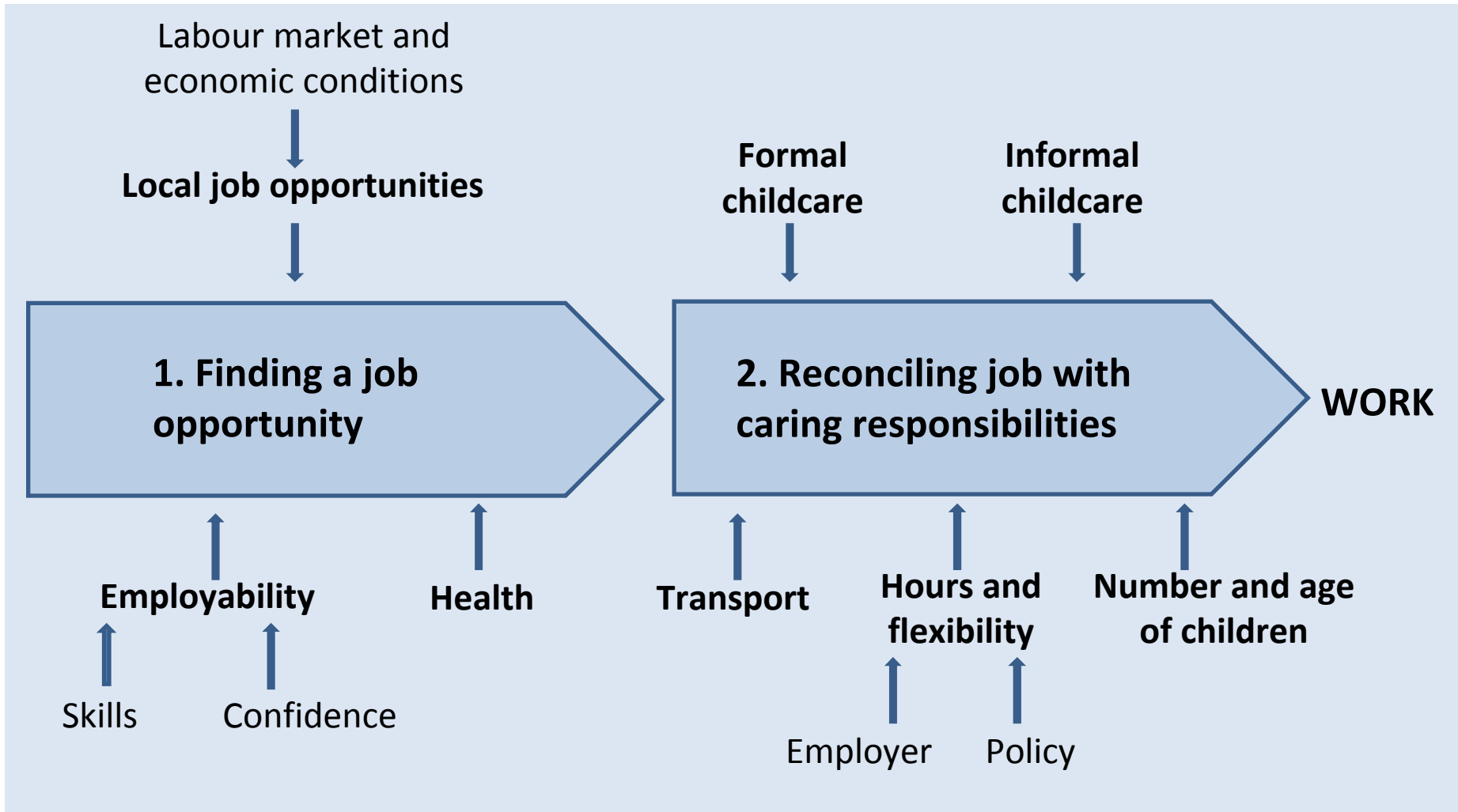
Poverty is experienced by lone parents both in and out of work

Proportion of children living in a lone parent household with an equivalised income of less than 60% of the median (UK)



Source: Households Below Average Income series, Department for Work and Pensions (2013)

Lone parents experience a number of barriers to work



The association between lone parenthood and health is complex

Lone mothers more likely than couple mothers to...

➤ ...report **less than good health** and **limiting longstanding illness** – effect holds across occupational classes

(Source: General Household Survey, Burström et al. (2010))

➤ ...experience **mental health problems** – effect disappears controlling for material circumstances and social support

(Source: Growing Up in Scotland, Marryat and Martin (2010))

➤ ...experience **common mental disorders** – effect disappears controlling for financial strain and social support

(Source: British National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, Cooper et al. (2008))

The association between lone parenthood and health is complex

Lone fathers...

- ...often dropped from quantitative analyses
- However, studies that include them suggest that the impact of lone parenthood on health is not as strongly mediated by material factors.
 - Interesting avenue for further research...

There *may be* an association between lone parenthood and child health and well-being

Growing up in a lone parent family is associated with...

➤ ...poorer **cognitive and behavioural outcomes** at age 5 – but not significant controlling for poverty

(Source: Millennium Cohort Study, (Kiernan & Mensah (2009); Schoon, Jones, Cheng, & Maughan (2012))

➤ ...poorer **physical and mental health** at age 7 – but not significant controlling for poverty

(Source: Millennium Cohort Study, (Pearce, Lewis, & Law (2013))

There *may be* an association between lone parenthood and child health and well-being

Growing up in a lone parent family is associated with...

➤ ...child **disability** – persists controlling for social disadvantage

(Source: Family Resources Survey, Blackburn, Spencer, & Read (2010))

➤ ...**obesity, low activity and screen time** – but disappears in multivariate modelling

(Source: Growing Up in Scotland, Parkes, Sweeting, & Wight (2012))

There *may be* an association between lone parenthood and adolescent well-being

- **Depressive symptoms** at age 14 associated with father absence in first five years – significant controlling for resources
(Source: Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, Culpin et al. (2013))
- Family structure associated with adolescent **life satisfaction** – only remains significant for 13 year old boys after controlling for family affluence and parent-child relationship
(Source: : HBSC: WHO-collaborative Study in Scotland, Levin, Dallago, & Currie (2011))
- Living in lone mother household associated with some adolescent outcomes (**truancy, vandalism, low-self esteem**) but not others (health and subsequent employment)
(Source: British Lone Parent Cohort, Marsh & Vegeris (2004))

Policy can make a small difference to lone parent employment rates

- NDLP + tax credit reform + increased support for childcare → higher lone parent employment
 - Evaluations put effect at 4 or 5 per cent

- Small impact, 'at the margin'.

Successful policy initiatives have a number of key features

- Employability support
 - Tailored, holistic, responsive
 - Well-trained and sympathetic advisor
 - Integrated with childcare

- Financial ‘incentives’
 - Retaining income via working tax credits
 - Help with childcare costs

Summary

- Lone parent families more likely than couple parent families to experience poverty, and to have no adult in employment
- Lone parents who are not in work face a number of barriers to finding employment and being able to reconcile it with their caring responsibilities
- Lone parenthood is associated with lower well-being (of lone parents and their children), but this is driven to a great extent by their relative material disadvantage
- Lone parents who are not in work need employability support, childcare and financial support to move into work

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