

An ESRC Research Centre



## **ICLS Occasional Paper 6.1**

### **Lone parents and employment: an exploration of findings from the Families and Children Study 2006 – 2008.**

**Anne Conolly, NatCen**

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This is one of five papers presented at the NatCen/ ICLS/ESRC Policy seminar on Work – Life Balance hosted at UCL in June 2011. Detail of the other papers in this series can be found at the end of this document or on the ICLS website.

# Lone parents and employment: an exploration of findings from the Families and Children Study 2006 – 2008.

## Slide 1

Okay. Thank you. I'm going to talk a little bit about the factors that influence lone parents' decision when it comes to taking up paid employment. And the findings I'm going to present come from a study looking at the Families and Children Study which Anne McMunn (Introduction) has already mentioned. Some of the analysis techniques use some complex modelling. I'm not going to go into all the technicalities of that today. But if you are interested in that detail then there's a DWP working report, I think it's Working Paper No 93 that has all the details about that in there.



## Lone mothers & employment

An exploration of findings from FACS 2006-2008

Anne Conolly



## Slide 2

I suspect that most of the people here today (7 June 2011) are quite up on the policy background so I'll just quickly go through the very basics of this. Up until 2008 all lone parents with dependent children were entitled to receive Income Support. Over the last ten years, or more than, that there has been an increasing focus on trying to raise the employment rates among lone mothers. That particularly stems from the Eradication of Child Poverty initiative and really trying to reduce the number of workless households in Britain.

### Policy background

- Until 2008 - All lone parents entitled to Income Support
- Labour policy aims
  - Increase employment rate
  - Reduce workless households
  - Reduce child poverty
- Lone Parent Obligation – Introduction of Conditionality
  - Transfer to active benefit – Jobseekers Allowance
  - Phased introduction based on age of child



Over the last ten years there has been various initiatives, things like New Deal for Lone Parents, but they tended to be on a voluntary basis and the take-up of such initiatives tended to be fairly low. In 2007 there was a Green Paper published which was called *In Work Better Off* and it outlined the steps going forward and thinking about lone parents obligations to work. It introduced this new idea of conditionality in receiving benefits. The idea was that once a lone parent's youngest child reached a certain age they would be transferred from an inactive benefit, ie Income Support, onto an active benefit such as Job Seekers Allowance, or for those with health ICLS Occasional Paper 6.1 - July 2011

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Lone parents and employment: an exploration of findings from the Families and Children Study 2006 – 2008. Anne Conolly, NatCen

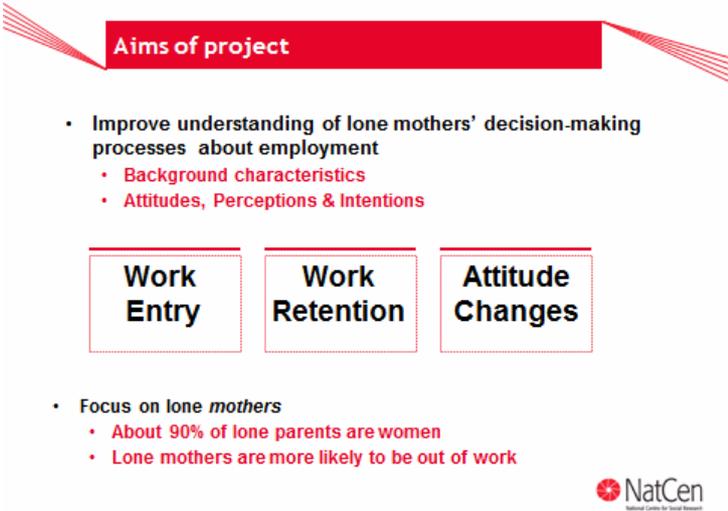
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conditions Employment Support Allowance. There was a phased introduction to this conditionality. The first stage was those with children aged twelve and over were expected to move onto an active benefit. Then I think last year it was reduced to age seven and over. When the coalition came into power they also announced a further reduction of that to children aged five and over.

**Slide 3**

The aims of this project, very briefly, were to try and understand what's going on when lone mothers are making decisions about starting work. We looked at various things, both background characteristics as well as the more internal things going on e.g. people's attitudes towards work-ing, people's perceptions about whether work is a possibility and their feelings about parenting and childcare and so on. And also intentions to work or not.



There were three key outcome variables that we looked at: The first was work entry. The second was work retention which we defined as being in employment one year after work entry. And the third outcome we looked at was also attitude changes following entry to work. So those were the three outcomes that we were specifically looking at.

We focused solely on lone mothers for a couple of reasons. First of all we know that in general the majority of lone parents are lone mothers. We also know that lone fathers tend to be quite a distinct group both in terms of their employment rate but also their demographics. So lone fathers tend to be older, they tend to have higher incomes and so on. And there were so few lone fathers in the dataset that we couldn't analyse them as a separate group and it didn't make sense just to throw them in with everyone else. So we just focused on lone mothers.

**Slide 4**

A little bit about the data: Anne McMunn (introduction) already mentioned Families and Children Study is a longitudinal survey. It ran from 1999 to 2008. We have ten years of data on the same families and how it changed over time. It's a representative sample of families with children in Britain. For this analysis we just focused on lone mothers. The data that we used in this particular analysis actually focused on the final three years of facts. So we're using data that was collected in 2006-2008. This is before the introduction of conditionality into the welfare receipts.

The reason we focused on those three years is because in 2006 we introduced a set of questions to FACS that was really to address choices and constraints around mothers' decisions about work. A lot of methodological work went into developing and testing this question set and the idea really was to move away from a barriers to work approach where we typically just have a list of things that might be barriers and it was yes/no to each one. But to move more to thinking how different things relate to one another and how attitudes play into that.

## Data & methods

- **Families & Children Study (FACS)**
  - Longitudinal
  - Representative
- **Choices & Constraints question set**
  - Attitudes: 32 attitudinal questions
  - Perceptions: 19 card sort statements
  - Intention: Single question
- **Structural Equation Modelling**
  - Direct & Indirect effects of background characteristics
  - Factor analysis - Attitudes & Perceptions



We came up with this set of questions which first of all included 32 attitudinal questions which were done as a self-completion. A card sort exercise where respondents were given cards with 19 different statements on them, they had to sort them into whether this was a big factor, a small factor or not a factor in their decision not to work. So again their thinking about how these different things relate to one another. There was also a short section about people's future plans and in that section there was a question about intention to work in the future. These are the main questions that we really used in this analysis.

The main method that we used was structural equation modelling (sem). SEM has many advantages but one of which is that we're able to look at both the direct and indirect effects that the variables we're looking at have on the outcome. But before we get into the structural equation modelling we have this huge amount of data, 32 attitudinal questions and 19 card sort statements, which what they're actually trying to do is tap into some underlying, latent attitude or perception about work. We carried out some factor analysis to try to get behind all of those attitude statements.

## Slide 5

First of all we looked at the 32 attitudes and carried out factor analysis and five factors emerged from that. And they, as you can see in the graph left, are motivation to work, motivation to parent, the idea of a social stigma or societal expectations around work, the view that parenting was a job in its own right, and the view that it was valuable to combine parenting and work. So those are the kind of underlying factors we found from the attitude statements.

### Key factors of Choices & Constraints

Attitudes Factors	Perceptions Factors
A1 Motivation to work	P1 Parenting as choice
A2 Motivation to parent	P2 Childcare concerns
A3 Social stigma	P3 Job concerns
A4 Parenting as a job	P4 Personal constraints
A5 Combining work & parenting	

Intent Whether mother thinks she will work in next 12 months



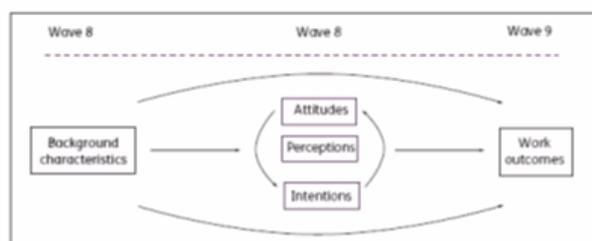
We did the same thing for the card sort and four factors emerged from that we got parenting as a choice, concerns about non-parental childcare, concerns about actually getting a job, and also other personal constraints which tended to be to do with health conditions.

You might feel that the difference between attitudes and perceptions is a little bit arbitrary here and it is but what we're really trying to see is those nine latent factors as an underlying idea or attitude. Then finally we've got this question which is about whether the mother thinks that she'd work in the next twelve months. And these data form the core of our modelling.

## Slide 6

Here (diagram right) we've got an example of a structural equation model about work entry. This is simplified but as you can see on the left hand side we've got the background characteristics and that includes a whole host of variables, things to do with the mother's age, her educational attainment, her ethnicity, but also things to do with the family, for example how many children are in the family, the use of childcare, the age of the youngest child and so on.

### SEM: Work entry



In the centre we've got these attitudes, these internal perceptions and intentions about work. On the right hand side we've got the work

outcome and in this particular case it's about work entry. And you can see that the background characteristics, these lines at the top and bottom are showing that there is a direct effect of the background characteristics on work outcome. Similarly you can see that attitudes, perceptions and intentions, they're all inter-related to one another but also have a direct effect on the work outcome. Finally we've got this extra arrow here which is saying that the background characteristics not only have a direct effect on work outcomes but they're having an indirect effect through their effect on attitudes, perceptions and intentions and so on.

## Slide 7

So what variables are making the effect and what direction is that effect going in? Positive effects on work entry: We can see the biggest one was their intention to work. So not a great surprise; for people who say they're intending to work in the future, there is a positive relationship for work entry. Interestingly the use of formal childcare had a direct impact on work entry and that could either be on its own or in combination with informal childcare. But we didn't see any direct effect between informal childcare on its own and work entry. Another interesting finding was that we looked at the age of the youngest child in quite a lot of detail and having a youngest child aged between 7 and 10 had a direct effect on work entry. But none of the other age group did seem to have that direct effect on work entry.

### Findings: Work entry

- Direct positive effects on work entry
  - Intention to work
  - Using formal or mixed childcare
  - Youngest child aged 7-10
- Direct negative effects on work entry
  - Parenting as a job
  - Long-term economic inactivity
  - Stopped using childcare
- Indirect effects



On the flip side we've got negative effects on work entry. If people hold the attitude that parenting is a job, it is their job, it has a direct negative effect on whether someone is likely to enter work. Similarly being out of employment for a long period of time and stopping the use of childcare has a negative effect on work entry. But what was very interesting was the indirect effects that we started seeing, in particular to do with childcare. So I mentioned already that the use of formal childcare has this direct effect. What we found with informal childcare is that it has an effect on people's intention to work. And we know that people's intention to work is then a key predictor of whether they are likely to enter work. So informal childcare is still playing a really key role but it seems to be the addition of formal childcare that has that direct impact. The other indirect effect that was really interesting was age of child. So that 7-10 group was the only direct effect but any age above being a baby (0 – 1), had an indirect effect through increasing this intention to work as well.

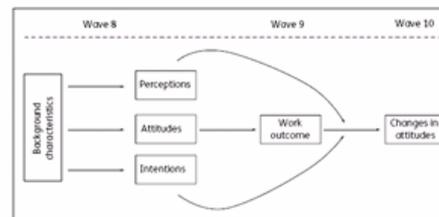
Okay. I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to talk about work retention which was the next thing that we looked at because I know I've not got a huge amount of time. But basically we found very similar variables affected people's retention of work for a

year that affected their entry to work in the first place. If anybody wants to talk in more detail about work retention afterwards then I'd be happy to discuss that. Okay.

## Slide 8

The next model that we looked at is very similar to that first one but we've got an extra thing at the end so we're looking then another year later at people's attitudes and whether there's been any change, having entered work, in people's attitudes. Interestingly we found one key difference which was a change in the attitude that was underlying the idea that combining work and parenting was a good idea. Why did that happen? Was it that people started work and suddenly they realise oh yes, this is a possibility to combine work and being a parent. That's one explanation. Other people have suggested maybe that change in attitude really comes about as a way of reducing the conflict that the mothers may be feeling about work and parenting. Whatever the interpretation this finding has been used by some people to argue in favour of conditionality. So by saying, once people are in work they'll realise it's possible. I'd be very cautious about taking that line because the data that we're analysing here, these people that moved into work, were doing it voluntarily and we know that they had exhibited extremely work-ready attitudes in the first place. Unfortunately we don't have FACS data beyond 2008 so we can't look how that might have changed in the last few years.

### Findings: Change in attitudes



- **Move into work increases motivation towards combining work and parenting**
  - Realisation of possibility to combine?
  - Change in attitudes to reduce conflict between attitudes & behaviour?



## Slide 9

Okay. So very quickly wrapping up some key findings and policy implications. Those internal things are really important. It's not just about people's background characteristics. People's attitudes, perceptions, intentions are key predictors of work outcomes. So parenting as a job is very negatively associated with job entry and retention. And people's own perception of their own constraints is also key in predicting whether they're likely

### Key findings & policy implications

- **Attitudes, perceptions & intentions – Key predictors**
  - Attitudes towards parenting as a job
  - Perception of personal & family constraints
  - Intention to work
- **Importance of informal childcare**
  - Alone – increases intention to work
  - In combination with formal – contributes to job retention
- **Conditionality**
  - 17% moved into work – pre-LPO 'voluntary' policy support
  - Motivation & multiple constraints



to work. Of course we saw a very strong relationship between people's intentions to work and them actually joining the job market.

To summarise, there are some interesting things about childcare. Informal childcare on its own seems to be playing a very important role in terms of changing people's intentions. But there is still this thing about it's the formal childcare, either in combination or on its own, that's having the direct effect. Which makes us question lots of things about childcare. There's been a reduction in the childcare element of tax credits, so cost for childcare as always is a big consideration. But it's not just about cost, there's preference for informal childcare, there's inflexibility of formal childcare and so on and so forth. It's not an easy nut to crack. Similarly the age of the youngest child and that 7-10 age group is really interesting because, as we know, the age of conditionality is being brought in at age 5. I think DWP have recognised that people with the youngest child at age 5 or 6 do need extra support and so on. But we need to make sure that that does get put in place given these findings.

Under the data collection between 2006-2008 we found that on a yearly basis 17% of lone parents moved into work based on that voluntary policy. But we also found that those 83% that didn't move into work, exhibit very different attitudes about movement into work than the people that did. It's not just about addressing people's constraints, it's also about people's motivation and their internal attitudes and perceptions about work.

Thank You

Full Report DWP Working paper 93

## Annex 1 : ICLS Occasional Papers Series No.6



### Work – Life Balance Policy Seminar

In June 2011, ICLS hosted a policy seminar on Work – Life Balance. The seminar was chaired by Richard Bartholomew, Chief Research Officer, Children, Young People and Families Directorate, Department for Education. Transcripts from this event, including this paper, have been made available via the ICLS Occasional Paper Series for those who were not able to attend the event or for those who might want to read the material covered in the seminar. See below for a full list of papers from this event.

#### Work – Life Balance Seminar Abstract

Much is written in the press about ‘Stay-at-Home’ and ‘Have-it-All’ mothers. Many parents are concerned whether or not they are getting the ‘Work-Life’ balance correct in order to safe guard both the well being of their children and themselves. And how does our paid and unpaid working life effect our health and wellbeing in later years? This policy seminar will present some results of studies carried out and ongoing at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the ESRC International Centre for Life Course Studies using the most up-to-date survey data and quantative methods. These studies throw light on what are likely to be the wider health and social implications of juggling work and family life.

#### Presentations and Speakers:

OP6.1 Lone parents and employment: an exploration of findings from the Families and Children Study 2006-2008. Anne Conolly, Researcher NatCen.

OP6.2 To be or not to be an employed mother- what is better for children’s health? Jitka Pikhartova, PhD Student, ICLS.

OP 6.3 Combining work & family: Health effects in women and their children. Dr Anne McMunn, ICLS Research Leader, Work-Life Balance.

OP 6.4 Labour market position, family circumstances and health in later life. Bola Akinwale, PhD Student, Imperial College

OP6.5 Transitions in work and family and quality of life at older ages’. Dr Elizabeth Webb, ICLS Social Epidemiologist.

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## Abstracts

**OP 6.1 Presentation 1 . Lone parents and employment: an exploration of findings from the Families and Children Study (FACS) 2006-2008.** Anne Connolly, Researcher, NatCen.

The Lone Parents Obligations is the most recent policy initiative aimed at increasing the employment rate of lone parents. It is a mandatory programme which moves lone parents onto job seekers allowance when their youngest child is in primary school. Understanding the ways in which lone parents make decisions about moving into work, and how they perceive constraints and barriers to employment, is important to help ensure a successful transition into sustained employment. Findings from a project that used structural equation modelling to analyse lone mothers' answers to the Choices and Constraints question set in three waves of FACS will be presented. Although the analysis observed lone mothers' transitions into work in a 'voluntary' policy support environment, the findings relating to attitudes, perceptions and intentions of those lone mothers who did not move into work have implications for the service providers under the Lone Parents Obligations programme.

Anne Connolly is a Social Researcher at NatCen. For a number of years Anne worked on the Families and Children Study (FACS), both implementing the survey fieldwork and analysing the data. Her research interests include the effects of maternal employment on the social and emotional well-being of children.

**OP 6.2 Presentation 2. To be or not to be an employed mother- what is the answer to this frequently asked question?** Jitka Pikhartova, PhD Student, ICLS

The aim of this study is to assess the influence of maternal employment in three childhood periods (preschool, primary school, secondary school) on the health of adolescents aged 16-21 in British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). Health is measured using self-rated health (SRH) and the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Data on SRH/GHQ-12, childhood maternal employment, and covariates such as maternal education, marital status or household income from 18 waves of the BHPS are used.

Jitka is a PhD student and her research is investigating maternal employment and adolescent health and well-being.

## Abstracts

### **OP 6.3 Presentation 3. Combining work & family: Health effects in women and their children.** Dr Anne McMunn, ICLS Research Leader, Work-Life Balance.

Previous research has fairly consistently shown that women who combine paid work with parenthood tend to be healthier than those who enact fewer roles when looking at a snapshot in time, but there has been little evidence about the direction of this relationship. Does this body of work provide evidence that combining work with having a family is good for women's health, or that healthy women are more likely to work and have children?

Evidence from a study, which tracks the long term health of British men and women born in 1946 throughout their lives, suggests that holding down a job, being a mum and maintaining a steady marriage helps keep women healthy over the long term. In addition, evidence from children born at the start of the millennium suggests that there is no detrimental effects of maternal employment in the early years on subsequent child wellbeing.

Dr. McMunn currently leads an ICLS research project investigating the influence of parental divisions in paid employment and childcare, as well as stability and change in family structure, on the emotional wellbeing of children in the UK Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). In addition, Dr. McMunn continues her work on the social determinants of healthy ageing in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) and is the Graduate Tutor for the UCL Division of Population Health.

### **OP 6.4 Presentation 4. Labour market position, family circumstances and health in later life.** Bola Akinwale, PhD Student, Imperial College

Individuals take on a variety of roles in their work and family lives. In relation to work, individuals may be employees, self-employed, unemployed, home-makers, retired, or out of work for other reasons. In the family sphere, people may simultaneously take on the role of child, parent, partner and carer. How do labour market and family experiences over people's adult lives impact on their health around retirement age?

Using data from the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study (ONS-LS) of England and Wales, this research considers the extent to which certain labour market and family histories are relatively beneficial or detrimental for longevity and general health in later life. It suggests that domestic and labour market experiences that provide opportunities for socially productive activity are advantageous for health.

Bola Akinwale is a PhD student in the Department for Primary Care and Public Health, Imperial College London and an attached member of the ICLS. Part of her research was conducted during a project funded by the New Dynamics of Ageing research programme.

## Abstracts

**OP 6.5 Presentation 5.** Transitions in work and family and quality of life at older ages. Dr Elizabeth Webb, ICLS Social Epidemiologist.

How do transitions in family and paid and unpaid work influence quality of life at older ages? And how do gender and changes in health, income and wealth interact with these transitions to affect quality of life? Transitions to be considered include those in and out of the labour market, caring, volunteering and cohabitation. These questions will be answered using analyses of data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, a cohort of 12 000 older people living in England.

Dr Elizabeth Webb is a social epidemiologist working with ICLS. Elizabeth's work focuses on the social determinants of health and well-being in older age and she has a particular interest in the longitudinal impact of work and family.

## Glossary

Cohort studies sample a cohort (defined as a group of subjects experiencing some event - typically birth - in a selected time period) and study them at intervals through time. A Household panel survey is an important sub-type of

cohort study. This type of study draw representative households, following all individuals through time on a usually annual basis.

A longitudinal study is a research study involving a repeated observations of the same cohort over long periods of time — often many decades, unlike cross-sectional studies that are conducted for a set period.

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) follows the lives of a sample of about 19,000 babies born in the UK in the year 2000/2001. It is the fourth longitudinal

birth cohort study conducted in the UK and is aimed at creating a multi-purpose dataset which describes the diversity of backgrounds into which children are born in the beginning of the 21st century. The MCS is funded mainly by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and various government departments and managed by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS)

The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS): A sample of British households drawn and first interviewed in 1991. The members of these original households have since been followed and annually interviewed. The resulting data base is very popular among social scientists for quantitative analyses of social and economic change. The BHPS is managed by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) of the University of Essex.

The Families and Children Study (FACS) is a longitudinal study collecting information about families with dependent children in Great Britain. It was originally known as the Survey of Low Income Families (SOLIF) which was set up in 1999 as a new survey for Britain's lone parent families and low-income couples with dependent children. From the third wave in 2001 onwards, the survey was renamed FACS and was extended to high-income families in order to represent a complete sample of

British families. FACS is managed by NatCen and funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other government departments.

MRC National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD), aka 1946 birth cohort, is the oldest of the UK national birth cohort studies and is based on a nationally representative sample of 5362 births out of all the single, legitimate births that took place in 1 week in March 1946 in England, Scotland and Wales. NSHD is managed by the MRC Unit for Lifelong Health and Ageing (LHA)

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) is a longitudinal study that collects multidisciplinary data from a representative sample of the English population aged 50 and older. The survey data are designed to be used for the investigation of a broad set of topics relevant to understanding the ageing process. ELSA is jointly run by teams at University College London (UCL), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), National Centre for Social Research and the University of Manchester. ELSA is funded by the US National Institute on Aging and a consortium of UK government departments.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Longitudinal Study (LS) contains linked census and vital event data for 1 per cent of the population of England and Wales (approx. 500,000). Information from the 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 Censuses has been linked across censuses as well as information on events such as births, deaths and cancer registrations.