

Institution: University of Bath
Unit of Assessment: 22: Social work and social policy
Title of case study: Lone-Parent Families: work, welfare and well-being
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>There are over two million lone-parent families in the UK, including one in three children. Since the late 1990s, the key policy targets have included raising employment rates and reducing in-work poverty. Researchers at the University of Bath have engaged in innovative and influential research on lone parenthood over many years. Our work has been instrumental in the development and evaluation of policies intended to help lone parents move into, and remain in, work. Specifically, our research has influenced the design and delivery of the New Deal for Lone Parents, Tax Credits, and policies to improve lone parent job retention. These policies have a direct and ongoing impact on the social and economic circumstances, and quality of life, of the families.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research [<i>Numbers in square brackets refer to references in Section 3</i>].</p> <p>While our work in this area dates back to the 1980s the focus is on research carried out since 1993 (in the REF impact period). Jane Millar (Bath throughout), Susan Harkness (Bath since 2007) and Tess Ridge (Bath since 2000) carried out the research. It also included joint projects with colleagues who have now left Bath, in particular Karen Rowlingson (Bath, 1999 - 2006) and Martin Evans (Bath, 2002 - 2007), and others on specific projects. Paul Gregg joined us in 2011, having already worked with Susan Harkness at Bath, and this further consolidates this body of research. Our work has been at the forefront of UK research into lone parenthood, work and welfare, with significant grants (including from ESRC, JRF, and DWP) and a substantial body of publications.</p> <p>For many years lone-parent families in the UK have had low employment rates and a high risk of poverty. Since the mid to late 1990s the focus of UK policy has been to promote ‘work as welfare’, with specific targets to increase lone-parent employment and to reduce in-work poverty. Our research in the REF impact period has explored both these topics in depth and made a distinctive contribution to knowledge and policy development.</p> <p>We have shown that the majority of lone mothers are highly motivated to work and in general employment leads to better quality of life for both mothers and children, including evidence of improvements in the mental health of lone mothers, and improved self-esteem and other outcomes for adolescents in lone-parent families [3.1]. However, our research has also found that high rates of job exit among lone parents were a key factor in limiting the ability of the Labour government to increase employment rates. Our work showed that improving job retention rates, to levels similar to those of other workers, would boost employment sufficiently to meet the 70% lone parent employment target [3.2]. Our research following lone mothers and children over time highlighted the role of the whole family, including the children, in maintaining employment and underlined the difficulty of ‘making work pay’ in practice, with low pay and tax credits often insufficient to establish income security [3.3].</p> <p>Research at Bath has included also evaluation of specific government policies. We were part of the team, with <i>NatCen Social Research</i> (independent research contractor), that evaluated the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) prototype scheme and national programmes [3.4]. This research highlighted the importance of the personal advisers providing tailored and individual support. It also showed that the scheme worked best for lone parents closest to the labour market, and least well for those with multiple work disadvantages. These conclusions are reinforced by our international comparative policy analysis of welfare-to-work policy [3.5]. Finally, our work has shown the</p>

importance of wage supplements to boost low wages and take working lone parents out of poverty. Our cross-national study of tax credits was the only research to examine this policy area design and delivery in detail and to provide evidence on the trade-offs between simplicity, responsiveness to income change, and administrative burden [3.6].

3. References to the research

3.1 Gregg, P., Harkness, S. and Smith, S., (2009). 'Welfare reform and lone parents in the UK'. *The Economic Journal*, 2009, volume 119 (535), F38-F65 DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0297.2008.02226.x

3.2 Evans, M and Harkness, S. (2004) *Lone Parents Cycling in and Out of Work and Benefits*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 217, Leeds: Corporate Document Services. (Based on research funded by DWP in 2003, with the Bath contribution by Evans.) URL: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/rr_abstracts/rra_217.asp

3.3 Millar, J. and Ridge, T., (2009) Relationships of care: working lone mothers, their children and employment sustainability. *Journal of Social Policy*, 38 (1), pp. 103-121. (Based on research funded by ESRC and DWP between 2001 and 2008, Millar and Ridge both Bath based.) DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047279408002572>

3.4 Evans, M., Eyre J., Sarre S. and Millar J. (2003) *New Deal for Lone Parents: second synthesis report of the national evaluation*, London: Department for Work and Pensions (Based on research funded by DWP between 2002 and 2003, all researchers based at Bath.) URL: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/jad/2003/163_rep.pdf

3.5 Millar, J. and Rowlingson, K., eds. (2001). *Lone Parents, Employment and Social Policy: Cross-National Comparisons*. Bristol: The Policy Press. (Based on research funded by DSS 2000, Millar and Rowlingson both at Bath.) (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.6 Whiteford, P., Mendelson M., and Millar J. (2003) *Timing it right? Tax Credits and responding to income changes*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (Based on research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2003, with the Bath contribution by Millar.) <http://www.jrf.org.uk/system/files/1859351107.pdf>

4. Details of the impact [Numbers in square brackets refer to evidence in Section 5].

The impact refers to policy and practice aimed at helping lone parents move into, and remain in, paid work. We have achieved impact by making our research available in accessible and timely ways. The beneficiaries include the policy community and the UK's two million lone-parent families. In relation to the REF guidance (REF 01.2012, Main Panel C) we identify three main types of impact.

1. 'Influencing policy and practice leading to improved take-up or use of services'. Our evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents and our cross-national research on welfare to work programmes for lone parents provided evidence that informed government decisions to extend employment advice and support to more groups of lone parents, to deliver that support through Personal Advisers, to provide 'better-off' calculations, and to introduce measures (such as benefits run-ons) to ease the transition to work. Such measures were introduced into the New Deal programme, following the evaluation, and hence were central to how the New Deal operated. Millar was a special advisor to the House of Commons Select Committee on employment targets, resulting in a 2007 report [reference 5.1] which led to measures to strengthen job retention in the operation of the New Deal [5.2] implemented from 2008. **Our research thus had a direct impact on the delivery of the New Deal to a substantial number of lone-parent families: between 2008 and 2011, official DWP statistics [5.3]**

show that a total of about 440,000 lone parents took up a place on the New Deal for Lone Parents programme.

2. *'Policy debate has been stimulated or informed by research evidence which may have led to the confirmation of policy, change in policy direction, implementation or withdrawal of policy'*. Our research on lone-parent employment was used extensively by the Labour government as confirmation of welfare-to-work policy for lone parents. This came about through regular presentations to DWP (for example, Millar on employment sustainability in 2008, Harkness on lone-parent employment and mental health in 2009). Harkness' work is referenced in eight government White Papers, including most recently in respect of universal credit in 2012 [5.7].

Our cross-national research on tax credits is a specific example of impact on policy implementation. Millar proposed and organised a seminar funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and held at HM Treasury in 2002 with participants from across government and NGOs. The work was cited in the HM Treasury paper [5.4] and influenced the design of the tax credits that were implemented from 2003 onwards, with substantial revisions to reporting requirements and the level of disregard in 2005/2006, these making the scheme operate more in line with our original proposals. Lord Best (former Director of JRF) stated in his testimonial for our Queen's Anniversary Prize entry (see below): this work 'significantly informed and influenced the measures The system of tax credits proved a very important part of the reduction by some 600,000 in the number of children living in poverty... The University of Bath can justifiably take some credit for the raising of living standards for these households.' [5.5]. **In each year from 2007-08 to 2011-12 official HMRC statistics [5.6] show about 1.2 million employed lone parents have received tax credits, making a considerable difference to their incomes and living standards.**

3. *'Influencing the work of NGOs or commercial organisations'*. We have worked closely with a range of NGOs, including key groups such as Child Poverty Action Group, One Parent Families, One Parent Families Scotland, Single Parent Action Network, Gingerbread and Gingerbread NI, Women's Budget Group, the Smith Institute, and the Resolution Foundation. Our research has helped NGOs to develop their responses to government policy, to articulate policy alternatives, and to provide advice and support on sustainable employment to lone parents. For example, Kate Green, MP and formerly Chief Executive of One-Parent Families, confirms that our research on **'the new deal for lone parents, the impact of tax credits, and children's attitudes to their parents' employment have all helped me with my campaigning and lobbying work, enabling me to point to evidence of the impact of government policies and to suggest areas for policy improvement**' [5.8]. Sue Cohen, Director of the Single Parent Action Network, notes a contribution to **'SPAN's Participatory One Parent Proofing (POPP) tool-kit. Jane Millar was a member of the Advisory Group and wrote the Forward for this tool-kit which has now been accepted by the Department of Work and Pensions as a model of good practice in providing single parents with practical stepping stones into sustainable employment'** [5.9].

The deep and sustained impact of our research in informing policy debates was recognised in 2011 by the award to Bath of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Further and Higher Education, awarded for 'influential research into child poverty and support for vulnerable people' [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 House of Commons Select Committee on Work and Pensions (2006/07), Third Report: The Government's Employment Strategy, HC 63-I,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmworpen/63/63i.pdf>

Impact case study (REF3b)

5.2 House of Commons Select Committee on Work and Pensions (2006/07), *First Special Report: The Government's Employment Strategy: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2006-07*, HC 492

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmworpen/492/492.pdf>

5.3 DWP Tabulation tool: http://83.244.183.180/new_deals/ndlp/live/tabtool.html, Starters (individuals), Caseload (starts), timeseries (start year), gender, NONE.

5.4 HM Treasury (2002) *The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System number 10, The Child and Working Tax Credits*, London: HM Treasury

http://www.hmtreasury.gov.uk/d/new_tax_credits.pdf

5.5 Testimonial: Lord Best, OBE. House of Lords

5.6 HMRC Child and Working Tax Credit Statistics Finalised Awards, 2013

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/fin-main-stats/cwtc-awards.pdf> , Table 1.2.

5.7 Department for Work and Pensions (2010) *Universal Credit: welfare that works*

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/universal-credit-full-document.pdf>.

5.8 Testimonial: Kate Green MP and formerly CEO One-Parent Families

5.9 Testimonial: Sue Cohen, formerly Chief Executive, Single Parent Action Network (SPAN), Bristol.

5.10 Queen's Anniversary Prize (2011) for Higher and Further Education: the University of Bath for 'influential research into child poverty and support for vulnerable people':

www.royalanniversarytrust.org.uk/ & www.bath.ac.uk/sps/about/queens-award/.