



Evidence for action briefing: lone parents

Note: This is one of a series of nine briefings that accompany our children and young people's profiles of Glasgow neighbourhoods, available at: www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles

Why is it important?

More than nine out of 10 lone parents are females.

Lone parents face the unique challenge of being both the sole carer and the main source of household income – often a challenging balancing act.

In Scotland nearly three in 10 families with children are lone parent families. Glasgow city has the highest rate of all 32 Scottish local authorities with four in 10 lone parent families and wide neighbourhood differences across the city.

Lone parents are not mostly young mothers. Their average age is around 38 years old and they have fractionally fewer children than couples. Many were in long term relationships before separating from their partners.

Thirty-three per cent of unemployed lone parents have a disability or longstanding illness, and 34 per cent have a child with a disability.

Most lone parents are in paid employment but are less likely to be in work compared with married or co-habiting parents. Among those in paid work, lone parents are much more likely to work part-time.

Lone parent figures in Scotland are expected to rise over the next 25 years.

Are there inequalities to consider?

Children in lone parent families are at twice the risk of experiencing relative poverty when compared with children in couple families (41% compared to 24%).

Lone parent families can experience a range of inequalities. For example, as a function of the neighbourhood they live in, as a result of welfare changes, in terms of job opportunities, and as a function of the parent's gender:

- Council ward areas in Glasgow (e.g. Springburn, Calton, North East and Drumchapel/Annie'sland) face some of the biggest welfare losses in Scotland while also having some of the highest rates of child poverty and lone parent families.
- In Parkhead and Dalmarnock, six in 10 families with children are lone parent families and 52% of all children live in poverty.
- The overwhelming majority of lone parents are women and a gender analysis of the welfare reforms shows that women are the biggest financial losers, largely due to their caring responsibilities.
- Lone parent families face the biggest losses as a result of the welfare reforms, losing on average around £1,800 a year.
- Although the majority (58%) of lone parents in Scotland as a whole are in paid employment, Glasgow has one of the lowest lone parent employment rates (50%) among Scottish local authorities.

Challenges and solutions

Universal Credit (UC) replaces a range of working-age benefits and tax credits and will have an impact on lone parents (re)entering the labour market. The introduction of UC includes in-work conditionality which means that individuals and those in low income households must do all they can to increase their earnings, supported by a new Department of Work and Pensions service.

Increasing working hours and hourly earnings can help reduce in-work poverty for lone parents. However, this may be difficult to achieve due to wider changes in the labour market with the increase in the numbers of people on zero hour contracts and those working part-time but unable to increase their hours or find a full-time job.

Attempts to improve lone parent employment rates across Scotland's 32 local authorities is challenging and involves important factors, such as tailored employability programmes, greater availability of childcare and jobs, as well as lower rates of welfare benefits sanctions.

Examples of positive action

1. The Working for Families Fund (2004-2008).

This fund was set up to offer support to parents facing barriers to participating in the labour market. The fund was administered by 20 Scottish local authorities and operated through locally based projects. There were 25,508 registered clients over the four years, the majority being female and single parents. 'Hard' project outcomes, such as finding and securing a job, were achieved for 53% (13,594) of clients. The programme's success included using an effective mix of tackling both childcare and employability.

2. Making It Work (2013-2016)

This is a single parent tailored programme that builds on the Working for Families principles by joining up services to tackle the barriers single parents face (re)entering work and creating more sustainable local partnerships to support parents in the future. Making It Work is funded by the Big Lottery and evaluation reports on this complex initiative will be available in 2017.

3. The Glasgow Lone Parent Development Project (March 2105 - present)

This is a unique partnership involving One Parent Families Scotland, Glasgow City Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Health Scotland, the GCPH and the Wheatley Group. The project aims to improve how the city's services work in partnership to respond to the impact of welfare reform on single parents. The project supports lone parents affected by poverty to bring evidence of lived experiences into policy processes thus influencing service delivery and policy development both at local and national levels.