

Lone parents in Scotland: work, income and child health; in-work progression; and the geography of lone parenthood.

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Key messages

- Household income and parental employment matter for the health of children.
- The mental wellbeing of children in working lone parent households is better than that of children in non-working lone parent households.
- Children in high-income working lone parent households have better mental wellbeing than those in low-income working lone parent households.
- There is some evidence that mental wellbeing for the children of lone parents in Scotland improved between 2003 and 2010. However, progress has stalled since then (and for the children of working lone parents, since 2012).
- Lone parents in work find it more challenging to remain and progress in employment than mothers in couple families.
- Lone parents in Scotland are more likely to live in Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, and Glasgow and the Clyde Valley.
- Employment rates for lone parents are lower than average in Inverclyde, Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and Edinburgh, and tend to be higher in rural areas.
- Higher lone parent employment rates are associated with stronger local labour market demand, lower sanction rates and greater availability of childcare.
- Consideration could be given to in-work poverty and the unintended consequences of increased conditionality on the wellbeing of lone parents and their children.

Summary

Work, income and the health of children in lone parent households

- For children in lone parent households, those in high-income working households have the best mental wellbeing, those in non-working households have the worst mental wellbeing and those in low-income working households occupy an intermediate position.
- There is a suggestion that mental wellbeing among children in lone parent households improved between 2003 and 2010, driven by improvement in the mental health of children in working lone parent households and by rising employment rates among lone parents. However, progress has stalled since 2010 (and for the children of working lone parents, since 2012).
- Consideration could be given to in-work poverty and the unintended consequences of increased conditionality on the wellbeing of lone parents and their children.

In-work progression and sustainability of employment for lone parents

- Lone parents are more likely to enter occupations with limited opportunities for progression and are more likely to be low paid. A total of 68% of those in work are in personal service, elementary, or sales or personal service jobs.
- Lone parents are also less likely than mothers in couples to remain continuously in work. Out of all single parents who start a job, 22% go on to experience a spell of unemployment or inactivity in the following 12 months.
- It would be useful to reflect on the challenges of promoting progression, pay rises and increased hours as a means of addressing lone parent poverty.

The geography of lone parents within Scotland

- Lone parents are more concentrated geographically in certain parts of Scotland (especially in Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, and Glasgow and the Clyde Valley).
- Employment rates for lone parents also vary substantially between local authorities, with especially low rates (in 2011) seen in Inverclyde (49%), Glasgow (50%), West Dunbartonshire (50%) and Edinburgh (51%).
- Higher employment rates for lone parents are associated with a greater availability of jobs and childcare. Use of benefit sanctions tends to be higher in areas with low lone parent employment rates, but the association is not strong.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Daniel Adams and Craig Kellock [Population Health (ASD Health), Scottish Government] for guidance on how to derive data on the children of lone parents from the Scottish Health Survey, and NHS Health Scotland colleagues for their helpful comments in improving this briefing note.

Introduction

This briefing was written to inform the work of the Lone Parents and Welfare Reform sub-group of the Scottish Government's Welfare Reform & Health Impact Delivery Group (HIDG). It accompanies the paper *Lone Parents in Scotland, Great Britain and the UK: Health, Employment and Social Security*. It summarises:

- work, income and the wellbeing of children in lone parent households
- in-work progression and sustainability of employment for lone parents
- the geography of lone parents within Scotland
- evidence on programmes to support lone parents in the labour market, highlighted by One Parent Families Scotland, the MRC and the Welfare Conditionality project.

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Work, income and the wellbeing of children in lone parent households

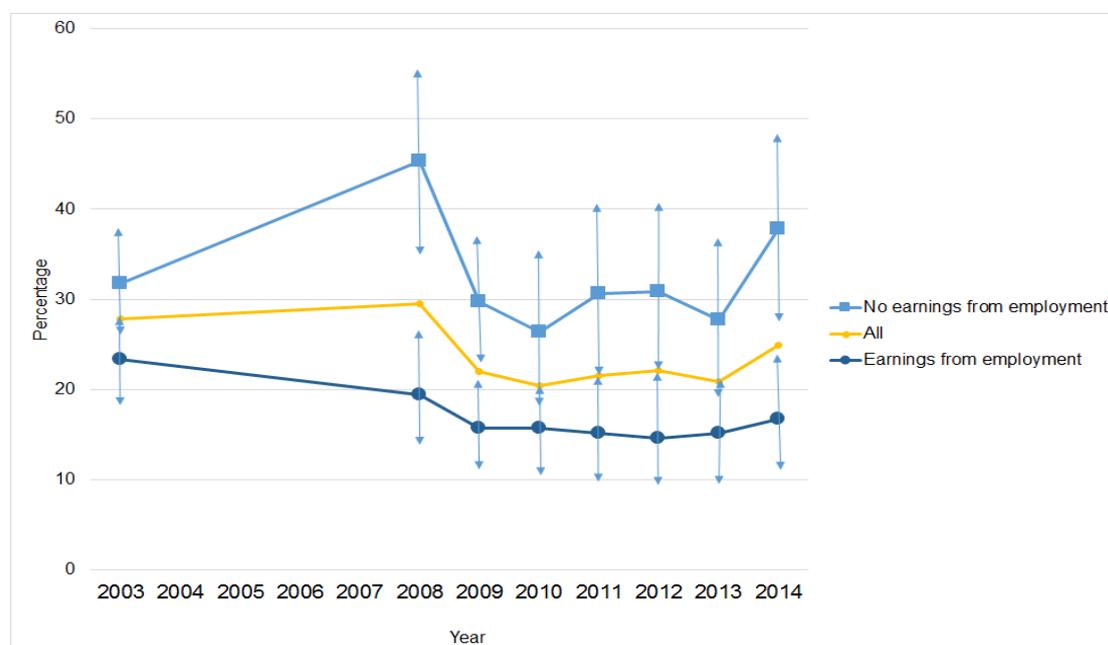
Figure 1 shows trends in the percentage of children aged 4–12 years in lone parent households with a borderline/abnormal Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score (a widely used measure of child wellbeing), by whether or not any of the household income is from employment or self-employment. The SDQ asks parents a series of questions relating to the social, emotional and behavioural problems of their child.

There is a suggestion that the mental wellbeing of children in lone parent households in Scotland improved between 2003 and 2010. It is likely that this was driven by improvements in the mental health of children living in working lone parent households, as well as by rising lone parent employment rates.* However, progress has stalled since 2010 (and for children in working lone parent households, from 2012). Welfare reform policies [including the replacement of Income Support with Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA) for lone parents whose youngest child is aged 5 years from 2011 and stricter sanctions regime for jobseekers after 2012] combined with a weak labour market may have played a role here.

The mental wellbeing of children in lone parent households in Scotland is poorer when the household has no income from employment. For children in these households, *Figure 1* data show that their mental wellbeing deteriorated between 2003 and 2008, improved between 2008 and 2010 and subsequently fluctuated without a clear trend.

* For children not living in lone parent families, the wellbeing of those in working families remained unchanged, while the wellbeing of those in non-working families fluctuated without a clear trend. Employment rates for parents in couple families have also risen over time, but the change was less pronounced than for lone parents (See ONS, Working and workless households 2015).

Figure 1: Percentage of children aged 4–12 years in lone parent households with a borderline/abnormal SDQ score, by whether or not the household had any income from employment: Scotland, 2003–2014.



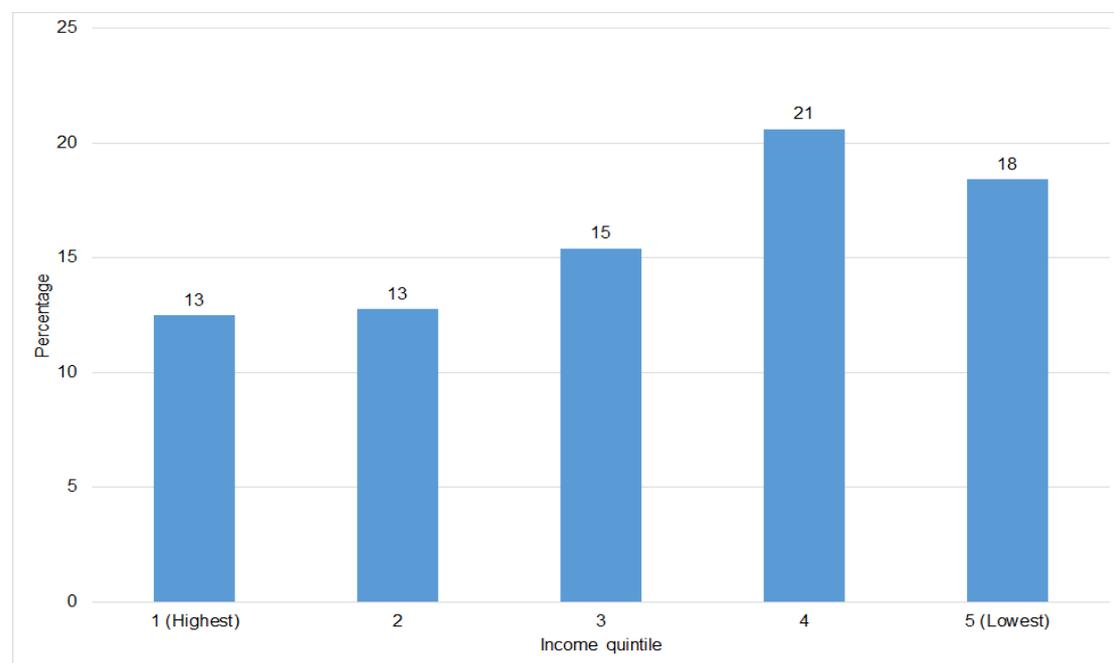
Source: Scottish Health Survey.¹ Note: unweighted sample sizes for children of lone parents with no earnings from employment were less than 100 in 2008 (88) and 2014 (83). In all other years they were greater than 100.

We should be cautious about this because the sample size for this subgroup was small in 2008 (< 100) and the difference could be caused by random fluctuation.[†] However, Harkness and Skipp² show evidence that these trends may be reflective of the true situation. Using British Household Panel Survey data, they found that between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, the mental health of lone mothers in work improved but the mental health of lone mothers not in work deteriorated: a plausible link to the trends seen for children of lone parents in Scotland above, given the association between maternal mental health and child wellbeing.

[†] It may also reflect the fact that Income Support sanctions for lone parents peaked in 2008/09 (at 7.8% of the caseload) and subsequently declined (until 2012/13).

Figure 2 shows variation in the percentage of children in working lone parent households with a borderline/abnormal SDQ score by income quintile. Children in working lone parent households with above average incomes were less likely to have borderline/abnormal SDQ scores than those in low income working households (13% vs. 18–21%). Income matters for the mental health of the children of lone parents, over and above parental employment.

Figure 2: Percentage of children aged 4–12 years in working lone parent households with a borderline/abnormal SDQ score, by household income quintile: Scotland, 2003, 2008–2014 (pooled data).



Source: Scottish Health Survey. Note: working defined as having any household income from employment or self-employment.

Implications

Sustained, paid employment is important for the health of children in lone parent households, although lowering in-work poverty would also be helpful to maximise these gains.

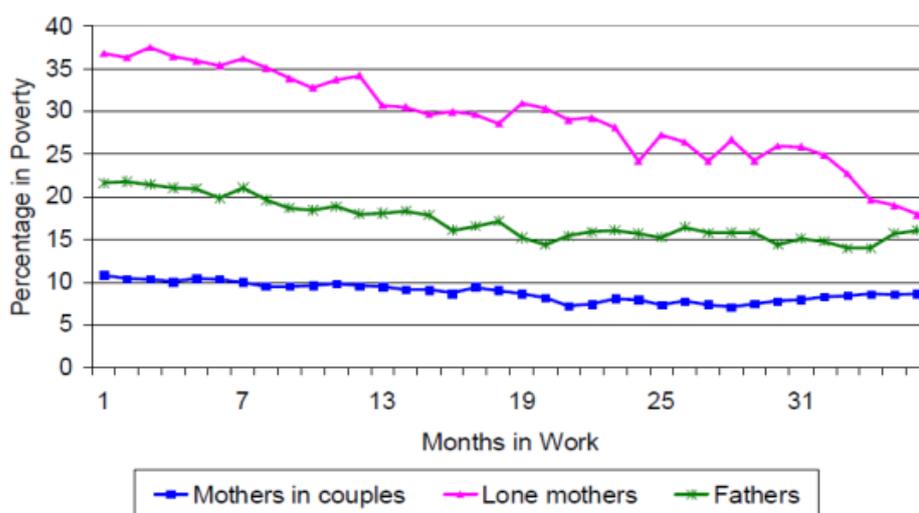
There is also a need to consider what factors protect or harm the mental health of the children of lone parents not currently in employment. Some

evidence show that lack of social support and recent experience of a financial crisis are associated with mental health problems for lone parents and jobseekers.^{3,4} As poverty and parental mental health (especially maternal mental health) are both associated with children's emotional wellbeing,⁵ it would be useful to consider measures which mitigate against these risks.

In-work progression and sustainability of employment for lone parents

The latest figures show that, overall, 64.4% of single parents are in work.⁶ However, employment rates vary considerably depending on the age of the youngest child. Analysis of 2006 employment rates showed that, while just under half (44%) of single parents of five-year-olds were in work (compared with 72% of coupled mothers of five-year-olds), almost three-quarters (72%) of single parents of 13-year-olds were in work (comparable to the 70% of coupled mothers of 13-year-olds in work).⁷ It is also of note that approximately 75% of single parents in work with younger children (0–6 years) opt for part-time hours.⁸ Analysis of Families and Children Study data by Browne and Paull⁹ shows that poverty rates for lone mothers decline after their entry into work, but remain twice as high as mothers in couples even after three years in work (*Figure 3*).

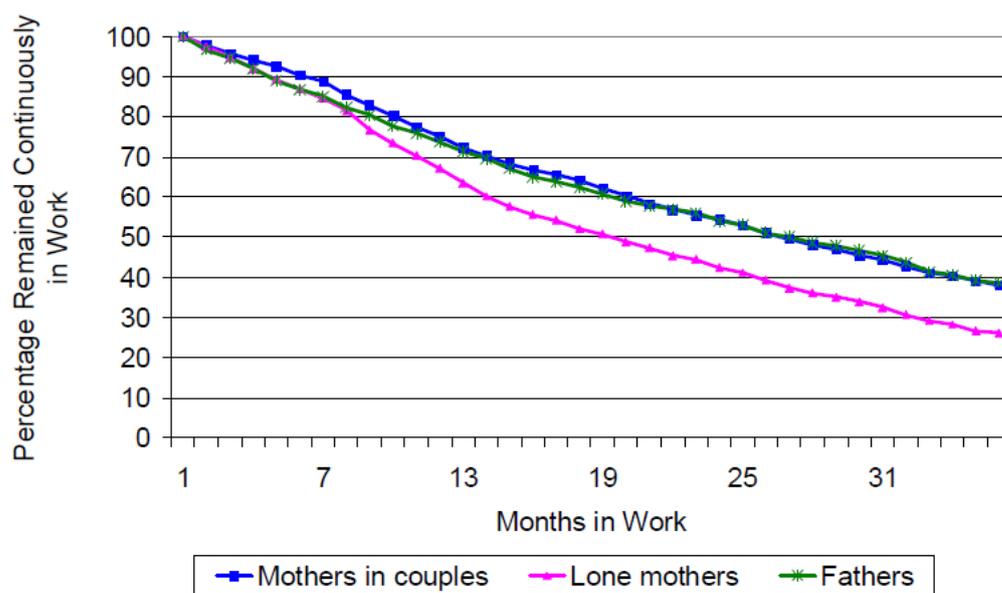
Figure 3: Percentage of parents in different household situations in poverty after entry into work: Britain, 2001–06 (pooled data).



Source: Reproduced from Browne and Paull.⁸ Based on Families and Children Study (FACS) 2001–2006 pooled data. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

Research also shows that single parents disproportionately enter lower-skilled occupations, which are typically low paid, less secure and often involve short-term contracts.⁴ A total of 27% of single parents enter elementary jobs that require little or no formal training, such as cleaning, or kitchen and catering work; a further one fifth enter sales and customer service posts. Data show that 22% take roles in personal service occupations, such as care assistants or childminders. In total, more than two-thirds (68%) of single parents enter these types of roles, which, inevitably, are more limited in opportunities for development and progression. Retention in work is also lower for lone mothers compared to mothers in couples (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4: Percentage of parents remaining continuously in work: Britain, 2001–06 (pooled data).



Source: Reproduced from Browne and Paull.⁸ Based on Families and Children Study (FACS) 2001–2006 pooled data. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

Newis⁷ estimated that as many as 22% of single parents who start a job go on to experience a spell of unemployment or inactivity in the following 12 months. This suggests that even a simple aspiration to get a job can be hindered within a short period of time after starting the job. Evidence for action on in-

work progression and sustainability of employment is presented in the additional research section at the end of this document.

Implications

The risk of poverty declines for lone mothers following job entry, although they are still twice as likely to be in poverty as mothers in couples after three years in work. They are also less likely to remain continuously in work. Lone parents in work are likely to be a particular focus of in-work conditionality.

While there is good evidence that increasing hours and hourly earnings can help reduce in-work poverty for lone mothers,⁸ there are substantial practical barriers to achieving this at scale. For example, 59,000 people in Scotland are on zero-hour contracts, 102,000 are working part-time hours because they cannot find a full-time job, and more than 216,500 working adults would like to increase their hours. There are also questions if individuals negotiating with employers for an increase in wages or hours (perhaps with support from a work coach) is the most effective way of achieving this aim.¹⁰

The geography of lone parents within Scotland

Where lone parents lived and their circumstances in 2011

In 2011, the largest number of lone parent households with dependent children in Scotland were in: Glasgow City (15.6%), North Lanarkshire (7.9%), Edinburgh (7.6%), Fife (6.9%) and South Lanarkshire (6.4%). In most places, the share of lone parents reflected the size of the local authority: however, Glasgow City stands out as having a higher share of lone parent families than might be expected given its share of all families with children (*Table 1*).

In relative terms (as a proportion of all households with dependent children), the local authorities with the highest percentage of lone parents were: Glasgow City (40%), Dundee City (38%), West Dunbartonshire (37%), Inverclyde (34%), North Ayrshire (33%), Renfrewshire (31%) and North Lanarkshire (30%). While Edinburgh had a large number of lone parent households, the local concentration is similar to the Scottish average and reflects its share of the population. There are also important differences within local authorities. For example, within Glasgow City, the percentage of lone parent households varies from 61% in Parkhead and Dalmarnock to 10% in Pollokshields West.¹¹ *Table 2* provides some more context on local authorities with a high percentage of lone parent households, including child poverty and area deprivation.

Table 1: Distribution of lone parents with dependent children across Scotland and concentration of lone parent households within each local authority, 2011.

Local authority area	Absolute number of lone parent households	National share of lone parents (%)	Local share (% of all households with dependent children)
Aberdeen City	4,933	2.9	22.1
Aberdeenshire	4,722	2.8	15.2
Angus	3,172	1.9	23.6
Argyll and Bute	2,323	1.4	24.7
Clackmannanshire	1,813	1.1	28.7
Dumfries and Galloway	3,864	2.3	23.2
Dundee City	6,143	3.6	38.0
East Ayrshire	4,191	2.5	27.9
East Dunbartonshire	2,610	1.5	20.5
East Lothian	2,766	1.6	22.4
East Renfrewshire	2,355	1.4	20.1
Edinburgh, City of	12,988	7.6	27.0
Eilean Siar	650	0.4	21.8
Falkirk	4,946	2.9	25.5
Fife	11,744	6.9	27.1
Glasgow City	26,513	15.6	40.4
Highland	6,280	3.7	23.5
Inverclyde	3,310	1.9	34.2
Midlothian	2,582	1.5	24.9
Moray	2,272	1.3	20.9
North Ayrshire	5,489	3.2	32.5
North Lanarkshire	13,351	7.9	30.3
Orkney Islands	463	0.3	20.1

Local authority area	Absolute number of lone parent households	National share of lone parents (%)	Local share (% of all households with dependent children)
Perth and Kinross	3,665	2.2	22.5
Renfrewshire	6,553	3.9	31.1
Scottish Borders	2,790	1.6	22.0
Shetland Islands	502	0.3	18.5
South Ayrshire	3,444	2.0	27.0
South Lanarkshire	10,822	6.4	28.1
Stirling	2,286	1.3	22.4
West Dunbartonshire	4,132	2.4	36.8
West Lothian	6,328	3.7	26.9
Scotland	170,002	100.0	27.6

Source: 2011 Census.

Table 2: Summary statistics: lone parents, child poverty and area deprivation in local authorities with a high % of lone parents

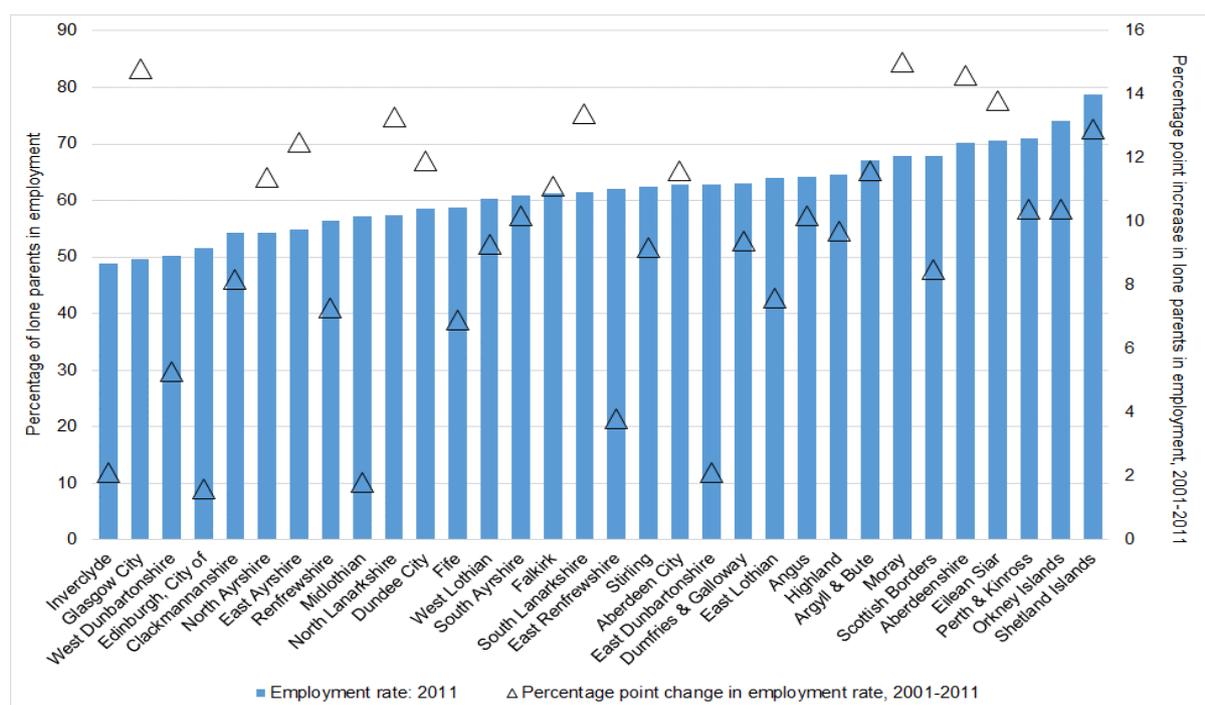
Local authority area	Lone parent families (% of all households with dependent children): 2011	Lone parents not in employment (% of all lone parents): 2011	Children living in poverty (after housing costs): % of all children: 2013	SIMD % of data zones in top 5% most deprived (local share): 2012	SIMD % of data zones in top 15% most deprived (local share): 2012
Clackmannanshire	29	45.8	26.3	3.1	21.9
Dundee City	38	41.4	27.9	10.6	30.7
East Ayrshire	28	45.2	25.7	7.8	20.8
Edinburgh, City of	27	48.5	21.1	3.5	9.8
Glasgow	40	50.4	33.1	21.3	41.6
Inverclyde	34	51.2	25.6	12.7	40
North Ayrshire	33	45.8	27.2	6.7	25.7
North Lanarkshire	30	42.6	24.5	5.5	23.9
Renfrewshire	31	43.6	21	6.5	22.4
West Dunbartonshire	37	49.8	24.6	10.2	26.3
Scotland	27	41.9	20.7	5	15

Sources: 2011 Census; End Child Poverty October 2014; Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), 2012. The definition used by End Child Poverty combines HM Revenue and Customs data on the number of children living in households dependent on out-of-work benefits and children living in working households with incomes below 60% of median incomes, with Labour Force Survey data on the number of children in working and workless households.

Lone parent employment rates: 2001 and 2011

In 2011, it was estimated that the employment rate (based on the 2011 Census) for lone parents in Scotland was 58%. The local authorities with the lowest lone parent employment rates were: Inverclyde (49%), Glasgow (50%), West Dunbartonshire (50%) and Edinburgh (51%). Lone parent employment rates tended to be higher in rural Scotland, although, it is notable that Aberdeen and Stirling had above-average lone parent employment rates (both ~ 63%). Based on national trends, it is likely that local employment rates for lone parents have increased since 2011 (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5: Percentage of lone parents in employment (2011) (left x-axis) and increase in lone parent employment rates, 2001–2011 (right x-axis), by Scottish local authority.



Source: 2001 and 2011 Census of population.

All local authorities saw lone parent employment rates increase between 2001 and 2011. The largest increases in lone parent employment rates were seen in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Moray, Eilean Siar (Western Isles) and South Lanarkshire.

Factors associated with higher rates of lone parent employment

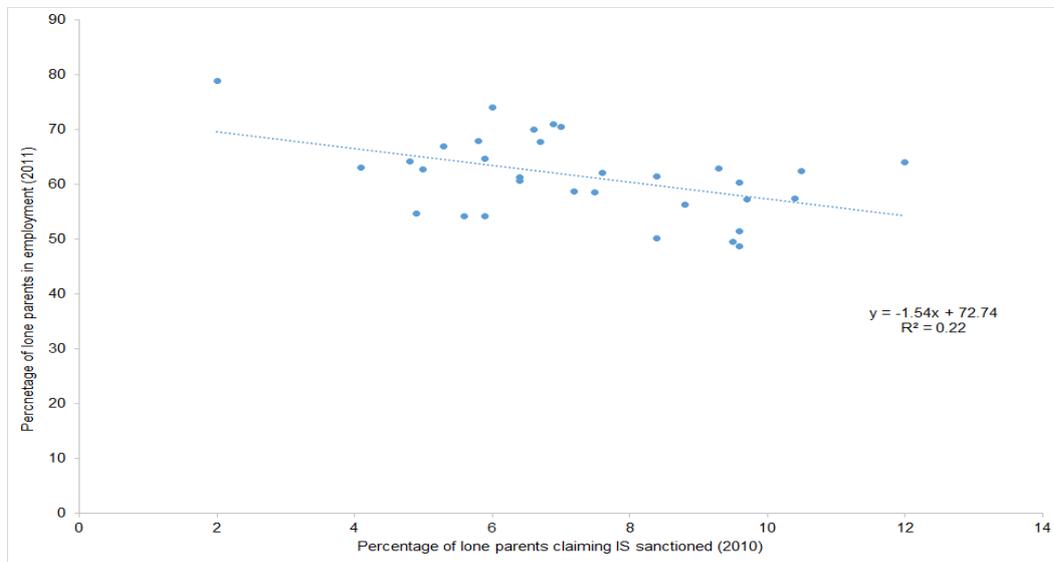
There are a number of possible explanations for differences in lone parent employment rates. These might include: local variation in conditionality; local labour market conditions; and local variation in childcare availability. We created simple scatter plots to look at the association between these variables and lone parent employment rates – these are exploratory only and do not take all possible explanatory factors into account (*Figures 6–9*). This was quantified by R-squared (R^2), a statistical measure indicating the proportion of variance in the dependent variable (lone parent employment rates) that is ‘explained’ by variation in the relevant independent variable (sanction rates, labour market demand and childcare availability).

Taking each of these in turn:

- *Figures 6 and 7* show there is a weak, negative association between **Income Support lone parent sanction rates** and lone parent employment rates across Scotland and Britain. This means that the local authorities with the highest employment rates for lone parents had lower sanction rates, although the association is not strong.
- *Figure 8* shows that there is a moderate, positive association between the ‘**jobs density**’ (a measure of local labour market demand) and lone parent employment rates for 64 counties/regions across Britain (used as proxies for local labour market areas) in 2011. Areas with stronger labour market demand had higher lone parent employment rates.
- *Figure 9* shows that there is a moderate, positive association between the availability of **childcare** and lone parent employment rates across Scotland. Local authorities with a higher density of childcare providers tend to have higher lone parent employment rates.‡

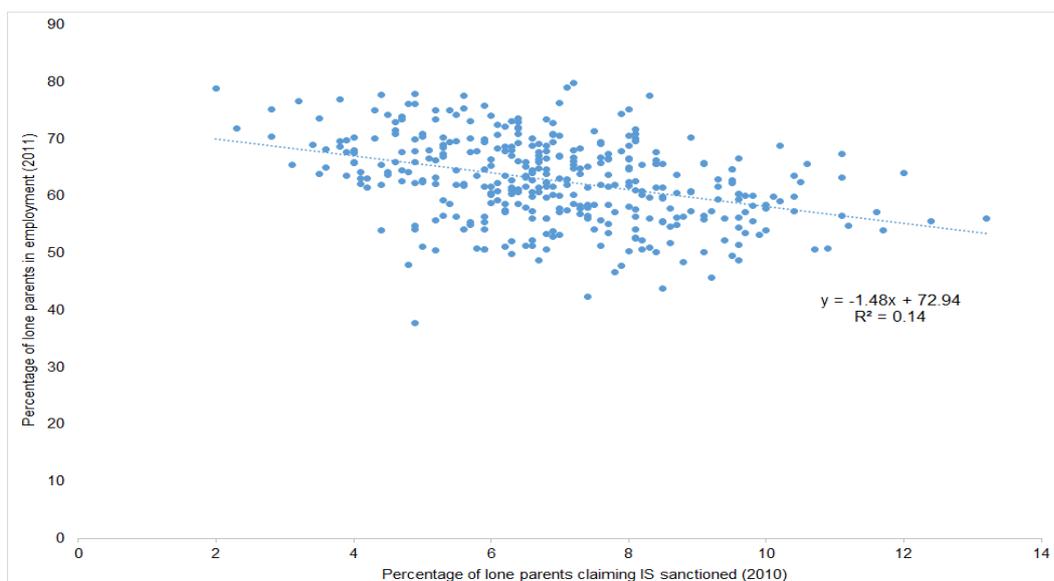
‡ The direction of causation is uncertain. This could indicate that greater availability of childcare allows more lone parents to work, or that childcare expands to meet the needs of more working parents.

Figure 6: Association between the percentage of lone parents claiming Income Support who were sanctioned (2010) and percentage of lone parents in employment (2011), Scottish local authorities.



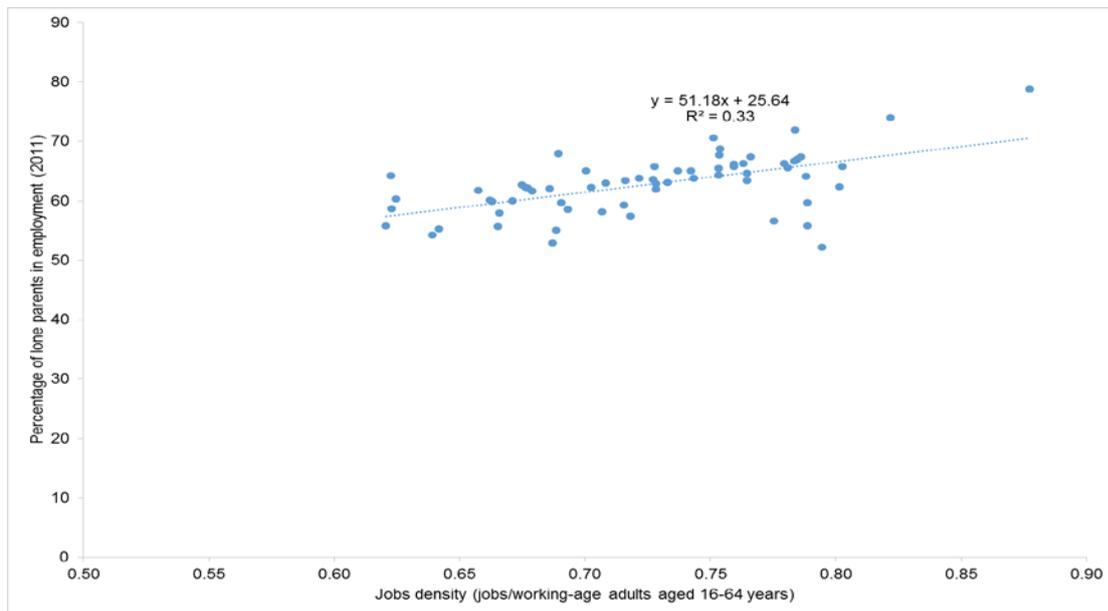
Sources: 2011 Census and Department for Work and Pensions freedom of information request 3634-2013 response. IS, income support.

Figure 7: Association between the percentage of lone parents claiming Income Support who were sanctioned (2010) and percentage of lone parents in employment (2011), 370 local authorities in Scotland, England and Wales.



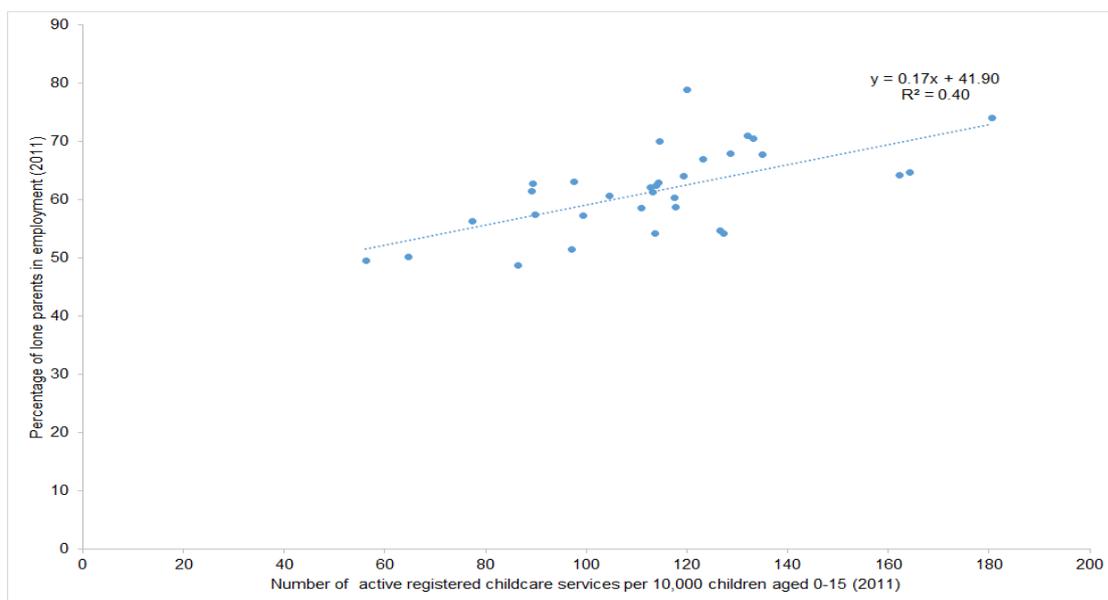
Sources: 2011 Census and Department for Work and Pensions freedom of information request 3634-2013 response. IS, income support.

Figure 8: Association between 'jobs density' measure of labour market demand (2011) and percentage of lone parents in employment (2011), 64 British counties/regions.



Sources: 2011 Census, including workplace population tables. Analysis at county/region level to reflect commuting flows across local authority boundaries.
 Note: the x-axis has been truncated to improve clarity of presentation.

Figure 9: Association between active registered childcare services per 10,000 children (2011) and percentage of lone parents in employment (2011), Scottish local authorities.



Sources: the 2011 Census and Care Inspectorate Childcare Statistics 2011.

These 'explanations' are not exhaustive. Indeed, as the charts highlight, the majority of the variation in lone parent employment rates is not explained by these single variables. Other relevant measures that could be having an effect might include: measures of lone parent education or skills, the age of the lone parent, number of children in the household and the (relative) generosity of the tax credit system.

Implications

Based on four measures (national share of lone parent households, local concentration of households with dependent children headed by a lone parent, local lone parent employment rate and change in local lone parent employment rate 2001–2011), local authorities that may warrant a greater focus include:

- Clackmannanshire, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire (poor on all four measures).
- East Ayrshire, Glasgow City, North Ayrshire and North Lanarkshire (poor on at least three of the measures).
- Dundee City, Edinburgh, Fife, Midlothian and South Lanarkshire (poor on at least two of the measures).

Higher lone parent employment rates are associated with stronger local labour market demand, lower sanction rates and greater availability of childcare. However, it is important to note that challenges to increasing lone parent employment rates may differ between local authorities and local labour markets. The Family and Childcare Trust provide a useful summary of childcare issues across all Scottish local authorities, which also highlights a lack of data on childcare within some local authority areas.¹²

Evidence on programmes to support lone parents in the labour market

This last section summarises the results from a range of Scottish and UK initiatives which aim to support lone parents in the labour market.

In-work progression and sustainability of employment

Employment Retention and Advancement

Evidence from Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA)¹³ suggests that a holistic package of training support is necessary to enable working lone parents to upgrade their skills and improve their long-term employment prospects. One weakness of ERA training was that the training focused on the supply side of the labour market. The programme did not engage employers in the choice of training. In addition, it did not take into account the local labour market or feedback from the demand side of the labour market.

Human capital employability models

Scotland has a proven track record of delivering very successful **voluntary** welfare to work schemes delivered by the voluntary sector/local authority partnerships, such as the Making it Work (MIW) programme and Working for Families.

MIW (2013–2016)

MIW is a single parent centre programme. It aims to build on the legacy of Working for Families by joining up services to tackle the barriers single parents face to going back to work and creating more sustainable local

partnerships to support single parents in the future. Through MIW, the Big Lottery has invested £7 million to support single parent families affected by poverty.

The model of support includes the following stages:

- **Early engagement:** Making connections. This part of the model focuses on reaching and engaging single parents.
- **Pre engagement:** Personal development, childcare and planning for work. This focuses on identifying improved and accelerated access to effective services for single parents.
- **Engagement:** Access to mainstream provision (much of which will be delivered by mainstream services). This focuses on supporting single parents in engaging with Regeneration Company programmes, Skills Development Scotland-funded programmes and Job Centre Plus, ensuring effective access and support.
- **Post employment (in work):** This focuses on working to support job retention and progression for single parents and encourage family-friendly policies by employers.

Key elements

- peer-to-peer support
- role of case worker/key worker
- integrated single parent tailored services
- bring together employability, childcare support and family support, and money and debt advice.

Impacts

- increased choice and empowerment for parents
- self-efficacy strength
- progression along employability pathway
- jobs and training outcomes – not work first.

The Big Lottery contracted Sheffield Hallam University to evaluate the programme and the research team have developed a robust mixed-method

research strategy to measure the success of this complex initiative. Evaluation reports will be available in 2017.

For more information see Making it Work¹⁴ and The Big Blog Scotland.¹⁵

The Working for Families (WFF) Fund (2004–2008)

WFF was established to invest in new initiatives to improve the employability of parents who have barriers to participating in the labour market, specifically to help them move towards, into or continue in employment, education or training. It was a voluntary scheme on the part of clients. It supported parents by helping them find sustainable childcare solutions and through providing or accessing other relevant employability-related support and services.

In rural areas, support also addressed barriers created by poor transport, limited services and the lack of a critical mass of clients. A total of 20 local authorities took part in the programme, operating through 226 locally based public, private and third sector projects.

Over the four years, the budget for WFF was £50 million, a total of 25,508 clients were registered, 53% of all clients (13,594) achieved 'hard' outcomes, such as employment, and a further 13% (3,283) achieved other significant outcomes.

Successful aspects of the WFF programme

- The main support provided by WFF was based around key workers who supported clients wishing to move into work, education or training by:
 - helping them to improve their employability
 - addressing childcare and other barriers standing in their way
- Effective combination of tackling both childcare and employability is essential.
- The majority of WFF clients were female (89%) and single parents (71%).

Research report

The report by Campbell *et al.*⁴ concluded that: '[Welfare to work (WtW)] requirements often conflicted with child care responsibilities. Available employment was often poorly paid and precarious. Adverse health impacts, such as increased stress, fatigue, and depression were commonly reported, though employment and appropriate training was linked to increased self-worth for some. WtW appeared to influence health through the pathways of conflict and control, analytical themes which emerged during synthesis. WtW reduced control over the nature of employment and care of children. Access to social support allowed some lone parents to manage the conflict associated with employment, and to increase control over their circumstances, with potentially beneficial health impacts'.

Department for Work and Pensions report

The Department of Work and Pensions assessment¹⁶ provides evidence that some lone parents affected by the changes to Income Support or JSA moved onto Employment and Support Allowance or Carers Allowance, and that a small minority moved out of the benefit system altogether but not into employment.

The 'Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change' project has also published relevant research in this area.^{17,18}

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