

One Parents and Employment: What are the Real Issues?

A research report by
One Family
November 2008



**POVERTY
RESEARCH
INITIATIVE**



**Combat Poverty
Agency**

funded by

*working for a
poverty-free Ireland*

Promoting understanding - Informing policy



This report has been researched
and written by:
Candy Murphy,
Patricia Keilthy and Louise Caffrey,
on behalf of One Family

© One Family 2008



THIS REPORT WAS FUNDED BY THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY UNDER ITS POVERTY RESEARCH INITIATIVE. THE VIEWS, OPINIONS, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS EXPRESSED HERE ARE STRICTLY THOSE OF THE AUTHOR(S). THEY DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY, WHICH TAKES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY ERRORS OR OMISSIONS IN, OR FOR THE ACCURACY OF, THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS WORKING PAPER.

ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a survey of a nationally representative sample of lone parents in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP). It provides robust information on the employment experiences of lone parents on social welfare and on the factors that influence their labour market participation and future career plans. The study was carried out in the context of the government's plans to help lone parents move into employment in an effort to reduce poverty and social exclusion in one-parent families in Ireland today. The study also addresses international experience of the effectiveness and impact of such policies to date.

The findings clearly show that lone parents are highly motivated to work and to participate in education and training. It also highlights the challenges lone parents face in accessing and progressing in the labour market and in balancing their employment and parenting roles. It shows that in today's labour market, employment for lone parents is mainly part-time and flexible with limited pay. This employment revolves around caring roles and is limited by childcare shortages and other poverty traps. For many, low educational qualifications and insufficient information on career options are also major limitations.

The findings also show that there are a number of distinct sub-groups within the overall population of lone parents on the OFP, each with different needs and experiences. The study finds that there is a need to highlight and respond to their specific needs and plans in a supportive and customised manner. Key sub-groups were found to be older lone parents, lone parents from new communities, those not looking for employment at present whilst caring full-time for their children and male lone parents. The study recommends that policies to support the fuller and more meaningful participation of lone parents in the labour market must also address wider issues of family poverty among one-parent families.

There are many positive findings also. Policies that harness the strong motivation of lone parents to work, train and gain qualifications in a way that supports their parenting role are likely to be well received and successful.

Key Words: Lone Parents, Employment, Employment Supports, Activation, Social Welfare, One-Parent Family Payment, One Family

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to study	1
1.2 Aims of study.....	1
1.3 Structure of report	2
Chapter 2: Methodology	3
2.1 Introduction	3
2.2 Research method: the Lone Parents and Employment Survey	3
2.2.1 Questionnaire design	3
2.2.2 Piloting of survey	3
2.2.3 Sample selection and survey administration	4
2.2.4 Response rate and weights.....	4
2.2.5 Data analysis	5
2.3 Ethical considerations	5
2.4 Limitation of the methodology.....	5
Chapter 3: Research context.....	7
3.1 Introduction	7
3.2 Overview of provision for one-parent families	7
3.2.1 Current welfare provision for lone parents in Ireland.....	8
3.2.2 Government's policy proposals for reforms in state supports for lone parents	8
3.2.3 Previous reviews of state supports for one-parent families	9
3.2.4 Activation ideology	9
3.2.5 Profile of lone parents in Ireland.....	10
3.2.6 Growth in one-parent families	10
3.2.7 Poverty rates among one-parent families	11
3.2.8 Employment rates among lone parents.....	11
3.2.9 The link between poverty and employment	12
3.2.10 Education and lone parents	12
3.2.11 Housing and lone parents	13
3.2.12 Childcare and lone parents	14
3.3 Summary	15
Chapter 4: Literature and policy review	17
4.1 Introduction	17
4.2 Moving into paid employment: experiences of lone parents	17
4.2.1 Attitudes to employment and parenting.....	17
4.2.2 Poverty and unemployment traps	18
4.2.3 Childcare	18
4.2.4 Low pay, education and family-friendly flexible employment	19

4.2.5	Security of payment	20
4.2.6	Perceptions of child welfare	20
4.2.7	Mental health	21
4.2.8	Lone parents from new communities	22
4.3	Key findings	22
4.4	Supports for lone parents accessing the labour market: international comparative policy	23
4.4.1	Effectiveness of work requirements	23
4.4.2	Childcare supports	25
4.4.3	Family-friendly employment	26
4.4.4	Exemptions from activation	27
4.4.5	Making work pay	27
4.5	Key findings	28
Chapter 5: Findings from the Lone Parents and Employment survey		31
5.1	Introduction	31
5.1.1	Structure of chapter	31
5.2	Profiling OFP recipients	32
5.2.1	Gender and Marital Status	32
5.2.2	Age	33
5.2.3	Education	33
5.2.4	Nationality	34
5.2.5	Region and Area	35
5.2.6	Housing	36
5.2.7	Health status	37
5.2.8	Length of time in receipt of the OFP	38
5.2.9	Current employment status	38
5.2.10	Key findings – demographic characteristics	39
5.3	Experiences of those in paid employment	40
5.3.1	Working hours of respondents	40
5.3.2	Average number of hours worked	41
5.3.3	Plans for work	41
5.3.4	Childcare	41
5.3.5	Average spend on childcare per week	42
5.3.6	Type of work and income	42
5.3.7	Length of time in job	44
5.3.8	Effect of employment on income	44
5.3.9	Transport	45
5.3.10	Key findings – those currently in employment	45
5.3.11	Community Employment scheme (CE scheme)	46
5.3.12	Views and experience of those who have been in employment since becoming recipients of the OFP	48
5.3.13	Preference for work now	49

5.4	Those with no previous work experience since becoming recipients of the OFP	49
5.4.1	Job search.....	49
5.4.2	Education/Training	50
5.4.3	Labour market engagement.....	50
5.4.4	Key findings – those not currently working	51
5.5	Future plans.....	51
5.5.1	Type of education or training planned.....	52
5.5.2	Barriers to education/training	53
5.5.3	Future work plans	54
5.5.4	Key findings – future plans	55
5.6	Views on parenting alone and employment	56
5.6.1	Caring roles	56
5.6.2	Financial considerations.....	56
5.6.3	Health.....	57
5.6.4	Parenting	57
5.6.5	Information.....	57
5.6.6	Education	57
5.6.7	Personal issues.....	57
5.6.8	Personal issues.....	57
5.6.9	Work and parenting	57
5.6.10	Findings from the ‘Comments’ section of the survey	59
5.6.11	Key findings – perceptions of employment and parenting.....	60
5.7	Overall key findings from the survey.....	60
Chapter 6:	Sub-group analysis.....	63
6.1	Introduction	63
6.2	Profiling those in employment, education or parenting full-time.....	63
6.3	Different sub-groups within the overall population	67
6.3.1	Male lone parents	67
6.3.2	Older lone parents	68
6.3.3	Parents from new communities	68
6.3.4	Caring for children full-time and not looking for employment	69
6.4	Key findings	70
6.5	Implications for policy	71
Chapter 7:	Key findings, conclusions and recommendations	73
7.1	Introduction	73
7.2	The context in which the current study was undertaken.....	73
7.2.1	Key findings from previous research.....	74
7.2.2	Key findings from relevant policy developments	74
7.3	Key findings from the current study.....	75
7.3.1	Motivation to work	75
7.3.2	Experience of employment	76

7.3.3	Balancing work and parenting.....	76
7.3.4	Education training levels and needs	77
7.3.5	Barriers to employment.....	77
7.3.6	Harnessing and supporting positive actions – creating a win-win situation	77
7.3.7	Sub-groups	78
7.4	Conclusions	78
7.5	Recommendations and policy responses	79
7.5.1	Child and family poverty in one parent families	79
7.5.2	Supporting employment options	80
7.5.3	Enabling lone parents to successfully balance employment and parenting	81
7.5.4	Increasing understanding of the needs of specific sub-groups of OFP recipients	81
Acknowledgements		83
Bibliography		85
Appendix A: Lone Parents and Employment Survey questionnaire		91
Appendix B: Letter		101
Appendix C: Coding		103
Appendix D: Cross-tabulations		105
Appendix E: Weighting		111

LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

Table 4.1:	Work test for lone mothers and employment rates for lone mothers with dependent children.....	24
Figure 5.1:	Gender of respondents	32
Figure 5.2:	Marital status of respondents.....	33
Figure 5.3:	Age of respondents	33
Table 5.1:	Highest Level of education achieved.....	34
Figure 5.4:	Nationality of respondents	34
Figure 5.5:	Region of respondents	35
Figure 5.6:	Area	35
Figure 5.7:	Housing status	36
Figure 5.8:	Rent Supplement and waiting list for local authority housing	36
Table 5.2:	Health status	37
Figure 5.9:	Medical card.....	37
Figure 5.10:	Length of time in receipt of the OFP.....	38
Figure 5.11:	Employment status	39
Figure 5.12:	Time of day worked	40
Figure 5.13:	Childcare arrangements	42
Table 5.3:	Occupation.....	43
Figure 5.14:	Financial Situation	44
Figure 5.15:	Transport	45
Table 5.4:	Views of CE scheme.....	46
Figure 5.16:	Future plans.....	47
Table 5.5:	Reason left previous job	48
Table 5.6:	Reasons not looked for a job	49
Figure 5.17:	Training/Education course completed	50
Table 5.7:	Future plans and career aspirations	51
Figure 5.18:	Type of qualification	52
Table 5.8:	Subject or area of planned qualification	53
Table 5.9:	Barriers to education or training.....	53
Figure 5.19:	Part-time jobs: what kind?	54
Figure 5.20:	Full-time job	55
Table 5.10:	Barriers to employment	56
Table: 5.11:	Views of parenting alone/employment	58
Table 6.1:	Employment status and key demographic characteristics:.....	64
Figure 6.1:	Housing type and paid employment	65

GLOSSARY

CCSS:	Community Childcare Supplement
CE:	Community Employment Scheme
CSO:	Central Statistics Office
DSFA:	Department of Social and Family Affairs
ECDL:	European Computer Driving Licence
ECS:	Early Childcare Supplement
EU:	European Union
OFP:	One-Parent Family Payment
ESRI:	Economic and Social Research Institute
FIS:	Family Income Supplement
JSA:	Job Seekers Allowance
NAPS:	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NDLP:	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDP:	National Development Plan
NEAP:	National Employment Action Plan
NESC:	National Economic and Social Council
NESF:	National Economic and Social Forum
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-Operative and Development
OSI:	Office for Social Inclusion
PA:	Parental allowance
PLC:	Post-Leaving Cert Course
RAS:	Rental Accommodation Scheme
EU SILC:	European Survey on Income and Living Conditions
UK:	United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to study

This study was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency under the Poverty Research Initiative in 2006. With the support of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA), One Family carried out this piece of research between May 2007 and April 2008. The overall aim of the study is to profile recipients of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) and gather information on their experiences of and barriers to paid employment. The study involved a nationally representative survey of 8,000 lone parents in receipt of the OFP.

Over the last number of years there has been an increase in the amount of information and statistics relating to one-parent families, in particular on the prevalence of poverty among this group (EU-SILC 2004-2006; Equality in Ireland study 2007; Living in Ireland Survey, 1997-2001). Although the DSFA does publish some statistics on OFP recipients and some valuable statistics have been published on lone parents at regional levels (Millar et al, 2007 and Cavan Lone Parent Initiative, 2007) this study is the first national, in-depth profile and analysis of one-parent families that are in receipt of the OFP.

This study is carried out in the context of the Government's policy proposals to support lone parents moving into employment¹. The rationale for this policy change is to reduce the poverty rate among one-parent families by supporting lone parents moving from welfare to work. International experience indicates that this policy orientation, often referred to as 'activation'² may lead to a situation where labour market participation becomes mandatory for some lone parents. The intention of this research is to inform policy and the current activation debate by: providing up to date information on OFP recipients; exploring their experiences and views of the labour market; and examining the supports necessary to enable lone parents to move into and progress within the labour market.

1.2 Aims of study

The main aim of this study is to gather and compile data on those in receipt of the OFP. Specific aims were:

- to review existing literature on lone parents and employment and explore international policies that have supported lone parents' transition into the work place;
- to examine the experience of those in employment and/or education or training;
- to ascertain the main barriers to employment and education/training for those in receipt of the OFP;
- to explore career aspirations; and
- to provide a sub-group analysis of the sample, with the possibility of identifying certain groups that may face particular difficulties in accessing the labour market.

1 see 'Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents', which was published by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in 2006.

2 See Section 3.2.4 for a full explanation of what activation is.

1.3 Structure of report

This report begins with an outline of the key methodological considerations, specifically how the data was collected and analysed and the ethical issues that were taken into account. Chapter 3 provides the context for the research by presenting existing statistics on one-parent families. This chapter also presents the key changes proposed in the Government's Green Paper. Chapter 4 reviews existing literature on lone parents' experiences of and barriers to employment. In this chapter a review of international policy developments on lone parents' transition into paid employment is provided. In the next two chapters, the results of the Lone Parents and Employment Survey are presented. The findings are split into two separate chapters. Chapter 5 presents the main finding from the survey and Chapter 6 explores further the experiences and needs of a number of sub-groups identified within the sample. The final chapter offers some overall conclusions and makes recommendations based on the main findings of the research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to gather information on those who are in receipt of the OFP. The most effective means of achieving this was a large scale national survey of OFP recipients. Although face-to-face interview surveys would be desirable, the time and cost involved with this was not feasible. A quantitative postal survey of those in receipt of the OFP was undertaken. With the co-operation of the DSFA 8,000 recipients were randomly selected and were sent a questionnaire and a letter explaining the aim of the survey and guaranteeing confidentiality. In this chapter the key methodological considerations involved are outlined.

2.2 Research method: the Lone Parents and Employment Survey

2.2.1 Questionnaire design

The initial phase of the study involved an extensive review of literature and policy relating to lone parents and employment. Once the key areas and issues were identified in the literature, the next step was to design the questionnaire. The design of the questionnaire was based on the specific research aims of the study and factors of importance identified in the literature. The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to give information on key demographic characteristics, such as: age; gender; marital status; nationality, education; housing status; and current employment status.

The next questionnaire section asked those who were currently employed about their work experience. This was followed by a section for those who were not currently employed. This section looked at the reasons for leaving a job or for not looking for a job and if they had taken part in any education or training since going on the OFP. The final section explored lone parents' barriers to employment and education/training. It also asked respondents what their future plans were and their views of parenting and family life. See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.

2.2.2 Piloting of survey

Once a draft of the questionnaire had been drawn up the survey was piloted to a small number of lone parents in Dublin and Monaghan. Feedback and comments were taken into consideration and the necessary alterations were made. Next a copy of the survey was sent to colleagues at One Family, the DSFA and the Combat Poverty Agency. Having taken their feedback into account the final questionnaire was agreed with the DSFA and Combat Poverty.

2.2.3 Sample selection and survey administration

Sample selection is a very important part of the research process. When subject variables such as gender, marital status, ethnicity, age etc are likely to influence behaviours or attitudes the sample must be representative of the entire population. The entire population of recipients of the OFP is over 80,000; therefore 10 per cent of this population was considered an adequate sample size. Thus 8,000 recipients of the OFP were selected at random by the DSFA to be sent the Lone Parents and Employment questionnaire.

Postal surveys are particularly associated with low response rates. There are a number of techniques that can be used to help increase the rate. The most common technique used is to include a letter with the questionnaire explaining the research and making the possible respondents aware of the importance of completing the questionnaire. Therefore a letter from One Family and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs explaining the research and the importance of participating was included with the questionnaire. Also prior to the mail out, promotional posters were sent to a variety of service providers including Citizen Information Centres, one-parent family organisations, health centres and Family Resource Centres across the country to encourage those who received the questionnaire to take part and return it. One Family also undertook a promotional campaign through the media. The mail out of the survey was administered by the DSFA because of data protection issues. Due to the considerable level of work required and costs involved in administering the survey, it was agreed that no follow-up work would be undertaken with those who received the questionnaire.

Those who responded to the survey posted their responses directly to One Family via freepost. The researchers accepted responses up until the end of November 2007. At this point over 1,600 OFP recipients had responded to the survey.

2.2.4 Response rate and weights

Of the 8,000 questionnaires that were sent out 1,636 were returned, giving an initial response rate of 20.5 per cent. The DSFA recorded that 181 surveys were undelivered therefore giving us a total response rate of 20.9 per cent. This is considered a reasonable response rate with no follow up and is comparable with similar studies (Millar et al, 2007).

Another method of improving the validity of survey data is to ensure that the sample is representative of the entire population, ie that the sample (1,636) matches the entire population (80,000) on the key demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, nationality etc. Based on information provided to us by the DSFA, the researchers were able to check if there was a statistical difference between the sample and the entire population based on these characteristics. Only the marital status of the respondents was found to be significantly³ different from the entire population (see Table 2.1) therefore it was necessary to weight⁴ the data by marital status. As 138 respondents did not give information on their marital status, an appropriate weight could not be applied to them therefore these respondents could not be included in the final analysis, thus giving us a total number of 1,488 or a response rate of 19 per cent. For further information see Appendix E.

3 Pearson, Chi-square test of significance.

4 Weighting is a statistical procedure used to make data more representative of the entire population. It does so by computing and assigning a weight to each survey respondent. Therefore it gives greater weight to a particular characteristic, in this case marital status. This does not affect the answers given by respondents.

It should be noted that it was not possible to weight the results by a number of other factors due to the way the data was collected in the survey and because of the way certain questions were answered. For example in relation to current employment status, our figures indicate that 44 per cent of respondents are working and a further 13 per cent are on education or training courses, compared to the DSFA figures which indicate that 60 per cent are working or on employment schemes. It is possible that some respondents on employment schemes defined themselves as on education or training courses. Also the question in relation to Rent Supplement was not answered by all respondents. Furthermore as no follow up of the sample was possible we could not take any action to try to redress the under-representation of certain sub-groups of the population.

Overall a comparison of our sample with the overall population of recipients of the OFP indicates that our sample over-represents those on Rent Supplement and under-represents those currently in employment. These differences need to be borne in mind whilst interpreting the results.

2.2.5 Data analysis

All data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The analysis primarily involved running frequencies on each variable and a number of cross-tabulations were employed to analyse the relationship between two variables. Statistical tests for significant differences were also carried out.

2.3 Ethical considerations

The primary ethical consideration for this research was to ensure that the anonymity of the respondents was upheld. None of the research team had access to the names or contact details of the respondents as the survey was administered through the DSFA using their database. Respondents were assured that nobody in the DSFA would have access to their completed questionnaires. During the analysis and the write-up of the report any categories with low responses were recoded to remove any possible identification of respondents.

2.4 Limitation of the methodology

All methodologies have their advantages and disadvantages. A nationally representative sample survey has the advantage of producing statistically robust results. However one of the major limitations of this method of data collection is the relatively poor response rate associated with postal surveys. As referred to above, non-response can bias the findings where a difference is found between those who respond to the survey and those who did not. Non-response in this survey may have been influenced by issues such as literacy and language difficulties or by the likelihood of a higher response rate from those experiencing most difficulties in accessing employment. This could perhaps explain why those not working and those on Rent Supplement are over-represented in the sample. Every possible action was taken to reduce such bias, particularly through piloting of the questionnaire to ensure that it was user-friendly and weighting the results where possible.

Postal surveys are also limited in the extent to which they can explore issues in depth or can explore particularly sensitive topics. For example we chose not to ask respondents to tell us their actual income as we considered that this would significantly reduce the response rate. Additionally some topics such as mental health are best explored using a range of qualitative techniques, rather than a quantitative approach. In this study we refer to some areas where such research has already been done and indicate areas where such research should be carried out in the future.

Overall this study represents a successful first attempt at obtaining statistically representative results on a target population that is currently experiencing serious disadvantage and is likely to experience profound change in the way the state addresses such disadvantage. As such we consider that its findings can make a very important contribution to the development of national policy towards lone parents in Ireland.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the historical, statistical and theoretical backdrop to the research project. It outlines the shift in welfare provision for one-parent families from support based on the assumption of lone mothers' non-participation in the labour market to a policy reorientation in the 1990s which sought to encourage lone parents to enter employment. It outlines current provision in this regard as well as highlighting the relevant points of the policy reform proposal entitled 'Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents', which was published by the DSFA in 2006. These proposals were made in the context of the current high and growing level of poverty among one-parent families as well as in response to the growing numbers on the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) and the related costs for the exchequer.

These proposals mark a deepening of Irish policy reorientation away from a policy which has increasingly encouraged lone parent employment towards a policy which ultimately aims to make labour market participation mandatory – a so-called 'work requirement'. This chapter discusses these issues in detail and provides a context for the research that follows.

3.2 Overview of provision for one-parent families

State support for one-parent families was first introduced in 1935 in the form of income support for widows and orphans. Until the 1970s this was the principal source of support for one-parent families. Unmarried mothers were dependent on discretionary forms of support which were limited and highly stigmatised (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007). The various forms of provision introduced in the 1970s were cumulatively based on the notion of supporting mothers who for varying reasons had no man to support them. There was an underlying assumption that mothers did not participate in the labour market due to their work in the home. The Lone Parents Allowance (LPA) introduced in 1990 forms the basis of the current social security provision for one-parent families and marked the beginning of a more formal employment-led approach (DSFA, 2006). Indeed notably in 1994 a limited earnings disregard was introduced to the means test. As McCashin points out, "Henceforth lone parents were considered workers as much as mothers and the design of social security payments were increasingly geared to facilitating employment" (McCashin, 2004). These changes were part of wider labour market activation measures developed in the 1980s and extended to lone parents in the 1990s (McCashin, 2004). In addition the scheme was now open to both male and female applicants, there was no need to prove desertion and the term 'unmarried mother' was abolished from the scheme. In 1997 the OFP scheme came into effect replacing the Lone Parents Allowance (LPA). It remains the current state support mechanism for one-parent families.

3.2.1 Current welfare provision for lone parents in Ireland

The OFP provides income support to one-parent families but also aims to “support and encourage lone parents to consider employment as an alternative to long-term dependency while at the same time supporting them to remain in the home if that is their wish” (DSFA, 2006). The income provided by the OFP depends on a recipient’s means. Currently the principal incentive to employment contained within the provision is the earnings disregard (DSFA, 2006).

Recipients of the OFP can earn up to the disregard amount without a reduction in their payment. The earnings disregard operates at €146.50 per week as of October 2008. Thus if a recipient’s means are under the disregard level they receive the full payment which amounts to €197.80 per week plus €24 for each dependent child. Over this level 50 per cent of earnings are assessed as means up to a limit of €425. Thus recipients earning between €146.50 and €425 may qualify for a reduced payment.⁵ It has been pointed out that this provision contains a ‘poverty trap’.⁶ Disincentivising earning over the disregard may trap lone parents in low-paid and part-time employment (DSFA, 2006). Indeed a lone parent with one child can drop 42 per cent of her/his net income by moving to a 40-hour wage job⁷ due to the combination of reduced welfare payments, increased rent and cost of childcare (OPEN/EAPN, 2005).

Lone parents receiving the OFP are also entitled to a number of secondary benefits. These include Rent Supplement as well as the Medical Card schemes. Lone parents who have been in receipt of a medical card for over 12 months may retain it for at least three years if they take up insurable employment regardless of income. They may also be entitled to a Doctor Visits card under this scheme. In addition recipients of the OFP working over 19 hours a week are entitled to Family Income Supplement (FIS). This is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with children who are on low pay.

3.2.2 Government’s policy proposals for reforms in state supports for lone parents

In February 2006 the DSFA published a government discussion paper entitled ‘Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents’. This paper sets out proposals for the reform of policy in the area of welfare supports for lone parents. The paper proposes the restructuring of both the OFP and the Qualified Adult Allowances into a household means-tested Parental Allowance (PA) to assist all low-income families. It is proposed that this PA would be time limited and qualified. When the youngest child in the family reaches the age of five, the payment becomes conditional on parents attending meetings with a Department Job Facilitator. These meetings will discuss future education, training and employment options. When the youngest child reaches the suggested age of eight years old, the payment would cease. If the parent is not in employment, (defined for lone parents as a minimum of 19 hours per week) or in education or training they can move on to the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).⁸

5 In addition, those who earn over €25 per week receive a transitional half-rate payment for six months.

6 A poverty trap refers to a situation where there is little or no gain from increased earnings because of loss of benefits and payment of taxes (Millar, 1992: 62)

7 From €97 to €15

8 Job Seekers Allowance was formerly known as Unemployment Assistance

In addition to these reforms, the earnings disregard for the new PA payment would be reduced from €146.50 to €120 but the proportion of means assessed would also be reduced from 50 per cent to 40 per cent. By these means the DSFA proposal seeks to ensure that an incentive exists to enter and increase hours of employment without facing a poverty trap (DSFA, 2006). However, it must be noted that a poverty trap will still exist for parents moving from the PA to the JSA. This arises from the substantial reduction in the income disregard on the JSA compared to the PA. Indeed for a lone parent working 20 hours per week in a minimum wage job this could amount to a reduction of €55 per week (OPEN, 2006).

The Government's proposals also recognise the supports needed to enable lone parents to move off social welfare and into employment, particularly into employment that will have real and positive effects on current poverty levels. Importantly it notes that the "introduction of an activation requirement is predicated on childcare supports being available" and also notes the importance of education and training initiatives. This has led to the setting up of an inter-departmental implementation committee to progress the proposals. Individual departments and state agencies are considering the impact of the proposals on how they specifically support lone parents to progress into meaningful employment and out of poverty and social welfare dependency.

3.2.3 Previous reviews of state supports for one-parent families

In 2000, the DSFA carried out a review of the OFP. This review essentially supported a strategy of incentives and encouragement rather than compulsion (DSFA, 2000). It recommended a proactive approach to employment and accepted that any form of work requirement or time limit on benefit receipt "should not be applied at this time, but that the position should be reviewed when access to childcare, training and education opportunities and progression paths to employment are more supportive, basically when the infrastructure would support a shift in policy" (DSFA, 2000).

Similarly an influential 2003 report by the OECD proposed activation measures in relation to Irish lone parents but also emphasised both the absence and need for supports to enable lone parents to engage in employment. It proposed the "encouragement" of more family friendly workplaces, improved childcare provision and upskilling of lone parents (OECD, 2003). Other reports in this area have all made similar recommendations, most in even stronger terms than the OECD, pointing to the absence of supports to enable lone parents to enter the labour force and calling for increased provision (NESF 2001; Kok 2003; and OPEN 2004). The 2006 proposal, including as it does a policy shift away from encouragement of labour market participation towards a policy of possible mandatory engagement, is not based on any updated research or any review of whether the required infrastructure is now in place.

3.2.4 Activation ideology

Work activation is the term used to describe this policy objective of moving people of working age from social welfare into paid employment (Murphy 2008). This policy emerged from increasing concerns that the social welfare system was too passive and was just in the business of making payments. Increasingly policy suggested that it should become more active ie encouraging, supporting and even forcing welfare claimants to engage in training, education and work (EAPN,

2008). Additionally over the last decade Irish anti-poverty policy has increasingly centred on work activation as the primary route out of poverty (Murphy, 2008). In practice, activation can mean a lot of different things from voluntary participation in career counselling, training or education through to workfare which is compulsory work on a public scheme to maintain a social welfare entitlement (EAPN, 2008). Activation is by no means an exclusively Irish phenomenon but rather reflects the growing international influence of this ideology. Over the past 30 years there has been an increasing emphasis on the responsibility of adults to engage in paid work in European welfare states (Andersen et al, 2005: 173).

In Ireland activation policy is progressed through the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP process) which commenced initially in 1998 and was rolled out nationally in 2003. Currently this applies only to unemployed people ie those receiving JSA (EAPN, 2008). However more recently the government has set a high-level goal to address the issues facing those who are furthest from the labour market. This includes not just people claiming unemployment payments, but all adults of working age who are capable of employment (EAPN, 2008).

In terms of lone parents, the 2006 DSFA policy discussion document 'Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents', as outlined above is rooted firmly in this ideology. Indeed this is clearly noted in the report (DSFA, 2006) as well as in commentary on it (McCashin, 2004; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007).

3.2.5 Profile of lone parents in Ireland

In order to fully appreciate the context of these proposals and accompanying policy reorientation it is important to examine the profile of lone parents in Ireland. This section profiles lone parents on a number of criteria including poverty rates, employment rates, housing and childcare needs.

3.2.6 Growth in one-parent families

The dramatic growth in the numbers of one-parent families in Ireland is central to the current proposals. Two trends influencing the growth in one-parent families in recent times are the growth in rates of divorce and separation and the increase in births outside of marriage (presuming a significant proportion of these are to unpartnered women). Rates of separation and divorce have steadily increased since the latter was introduced in 1996 (CSO, 2007). In addition, while in 1961 non-marital births comprised just 1.7 per cent of all births (McCashin, 2004) today the comparative figure is 31 per cent (CSO, 2007). This is broadly in keeping with international trends (Eurostat, 2006).

The result of these trends in Ireland is that while in 1981 one-parent families with children made up just 7 per cent of all families with children (Fahey, 2006: 398), in 2006 that figure had risen to 22 per cent (CSO, 2007). Indeed between 2002 and 2006 the total number one parent families increased from 153,900 families to 189,200 families⁹ (CSO, 2007c). Today, approximately one in five children in Ireland lives in a one-parent family (CSO, 2007). Comparing international data on European countries, Ireland is middle of the range in terms of its share of one-parent families. Most European countries as well as USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have experienced a long-term trend of a growing number of lone parent families (McCashin, 2004). Also important to note is the gendered nature of the profile of one-parent families. The vast majority of lone parents in Ireland (86 per cent) are

9 Although it must be kept in mind that this increase has been partly due to the revised relationship question in Census 2006 which allows one-parent families living within other households to be better identified.

mothers (CSO, 2007) and, even more strikingly, mothers account for 97.7 per cent of OFP recipients (DSFA, 2006).

A consequence of the increased number of one-parent families in Ireland as well as increases in the payment has been a dramatic rise in the number of claimants of the OFP. Today over 40 per cent of all one-parent families and 68 per cent of one-parent families with children under 20 years old are dependent on the OFP (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007). From 1981 to 2001 the number of lone parents in receipt of social security payments more than doubled and grew at an annual average rate of 7.4 per cent (McCashin, 2004: 169). Thus in December 2007 there were 84,364 claimants of OFP compared to 58,960 in 1997 (Faughnan, 2008). The result of this trend has been a dramatic increase in expenditure on the payment from €338.5 million in 1997 to an estimated €818 million in 2006.

3.2.7 Poverty rates among one-parent families

One of the most striking features of data relating to one-parent families in Ireland is the high rates of poverty that characterise this family form. According to recent policy papers this is the issue of most concern in addressing social security provision for one-parent families (DSFA, 2000, 2006; NESF, 2001; Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007). The at-risk-of poverty rates¹⁰ for lone parent families has decreased in recent years from 48.3 per cent in 2004 (EU-SILC, 2006) to 39.6 per cent in 2006 (EU-SILC, 2006). However this still represents a relatively high rate and lone parents remain an at risk group (EU-SILC, 2006). Moreover members of lone-parent households still experience the highest levels of consistent poverty¹¹ and the percentage of lone parent households experiencing this form of poverty increased from 27 per cent in 2005 to 32.5 per cent in 2006; a rate more than four times the national average (EU-SILC, 2006).

Members of one-parent families also have the highest levels of deprivation in the country, with 64.7 per cent experiencing deprivation (EU-SILC, 2006).¹² In 2006 there were 121,394 children living in one-parent families. Children in lone parent families and larger families have also been identified in the NAP/inclusion to be at greatest risk of poverty (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005).

The just-published ESRI report that provides an in-depth analysis of EU SILC data by household type concludes that: "Lone parent heads of households are quite distinctive in terms of the multi-faceted nature of the deprivation that they experience" (ESRI, 2008).

3.2.8 Employment rates among lone parents

Employment rates among lone parents have also increased in the last decade (McCashin, 2004). Between 2002 and 2006 alone the percentage of lone parents in paid employment increased from 40 per cent to 46 per cent (CSO, 2007). Comparisons of the employment rates of lone parents to parents in couples however can be misleading. A more accurate reflection of the situation can be achieved by differentiating employment rates by gender. Examining the labour force participation

10 The at-risk-of poverty rate is measured by calculating the median income which is the mid-point on the scale of all incomes in the State from the highest to the lowest and setting the line at 60 per cent of the median. People whose incomes fall below this line are said to be *at risk of poverty*.

11 The consistent poverty rate combines *at risk of poverty* with a number of deprivation indicators (e.g. having no substantial meal for at least one day in the past two weeks; getting into debt to pay for ordinary living expenses etc). Source: www.combatpoverty.ie

12 Based on EU-SILC eight basic deprivation indicators

rates for female lone parents compared to mothers in couples reveals that while lone mothers still have a lower participation rate compared to mothers in couples, the difference is not substantial. In 2006, 53.2 per cent of female lone parents with children under 18 were employed compared to 59 per cent of other female parents (CSO, 2007c).

Looking specifically at recipients of the OFP, the majority of recipients already work. In 2004, 59 per cent were in some form of employment. However, 43 per cent of these were earning less than €146.50 per week (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007). This suggests that the majority of lone parents on the OFP are in employment but tend to be concentrated in low paid, part-time employment (DSFA, 2006).

3.2.9 The link between poverty and employment

The link between poverty and employment is at the core of the proposals for reforming social security in this area. The central idea is that removing obstacles to employment will facilitate lone parents to achieve financial independence and reduce the rates of poverty. Indeed the DSFA publication concludes that, “employment has proven to be a major factor for people exiting out of poverty and also influences quality of life and social well-being” (DSFA, 2006). In respect of this assertion the publication cites the following: households with two adults employed have a four per cent risk of poverty. Households with one adult employed have a 10 per cent risk of poverty and households with no adult employed have a 74 per cent risk of poverty (DSFA, 2006).

It is important to note, however, that this assertion may somewhat oversimplify the problem. There is much evidence to suggest that employment in itself does not guarantee freedom from poverty and low incomes. Indeed the European Commission recently pointed out in their discussion on poverty for lone parents that “the relationship between employment rates and risk of poverty is a complex one” (European Commission, 2006: 92). They suggest that wider issues such as the quality of employment and wage levels as well as the degree of support through tax and benefit transfers are of crucial importance (European Commission, 2006).

In 2005, 33 per cent of those in consistent poverty in Ireland were living in working households and 46 per cent of those at risk of poverty were living in working households (Rocks, 2007). Employment is by no means a guaranteed route out of poverty. If lone parents merely enter low paid employment in a low transfer tax/benefit system it seems unlikely that poverty levels will be improved. In this sense the quality of employment into which lone parents enter as well as the level of social transfers they receive are issues that must be addressed.

3.2.10 Education and lone parents

Quality of employment is highly influenced by educational attainment and lone parents in Ireland are further characterised by low levels of educational attainment. While 8 per cent of other parents have

only a primary level of education or below, the figure for lone parents is 13 per cent. Furthermore, while 34 per cent of other parents have achieved third-level education, only 23 per cent of lone parents have (CSO, 2007c). Regardless of family status, those with lower educational levels are more likely to be inactive in the labour market. In 2005 the inactivity rates for women aged 25-54 who had attained less than upper secondary level education was more than 50 per cent (Eurostat 2006b).

In addition, low educational attainment has poverty implications. According to EU-SILC, almost 30 per cent of adults in Ireland who had no more than a primary level education were at risk of poverty. The risk was halved to 14.8 per cent for persons with a higher secondary education. Less than four per cent of persons with a third level degree or above were considered to be at risk (EU-SILC, 2006). Importantly the National Economic and Social Forum have suggested that lone parents with low levels of educational attainment are most likely to be accessing low wage jobs in the labour market (NESF, 2001).

3.2.11 Housing and lone parents

A further pronounced characteristic of lone parents relates to housing tenure. A recent review found that lone parents are disproportionately likely to be on local authority waiting lists for housing (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007). Strikingly, while one-parent families constitute only 22 per cent of all families with children under 20, in 2005 they made up 38 per cent of all households in need of housing, and 75 per cent of all households with children in need of housing. Of those one-parent families waiting to be housed in 2005, 65 per cent were in private rented accommodation (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007).

This high dependency amongst lone parents means that Rent Supplement is “perhaps the most important” (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007) secondary benefit for lone parents. In 2006, 17 per cent of OFP recipients were also claiming support under the Rent Supplement scheme (14,397 people) (DSFA, 2007b). This constituted 24 per cent of all those on Rent Supplement in that year (DSFA, 2007b). The importance of the Rent Supplement can be gauged from the necessary levels of support provided by the supplement. This ranges from a high €1000 a month in Dublin to €140 a week in Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly. Hence as has been pointed out, “the employment opportunities for lone parents would need to significantly increase their income to compensate for the loss of rent supplement” (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2006). This in effect creates an employment disincentive or unemployment trap for those lone parents on the OFP and Rent Supplement (Norris, 2006: xiv).

While the DSFA is working to reduce the poverty trap implicit in Rent Supplement by introducing a more gradual tapering of reductions in Rent Supplement as income levels increase, the total removal of this trap will require a substantial change in the way that long-term housing needs are met¹³.

13 Since July 2007 some reforms have been made to remove some of the difficulties associated with this poverty trap. For example if you qualify for the Rental Accommodation Scheme and have not been employed or have not been employed full-time for the previous 12 months (but are now in full-time employment) you may be able to retain your Rent Supplement. Recipients who were part of a Community Employment Scheme (CE), Area Enterprise Scheme or getting the Back to Work Allowance immediately before they take up full-time employment may also retain the supplement. This is subject to reassessment of increased income after a certain time period (www.welfare.ie)

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), which was introduced in 2004, is intended to tackle the employment disincentive in the Rent Supplement. RAS is available to lone parents who have been claiming Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer and allows recipients to work full-time and retain this benefit. There is no upper limit on earnings. Instead 15 per cent of a recipient's earnings are taken in respect of rent.

However in November 2006 only 2,600 tenants had been accommodated under RAS (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2007: 18). In addition a review of the scheme indicated that the RAS may give rise to a perverse incentive whereby recipients are encouraged to continue claiming Rent Supplement into the long term in order to qualify for entry to RAS (Norris, 2006: xiv).

3.2.12 Childcare and lone parents

Lone parents, along with other parents have access to a number of childcare supports. However, the childcare infrastructure in Ireland is relatively underdeveloped and the current social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* contains the following statement:

"The Government and social partners agree to continue to work together over a ten-year period to develop an infrastructure to provide quality, affordable childcare and to work towards increasing the supply of childcare places (of all types) by 100,000 over this period. This will be achieved through a combination of the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010, appropriate successor programme(s) and other providers. This strategy aims to increase the number of available childcare places as well as to target the early childhood needs of disadvantaged children. It also includes a commitment to encourage school facilities to be made available to support after school childcare provision. Recent additional supports for childcare in Ireland include the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) and the Early Childcare Supplement."

The CCSS is described as follows: "The CCSS is a support scheme for community childcare services to enable them to charge reduced childcare fees to parents who are disadvantaged or on lower incomes. This new system is more responsive to changing parental profiles than the previous funding scheme, and provides services with higher levels of funding, thereby further reducing the fees charged of parents in these services." (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs website: www.omc.gov.ie)

The Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) is a direct, non-taxable payment, to be paid at the end of each quarter for each child under six years of age who receives Child Benefit. The payment amounts to €275 per quarter (€1,100 per year) for each eligible child. The full quarterly payment is due for each child who is aged under six at any time during that quarter. However Budget 2009 reduced the age limit of the payment such that from 2009 the Early Childcare Supplement will be paid to children up to 5½ years of age.

Overall childcare support in Ireland remains weak by international standards. The OECD has estimated that parents in Ireland spend around 20 per cent of their income on childcare (OECD, 2006). The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) has estimated that lone parents in Ireland with two children (on the average industrial wage) spend between 33 per cent and 43 per cent of their earnings on childcare. Moreover lone parents on the minimum wage with two children spend between 61 per cent and 78 per cent of income on childcare costs (NWC, 2005).

Commenting on the childcare infrastructure in Ireland, the OECD in a recent report states that:

“Child support is paid whether the parents are working or not. In order to help families, the 2006 Budget introduced a new cash transfer for families with young children. Similar to the existing Child Benefit, the Early Childcare Supplement is paid universally regardless of parents’ labour force status and regardless of whether they are purchasing childcare services or not. This is an extremely expensive solution that involves considerable deadweight costs, but was chosen to reflect public preferences for not discriminating against mothers at home. From a labour supply point of view, it would be more effective if over time childcare supports such as the Early Childcare Supplement became linked to employment status or to the use of formal childcare.

“Out-of-school-hours care is almost non-existent and is one reason why the employment rate of mothers with children is especially low. The 2006 Budget announced measures to create 5 000 places in after-school care by 2010. Labour supply could be increased by encouraging school boards to make their facilities available for after-school care.”

This OECD report goes on to say that:

“Ireland has a large number of sole parents and their employment rate is low. This reduces labour supply, but more importantly it contributes to child poverty: nearly half of children in non-working single-parent families live in consistent poverty. International experience shows that the most effective way to reduce child poverty is for the parent to be working. Ireland should move away from passive income support and instead move to a mutual obligations approach to assist and encourage single-parent mothers to find a foothold in the labour market, at least once their children have reached a certain age. Options include reducing the phase-out rate of the One Parent Family Benefit (because it creates a low-activity trap) and allowing parents who return to work to keep some of their other benefits such as the rent supplement and free medical care (perhaps for a limited time). As part of this package, job-search requirements should be increased for sole parents whose children are at school. Of course, most of this would have to wait until job support, childcare and out-of-school-hours care programmes are expanded.”

(Economic survey of Ireland, OECD, 2006)

3.3 Summary

To summarise, the environment in which this study has been undertaken is one in which:

- The issue of lone parents and employment has become a key area for policy reform in Ireland today. This is due to the combination of a growing number of one-parent families dependent on social welfare and the high poverty levels found among such families.
- Such policy reform is taking place within an Irish and international policy climate that supports greater activation of social welfare recipients as the main means of reducing poverty rates among different groups in their labour market, including lone parents.
- One-parent families are characterised by relatively high rates of poverty, low educational attainment and poor housing tenure.
- Lone parents are normally seen to have low rates of employment but a more accurate reflection of the situation can be achieved by differentiating employment rates by gender. This analysis suggests that female lone parents’ labour market participation is only slightly lower than female parents with dependent children in two-parent households.
- It is estimated that almost 60 per cent of OFP recipients are in some form of employment.

- Over 40 per cent of these parents are earning below the income disregard level, indicating that many are in low-paid, part-time work.
- Lone parents, like other low-income parents have limited access to affordable, quality childcare, especially out of school hours care. This has a negative effect on employment rates and is an issue that must be addressed if new policies aimed at increasing the employment rate of such parents are to be effective.
- These findings highlight the fact that reforms in the way that the State supports lone parents must be based on the recognition that many lone parents are already working. Policies to increase their employment rate are unlikely to be effective in reducing poverty rates, unless accompanied by measures to address existing poverty traps, to raise educational levels and qualifications and to significantly increase the availability of affordable, quality childcare, especially out-of-hours care.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE AND POLICY REVIEW

4.1 Introduction

The first section of this chapter reviews domestic research regarding the issues that lone parents in Ireland face in progressing off social welfare and into paid employment. Each sub-section begins with a review of the seminal research on the issue and then moves to discuss more recent literature. In addition it compares some of the relevant comparative international research on this theme. The second section gives an outline of specific policies in other countries aimed at supporting lone parents moving into employment.

4.2 Moving into paid employment: experiences of lone parents

In this section empirical research in both Ireland and abroad on the experiences of lone parents moving from social welfare into paid employment is reviewed. Issues that are examined include:

- attitudes to employment and parenting;
- poverty and unemployment traps;
- childcare;
- education level ;
- family-flexible employment;
- perceptions of child welfare; and
- security of payment and mental health.

4.2.1 Attitudes to employment and parenting

There is an absence of quantitative research at a national level in Ireland on the combination desired by lone parents of paid work and parenting. However the available locally based studies all indicate the positive orientation of most lone parents towards work. Indeed these studies indicate that most lone parents perceive considerable personal benefits from taking up work or training but point to barriers which disenable participation. This has been the finding of research undertaken in Ireland at a sub-national level (Russell and Corcoran, 2001; Millar et al, 2007; Cavan Lone Parents Initiative, 2007) as well as internationally (Russell, Smyth et al, 2002).

However it is also important to note that recent mixed-method research examining the labour market needs and social exclusion of one-parent families in Galway found that many parents felt their role as parents was not adequately valued and more value should be put on this role (Miller et al, 2007).

Examining data on mothers in European countries, Gerhard et al (2005) conclude, "When one compares the patterns of family policy with the employment rate of mothers, it becomes clear that there is a relation. It appears that when the policy package offers women a choice most of them elect to be in the labour market" (Gerhard et al, 2005:133). At the same time other research points out that "many mothers feel torn between children and work" (Daly and Klammer, 2005). It is possible that while many mothers want to work, those wishes are mediated by parental and childcare responsibilities (Coakley, 2005). Where the context of work does not support an ethic of

care (through for example family-friendly policies, parental leave and part-time employment) the wish to work may be negatively influenced.

However lone parents are “not a homogenous group” (Miller et al, 2007) and it seems likely that parents express different work preferences, particularly over their life cycle. Indeed comparative research in the UK shows a figure of around 10 per cent of lone parents on income supports expressing no wish to enter paid employment (Bryson et al, 1997: 97). The assessment of these preferences amongst Irish lone parents is an important objective of this research project.

4.2.2 Poverty and unemployment traps

Irish research in this area suggested that lone mothers in Ireland face an unemployment trap in relation to work participation. Early research suggested that this trap was created by the social security system and the means-tested Lone Parents Allowance (McCashin, 1993). However in 1994 social security provision for lone parents was reformed, introducing an earnings disregard into the payment. Research conducted after this reform (1996) concluded that while lone parents were positively oriented towards work, childcare costs, travel-to-work costs, income tax and PRSI deductions from wages erode much of the financial gains from work. Thus a disincentive to earn above the earnings disregard exists with the effect that many lone parents may become trapped in low-paid part-time employment (McCashin, 1996). This conclusion is substantiated by the DSFA discussion paper ‘Poverty and Lone Parents’ (DSFA, 2006). In addition, while the One-Parent Family Payment (OPF) itself may not create an unemployment trap, research suggests that the structure of secondary benefits, notably Rent Supplement, may present such a barrier (McCashin, 1996; Russell and Corcoran, 2001; Norris, 2006; Millar et al, 2007; OPEN/EAPN 2006). Indeed Miller et al found that “the impact of withdrawal of secondary benefits and allowances is detrimental to the lives of those parenting alone and their children. The fear of losing benefits deters many parents from contemplating engaging in paid employment” (Miller et al, 2007). This indicates that despite recent policy shifts, significant barriers to employment remain.

Research has also indicated how in some cases, perceived rather than actual financial disincentives to the take-up of employment act as a significant barrier. Research by Harrington (2004) for example found that “the complex nature of the interaction between the social welfare and tax systems results in the proliferation of mis-information particularly in relation to how individuals stand financially upon taking up various forms of education/training and employment”. This was further substantiated by the Galway research which indicated that parents found regulations governing benefits financed by the DSFA “complex and confusing” and that ultimately this served to “discourage them from taking up training, education or employment opportunities” (Miller et al, 2007). Thus a lack of clear, up-to-date information on a range of issues including childcare payments, entitlements and training eligibility can also act as barriers to accessing suitable opportunities (Miller et al, 2007).

4.2.3 Childcare

McCashin’s (1996) study highlighted affordable and accessible childcare as a vital support to enable employment for lone parents. This has been mirrored in the findings of a number of more recent qualitative and quantitative studies on this topic in Ireland (NESF, 2000; Russell and Corcoran, 2001; Millar et al, 2007; Cavan Lone Parents Initiative, 2007). Indeed the most recent study by Miller et al (2007) found that the absence of childcare and in particular affordable, accessible, flexible childcare is deemed by many lone parents in Galway to be a key barrier to entering employment or taking up training and educational opportunities. Irish data emerging from the DFSA consultative fora also

concluded that for lone parents, childcare is a “very large” barrier to employment and emphasised that for lone parents who work, the bulk of their earnings go on childcare (Daly, 2005).

Interestingly, a mixed method study by the Ballymun Job Centre (2004) of its overall female client base found that caring responsibilities were the number one barrier to participation for those who had not accessed employment, those who accessed employment but were no longer employed and progression for those employed. This could indicate a general barrier to female participation in employment especially where clients have a low skill base. Presumably this barrier may be exacerbated where the mother is the sole carer. In addition to childcare support this report recommended the provision of pre-school and after-school care arrangements as well as practical support for carers in managing unanticipated domestic care needs that affect work attendance (Harrington, 2004). Substantiating these findings a recent OECD report examined the obstacles to employment for women in Ireland and suggested that a lack of childcare is the key reason why participation rates are low relative to those in the OECD generally (OECD, 2006a).

International comparative research has come to a similar conclusion regarding the importance of childcare provisions. Indeed the principal finding of Bradshaw’s (1996) seminal cross-national study of lone parents and employment was that “probably the most important factor of all is the availability of good-quality, flexible and affordable childcare. Childcare alone is not enough, but without it other measures will prove fruitless” (Bradshaw, 1996). The importance of childcare as an enabling mechanism has been verified in a myriad of other more recent research reports internationally (including Duskin, 1990; Millar, 1996; Clark et al, 2001). In addition to this, research has pointed to the importance of mothers’ perceptions of their childrens’ needs and hence the importance of access not just to childcare, but to reliable, quality childcare (Millar, 1996; Clark et al, 2001).

In relation to childcare provision in Ireland, only 12 per cent of children aged less than three are in registered childcare compared to the OECD average of 29 per cent and rates reaching 54 per cent and 65 per cent in the United States and Sweden (OECD, 2006). This OECD report found that a major difficulty for parents in Ireland is the lack of after-school care since only 2.2 per cent of primary school children were enrolled in after-school programmes in 2002 (OECD, 2006). The report also emphasised that by international comparison, parents in Ireland face the highest level of net childcare costs among OECD countries. It highlighted that low public spending has led to the dominance of private sector provision and that the associated cost of this has become prohibitive for low and even middle-income families (OECD, 2006). The expense of the childcare burden for parents who work is clearly shown in the fact that parents in Ireland have been found to pay on average 20 per cent of their average earnings on childcare, compared with parents in other European countries who on average pay 8 per cent (OECD, 2006).

4.2.4 Low pay, education and family-friendly flexible employment

Seminal qualitative research by McCashin emphasised that even if lone parents re-enter paid employment, their skill levels and education levels and employment histories may consign many of them to insecure, low paid, marginal employment (McCashin, 1997). In addition this study found a very sharp relationship between educational attainment and labour market participation. Similarly, Bradshaw and Millar (1991) found that low pay (along with childcare) was one of the two main barriers to employment and that this was related to low levels of education amongst lone mothers. More recently these findings have been substantiated by Miller et al (2007) who found that the absence of well-paid employment opportunities may preclude entrance to the labour market. In

addition it must be noted that lone mothers from ethnic minority backgrounds may face additional language barriers in seeking employment.

Given the low levels of educational attainment associated with lone parenthood, Irish, UK and EU-wide research has emphasised the importance of access to education and vocational training for lone parents entering employment (McCashin, 1996; Clark et al, 2001; Millar et al, 2007). However research in Ireland has also indicated that both the financial cost and the inability to undertake other activities whilst participating in education and training can act as major deterrents to further participation (Harrington, 2004). Research by Harrington (2004) into barriers to employment faced by female clients of the Ballymun Job Centre identified an additional dimension to the education barrier concluding that, “one of the strongest barriers identified in the study was the lack of understanding by the participants of the relationship between education/training and outcomes such as securing employment, employment stability over one’s lifetime, career progression and potential income”. Thus it may be additionally vital for support to emphasise to parents the importance and relevance of education and training.

Miller et al found that the absence of flexible employment opportunities and in particular the inability to take time off at short notice is an important consideration for lone parents (Miller et al, 2007). However jobs affording flexible family-friendly employment conditions may not be easily sourced, especially where human capital levels are low. Additionally research has indicated that lone parents’ need for flexibility in employment can lead parents to compromise job quality or rights in exchange for flexibility. For example a qualitative examination of low-income working families in Britain following reform in that jurisdiction found that some working parents were accepting low pay or acceding to unreasonable demands from their employers in return for a minimal degree of flexibility to accommodate their needs as parents. Others fearing competition from other workers without parental responsibility or from undocumented migrant workers, were prepared to forego or else felt disadvantaged by their new entitlements (Dean, 2001).

4.2.5 Security of payment

Studies have in different ways pointed out that for lone parents the financial incentives of employment may not be as important as ensuring an ongoing sense of financial security and stability. As Millar states: “The idea that financial incentives are the only, or even the most important factor determining lone mothers’ employment decisions seems particularly inadequate... policies which focus simply on the immediate financial arithmetic of ‘returning to work’ may be somewhat misplaced” (Millar, 1996).

In this regard, UK research has pointed to the quite complex ways in which financial and economic decisions are made by lone parents. Notably the stability and security of their incomes, rather than the amount of their incomes, can be an important incentive (McLoughlin, Millar and Cooke, 1989; Clark et al, 2001). The recent (2007) study of one-parent families in Galway provided some evidence of this in the Irish context finding that financial security was a stated desire of many of the participants (Miller et al, 2007).

4.2.6 Perceptions of child welfare

Research has consistently provided evidence indicating that lone parents’ perception of the needs and welfare of their children is a particularly important factor in any decisions regarding employment (McCashin, 1996; Russell and Corcoran, 2001; Clark et al, 2001). Indeed Miller et al (2007) recently

substantiated these findings indicating that in taking up employment, education or training, “a key concern for many parents is the well-being, both physical and psychological, of their children”.

Duncan and Edward’s mixed method research in the UK led them to argue the importance of “gendered moral rationalities”, asserting that the decisions lone mothers make about paid work are not simply determined by financial considerations, but through mothers’ individual beliefs about what constitutes “good” mothering (Duncan and Edwards, 1997). Similar propositions have emerged from research findings in Ireland. From their qualitative study of lone mothers Leane and Kiely hypothesised that the idealisation of the home-based mother in Irish society may be internalised by the single lone mother seeking to confirm her standing as a good mother (Leane and Kiely, 1997). More recently research emanating from the DSFA consultative fora suggested that lone parents must make a particular calculation when weighing up considerations around employment or staying at home. This calculation, Daly proposed, may lead lone parents to feel that they have an additional responsibility to be there for their children and so may act as a disincentive to employment (Daly, 2005). In a similar vein the recent research on one-parent families in Galway found that many parents suffer a sense of guilt about leaving their children to attend work, training or educational courses (Miller et al, 2007).

4.2.7 Mental health

A final point to note is the substantial research documenting elevated levels of common mental health disorders (such as anxiety and depression) among single mothers compared with partnered mothers (eg, Butterworth, 2004; Wang, 2004; Hope et al, 1999). In an analysis of the Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being, Butterworth (2004) found approximately 45 per cent of single mothers experienced a common mental disorder in the previous 12 months, compared to 23.6 per cent of partnered mothers.

A range of factors have been proposed in the international literature to explain the higher prevalence of mental health problems among single mothers, including financial hardship, unemployment, lack of social support, the responsibility of caring for children, the consequences of divorce and separation, trauma (eg domestic violence), childhood adversity and socio-economic disadvantage (Brown and Moran, 1997; Butterworth, 2004; Hope et al, 1999; Meltzer et al, 1995; Weich et al, 1998). Whelan’s 1992 quantitative analysis of an Irish sample found that deprivation mediated the influence of family income on mental health (Whelan, 1992). Recent international research suggests that the most powerful predictor of negative mental health amongst lone mothers is financial deprivation. This was the finding of Hope’s longitudinal analysis (Hope et al, 1999) as well as a recent analysis of cross-sectional data from a large, nationally representative longitudinal Australian household survey (Crosier et al, 2007). The latter research found that socio-demographic, household income, financial hardship and social support accounted for 94 per cent of the association between single mother status and poor mental health (Crosier et al, 2007).

Importantly mental health and unemployment have been shown to mutually influence each other, that is, while the perceived characteristics of the situation of being unemployed affect mental health, mental health may also influence the chances of being unemployed (Taris, 2002). Indeed research in the US and New Zealand has demonstrated how poor mental health can prevent lone parents from getting and keeping jobs even when unemployment rates are low (Baker and Tippin, 2004).

Irish research has also found that “poverty, housing insecurity and stigma have a very real impact on parents’ well-being including their physical and mental health” (Miller et al, 2007) while the Irish

Women's Health Council recently identified lone mothers as a vulnerable group in terms of their physical and mental wellbeing (Women's Health Council, 2005).

Recent research by OPEN (2007) involving consultation with lone parent groups and with service providers found that:

"An overwhelming majority of participants in the research – 90 per cent – indicated that they had experienced depression... Participants also noted that anxiety, stress and depression have an effect on the quality of their parenting – 76 per cent felt that their parenting was affected and 62 per cent said this affected their children."

4.2.8 Lone parents from new communities

Although 22 per cent of OFP recipients are estimated to be non-Irish (DSFA, 2008), little research has been carried out on lone parents from new communities in Ireland. Millar et al (2007) also found that almost 20 per cent of their Galway sample was from non-Irish communities. Of these over 23 per cent had experienced some form of racism when they had tried to look for employment. They were also more likely to have English literacy and numeric problems than Irish lone parents in the Galway area.

During 2002, 61 interviews were conducted with lone parents from ethnic minorities in the UK to ascertain their experiences and attitudes of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). Many of the interviewees were non-English speakers or had little English language skills and therefore had limited awareness or understanding of the NDLP. This had contributed to them not attending their first NDLP interview (Pettigrew 2004). This was also a contributing factor to their poor confidence in attending interview for possible employment. Other key findings of the study were that many had a high dependency on family for childcare support and those from Asian communities were reluctant to enter the labour market as they believed women in the workplace was culturally unacceptable.

4.3 Key findings

Domestic and international research shows that lone parents continue to face significant barriers in accessing and participating in the labour market and in combining their work and caring roles. Research findings are consistent across time and across countries:

- Lone parents are positively motivated towards work and recognise the considerable positive benefits that derive from work for them and their families but they experience many barriers to participation.
- Decisions regarding employment are mediated by their key concern which is for the needs and welfare of their children. Thus when these welfare issues cannot be reconciled with employment, the desire to work may not be realised.
- Lone parents are not a homogenous group and are likely to express different work preferences at different life stages.
- Due to the financial cost of going to work (eg loss of secondary benefits, childcare and transport costs), work does not pay for some lone parents who may be trapped in welfare dependency and in part-time employment.
- Perceived as well as actual disincentives to employment may act as a barrier in some cases, highlighting the importance of access to good-quality information.

- The absence of affordable, accessible and flexible childcare has been identified in many studies as the key barrier to employment for lone parents.
- Low levels of educational attainment may trap many lone parents in low-paid jobs which make work financially unrewarding when the costs of going to work, including childcare, are taken into account.
- Flexible family-friendly employment is a requirement for many lone parents in balancing their parenting responsibilities with work. However such employment conditions may not be easily sourced, especially where skill and qualification levels are low.
- Lone parents view the security and stability of their income as an important issue when considering employment. Studies have in different ways pointed out that for lone parents an ongoing sense of financial security and stability may be more important than financial incentives.
- Some lone parents experience mental health difficulties due primarily to financial stress and related pressures. Poor mental health may act as a barrier to employment and stability of employment.
- English language difficulties, discrimination and a lack of knowledge of the labour market can be additional barriers for ethnic minority lone parents' participation in employment.

The survey of lone parents carried out for this study will examine the extent to which these factors impact on the employment experience of lone parents on the OFP throughout Ireland.

4.4 Supports for lone parents accessing the labour market: international comparative policy

In this section we examine available research on the outcomes of welfare to work or activation programmes in other countries.

4.4.1 Effectiveness of work requirements

Activation policy may be implemented by means of a work requirement. The DSFA (2006) discussion document proposed that once children reach a certain age, parents who are on OFP should be work tested. A work requirement usually requires recipients to register as unemployed and to establish in various ways that they are actively looking for work (Millar, 2005). As can be seen from the table below no necessary correlation has been found between applying a work requirement and the likelihood of lone mothers being in paid employment.

Table 4.1 Work test for lone mothers and employment rates for lone mothers with dependent children

Country	Work requirement for lone parents	Dependent on age of child	Age of child ¹⁴	% of lone mothers with dependent children in employment
Australia	Yes	Yes	5	46 (2000)
Austria	Yes	Yes. Subject to childcare provision	3	80 (1999)
Belgium	Yes	Discretion	-	59 (1997)
Canada	Yes	Yes	6	51 (1996)
Denmark	Yes	No. Subject to childcare	-	73 (1995)
Finland	Yes	Yes	4	65 (1998)
France	No	-	-	66 (2001)
Germany	Yes	Yes	3	67 (2000)
Greece	No	-	-	75 (1996)
Ireland	No	-	-	53 (1999)
Italy	Yes	Yes	3	65 (1998)
Japan	Yes	Yes	1	83 (1999)
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	6	82 (2000)
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	5	42 (1997)
New Zealand	No	-	- (was 11)	45 (2001)
Norway	Yes	Yes	3	68 (1999)
Portugal	No	-	-	88 (1996)
Spain	No	-	-	68 (1991)
Sweden	Yes	No	-	68 (1998)
UK	No. But compulsory - interview	-	-	52 (2000)
USA	Yes	Yes	1 (3 months)	68 (2000)

Source: Murphy (2008)

While some countries with a work requirement such as Austria, Denmark and Luxembourg, have high rates of employment amongst lone mothers, others such as the Netherlands and Canada do not. Equally some countries with no work requirement have a low rate of labour market participation amongst lone mothers (Ireland, UK) while other countries with the same policy have high rates of employment (Portugal, Spain, Greece). Indeed employment rates in Portugal where there is no work requirement are higher (88 per cent) than in most countries with a work requirement. An OECD-

14 Definitions of lone parenthood differ by age of child, ranging from under 18 years old in France and Germany, under 15 in Austria and Ireland and under 20 in Japan. It is not clear how or whether women on parental or maternity leave are counted in such figures (Murphy, 2008)

wide review of labour market activation evaluations shows little results from activation programmes (Murphy, 2008). Such a finding points to the fact that work requirements do not exist in a vacuum.

The available research indicates that activation of lone mothers needs to be accompanied by changes in the tax benefit system alongside other policy changes aimed at addressing childcare and supporting family-friendly employment practices (Bradshaw et al, 2005). In this context Murphy states, "Lone parents... will benefit from a regime that is parent-friendly and child-friendly and Ireland has much to do in this regard" (Murphy, 2008).

The research also highlights how other issues that affect the rate of employment amongst lone mothers need to be understood, including the role of mothers as main carers, and the impact this has upon the desirability and accessibility of paid work. These include for example, the preferences of lone mothers between career and caring (Hakim, 2000); gender equity in unpaid work; and family policies that support maternal employment (Gornick, 1999).

In her recent discourse on the activation debate, Murphy concluded her analysis of work requirements as follows:

"Overall evaluations demonstrate that activation approaches alone will not suffice, that in-work benefits, flexible employment and wrap-around childcare are essential and that, as the UK and New Zealand experiences demonstrate, voluntary activation policy achieves as much as mandatory activation policy." (Murphy, 2008)

4.4.2 Childcare supports

The context in which a work requirement is implemented is critical to its impact (McCashin, 2004). In this respect countries diverge greatly in the level of support they provide to lone parents entering employment. The level of childcare provision between countries provides a good illustration of this. Childcare is provided in many different settings and the form, complexity and extent of subsidies from the state vary (Hilard, 2001). The tax system may be used to reduce the cost of supporting or paying the carer and this may take the form of a tax relief, an allowance or a tax credit.

Tax relief for paid childcare has been available in the US since the 1970s but could not be used for care provided by relatives. France introduced a form of tax relief for carers employed in the home in 1986 but made it conditional on the carer receiving payment of at least the minimum wage and guaranteed protection of their pension rights (Hilard, 2001). The various welfare-to-work programmes provide support for childcare as without it any compulsions to participate either in the programme or in employment would be impossible (Hilard, 2001). In the US this may take the form of a directly sponsored place or reimbursement of receipted childcare expenses. The Australian scheme also pays subsidies directly to the childcare provider in the formal sector. The UK system is more complex. The childcare tax credit is really a cash benefit which may be paid directly to the caring parent or via the employer in the earning parent's wage packet. It can pay up to 70 per cent of the cost of formal childcare. However care provided in the child's own home is excluded (Hilard, 2001).

Compared to other OECD countries, the Nordic states tend to provide a high level of support to parents in terms of early childhood development education. An examination of Sweden provides an interesting case study in this regard. Childcare in Sweden is specifically organised so that parents can combine parenthood with work or study and is financed mainly out of public funds. By law all children aged one to twelve years have a right to childcare as long as both parents work or study, and a childcare place must be provided within three to four months after application (OECD,

2002:177). In terms of finance, the Swedish state meets around 89 per cent of the costs of childcare (Pond, 2007). This includes the provision of universal pre-school comprising up to 525 hours of care per year free of charge for all four to six year olds of employed or studying parents. In addition there is a maximum ceiling set on the fees payable by parents for their children and the fee charged may not exceed between one and three per cent of family income.

According to the OECD: "The comprehensive support for Swedish parents trying to reconcile their work and family commitments contributes to some impressive outcomes" (OECD, 2007). More than 70 per cent of mothers with children and 80 per cent of lone mothers have jobs. Such high maternal employment rates keep child poverty rates very low at just four per cent (OECD, 2007).

A recent ESRI report (2008) emphasised the relationship between compulsory work tests and childcare provision pointing out that activation in the Scandinavian countries is typically compulsory but that this is in the context of "an excellent and fully fledged childcare system, making it possible for families, including lone parent families, to combine work and care." As the ESRI points out this context does not (yet) exist in Ireland. The extent of compulsion in Ireland needs to be linked to the extent of accessible childcare provision (ESRI, 2008).

4.4.3 Family-friendly employment

As the previous section indicated, the existence of accessible family-friendly employment is important for lone parents seeking employment. Such measures allow lone parents to better combine working with parenting responsibilities, to take time out from work when the need arises and to facilitate parental choice within the workplace.

Many countries have introduced statutory rights for parents who work in order to facilitate a better work-life balance. The OECD have pointed out that parental leave is, "an essential component of any strategy to support working parents with very young children" (OECD, 2004). Some countries have introduced highly developed policies in this regard. Maternity pay in Denmark is the most generous within the EU, with an entitlement equivalent to 22 weeks on full pay. Parental leave in Sweden is sufficiently flexible to allow parents or carers to organise and arrange time off as they themselves desire up to 13 months at 80 per cent of earned income plus an additional three more months at a relatively low benefit not related to income (Hoem, 2005). Similar provisions exist in other Nordic states. In Germany, parents are entitled to leave of up to three years from the time of birth. This includes income-dependent benefit for up to 24 months.

Belgium has been one of the pioneers of measures allowing career breaks for parents. Under Belgian law, each parent is able to take full-time parental leave for three months or to reduce hours for six months up to the child's fourth birthday. Pay is provided by the state at a flat rate (Hardy and Adnett, 2002). In countries such as Sweden and Germany there also exists an unconditional right to part-time work (Hoem, 2005). In addition, Swedish parents have a legal right to take up to 60 days off per year at 80 per cent of their salary to care for a sick child (Korip, 2004).

Other countries also allow for similar provision. For example German parents are entitled to ten paid days off per child per year (max 25 days) to care for sick children (Hoem, 2005). Dutch female employees enjoy the highest incidence of flexitime working in the EU. Parents are allowed to take six months leave until the child is a maximum of eight years old, and are entitled to reduce their working hours for a period of six months at any time until the child's eighth birthday. This reduction in hours is unpaid, unless reduced hours take a lone parent below social insurance. As in Germany, parents in the Netherlands now have the statutory right to change working hours.

4.4.4 Exemptions from activation

The general situation within OECD countries now is that lone parents with children of school-going age are expected to participate (Murphy, 2008). However there is considerable diversity concerning the actual application of work requirements. Notably, in many countries work requirements are conditional on the availability of certain supports and exemptions exist in certain circumstances. In other countries exemptions are absent from policy.

Some countries exempt mothers caring for a family member with a temporary or long-term disability or allow for parental choices, such as home parenting, as in the case of New Zealand (Murphy, 2008: 26). In Germany, Austria and Denmark, the work test is conditional on a guaranteed childcare place. In the US no sanctions can be applied if adequate childcare cannot be found when children are under six (Murphy, 2008). Italy, Finland and Norway do not guarantee a place for a child but work test all parents (Murphy, 2008). In Belgium and the Netherlands there is significant local discretion, while in Japan and Norway work tests are strictly applied in a national framework (Murphy, 2008). Germany has a moderate work test aimed at part-time work. Spain, France and Portugal have no work test but social integration clauses attached to receipt of minimum income can require labour market insertion (Murphy, 2008).

These findings indicate the complexities in practice of a work requirement for lone parents and suggest that such requirements need to be customised for local conditions, especially to the availability of childcare supports, as well as to prevailing attitudes to parenting and parental choice. Indeed Murphy (2008) has suggested that: “imposition of work requirements will not be seen to be reasonable unless transparent exemptions are clearly available and unless case workers are allowed a degree of accountable discretion” (Murphy, 2008).

4.4.5 Making work pay

Recent policy discussion in Ireland has highlighted increasing concern about the growing numbers of what are referred to as the ‘working poor’. The working poor are measured as individuals who are themselves in work but who live in a household that is poor or at risk of poverty (ESRI, 2008). In Ireland 17 per cent of adults who are at risk of poverty are in work (ESRI, 2008). Thus it is clear that work in itself is not necessarily a remedy for poverty.

Moreover a recent review of welfare-to-work policy and child poverty found “clear evidence that increased employment among lone parents only benefits children where incomes rise” (Gregg, Harkness & Smith, 2007). Furthermore it found that for teenage children, increased employment among lone mothers results in adverse effects on children unless incomes rise significantly. The income effects on young children’s development are substantively positive and are shown experimentally (Gregg, Harkness & Smith, 2007). When welfare groups get help to move into work but with no extra income, the children do not improve maths and reading test scores; when incomes are supplemented test scores rise (Gregg, Harkness & Smith, 2007). Thus in terms of outcomes, the importance not just of employment but of reasonably paid employment for lone parents must be emphasised. In this context a recent report commented: “Solutions lie not with welfare alone, or employment alone, but a combination of both” (ESRI, 2008).

The benefits of such an approach which supplements income where necessary are clearly demonstrated in the Nordic countries where the rate of poverty among working lone parents and their children is particularly low. This is influenced by the relatively generous package of social transfers (for example case benefits, tax allowances or subsidies for childcare) provided in these

countries to lone parents in employment. In Norway for example this adds €302 per month in purchasing power parity terms to the earnings from employment of lone parents on half the average earnings (Kilkey and Bradshaw, 2001). In contrast, other countries perform less well in reducing poverty amongst working lone parents because they give less in the form of social transfers (Kilkey and Bradshaw, 2001). Indeed in many countries, after childcare costs, the impact of social transfers is to reduce net income. Thus for example a 2001 UK report found that the cost of childcare more than offset the value of any cash benefits paid to lone parents in employment resulting in a reduction of income of £406 per month (Kilkey and Bradshaw, 2001).

In addition it has been suggested that “to tackle poverty, the financial incentives to work need to be focused so as to encourage enough hours of work with sufficient support to lift families out of poverty” (Gregg, Harkness and Macmillan, 2006). It is particularly interesting in this context that the research by Gregg et al also found that work requirements for financial support have resulted in claimants taking up only minimum hours of employment to fulfil the requirements but no more (Gregg, Harkness and Macmillan, 2006).

This financing has led to the introduction of positive tapering mechanisms aimed at off-setting the financial disincentive to work above disregard levels. For example the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the US has a zone where extra earnings results in extra credits (a positive taper) and it has been widely demonstrated that the EITC has raised employment, earnings and incomes among the poor. This positive taper acts to offset reductions in other welfare support as earnings rise. Hence it creates a substantial zone where extra earnings results in little or no reduced financial support from the state, overcoming incentives to take ‘small jobs’ (Gregg, Harkness and Macmillan, 2006).

In the case of an absence of effective supports to supplement lone parents’ income to adequate levels, Murphy (2008) comments: “The assumption that paid employment will enhance well-being and health does not hold when employment is restricted to low-paid serial or casual work; it therefore makes little sense from a child well-being or anti-poverty perspective, to oblige poor mothers to take up such work.” (Murphy, 2008: 26)

4.5 Key findings

The review of international experience of lone parents and employment indicates the following:

- Many countries have introduced work requirements for lone parents. However the research clearly indicates that there is no necessary correlation between work requirements and rates of employment amongst lone parents. Rather it seems that the effectiveness of activation policy in increasing employment rates is mediated by other factors such as in-work benefits, flexible employment and wrap-around childcare.
- Compared to many other OECD countries, Ireland has a low level of childcare support and parents expend a very high level of income on childcare. In the absence of more developed childcare provision in Ireland a compulsory work requirement is likely to be difficult to operate in practice. It is also likely to be highly problematic in reducing poverty rates in families affected. It has been suggested that the extent of labour market compulsion in Ireland needs to be linked to the extent of accessible childcare provision.
- Many countries have introduced statutory rights for parents who work in order to facilitate accessible family-friendly employment. This includes provisions such as generous parental leave and pay; a statutory right to career breaks; an unconditional right to part-time work; a right to take paid time off to care for a sick child; and flexi-time.

- Work requirements within activation policy are often conditional on the availability of certain supports (such as childcare) and exemptions for personal circumstances exist in certain countries.
- The high levels of poverty amongst those in work in Ireland highlight that work in itself is not necessarily a remedy for poverty. Research strongly indicates that increased employment amongst lone parents only benefits children where incomes rise. This has also been found to be true for teenage children. This highlights the overwhelming importance of making work pay for lone parents. International experience implies the necessity not only of supportive activation mechanisms but also of accompanying them with improved welfare benefits and social transfers if poverty rates are to be reduced.

Overall this chapter's findings indicate a number of specific questions that need to be explored in the current research:

- How motivated are lone parents to participate in paid employment and to develop meaningful careers?
- What influences a lone parent's attitudes to employment?
- What type of employment are lone parents currently involved in and why?
- How interested are lone parents in accessing education and training?
- How best can lone parents balance work and parenting?
- What are the key barriers to employment for lone parents at the present time?
- Are there sub-groups of lone parents for whom activation may be particularly problematic and, if so, why?

The results of this research are presented in the next two chapters of the report.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS FROM THE LONE PARENTS AND EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the Lone Parents and Employment survey are presented. Over the last number of years there has been an increase in the amount of information available relating to one-parent families, in particular on the prevalence of poverty among this group (EU-SILC, 2004-2006; Equality in Ireland Study, 2007; Living in Ireland Survey, 1997-2001). Chapter 4 outlined a number of studies have been carried out at local level, however this study is the first nationally representative, in-depth profile and analysis of one-parent families in receipt of the OFP in Ireland.¹⁵

Guided by the literature, a number of research priorities were identified for the current study which were:

- to provide a national profile of those receiving the OFP;
- to examine the employment and education/training experience of those on the OFP;
- to examine the main barriers to employment and education/training for those in receipt of the OFP and to analyse the key factors determining their employment decisions and career aspirations;
- to provide a sub-group analysis of the respondents in order to identify certain groups that may face particular difficulties in accessing the labour market; and
- to identify the specific responses required from policymakers to support lone parents moving away from social welfare dependency and out of poverty in the current context of government plans for the activation of lone parents.

The first four priorities are addressed in this chapter and the final priorities are examined in Chapters 6 and 7. While the data presented here is highly valuable to the research and policy context, it must be noted that the data collected is solely quantitative and that further qualitative research may be required to provide more in-depth analysis of specific issues.

5.1.1 Structure of chapter

The results of the Lone Parents and Employment Survey are presented in a number of different sections:

1. Section 5.2 gives an overview of the key demographic characteristics of those in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) based on the survey results broken down by gender, age, marital status, nationality, age and area/region of residence. Information on educational attainment and housing situation as well as on respondents' perceptions of their physical and mental health is also presented. The final part of this section looks at the current employment status of those in receipt of the OFP.

¹⁵ Two important studies have been carried out recently at a regional level. See Millar et al, 2007 and the Cavan Lone Parent Initiative, 2007.

2. Section 5.3 focuses on the experiences of those who are currently in paid employment. Respondents' views of the Community Employment Scheme (CE) are also presented in this section.
3. Section 5.4 focuses on the perceived barriers to employment by those not currently employed and looks at their experience of participating in education and training.
4. Section 5.5 looks at the future work-related plans of all respondents.
5. Section 5.6 looks at views on working and parenting alone from all respondents.

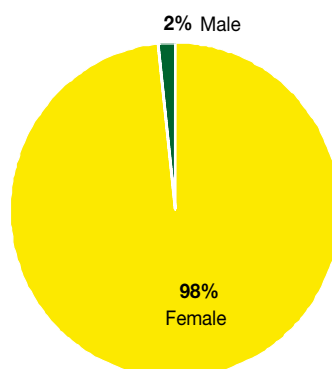
5.2 Profiling OFP recipients

All the data presented here are the weighted responses of the 1,488 lone parents who replied to the survey.¹⁶

5.2.1 Gender and Marital Status

In line with the DSFA breakdown of OFP recipients, the majority of the respondents are female (1,442 respondents) with only 1.7 per cent or 25 of the respondents being male.

Figure 5.1: Gender of respondents¹⁷



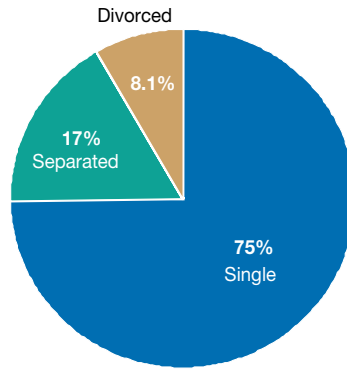
Looking at marital status as can be seen from Fig.5.2 below, respondents are predominantly single or never married (74.7 per cent), 17.1 per cent are separated (legally and informally) and 8.1 per cent are divorced. Only 0.1 per cent are widowed.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Appendix E

¹⁷ Gender: n = 1488, missing = 20

¹⁸ Single= 1008; separated = 230; divorced= 109 and widowed = 2.

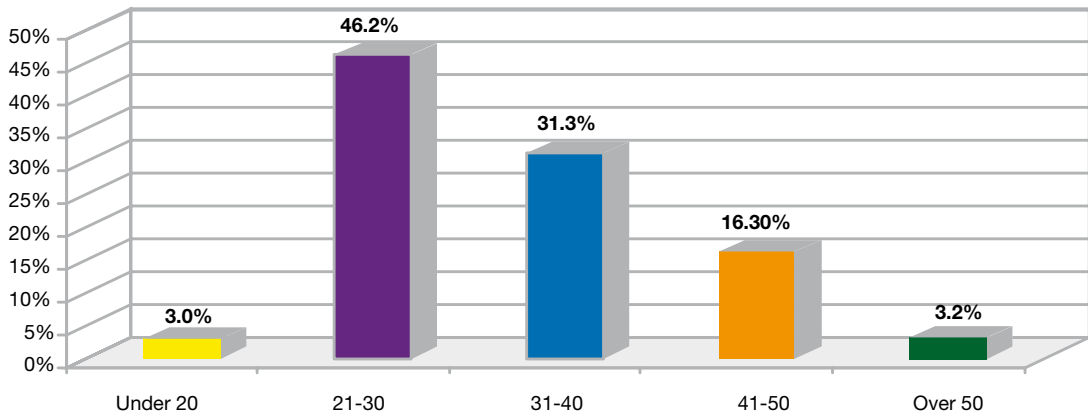
Figure 5.2: Marital status of respondents¹⁹



When marital status is examined in relation to gender the difference between men and women is clear. The majority of women are single (76 per cent) but just a third of men (33.3 per cent) describe themselves as single. Men are most likely to be separated (37.5 per cent) or divorced/ widowed (29 per cent). This is compared to 16.6 per cent of women who are separated and 7.7 per cent who are divorced or widowed).

5.2.2 Age

Figure 5.3: Age of respondents²⁰



The above diagram illustrates that a large proportion of the respondents are aged between 21 and 40 years old. Only three per cent of respondents are under 20 years old and 19.5 per cent are over 41.

5.2.3 Education²¹

Looking at the highest level of education achieved (see Table 5.1), a quarter of respondents have achieved a Junior Certificate (328 respondents) and a further quarter a Leaving Certificate (362 respondents). Over a quarter (423 respondents) have completed either a Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) course or a third level diploma. A total of 94 respondents or 6.4 per cent have a degree or higher. However 18 per cent have no educational qualifications.

19 Marital Status : n = 1488, missing = 138

20 n = 1488, missing = 15

21 There is no national data available stating the educational attainment of those on OFP. It is therefore not clear if the data presented in this study is biased in favour of those with higher educational attainment and literacy.

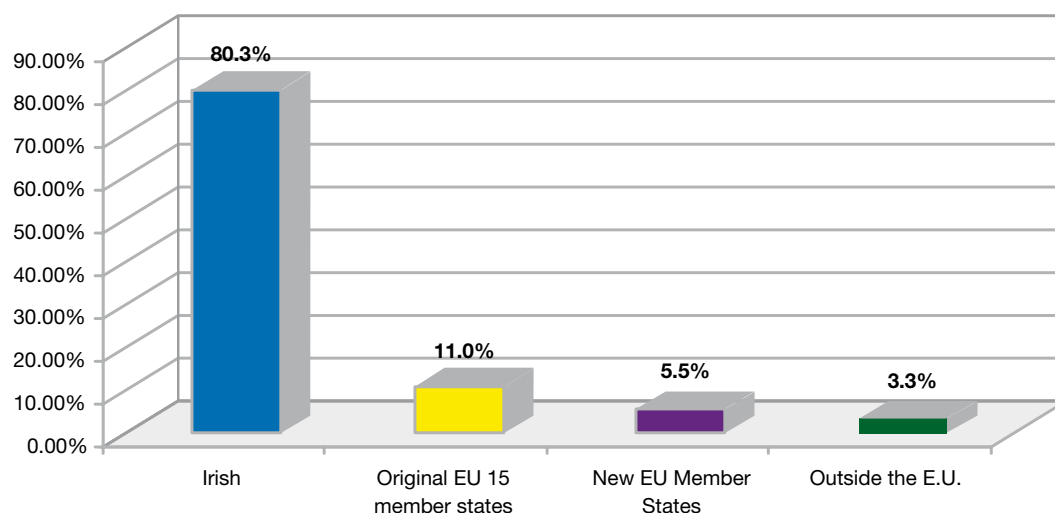
These findings indicate a wide variety of educational qualifications among recipients of the OFP. As might be expected the data reveals a positive relationship between education and employment status. Those with a Leaving Certificate or above level of education are more likely to be in paid employment and less likely to be caring for children and not looking for employment compared with those respondents with below Leaving Certificate education.

Table 5.1: Highest Level of education achieved²²

	Frequency	Percentage
Did not Complete Primary	17	1.1 per cent
Completed primary	41	2.8 per cent
Attended secondary	206	14 per cent
Junior Certificate	328	22.3 per cent
Leaving Certificate	362	24.6 per cent
P.L.C.	200	13.6 per cent
3rd level dip or higher	223	15.2 per cent
Degree or Higher	94	6.4 per cent
Total	1472	100 per cent

5.2.4 Nationality

Figure 5.4: Nationality of respondents²³



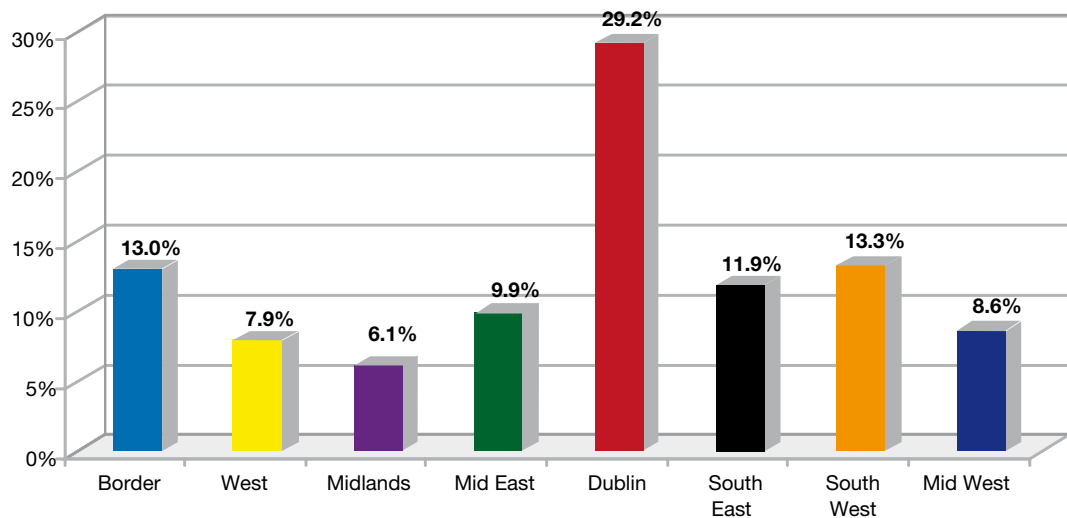
The nationality of the respondents is displayed in the above table. Over 80 per cent (1,151) of respondents were born in Ireland. This is similar to the entire population dependent on the OFP (DSFA 2008). The second largest group are those from the original 15 member states (11 per cent). A number of respondents are from the new member states that joined the EU in 2004, representing 5.5 per cent (or 78 respondents). Those from outside the EU accounted for 3.3 per cent of the population. For a full breakdown and the list of countries in each category see Appendix C.

²² n = 1488, missing = 15

²³ n = 1488, missing = 54

5.2.5 Region and Area

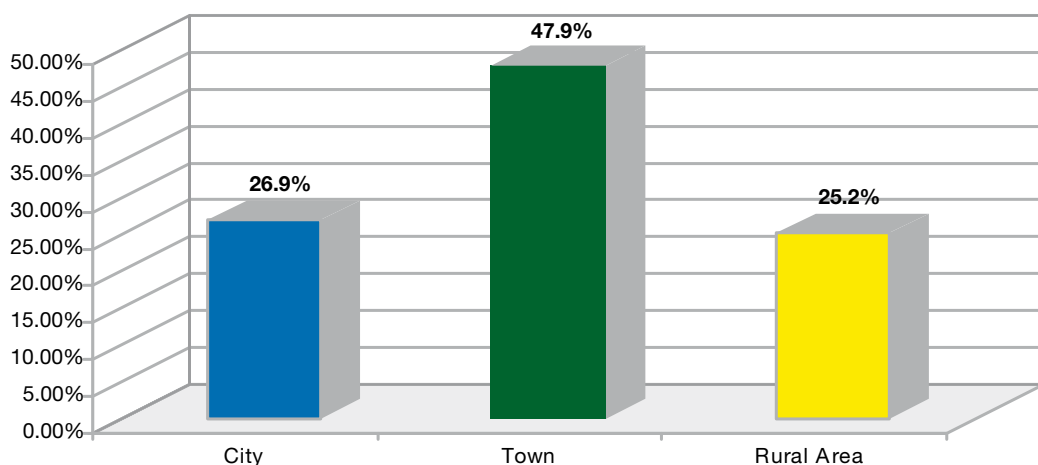
Figure 5.5: Region of respondents²⁴



All respondents were asked what county they were currently living in. These counties were then recoded into the different geographical regions that are displayed in the above chart. The majority of respondents cluster around the east coast and Dublin (Dublin, Mid East and South East account for 51 per cent), with smaller numbers in the West (29.8 per cent) and Border counties (13 per cent). Just over six per cent of respondents are from Midland counties.

Respondents were also asked to identify or describe the type of area they lived in: 387 respondents describe the area they lived in as a city; 691 respondents say they lived in a town; and 364 people describe the place they lived in as a rural area. Therefore just over a quarter live in rural compared to 75 per cent living in a more urban environment. See the chart below for the percentage breakdown.

Figure 5.6: Area²⁵

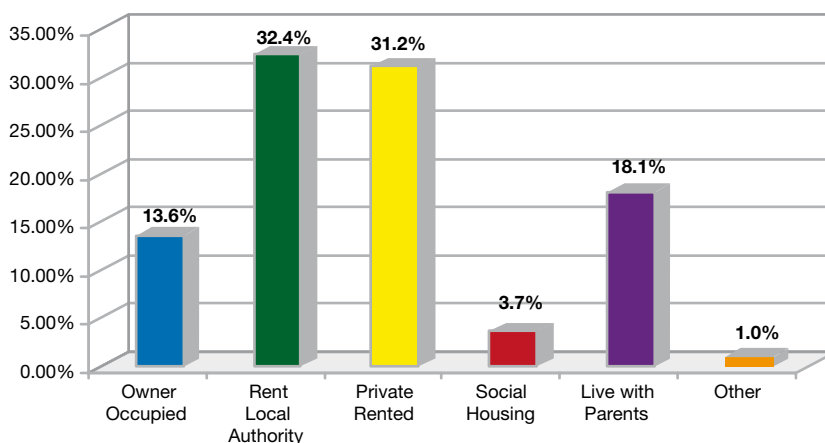


24 n = 1488, missing = 99

25 n = 1488, missing = 45

5.2.6 Housing

Figure 5.7: Housing status²⁶

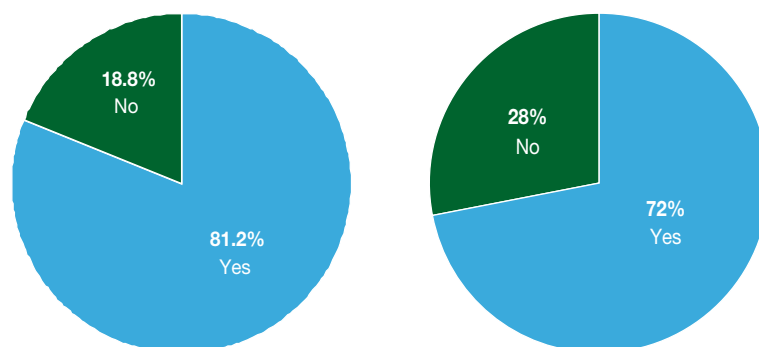


The above diagram illustrates that 63.6 per cent of respondents either rent from the Local Authority or from a private landlord. Almost a fifth are living with their parents (ie 18.1 per cent or 266 respondents). A further 201 respondents own their own home and represent 13.6 per cent of the total population. People who fell into the 'other' category include those living in mobile homes, those living with friends and those who co-own a house with the local authority or their former partner.

As the literature review illustrated, the Rent Supplement scheme is one of the most important forms of assistance to lone parents, therefore all recipients who are living in private rented accommodation were asked if they are in receipt of this payment. Of those in private rented accommodation (460) 81.2 per cent or 363 respondents are in receipt of the Rent Supplement and only one fifth (18.8 per cent or 84 respondents) are not receiving this payment.

This indicates that 24 per cent of respondents are receiving the Rent Supplement support. DSFA statistics show that overall 17 per cent of OFP recipients are in receipt of Rent Supplement. This implies an over-representation of those on Rent Supplement in the survey presented here. It is not possible to empirically ascertain the reason for this difference or to adjust for it. Where possible and relevant we have analysed responses by whether respondents are on Rent Supplement or not.

Figure 5.8: Rent Supplement²⁷ and waiting list for local authority housing²⁸



²⁶ n = 1488, missing = 14

²⁷ n = 460, missing = 13

²⁸ n = 1488, missing = 434

Similarly respondents were asked if they were on the waiting list for local authority housing. Of those who were eligible for local authority housing, 72 per cent are on the waiting list.

5.2.7 Health status

All respondents were asked to rate their physical health and mental health on a scale from poor to excellent.

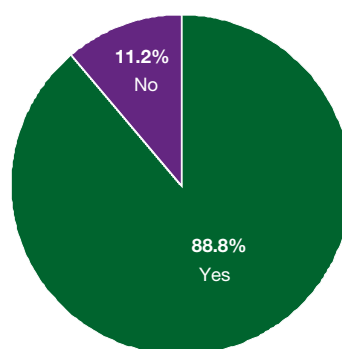
Table 5.2: Health status ²⁹

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Physical health	21.3 % (321)	34.4 % (506)	30.8 % (453)	10.2 % (150)	2.8 % (41)	100 % (1471)
Mental health	29.4 % (431)	26.2 % (384)	27.7 % (407)	13.7 % (201)	3.0 % (44)	100 % (1467)

Looking at the physical health of the respondents, over 85 per cent rate it as good, very good or excellent. Only 13 per cent or 191 respondents rate their physical health as fair or poor. A similar picture emerged for the mental health of the respondents, with the majority of respondents rating it as good, very good or excellent. But 17 per cent rate their mental health as fair or poor. Older cohorts (over 40) are more likely to rate both their mental and physical health as poor or fair than younger cohorts (under 30). Non-Irish respondents are more likely to rate their physical health as poor or fair than Irish respondents.

Another important support for those in receipt of the OFP is the Medical Card scheme. Almost 90 per cent of respondents stated that they have a Medical Card. 162 people or 11.2 per cent stated that they have not.

Figure 5.9: Medical card ³⁰



Those from new member states and Ireland are less likely to have a medical card than those from the original EU states and respondents from outside the EU.³¹

²⁹ n = 1488, missing = 37

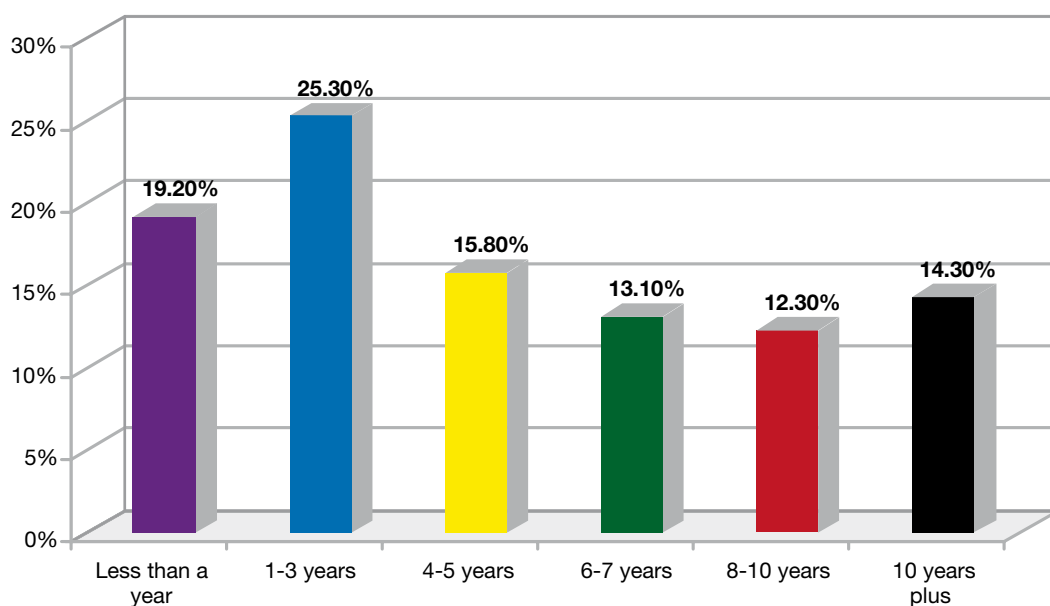
³⁰ n = 1488, missing = 42

³¹ For a full list of countries in each nationality grouping see Appendix C

5.2.8 Length of time in receipt of the OFP

The length of time each respondent had been in receipt of the OFP is displayed below. Over 40 per cent of respondents have been in receipt of the OFP for less than a year or between one and three years. There is only a small variation between those who have been dependent on the payment for a medium period of time (four - five years or six - seven years comprised 28.9 per cent) and those who have been dependent on it for a longer period of time (26.6 per cent for over eight years). These results are particularly salient given that length of time on the payment is likely to be a factor in determining when lone parents are required to engage in the activation process.

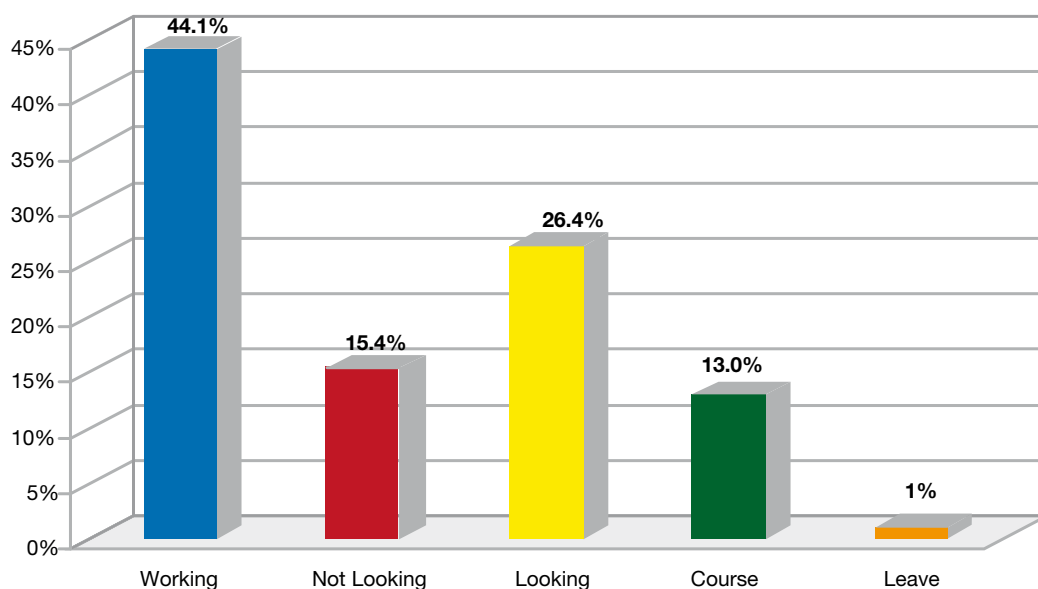
Figure 5.10: Length of time in receipt of the OFP³²



5.2.9 Current employment status

According to DSFA figures (2008) it was estimated that just under 60 per cent of OFP recipients are in receipt of additional income. In this survey, 57 per cent or 847 respondents said they were in some form of paid employment or in education or training. These figures are however not directly comparable. The DSFA figures include those on community employment and job initiative schemes whereas some of our respondents may have classified themselves as in education or training when on these schemes. Overall these figures would indicate that this survey may have under-represented those at work and this should be born in mind when interpreting the results.

32 n = 1488, missing = 49

Figure 5.11: Employment status³³

The next largest group are those that are caring for their children full-time and currently seeking employment (26.4 per cent or 391) while 15.4 per cent are not currently looking for employment (227 respondents). Almost 200 respondents or 13 per cent of the sample are currently attending an education or training course and just one per cent indicated that they are currently out of work on illness, disability or maternity leave³⁴. These findings indicate that 84 per cent of recipients of the OFP are in employment, education, training or are looking for work.

5.2.10 Key findings – demographic characteristics

Although the sample is diverse this study indicates that the key characteristics of the lone parent population on OFP are:

- the majority of respondents are female and single;
- male recipients account for only a small proportion of total numbers but are more likely to be separated, divorced or widowed;
- nearly one fifth of respondents were born outside Ireland;
- the majority live in urban areas;
- educational levels vary greatly with 18 per cent having no qualifications and a third having a post-Leaving Certificate or third level qualification;
- one third rent from Local Authority housing while a further third live in private rented accommodation;
- almost 20 per cent live with their parents;
- seventeen per cent describe their mental health as either fair or poor and 13 per cent describe their physical health as fair or poor;

³³ N = 1488, missing = 12

³⁴ These were the most common responses found in the 'other' category of this question.

- over 80 per cent of those living in private rented accommodation are dependent on rent supplement which represents a quarter of the population and 50 per cent of the sample are on the waiting list for Local Authority housing;
- over a quarter have been on the OFP for over eight years; and
- eighty four per cent of recipients are currently either working, in education or training or looking for work. This is comprised of 44 per cent who are currently working, 13 per cent in education or training and a further 26 per cent who are looking for work.

These key demographic characteristics are applied in further analysis of the data to help highlight the key factors determining participation in, and plans for, participation in the labour market.

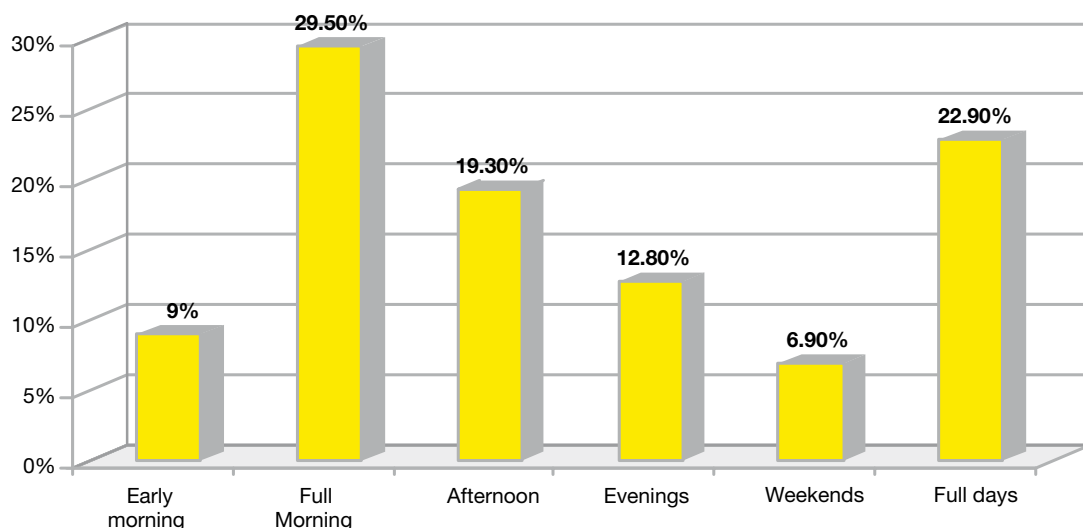
5.3 Experiences of those in paid employment

In this section an analysis of the 44 per cent of respondents who are currently in paid employment is presented. Issues examined include: time and days of week worked; number of hours worked and type of jobs; childcare; and transport issues.

5.3.1 Working hours of respondents

Flexibility and part-time work have been identified in a number of studies as a preference among lone parents, in particular female lone parents (Gerhard et al, 2005: 139). In this study respondents were asked what time of day they work ie morning or afternoon and on average how many hours they work a week. The results are displayed below.

Figure 5.12: Time of day worked³⁵



These results indicate a high level of flexible working arrangements with almost a quarter working varying hours, 20 per cent working in the evening or weekends and only 19 per cent working in the afternoon³⁶. Only 23 per cent work full days.

35 Multiple Responses, n = 647, missing =4

36 The results that are presented here are multiple responses sets, ie respondents answered any category that was relevant to their situations, and therefore figures represent percentages of responses rather than individual respondents.

5.3.2 Average number of hours worked

The average³⁷ number of hours worked by respondents was 20 hours per week. However 40 per cent of respondents indicated that they worked on average more than 24 hours per week. The maximum number of hours worked by respondents is 45 and the minimum is four. Interestingly no statistically significant difference was found between employment categories in terms of the hours people work. Neither was a difference found in average hours worked between people with varying educational attainment.

5.3.3 Plans for work

All respondents currently in employment were asked if they would like to work more hours than they currently do and 32.2 per cent said they would like to be working more over the next year; 54.4 per cent said they would not; and 13.4 per cent said they did not know. Interestingly, 66.9 per cent said they would like to be working more than they currently are in three years time, where 21.4 per cent said they would not and 11.7 per cent said they did not know.

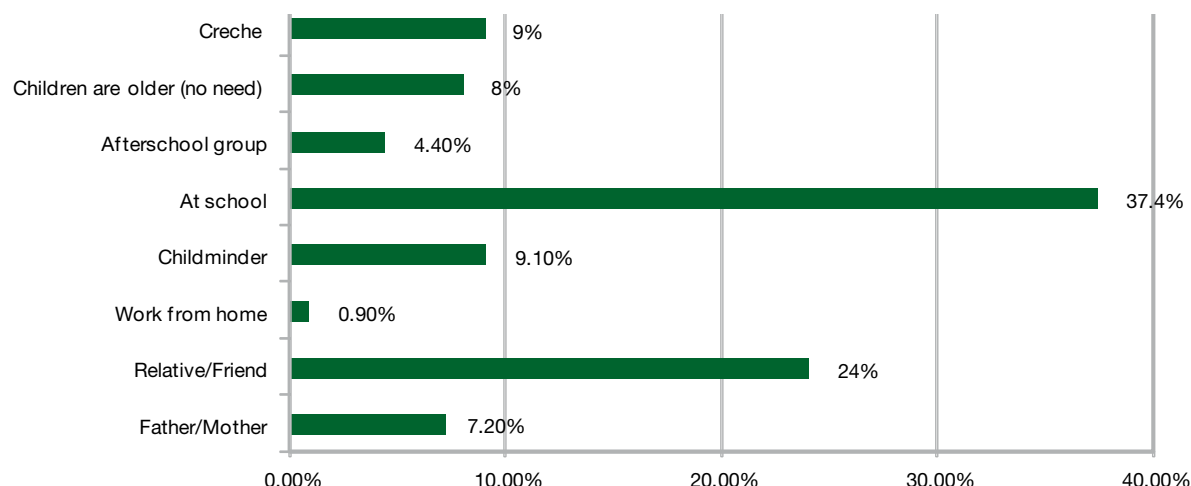
5.3.4 Childcare

Numerous studies have cited a lack of affordable childcare as a major barrier to employment for those parenting alone (McCashin, 1997; NESF, 2000; Russell and Corcoran, 2001; Millar et al, 2007). Therefore it was important to ascertain the childcare arrangements of those who are currently employed. For most respondents their children are at school when they are working (37.4 per cent of responses). A significant number also said that their children are taken care of by a friend or relative while they are at work. Nearly 20 per cent of people used a crèche or a childminder and a further 4.4 per cent used after-school groups. This suggests that only a relatively small number of lone parents use formal childcare with many using friends and relatives to take care of their children while at work or else they work while their children are in school.

Childcare arrangements were found to vary somewhat in relation to hours worked. Those who work longer hours (over 19 hours) are more likely to use formal childcare (a childminder, nursery, crèche, playgroup) than those who work between one and 18 hours (21 per cent compared to 32.9 per cent).

³⁷ The median opposed to the mean was taken as the average. The median is the central point when the extreme values are removed (maximum and minimum responses). Using the median instead of the mean ensures that the data will not be skewed in a certain direction.

Figure 5.13: Childcare arrangements³⁸



5.3.5 Average spend on childcare per week

Respondents were also asked what they spend on childcare per week. For those who pay for childcare (324) the average spend per week is €60 with five per cent of respondents spending €160 or more a week; 10 per cent spending between €130 and €160; and 25 per cent spending between €90 and €130. This indicates a relatively low level of expenditure on childcare, reflecting perhaps the low level of reliance on formal childcare and also perhaps a level of reliance on childcare subsidies.

5.3.6 Type of work and income

Another finding from the literature is that the combination of low levels of education, limited work experience and the need for part-time flexible work often result in lone parents being in low-paid work (Millar et al, 2007; Murphy, 2008; McCashin, 1997). In this study respondents were asked what type of work they do. These responses were categorised into the rankings used by both the CSO and the ESRI. See Appendix D for further information.

³⁸ N = 647, missing = 5

Table 5.3: Occupation³⁹

	Frequency	Percentage
Managers	5	0.7 %
Professional/associate professional	41	6.4 %
Clerical	165	25.7 %
Skilled manual	43	6.8 %
Operative	30	4.7 %
Sales occupations	125	19.5 %
Caring occupations	98	15.2 %
Other services	71	11.1 %
Unskilled manual	59	9.3 %
Self employed	4	0.7 %
Total	642	100 %

This table indicates that only a small number of respondents are in management, professional (including associate professional) or skilled manual jobs (13.9 per cent). These jobs usually refer to those working in the health or education sector or in skilled work such as hairdressing, beautician, chef etc. The majority of OFP recipients are concentrated in sales occupations, caring occupations or clerical work (60.4 per cent), with a significant number in other services or unskilled manual work (20.4 per cent). Common responses in these categories were secretary, childcare assistant, shop assistant, home help or catering work. As might be expected there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and occupation. Better-paid occupations are dominated by those with a Leaving Certificate or above level of educational attainment compared to those with Leaving Certificate or below. Indeed 77.5 per cent of the professional categories as well as 76.1 per cent of clerical and 62.5 per cent of skilled manual occupations are made up of those with Leaving Certificate or above educational attainment.

Given the dominance of women among the lone parent population it could be suggested that the frequencies of these occupations simply reflect the more general position of women in the Irish labour market. However while the rates of lone parents in clerical employment can be said to be similar to those of women generally in employment in Ireland, other categories show marked differences. Notably the percentage of lone parents in sales is far higher than the percentage of women generally (19.5 per cent compared to 12.4 per cent among women generally⁴⁰). Additionally the percentage of lone parents in professional employment is lower than the overall female population (6.4 per cent compared to 13.3 per cent⁴¹).

39 n = 647, missing = 5

40 CSO, (2008), QNHS Vol. 2, CSO, Dublin Stationery Office: Dublin

41 CSO, (2008), QNHS Vol. 2, CSO, Dublin Stationery Office: Dublin

These job categories combined with the times, days and number of hours worked per week indicates that a significant number of lone parents who work while in receipt of the OFP are concentrated in low-paid, part-time work requiring high degrees of flexibility.

5.3.7 Length of time in job

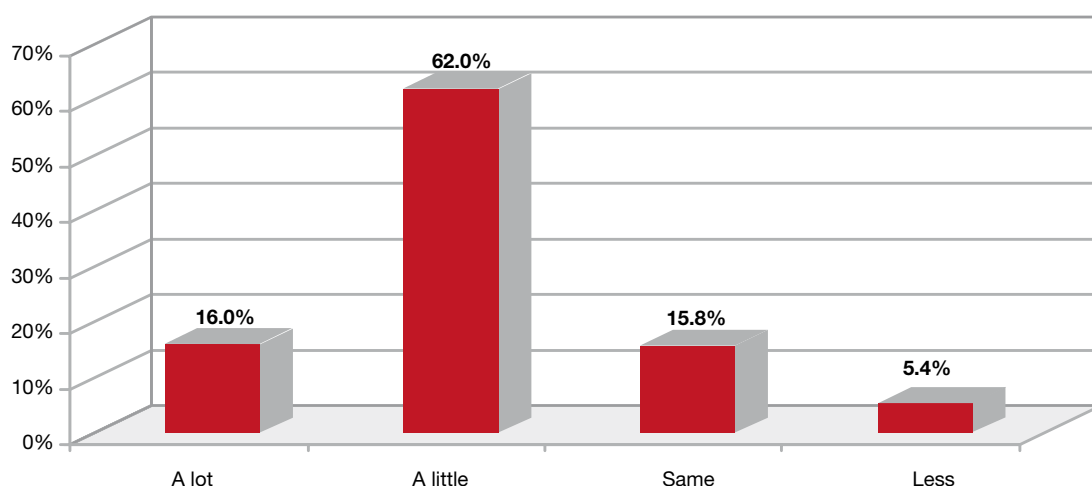
The average time respondents have been in their current job is one year and seven months. However five per cent have been in their job ten years or longer, ten per cent have been there between seven and nine years and 25 per cent have been in their job between four and six years.

The only statistically significant difference⁴² between occupational categories⁴³ in the length of time in their jobs is that respondents working in a caring occupation have spent significantly less time in their jobs compared to other categories. There is no significant difference between people with varying educational attainment.

5.3.8 Effect of employment on income

All respondents that are currently working were asked if their financial situation has improved since they began working.

Figure 5.14: Financial Situation⁴⁴



Just over 60 per cent said they are bringing home a little bit more since they started working. Only 16 per cent said that they are taking home a lot more (16 per cent) while a similar percentage are taking home about the same as they did before they started work (15.8 per cent). Interestingly 5.4 per cent of respondents said that they are taking home less than they did before they started work. It must be noted that the measure used here depends on respondents' own perceptions of how much they are earning. Nevertheless such measures are an important way of assessing lone parents' perceptions of the financial gain of working as this may influence their attitude towards work in future.

42 Difference at .05 level. A statistically significant difference is a difference which is unlikely to occur simply due to chance.

43 Occupational categories: professionals/associate professionals; clerical; skilled manual; sales; caring; other skilled; unskilled.

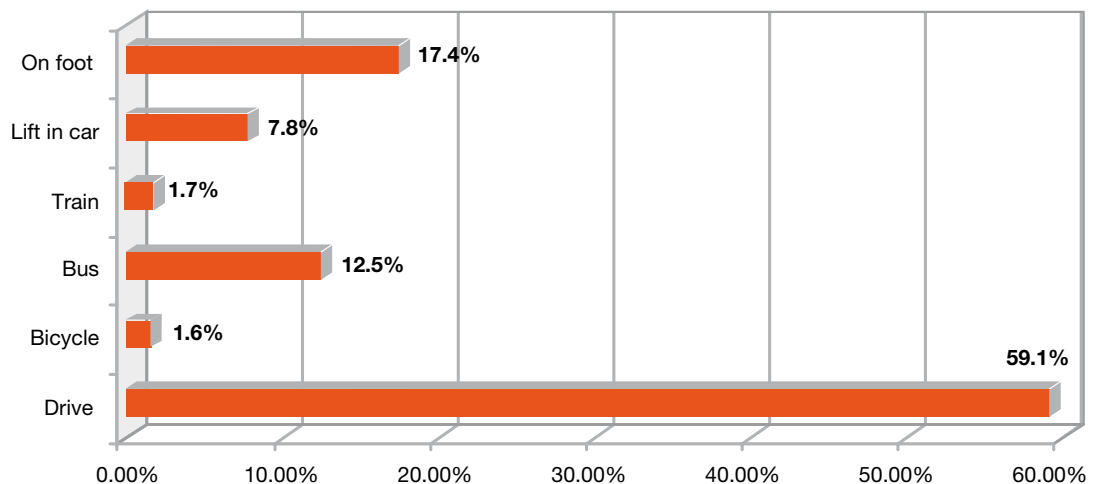
44 N = 647, missing = 10

The importance of this can be found in the findings of previous studies outlined in the literature review which indicate the importance of lone parents' *perceptions* of financial gain.⁴⁵

5.3.9 Transport

The primary means of transport to work for those who are currently employed is by car (59.1 per cent). Others go by foot (17.4 per cent) or by bus (12.5 per cent). Only a small number go by train or bicycle, 7.8 per cent are driven to work by someone else.

Figure 5.15: Transport ⁴⁶



When this is analysed in relation to the type of area lived in, almost 90 per cent of those in rural areas drive to work – compared to 47 per cent of those in cities and 58 per cent of those living in a town. This indicates the high dependency on cars, especially among those living in rural areas.

5.3.10 Key findings – those currently in employment

As stated in the earlier section 44 per cent of recipients are currently in paid employment. An examination of their employment patterns indicates that:

- there is a high level of flexible working by respondents with a significant amount of varying work hours, coupled with evening and weekend work. However only 19 per cent work in the afternoons and only 23 per cent work full days;
- the average hours worked is 20 per week but 40 per cent of respondents work over 24 hours on average per week;
- one third would like to be working more hours in one years time and two thirds in three years time;
- the use of formal childcare arrangements is low with over one third working when children are in school and almost another third relying on family and friends. These trends are reflected in the relatively small average spend on childcare by OFP recipients. There is some evidence that childcare arrangements are influenced by the number of hours worked with those working longer hours more reliant on paid childcare, with obvious cost implications;

⁴⁵ It was decided not to ask about actual pay rates as it was considered that the sensitivity of this issue could significantly reduce response rates.

⁴⁶ Multiple Response: n = 647, missing = 0

- the average duration in employment is 1.7 years. However 40 per cent have been in their current job for four years or more;
- over 60 per cent are employed in sales, caring, catering or clerical jobs; and
- only 16 per cent bring home 'a lot more' money since they started working.

These findings indicate that OFP recipients who are in paid employment are primarily in low-level jobs offering limited financial reward and requiring high levels of flexibility. This is presumably to avail of low-cost or no-cost childcare options. Nevertheless most respondents do indicate a desire to increase their working hours in the future and a significant number are currently working over 24 hours per week, with many in their current jobs for considerable periods of time.

5.3.11 Community Employment scheme (CE scheme)⁴⁷

Just under 180 respondents indicated that they were employed on a CE scheme. This represents 12 per cent of all respondents and 28 per cent of those describing themselves as employed. These respondents were asked about their views on the training they received on CE. Nearly 60 per cent said the training was good (25.8 per cent) or very good (34.9 per cent). Almost 30 per cent rated it as "OK" and just over 10 per cent said it was poor (6.7 per cent) or very poor (3.7 per cent). These respondents were also asked if they agreed or disagreed with these statements:

Table 5.4: Views of CE scheme⁴⁸

	Agree	Disagree
CE gives me little opportunity to learn new skills	46.3 %	53.7 %
CE allows me to work and keep my benefits	86.8 %	13.2 %
CE hours can be worked at a time that suits me	80.1 %	19.9 %
CE does not lead on to further training	25.5 %	74.5 %
CE had developed my self confidence	88.0 %	12.0 %
CE gives me a start in getting back to employment	93.4 %	6.6 %

Overall the views of the CE scheme are largely positive. However almost half (46.3 per cent) believe that it has given them little opportunity to learn new skills and 25.5 per cent believed that it does not lead to further training.

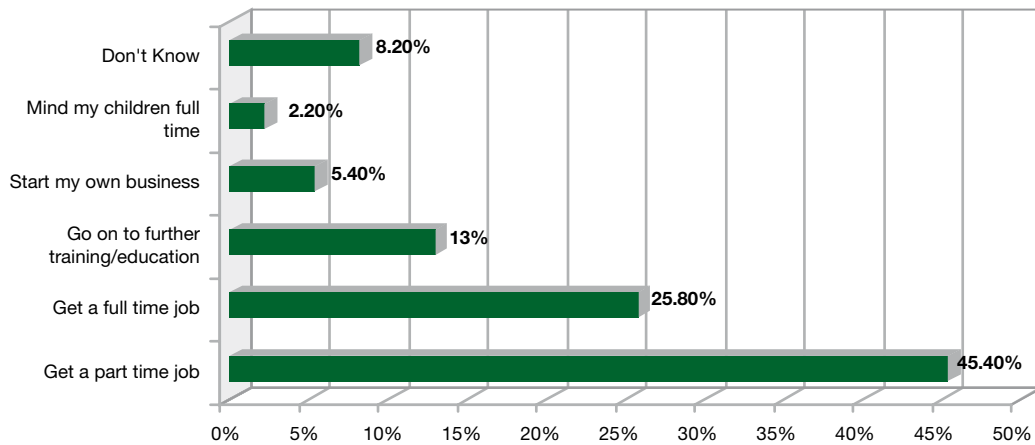
The most positive benefits of the scheme were seen in terms of giving lone parents a start in getting back into employment, allowing participants to work and keep their benefits, developing self-confidence and allowing them to work suitable hours. These benefits mirror the needs of other

⁴⁷ The CE scheme is operated by FÁS, Ireland's training and employment authority. It is designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities. It is possible for participants to seek other part-time work during their placement. After the placement, participants are encouraged to seek permanent part-time and full-time jobs elsewhere based on the experience and new skills they have gained while in the Community Employment scheme. Source: www.citizensinformation.ie

⁴⁸ n = 180

working parents to work suitable hours. They highlight the importance of providing opportunities to lone parents to develop their self-confidence and to get a start in getting back into employment.

Figure 5.16: Future plans



Looking at the future plans of CE workers the largest group (45.4 per cent) were those who indicated that they would like to get a part-time job on completion of their CE scheme. Only 26 per cent would like to get a full time job, 13 per cent would like to go on to further education or training, five per cent would like to start their own business and two per cent would like to care for their children full-time. Eight per cent of respondents stated that they did not know what they would like to do.

5.3.12 Views and experience of those who have been in employment since becoming recipients of the OFP

The reasons that those who had been employed⁴⁹ since starting to receive the OFP but who are not currently employed cited the following as the main reasons that they had left that job:

Table 5.5: Reason left previous job⁵⁰

	Frequency	Percentage
Financially it was not worth my while working	112	18.4 %
I couldn't get affordable, quality childcare	97	16.0 %
I didn't like the work	18	2.9 %
I wasn't able to use my skills or qualifications	23	3.8 %
I don't have the confidence to do the work	8	1.3 %
I became ill	45	7.3 %
I moved house	24	3.9 %
I wanted to spend more time with my children	50	8.2 %
The hours did not suit me	77	12.6 %
I got pregnant	32	5.3 %
I got another job	5	0.8 %
Contract was up/CE ended/made redundant	90	14.8 %
Went back to education/training	14	2.3 %
Poor work conditions	6	1.0 %
Child/family member became ill	8	1.3 %
Total	609	100 %

The most important factors that contributed to respondents leaving their jobs were:

- Financially it was not worth their while (18.4 per cent).
- A lack of affordable quality childcare (16 per cent).
- Contract was up (usually their Community Employment scheme) (14.8 per cent).
- The hours did not suit (12.6 per cent).

Other factors that contributed to respondents leaving employment are that they became ill (7.3 per cent) or that they wanted to spend time with their children (8.2 per cent). For some respondents there was a mismatch between the skills and qualifications they had and their job (3.8 per cent).

⁴⁹ Those who had been employed since going on the OFP and those that had not had a job since going on the payment were asked to complete separate sections of the questionnaire. However a number completed both sections and others answered only one question in a section. It has not been possible therefore to identify the exact number in each of these groups. The responses referred to here are based on those who replied to both Q31 and Q32, (385 respondents).

⁵⁰ (Multiple Response) n = 385

Jobs held in the past by respondents were similar to those currently held by those who were employed ie mainly in clerical, sales and caring occupations.

Again these findings point to the difficulties OFP recipients experience in obtaining financially attractive employment while at the same time sourcing affordable childcare.

5.3.13 Preference for work now

This group were also asked would they prefer to be working now and 77.1 per cent said yes, 8.8 per cent said no and 14.0 per cent said they did not know, indicating a strong desire to work among this group.

5.4 Those with no previous work experience since becoming recipients of the OFP

5.4.1 Job search

For the group who have never been employed while in receipt of the OFP, 58.9 per cent had looked for a job and 41.1 per cent had not. The reasons given by these respondents for not looking for a job are outlined below.⁵¹

Table 5.6: Reasons not looked for a job⁵²

	Frequency	Percentage
Financially it was not worth my while	101	21.8 %
I can't get affordable quality childcare	109	23.6 %
I don't have the confidence to get a job	33	7.2 %
I am not qualified to get the type of work I would like	42	9.2 %
I have health problems	26	5.6 %
There are no jobs available	10	2.2 %
I can't get a job that uses my skills and qualifications	9	2.0 %
My children have health problems	16	3.5 %
I want to spend time with my children	75	16.2 %
I got pregnant	13	2.8 %
I went into full time education	20	4.4 %
I do not have the time, need flexible hours	8	1.7 %
Total	463	100 %

Similar to those who had left their jobs, the main reasons cited by these respondents for not looking for work are lack of financial viability and lack of affordable childcare.

51 Responses here are based on those who answered no to Q.34 and answered Q.36.

52 Multiple Response: n = 230, missing = 9

Interestingly a relatively high number of these respondents said that one of the reasons they had not looked for a job was because they wanted to spend more time with their children (16.2 per cent) or that their children had health problems (3.5 per cent). 12 per cent indicated that they themselves had health problems. One fifth said that they were not properly qualified and 7.2 per cent said that they did not have the confidence to get a job.

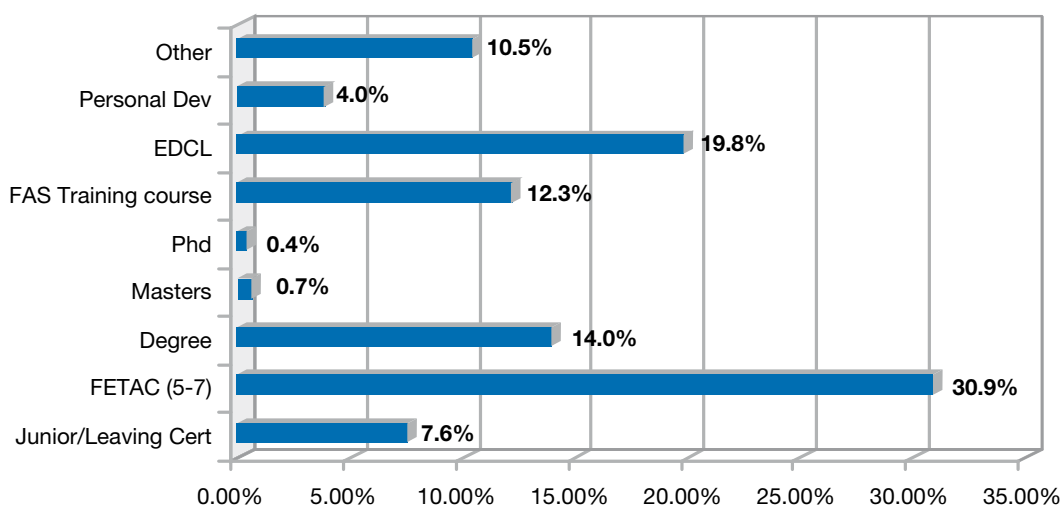
Those that had looked for jobs had again sought jobs in clerical, caring and sales occupations.

5.4.2 Education/Training

Education and training are key factors in accessing viable and sustainable employment. Therefore those who had never worked since going on the payment were asked whether they had attended any education or training courses since receiving the payment⁵³. This revealed that a third had completed an education course and 28 per cent a training course⁵⁴.

For those who had completed a course the table below illustrates the type of course they had attended and completed. This shows that the most popular courses are FETAC Level 5 to 7 (PLC, Certificate, Diploma), followed by ECCL courses. Only one in eight of this group had completed a FÁS training course.

Figure 5.17: Training/Education course completed



An interesting point here is that of those who have completed an education or training course, 14 per cent have completed a degree.⁵⁵

5.4.3 Labour market engagement

Overall the findings indicate that around ten per cent of all respondents have neither looked for a job since going on the payment nor attended education or a training course. Thus nine out of ten could be considered to already have either experience of the labour market, education or training.

⁵³ Responses here are based on those that answered Q.34 and 37 (N=480 for education and 444 for training).

⁵⁴ Multiple responses were possible so respondents may have completed an education and a training course.

⁵⁵ FETAC levels 5-7 includes Leaving Certificate equivalent and PLC courses as well as diplomas.

5.4.4 Key findings – those not currently working

- The findings show that the three main barriers to employment for all three sub-groups ie, those who are currently working; those who have worked while in receipt of the payment; and those who have not worked since receiving the OFP, are similar. They are lack of affordable childcare, unsuitable hours and the perception of limited financial benefits to be gained from working.
- Almost 80 per cent of those that have worked in the past since going on the OFP would prefer to be working now and almost 60 per cent of those that have not worked say that they have looked for work since going on the OFP.
- Just over a third of those who have not worked since going on the OFP have completed an education course and just over a quarter a training course, with FETAC-accredited courses being the most common followed by an ECDL course.
- Those that have not looked for work are more likely to give as a reason that they want to spend more time with their children than those who have left a job in the past – 16 per cent versus 8 per cent. However this reason was found to be consistently less likely to be given than reasons relating to childcare, working hours and the perceived financial benefits of employment.

5.5 Future plans

A key element of the survey was aimed at exploring lone parents' future plans, particularly in relation to their participation in the labour market, and to ascertain what supports will help them to realise these plans. Firstly all respondents were asked if they intended to do any of the following in the next year or in the next three years:

Table 5.7: Future plans and career aspirations

	Within a year	% of total respondents	Within 3 years	% of total respondents
Gain a new skill	233	15.7 %	245	16.5 %
Get a part-time job	347	23.3 %	208	14.0 %
Get a full-time job	161	10.9 %	261	17.6 %
Go on a CE scheme	89	6.0 %	64	4.3 %
Study for a qualification	226	15.2 %	308	20.7 %

This revealed that 15 per cent of respondents ⁵⁶ plan to train in a new skill within a year and 16 per cent within three years. Almost a quarter plan to get a part-time job within a year and 15 per cent within three years while 11 per cent of respondents plan to get a full-time job within a year and 17.6 per cent within three years. Relatively small numbers plan to go on a CE scheme – 10 per cent in total. Fifteen per cent of respondents said they plan to study for a qualification within one year and 21 per cent within three years.

Allowing for the fact that respondents could choose a number of these options, the findings indicate that one fifth plan to go into education or training in the next three years. If these figures were

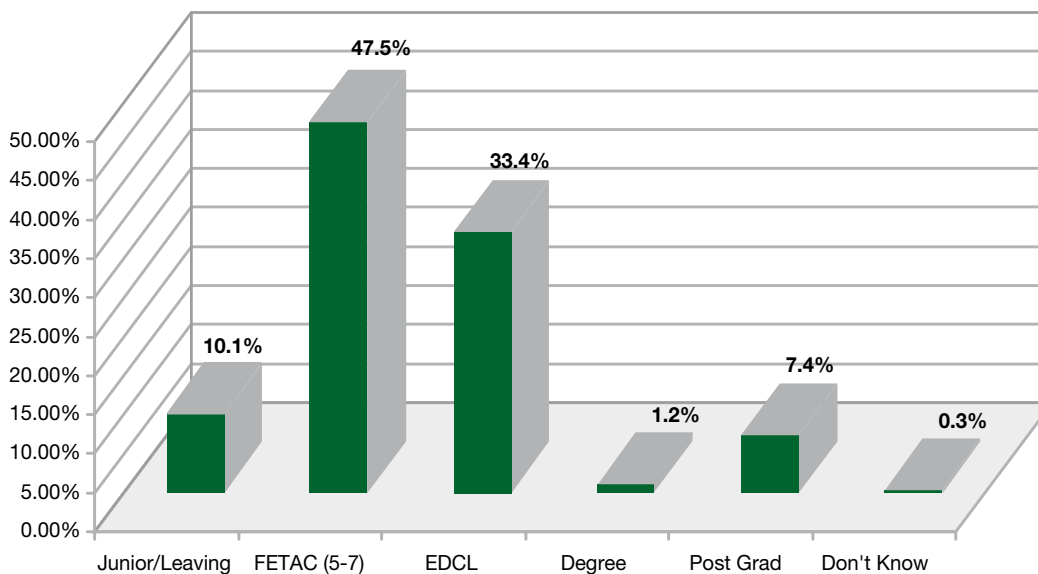
56 Multiple responses possible, ie respondents might like to get a qualification in the next year and a full-time job in three years.

translated into total numbers on the payment this would suggest a high level of demand, perhaps latent demand, for education and training courses from this group.

5.5.1 Type of education or training planned

Figure 5.17 illustrates the type of qualification desired by those who plan to gain a qualification in the next one or three years.

Figure 5.18: Type of qualification⁵⁷



Most of these respondents said they plan to gain a FETAC level (5-7)⁵⁸ qualification or an ECDL qualification (47.5 per cent). Just over ten per cent said that they plan to get their Junior or Leaving Certificate. A small number stated that they plan to study for a degree (1.2 per cent) or a post-graduate degree (7.4 per cent).

Respondents were also asked what particular area they plan to study in. The main areas stated are:

- Social Science/Psychology/Arts Degree: 13.6 per cent
- Special Needs/Disabilities: 10.8 per cent
- Business/Management: 10 per cent
- Childcare: 9.2 per cent
- Health Care/Nursing: 8.8 per cent

⁵⁷ N = 534, missing = 216

⁵⁸ This question was open-ended therefore some people explicitly said a certain level of FETAC accreditation, where others said a FETAC generally. Those who stated a desire to gain a PLC, certificate or diploma were recoded into this category.

Table 5.8: Subject or area of planned qualification⁵⁹

	Frequency	Percentage
Childcare	33	9.2 %
Accounting	27	7.5 %
Social Work	24	6.6 %
Computers	31	8.7 %
Community Development	9	2.5 %
Hairdressing/Beauty	22	6.1 %
Sport/Recreation	9	2.4 %
Health care/Nursing	32	8.8 %
Disabilities	39	10.8 %
Tourism/Catering	16	4.5 %
Social Science/Psychology/Arts Degree	49	13.6 %
Art/Craft	7	1.9 %
Trade	3	0.9 %
Business/Management	36	10.0 %
Don't Know	24	6.5 %
Total	361	100 %

5.5.2 Barriers to education/training

Those who had no plans to go into education or training in the next one to three years were asked for their reasons which are outlined below:

Table 5.9: Barriers to education or training

	Frequency	Percentage
There are no courses available in my area that I want to do	73	6.5 %
The course that I want to do is not available on a part-time basis	60	5.3 %
The time of the courses don't suit me	65	5.8 %
I cannot afford the cost of the courses	174	15.5 %
I don't have enough information on what is available	94	8.3 %
I can't get the childcare I need	143	12.8 %
I am afraid it would interfere with my payments/benefits	132	11.8 %
I can't get affordable, quality childcare	94	8.4 %
I'm not eligible for back-to-education supports	20	1.8 %
I already have the skills and qualifications that I need	87	7.8 %
I am working or plan to get a job	158	14.1 %
Other (children too young, language issues, health issues)	21	1.9 %
Total	1123	100 %

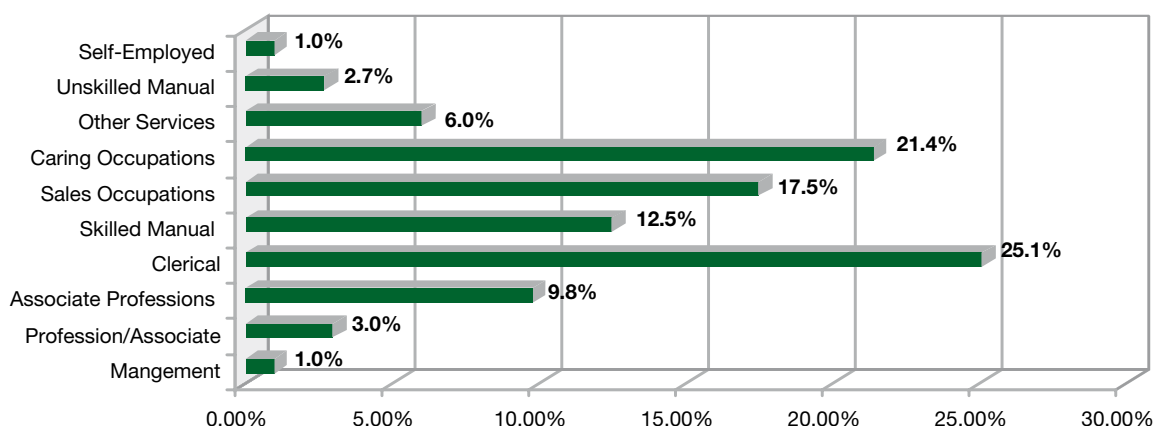
⁵⁹ N = 534, missing =173

Similar to barriers to employment, childcare and fear of losing benefits are the main reasons given for respondents not planning to go into education or training. However the highest number of respondents referred to the costs of courses (15 per cent) as the main reason for not planning to undertake education or training. Other important barriers identified by respondents were the non-availability of courses in the area or on a part-time or suitable time basis, or the lack of information on courses available. Additional reasons given are that they are already working or planning to work.

5.5.3 Future work plans

Figure 5.19 shows the type of jobs those who plan to work part-time in the next three years are aiming for. The respondents plan to work in clerical (25.1 per cent) or caring occupations (21.4 per cent). A high number also plan to work in sales occupations (17.5 per cent) or skilled manual jobs (10.7 per cent). Interestingly ten per cent said they would like an associate professional level job, referring to areas such as teaching assistants, nurses and legal secretaries.

Figure 5.19: Part-time jobs: what kind?⁶⁰

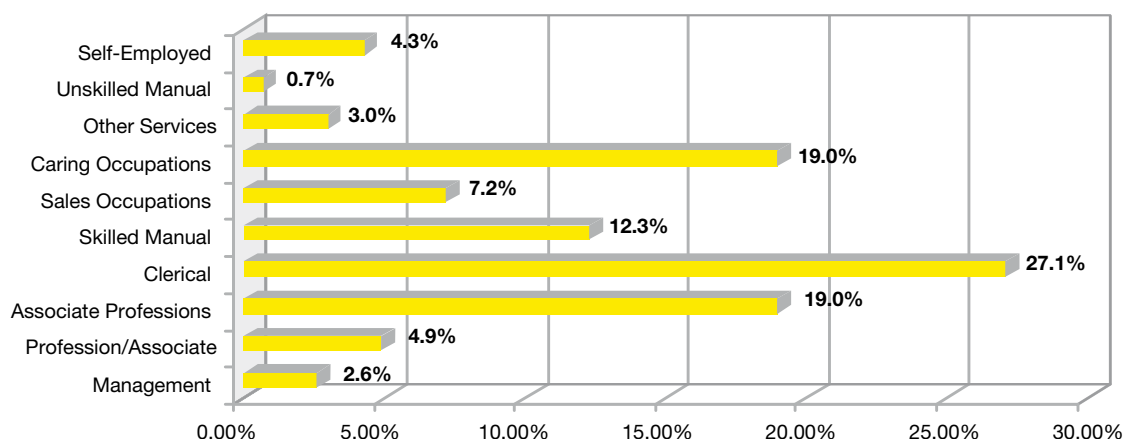


Looking at the type of full-time employment⁶¹ sought by respondents a somewhat different pattern emerges. Figure 5.19 shows that the highest response category to this question is again clerical (27.1 per cent) followed by associate professional (19 per cent) and skilled manual (12 per cent). This includes hairdressing, beautician, chef and culinary work. However fewer respondents state that they would like a sales-based occupation (7.2 per cent compared to 17.5 per cent for part-time).

These findings suggest that those planning to work full-time may have higher aspirations and recognise the need to work at a higher occupational level if full-time employment is to be a viable option.

60 N = 555, missing = 169

61 N = 555, missing = 169

Figure 5.20: Full-time job⁶²

5.5.4 Key findings – future plans

- Approximately 16 per cent of respondents plan to gain new skills and 20 per cent plan to study for a qualification in the next three years.
- Half of those planning to get a qualification are planning to achieve FETAC level 5-7.
- Subject areas where respondents plan to study are predominantly in the caring professions – social science, health, childcare, disabilities.
- Ten per cent plan to study business/management, 8 per cent accounting and 8 per cent computers.
- Those who plan to work full-time within three years demonstrate a greater preference for associate professional and skilled manual work such as nurses, teaching assistant, hairdressing, beautician, chef, and a lower preference for sales jobs. This reflects a recognition that jobs at this level are required if full-time employment is to be financially viable and also perhaps more fulfilling.
- The barriers to engaging in training and education are very similar to the barriers mentioned in relation to employment – lack of childcare and fear of losing benefits. However the cost of courses, problems accessing courses, as well as lack of information on what courses are available, were also referred to.

62 n = 422, missing = 104

5.6 Views on parenting alone and employment

In the final section of the questionnaire all respondents were asked for their views on a number of issues affecting their perceptions of employment and on being in employment while parenting alone. Firstly they were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

Table 5.10: Barriers to employment⁶³

	Agree	Disagree
I cannot access affordable, quality childcare	81.3 %	18.7 %
I cannot get work for the hours I want	73.2 %	26.8 %
I want to be a full time mum/dad	38.4 %	61.6 %
I cannot afford the costs involved in going out to work	54.5 %	45.5 %
I have a health condition or disability that limits my ability to work	20.1 %	79.9 %
I think I might be worse off financially if I started work	53.2 %	46.8 %
I haven't got the skills or experience to get the kind of job I would like	53.3 %	46.7 %
I'm afraid I will lose my Medical Card	70.4 %	29.6 %
My confidence about work is low	36.1 %	63.9 %
I care for someone who has a health, a disability or behavioural issue	20.7 %	29.3 %
I don't have the transport I need to get to a job	30 %	70 %
I don't have the support of family/ friends to help me while I'm working	46.7 %	53.3 %
I cannot get a job that uses my qualification and skills	30.4 %	69.6 %
I have English language problems	10.5 %	89.5 %
I have literacy/numeracy problems	14.6 %	85.4 %
I don't know how to go about getting a job	15.1 %	84.9 %
I don't have enough information on my rights and entitlements	65.2 %	34.8 %
I have nobody to mind my children if they are ill or off school	72.3 %	27.7 %
I am afraid that I would lose my Rent Supplement	44.1 %	55.9 %

5.6.1 Caring roles

Similar to the earlier results, 81.3 per cent agreed that they cannot access affordable, quality childcare while 20 per cent also state that they care for someone with a health condition. Almost half say they have no support to help them while working and almost three quarters say they have no one to mind their children if they are ill or off school. These findings clearly highlight the depth and complexity of caring roles on the work experience of lone parents. This finding is reinforced by the fact that almost three quarters state that they cannot get work for the hours they want.

5.6.2 Financial considerations

Financial considerations also play an important role. Half of the respondents agreed with the statements: *I think I might be worse off financially if I started work* and *I cannot afford the costs*

63 N = 1488

involved in going out to work. The fear associated with losing the Medical Card (70.4 per cent) and/or Rent Supplement (44.1 per cent) reinforces these concerns.

5.6.3 Health

Just over 20 per cent of respondents agree that they have a health condition or disability that limits their ability to work.⁶⁴

5.6.4 Parenting

Thirty eight per cent of respondents said they want to be a full-time mum/dad while almost two thirds of respondents disagreed with this statement indicating their preference to balance caring with other activities.

5.6.5 Information

Lack of information is also an issue for the respondents as over 65 per cent agree they do not have enough information on their rights and entitlements while 15 per cent agree they do not know how to get a job.

5.6.6 Education

Half the respondents agree with the statement: *I haven't got the skills or experience to get the kind of job I would like*, while over ten per cent agree they have English language difficulties and nearly 15 per cent said they have literacy/ numeracy problems. Interestingly almost a third agrees with the statement: *I cannot get a job that uses my qualification and skills*.

5.6.7 Personal issues

Just over a third (35 per cent) agreed that their confidence about work was low indicating that a substantial minority of OFP recipients need support to build their confidence before they can successfully progress their employment plans.

5.6.8 Personal issues

Overall these findings indicate the complexity of work related issues facing lone parents currently dependent on social welfare. Taken with the results shown earlier they clearly demonstrate the willingness of such parents to work but the myriad of issues lone parents have to overcome to do so in a way that allows them to balance work and family life, to make work financially viable and, for many, to make up for their current lack of skills and education. The findings highlight the important role that information and access to education, training and childcare can make in helping such parents to make the transition from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency.

5.6.9 Work and parenting

Next, respondents were asked their views about the effect of work on their lives and on the way work links to parenting.

64 This compares with findings from EU-SILC 2006 which shows that 22.8% of households containing one adult and children have a "chronic illness or health problem"

Table: 5.11: Views of parenting alone/employment ⁶⁵

	Agree	Disagree
Having a job is good for my confidence and self-esteem	98.1 %	1.9 %
Unless the Government makes work pay I may as well stay on welfare	51.0 %	49.0 %
Having a job improves my family's quality of life	89.1 %	10.9 %
Being a full-time mother/father is the best job in the world	50.6 %	49.4 %
I would like to be able to discuss my career opportunities with someone	79.3 %	20.7 %
I am afraid to take a job in case I lose my benefits	61.0 %	39.0 %
Parenting is a full-time job	81.3 %	18.7 %
Childcare problems mean that I won't be able to get a decent job until my children grow up	69.4 %	30.6 %
I would like to be able to get advice on parenting	41.3 %	58.7 %
My teenage children need to be minded as much as my young children	53.3 %	46.7 %
I have always lived in situations where money is scarce	67.8 %	32.2 %
Staying on welfare is not good for me or my child	81.3 %	18.7 %

Again the results indicate that lone parents on the OFP have highly positive attitudes to work with over 98 per cent agreeing that having a job is good for their confidence and self-esteem and 90 per cent agreeing that having a job improves their family's quality of life. Over 80 per cent believe that staying on welfare is not good for them or their children.

In terms of moving on to work, almost 80 per cent of respondents agree that they would like to discuss their career options with someone.

However the barriers identified above resurface again here with almost 70 per cent of respondents agreeing that childcare problems mean that they will not be able to get a decent job until their children grow up and 61 per cent expressing a fear of losing their benefits if they go into employment. The implications of these barriers can be clearly seen where over 50 per cent of respondents agree with the statement that unless the government makes work pay they may as well remain on social welfare.

This table also conveys the difficulties for some parenting alone with almost 70 per cent of respondents agreeing that they live in a situation where money is always scarce.

The importance of parenting to this group is also clear in that over half of respondents believe that being a full-time mum/dad is the best job in the world and over 80 per cent agree that being a parent is a full-time job. Over 40 per cent said they would like some advice on parenting. Interestingly almost half the respondents agree with the statement that '*my teenage children need to be minded as much as my young children.*' This finding indicates that issues relating to balancing parenting with employment continue into the teenage years, with obvious implications for out of school care.

5.6.10 Findings from the 'Comments' section of the survey

The final section of the Lone Parents and Employment Survey asked respondents if they would like to make any other comments. Many respondents replied with detailed answers eliciting an important, if limited source of qualitative data on the issues. Such comments help to illustrate the real issues lone parents face in relation to employment, poverty and managing a family. Data from this section is presented in respondents' own words and this section provides a brief overview of some of the comments received.

On the issue of entering employment for example, one respondent commented:

"Being a single mother is not something I am ashamed of but living on welfare is not good for my kids... This is why I would love to work. But the government makes it so hard for me to do this."

Some parents explained that parenting responsibilities place limits on how much they wish to work. One parent commented:

"I would like to get back to work for myself part-time. I only want for the moment to work three mornings a week. Having three kids to look after I need time for cleaning and homework and also spending time with my kids."

Other barriers to employment were also cited by parents. For example a respondent commented:

"I would love to go back to work but finding a job close to where the children go to school is hard and getting the hours I need is also hard. I don't have anyone to collect my kids from school if they have half days and I have no one to mind them when there is no school."

Childcare was highlighted by parents as another barrier. Interesting to note here is the indication of the importance to parents not just of affordable, but also quality childcare.

"It is very hard to get decent minders for your children and that you can afford. It is not worth your while working when you have to pay half of your money to childminders [especially] when they are on holidays from school."

Some parents articulated how they felt trapped either in unemployment or in part-time employment as increasing their current hours of work would in fact leave them financially worse off. One parent explained:

"I understand that by going back to work I am not entitled to my full [OFP] but childcare and travel expenses leave us with no options but to stay at home. As we end up working to pay these expenses it doesn't pay us to work."

Some respondents felt frustration with the inaccessibility of educational possibilities which would enable them to achieve a higher pay rate:

"If government can fund education on part-time or evening courses for lone parents it will help some of us who want to further our education without any financial restraint and at the same time work. With minimum wage as a childcare worker it is not enough at all, even with one child. Since I cannot afford further training it's going to be difficult to go off benefits. And I really want to go off benefits."

The anxiety and desperation felt by some parents in relation to their financial situation was also elucidated in this section. Often this stress was compounded by parents' perceived inability to improve their situation by entering employment. In the words of one respondent:

“My children are all teenagers now. Looking back I can only say that the poverty, helplessness, guilt [and] stress has destroyed me as a person. Life has been a constant battle. First having enough to feed a family from Thursday to Thursday is never enough; the weekly expense of school a nightmare and the stigma of not having money at school has left its mark on my children.”

A number of respondents commented that while CE was beneficial they required further support once the scheme had ended. For example one parent explained:

“I enjoyed doing three years of CE scheme, the hours of work suited, the money was great but I think that after three years there should be more support given to get CE trainees into the work place when course finishes not just left to go looking yourself.”

5.6.11 Key findings – perceptions of employment and parenting

- Overall respondents have a very positive attitude towards employment with most seeing the positive benefits to them and their families.
- Caring roles are very important to this group and optimal ways of combining parenting, caring, education and work are seen to be very important.
- Lack of childcare supports, for both young and older children, fear of losing benefits and a lack of confidence are major barriers to employment/education.
- One fifth of respondents state that they have a health condition/disability that limits their ability to work while one fifth cares for someone else with a health condition/disability.
- Many wish to discuss their career opportunities with someone.
- A complex web of barriers face lone parents seeking to combine work and parenting and the data indicates that all need to be addressed if such parents are to move out of social welfare dependency and poverty.

5.7 Overall key findings from the survey

The key findings from the survey are as follows:

- Recipients of the OFP are a diverse group with different needs, views, experiences and career plans.
- The majority are female and single, a fifth were born outside Ireland.
- Education levels vary significantly with 18 per cent having no educational qualifications and a third having post-leaving certificate qualifications.
- Most strikingly the data clearly shows that lone parents on the OFP have a strong motivation to work and/or engage in education/training with over 80 per cent currently either working, in education/training or looking for work. The vast majority see the benefits of working for themselves and their family.
- Parenting is a highly valued activity and strongly influences the current work options available to this group. Most favour a combination of work and caring.
- Housing and loss of housing benefit may play an important role in OFP recipients' work plans with almost 20 per cent living with their parents and a quarter of the total in receipt of Rent Supplement.
- Those currently in paid employment are primarily concentrated in low paid part-time work, with many OFP recipients receiving little financial reward in entering the labour market.

- Recipients on the OFP already demonstrate a high level of flexibility in how they balance work, parenting and caring roles.
- The majority of those in paid employment have children that are in school or have friends or relatives who take care of their children while they are at work. There is some evidence that those who work longer hours are more likely to avail of paid childcare.
- Two thirds of those currently working want to be working more hours in three years time and a third within one year. 40 per cent work over 24 hours on average per week but only 19 per cent work in the afternoons.
- Of those who have worked in the past since going on the OFP, over three quarters would prefer to be working now and almost 60 per cent of those that have not worked have looked for work.
- A third of those that have not looked for work since going on the OFP have completed an education course and 28 per cent a training course.
- Those who have not looked for work are more likely to have provided the reason of wanting to spend more time with their children than those who left their jobs in the past.
- Twenty per cent plan to get a qualification in the next three years and almost 30 per cent plan to work full-time. Those who plan to work full-time are more likely to be looking for associate professional or skilled manual jobs than those who plan to work part-time.
- The main barriers to employment experienced by all OFP recipients are lack of affordable/quality childcare and a limited financial incentive to work.
- Up to 20 per cent cited a that they had a health condition and/or their children had one as a barrier to work.
- Many refer to low confidence/self-esteem (35 per cent), lack of skills and education to get the kind of job they want (50 per cent), lacking information on their rights and entitlements (65 per cent) and not being able to get work for the hours they want (75 per cent). A small but significant number refer to English language problems (10 per cent) and numeracy/ literacy problems (15 per cent) as factors that limit their ability to participate in the labour market.
- Similar barriers are referred to in relation to participating in education and training although ten per cent specifically refer to the cost of courses as a further disincentive in this area.
- Eighty per cent want to discuss their career options with someone.
- Thirty per cent refer to transport difficulties in going to work.

These issues are explored further in the next chapter in the context of a sub-group analysis of the survey results.

CHAPTER 6: SUB-GROUP ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter an examination of the key characteristics of the different sub-groups is presented ie those in employment, those in education or training and those who are caring for their children full-time. Each sub-group is examined in relation to their age, gender, marital status, nationality, education, housing, length of time in receipt of the payment and health status of the respondents. The purpose of this is to see if it is possible to identify particular profiles among those in employment, education or training and caring for their children full-time.

The second section of this chapter explores in further detail groups that have been identified as having greater difficulty in accessing the labour market. These include; members of new communities, older lone parents and those who are caring for their children full-time.

6.2 Profiling those in employment, education or parenting full-time

The table below displays the significant and non-significant relationships between respondents' demographic characteristics and their current employment status⁶⁶. Random chance means that there will almost always be some difference between groups. However the finding of a 'statistically significant difference' defines a difference between groups which is unlikely to occur simply due to chance⁶⁷. The finding of such a difference implies that other factors are at play.

The purpose of the analysis below is to examine if there are statistically significant differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of those lone parents in paid employment compared to those caring and not looking for work and those in education or training. In this way we can determine if there is some relationship between lone parents' demographic characteristics and their employment status. This is important from a policy perspective. If for example we find that lone parents not in work and caring for a child have a significantly lower level of education compared to those in work (ie a level lower than that which could occur by chance), we might conclude that policy measures to raise the level of education of lone parents would be important in improving employment rates.

In Table 6.1, statistically significant relationships are highlighted by bold font and an asterisk. Under each employment category the most frequent sub-category of demographic characteristic is listed. Where no significant relationship was found to exist between variables those variables are in normal font and categories of analysis are not applicable (n/a).

66 See Appendix D for cross tabulations

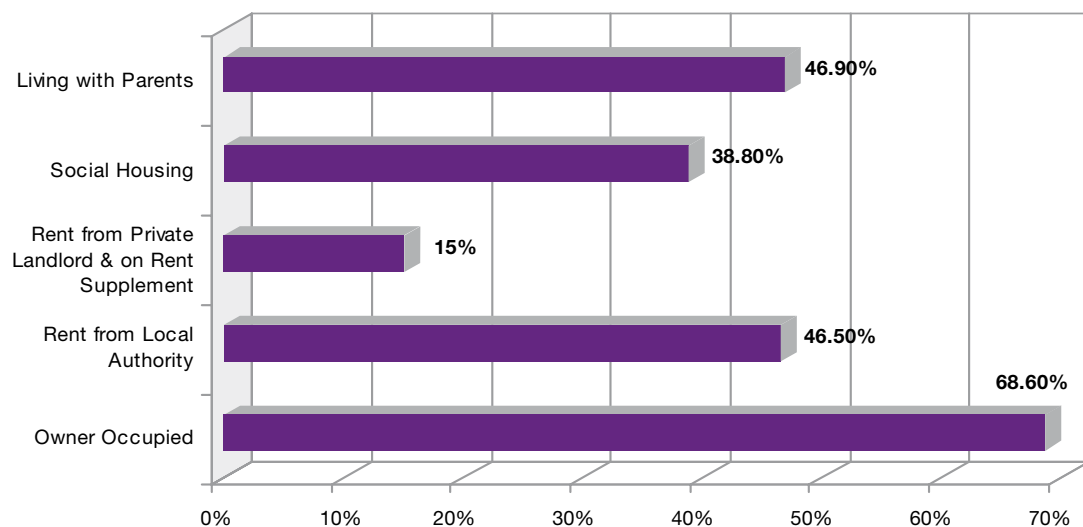
67 Significant values are highlighted with a * ($p \leq .05$)

Table 6.1: Employment status and key demographic characteristics:

Areas of significant difference	In paid employment	Caring, not looking for work	Caring, looking for work	Education/ Training	Disability/ maternity leave
Gender	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Marital* Status	Separated or divorced	Single	Single	Single or separated	Divorced
Age*	Between 21 and 50 (Mid)	Over 50 and 21-30 (Old and young)	Under 30 (Young to mid)	Under 40 (Young to mid)	31-50 (Mid to older)
Education*	Leaving Certificate and degree or higher	Under Leaving Certificate	Under Leaving Certificate	Degree or higher	Under Leaving Certificate
Nationality*¹	Ireland, EU and new EU member states	EU and Irish	Outside the EU	Outside the EU and new member states	Outside the EU
Area	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Region	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Length OFP*²	Long term	Short and medium term	Short term (small difference)	Short term	Long term
Housing*	Owner occupied	Private rent or social housing	Private rent or live with parents	Private rent	Rent from local authority or social housing
Mental health	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Physical* health	Very good or excellent	Fair or poor	Good or fair	Excellent or very good	Poor

The above table indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between lone parents' employment status and their marital status, age, nationality, education, length of time in receipt of the OFP, housing status and physical health. Therefore all these factors have been found to have a significant impact on the employment status of lone parents.

As the literature review indicated, Rent Supplement has been cited as a significant barrier to employment for lone parents (Russell and Corcoran, 2001; Norris, 2006; Millar et al, 2007; OPEN/ EAPN, 2006). Within the current study, further data analysis of housing type validates this previous research and additionally indicates the extent of the negative impact of Rent Supplement on employment participation rates. As can be seen from Figure 6.1, those who are renting from a private landlord and receive Rent Supplement are by far the least likely group to be in paid employment. Only 15 per cent of those on Rent Supplement are in employment compared to 39 per cent of those in social housing, 49 per cent of those living with their parents or renting from a local authority and 69 per cent of those who own their own home.

Figure 6.1: Housing type and paid employment⁶⁸

Interestingly no significant relationship was found between gender, area, region, mental health and employment status.

The finding that mental health is not a significant indicator of employment is surprising given that much research in this area has found the contrary. However quantitative self-completion questionnaires, which form the basis of this study, may mask mental health problems. Such issues are best explored in a qualitative expert interview situation which was outside the remit of the current study. Given that the literature review indicates a significant difference in the mental health of lone mothers compared to partnered mothers and a relationship between poor mental health and employment, this is an area that needs to be explored further.

Summarising the information presented above it can be concluded that:

Lone parents in **paid employment** are more likely to be:

- separated or divorced;
- older;
- at a Leaving Certificate or higher level of education;
- from Ireland or the EU;
- in receipt of the OFP for a medium to long period of time;
- owners of their own home; and
- in very good physical health.

Lone parents in **education or training** are more likely to be:

- Single;
- in the young to middle age category;
- a degree or higher educational qualification holder;
- from outside the EU or a new member state;
- in receipt of the OFP for a short period of time;
- living in private rented accommodation; and

68 N = 432

- in very good physical health.

Those who care for their children and are **not looking** for employment are more likely to be:

- Single;
- over 50 or between 21 and 30 years of age;
- below a Leaving Certificate level of education;
- from the EU or Ireland;
- in receipt of the payment for a short or medium period of time;
- living in private rented accommodation or social housing; and
- in poor physical health.

Lone parents who are caring for their children full-time **and looking for employment** are more likely to be:

- single;
- in a young to middle age category;
- from outside the EU;
- below a Leaving Certificate level of education;
- in receipt of the OFP for a short period of time (although little difference was observed between short, medium and long term);
- living in private rented accommodation or living with their parents; and
- in fair or good physical health.

This analysis indicates that there are significant differences between the sub-groups of those in paid employment, those in education or training and those who are caring for their children full-time, along a number of demographic characteristics.

Looking at those in work, this group are more likely to be separated or divorced with 48.7 per cent of those separated or divorced in paid employment compared to 41.5 per cent of those who are single. Those in paid employment are also more likely to have higher educational qualifications. Indeed 40 per cent of those with below Leaving Certificate level of education are in paid employment compared to 46.3 per cent of those with Leaving Certificate or higher and 48.6 per cent of those with a degree or higher. While these differences are statistically significant the variations are not as large as for some other factors, indicating that other factors are also important in influencing employment rates.

For example, those in paid employment are more likely to describe themselves as in good health, with 45.6 per cent of those in employment describing their health as excellent, very good or good compared to 32.7 per cent describing their health as fair or poor. Finally those in employment are far more likely to own their own home and are far less likely to be receiving Rent Supplement. While 68.6% of those who own their own home are in employment, the comparative figure for those on Rent Supplement is only 15 per cent. Indeed home ownership would appear to be the strongest indicator of employment status with the effect of Rent Supplement seemingly having a particularly strong negative effect on labour market participation. For a more detailed analysis of these issues please see Appendix D.

Those who are in education or training are more likely to already have educational qualifications and to have been born outside Ireland. Those looking for work are more likely to have an under Leaving

Certificate level of education and to be on the OFP for a shorter period of time. They are also more likely to be living in private rented accommodation.

These findings suggest that those not currently in work face additional barriers in accessing employment, especially in relation to educational qualifications and in terms of poverty traps related to Rent Supplement.

Comparing those that are caring full-time and looking for employment and those caring full-time and not looking for employment, there are less marked differences. However those caring and not looking for employment are more likely to be over 50 or under 30 and to be from the EU or Ireland and in poor physical health while those looking for work are more likely to be younger and living with their own parents.

The analysis also suggests that lone parents from new communities are more likely to be looking for employment or be in education or training.

The next section looks at these two sub-groups in terms of future plans and here more significant differences emerge.

6.3 Different sub-groups within the overall population

Following on from this, the next section focuses on those groups where the most pronounced differences were found. These are:

- older groups
- those not looking for employment
- those from new communities.

These sub-groups are analysed in relation to their desire or ability to work; their future plans; and their perceived barriers to employment. We also found some significant differences by gender which did not emerge in the above analysis, probably because of the relatively small number of male respondents to the survey. These are also looked at below.

6.3.1 Male lone parents

Although the relationship between employment status and gender was not statistically significant, there are some interesting points about male respondents to be noted. Firstly no male respondents are in education or training while a relatively large proportion are caring for their children full-time and not looking for employment (25 per cent⁶⁹). Also a higher number of men (4.2 per cent) said that they were on illness/disability leave than women (one per cent).

As the previous chapter illustrated male lone parents are also more likely to be separated or divorced than women and to have a lower level of education with over 75 per cent of men having a below Leaving Certificate level of education compared to 39 per cent of women. However no significant difference was found between male and female respondents' housing situation, health status and the length of time they have been in receipt of the OFP.

The findings suggest that male lone parents may face greater difficulties in the activation process. However due to the small numbers involved (25 respondents out of 1,488), such findings must be

69 Please note that there is small number in each category as male respondents only made up 1.7% of the sample or 25 respondents.

treated with caution. Such a small number of respondents also renders any further analysis highly problematic in terms of significance. This is an area where further research would be useful.

6.3.2 Older lone parents

As highlighted above, respondents that are over 50 years of age are more likely to be caring for their children full-time and not looking for employment than younger cohorts and they are also less likely to be in education or training. This group is also characterised by relatively poor physical and mental health as well as by low education status. Lone parents over 50 are also more likely to be divorced or widowed and more likely to own their own housing or live in Local Authority housing. A further examination of this group found the following:

- They were less likely to have looked for a job since they began receiving the OFP.
- Only 8.3 per cent said they planned to study for a qualification in the next one to three years. This compares to 48 per cent of those under 20 and 38 per cent of those aged 21-40.
- They are more likely to want a part-time job than a full-time job.
- They are more likely to agree that they have a health condition or a disability that limits their ability to work, that they have little support from friends and family and that they have low confidence about work.
- This group are also less likely to agree with the statement that they have no one to mind their children when they are ill or off school and that they would be afraid to lose their Medical Card.

This group it would appear are far removed from the labour market or from education and training. The effects of activation on this group unless backed up by targeted supports are likely to be particularly problematic. This is a significant issue as many of these lone parents may be soon faced with a situation where they are no longer eligible for the OFP due to their childrens' age or because their children are no longer in full-time education.

6.3.3 Parents from new communities

Table 6.1 illustrated that respondents from outside the EU have a much lower level of labour market participation than those from Ireland, the EU and those from new member states. However respondents from outside the EU and from new member states are also more likely to be in education and training than Irish respondents and to have a degree or higher ie those from outside the EU (15 per cent), those from new member states (20.5 per cent) compared to Irish respondents (5.2 per cent). Respondents from new communities are also more likely to be living in private rented accommodation, have poorer mental and physical health (particularly those from outside the EU) and to have been in receipt of the payment for a shorter period of time than their Irish and EU counterparts.

Further analysis revealed that respondents from new communities have:

- a relatively stronger desire to work and in particular to work full-time. Almost 40 per cent of those from outside the EU planned to get a full-time job compared to 28 per cent of those from new member states and 28 per cent of those from Ireland;
- a stronger plan to study for a qualification in the next three years. A total of 51 per cent (or 40 respondents) from the new member states and over 45 per cent of those from outside the EU said they would like to study for a qualification in the next one to three years as compared to 34 per cent of Irish respondents;

- less support from family and friends – 63 per cent of respondents from both new member states and 73 per cent from outside the EU agreed that they do not have the support of friends and family compared to 44 per cent from Ireland and 52 per cent from the EU;
- greater problems finding a job where they can use their skills and qualifications as 45 per cent from new member states, 42 per cent from existing member states and 49 per cent from outside Europe (49 per cent) agreed with this statement, compared to 27 per cent from Ireland;
- less knowledge of how to get a job – almost 28 per cent of those from outside the EU agreed that they did not know how to get a job compared to 20 per cent of those from new member states, 9 per cent from the EU and 14 per cent from Ireland; and
- more literacy and/or numeracy problems as well as English language difficulties.

These findings provide clear evidence of the particular difficulties lone parents from new communities face in accessing the labour market, such as having their skills and qualifications recognised and in having their language needs addressed. These findings highlight the need to provide a targeted response to the needs of this group if they are to successfully move from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency. This response recognises their high motivation to work and their current relatively high skill and education levels. A further issue here may relate to additional restrictions and difficulties faced by members of new communities from outside the EU in accessing employment. The ESRI and the Equality Authority recently found that that non-Irish nationals report twice the rate of employment discrimination as Irish nationals. Furthermore people of black ethnicity report the highest rate of discrimination at 40 per cent compared to 12 per cent of Irish nationals (ESRI and Equality Authority, 2008). These wider issues therefore also need to be taken into account in planning labour market interventions for this group of lone parents.

6.3.4 Caring for children full-time and not looking for employment

The analysis above reveals that those who are caring for their children full-time are more disadvantaged than those currently in employment especially in relation to education and housing. Looking at demographic factors alone does not indicate any significant difference between those caring for children and not looking for work and those caring for children and looking for work. However for those caring for children and not looking for work, analysis of data on future work plans does indicate some important differences:

- Many plan to work but on a part-time basis as 60 per cent of those caring for their children but not looking for employment indicated that they plan to get a part-time job and 10 per cent said that they plan to get a full-time job.
- Although some said they plan to get a full-time job, only 13 per cent said they plan to get one within the year. This is compared to 36 per cent of those in paid employment, 47 per cent of those caring and looking and 42 per cent of those in education or training.
- Just under 20 per cent of this group said they would like to study for a qualification within one to three years.
- Overall this group are less likely to have plans to work and/or train than other groups and are more likely to see these as plans for the future and not something that they desire at present.
- This group are also more likely to be caring for someone with a health condition or disability than other groups (30 per cent).
- Almost 70 per cent of those who are caring for children and not looking for employment group said that they wanted to be a full-time mum/dad and almost 75 per cent (or 141 respondents)

agreed that being a parent is the best job in the world. These responses are very high in comparison with other groups.

- The caring for children and not looking for employment group is also more likely than those who are caring for children but looking for employment group to not know how to get a job or have the skills and qualifications to get the job they want.

These findings indicate that for this group caring is their principal concern at the present time. However many plan to work in the future but many need more support to do so. For some of this group at least, participation in the labour market may remain a low priority for some time to come.

6.4 Key findings

- Current employment status is highly influenced by a number of demographic characteristics which include health status, housing status, nationality, age, marital status, education level and length of time in receipt of the OFP.
- Home ownership would appear to be the strongest indicator of employment status with the effect of Rent Supplement seemingly having a strong negative effect on labour market participation.
- Once again the data reveals that the majority of OFP recipients have a strong desire to work, train or go into further education. Most of those who are focused on caring for their children at present do plan to go into employment, albeit part-time employment in the future.
- Those who are currently working vary from those not working across a number of demographic characteristics. They are more likely to be separated or divorced, to have above Leaving Certificate level of qualifications and to own their own house than those who are not working.
- Respondents from new communities have a particularly strong desire to work and/or go into further education, but lack support from family and friends and some have English language difficulties. Some of these parents find it difficult to get employment that matches their skills and qualifications, even though they have a relatively high level of education. We were not able to identify in this study the extent to which lone parents from new communities face additional barriers in accessing employment related to nationality or residency status. This is an area requiring further investigation.
- Older recipients and male lone parents on the OFP appear further removed from the labour market indicating less desire or plans to increase their employment rates. This research indicates that these two groups may face additional difficulties in accessing employment. This issue should be investigated further in the context of planned policy to activate lone parents, especially those with older children.
- A sub-group of lone parents have health problems in the family – either relating to themselves or their children and these issues limit their work plans. Health issues are also more likely to be affected by age. Further investigation of this issue is required.
- The findings indicate that there is a sub-group of lone parents for whom caring for their children full-time or caring for someone with a health condition or disability is their overarching priority at the present time. For some of this group participation in the labour market may remain a low priority for some time to come.
- Overall this chapter provides further and more concrete evidence that OFP recipients are a diverse group with different needs and experiences, requiring a wide range of policy responses.

6.5 Implications for policy

As these findings identify specific sub-groups of lone parents they are highly significant from a policy perspective:

- One size will not fit all and effective responses must allow for flexible and customised responses based on individual needs and circumstances.
- Motivation to work is extremely high. This indicates that an activation policy based on a 'carrot' rather than a 'stick' will be most effective (Murphy, 2008).
- While the vast majority of lone parents on the OFP are motivated to work, for some this is a long-term rather than a current aspiration and one that appears to be mediated by current educational levels and housing arrangements. This suggests that activation policies that allow for long-term career planning and related supports, especially easy access to second-chance education, are most likely to be successful.
- The results also highlight how housing issues impact on work plans. This indicates how important it will be for activation policies to be complemented by better access to alternative forms of housing support for those on Rent Supplement .
- Older lone parents, and therefore those most likely to come off the payment in the near future, have been found to be one of the sub-groups most distant from the labour market. This sub-group has also been found to be less likely than others to plan to engage in education or training in the future. This could largely be a generational issue reflecting a history of long-term non-engagement in the labour market. Efforts to activate these older lone parents may therefore prove to be particularly problematic and may result in ongoing welfare dependency and related poverty unless they are based on a clear understanding of the needs of this sub-group of lone parents.
- Lone parents from new communities appear to be experiencing discrimination in the labour market. It would appear that a separate plan of action is required to support such lone parents to access employment that is suitable and reflects their educational qualifications and work experience.
- A significant number of lone parents want to and indeed have definite plans to develop their careers and have the necessary educational qualifications and relevant work experience to do so successfully. The outstanding barrier for them in accessing meaningful well-paid work appears to be childcare. This finding emphasises again the importance of ensuring such parents can access out-of-school care in order for them to develop their working lives, move out of poverty and welfare dependency and successfully carry out their parenting roles.
- If a work requirement is introduced in Ireland for lone parents, exemptions are most likely to be required, particularly for lone parents who are experiencing health problems themselves or are caring for others with health issues. This again indicates the importance in our view of proceeding on a voluntary basis aimed at activating those most ready and most keen to develop their careers first.

CHAPTER 7: KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the key findings from the study are pulled together and a number of conclusions are drawn and recommendations made. We know that lone parents represent a growing and particularly disadvantaged group in Irish society whose families are experiencing high and increasing rates of poverty. Strategies to reduce poverty among such families are increasingly aimed at raising the labour market participation rate of lone parents. However there is much debate on the effectiveness of such an approach. Policy developments in this area need to be based on a clear understanding of the current labour market situation of lone parents and on the facts that determine the choices such parents are currently making in balancing their work, parenting and caring roles. This study aims to provide nationally representative data and analysis to inform this topical debate.

The findings presented in this study are based on the results of an analysis of the 1,488 postal survey responses received by One Family from OFP recipients across the country, representing a return of almost 20 per cent from our sample. Our conclusions and recommendations are made in the context of previous research on lone parents' labour market experiences, their needs and supports available, and in the light of proposed policy changes aimed at increasing the involvement of lone parents in the labour market.

7.2 The context in which the current study was undertaken

- The issue of lone parents and employment has become a key area for policy reform in Ireland. This is due to the combination of a growing number of one-parent families dependent on social welfare and the high poverty levels found among such families.
- Such policy reform is taking place within a growing Irish and international policy climate that supports greater activation of social welfare recipients as the main means of reducing poverty rates among different groups in the labour market, including lone parents.
- One-parent families are characterised by relatively high rates of poverty, low educational attainment and poor housing tenure.
- Lone parents are normally seen to have low rates of employment but a more accurate reflection of the situation can be achieved by differentiating employment rates by gender. This analysis suggests that female lone parents' labour market participation is only slightly lower than female parents with dependent children in two-parent households.
- Furthermore it is estimated that almost 60 per cent of OFP recipients are in some form of employment.
- Over 40 per cent of these parents are earning below the income disregard level, indicating that many are in low-paid, part-time work.
- Lone parents, like other low income parents have limited access to affordable, quality childcare, especially out of school hours care. This has a negative effect on employment rates and is an issue that must be addressed if new policies aimed at increasing the employment rate of such parents are to be effective.

7.2.1 Key findings from previous research

Domestic and international research indicates that lone parents continue to face significant barriers in accessing and participating in the labour market and in combining their work and caring roles. Research findings are consistent across time and across countries and include the following:

- Lone parents are positively motivated towards work and recognise the considerable positive benefits that derive from work for them and their families, but experience many barriers to participation.
- Decisions regarding employment for lone parents are mediated by their key concern which is for the needs and welfare of their children. Thus when these welfare issues can not be reconciled with employment, the desire to work may not be realised.
- Lone parents are not a homogenous group and are likely to express different work preferences at different life stages.
- Due to the financial cost of going to work (in terms of eg loss of secondary benefits, childcare and transport costs), work does not pay for some lone parents who may thus be trapped in welfare dependency and in part-time employment.
- Perceived as well as actual disincentives to employment may act as a barrier in some cases, highlighting the importance of access to good-quality information.
- The absence of affordable, accessible and flexible childcare has been identified in many studies as the key barrier to employment for lone parents.
- Low levels of educational attainment trap many lone parents in low-paid jobs which make work financially unrewarding when the costs of going to work, including childcare, are taken into account.
- Flexible family-friendly employment is a requirement for many lone parents in balancing their parenting responsibilities with work. However such employment conditions may not be easily sourced, especially where skill and qualification levels are low.
- Lone parents view the security and stability of their income as an important issue when considering employment. Studies have in different ways pointed out that for lone parents an on-going sense of financial security and stability may be more important than financial incentives.
- Some lone parents experience mental health difficulties due primarily to financial stress and related pressures. Poor mental health may act as a barrier to employment and stability of employment.
- English language difficulties, discrimination and lack of knowledge of the labour market can be additional barriers for lone parents' from ethnic minorities participation in employment.

7.2.2 Key findings from relevant policy developments

- Many countries have introduced work requirements for lone parents. However the research clearly indicates that there is no necessary correlation between work requirements and rates of employment amongst lone parents. Rather it seems that the effectiveness of activation policy in increasing employment rates is mediated by other factors such as in-work benefits, flexible employment and wrap-around childcare.
- Compared to many other OECD countries, Ireland has a low level of childcare support and parents expend a very high level of income on childcare. In the absence of more developed childcare provision in Ireland a compulsory work requirement is likely to be very difficult to

operate in practice and to be highly problematic in terms of reducing poverty rates in the families affected. It has been suggested that the extent of labour market compulsion in Ireland needs to be linked to the extent of accessible childcare provision.

- Many countries have introduced statutory rights for parents who work in order to facilitate accessible family-friendly employment. This includes provisions such as generous parental leave; a statutory right to career breaks; right to part-time work; a right to take paid time off to care for a sick child; and flexi-time.
- Work requirements within activation policy are often conditional on the availability of certain supports (such as childcare) and exemptions for personal circumstances exist in certain countries.
- The high levels of poverty amongst those in work in Ireland highlight that work in itself is not necessarily a remedy for poverty. Research also strongly indicates that increased employment among lone parents only benefits children where incomes rise. This has also been found to be true for teenage children. This highlights the key importance of making work pay for lone parents. International experience would imply the necessity not only of supportive activation mechanisms but also of accompanying them with improved welfare benefits and social transfers if poverty rates are to be reduced.

7.3 Key findings from the current study

This study provides statistically representative data on the experiences, plans and views of lone parents that are currently on the OFP in Ireland. It confirms many of the findings of earlier studies, providing hard national data to support these findings and, for the first time, demonstrates in a statistically robust way the needs and experiences of a number of key sub-groups of OFP recipients among this population across the country.

The research results are summarised under a number of headings.

7.3.1 Motivation to work

- The study clearly demonstrates the high level of motivation among lone parents on the OFP to participate in employment. The vast majority of those surveyed – 84 per cent – are currently working, looking for work or engaged in education or training.
- Two thirds of those who are currently working plan to be working more in three years time.
- Almost 80 per cent of those that have worked in the past since going on the OFP would prefer to be working now.
- Sixty per cent who have not been in employment since going on the OFP have looked for a job.
- A third of those who have not worked since going on the OFP have undertaken an education course and 28 per cent a training course.
- Only ten per cent of total respondents have neither looked for work nor attended an education or training course.
- Future career plans are influenced by current employment status, with those who are currently employed more likely to plan to work full-time and those currently caring for their children full-time more likely to seek part-time work in the future.

7.3.2 Experience of employment

- Those currently in paid employment are primarily concentrated in low-paid part-time work, with many OFP recipients stating that they receive little financial reward from entering the labour market. Only 16 per cent say that they are taking home a lot more money since they started working. However there is some evidence that higher occupational categories are dominated by those lone parents with a Leaving Certificate or above level of education.
- Forty per cent work on average over 24 hours per week but only 19 per cent work in the afternoons and 23 per cent work full days.
- Forty per cent have been in their current job for over four years.
- Two thirds of those currently working want to be working more hours in three years time and a third within one year.
- Four out of five respondents want to discuss their career options with someone, while 15 per cent say they do not know how to get a job.
- Those who are currently employed are more likely to be in the middle group in terms of age; have greater stability in regard to housing and health status; have been in receipt of the OFP for a medium period of time; and have a relatively good level of education, compared to those that are not in employment.
- Rent Supplement appears as the factor most likely to determine participation in the labour market.
- The most highly ranked reasons for leaving their last job are 'financially it was not worth my while' (18 per cent of total responses), followed by 'I couldn't afford, quality childcare' (16 per cent). These are also the two most frequent reasons given by respondents that have not looked for a job since going on the OFP (27 per cent and 23 per cent respectively).

7.3.3 Balancing work and parenting

- For lone parents participation in employment is not at the expense of parenting but rather is something that must be accommodated with an important parenting role. Many lone parents believe that parenting is the best job in the world and most agree that parenting is a full time job. However nine out of ten agree with the statement that having a job improves their family's quality of life.
- Work is organised around childcare and parenting and for many this situation results in employment that requires high levels of flexibility, part-time hours and limited financial reward.
- The majority of those in paid employment either have children that are in school or their friends and relatives take care of their children while they are at work. There is some evidence that those who work longer hours are more likely to avail of paid childcare.
- There is a sub-group of lone parents for whom caring for their children full-time or caring for someone with a health condition or disability is their overarching priority at the present time. For this group, participation in the labour market may remain a low priority for some time to come while this group is also relatively disadvantaged in relation to housing and education. However many of these lone parents plan to work in the future and most see the benefits of employment for their family.

7.3.4 Education training levels and needs

- Educational levels vary enormously with 18 per cent having no educational qualifications and 36 per cent having post-Leaving Certificate qualifications.
- Half of the respondents agree that they do not have the skills or experience to get the kind of job they want.
- Ten per cent have English language difficulties and 15 per cent have a literacy and/ or numeracy need.
- Many of those who plan to work full-time want to work in associate professional and skilled manual jobs.
- Access to education for those with limited initial education is a key to employment. Problems turning education and training into satisfying work opportunities present barriers for others.
- Access to education and training qualifications is limited by the costs of courses, non-availability of courses locally and by lack of information on provision. Sixteen percent stated that the cost of courses was a barrier to their participation in education and training.
- Respondents are interested in participating in a range of personal development, parenting and work preparation courses.

7.3.5 Barriers to employment

- Lone parents face a range of barriers in participating and increasing their participation in employment.
- The most significant barriers to employment for OFP recipients are the lack of a financial return from work and the lack of affordable, quality childcare.
- Housing and health issues currently present barriers to lone parents' employment plans, especially for those with limited educational qualifications and therefore limited earning power.
- The removal of barriers to accessing skills and qualifications is vital, particularly those aimed at reducing the costs of participating in such programmes.
- Unless childcare needs are met, 'unsuitable hours' and 'lack of access to flexible employment' that matches their skills and qualifications will also remain key barriers to employment. Seventy per cent agree that childcare problems mean that they will not be able to get a decent job until their children grow up.
- Lack of confidence is an issue for one third of lone parents when seeking employment. This highlights the need to ensure that personal development programmes are widely available and accessible to lone parents as part of the activation process.

7.3.6 Harnessing and supporting positive actions – creating a win-win situation

The findings indicate that there are many positive factors that new policies and programmes can build on:

- Twenty per cent of respondents are planning to get a qualification within three years and 16 per cent a new skill.
- A number of lone parents who are not currently employed have a relatively high level of education and/or have completed a training course, particularly those from new communities. This suggests that there is an opportunity for the relevant agencies to do more to support these parents to find work that matches their skills and qualifications.

- As referred to above, the vast majority are currently working, looking for work or engaged in education or training. Many already are, or plan to participate in education or training or to move to full-time work.

7.3.7 Sub-groups

Older lone parents, lone parents from new communities and male lone parents can be identified as three groups that have particular experiences, plans and views of employment.

New communities

- Lone parents from new communities have a particularly high motivation to work and/or get an educational qualification but English language difficulties and lack of other supports work against this. These lone parents are, on average, better qualified than Irish recipients of the OFP but often find it difficult to get work that matches their skills or qualifications. They tend to have less family support; poorer health status; and limited knowledge of how the Irish labour market operates.

Older lone parents

- Older OFP recipients are characterised by relatively low levels of education and greater health problems. They have fewer plans to work or to gain an educational qualification compared to other age categories.

Male lone parents

- Male lone parents are more likely to be separated or divorced, have low levels of education and no male respondents were in education or training courses. A relatively high proportion of this group are caring for their children full-time. The small number of responses from males means that these figures must be interpreted with caution.

These findings demonstrate that lone parents are not a homogenous group but are highly diverse with differing needs and experiences. Their employment status is highly influenced by demographic factors and differing life situations. A range of policies and programmes are therefore required to support lone parents to move out of poverty and welfare dependency and into sustainable employment.

7.4 Conclusions

Following on from these key findings a number of conclusions can be made:

- Compulsory work engagement is likely to be neither necessary for, nor useful to lone parents on the OFP as they are already highly motivated to work, train and gain qualifications. Rather activation measures should seek to ensure that lone parents are better enabled to partake in financially viable and fulfilling employment with spin-off benefits for their families.
- Policy changes in this area should be aimed at developing a system of supports that recognises the importance of OFP recipients' parenting role and their need to balance work and parenting in a way that improves their financial situation. It should also recognise their desire to progress and the particular circumstances of different sub-groups within the overall population.
- If activation is to be successful in reducing poverty in one-parent families it must ensure that greater employment results in greater income. Such an outcome is also required if increased labour force participation is to improve rather than worsen family well being.

- Those who are currently working in low-paid jobs with limited financial reward must be supported to address the specific issues that cause this situation. This means ensuring access to adequate childcare across a range of age groups, removing the Rent Supplement poverty trap and supporting greater access to educational, training skills and qualifications.
- The full range of barriers ie educational, housing, childcare and, for some, health that prevent lone parents from seeking employment must be addressed. .
- Overall an effective activation policy must be based on a recognition that without changes in housing supports and improvements in childcare provision, work will continue to have limited financial benefits however well targeted other more direct supports are.
- Given the diverse needs and experiences of the population of OFP recipients, policy developments in this area must be capable of providing customised responses and tailored supports. This will involve the provision of comprehensive information and advice, access to education and training, personal development opportunities where required, as well as supports aimed at easing the transition into work and from part-time to full-time work.
- Many lone parents will continue to rely on the OFP for significant periods of their children's lives whatever other policy changes are implemented. Therefore complementary policies to address child and family poverty among those dependent on social welfare are also required.
- There are many positive factors that activation policy can build on and support eg lone parents' current work levels; their desire and plans to work and to participate in education and training; and their recognition of the benefits of working for both themselves and their families.

7.5 Recommendations and policy responses

Based on the literature, the international policy review and the results of the Lone Parents and Employment Survey a number of recommendations are made.

The central goal of government policy for lone parents should be to lift one-parent families out of poverty in a way that facilitates choice, supports financial independence and leads to improved family and individual well being.

This requires a strategy that:

- reduces child and family poverty;
- supports a wider range of education, training and employment options for lone parents aimed at meeting their career aspirations and improving their financial returns from employment;
- enables lone parents to successfully balance employment and parenting; and
- is based on detailed information of the specific needs of different sub-groups of the OFP population.

7.5.1 Child and family poverty in one parent families

We recommend the following:

1. Building on the recent NESC report (NESC, 2007) which examined child income support mechanisms, a special group made up of relevant departmental officials, state agencies and social partners, including relevant NGOs, should be established to recommend specific actions to address child and family poverty in one-parent families in an employment-positive way.

2. Immediate action be taken to reduce existing poverty traps in the housing system through the faster roll-out of the Rental Accommodation Scheme and through increasing the supply of social and affordable housing with challenging targets set for one-parent families over the next three years.
3. These actions should be incorporated as key targets within the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.

7.5.2 Supporting employment options

We recommend that the DFSA, supported by other departments, develop, pilot and monitor a co-ordinated system of supports for lone parents on the OFP. This system would include the following elements:

1. An assessment of each lone parent's needs and career plans and the subsequent development of a rolling career plan that would be regularly reviewed by local facilitators with expertise and knowledge of the area.
2. Access to a comprehensive information, advice and referral system, staffed by personnel with specialist expertise that focuses on:
 - rights and entitlements;
 - the financial implications of pursuing different work, education and training options;
 - available education, training and employment opportunities and childcare options that match the lone parent's own career plans as well as their education, training and employment history; and
 - the needs of different sub-groups within the overall population, especially older lone parents, male lone parents, lone parents from new communities and those with no educational qualifications.
3. Access to specialist personal development and family supports, including parenting supports, where required, with recognised progression routes and referral.
4. Access to a menu of options in terms of affordable education and training that allows for flexibility and leads to recognised qualifications.
5. Provision of financial supports to assist in making the transition into work or into more rewarding work, in addition to childcare supports.
6. The development of initiatives with the social partners to facilitate access by lone parents to flexible employment options that support their career plans and their need to improve the financial returns from employment, while also addressing employers' needs.

We recommend that the roll-out of this system be piloted on a voluntary basis in a number of areas based on a range of agreed indicators and targets. We also recommend that all recipients should be encouraged to engage with the process, regardless of their length of time on the OFP. Prior to its implementation the relevant personnel should be trained. Effective links with lone parent and other relevant groups should be developed to assist in providing information, referral and support the lone parents in the areas involved in the pilot.

The operation of the pilot system should be fully monitored and evaluated as part of the roll-out of the Social and Economic Participation Programme of the National Development Plan and its

effectiveness and impact on increasing employment, income and the family well of one-parent families fully evaluated.

7.5.3 Enabling lone parents to successfully balance employment and parenting

We recommend that:

- Specialist resources be made available to support the development and implementation of a co-ordinated strategy for the provision of accessible, affordable, quality childcare, including after school care, as part of the activation process. This programme of action should be built into a revised national childcare strategy, which will be monitored and evaluated.

7.5.4 Increasing understanding of the needs of specific sub-groups of OFP recipients

We recommend that further studies be undertaken on:

- The health needs and concerns of one-parent families, including children
- The specific issues affecting male lone parents dependent on the OFP.

Based on these studies, action should be taken to address their findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to first thank the research section of the Combat Poverty Agency, which provided valuable feedback and assistance throughout the research process, as well as the funding to complete the study. We would also like to express our special thanks to the Department of Social and Family Affairs for their support and assistance and without whom the study would not have been possible. A special thanks to Helen Faughnan, Ann-Marie O'Connor and Brendan Walker in the department for their help and support. We would like to thank all the staff at One Family for their assistance with the project.

Finally, and most importantly, we want to thank all those who took the time to complete and return the Lone Parents and Employment questionnaire. We trust that their involvement will have been worthwhile.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andersen, J., Guillemard A., Jensen, P. and Pfau-Effinger, B. eds. (2005) *The Changing Face of Welfare: Consequences and outcomes from a Citizenship Perspective*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Armstrong, J. (2006) Beyond 'juggling' and 'flexibility': classed and gendered experiences of combining employment and motherhood', Lancaster University, *Sociological Research Online*; 11(2).
- Baker and Tippin (2004) More Than Just Another Obstacle: Health, Domestic Purposes Beneficiaries, and the Transition to Paid Work, *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*; 21: 98-120.
- Bradshaw, J., Kennedy, S., Kilkey, M., Hutton, S., Corden, A., Eardley, T., Holmes, H. and Neale, J. (1996) *The Employment of Lone Parents: A Comparison of Policy in 20 Countries*. London: Family Policy Studies Centre.
- Bradshaw, J., Finch, N., Mayhew, E. (2003) *Financial Incentives and Mothers Employment: A Comparative Perspective*. Paper for the Foundation in International Studies in Social Security, Stiguna Sweden.
- Bradshaw, J. and Millar, J. (1991) *Lone Parents in the UK*, London: HMSO.
- Brannen, J. (1988) Research Note: 'The Study of Sensitive Topics', *Sociological Review*; 36: 552-63.
- Bryson A. et al. (1997) *Making Work Pay: Lone Mothers, Employment and Well-Being*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Butterworth P., Crosier T. (2004). The validity of the SF-36 in an Australian National Household Survey: Demonstrating the Applicability of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA). Survey to Examine Health Inequalities, *BMC Public Health*; 4:44.
Available at: <http://www.biomedcentral.com>.
- Callan, J. et al. (2008) *Tackling Low Income and Deprivation: Developing Effective Policies*, Dublin: ESRI.
- Cavan Lone Parents Initiative (2007) *Lone Parents and Labour Market Barriers in County Cavan*, Cavan: Cavan County Development Board.
- Clark, H., Chandler, J., Barry, J. and Woolliams, P. (2001) *Lone Parents: Parenting and Employment*, London: National Council for One Parent Families.
- Coakley, A. (2005) *Mothers Welfare and Labour Market Activation*, Working Paper, Dublin: Combat Poverty.
- Combat Poverty (1991) *Tackling Poverty in the Nineties*, Dublin: Combat Poverty.
- Crosier. T., Butterworth P., Rodgers, B. (2007) Mental health problems among single and partnered mothers, the role of financial hardship and social support, *Social Psychiatry and Epidemiology*, 42; 6-13.
- CSO (2003) *Census 2002*, Dublin: Stationary Office.

- CSO (2007) *Census 2006: Principal Demographic Results*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- CSO (2007b) *Census 2006: Principal Socio-economic Results*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- CSO (2006c) *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2005*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- CSO (2006d) *Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 2*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- CSO (2007c) *Measuring Ireland's Progress 2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- CSO (2007) *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- CSO (2008) *Quarterly National Household Survey, Quarter 2*, CSO, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Daly, M. (2004) *Families and Family Life in Ireland: Report of Public Consultation Fora for the Department of Social and Family Affairs*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social and Family Affairs (2007) *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016: Building An Inclusive Society*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (2000) *Review of One Parent Family Payment: Programme Evaluation Report No 7*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social and Family Affairs (2006) *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- DSFA (2007b) *Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services 2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Duncan, S., and Edwards, R. (1997) *Single Mothers in an International Context: Mothers or Workers*, California: UCL Press.
- Duskin, E. (1990) *Overview in the OECD: Lone Parent Families, The Economic Challenge*, Paris: OECD.
- Eurostat (2006) *The Family in the EU25 Seen Through Figures*, News Release; 59.
- Eurostat (2006) *People outside the labour force: Female inactivity rates down, Statistics in focus: Population and Social Conditions*, Available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa>.
- Economic and Social Research Institute (2000) *Child Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Economic and Social Research Institute (2005) *Trends in welfare for vulnerable groups: Ireland 1994-2001*, Dublin: ESRI.
- Economic and Social Research Institute (2008) *The Life Cycle Perspective on Social Inclusion in Ireland: An Analysis of EU SILC*, Dublin: ESRI.
- Economic and Social Research Institute and the Equality Authority (2008) *The Experience of Discrimination in Ireland*, Dublin, ESRI.
- Faughnan, H. (2008) *Proposals for supporting lone parents and other parents on low incomes*, Dublin: Presentation to ICTU Women's Committee.
- Fahey, T. (2006) Family Policy, in S. Healy, B. Reynolds and M. Collins (eds.) *Social Policy in Ireland, Principles, Practice and Problems*, Dublin: Liffey Press.

- Gerhard. U., Knijn, T. and Weckwert, A. (2005) *Working Mothers in Europe; A Comparison of Policies and Practices*, Cheltenham and Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Harkness, S. and Gregg, P. (2003) *Welfare Reform and Lone Parents in the UK*, CPMO Working Paper 03/072.
- Harkness, S et al. (2006) *Welfare to Work Policies and Child Poverty*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Hartley, D. (2001) *Working Parent hook and Parental Obligation*, Critical Social Policy 21(8): 267-286.
- Harrington, E (undated) *Pathways to Progression: An exploration of barriers to progression and entry within the labour market on completion of vocational training in the Ballymun Area*, Dublin: Ballymun Job Centre.
- Higgins Ní Chinnéide, B. (17 July, 2007) *State Childcare Grants*, Dublin: The Irish Times.
- Hope, S., Power, C., Rodgers, B. (1999) Does financial hardship account for elevated psychological distress in lone mothers?, *Social Science in Medicine*; 49: 1637–1649.
- Hoem, J. (2005) *Why does Sweden have such high fertility?* MPIDR Working Papers WP-2005-009: Rostock: Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.
- Houses of the Oireachtas Library and Research Service (2007) *Lone Parents in the Social Welfare System: Issues and Debates*, Spotlight No.1 April 2007.
- Kilkey, M. and Bradshaw, J. (2001) Making work pay policies for lone parents, in Millar, J. and Rowlingson, K. eds. *Lone Parents, Employment and Social Policy: Cross National Comparisons*, Bristol: The Policy Press: 211-231.
- Knijn, T. and van Wel, F. (2001) Careful or lenient? Welfare reform for lone mothers in the Netherlands, *Journal of European Social Policy*; 11 (3): 235 – 252.
- Kok, W. (2003) *Jobs, Jobs, Jobs: Creating more Employment in Europe*, Luxembourg: EU Commission.
- Leane, M. and Kiely, E. (1997) Single Lone Motherhood: Reality Versus Rhetoric in Byrne, A. and Leonard, M., (eds.) *Women and Irish Society: a Sociological Reader*, Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications.
- Lewis, J. (1993) *Women and Social Policies in Europe*, London: Edward Elgar.
- Loftus, C. (2004) *One Size Fits All?* Dublin: OPEN.
- Millar, J., Leeper M. and Davies, C. (1992) *Lone Parents: Poverty and Public Policy in Ireland*, Research Report Series No. 15 for Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin: Argus Press.
- Millar, J. (2005) Work as welfare lone mothers; social security and employment in Saunders, P., (ed) *Welfare to Work in Practice: Social Security and Participation in Economic and Social Life*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Millar, J. and Rowlingson, K. eds. (2001) *Lone Parents, Employment and Social Policy Cross National Comparisons*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

- Millar, M., et al. (2007) *Towards a Better Future: Research on Labour Market Needs and Social Exclusion of One-Parent Families in Galway City and County*, Galway: Galway City Partnership.
- McCashin, A. (1997) *Employment Aspects of Young Lone Parenthood in Ireland*, Dublin: National Youth Foundation and Treoir.
- McCashin, A. (1993) *Lone Parents in the Republic of Ireland: Enumeration, Description and Implications for Social Security*, Paper no. 29: Dublin: ESRI.
- McCashin, A. (1996) *Lone Mothers in Ireland: A Local Study*, A Report for Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- McLoughlin, E., Millar, J. and Cooke, K. (1989) *Work and Welfare Benefits*, Aldershot: Avebury.
- Meltzer, H., Gill, B., Petticrew, M., Hinds, K. (1995) *The Prevalence of Psychiatric Morbidity Among Adults Living in Private Households*, London: HMSO.
- Murphy, M. (2008) *Reframing the Irish Activation Debate: Accommodating care and safeguarding social rights*, Dublin: The Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin.
- National Economic and Social Council (2007) *Ireland's Child Income Supports: The Case for a New Form of Targeting*, Dublin, NESO.
- National Economic and Social Forum (2001) *Lone Parents*, Forum Report No.20, Dublin: Government Publications Office.
- Norris, M. (2006) *Supplementary Welfare Allowance, Rent Supplement: Implications for the Implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme*, Dublin: Centre for Housing Research.
- NWCI (2005) *An Accessible Childcare Model*, Dublin: NWCI.
- O'Brien, C. (14 April 2007) *Call to Clarify Rules for Carers of Children*, Dublin: The Irish Times.
- OECD (2006) *Removing Obstacles to Employment for Women in Ireland*, Economics Department Working Papers No. 511 ECO/WKP 39, Available at: www.oilis.oecd.org/oilis/2006doc.
- OECD (2003) *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*, Vol. 2, Paris: OECD.
- Office for Social Inclusion (2005) *Implementing Report for Ireland on the NAP/ inclusion 2003-2005*, Dublin: Office for Social Inclusion.
- OPEN/EAPN (2005) *Out of the Traps: Ending Poverty Traps and Making Work Pay for People in Poverty*, Dublin: OPEN/EAPN.
- OPEN (2006) *Submission in relation to Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*. Dublin: OPEN.
- Pettigum, N. (2004) *Experiences of Lone Parents from Minority Ethnic Communities*, London: Department of Work and Pensions.
- Phoenix, A. (1991) *Young Mothers*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rocks, P. (November 2007) *Low income Working Household*, Presentation made at Combat Poverty Research Centre.
- Russell, H. and Corcoran, M. (2001) *Report of the ESRI Lone Parent Focus Groups*, Dublin: DSCFA.

- Sweeney, J. (2002) *Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries, What Works?* Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.
- Wang, J.L. (2004) The Difference between Single and Married Mothers in the 12-Month Prevalence of Major Depressive Syndrome; Associated Factors and Mental Health Service Utilisation, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*; 39: 26–32.
- Weich, S., Slogett, A., Lewis, G. (1998) Social roles and gender differences in the prevalence of common mental disorders, *British Journal of Psychiatry*; 173: 489–493.
- Whelan, C. (1994) Poverty unemployment and psychological distress in Nolan, B. and Callan, T., (eds.) *Poverty and Policy in Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Wilson, H. and Huntington, A. (2005) Deviant (M)others: The Construction of Teenage Motherhood in Contemporary Discourse, *Journal of Social Policy*: 35: 59–76.

APPENDIX A: LONE PARENTS AND EMPLOYMENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Lone Parents – Is Employment an Option?

SURVEY OF LONE PARENTS AND EMPLOYMENT

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
September 2007

Introduction

One Family is writing to you to ask your views about employment while parenting alone. You are on the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) but you may also be working. Sixty per cent of parents on the OPFP are working. You may be looking for a job, participating in education or training, or planning to go into education, training or work when your child/children are older. Or you may be at home full-time with your children. Whatever your own situation we want to know what you think about lone parents and employment.

We are therefore asking you to complete the attached questionnaire and return it to One Family in the envelope provided. It should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Not all questions need to be answered. Just follow the instructions on the questionnaire. Please be assured that the completed questionnaire will only be seen by the research staff at One Family.

If you have any queries or would like some help in completing this questionnaire please ring One Family on the following low cost number 1890 66 22 12 and ask for Louise Caffrey or Tricia Keilthy. You can also contact us on policy@onefamily.ie or consult our webpage www.onefamily.ie

Part 1: Profiling Information

In order to better understand your situation we would like you to tell us a bit more about yourself.

Q.1 Are you: Female ☐ Male ☐ Single ☐ Separated ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed

Q.2 What is your age? Under 20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 50+ ☐

Q.3 What county do you live in? County _____

Q.4 Would you describe where you live as: a City ☐ a Town ☐ a Rural area ☐

Q.5 Are you: Born outside Ireland ☐ Born outside the EU ☐

If born outside Ireland please indicate your country of birth _____

Q.6 How long have you been on the OPFP? (please tick one only)

Less than a year ☐ 1-3 yrs ☐ 4-5 yrs ☐ 6-7 yrs ☐ 8-10 yrs ☐ 10yrs+ ☐

Q.7 In relation to education, which of the following best describes your situation? (Please tick only one with reference to the highest qualification that you have)

- I did not complete primary school ☐
- I completed primary school ☐
- I attended secondary school but did not complete it ☐
- I have my Junior/Inter/Group/ Certificate or equivalent ☐
- I have my Leaving certificate or equivalent ☐
- I have a post leaving certificate qualification ☐
- I have a Third level certificate/diploma ☐
- I have a Third level degree or higher ☐

Q.8 Do you: (Please tick one only)

- Own your own house ☐
- Rent from the local authority ☐
- Rent from a private landlord ☐
- Have social housing ☐
- Live with parents or other relatives ☐
- Other (please specify) _____ ☐

Q.9 If you live in private rented accommodation are you on Rent Supplement (Rent Allowance)
YES ☐ NO ☐

Q.10 Are you on a waiting list for local authority housing? YES ☐ NO ☐

Q.11 Do you have a medical card? YES ☐ NO ☐

Q.12 At the moment are you ...(Please tick one answer only)

- In paid employment (including Community Employment (CE)) ☐
- Caring for your children full-time and not looking for employment, education or training ☐
- Caring for your children full-time while looking for employment, education or training ☐
- Caring for your children while doing an education/training course ☐

Other (please specify) _____

☐

If you are in paid employment at the present time, including CE, please go to Part 2, if NOT please go to Part 3

Part 2: Current Employment

Q.13 What days do you work on an average week? (Please tick all that apply)

Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐ Saturday ☐ Sunday ☐ Varying shifts ☐

Q.14 How many hours per week do you work on average? _____ hours

Q.15 At the moment would you like to be working more hours than you currently are? (Please tick one only) YES ☐ NO ☐ Don't Know ☐

Q.16 In three years time would you like to be working more hours than you currently are? (Please tick one) YES ☐ NO ☐ Don't Know ☐

Q.17 What time of the day do you work? (Please tick all that apply to you)

Early morning ☐ Full Mornings ☐ Afternoons ☐ Evenings ☐ Weekends ☐ Full days ☐

Other (please specify) ☐ _____

Q.18 How long have you been in this jobs? _____ months

Q.19 What kind of work do you do?

Q.20 Would you describe yourself as (Please tick one only)

Taking home a lot more money since I started working

☐

Taking home a little more money since I started working

☐

Taking home the same amount since I started working

☐

Taking home less since I started working

☐

Q.21 When you are at work how are your children cared for? (Please tick as many as apply to you)

- Minded by their father/mother ☐
- At school ☐
- Minded by relative/ friend ☐
- At an after school group/club ☐
- Working from home/minding them myself ☐
- Old enough to look after themselves ☐
- With a childminder ☐
- In nursery, crèche, playgroup ☐
- Other (please specify) _____ ☐

Q.22 How much do you spend on childcare on average per week _____ euro

Q.23 How do you get to work? (Please tick as many as apply to you)

- Drive my car/family car ☐
- By train ☐
- By bicycle ☐
- Get a lift in a car ☐
- By bus ☐
- On foot ☐
- Other (please specify) _____ ☐

Q.24 What are your views on the training you receive on CE? (Please tick one only)

Very good ☐ Good ☐ OK ☐ Poor ☐ Very poor ☐

If you are on CE at present please answer Q25-27. If NOT on CE please go to Part 5

Q.25 What would you like to do immediately after you finish your CE scheme? (Please tick one only)

- Get a part-time job ☐
- Get a full-time job ☐
- Start my own business ☐
- Go on to further training ☐
- Go on to further education ☐

- Mind my children full-time ☐
- Don't Know ☐
- Other (please specify) _____

Q.26 If you would like to get a job, what type of work would you like to do?

Q.27 What are your views of CE? *(Please tick one answer on each line)*

	Agree	Disagree
CE gives me little opportunity to learn new skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CE allows me to work and keep my benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CE hours can be worked at a time that suits me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CE doesn't lead on to further training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CE has helped me to develop my confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CE gives me a start in getting back into employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE GO STRAIGHT TO PART 5

Part 3: Previous Employment

You need only answer this section if you have been employed (including CE employment) since going onto the One Parent Family payment but are not currently employed.

If you are currently employed please go back to Part 2. If you have not worked since going onto the One Parent Family Payment please skip this section and move on to Part 4

Q.28 Please describe your last job _____

Q.29 How many hours per week did you work on average? _____ hours

Q.30 How long were you in the job? ____ months

Q.31 What were the main reasons you left this job? *(Please tick the 3 main reasons only)*

- Financially it was not worth my while working ☐
- I couldn't get affordable, quality childcare ☐
- I didn't like the work ☐
- I wasn't able to use my skills or qualifications ☐
- I didn't have the confidence to do the work ☐
- I became ill ☐
- I moved house ☐
- I wanted to spend more time with my children ☐
- The hours did not suit me ☐

Other (please specify) _____ ☐

Q.32 Would you prefer to have a job now? YES ☐ NO ☐ Don't Know ☐

Q.33 If YES what type of job? _____

PLEASE GO STRAIGHT TO PART 5

Part 4: Employment Search

If you have NOT had a job since going on the OPFP please answer this part of the questionnaire

Q.34 Since going on the OPFP have you looked for paid employment *(Please tick one only)*
YES ☐ NO ☐

Q.35 If YES what type of job have you looked for?

Q.36 IF NO, what are the main reasons that you have not looked for paid employment? *(Please tick three main reasons only)*

- Financially I don't think that it is worth my while working ☐
- I can't get affordable, quality childcare ☐
- I don't have the confidence to get a job ☐
- I am not qualified to get the type of work I would like ☐
- I have health problems ☐
- There are no jobs available ☐
- I can't get a job that uses my skills and qualifications ☐
- My children have health problems ☐
- I want to spend my time with my children ☐
- Other (please specify) _____ ☐

Q.37 Since going on the OPFP have you attended any education or training courses? *(Please tick one only on each line)*

Education courses YES ☐ NO ☐

Training courses YES ☐ NO ☐

If YES please give details _____

Part 5: Career Plans

Part 5 to be answered by everyone

Q.38 Do you plan to do any of the following over the next few years? *(Please tick all that apply to you and give some details of your plans)*

Train in a new skill

☐ ☐ Type of skill _____

Study for an educational qualification

☐ ☐ Type of qualification _____

Get a part-time job

☐ ☐ Type of Job _____

Get a full-time job

☐ ☐ Type of Job _____

Go on a CE scheme

☐ ☐ _____

Q.39 If you have **NO** plans to go into education or training in the next 1-3 years why is this? *(Please tick 3 main reasons only)*

There are no courses available in my area that I want to do

☐

The course that I want to do is not available on a part-time basis

☐

The time of the courses don't suit me

☐

I cannot afford the cost of the courses

☐

I don't have enough information on what is available

☐

I can't get the childcare I need

☐

I am afraid it would interfere with my payment/benefits

☐

I can't get affordable, quality childcare

☐

I'm not eligible for back to education supports

☐

I already have the skills and qualifications that I need

☐

I am working or plan to get a job

☐

Other (please specify) _____
 _____ ☐

Q.40 If there are no courses available locally that you would want to do, can you say what type of course/s you would like to try? *(Please tick all that apply)*

Career development

☐

Personal development

☐

English language courses

☐

Parenting courses

☐

Interview techniques courses

☐

Specific skills courses (please specify) _____
 _____ ☐

Other courses (please specify) _____
 _____ ☐

Part 6: Barriers to paid employment

Part 6 to be answered by everyone

Q.41 Below are listed some things that are seen to limit the opportunities lone parents have to take up or stay in work. *Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with*

Agree

Disagree

I can not access affordable, quality childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can not get work for the hours I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to be a full time mum/dad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can not afford the costs involved in going out to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a health condition or disability that limits my ability to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think I might be worse off financially if I started to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I haven't got enough skills or experience to get the kind of job I would like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm afraid that I would lose my medical card	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My confidence about work is low	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I care for someone who has health, a disability or behavioural issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have the transport I need to get to a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have the support of family or friends to help me while I'm working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cannot get a job that uses my qualifications and skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have English language difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have literacy/numeracy problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't know how to go about getting a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have enough information on my rights and entitlements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have nobody to mind my children if they are ill or off school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am afraid that I would lose my rent supplement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.42 Looking again at the above what in your view are the three most important things that would help you to take up and stay in a job. No.1 being the most important

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Part 7: We would now like to ask you some questions about your views on life in general

Q.43 Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? *(Please tick only one answer on each line)*

	Agree	Disagree
"Having a job is good for my confidence and self esteem"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Unless the government makes work pay I may as well stay on welfare"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Having a job improves my family's quality of life"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Being a full-time mother is the best job in the world"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"I would like to be able to discuss my career opportunities with someone"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"I am afraid to take a job in case I loose my benefits"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Parenting is a full-time job"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Childcare problems mean that I won't be able to get a decent job until my children grow up"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"I would like to be able to get advice on parenting"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"My teenage children need to be minded as much as my young children"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"I have always lived in situations where money is scarce"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Staying on welfare is not good for me or my children"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.44 In general, how would you describe your physical health at the present time? Would you say it is:

(PLEASE CIRCLE ONE ON EACH LINE ONLY)

Excellent Very good Good Fair Poor

Q.45 In general, how would you describe your mental health at the present time? Would you say it is:

(PLEASE CIRCLE ONE ON EACH LINE ONLY)

Excellent Very good Good Fair Poor

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

One Family
Cherish House
2 Lr Pembroke St.
Dublin 2

APPENDIX B: LETTER

Dear Parent,

14 September 2007

One Family is the national organisation representing one-parent families throughout Ireland. We are a trusted independent charity working for one-parent families for over thirty-five years. At One Family we support people parenting alone in their roles as parents and into training, education and jobs.

In this envelope you will find a questionnaire from One Family which we very much hope you will have time to complete and return to us. It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Please return the completed questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided.

The questionnaire is being sent to you by One Family as part of the research we are carrying out on lone parents' experience of getting jobs, remaining at work and moving into quality and long-term employment. The research is funded by the Combat Poverty Agency. The aim of the research is to inform people who make policy in Ireland of the real issues faced by lone parents on social welfare in getting into good employment and developing careers.

The reason you personally have received the questionnaire is that the Department of Social and Family Affairs has agreed to assist One Family in this study by drawing up a random list of people on the One Parent Family Payment and posting the questionnaire to you.

Over 8000 lone parents on the One Parent Family Payment have been sent this questionnaire.

Please be assured that the completed questionnaire will only be seen by the research staff at One Family. Nobody in the Department of Social and Family Affairs will see the completed questionnaire. No one involved has any way of knowing who has returned a questionnaire. Only the results of all the questionnaires added together will be shown to anyone outside of One Family and will be included in the report which will be published based on this research.

If you have any questions or would like some help in completing this questionnaire please ring One Family on the following low cost number 1890 66 22 12 and ask for Louise Caffery or Tricia Keilthy. You can also contact us on policy@onefamily.ie or consult our web page www.onefamily.ie.

We very much look forward to hearing from you and to including your views and experience in our study. We would be very grateful if you could return the completed questionnaire by 12 October 2007 and thank you for taking the time to complete it.

Yours sincerely

Candy Murphy
Policy & Campaigns Manager
One Family

APPENDIX C: CODING

Nationality

EU	EU: New Member States	Eastern Europe: Non EU	Outside EU and Europe
Ireland	Czech Republic	Croatia	Africa
U.K	Estonia	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	India
Germany	Hungry	Turkey	China
France	Latvia	Albania	Korea
Spain	Lithuania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Japan
Italy	Malta	Montenegro	Israel
Sweden	Poland	Serbia	Pakistan
Denmark	Slovakia	Ukraine	USA
Portugal	Slovenia	Moldova	Canada
Netherlands	Bulgaria	Belarus	Central and South American countries
Luxemburg	Romania	Georgia	
Greece		Armenia	
Finland		Azerbaijan	
Belgium		Russia	
Austria		Kazakhstan	

Occupation

1. Agricultural Occupations
2. Managers and Proprietors
3. Health and Education Professionals
4. Science and Engineering Professionals
5. Health Associate Professionals
6. Science and Engineering Associate Professionals
7. Other Associate Professionals (*Information Provider, Child Protection, accounting assistant, special needs assistant, chef, accountant*)
8. Clerical (*office work, computers, administration, legal secretary, receptionist, call centre*)
 - Secretary/ receptionist

- Accountants/Book keeping
 - Other
- 9. Skilled Building Worker
- 10. Skilled Maintenance Worker
- 11. **Other skilled manual**
 - Hairdressing/ Beautician
 - Chef/Culinary work
 - Other
- 12. Operatives
- 13. Transport Occupations
- 14. **Sales Occupations** customer service
 - Retail/Customer Service
 - Other
- 15. **Caring Occupations** (Childminding, Carer (elderly), social care)
 - Child care/minding
 - Social Care
 - Care of the Elderly
- 16. **Other service and protective activities** (waitress, catering, life coach, catering assistant, deli assistant)
 - Restaurant/ Bar work
 - Other
- 17. **Unskilled manual** (Domestic cleaner, kitchen staff, grounds keeper, cleaner)
 - Domestic work
 - Grounds Keeper
 - Restaurant/Kitchen work
- 18. Self employed

APPENDIX D: CROSS-TABULATIONS

	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
In paid employment	626 43.7%	9 37.5%	635 43.6%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	219 15.3%	6 25.0%	225 15.5%
Caring for children, looking for employment	380 26.5%	8 33.3%	388 26.6%
Doing and education and training course	193 13.5%	0 0%	193 13.3%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	14 1.0%	1 4.2%	15 1.0%
Total	1432 100%	24 100%	1456 100%

$\chi^2(4) = 7.622, p > .05$

	Age					Total
	Under 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	Over 50	
In paid employment	9 20.9%	250 37.1%	220 48.1%	139 58.2%	25 52.1%	643 44%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	4 9.3%	122 18.1%	66 14.4%	19 7.9%	13 27.1%	224 15.3%
Caring for children, looking for employment	14 32.6%	209 31.0%	100 21.9%	57 23.8%	6 12.5%	386 26.4%
Doing and education and training course	16 37.2%	87 12.9%	64 14.0%	22 9.2%	4 8.3%	193 13.2%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	0 0%	6 0.9%	7 1.5%	2 0.8%	0 .0%	15 1.0%
Total	43 100%	674 100%	457 100%	239 100%	48 100%	1461 100%

$\chi^2(16) = 82.052, p < .05$

	Marital Status			Total
	Single	Separated	Divorced/ Widowed	
In paid employment	415 41.5%	111 48.7%	64 58.7%	590 44.2%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	165 16.5%	26 11.4%	13 11.9%	204 15.3%
Caring for children, looking for employment	275 27.5%	61 26.8%	17 15.6%	353 26.4%
Doing and education and training course	134 13.4%	29 12.7%	12 11.0%	175 13.1%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	10 1.0%	1 0.4%	3 2.8%	14 1.0%
Total	999 100%	228 100%	109 100%	1336 100%

$\chi^2(8) = 21.504, p < .05$

	Nationality				Total
	Ireland	E.U.	New member states	Outside E.U.	
In paid employment	518 45.4%	71 45.5%	33 42.3%	4 8.5%	626 44%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	178 15.6%	29 18.6%	10 12.8%	5 10.6%	222 15.6%
Caring for children, looking for employment	301 26.4%	35 22.4%	18 23.1%	21 44.7%	375 26.4%
Doing and education and training course	132 11.6%	19 12.2%	17 21.8%	16 34.0%	184 12.9%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	12 1.1%	2 1.3%	0 0%	1 2.1%	15 1.1%
Total	156 100%	78 100%	78 100%	47 100%	1422 100%

$\chi^2(12) = 47.359, p < .05$

	Education			Total
	Under leaving Certificate	Leaving Certificate or higher	Degree or higher	
In paid employment	235 40.0%	361 46.3%	53 48.6%	649 43.9%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	129 21.9%	93 11.9%	4 4.6%	227 15.4%
Caring for children, looking for employment	170 28.9%	198 25.4%	24 22.0%	392 26.5%
Doing and education and training course	46 7.8%	123 15.8%	25 22.9%	194 13.1%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	8 1.4%	5 0.6%	2 1.8%	15 1.0%
Total	588 100%	780 100%	109 100%	1477 100%

 $\chi^2 (8) = 64.104, p < .05$

	Housing						Total
	Owner	Rent from L.A.	Private rent	Social house	Parent	Other	
In paid employment	140 69.7%	222 46.7%	124 27.1%	21 40.4%	125 47.3%	9 64.3%	641 43.8%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	20 10.0%	68 14.3%	94 20.5%	11 21.2%	32 12.1%	1 7.1%	226 15.4%
Caring for children, looking for employment	29 14.4%	119 25.1%	157 34.3%	12 23.1%	69 26.1%	3 21.4%	389 26.6%
Doing and education and training course	12 6.0%	57 12.0%	80 17.5%	7 13.5%	36 13.6%	1 7.1%	193 13.2%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	0 0%	9 1.9%	3 0.7%	1 1.9%	2 0.8%	0 0%	15 1.0%
Total	201 100%	475 100%	458 100%	52 100%	264 100%	14 100%	1464 100%

 $\chi^2 (20) = 64.709, p < .05$

	How would you describe your physical health?					Total
	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	
In paid employment	145 45.6%	225 44.6%	209 46.4%	50 33.8%	13 31.7%	642 43.9%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	34 10.7%	75 14.9%	69 15.3%	31 20.9%	13 31.7%	222 15.2%
Caring for children, looking for employment	89 28.0%	122 24.2%	120 26.7%	51 34.5%	6 14.6%	388 26.6%
Doing and education and training course	49 15.4%	80 15.9%	50 11.1%	11 7.4%	4 9.8%	194 13.3%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	1 0.3%	2 0.4%	2 0.4%	5 3.4%	5 12.2%	15 1.0%
Total	318 100%	504 100%	450 100%	148 100%	41 100%	1461 100%

$\chi^2(16) = 64.104, p < .05$

	How would you describe your mental health?					Total
	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	
In paid employment	187 43.5%	181 47.6%	173 43.0%	83 41.7%	17 37.8%	641 44.0%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	66 15.3%	49 12.9%	59 14.7%	37 18.6%	9 20.0%	220 15.1%
Caring for children, looking for employment	113 26.3%	89 23.4%	119 29.6%	55 27.6%	11 24.4%	387 26.6%
Doing and education and training course	60 14.0%	57 15.0%	48 11.9%	21 10.6%	7 15.6%	193 13.3%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	4 0.9%	4 1.1%	3 0.7%	3 1.5%	1 2.2%	15 1.0%
Total	318 100%	504 100%	450 100%	148 100%	41 100%	1461 100%

$\chi^2(16) = 12.726, p > .05$

	Area		
	Urban	Rural	Total
In paid employment	461 43.0%	165 46.0%	626 43.7%
Caring for children, not looking for employment	158 14.7%	61 17.0%	219 15.3%
Caring for children, looking for employment	292 27.2%	89 24.3%	381 26.6%
Doing and education and training course	152 14.2%	39 10.9%	191 13.3%
Illness/disability/maternity leave	10 0.9%	5 1.4%	15 1.0%
Total	1073 100%	359 100%	1431 100%

$\chi^2(4) = 4.794, p > .05$

Region: $\chi^2(28) = 26.503, p > .05$

APPENDIX E: WEIGHTING

The information displayed here is the significances tests to ascertain whether our sample was significantly different to the General Population of OFP recipients. The General Population refers to the 84,364 OFP recipients (DSFA, December 2007).

Gender

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Female	1588	1581.1	6.9
Male	27.0	33.9	-6.9
Total	1615		

Test Statistics

	Gender
Chi-Square(a)	1.440
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.230

$$\{X^2 = 1.4440 (1), p > .001\}$$

There was no statistical difference between the sample breakdown of gender and the general population breakdown.

Age

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Under 20	48.0	48.3	-0.3
21-30	754.0	697.8	56.2
31-40	508.0	554.3	-46.3
51-50	259.0	266.4	-7.4
Over 50	51.0	53.2	-2.2
Total	1620		

Test Statistics

	Age
Chi-Square(a)	8.703
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.069

$$\{X^2 = 8.703 (4), p > .001\}$$

There was no statistical difference between the sample breakdown by age and the general population.

County

What county do you live in?

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Carlow	17.0	21.5	-4.5
Cavan	14.0	16.9	-2.9
Clare	30.0	30.8	-0.8
Cork	147.0	153.9	-6.9
Donegal	84.0	63.1	20.9
Dublin	477.0	517.2	-40.2
Galway	63.0	55.4	7.6
Kerry	43.0	43.1	-0.1
Kildare	71.0	61.6	9.4
Kilkenny	20.0	21.5	-1.5
Laois	19.0	16.9	2.1
Leitrim	7.0	6.2	0.8
Limerick	54.0	67.7	-13.7
Longford	17.0	15.4	1.6
Louth	64.0	55.4	8.6
Mayo	37.0	30.8	6.2
Meath	43.0	40.0	3.0
Monaghan	16.0	15.4	0.6
Offaly	25.0	23.1	1.9
Roscommon	19.0	12.3	6.7
Sligo	21.0	16.9	4.1
Tipperary	41.0	53.9	-12.9
Waterford	52.0	50.8	1.2
Westmeath	29.0	27.7	1.3
Wexford	82.0	63.1	18.9
Wicklow	38.0	49.3	-11.3
Total	1530		

Test Statistics

What County do you live in	
Chi-Square(a)	36.740
df	25
Asymp. Sig.	.061
{ $X^2 = 36.740$ (25), $p > .001$ }	

There was no statistical difference between the sample and the general population based on county.

Marital Status

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Single	1118	1193.7	-75.7
Separated	252	181.8	70.2
Divorced/widowed	121	115.5	5.5
Total	1491		

Test Statistics

Recoded Marital status	
Chi-Square(a)	32.213
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000
{ $X^2 = 33.213$ (2), $p < .001$ }	

There was a statistically significant difference between the sample breakdown by marital status and the general population breakdown; therefore it was necessary to weight the data by marital status.

Variable	Unweighted Sample	General Population	Weighted Sample
Gender			
Male	98.3	97.9	98.3
Female	1.7	2.1	1.7
Age			
Under 20	3.0	3.0	3.0
21-30	46.5	43.3	46.2
31-40	31.4	34.4	31.3
41-50	16.0	16.5	16.3
Over 50	3.1	3.3	3.2
Marital Status **			
Single	75.0	77.5	74.7
Separated	16.9	11.8	17.0

Variable	Unweighted Sample	General Population	Weighted Sample
Divorced/Widowed	8.1	7.5	8.2
County			
Carlow	1.1	1.4	1.1
Cavan	0.9	1.1	0.8
Clare	2.0	2.0	2.0
Cork	9.6	10.0	10.3
Donegal	5.5	4.1	5.9
Dublin	31.2	33.7	29.2
Galway	4.1	3.7	4.4
Kerry	2.8	2.8	3.0
Kildare	4.6	4.0	4.6
Kilkenny	1.3	1.4	1.3
Laois	1.2	1.1	1.3
Leitrim	0.5	0.4	0.5
Limerick	3.5	4.4	3.8
Longford	1.1	1.0	1.2
Louth	4.2	3.6	3.3
Mayo	2.4	2.0	2.4
Meath	2.8	2.6	2.8
Monaghan	1.0	1.0	1.1
Offaly	1.6	1.5	1.5
Roscommon	1.2	0.8	2.8
Sligo	1.4	1.1	3.6
Tipperary	2.7	3.5	2.1
Waterford	3.4	3.3	5.9
Westmeath	1.9	1.8	2.4
Wexford	5.4	4.1	5.9
Wicklow	2.5	3.2	2.4

** Statistically significant $\{X^2 = 33.213 (2), p < .001\}$



One Family

Cherish House
2 Lower Pembroke St
Dublin 2

Tel: 01 662 9212

Fax: 01 662 9096

askonefamily: Lo-Call 1890 66 22 12

Email: info@onefamily.ie

Website: www.onefamily.ie

Company No. 45364 Charity No 6525

If you would like to make a donation to One Family you can do so at Bank of Ireland
Account No: 17 19 19 23 Sort Code: 90-00-17

If you would like to learn more or become involved in our policy and campaigning work
you can become a member of **can*** (Campaigning and Advocacy Network).
Please e-mail can@onefamily.ie for more information.