

One parent families

**The Problem of Lone Parenthood
in the 21st Century**

27 November 2003

Contents

Opening Remarks	3
Social Policy in the 19th and 20th Century , <i>Rt Hon Baroness Patricia Hollis of Heigham, Parliamentary Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions</i>	3
Response , <i>Beatrix Campbell, Social Historian (Chair)</i>	5
Lone Parents and the Law , <i>Mavis Maclean CBE, Director, Oxford Centre for Family Law and Policy (OXFLAP)</i>	5
Discussion	6
Changing Landscapes of Family Life: Parents, Children and Divorce , <i>Professor Carol Smart, Professor Of Sociology, University of Leeds</i>	8
Discussion	10
Lone Parents in the 1970s and 1980s – More of the Same or Different? , <i>Professor Hilary Land, President, Social Policy Association</i>	13
Discussion	14
Understanding Lone Parent Employment , <i>Professor Jane Millar OBE, Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy, University of Bath</i>	17
Discussion	19
Conference Summary , <i>Professor Pat Thane</i>	21

Opening Remarks

Antonia Byatt, Director, The Women's Library

One Parent Families' archive is now open to the public at the Women's Library. The archive will prove to be a valuable resource for researchers.

Kate Green, One Parent Families

The archive, and today's conference, will reveal that many of the issues facing lone parents have persisted through One Parent Families' history.

Professor Pat Thane, Professor of Contemporary British History, University of London

We are celebrating the survival of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child established in 1918 and now known as One Parent Families.

Social Policy in the 19th and 20th Century

Rt Hon Baroness Patricia Hollis of Heigham

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions

I. The Early 19th Century

All social panics about lone mothers have been proxy concerns about feral fathers.

Maleness in the early 19th century rested in animalistic brutality. Suffrage established itself first in less developed societies where women were present to domesticate. Suffrage was a tool for controlling male society and had little to do with realising women's rights.

Single women and lone mothers were perceived as a threat to male health, both physical – through STDs – and moral. Policymakers did not want men domesticated as they needed to harness their brutality for use in warfare.

II. Victorian Attitudes

1. The Moral Threat of Lone Mothers

Victorians dealt with women according to the dichotomy of Madonnas and Magdalenes.

Female sexuality threatened male self-constraint, undermined family values and was considered a danger to society. Hence, women were desexualised.

2. The Financial Threat of Lone Mothers

Lone mothers were a perceived financial threat as, unlike professional prostitutes, they did not control their fertility and the state assumed the role of father and husband.

The Poor Laws focused on individual character and morality as causes of financial degradation, and ignored the social structures that created poverty. The workhouse, designed to punish able-bodied men who refused to work, ended as a punitive system for lone mothers. Redemption was through work; lone mothers were forced into arduous and poorly paid labour.

III. 20th Century Reform

Defining lone mothers as 'moral imbeciles' continued into the 20th century. So did the policy of separating them from their children. Lone parents were thought to lower the quality of the human race, and sterilisation programmes were debated.

David Lloyd George established National Insurance to alleviate state support from the marginalising stigma of the workhouse. Family Allowance deposed male supremacy over the family.

In the 1950s social emphasis was on the rebuilding of post-war Britain. The second women's movement of the 1960s reconfigured attitudes to lone mothers, opening up employment opportunities.

IV. Rights for Women and Children

The Victorian conception of the family unit as a sovereign commonwealth with the male as its head denied universal suffrage. The late 19th century saw the dis-aggregation of women's rights from men's; the 1960s saw a similar dis-aggregation for the rights of children.

Government institutions privileged lone mothers during the 1960s and 1970s, as poverty became a larger social issue than the collapse of the family unit.

The question of lone mothers has always been bound to the question of what happens to men when they are unregulated by family responsibilities and excluded from the labour market.

Response

Beatrix Campbell

Social Historian (Chair)

The story of the lone mother is the story of masculinity, how we define it and what we demand of it. The single mother has always been at the centre of the women's movement. The Labour Movement, centred on the iconic figure of the male breadwinner, did not work successfully for the lone mother.

A feminist economic theory – using the part-time employed, single parent as the ideal model individual – posited a liberation from patriarchy. This idea, like many others, was decimated by Thatcherism.

Lone Parents and the Law

Mavis Maclean CBE

Director, Oxford Centre for Family Law and Policy (OXFLAP)

I. Maintenance from the Non-Resident Parent

A woman used to have to make a legal claim for support to the court through the divorce procedure. It has now become an administrative procedure. All children in single parent families have an entitlement to support. Child support has transformed from private claim to publicly supported right.

II. The Thatcher Years

During the Thatcher years, the family was established against the state as the main form of defence for the individual. The aim was to reduce state involvement in family life and encourage individual responsibility. Yet to achieve this they had to become, paradoxically, more interventionist than previous governments.

The legal primacy of first children was re-established, in direct contrast sometimes to the practical needs of younger and more dependent children in a second family. Children's rights were separated from the legal status of the parents, in terms of co-habitation, marriage and so on.

A philosophical change occurred placing children's best interests at the heart of family law.

III. The Child Support Package

One Parent Families was involved in discussions at the close of the 1980s, with the aim of assessing the correct package of financial support required for a child, including factors such as subsistence costs, actual expenditure and childcare.

IV. The Difficulties Faced by the Child Support Agency (CSA)

Courts are designed to assess party/party disputes. The CSA is an administrative and not interrogative body. Each statement provided has to be investigated by the agency. Hence all assessments are lengthy.

It was thought that there were rich absentee fathers, yet this rarely proved to be the case.

V. The Achievements of the CSA

The money transferred has improved upon that under the court system. Support paid to single parents by absentee parents is portable income, and remains regardless of their employment and benefit situation.

Child Support is now an entitlement; legal arguments concerning assessment and procedure have been eliminated.

VI. Issues for the Future

Securing housing for children is the next issue to tackle. Primary legislation is a difficult route to obtain property for children; the Children Act contains clauses that can be utilised.

The other issue is that of the non-resident parent's right to contact. Civil status does not alter parental status; this makes no provision for instances of domestic violence. Often families suffering domestic violence are involved in legal disputes, and issues can be resolved through that route. To alter the Children Act might make it favour one or other gender.

Discussion

Participant 1

How can someone justify the low levels the government expects individuals to survive on? When paternity is opposed, how can resident parents enforce paternity?

Baroness Hollis

20,000 men a year contest paternity. If he refuses the test, an assumption of paternity is allowed. It is almost always the case that the DNA test confirms paternity. There is no expense on the part of the mother.

Participant 1

My case has been going on since 1995. The CSA have not enforced the test, as he keeps moving. I have had only one instance of contact with the CSA since this began.

Kate Green, One Parent Families

There is a public perception that cheating the CSA is a smart thing to do. Has there really been a shift in attitude?

Participant 2

I think there has been a shift for women. They are more comfortable using the CSA. The stigma, though still present, has been reduced.

Participant 3

Would it be appropriate to give the CSA more power and manpower?

Participant 1

They already have too much power. They can remove money from people's bank accounts or wages.

Participant 4

I know of a person who has managed to escape the CSA. The CSA know where this individual is, but because of his legal manoeuvres, they cannot touch him. This has gone on for four years. They need more power. They need the authority to go to the person's house and question them about their non-payment.

Mavis Maclean

It is a huge task facing the CSA. We are not disputing any longer whether a payment should be made from parent to child, as we were two decades ago. It is now a question of enforcing payment.

Participant 5

I have been involved with the CSA for 10 years and received no money. Respectable individuals with plenty of money and security can avoid paying, through the tax credits system. As my ex-partner is claiming tax credits, the matter becomes an issue for fraud investigation by Inland Revenue. The CSA causes bureaucratic headaches for those who avoid payments, but that is all. If they do not want to pay, they will not.

Beatrix Campbell (Chair)

The balance of rights between children and parents is an issue to consider. Fathers accused of domestic violence or sexual abuse have been empowered by the Children Act to intervene in children's lives. They have the right to be involved in consultations.

Mavis Maclean

It is appropriate that both parents are involved. It would be wrong to exclude a parent if there exists only an accusation, not a conviction. Would you suggest that as soon as an allegation is made a parent should be excluded from the process?

Beatrice Campbell (Chair)

Even parents serving prison sentences for sexual offences have a legal right to involve themselves in the process.

Mavis Maclean

Keeping men involved is very important, but the central concern of the Children Act is to preserve children's rights.

Baroness Hollis

We are moving from parental responsibilities to parental rights. There is an automatic assumption that what the mother wants is best for the child; this is not always the reality. Arguing over a property right dependent on ownership of a child, regardless of the child's welfare, is turning the clock back 50 years. I wonder how we could shore up independent assessments of a child's welfare against these other interests.

Mavis Maclean

The beauty of the Children Act is that it keeps children's rights centre stage, and gives them primacy over those of adults.

Changing Landscapes of Family Life: Parents, Children and Divorce

Professor Carol Smart
Professor Of Sociology, University of Leeds

I. Overview

The main theme of this paper is a positive one, using data from a study of six families, conducted by the University of Leeds. People are managing their lives differently and with success in the face of the rising divorce rate.

There is a shift in thought from fault to misfortune in assessing divorce, from parental status to parental role and from distribution of assets to child support. The idea of the total breakdown of the family is losing currency. Similarly the clean break from the ex-partner is unrealistic.

II. Parenthood Post-Divorce

1. Fault-based Approach

The classic stance is of excluding the other parent as they have ‘sacrificed’ their right of access to their children. Many feel this way initially, though often their position becomes more sophisticated over time.

2. Misfortune-based Approach

Children should not lose contact with one of their parents simply because the parents no longer wish to remain in a relationship.

3. Shared Parenting

Shared parenting post-divorce is difficult; there are emotional as well as logistic problems. Mothers are primary carers in most cases; this gender contract is broken by divorce.

The problems of a bad relationship continue, and sometimes increase, with divorce. Roles defined over the course of lengthy relationships are difficult to break with. Children are often fully aware of these issues.

The relationship continues after divorce. Courts procedures cannot replace this relationship. Looking after children requires each parent to consider the other parent’s feelings.

4. Parents Pressurising Children

Parents over-invest in children during the primary stages of divorce. Children require space to live and develop. Shared residency is considered a bonus, yet it requires children to make an emotional, as well as physical, journey. They must psychologically and emotionally adjust on a weekly basis.

Parents can make this process easier or harder for children, for example by allowing or forbidding telephone contact with the other parent. Fairness towards both parents is the key issue for children. They are sensitive to avoid giving the advantage to either parent.

III. Children’s Response to Shared Residency

Children’s enthusiasm for and satisfaction with shared residency deteriorate with age. Children in puberty are perhaps spending too much time with their parents. They feel obliged to do so, yet they are under pressure from the demands of a normal social life for a child.

IV. The Changing Role of Step-Parents

1. The Child's Perspective

The term and the role are both problematic. When a child is in contact with both parents, there is often no gap to be filled. Children question the role of the step-parent. They are more often viewed as a parent's partner and not as an additional parent. It is not a direct relationship and children establish these boundaries very early and clearly.

Children feel an emotional burden is lifted when parents acquire new partners, and are, on reflection, keen for them to exist.

2. The Parent's Perspective

There is less of a social need for a new partner. Often parents, especially women, felt there was not sufficient room for another man. This has given rise to 'living apart together' (LATs). Parents form relationships with new partners based on a degree of physical separation, and it helps keep their lives compartmentalised. The partners are unwilling to live with the single parents' children. It is perhaps easier on children if new partners do not live in.

V. Grandparents

Grandparents frequently provide support and stability. However, they may have the same faults as the parents. Grandparents can contribute to the pressure on children. They do form a part of the development of the family. Parents should, and often do, aim to cultivate relationships between children and grandparents. This is achieved by being attentive to the grandparents' feelings.

VI. Conclusion

Family links can and, if worth preserving, ought to be maintained post-divorce. Children should not be expected to carry the whole emotional burden. More parents are rising to this moral challenge. Relationship practice is altering to accommodate this aim.

Discussion

Participant 1

How will your research outcome help people?

Professor Carol Smart

We feed back to mediation services, such as the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and NGOs. We researched children's responses and have produced a book

containing their thoughts and feelings, which allows children to access other children feeling similar emotions.

Participant 2

Did you look at the role of step-parents in situations where one parent is totally absent or dead?

Professor Carol Smart

When an emotional space existed, step-parents do fill this role. Children do become emotionally attached to parents' partners.

Participant 3

Children's visions of their own parenthood alter continually. My children initially said that they would never have children themselves; now they say they will have child minders.

Professor Carol Smart

We have not analysed that research yet. Children often remark that they will not emulate their parents' mistakes. They do not wish to make their children endure what they have.

Participant 4

I did similar research in New Zealand ten years ago. What kind of relationships are grown-ups, affected by divorce in childhood, developing for themselves as adults?

Professor Carol Smart

We have not got that data.

Participant 2

How do you collate this data from all small-scale studies to create an overview of the whole question?

Professor Carol Smart

It is a methodological and financial challenge and I hope it can be achieved soon.

Participant 5

I was talking with a head teacher and he thought that children today were far more comfortable with the idea and process of divorce. It is more acceptable and less painful.

Professor Carol Smart

That depends on area. It is probably true of London, or other urban environments. However, in a school in a rural area divorce is scarce. Possibly only one child in a school year will have divorced parents.

Participant 6

I have three sons. There is a stigma attached to children having no contact with a parent. The loss of a masculine figure has been devastating. In their eyes, it is vital that no one in their school is aware that their father has no interest in seeing them, as it devalues them as young men. It is unusual for children to have absolutely no contact. It is an issue of rejection and becomes a tool for bullying.

Participant 5

A schoolboy of 12 years at my school used to have both his parents turn up with their respective parents and it was too much for him. He could cope with them individually.

Professor Carol Smart

Teachers often plan to have parents and partners come to the school play on different evenings and other such arrangements.

Participant 7

What if there is no income involved? Do you have pre-divorce policies to help with the post-divorce scenario?

Professor Carol Smart

I am interested in what procedures women are going to develop in response to the new relationship patterns emerging. These considerations will feedback into how people conduct their lives. People do not wish their children to always be in childcare. Grandparents are often migrating to avoid the responsibilities placed on them by the divorce of parents.

Beatrix Campbell, Social Historian (Chair)

Our sense of what a family is has been transformed. There have been significant constitutional and economic shifts in our lifetime yet these have not exploded the popular myth of a family unit 'golden age'. Children, improvising strategies to respond to divorce, are the key to cultural revolution.

Lone Parents in the 1970s and 1980s – More of the Same or Different?

Professor Hilary Land
President, Social Policy Association

I. Introduction

Professor Pat Thane, Professor of Contemporary British History, University of London, (Chair)

There are long-running continuities in the issues that One Parent Families has been dealing with since its inception. Fathers' acceptance of parental responsibility and provision of financial support is one. The organisation has aimed for children of lone parents to receive the same legal and social status as other children. One Parent Families opposed the pressures on lone mothers to have their children adopted. This was prevalent in the 1950s, an oppressive time for single mothers.

II. Presentation

Professor Hilary Land

1. Context for Change

The 1950s and 1960s were not good times for lone unmarried mothers. Information about contraception was scarce; abortions were difficult to secure.

The rediscovery of child poverty raised the issue of lone parents. Changes in family law attempted to ensure that children should not be legally affected by the status of their parents. The notion that women were dependent upon husbands was challenged by the re-emergence of the women's movement.

A major review of the benefit system began. Lone parents were present - but not visible - on the agenda.

2. Action in the 1970s

The focus of child poverty investigations was upon children of working parents, but inclusion in the labour market is not a solution to the poverty problem. Creating parity between lone parents and two-parent families was a priority of the Conservative government of the early 1970s. The tax allowance for a working lone parent family was greater than that for a two-parent family, acknowledging the greater burden on the individual.

The co-habitation rule for benefits precluded favouring lone parents over two-parent families. Benefits were structured to focus on provision for the first family of any man, as it was felt more likely that the individual would support the family he lived with.

The benefits package was improved through the decade, including the introduction of child benefit. The focus remained on lone mothers connected with the labour market. The housing situation improved with the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, which prioritised homeless people with children.

Lone mothers were not perceived as a large drain on the benefit system.

3. Reactions in the 1980s

The Conservative government was concerned with issues such as the escalating costs of residential care for the elderly and the large numbers of unemployed young persons. The government felt elements such as child benefit and free school meals could encourage striking workers. The 1986 benefits review transformed Family Allowance into Family Tax Credit, eliminating such subsidiary areas of state support. This reduced incentives for lone mothers to work; the number of lone mothers was expected to fall.

Lone mothers rose in government priority with the realisation that over the decade the amount of benefit being claimed by them doubled.

Theoretically, lone mothers had the freedom of choice to enter the labour market. Lone mothers, relocated away from grandparents and extended family, were prohibited from work due to the lack of childcare. The labour market of the 1980s demanded educational qualifications.

Mrs Thatcher, suddenly aware of the breakdown of the family unit, considered this the root of social ills. Her concern precipitated the 1991 Child Support Act, which aimed to guarantee children's rights to share in the wealth and quality of life of both their parents.

Significantly, it was only after the policy failure of the attempt to force errant fathers into accepting financial responsibility for their children that the government began to encourage lone mothers to function economically identically to married mothers.

Discussion

Participant 1

Lone parent poverty is still more about the state of poverty the child is living in.

Professor Hilary Land

The debate in the 1960s was more about the entitlement of children to an adequate standard of life. It was not that a deprived childhood would lead to widespread social problems as children will underachieve, lack qualifications and end up unemployed or as criminals, which is the case now.

Participant 2

What can be said about the change in the way the state supports never-married single parents in gaining qualifications? In the 1970s, the grants for never-married mothers at university were withdrawn, only for one year.

Professor Hilary Land

Individuals underachieving at school prove more likely to become lone mothers before they reach the age of 21. Although there exists more childcare support now, the emphasis is wrongly placed on driving lone mothers into low-paid employment, perpetuating the cycle. The emphasis ought to be on childcare and education. Parenthood is often considered to make men more responsible and mature. The same is true with women. Some lone mothers have been saved by the birth of their child and are now driven to achieve and acquire an education.

Kate Green

Lone mothers become acutely aware of their responsibilities when they have children to provide for. This is something to incorporate into social policy.

Participant 3

Council rent rates rising and cuts in housing benefit have contributed to the poverty trap.

Professor Hilary Land

It is another example of the invisibility of lone mothers in work. When lone mothers lived with their parents, the amount of childcare required to hold down full-time employment was concealed.

Participant 4

How do you see this situation developing in 10 or 20 years' time?

Professor Hilary Land

I would hope to see an affordable, available childcare system. Our long-hours work culture is divisive and destructive to family life. Hopefully we will follow EU working regulations. Part-time employed lone parents are at a huge disadvantage. The social wage is important to lone mothers; creating transport, childcare and an adequate environment for lone parent families can only be created through collective responsibility and state provision.

Participant 5

Perhaps we should invert our analysis and view the question from the perspective of the child. It is a question of a child's housing, education, emotional support, transport and quality of life. Should we not consider that the state should guarantee a quality of life that is high enough, regardless of the parental situation?

Participant 6

Are you suggesting a Department of Parenting supporting children regardless of parental status?

Professor Hilary Land

You cannot ignore the presence of the parent. You cannot separate the child's welfare from the parent's.

Participant 5

The parent's welfare would improve as a consequence of focusing on the rights and entitlements of the child as the key independent entity. Examining the needs of the children would highlight areas with poverty or housing issues, etc.

Participant 7

There was benefit support that enabled lone mothers to retain contact with the labour market pre-1986. Now the structure of benefits seems to dissuade lone parents from employment. It appears that at present the only way forward is for lone mothers to work above 16 hours a week to secure tax credits. Was there a better process in the past and could we reconfigure policy to provide the suitable fiscal support and restructure the family?

Professor Hilary Land

Nearly 60% of lone parents in the 1970s were receiving support from extended family. 30% were dependent on Local Authorities, which was means-assessed and local.

Participant 8

How many never-married mothers were from ethnic minorities?

Professor Hilary Land

Families and Their Needs, a government study by Audrey Hunt, drew some results by examining lone parents in the borough of Haringey. Studies of ethnic groups are normally small and specific in nature.

Participant 6

What can be done for children?

Professor Hilary Land

A universal benefit. Children's claims on the state are far more contingent on their parents now than decades ago. Children under five used to have free orange juice, milk, vitamins, greater access to public areas, without requiring adult supervision. This affects access to skills and opportunities. We have to stop thinking entirely as individual consumer/citizens, and try to achieve

through collective action. As children are dependent on parents, so are those parents dependent on the state.

Understanding Lone Parent Employment

Professor Jane Millar OBE

**Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy,
University of Bath**

I. Trends in Lone Parent Employment

Since the early 1980s there has been an obvious gap between lone mothers and married mothers.

II. Changing UK Policy

1. Freedom of Choice

The state cannot be neutral; its actions affect the individual's decision greatly. Government incentives are limited and focus almost exclusively on financial issues. The rhetoric was about choice; the reality did not hold this up.

2. Present Policies

The recent government pledged to eradicate child poverty and increase lone mother employment. These policies are perceived as closely related. Consequently, all policies aim to make work the goal of lone parents.

III. Attitudes to Lone Parents in Employment

1. Survey of the General Public

50% of the public believe lone mothers have the right to work or remain at home as they choose. The view that it is appropriate for lone mothers to be employed increases greatly when the children are of school age.

2. Survey of Lone Mothers

Various factors inhibit employment, not least economic factors and job scarcity that affect many social groups. There is among lone mothers, as with married mothers, a wide variance in opinion as to the pros of employment offset against the pros of remaining at home. Greater income, freedom from the benefit system, social interaction and the enhanced self-esteem are given as reasons for employment.

IV. Is Current Policy Working?

The NDLP is very successful, but has a very low take-up rate. The number of lone parents on income support has fallen, as those claiming tax credits has risen. Poverty rates have also fallen. These improvements are not entirely due to policy, but also result from the state of the labour market.

V. A Common Policy Trend?

1. Motivations for Policies

Governments around the world are using the following common arguments to encourage lone parents to re-enter employment.

Long-term unemployment drains the benefit system and has a detrimental effect on the individual and their children. Working improves social inclusion. Paid work is the norm for mothers, and lone mothers should also be in employment. Care work is no longer a legitimate activity for long-term state support.

2. Nature of Policies

a. Push into work – negative policies

Curtailing benefit or state support to drive lone mothers into work.

b. Pull into work – positive policies

Tax credit systems encourage lone mothers to work.

c. Trade-offs

Obligations to take employment are compensated by improved support systems.

The UK has a choice system, but also has one of the highest rates of lone parent poverty in Europe.

Are lone mothers simply the next group of women being brought into the labour market?

VI. Conclusions

Policy has to change providing childcare and support services. Equal pay between genders would serve to reduce child poverty; this is as true now as it was 100 years ago.

There needs to be a change in the processes of delivery.

A change in theory is required. Children are not just a barrier to work, neither is ill health. These are factors that people have to deal with while in paid work.

Discussion

Professor Pat Thane (Chair)

What jobs and levels of earning are lone mothers moving into?

Professor Jane Millar

There needs to be research into retention rates. The labour market suffers from a gender divide. The government believes training is of no use in reducing employment. One of the reasons for the low take-up level of the NDLP is that it offers no training.

Kate Green

The Conservative party have recently announced they are looking at re-introducing all mothers of secondary school age children into the labour market, and they appear to accept that training schemes play a part in realising this.

Participant 1

About a third of lone mothers are caring for disabled children. Does the 70% figure for lone parent employment mean that every lone parent not caring for a disabled child must work?

Professor Jane Millar

The target should exempt those in education. There seems to have been no provisions for exceptional cases.

Participant 2

Policies are designed for broad groups. There are parents of disabled children who want to work but cannot afford the expensive, specialist childcare. A transitional year in the benefit structure is important. Women have historically done low-paid work, and that is still seen as acceptable. The remaining 30% of unemployed lone parents will be excluded further by this target.

Professor Hilary Land

Quite minor disabilities can exclude a child from childcare. The whole range of children's needs must be catered for.

Participant 3

Parents with disabled children need a respite. They receive £40 a week to care for children with extreme social problems or disabilities.

Participant 4

How did the USA reach its level of employment?

Professor Jane Millar

In the USA they have the diversion policy that makes it very difficult for people to receive benefits. They restrict the choices of lone parents who wish to leave the labour market. They also have a growing economy that would increase lone mother employment rates. Expectations have changed; lone mothers anticipate remaining in work.

Participant 3

The Institute for Fiscal Studies suggested that the 70% figure for the USA is inaccurate.

Professor Jane Millar

Benefit levels in the USA were so low, people must have been working to survive. The increase in employment is actually previous employment now becoming visible.

Participant 6

The stigma attached to unemployment in the USA means that people declare all work.

Professor Jane Millar

Childcare spending in the USA has tripled.

Participant 7

Lone parents have a vast range of social backgrounds, education and employment skills. The breakdown of a marriage can be a great shock and it is very difficult to maintain employment.

Professor Jane Millar

Policy struggles to cope with the diversity of lone parents.

Participant 8

I had to leave employment when my husband left. It would be interesting to know how many people had to leave employment and did not require any more training to get back into work, and to know the success of the three-month transition to work.

Professor Jane Millar

The government has recognised the need for a transitional period and that it is better for lone parents to remain in employment than to try and return to employment.

Marvis Maclean

This transition provision is there in the case of a death.

Participant 7

The lone parent's time is halved.

Professor Jane Millar

It is a period of emotional chaos.

Conference Summary

Professor Pat Thane

The issues involving lone parents are embedded in a wider social and economic context. The inequality gap is growing in the UK. Although diverse, lone parents are likely to be towards the low end of the labour market and at greater risk of poverty. Childcare and other services are not readily available. The work environment has become more hostile. We need to think and campaign about these wider issues.

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