

Single Parent

FACTFILE

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Myths and labels abound about single parents ...

HERE ARE THE FACTS

1

Single parent families are an ordinary part of family life

- Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of households with dependent children are single parent families,¹ and there are 1.9 million single parents in Britain today.²
- There are 3 million children living in a single parent household, (24 per cent of all dependent children).³
- Single parents are predominantly women, although 8 per cent of single parents are fathers.⁴ Single fathers are more likely to be widowed than single mothers (12 per cent of single fathers are widowed, compared with 5 per cent of single mothers), and their children tend to be older.⁵
- Ninety per cent of single parents are White, 5 per cent are Black, 2 per cent are Asian and 3 per cent fall into other categories.⁶

2

The proportion of single parent families has increased since the 1970s, but it hasn't changed much in the last ten years

- In 1971 just 8 per cent of families with children were single parent families.
- In 1998 24 per cent of families with children were single parent families.
- In 2007 23 per cent of families with children were single parent families.⁷

3

Very few single parents are 'unmarried teenagers'

- Just 2 per cent of single parents are teenagers.⁸
- The median age for a single parent is 36.⁹
- The majority of single parents had their children within marriage – 55 per cent are separated from marriage, divorced or widowed.¹⁰ Only 6 per cent of all births are registered alone, and 9 per cent are registered to two parents who live apart.¹¹
- The proportion of single parents who have never been married (though most of them will have cohabited with a partner) has remained stable for the last ten years.¹²

4

Single parent families are more likely to be affected by poverty

- Over half (52 per cent) of children in single parent families are poor, compared to 25 per cent of children in couple families.¹³
- Only two-fifths of single parents receive maintenance from their child's other parent.¹⁴
- Paid work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty for single parents; the poverty rate for single parent families where the parent works part time is 32 per cent, and 22 per cent where the parent works full time.¹⁵
- The median weekly income for working single parent families is £404.52, compared with £618.44 for couple families with one worker.¹⁶

5

Single parents work

- The latest employment figures show that 56.7 per cent of lone parents are in work, up 12 percentage points since 1997. In the same period, the employment rate of mothers in couples has risen three percentage points to 71 per cent.¹⁷
- The employment rate for single parents varies depending on the age of their youngest child. Once children are 12 or over, single parents' employment rate is similar to, or higher than, the employment rate for mothers in couples (71 per cent of single parents whose child is 12-15 are in work).¹⁸
- Where single parents are not working, this is often because there are health issues that make work difficult: 36 per cent of unemployed single parents have a disability or longstanding illness and 30 per cent have a child with a disability.¹⁹

¹ Table 3.7, General Household Survey 2007, Office for National Statistics.

² Economic and Labour Market Review, February 2009, Office for National Statistics.

³ Three million children in single parent families:

⁴ Social Trends 39, Office for National Statistics (2008).

⁵ Analysis of Labour Force Survey data from April-June 2006 produced for Gingerbread.

⁶ Families with children in Britain: findings from the 2007 Families and Children Study (FACS). DWP research report 578.

⁷ Table 3.6, General Household Survey 2007, Office for National Statistics.

⁸ Derived from Families and Children Study data for 2005.

⁹ Gingerbread analysis of data from the Families and Children Study, 2005.

¹⁰ 'Median' is the midway point of the distribution - the point at which half the sample are older and half are younger.

¹¹ Labour Force Survey data Spring 2006, produced for Gingerbread.

¹² ONS Statistical Bulletin Dec 2009.

¹³ Table 3.6, General Household Survey 2007, Office for National Statistics.

¹⁴ Households Below Average Income; an analysis of the income distribution 1994/5 - 2007/8.

Department for Work and Pensions (2009). Table 4.11ts.

¹⁵ Table 15.1 Families with Children in Britain: Findings from the 2007 Family and Children Study, DWP Research Report No 578.

¹⁶ Households Below Average Income; an analysis of the income distribution 1994/5 - 2007/8.

Department for Work and Pensions (2009). Table 4.11ts.

¹⁷ Analysis of Expenditure and Food Survey 2007 data; does not include Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit as income. In Peacey V (2010) Family Finances. Gingerbread.

¹⁸ Labour Force Survey April-June 2009, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=409>

¹⁹ Analysis of Labour Force Survey data from April-June 2009 produced for Gingerbread, in Peacey V (2009) Signing on and stepping up? Single parents' experience of welfare reform. Gingerbread.

²⁰ Families with children in Britain: findings from the 2007 Families and Children Study (FACS). DWP research report 578.