

# The Facts

## about single parents.

### 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.<sup>1</sup>
- There are 3 million children living in a single parent household (24 per cent of all dependent children).<sup>2</sup>
- There are 1.9 million single parents.<sup>3</sup>
- These figures mean that nearly everyone will have at least one friend bringing up children alone, or will know someone who was brought up by a single parent.

### 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.<sup>4</sup>

### Very few single parents are 'unmarried teenagers'

- Only 13 per cent of single parents are aged under 25.<sup>5</sup>
- The median age for a single parent is 36.<sup>6</sup>
- The majority of single parents had their children within marriage – 55 per cent are separated from marriage, divorced or widowed.<sup>7</sup>

### 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.<sup>8</sup>
- An even higher proportion of single parent families (57 per cent) spend below the Minimum Income Standard – a baseline to determine the amount that a household needs to live on to achieve an acceptable standard of living.<sup>9</sup>
- Poverty has a real impact on children and their chances in life. It is strongly related to educational achievement and exclusion, to health, to children's life chances as adults, and to the happiness and mental health of all family members.<sup>10</sup>
- 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.<sup>11</sup>

### Single parents work

- The latest employment figures show that 56.7 per cent of single parents are in work.<sup>12</sup>
- 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).<sup>13</sup>
- Where single parents are not working, this is often because there are health issues that make work difficult: 36 per cent of unemployed lone parents have a disability or longstanding illness and 30 per cent have a child with a disability.<sup>14</sup>

### Single parents earn less

- Single parents' mean hourly wage is £9.71 per hour, compared with £11.19 for couple mothers.<sup>15</sup>
- The median weekly income for working single parent families is £404.52, compared with £618.44 for couple families with one worker.<sup>16</sup>

# Let's Lose the Labels

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### Other useful information

- Single parents are more likely to have experienced domestic violence than other groups (15 per cent, compared with 4 per cent of other women).<sup>17</sup>
- Single parent families are more likely to live in poor housing – 26 per cent live in 'non-decent' homes.<sup>18</sup>
- Single parents are predominantly women, although eight per cent of single parents are fathers.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>
- 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.<sup>21</sup>
- Single parents have much higher rates of depression than other groups; 42 per cent have been treated for depression or diagnosed with depression at some time, compared with 27 per cent of mothers in couples.<sup>22</sup>

*These are the most up-to-date figures at the time of printing (February 2010).*

*Gingerbread's research department can check facts for journalists – please contact our press office with requests.*

- <sup>1</sup> Table 3.7, General Household Survey 2007, Office for National Statistics.
- <sup>2</sup> Table 3.7, General Household Survey 2007, Office for National Statistics.
- <sup>3</sup> Economic and Labour Market Review, February 2009, Office for National Statistics.
- <sup>4</sup> Table 3.6, General Household Survey 2007, Office for National Statistics.
- <sup>5</sup> Families with children in Britain: findings from the 2007 Families and Children Study (FACS). DWP research report 578.
- <sup>6</sup> Gingerbread analysis of data from the Families and Children Study, 2005. 'Median' is the midway point of the distribution – the point at which half the sample are older and half are younger.
- <sup>7</sup> Labour Force Survey data Spring 2006, produced for Gingerbread.
- <sup>8</sup> Households Below Average Income; an analysis of the income distribution 1994/5 – 2007/8. Department for Work and Pensions (2009). Table 4.11ts.
- <sup>9</sup> Peacey V(2010) Analysis of Expenditure and Food Survey data, in 'Family Finances', Gingerbread.
- <sup>10</sup> Strelitz J and Lister R (Eds) Why money matters: family income, poverty, and children's lives. Save the Children (2008).
- <sup>11</sup> Households Below Average Income; an analysis of the income distribution 1994/5 – 2007/8. Department for Work and Pensions (2009). Table 4.11ts.
- <sup>12</sup> Labour Force Survey April-June 2009, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=409>
- <sup>13</sup> 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.
- <sup>14</sup> Families with children in Britain : findings from the 2007 Families and Children Study (FACS). DWP research report 578.
- <sup>15</sup> Analysis of Labour Force Survey data from April-June 2009 produced for Gingerbread. In Peacey V (2010) Family Finances. Gingerbread.
- <sup>16</sup> 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.
- <sup>17</sup> Walby S and Allen J (2004), Domestic violence, assault and stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey, Home Office Research Study no. 276.
- <sup>18</sup> Table 10.10 in Social Trends 38, Office for National Statistics (2007).
- <sup>19</sup> Social Trends 39, Office for National Statistics (2008).
- <sup>20</sup> Analysis of Labour Force Survey data from April-June 2006 produced for Gingerbread.
- <sup>21</sup> Families with children in Britain: findings from the 2007 Families and Children Study (FACS). DWP research report 578.
- <sup>22</sup> Roberts T and Ketende SC, in Hansen K and Joshi H (Eds) (2008) Millennium Cohort Study Third Survey: a user's guide to initial findings. Centre for Longitudinal Studies, University of London.

**Gingerbread**  
Single parents, equal families

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