

Lone mothers in the UK, have their lives got better since the transition from welfare to work?

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Abstract

The UK governments in recent history have built a strong paternalistic argument describing paid work as an essential route to improve lone parents' mental and physical well-being. This thesis therefore sets out to explore the question of

How does the transition from social assistance benefits into paid work affect the overall subjective well-being of lone mothers and their quality of life?

On the impacts of the transitions to work on the well-being of lone parents, some less-researched areas are found when adopting an analytical framework of the Personal Well-being Index (PWI), and they are: quality of relationships, future security, community-connectedness, safety, and leisure. This thesis adopted a qualitative method to fill the gap. In-depth interviews were conducted with some 20 lone mothers with at least one child aged six or under and who had recently returned from social assistance benefits to paid work.

Overall, the evidence shows that lone mothers may not be 'better off' in work either financially, emotionally, socially or physically. What is clear however, is that they are 'better-off' being free from the stigma associated with claiming social assistance benefits. This raises two policy implications. One, the social stigma is being generated and effectively delivered by political tactics to get people off benefits, and it damages the well-being of lone mothers not only during the period of being on benefits, but also for long after their transition. Two, while low out-of-work benefits and sanction regimes are considered as the right measures to encourage claimants to accept a 'reasonable' job because it would ultimately benefit their own well-being, it is clear that taking 'any work' is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Moving to any type of work in fact carries a great risk that threatens the well-being of the lone mothers, as it can equally be stigmatising, isolating, insecure, and unsafe, and not a route to becoming independent. However, rather it provides good and legitimate reasons for: reducing quality time with children, being unavailable to family and friends, and having leisure time that is informal, irregular, and fragmented, and also for not prioritising their own physical health.

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Author's declaration

I, Miyang Jun, declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

Background

There has long been an argument regarding the relative importance of the role of the welfare state and the roles of the market in creating and distributing well-being to their citizens. Pacek and Radcliff (2008) explains that, on the dichotomised arguments of politics versus markets, some arguments prioritise politics over the market, since the market forces workers to behave as a commodity in order to survive (Esping-Andersen 1990), and the market is indifferent to the well-being of individuals (Lane 1978). Others, on the other hand, consider decommodification (eg. a nation's social security systems to reduce individual's reliance on the market) as inefficiency and wastefulness, which imposes itself via costs to the population, and lowers the general level of happiness, whilst also reducing the quantity and quality of well-being (Pacek and Radcliff 2008).

Taken from the second view point of pursuing well-being, the UK political rhetoric has largely been focusing on making lone parents more dependent on the market and independent from social assistance benefits, and concentrates on how to 'make work pay' so that they are financially better-off through the welfare to work transition. Indeed, the financial rewards of being in work were explicitly stated under the auspices of the Labour Government's New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), which argued 'lone parents are financially better off' by moving to the labour market, by taking a job and/or increasing working hours (DWP 2007b). And as Tony Blair said in 2002 "Government has a responsibility to provide real opportunities for individuals to ... get into work that pays" (Society Guardian 2002). This assertion was reinforced for lone parents a decade later under the Coalition Government: "For that single mother who wants to work – we are making sure work pays" (Cameron 2011) and "Work remains the best route out of poverty" (HM Government, 2014, p106).

However, the governmental emphases on the benefits of welfare to work on lone parents have recently been moving towards 'wider than just remuneration', because "the income [work] brings, can change lives – boosting confidence and self-esteem, providing a structure to people's lives and giving them a stake in their community" (DWP 2012b, p.10 and p.37). David Cameron's (2010) speech on well-being described that we have our 'instincts' that having the purpose of a job will improve people's lives. The goal of the welfare state is now to promote the well-being of citizens, and nudging benefit claimants into paid work is being discussed as a critical measure to meet this overarching goal, and make their quality of life and well-being better. Nudge theory is based on a political philosophy named by Thaler and Sunstein as 'libertarian paternalism', and promotes public policies to provide encouragement (nudges), in which individuals are steered to choose the desired behaviours (Davies 2014). A number of policy measures have been introduced to achieve

this, including Lone Parent Obligation, which requires lone parents to move off social assistance benefits and take up paid work of 16 hours or more a week when their youngest child reaches the age of five, from May 2012 (Coleman and Riley 2012).

The question is what happens to the subjective well-being of lone mothers since their transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work, and how does it differ from being on benefits? How do they perceive the impacts of this transition to work on their quality of life as an outcome?

Literature Review

In responses to these questions, there have been many studies trying to answer whether the lives of lone mothers got better since the transition to work. Much is known already about the practical barriers and difficulties in returning to work faced by lone parents who are dependent on means-tested social security benefits. The difficulties can be understood as often due to their own health, financial circumstances, difficulties in finding work with suitable and/or flexible hours, paucity of local jobs, lack of skills and qualifications, lack of confidence, and childcare cost and availability difficulties (Bell et al. 2005; Evans et al. 2004; Gingerbread 2011c; Griffiths 2011; Harden et al. 2012; Thomas 2007).

We also know that being in paid work improves lone parents' circumstances and bring many benefits to their financial circumstances (Casebourne et al. 2010; Hales et al. 2000; Haux et al. 2012; Lane et al. 2011; Millar 2006; Millar and Ridge 2009; Ridge and Millar 2008), and to their health while relieving stress from poverty (Peacey 2009), building self-esteem. The transition to work also provides feelings of achievements and respect from their children (Haux et al. 2012; Lane et al. 2011), and community-connectedness allowing more of social involvements and new networks from work (Haux et al. 2012).

At the same time however, it is also known that the experiences of moving to work often address some negative impacts on their well-being in regard to their health (Backett-Milburn et al. 2001; McHardy 2012), quality time spent with their family and managing time balance with their caring responsibilities (Harden et al. 2012; Peacey 2009; Ray et al. 2010; Skinner 2005; Wattis et al. 2013), while those in a low quality of job suffer from feelings of insecurity and anxiety regarding their future outlook (Haux et al. 2012; Ridge 2007) and achievements in work (Coleman and Riley 2012; Evans et al. 2004; Haux et al. 2012; Hoggart and Vegeris 2008; Millar 2008b; Ray et al. 2010; Ridge and Millar 2011; Yeo 2007).

Despite these informative contributions in the existing literatures, there are some gaps in knowledge which are still wide enough to be considered in terms of the subjective well-being of

lone mothers in the process of transition to work. The well-being and the quality of life of lone mothers making a transition has not been qualitatively approached from a much broader concept of 'life as a whole' in the UK, embracing most of the key well-being domains in their life. Much of the research has focused on important but more narrowly prescribed areas of life (mostly on their financial aspects) and /or to specific policy programmes and expectations. More importantly, lone mothers' own perspectives on their well-being which have been impacted by the experiences of transition are largely missing in the existing literature.

The gaps in knowledge become visible when applying an analytical framework of the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) (The International Wellbeing Group 2013). The index proposes eight domains that represent one's life as a whole, and has been used in an Australian context to quantitatively measure the subjective well-being and the quality of life of lone mothers during their transitions. The eight domains are:

- Feeling financially better off
- Health
- Achievement
- Relationships
- Safety
- Community-connectedness
- Future security
- Leisure

When analysing the existing literature based on the framework of the PWI, the eight domains can be categorised into three, depending on the volume and depth of the existing knowledge. There are some heavily researched areas in the lives of lone mothers moving to work, while there are some less researched areas and some missing parts of life. These categories are as follows:

- Three well-researched domains: financial circumstances, achievement, and health
- Two less-researched domains: relationships, and future security
- Three missing domains: community-connectedness, safety, and leisure

The empirical study of this thesis is therefore designed to fill these gaps in knowledge, and make a meaningful contribution to explore the lived experiences of the UK lone mothers making a transition from a wider perspective, as life as a whole.

Research questions

This thesis therefore sets out the following main research question:

How does the transition from social assistance benefits into paid work affect the overall subjective well-being of lone mothers and their quality of life?

This question can be broken down into three questions and associated sub-questions that this thesis wishes to address based on both the literature review and an empirical study, shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Research Questions and sub-questions

1. How have the UK governments in recent history politically approached lone parenthood and the parents' transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work, and how have they designed policy measures to improve the well-being of lone parents?
2. What does the evidence show about the effects of living on social assistance benefits on lone mothers' subjective well-being?
 - How do lone mothers perceive their subjective well-being on the 8 domains of life (financially better-off, health, achievement, relationship, safety, community-connectedness, future security, and leisure)?
 - Are there other important domains of subjective well-being beyond the 8 domains that have been influenced by the transition?
3. How do the levels of subjective well-being change for lone mothers, due to the influence of the welfare to work transition?
 - How do lone mothers perceive their subjective well-being across and beyond the 8 domains of life, especially at an early stage of the transitional period?
 - How are the levels of subjective well-being for lone mothers in paid work different from those who are on social assistance benefits?

The first question addresses how the UK governments in recent history have approached lone parenthood and their transitions to paid work. The existing literature, including governmental reports and academic evaluations, is used to answer the questions, and explores political ideologies, rhetoric, and policy measures from Thatcher's Conservatives to the Coalition government. The second and third questions address, based on both the existing literature and an empirical study, how the lives of lone parents have been influenced by their transitions into work. The second question explores the well-being of lone parents whilst living on social assistance

benefits prior to their transitions to paid work. The third question discusses how their subjectively perceived well-being has changed since moving into paid work, especially at the early stage of transition, and if so, in what domains of their lives. In the process, the role of the empirical research can be claimed to make a contribution on the less researched domains of lone mothers' lives (see chapter three for the empirical research questions). By doing so, the thesis overall addresses the individual evaluations of lone mothers' well-being under the influence of the welfare to work transition, the decision made for them through Lone Parent Obligations. The contributions of this thesis can be summarised as follows:

- **This thesis makes a novel empirical approach to using the analytical framework of the PWI to qualitatively examine the subjective well-being of lone mothers in the process of transition to work.**
- **The empirical research makes a contribution by exploring the less researched areas of lone mothers' lives, such as their quality of relationships, leisure, and safety and future security.**

The empirical research

This research uses abductive reasoning as a research strategy, which has its research paradigm in interpretivism. Abductive logic is the method of theory construction based on social actors' language, meanings and accounts in the context of everyday activities (Blaikie 2007). This approach is particularly useful in this thesis, firstly, because it allows the researcher to engage with some sensitising concepts learned from literature review prior to the data collection. These concepts can be used as topics or as a guide, which can help to generate new knowledge when the data obtained are compared to the existing knowledge. It is a major benefit of abductive reasoning that can be differentiated from inductive reasoning which requires the researcher to let the new knowledge emerge from data inductively. Secondly, abductive reasoning is useful because it focuses on the intersubjective meanings of social actors embedded in their everyday language. This thesis aims to explore the experiences of lone parents, and whether their transitions have changed their everyday lives, and in what ways, and whether it is understood as an improvement as argued by the governmental rationale (see chapter one). The data will be directly obtained from what the social actors – lone mothers - have constructed and reproduced with their own language. During the transition period of lone mothers moving to work, they have already constructed their own concepts and meanings about their experiences, which can only be delivered by their own voice. As also argued by Ravallion and Lokshin (1999), the social world they constructed and reproduced will be the best resources to see their overall subjective well-being and quality of life, which make them the judges of their own lives.

In the empirical research, in-depth interviews were conducted with some 20 lone mothers who were recruited through on and offline advertisements passed on by a number of gate keepers working in local authorities, as well as lone parents' interest groups and local institutions (primary school, school nurseries, and child centre). The data collection methods include various forms, including face-to-face, video (Skype), and telephone interviews. The characteristics of the participants can be summarised as follows:

- Lone mothers who were with at least one child aged six or under
- Those who had recently returned from social assistance benefits to paid work (in last 17 months)
- Those who were working at least 16 hours per week at the point of interview, by leaving means-tested social assistance benefits such as Income Support (IS) or Income based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)

The data obtained are analysed using thematic analysis, the analysis technique influenced by grounded theory, as both the abductive reasoning and the Constructionist Grounded Theory Method share a great deal of their assumptions in interpretivism (see chapter three). The data analysis produced three main themes, which resulted in three findings chapters: quality of relationships, leisure, and sense of safety and security. The following section presents the structure of the thesis.

The structure of the thesis

The aim of the research is to examine the quality of life of lone mothers by discussing how their subjective well-being levels change over the course of transition to paid work, especially at an early stage. In doing so, this thesis is structured with eight chapters.

Chapter one starts by presenting the current demographic characteristics of lone parenthood in the UK, by looking at statistical evidence. This section aims to address where the lone parent families stand and how they are doing in the UK society and the labour market. The second part of the chapter discusses how lone parenthood has been conceptualised as a social problem and approached by the previous three UK governments. It uses Lister's (2010) three concepts of social constructionism as an analytical tool and reviews political ideologies and rhetoric, as well as the policy measures targeting lone parenthood.

Chapter two provides a literature review and introduces an analytical framework. It is divided into three parts. The first part explores the conceptual scope of subjective well-being that will be used in this thesis. The second part introduces the analytical framework of the literature review - the

eight domains of the PWI which is designed to represent one's life as a whole. The final section reviews the existing qualitative evidence on lone parents' transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work, adopting the analytical framework with an expectation that it would make the gaps in knowledge more visible.

Chapter three proposes the empirical research questions and methods. It is divided into three sections. The chapter starts by setting out the empirical research questions addressing the less-researched areas discussed in chapter two. The second part discusses its methodological framework, including its ontological and epistemological positions, and research paradigm. Third, the actual research process is explained, including the data collection and ethical considerations, the sampling design and recruitment, the results of field work, and the data coding and analysis.

Chapters four, five, and six describe the three themes that emerged from the research findings: quality of relationships, quality of leisure, and sense of safety and security. Chapter four discusses the quality of three types of relationships the lone mothers have: with children; informal relations such as family, friends and close neighbours; and with formal relations such as acquaintances, colleagues, and the general public. Chapter five discusses the quality of leisure and its changes as they make transitions into paid work. Chapter six presents the lone mothers' senses of safety and security.

Chapter seven discusses the key findings and emergent concepts arising from the three finding chapters, and what they imply for the subjective well-being of lone mothers over their transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis by revisiting the gaps in knowledge, and discusses the limitations of the research methods conducted to fill the gaps. The findings arising from the research and the implications are revisited but in the political context, and it sets out the future research areas that may be fruitful for further enquiry.

Chapter 1: The Picture of Lone Parenthood in the UK

Introduction

There has been a steady rise in the number of lone parent families over the last few decades, and they now account for about a quarter of all families with dependent children in 2014 in the UK (ONS 2015a). The proportion has been large enough to be a political concern, especially due to the increased risks they face associated with lower socio-economic factors, such as lower educational attainment, income, employment rates, and poor housing conditions, when compared to married or cohabiting families.

Over the last few decades, therefore, lone parenthood has been at the centre of the British political rhetoric. They have been conceptualised as a social threat that is associated with various social problems, including poverty, unemployment, child abuse/mal-treatment, and low levels of health and education. The political rhetoric has problematised lone parenthood in (largely) two ways. Firstly, it has created a moral crisis, since lone parents are reported as actively choosing to be dependent on state benefits (Levitas 2005; Lister 2004; Duncan and Edwards 1999). This moralistic discourse links to underclass theories of poverty. The theory positions the poor as inhabiting a different and dangerous culture to the rest of society, and one which poses a moral threat to society and to itself, through the 'transmission' of poverty and immoral rationality down the generations. Secondly, the political rhetoric has gradually moved away from a moralistic discourse and towards a social integrationist discourse and a redistributive and egalitarian one, especially since New Labour, although the moralistic discourse has never disappeared (Levitas 2005; Lister 2004). The political rhetoric and policy measures have therefore been formed based on the two different perspectives.

This chapter aims to set out the context explaining the problematisation of lone parenthood in recent history and will answer the following questions:

- What are the recent demographic features of lone parenthood in the UK?
- How has lone parenthood been problematised, and what are the governmental measures to approach the recognised problems associated with lone parenthood?

The first part of this chapter provides some context in terms of demographic characteristics of lone parenthood, using statistical data. The second part discusses the way in which lone parenthood became a social problem, using Lister's three concepts of social constructionism as an analytical tool: ideology, discourse and language, and power (Lister 2010). It reviews the recent history of political ideologies and rhetoric problematising lone parenthood in the UK, and reviews policy measures dealing with the recognised social problems.

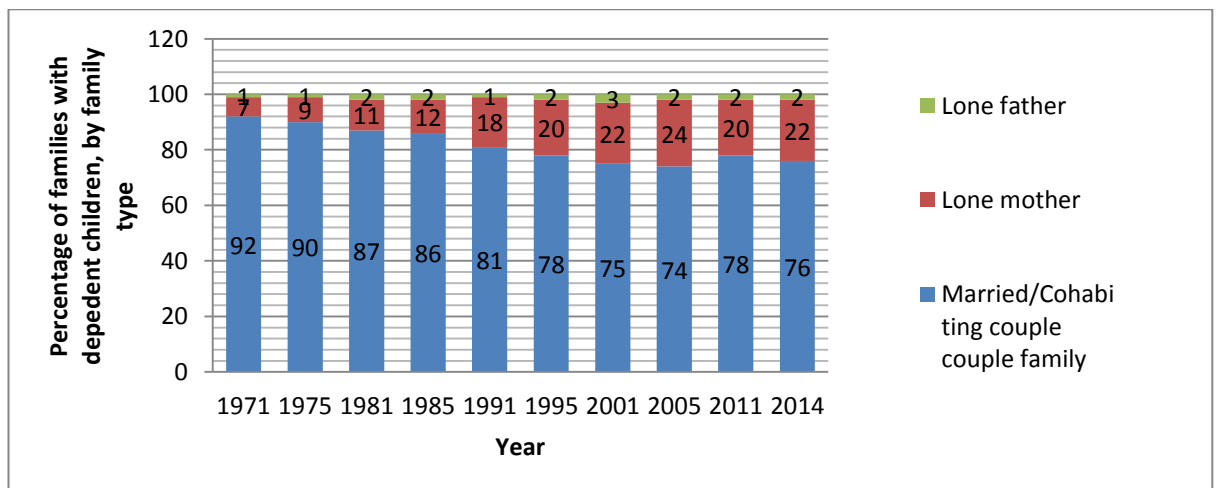
1.1 Demographic characteristics of lone parenthood in the UK

The number of lone parent families shows a constant rise over the last few decades, and it has become the centre of political debates and policy interventions. It is therefore important to draw a big picture of current social and economic positions of lone parent families in the UK. Using statistical data, this section will present their demographic characteristics, including population and socio-economic backgrounds.

Population

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of lone parent families with dependent children starting from 1970s. As can be seen from figure one¹, lone parent families were less than one in ten (8%) of all types of families in 1971, and reached its peak in 2002 at 27% (ONS 2013a). It has been relatively stable since then, and the latest data shows that 25% of families in the UK are headed by lone parents (ONS 2015b). While lone parent families with dependent children has increased by 16 %, the number of civil partnerships and cohabiting families with dependent children has increased by 4%, and married couples with dependent children has decreased by 5% (ONS 2015b). As lone parenthood was the fastest growing type of families in the UK, it has been in the centre of the political concern.

Figure 1 Percentage of families with dependent children, by family type



Source: derived from Labour Force Survey (ONS 2013a; 2015b).

Among lone parent families, a substantial increase has been shown in the number of lone mother families. It increased from 7% in 1971 to 22% of all families with dependent children in 2014, while lone father families have changed very little since 1970s (increased by 1%) (ONS 2013a; ONS

¹ Four year intervals are chosen to show the trends in the percentage of lone parent families, with an exception in 2014, as it was the most recent data available.

2015b)². It means that lone mothers made up 92% of all lone parent families with dependent children, while lone fathers accounted for 8% in 2014. Also, lone mothers are caring younger children more than lone fathers. Based on a General Lifestyle Survey, 40% of all families in the UK have the youngest children aged 0-4 in 2011 (ONS 2013a). While married and cohabiting couples have the largest proportion of them (43%), lone mothers and fathers have 36% and 15% respectively. The youngest dependent children living with lone fathers tend to be older, compared to other types of families. Some 63% of the youngest children at the age of 10 or older are living with lone fathers in 2009-10, while the equivalent figures for married/cohabiting couples (33%) and lone mother families (37%) are less than 40%. Lone mothers seem to take more of the main caring role for any children when relationships break down, especially young children.

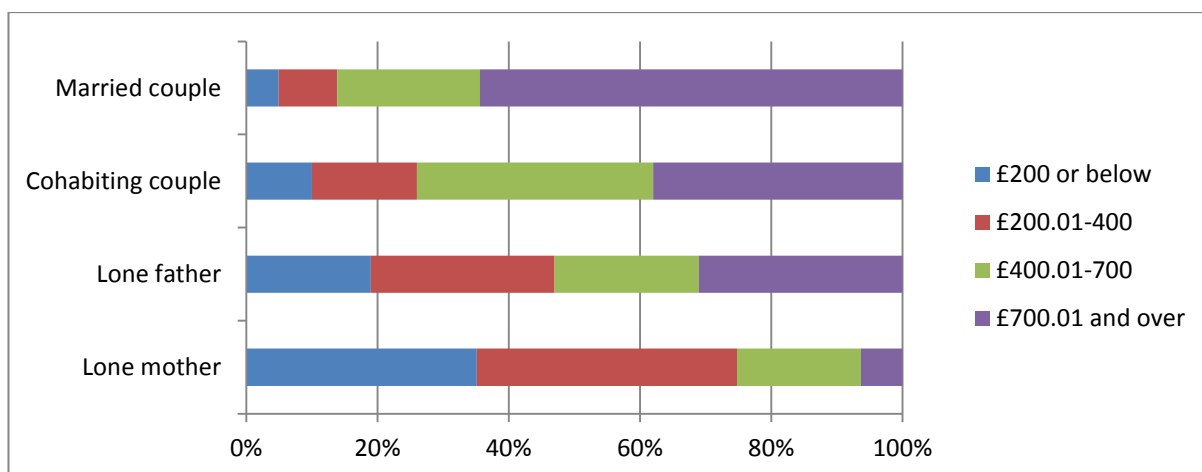
Employment and socio-economic backgrounds

While the population of lone parenthood increases, their low economic activity has been at the centre of the political concerns. Several policy measures were introduced during the last few decades, including New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), Lone Parent Obligation, and the Work Programme, which will be discussed in detail in the next section. As a result, the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2014) reports that there has been the largest increase in the percentages of working lone parent families since 1996, from 47.1% to 65.7%. This can be seen as a result of the policy measures as well as a general increase in the number of working families in the UK as working couple families also increased from 92% to 95.7% during the same period of time. The report indicates that the increase in the percentage since 2012 has been driven by lone parent families (ONS 2014).

However, a statistical increase in economic activity does not necessarily mean that they have achieved a good standard of living or quality of life. According to ONS (2014), twice more of lone mothers with dependent children (14.7%) are working in low skilled jobs such as cleaners and catering assistants than couple mothers (7.9%) in 2014. On the contrary, while 30.9% of couple mothers are in high skilled jobs such as nursing and teaching professionals, only 17.1% of lone mothers are working in such jobs. It means that mothers in couple families are more likely to be working in high skilled work, while lone mothers are in low skilled occupations.

² ONS (2013a) is used for data for trends of 1971-2011, and ONS (2015b) is used for the most recent data of 2011-2014

Figure 2 Usual gross weekly household income of families with dependent children by family type



Source: derived from General Lifestyle Survey, ONS (2013b)

There are large differences in weekly income across different family types. The figure above shows the weekly gross income of household with dependent children in 2011. Compared to married or cohabiting families, the greater percentage of lone parent families are in the lowest band of weekly income. While 39% of lone mother families with dependent children have weekly income below £200, 10% and 5% of cohabiting and married families are in the same income band. Among lone parent families, lone fathers are on average much richer than lone mothers. While more than a half of lone fathers with dependent children (53%) have weekly income more than £400, only 28% of lone mother families are in the same income band. Lone parent families also carry higher child poverty risks. Children in lone parent families are more likely to live in relative low income households, compared to that of couple families. According to Households Below Average Income statistics (DWP 2015), 29% of children in lone parent families suffer from material deprivation and low income or severe low income in 2013/14, while 13% of children in couple families are in the same band.

A similar pattern can be found in relation to their housing. According to ONS publication on social trends (ONS 2009), 64.6% of lone parents rent their house as a social or private tenant and the majority (41%) of them rent a house from the social sector such as registered social landlords or local authorities in 2009. Only about 13.2% of couple families rented from the social sector. Also, lone parents are more likely live in houses that are associated with the working class, such as purpose-built and terraced houses (ONS 2008). They are three times more likely to live in a purpose-built flat or maisonette (15% compared with 7%), while couple families with dependent children are more likely to live in a house or bungalow (93% and 76% respectively). While 39% of lone parents with dependent children live in terraced houses, 30% of couple families live in the same form of housing. The family type is also associated with the quality of housing, as 26% of

lone parent households with dependent children live in non-decent houses³ and 23% of them live in poor-quality⁴ environments in 2005, while 22% and 16% of couple households with dependent children live in non-decent homes and poor quality environments (ONS 2008).

The data shows that lone parent families, especially those headed by mothers, are more likely to live with relatively low income, in low-skilled jobs, in poor quality housing, and carried greater risks of child poverty. The next section will discuss how lone parenthood has been pictured by the previous governments, in regards to their demographical expansion and associated socio-economic factors.

³ A decent home is one that: meets the current statutory minimum for housing a) in a reasonable state of repair, b) has reasonably modern facilities and services and c) provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort, that is it has efficient heating and effective insulation (ONS 2008).

⁴ The poor quality environments is either ; a) the upkeep, management or misuse of private and public buildings and space, b) abandonment or non-residential use, and c) A home is regarded as having a poor quality environment of a given type if it is assessed to have 'significant' or 'major' problems in respect of any of the specific environmental problems assessed and grouped under that type *ibid.*.

1.2 Governmental approaches towards lone parenthood

Lone parenthood in the UK has long been seen as a social problem since the post-war period, although the discourses around the problems have been constructed differently. According to Kiernan et al. (1998), lone parenthood from the 1950s to 60s was regarded as the problems of unmarried motherhood, being immature, and becoming a moral and social problem. It was only the late 1970s when the problems related to divorce were highlighted over the unmarried mothers, and two groups of lone parents became recognised as a single problem. Since then, discourses around the problems of lone parenthood have moved away from the moral and social one to that of the material one, in terms of their 'welfare dependency' (although, according to Lister (2004), 'welfare dependency' is associated with a moralistic discourse as well, in terms of emphasising individual values and behaviours of as being dependent on the state). According to social constructionists, who consider a problem as socially constructed rather than naturally given, the discourses around lone parenthood problems had been constructed once in the 50s, and reconstructed completely in the 80s and 90s (Lister 2010).

Taking the views of social constructionists, this section will show how the previous UK governments have constructed their discourses around problems in lone parenthood, from Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979 to the Coalition government up to May 2015. In doing so, it adopts three concepts introduced by social constructionists to define a social problem: ideology, language and discourse, and power (Lister 2010). Ideology is used to legitimate some social phenomena as 'common sense' while marking others as problems. Language and discourse label certain groups of people or behaviour as problematic. Power which can be divided into 'discursive power' and 'institutional or practical power' is used to impose common sense to define a problem and attempt to solve it. Using these concepts – ideology, political rhetoric, and policy measures – as an analytical tool, this section will argue how the previous governments have constructed its problematisation toward lone parenthood in the UK.

The two conservative governments, 1979 - 1996

During the 80s and 90s, the UK experienced major social and economic changes, with its family values and female employment patterns (Kiernan et al. 1998). Birth rates outside of marriage almost doubled during the 1980s, and reached one in three children. While most countries in the European Union experienced similar patterns, the UK scored the highest proportion of lone parent families. The labour market experienced a change as well, in regards to a rise in female employment rates from 56% to 63%, from 1979 to 1990 (ONS 2013b). While the employment rates of married women with children increased from 52% to 63%, that of lone parents decreased from 47% to 42% during the same period in the 1980s. It generated politically sensitive arguments

over their high level of reliance on social assistance benefits, as the numbers of lone parent families on social assistance increased from 38% to 70% (Jones and Millar 1996).

Ideologies under the two Conservative governments

The Conservative governments under Thatcher and Major had two clear objectives, taking the views of the 'New Right': one is protecting and conserving the value of 'the traditional family', and two, implementing the 'free market and the minimal state' of the earlier post-war years to the economy and social policy.

This fundamentalist idea of the New Right returning back to tradition was legitimated by two different political ideologies: social-authoritarianism and neo-liberalism (Steel and Warren 2001). Their social-authoritarianism emphasised the moral sense of the family, where people should be morally responsible for their family and themselves rather than overloading state or the welfare system. This was the moral standards of society. The idea of neo-liberalism is in the line with social-authoritarianism in regards to moral responsibilities, as it stands for the freedom of individual choices within the competitive labour market. As families are responsible for themselves, the state can only be minimal and the market can be competitive without state regulations. Neo-liberalism was believed as a cure for Britain's economic crisis which was primarily caused by Keynesianism, and state provisions of welfare should therefore be commodified so that individuals can purchase (Fitzgerald 1983). Poverty and unemployment were seen as faults of individuals, since the individuals have the 'freedom' to have control of their own lives. The social security so called 'scroungers' were therefore seen as a disease and a threat to a 'moral' and 'healthy' society as well as a burden on other innocent citizens with high welfare costs paid through the taxation system.

In order to make their social-authoritarian argument on the traditional family stronger, the Conservatives use the notion of nationalism. In building nationalism, naturalism plays a role. According to the naturalism, the family is a product of nature, and "the most natural state is the one composed of a single people with a single national character" (Jagger and Wright 1999, p. 136). Family, 'biologically related' and 'naturally spread', holds the relationship between members of the family, and eventually leads to memberships of the nation. Most importantly, the natural family has to be patriarchal because the father is, by nature, an economic provider, as Hobbes stated 'the dominion is in him that nourisheth' (Jagger and Wright 1999, p. 139). The 'natural family' also legitimates a minimal state, as individuals' contractual relationships and retained benefit would allow state intervention as little as possible (Jagger and Wright 1999). The natural family acts as a mechanism that is held together by kin relationships, which then reproduces

national identity for their offspring as well as performing educative and care roles that the state can or will not perform.

The New Right ideas of family had been criticised by groups of thinkers, which was known as the 'resistance' in the words of the social constructionists (Lister 2010). Marxists and socialists argued the good of the collective over the needs of the individuals. They understood social problems such as poverty and inequality as structural problems, caused by a narrow group of people who own and control the means of production and use them to oppress others' opportunity and freedom. The New Right idea of individualism was understood as ideological justification for capitalism (Steel and Warren 2001). Feminists have also criticised the New Right ideas of patriarchy that keep women's place in the home. However, the mainstream arguments were well-maintained and expressed through political languages and discourses under Conservative governments.

Languages and discourses: moral panic or structural failure?

While Conservative governments legitimate the traditional family and the competitive market, their political language and discourse labelled lone parenthood and the behaviour of becoming a lone parent (eg. unmarried and divorce) to be problematic. The labelling was done in two ways: one, as a 'social threat', blaming the moral side of lone parenthood, and two, as a structural problem caused by a Keynesian welfare state.

Lone parenthood as a social threat

The political discourse created by the Conservatives is largely associated with moralistic and underclass discourses. This is dubbed as MUD by Levitas (2005), and discussed in comparison to redistributive and egalitarian discourse (RED) and social integrationist discourse (SID) by Lister (2004). The Conservative government interpreted the changing family values as a moral crisis in the society. The moralistic discourse is closely linked to the 'underclass' theory, popularised by the American New Right theorists such as Charles Murray (Duncan and Edwards 1999) and was strongly supported by British Conservative politician Keith Joseph. Main (forthcoming) explains that Joseph's influence on Thatcher's government contributed to the individualisation and personal responsibility of poverty, together with Thatcher's neoliberal ideology. According to the underclass theory, there is a developing class posited in segregated areas, consisting of those who have little stake in the social order, and those who are alienated from and hostile to society. They become a major source of crime, deviancy, and social breakdown. The underclass then become dependent on welfare systems, and collapses both the traditional family and work ethics. This immoral rationality is culturally reproduced from one generation to another in everyday life (Duncan and Edwards 1999).

The Conservatives adopted the language of the 'underclass' to describe lone parenthood in the UK as one of the active agents producing the underclass and moral crisis (Steel and Warren 2001). Discourses against lone parenthood at that time can easily be found from major media sources and the New Right political thinkers who argued for policy measures to reinforce morality in the society. An organisation within the Conservative party called the 'Conservative Family Campaign' (launched in 1986) argued in its publicity material that 'The acceptance of abnormal relationships, in particular the concept of single parenthood as an equal and viable alternative to the two parent family' is a national moral decay (Jagger and Wright 1999 p. 120). John Major's 'back to basics' campaign blamed single mothers for 'jumping the housing queue' through homelessness routes by deliberately getting pregnant (Jones and Millar 1996).

The notion of traditional family was, on the other hand, positively labelled, as a quotation of Margaret Thatcher 'we are the party of the family' summarises the overall political rhetoric (Wasoff and Dey 2000, p.135). Thatcher's speech at the Conservative Women's Conference in 1988 claimed that 'family breakdown ... strikes at the very heart of society therefore policies must be directed at strengthening the family' (Jones and Millar 1996, p.14). Similar messages were made by several new groups and campaigns that emerged in Britain. They stood for the moral and traditionalist 'family value', wishing to 'turn the clock back to an earlier and better age for the family' (Harding 1993, p.108). The 'Conservative Family Campaign' described the traditional family as the most fulfilling and effective way to maintain a stable society which was currently under a social and economic threat from tax and benefit policies, and education (Harding 1993). The Social Affairs Unit, a right-wing think tank, portray 'the family' composed of husband, wife, and children, staying together based on the idea of the husband as the principal, if not the only, breadwinner (Jones and Millar 1996). According to Fitzgerald (1983), such languages and discourses contain the main ideologies of Conservative, the traditional family based on the patriarchy and mother's responsibilities of care, 'familialism' and 'nationalism'.

Lone parenthood as a structural problem

While the dominant discourses were made around the moral failure of lone parenthood, structural causes of the problems also got attention, in regards to changes in the labour market and the generosity of the welfare state. The labour market changes were concerned in relation to widening earning gaps, declining earning power of unskilled young men and women, and its influences on family break-ups, the growth of lone parenthood, and the increased reliance on benefits (Jones and Millar 1996). The main blame was the structural failure, where external social circumstances placed lone mothers and their children in an economically and socially disadvantaged position (Duncan and Edwards 1999). Under this discourse, there is no self-

reproducing underclass that deliberately stands outside cultural, political and economic norms, but a failing welfare state suffering from the economic downturn.

The generosity of the welfare state was however seen as a bigger concern. Margaret Thatcher herself and Conservative government ministers described the social security system as the 'time bomb' which built 'dependency culture' for lone mothers who are not in paid work and not receiving child maintenance payments from the 'absent father' (Bennett and Millar 2009; Jones and Millar 1996). John Major criticised the Beveridge thinking of the welfare state where the state was seen as the best mechanism to control a system and to benefit those who are unable to help themselves. He argued that poor families should be 'helped to help themselves' (Steel and Warren 2001, p. 226). The financial cost of lone parenthood was in the centre of the political discussions, in regards to legal aid for divorce, demands on housing, social services on child care needs, and possibly extra demands on the health care, criminal justice, and education systems (Harding 1993; Kiernan et al. 1998). The 1993 Party Conference saw debates on the incentives to support the employment of lone parents, the payment of child maintenance, and on the parental responsibilities of young lone parents (Jones and Millar 1996). The generosity of welfare and Housing Benefits was believed to be encouraging the 'problem' of lone parenthood (Jones and Millar 1996). As Stephen Green, Chairman of the Conservative Family Campaign argued, 'putting girls into council flats and providing tax-payer funded child care is a policy from hell' (Duncan and Edwards 1999).

The Conservative government considered the welfare state as the origin of encouraging the dependency culture, an 'overloaded state', and the underclass. The governmental welfare provisions were seen as an unnecessary intervention into the private world of the family with state control over the individuals' freedom, which generated unnecessarily high taxation and the welfare 'scroungers'. Altogether, lone parenthood was seen as a threat to a healthy society.

Policy measures (Institutional powers)

Social Constructionists divide the power to implement ideologies into practice into two – 'discursive power' and 'institutional or practical power' (Lister 2010). The discursive power enables some dominant groups to impose their views to define 'common sense', while constructing others as a problem. The institutional (practical) power is then developed and delivered by social policies to solve the constructed problems.

Policies to strengthen 'the family'

While Conservative governments and the New Right political thinkers used their discursive power to morally demonise lone parenthood, a rather extreme authoritarian measure of institutional

power was exercised to solve problems related to family breakdown and parental irresponsibility. The Child Support Act 1991 required all lone parents in receipt of means-tested benefits to register and name the non-resident parent, mainly fathers, with the Child Support Agency (Smith 2005). If they fail to do so without a good reason, they face up to a 20% cut in benefits, while payments from 'absent fathers' can often be irregular and unpredictable, carrying risks of harassment, violence, and the loss of other forms of support from him (Jagger and Wright 1999). The maintenance then was deducted from benefits, so they would gain no financial advantage from the benefits. The Child Support Act had a clear aim of reducing social security expenditures as well as upholding their ideologies of familialism and neo-liberalism. It strengthened the family and parental responsibilities, and controlling men as well as women in the private sphere, through quite an extreme authoritarian approach, leaving the role of the state minimal in the laissez-faire labour market. It forces lone mothers to be more financially dependent on individual men or themselves, rather than state finance (Jones and Millar 1996). In addition, the Conservative government reduced or removed benefits for young people such as student maintenance grants, based on the notion of extended parental controls and responsibilities on young adults. The greater parental controls and family values may have achieved, but it was at the same time another laissez-faire solution with power exercised to the young people. It left the possibilities of no safety net for young people from either their parents or from the state when the parents give up their control due to financial difficulties.

Policies for structural problems

As the Thatcher government was reluctant to face structural needs associated with lone parenthood, working mothers in paid work or support systems, including childcare or leave systems, did not get much attention. It should, according to familialism, be available within the family in the ideal traditional family (Jagger and Wright 1999).

Major's government, on the other hand, used much of its institutional power on unburdening social expenditure by making lone parents independent in the labour market. Several labour market activation approaches were introduced, by making obvious example and encouraging women to senior public appointments after his all-male Cabinet (Jones and Millar 1996). An employer-led initiative was also introduced to help women to break the 'glass ceiling'. Gillian Shepherd, Secretary of State for Employment after 1992 Election, formed a top-level group to advise her to encounter difficulties of working women in the labour market. However, Major's commitment to labour market deregulation was continued, and it resulted in exacerbating the difficulties of working women in the labour market, such as widening earning gaps between women and men (Jones and Millar 1996).

In doing so, Major's government acknowledged the need for childcare services, but more as the role of voluntary and independent sectors. The Children Act 1989 includes school-aged children from lone parent families to be eligible for day care provided by local authorities (Jones and Millar 1996). Its capacity however was relatively small and produced a long waiting list, while funds have been available to promote pre-school and after-school care by the voluntary sector and employers (Hardey and Crow 1991). John Major made his issue in relation to universal pre-school provision in 1993, but a concrete plan was realised in 1996 with an experimental scheme for nursery vouchers for three and four year olds (Jones and Millar 1996). Yet, working mothers' needs on flexible leave arrangements were less recognised. The government resisted pressures from the EU to introduce either parental or family leave (Kiernan et al. 1998).

Major's government was, however, less passive in supporting childcare cost. In relation to social assistance benefits, Income Support was introduced replacing Supplementary benefit under the 1986 Social Security Act to provide incentives for lone parents to paid work (Kiernan et al. 1998). Although Income Support allowed higher earning disregard for lone parents than claimants of the Supplementary Benefit, it took no account of work expenses such as day care and travel to work. It also left free school meals and reduced Housing Benefits (Jagger and Wright 1999; Kiernan et al. 1998). It was therefore a loss for most lone parents who have to meet day care expenses. As a measure to improve work incentive, the government reduced the number of hours which qualify for Family Credit, the benefit payable to full-time low paid working parents with dependent children, from 24 to 16 hours in 1992, and introduced a childcare disregard in 1994 (Kiernan et al. 1998). The disregard however supported for care costs of registered childminder or day nursery, while penalise many lone mothers in employment still relied heavily on informal childcare. The support was set up to £40, and criticised to be set at a level that would not even cover the full-time care of one child (Duncan and Edwards 1999). The main concern stayed with promoting the competitive and active labour market, rather than meeting the financial needs of lone parents.

The Major government's policy responses towards lone parenthood and its structural problems can be interpreted from two angles. It was on the one hand a recognition of lone parents as victims of structural problems, and it also financially supported motherhood, met some of care costs, and perhaps allowed mothers to be at home as the care giver. On the other hand, it still remained at the centre of traditional family value (familialism) and laissez-faire labour market idea. It understood the role of parents to be entirely responsible for childcare in the private sphere, where the state only met the inevitable minimum.

The New Labour government, 1997 - 2010

This section will discuss New Labour's approaches towards lone parenthood, using the same analytical concepts of social constructionism, in the order of ideology, language and discourse (political rhetoric), and power (policy measures) (Lister 2010).

During the era of neo-liberalism under the two Conservative governments, there have been 'resistance' arguments criticising neo-liberal financial deregulation and heavy reliance on market relations. They discussed social and economic problems as direct results of neo-liberal social policies, such as increased levels of child poverty, working poor, gaps in benefit coverage and imbalance in programme financing (Jenson 2012). This raised the need for a new setting in the relations between states, markets, communities and families, and spread new ideas of 'the social investment state'.

Ideologies, and languages and discourses

The concept of 'the social investment state' is associated with the 'Third Way', a concept introduced by Giddens (1998) and became a key principle of the New Labour government. Perkins et al. (2004) explains the 'Third way' between neo-liberalism and the post-war welfare state, where the central component of the social investment state is to secure social cohesion and economic competitiveness through placing most citizens in the labour market. This view is based on a pragmatic adoption of social citizenship (Dwyer 2004). While the theory of social citizenship argued by T.H. Marshall put more focus on social rights than responsibilities, such as the right to enjoy economic welfare and security, and to share the social heritage and the standard of life as a civilised being, the social investment state under New Labour focuses on 'no rights without responsibilities' (Marshall 1992, cited in Hemerijck, 2012, p.36; Giddens 1998). Rather than using resources to help needy people on income transfers, the social investment approach would help them find ways to self-reliant, pay tax, and contribute to economic development (Perkins et al. 2004). The ultimate goal of the New Labour government was to emphasise the responsibilities of individuals and families on their own well-being through their own market incomes. It would then become less of a financial threat to the social security system from 'welfare dependency', which has been pressured by an ageing society and family transformation. In pursuing this goal, New Labour introduced active labour market reform, based on 'behavioural conditionality', where individuals can only access social rights when they are willing to become workers in the paid labour market (Dwyer 2004).

In pursuing the social investment state based on an active labour market, lone parenthood became problematic. Lone parenthood has been associated with labour market inactivity, which

was seen as a greater problem than high or low employment rates (Wright 2009). Also, low employment and child poverty rates associated with lone parenthood became a concern (Whitworth 2013a). According to Lister (2004), New Labour initially formed its political rhetoric around RED, where the needs of redistributive efforts were identified through increased benefits and tax credits, but built its general concern largely around SID, in terms of the attempt to draw everyone into paid work, supported by education and training as the key measure of achieving social cohesion and social inclusion. Lone parenthood therefore was at the centre of New Labour's labour market activation and welfare conditionality, which was based on two ideological justifications.

Whitworth and Griggs (2013) described the ideological justifications of behavioural conditionality on welfare, contractualism and paternalism, developed by Deacon (2004) in relation to housing. Paternalism justifies welfare conditionality because it supports paid work, which is beneficial, while contractualism justifies it because it is fair to ask for a contribution from everyone through paid work, wherever possible. These two ideologies set out the correct role of government as 'the social investment state', where there is a reciprocal relationship between rights and responsibilities; and the state makes its commitments to social justice and equality based on the redistribution of possibilities, such as the opportunities of employment and the right to education, rather than wealth (Dwyer 2004). It was a fundamental challenge to the post-war Keynesian welfare state and universal entitlement of social citizenship, and became the core ideology of the New Labour government.

The two ideological justifications, paternalism and contractualism, were used to picture the labour market participation as an expected responsibility of lone parents. With the paternalistic approach, discourses were made on the goodness of moving into work. The main paternalistic arguments started from financial benefits of being in paid work, when Tony Blair said in 2002, "Government has a responsibility to provide real opportunities for individuals to ... get into work that pays" (Society Guardian 2002). The Department of Work and Pensions also published 'lone parents are financially better off' by moving to the labour market, by taking a job and/or increasing working hours (DWP 2007b). The paternalistic justifications on paid work were then constructed in relation to one's well-being and quality of life, as the 2007 Freud Review argued "work is generally good for physical and mental well-being" (Freud 2007, cited in Whitworth, 2013a, p.831). Some associations with child well-being were also presented as good parenting became the one "tied to (re)employment, financial independence and offering a productive role model to children" (Smith 2013, p. 162). The paternalistic justifications of paid work and its beneficial influences implied that not being in paid work would be a way of self-destruction as well as a bad parenting.

New Labour's contractualistic approaches were expressed from the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) 'In work, Better off' Green Paper (DWP 2007a). Whitworth (2013a) argues that the report justifies welfare conditionality, when childcare, employment flexibility, and employment advice should be supported, in exchange for increased expectations of paid work for lone parents. As the DWP stated, "the offer of increased help would be balanced with the responsibility of individuals to make the best use of that support or face a loss of benefit" (DWP 2007a, cited in Whitworth, 2013a, p. 830). It was also explicitly stated when New Labour introduced the 'New Deal' in their very first term that "we called for a new welfare contract between the citizens of the country based on Work for those who can, security for those who cannot" (Lane et al. 2011). The detailed policy measures of New Deal will be discussed in the following section. The key approach that New Labour pursued was therefore to change lone parents' social behaviour 'by using legislation to sustain and induce particular types of partnership and parenting, and to discourage other, less favoured, forms" (Davies 2014, p.152).

Policy measures for making lone parents work

As Lister (2010) argued, those who have dominant power in a society exercise their power to legitimate and promote certain behaviour. In promoting an active society where all individuals are expected to be self-reliant through paid work, 'the problems' of lone parenthood – economic inactivity and welfare dependency, low employment rates, and child poverty, were given two policy measures: first, welfare conditionality was introduced, based on the paternalistic approach of helping lone parents to have a better life. Second, policy measures of making work pay and work possible, including tax benefits and childcare, were introduced, based on the contractualistic approach of supporting lone parents in exchange for getting ready for paid work.

Welfare conditionality

A significant change was made on the benefit entitlements of lone parents on the grounds of being a lone parent. As one of the governmental aims to encourage the 'inactive group' into paid work, lone parents became a target of 'active society' as a functional equivalent of the 'unemployed', (Smith 2005). New Labour categorised all working age people, including lone parents, in terms of labour market status, distance from the labour market, and work readiness, rather than their family status, health, or age (Knijn et al. 2009).

A number of policy measures were introduced to prepare lone parents to move to the labour market. Whitworth and Griggs (2013) divided three levels of intensities of welfare conditionality designed for lone parents as follows.

- First level: mandates a Work Focused Interview (WFI) but no following actions

- Second level: mandates a WFI plus some work-related activities, but with the transition to paid work remaining voluntary.
- Third level: active attempts to seek paid work also become a mandatory requirement of continued eligibility for social assistance

As the first level, mandatory WFIs were introduced in 2001 for lone parents on Income Support (IS) with their youngest child aged five or over, but extended to all lone parents on IS in 2004 (Johnsen 2014). WFIs became more intensive after 2005, as it required lone parents to specify preparation steps for work with a personal adviser. This is when the welfare conditionality moved to the second level of intensity. With the introduction of Lone Parent Obligation in 2008, lone parents were no longer entitled to claim IS on the grounds of being a lone parent depending on the age of their youngest child, which was maintained since the post-war Beveridge report (Lane et al. 2011). They were subjected to move into Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), where job seeking activities are a mandatory requirement of eligibility for social assistance benefits. The conditionality thresholds based on the age of the youngest child kept decreasing (to age ten in 2009 and age seven in 2010). The lone parents have gradually moved from first to third level within a short period of time, depending on the age of their youngest child.

Make work pay and work possible

With the contractualistic approach, some helping hands were also introduced for lone parents' transitions to paid work. The NDLP programme was introduced on a voluntary basis and had no requirement to participate in it, offering a series of supports including job-search, training, and practical help (Knijn et al. 2009). It was in the same vein as the social investment idea, in terms of making lone parents more ready for paid work. In this sense, New Labour's welfare conditionality made 'incremental inroads' in terms of changing the support side of the contract first on a voluntary basis (Whitworth and Griggs 2013). The New Deal had twofold supports for lone parents, mainly those with children of school age: 'make work pay' and 'make work possible' (Wright 2009).

The New Deal, aiming to 'make work pay', made new arrangements in tax and benefit systems to make employment financially attractive (Smith 2005; Wright 2009). The fiscal measures were at the centre of the debates aimed at reducing child poverty as well, by increasing work incentives and reducing in-work poverty (Knijn et al. 2009). With One Parent Benefit abolished in July 1988, the rates of universal Child Benefit and Income Support (for children under 11) have both increased (Piachaud 2011). The contribution to National Insurance, which was firstly designed for 40-year-old male breadwinners, has been cut for the lowest earners. The introduction of the National Minimum wage assisted women in low-paid and/or part-time work, resulting in increasing the wages of 1.5 million people (Smith 2005). Two new means-tested tax credits were

introduced: the Working Families' Tax Credit and the Children's Tax Credit (Piachaud 2011). They aimed at a guaranteed minimum income and 70% of childcare costs up to a fixed maximum for working families, including lone parents, using registered childcare. The two tax credits were reorganised as the Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, and recognised as reducing stigma on recipients as well as rewarding paid employment (Piachaud 2011). The state subsidy was, however, criticised for doing little for informal childcare, and the remaining costs for parents were still a heavy burden (Smith 2005). This heavy burden was well recognised by Skinner and Finch's (2006) research on lone parents' use of informal care, based on 78 qualitative in-depth interviews and eight focus groups with lone parents. The research identified the preferences for informal childcare expressed by lone parents, mainly mothers, and how complex the negotiation of childcare can be within private family relationships.

On the other hand, a few policy measures were introduced to 'make work possible' for lone parents. As concerns of lack of affordability and accessibility in childcare provision were raised in mid-1990s, New Labour expressed its commitments to childcare provision starting in 1998, when the National Childcare Strategy announced its commitments to increasing the availability and affordability of early childhood education and childcare (The Daycare Trust 2013). In 2006, the effect of Childcare Act obliges local authorities to provide sufficient childcare for working parents and for those preparing for a transition to work while in education or training. Since the Childcare Act, there has been a dramatic increase in the governmental budget towards making childcare more affordable and accessible. However, a short of local childcare places still was a concern in 2011 for a third of parents and childcare costs were difficult to meet for over a quarter of parents (Huskinson et al. 2013).

The NDLP involved an individual case management system. Each participant was allocated a 'personal advisor', who provided a tailored package of individual advice and assistance at both the preparation and the first few months of employment (Knijn et al. 2009). Personal advisors help lone parents with their job search, the financial implications of working, claiming in-work tax credits and benefits, finding childcare, and financial support to meet the cost of making the transition into work. In the process of job searching, some flexibility became available for lone parents on JSA regulations in 2008, in order to make their care responsibility compatible with paid work. The flexibilities, for example, allowed lone parents to: limit working hours and travel times to work, have longer days of notice for job interviews and start of work, and refuse a job without appropriate or affordable childcare (Gingerbread 2011b).

Although the main objective was to get lone parents into paid employment, there were limited opportunities to increase their employability through education and training. This opportunity was, however, mainly targeting lone parents who left school at an early age and had no

qualifications (Smith 2005). A proposal of training 18 to 25-year-olds for childcare was introduced through the New Deal, although it faced criticisms that it made care work a low-paid, insecure, and gendered employment.

To sum up, New Labour's prime motto was making individuals' self-reliance through labour market activity under paternalistic and contractualistic justifications. On the one hand they made welfare benefits conditional to economic activity for lone parents, and on the other hand provided policy measures to make their work pay and work possible. Although lone parents faced rather significant changes in benefit eligibility, it is fair to mention New Labour did more than that, in terms of making paid work more plausible than before. The main principle of New Labour, welfare conditionality, still remains at the core of the Coalition government.

The coalition government, 2010 - 2015

This section reviews continuity and change since the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government came into power in 2010, and the journeys of lone parents under the regime. It is important to distinguish what exact policy measures lone parents are under at the point of this research and its field work in 2014, as the UK has gone through a series of recent policy reforms and some are still in the process of implementation.

Ideologies and discourses

One of the main concerns under the Coalition government was, according to Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the transmission of poverty and unemployment across the generations (Wiggan 2012). The intergenerational poverty and related social problems are seen as having their roots in the poor and anti-social choices of individuals, which have been facilitated by excessive and poorly targeted social expenditure. The sentiments of the Coalition remain on similar lines as New Labour, that is a culture of blame that holds individuals responsible for their own (poor) welfare choices, but tied to this is the failure of state intervention under New Labour (Wiggan 2012). This gives room for the Coalition's belief that measures are needed to fix social problems caused by the outdated state intervention and control, and wrongly targeted social security policies.

In arguing this, the Coalition government used the same ideological justifications of New Labour - paternalism and contractualism. However, there is a shift, in three ways, in the qualitative nature of welfare conditionality, according to Whitworth (2013a). First, the Coalition paternalistically argues that clear rewards can be obtained by all types of work, as "complacent happy claimants are nudged to choose work over welfare by avoiding the stick of sanctions and through the carrot that work pays more than benefits." (Tomlinson and Kelly 2013, p.152). This paternalistic approach assumes that the government knows better about what is good for the benefit claimants (Daguerre and Etherington 2014). Second, the contractualistic justification of welfare conditionality became less of a focus, as the governmental supports given in exchange for paid work, such as childcare, are less emphasised. The 'adequacy' or 'increased' support is no longer a critical component of their contract of being in paid work, other than the existence of 'the support they [already] receive' (Whitworth 2013a). It means that paid work is legitimised regardless of the level of government supports. Third, the contract under the Coalition is now between "obligations and employment supports (of whatever level)" and between "benefit recipients and tax payer" (Whitworth 2013a, p.8). The latter point implies that benefit recipients are not tax payers, at least not 'proper' ones, and they are the ones who mainly receive the 'support'. This approach of 'othering' provides great room for stigmatisation of those who are on

social assistance benefits as well as those who have had experience of being on it (Etherington and Daguerre 2015).

Lone parenthood remains one of the main target groups for policy intervention under the Coalition government. The formation of families is less of a concern, although lone parents are still seen as the main cause of family breakdown and a threat to marriage which is the 'better' form to heal Broken Britain, according to the Centre for Social Justice which was established by Ian Duncan Smith and published influential reports to shape the Coalitions' approach (Haux 2011; Wiggan 2012). A governmental report 'Social Justice: Transforming Lives' argues that "family breakdown and other risk factors – worklessness, educational failure, mental ill health or drug and alcohol dependency" can feed one another and lead to damaging and costly outcomes to society (DWP 2012b, p.15). While it is not to say lone parents cannot provide high levels of love and support for children, the report still makes it explicit that marriage should be supported and encouraged for greater longevity and stability in society.

A greater emphasis has been made on combating lone parents' worklessness and welfare dependency. According to Daguerre and Etherington (2014), a political need creates a picture of benefit claimants as an illegitimate burden on society and tax payers caused by their own behavioural problems. The state financial supports are thought to be encouraging the behavioural problems, by enabling non-working individuals' to care for children or relatives staying at home (Wiggan 2012). Therefore, this 'unfair advantage' of welfare benefits should be avoided, and low out-of-work benefits and sanction regimes are the right measures to encourage the claimants to accept a 'reasonable' job (Daguerre and Etherington 2014; Newman 2011). The White paper, Universal Credit, stated, "a life on benefits is a poor substitute for a working life but too much of our current system is geared towards maintaining people on benefits rather than helping them to flourish in work" (DWP 2010b). Lone parents should therefore be re-commodified, even at the margins of the labour market (Wiggan 2012).

The two key policy objectives of the coalition government therefore can be summarised as a) combating welfare dependency and worklessness, and b) cutting the public spending. It means the Coalition embraces New Labour's schemes of welfare to work for lone parents, while making paid work financially more attractive, and being based on more punitive and 'blaming victim' measures including tougher sanctions (DWP 2010b).

Policy measures for lone parents

As the social assistance benefits and supporting mechanisms for welfare to work in the UK have undergone several changes during the last few years, it is worth mentioning the policy measures

at the point of field work and upcoming changes. Welfare to work policy measures can largely be divided into three, depending on its main objective: a) social assistance benefits and job seeking requirements, b) enhancing employability, and c) supports for caring responsibilities and costs.

Social assistance benefits and job seeking requirements

Social assistance benefits are means-tested “safety net” cash benefits, paid to meet some minimum income level (Cappellari and Jenkins 2009). Lone parent families are entitled to a range of state social security benefits and tax credits to support them in caring for their children. At the time of the fieldwork for this study, proposed benefit eligibility for lone parents was based on their working hours and the age of the youngest, as can be seen in table one. Job seeking requirements became important for continued eligibility. These requirements have shifted over time putting more emphasis on labour market activity.

Table 1 Social assistance benefit edibility, by work status and age of the youngest child

Out-of-work benefits (for those working less than 16 hours a week)		In-work benefits (more than 16 hours a week)
Having the youngest child aged less than 5	Income Support	Child Benefit
	Child Benefit	Child Tax Credit
	Child Tax Credit	In Work Credit
Having the youngest child aged 5 or above	Jobseekers Allowance	Working Tax Credit
	Child Benefit	
	Child Tax Credit	

Lone parents with a dependent child under five are eligible for Income Support, Child Benefit, and Child Tax Credit. As of July 2015, Income Support is paid at £73.10 per week for those lone parents who aged 18 or over, have little or no income, working less than 16 hours a week, and have savings under £16,000 (HM Government 2015d). On top of that, lone parents with a dependent child under 16 are eligible for Child Tax Credit of up to £2,780 a year for each child depending on their income as well as a basic amount (known as the family element) of up to £545 a year (HM Government 2015b). Child Benefit is a universal and non means-tested benefit, providing up to £20.70 per week depending on the number of children under 16 (or 20, if they are in full-time education or training) (HM Government 2015a).

No compulsory job seeking requirement is embedded in the eligibility of Income Support depending that is on the age of the youngest child. This means the system allows lone parents to be a primary carer for a young child – up to an age determined by policy. The entitlement changed under the new Lone Parent Obligation provision and it began from the age of the youngest child being twelve in Nov 2008, reduced to seven years old in autumn 2010, and then

set at age five (Gloster et al. 2010). However, the Emergency Budget in June 2011 announced that lone parents are required to stay in touch with Jobcentre Plus⁵, once their youngest child is one (Haux 2011). As of March 2014, lone parents with a child aged one to three are expected to attend a WFI for every six months, while lone parents of children aged four are expected to attend quarterly, depending on the discretion of the adviser (DWP 2014). WFI is designed to assess work prospects and identify activities, training and work opportunities to enhance the claimant's job prospects (Etherington and Daguerra 2015). From April 2014, Jobcentre Plus advisors have discretionary power to include lone parents with their youngest child aged one to four for mandatory WFIs (DWP 2014). Work Related Activity (WRA) is also introduced for parents with their youngest child aged three and four, where tailored support will be provided, including preparing CV, exploring the local labour market, or attending trainings (DWP 2014). It does not require lone parents to apply for or take up a job. The duration of (arguably) having a choice to be a carer has been cut under the Coalition, and the range of lone parents expected to be ready or seeking a job is rapidly expanding.

The current system clearly interprets lone parents with their youngest child aged five or more as workers as can be seen from the table one. With the impact of Lone Parent Obligation, lone parents with older children are subjected to be transferred from IS to JSA⁶ unless they work more than 16 hours a week (Prince 2013). On the JSA, lone parents without caring responsibilities and health problems are expected to actively seek and be available for full-time paid work that pays over the National Minimum Wage on a full-time basis and is within 90 minutes of their home, like others on the JSA scheme have to do (DWP 2010b; Wright 2009). They are expected to attend JSA interviews where they discuss the steps and skills to move closer to the labour market, while they get paid work and get their job-searching activities confirmed (Rafferty and Wiggan 2011). The same amount of Income Support (up to £73.10 per week – as of July 2015) is then given to lone parents on JSA. If they fail to do so without a good cause, they face disallowance or benefit sanction (Rafferty and Wiggan 2011), with a chance of appealing or asking to revise the decision and applying for hardship fund (Gingerbread 2011a). Some transitional supports for getting into paid work are offered to lone parents on JSA. For example, the Flexible Support Fund provides up to £300 payments based on the Jobcentre Plus advisor's discretion, to remove barriers that would prevent the applicant's transition to work, and up to £50 per night is given for travelling expenses of up to two nights' accommodation to attend an interview (HM Government 2013a). However, research on lone parents' experiences of employment support argues that the Flexible Support Fund has a high level of potential inequality within its nature of being flexible on the advisor's

⁵ Jobcentre Plus is designed to provide employment support and deal with out-of-work benefits, and has a team of personal advisors who are trained in work-targeted interviewing (House of Commons 2014).

⁶ Lone parents that claim Income Support solely on the basis of being a lone parent

discretion, as only one third of lone parents have asked for or been offered such funds (Whitworth 2013b).

With introduction of the Work Programme in 2011, lone parents who claimed JSA for over nine to twelve months (depending the age of a lone parent) are subjected to be transferred to the Work Programme (Haux et al. 2012). Specialist organisations called 'prime contractors', mainly consisting of large private companies, now design a personalised support and set their own minimum standards of price and quality for long-term unemployed claimants. Depending on the level of success in employment, the state pays providers for their initial attachment fee, job outcome payments, and longer-term sustainment payments. Providers support lone parents on JSA with job-searching as well as buying training courses with a small state budget for their claimants. This approach was believed as allowing providers more freedom to help claimants, longer periods to provide help, and sooner intervention (NAO 2012).

Once a lone parent enters paid work of more than 16 hours a week by moving off out-of-work benefits, such as Income Support or JSA, they are eligible for Working Tax Credit and In Work Credit on top of their family based benefits, such as Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit. Working Tax Credit is given for those lone parents working at least 16 hours a week, up to £1,960 a year depending on their circumstances and income (HM Government 2015e). In Work Credit is a tax-free weekly payment up to £40 (outside London, £60 for London) available for a lone parent with a child under 16 who stopped claiming qualifying benefits (eg. JSA or IS) (HM Government 2013e). It lasted 52 weeks for lone parents working for 16 hours or more a week and earning less than £15,000 per year. In Work Credit however stopped on 1st October 2013 (most of participants of this research had experiences of receiving it). In addition, lone parents are still eligible for Child Tax Credit depending on their income and universal Child Benefit. The Child Benefit is no longer universal, as the 'High Income Child Benefit Charge' is applied for high income families over £50,000 a year since January 2013 (HM Government 2015c).

However, the benefit system above underwent a few major changes in its name and value with the effects of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the introduction of Universal Credit, and the recent moves have not been interpreted as being fully responsive to the financial pressures of lone parents during the transitional period. Prior to the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, research found that run-on payments helped lone parents with a smooth transition into work, such as 'Housing Benefit run-ons'⁷, 'Job Grant'⁸ and 'In Work Credit', 'Working Tax Credit' and 'Child Tax Credits'

⁷ Extended Payment of Housing Benefit: 4 weeks of extended payment for those who have been on a social assistance benefit for more than 26 weeks, and payment of their rent while on a low income, and having savings of less than £16,000 (HM Government 2013d).

(Casebourne et al. 2010; Lane et al. 2011). The payments of Job Grant and In Work Credit have now stopped since April and October 2013 (HM Government 2013h). In addition, these are all considered under the Benefit Cap⁹ so that the summed amount of benefits cannot exceed £500 a week altogether, which would negatively affect the total value of benefit payments available for lone parents with dependent children (HM Government 2013b, h).

In addition, the complex range of different benefits is all being replaced by Universal Credit proposals embedded in the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The Coalition government introduced Universal Credit that is being phased-in between 2013 - 2017, aimed at reducing the number of benefits and increasing the work incentives (Johnsen 2014). The system still firmly believes in 'make work pay' and personal responsibility to combat worklessness and poverty. It replaces a number of existing means-tested and work-related benefits, including: income-based JSA, income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit, and Working Tax Credit. All new claims for out-of-work support are now being treated as claims to Universal Credit. Many households will, however, still be entitled to other benefits such as disability benefits, Child Benefit and all insurance-related benefits such as unemployment benefit and Pension Credit (Haux 2011). As Haux (2011) argued, the governmental desire for a simplified benefit system based on the Universal Credit is therefore being blurred in this sense.

With the criticisms made on the replacement of a few useful benefits for welfare to work journeys, the Coalition responded with stronger financial incentives of Universal Credit, during and after the transition process. Universal Credit has a single taper at which benefit is reduced or withdrawn to take account of people's earnings. While the current system has different tapers for benefits and tax credits, Universal Credit taper's withdrawal rate is around 65% for each pound of net earnings (Haux 2011). In case of lone parents, financial reward will be applied for those who work 15 to 17 hours per week, where extra hours and earnings no longer face a marginal deduction rate of 96% (Smith 2011). It means that lone parents working at the National Minimum Wage would take an extra £17 per week if they work 25 hours per week (while the current system allows £5 a week extra), on top of Working Tax Credit and housing benefit (Carling et al. 2002). Whilst there may be some positive gains for lone parents under Universal Credit, the fieldwork for this study was conducted under the previous benefits system.

⁸ Job Grant was given for those moving directly from benefit (for 26+weeks) into a work (16+ hpw), and maintain 5+ weeks, up to £250 for a lone parent as one-off payment, but payment stopped since April 2013 under the effect of Universal Credit (HM Government (2013f)

⁹ The benefit cap limits the total amount of benefit at £500 a week for lone parents with dependent children (HM Government 2013b).

Supports for enhancing employability

As discussed in the first section, being a lone parent is more likely to be associated with low paid jobs and low income. In this regard, the Coalition government made its approach in a rather easier way, by introducing training support rather than changing the nature or quality of jobs. The training and education opportunities, however, can still be an important bridge to increase employability, and make steps towards an advanced job, by refreshing or improving their skills.

There are some, but limited, training supports available for lone parents whilst claiming Income Support. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 promised both short and long-term support for extended training, which included transitional protection for lone parents with children aged five to seven on a long term training course so that they can remain on social assistance benefits until the end of training (Haux et al. 2012, p.17). However, there is currently no formalised stage for lone parents to undertake longer-term training while being on Income Support.

The quality and quantity of training and education on JSA are also short of satisfactory. Available training and education courses are predominantly on part-time basis, in the exchange of active job seeking activities. Full-time training of two weeks only becomes available with the consent of their personal advisor within twelve months, and self-employment training is available after six months. In Haux and colleagues' (2012) study of lone parents on the JSA, negative views on their future security were identified due to a lack of training or education opportunities by the JSA programme or by the job itself. Whitworth's (2013b) research on lone parents' experiences of employment support within the Jobcentre Plus Offer and the Work Programme, based on quantitative DWP data and qualitative telephone interviews with 27 lone parents also pictures similar circumstances with a lack of support from the mandatory meetings of JSA. The research argues that about a half of lone parent participants understood courses available and offered from JSA, such as basic skills (literacy, numeracy, IT), CV writing, and interview techniques. However, others understood the courses as not meeting their needs, as they tend to be too basic and generic such as basic English and Maths, which are required in the most common (often that of low quality) jobs, such as retail, catering, and hospitality (Whitworth 2013b). The limited period of full-time training, generic, and basic courses available on JSA still restrict lone parents' opportunities to advance in work as well as to increase their employability to find a better quality of job.

Once lone parents are transferred to the Work Programme after 12 months on JSA, private providers buy training courses with state budget for their claimants (NAO 2012). Although it is too early to assess the full outcome of the Work Programme, the training provided through the Work Programme is seen as not being so different from the courses available on JSA in terms of its volume, coverage, or level. Similar complaints were reported about training courses for the Work

Programme being too basic and generic, such as CVs, job search strategies, job applications, interview skills, and confidence building (Whitworth 2013b). Dewar's (2012) research on the experience of single parents who had transferred onto the Work Programme in Bristol has a similar finding, as several cases of disappointments in the lack of in-depth training, lack of clarity on what is available, and lack of budget were reported (Dewar 2012). Some respondents found these training programmes useful, although it could have been better to have these courses a year earlier when they were on JSA (Whitworth 2013b). It shows an unequal distribution of training opportunities available on JSA, since some wished to have the basic courses prior to the Work Programme, while others were already experienced on JSA.

The Work Programme offers specific skills required for jobs that are popular in the market, including hospitality, construction, catering and education, although there are variations depending on which specialist providers a lone parent was referred to (Whitworth 2013b). The unequal provision of training courses was shown again under the Work Programme, as some respondents with particular prime providers did not receive any training offers. Other respondents in Whitworth's study (2013b) indicated that some basic courses were tailored to their needs (CV writing for the jobs she applied for), which are the fundamental rhetoric of the Work Programme. However, overall, the training courses available from the Work Programme which are reported as basic, generic, limited and mismatched, are far apart from the notion of the Work Programme, which was built on the rationalities of personalised support.

Supports for caring responsibilities

As a small step to help lone parents to balance paid work and caring responsibilities, the Coalition government introduced some flexibility on JSA. Lone parents with caring responsibilities can only be available to work when a) it fits with the school hours, b) it provides flexible-working times to take and collect their child from school, and c) it takes into account their child's care needs, like school holidays, alternative care availability, or affordability (Gingerbread 2013). Lone parents with care responsibilities for a child between the age of five and twelve, or an older one with exceptional care needs, can limit their working hours to their child's usual school hours (Gingerbread 2013). This will be maintained after the Universal Credit phase between 2013- 2017, until the Universal Credit phases out as the earning increases and children get older (Pennycook and Whittaker 2012). Caring responsibilities are also taken into account when deciding how far it is reasonable to travel to work (Gingerbread 2011a). The maximum cannot exceed one hour each way in the first 13 weeks on JSA claim, and one and a half hours each way after that, including the time required for dropping off and collecting their children from childcare. Lone parents do not have to accept a job or follow an instruction if there is no affordable and appropriate childcare, as long as it is agreed with Jobcentre Plus advisor. In addition, lone parents can request up to seven

days' notice before a job interview and up to 28 days' notice before starting a job if they have caring responsibilities (Gingerbread 2013). A case study conducted by One Parent Families Scotland however suggests that these flexibilities are not being well-delivered or communicated by Jobcentre advisers to parents (OPFS, 2014).

While the Coalition announced the flexibilities for paid work arrangements, the availability and accessibility of childcare services still remains a big barrier for lone parents entering work. Historically, Bell et al. (2005) reported problems regarding the availability of childcare such as having a long waiting list or restrictions on in-take such as catchment schools or areas, especially for those working atypical hours with the needs of out-of-school and holiday care. This old problem still remains as a barrier in 2013, as 60% of local authorities in England report that they do not have sufficient childcare for working parents. The level of gaps has not improved much during the last four years (2009-2013), as some of local authorities reported a worsening percentage (The Daycare Trust 2013).

Childcare costs

A range of supports for childcare costs changed under the Coalition government. The Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 announced that free part-time early education would still be available, as all three and four year old children receive 15 free hours per week for 38 weeks of the year, which will also be available for 40% most disadvantaged two year olds by 2013 (Haux 2011). When in work, lone parents were also still entitled to support through the 'childcare element' of Working Tax Credit. The value of this was reduced however in 2013 even though the government spent £1.5 billion on tax credit support of childcare, for lone parents working more than 16 hours a week. It supported up to 70% of childcare costs, up to a maximum of £175 per week for one child and £300 per week for more than one child (The Daycare Trust 2013, p.6). This childcare support was however affected by the backdrop of public spending cuts. The maximum coverage rate was reduced from 80% of childcare costs introduced by the previous Labour Government to 70% in 2011. This resulted in an average £10.47 loss per week (The Daycare Trust 2013, p.7). Pressures on local authority and school budgets resulted in fewer subsidies to after-school childcare, while the actual cost of after-school clubs has increased across Britain. A report released from Daycare Trust and the Family and Parenting Institute in 2013 indicates that while real earnings have fallen, the real childcare costs have increased during the last 10 years (2003-2013) and became a bigger pressure to the household income (The Daycare Trust 2013). Even so, employers are being helped in providing childcare costs as a form of voucher, £800 million investment per year— additional benefit on top of parents' salary (The Daycare Trust 2013). The voucher exempts on tax and national insurance contributions on up to £55 per week, if the recipients are basic rate taxpayers or higher rate taxpayers who joined a voucher scheme

before April 2011. However, according to Greenwood (2015), the voucher scheme will be replaced from the autumn 2015, by a new 'top-up' payment. In the new system, working lone parent families with a salary of up to £150,000 will be able to claim government support worth 20p for every £1 they spend on childcare, alongside the Working Tax Credits.

Things are not expected to improve much under the new Universal Credit. The Barnardo's report anticipates that lone parents working more hours a week would be worse off under Universal Credit, especially as their children get older (Barnardo's 2012). After the cuts of the Child Benefit and of childcare costs coverage were factored in, lone parents with at least one pre-school child will lose a significant proportion of the money they earn under Universal Credit's in-work conditionality. The condition would be harder for those who live in locations with higher costs of childcare and transportation, such as London, which has not been accounted for by the Universal Credit calculations (Centre for economic & social Inclusion 2015). A recent report published by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Hirsch 2015) argues that with the announcement of 2015 summer budget, lone parent families are expected to lose the biggest among working families, if past increases in the cost of childcare continue in future. This poor incentive would make it harder for lone parents to increase their working hours and remain in work.

The high childcare costs still remain as the main barrier for lone parents returning to work. Huskinson et al. (2013) explores parents' views and experiences of using early years childcare, based on 6,350 interviews with parents with children aged 14 or less. According to the study, formal childcare is still being closely related to higher income group and working couple families, and lone parents are still in a deprived position in getting formal care (Huskinson et al. 2013). Lone parents are more likely to feel the difficulties of getting good childcare, even when they are employed, compared with couple families where one or both parents were employed (39% compared to 21% and 22% respectively). The childcare provisions during holidays also do not meet the needs of lone parents, as 23% of lone parents found it difficult to very difficult. Lone parents are more likely to use informal childcare (39%) and less likely to use formal care (44%), compared to couple families (27% for informal care and 53% for formal care) (Huskinson et al. 2013).

The incoming new Conservative led government elected in May 2015 is however focusing on improving childcare provision as one of its key policy areas to help tackle some of these issues. Childcare support in Universal Credit will be increased to 85% from 2016, although the level of such eligibility remains frozen since 2006, and free childcare for three- and four-year-olds will be available up to 30 hours a week from September 2017 (Hirsch 2015). It remains to be seen how effective these might be.

Conclusion

This chapter sets the context to the thesis. It describes the demographic, political and policy measures aimed at lone parent families and it shows how things have developed and changed over time and across different governments. The statistical evidence shows a significant rise in the number of lone parent families, mainly lone mothers, and they now account for about a quarter of all families with dependent children. Lone parents are at greater risk of experiencing poverty and material disadvantage, compared with married and cohabiting couple families in the UK, as a larger percentage of lone parents achieve lower levels of qualifications, work less and earn less, and live in rented property of non-decent or poor-quality.

These demographic characteristics of lone parenthood have long attracted political concerns. Throughout the 80s and 90s, the two Conservative governments dealt with lone parenthood based on two objectives, strengthening traditional family values and the laissez-faire labour market. These objectives gained their legitimacy with two ideologies, social-authoritarianism and familialism, arguing for the moral sense of the family (which led to familialism and then nationalism), and neo-liberalism, focusing on the competitive labour market with minimal state intervention. The political rhetoric of this time therefore explicitly labelled lone parenthood problematic, in two ways, depending on their policy priority. First, lone parenthood was morally demonised as a social threat producing moral panic to the society, and as an underclass group relying on the state benefits. Some punitive measures to bring back the 'healthy, normal and traditional' society were applied. Second, political discourses also attacked the structure of the labour market and the generosity of welfare provision, especially under Major's government. Lone parents were seen as a victim of society with economic and social disadvantages, and some governmental acknowledgement of their needs were expressed through providing day care services and/or disregarding childcare costs in benefit systems. However, the main objective remained making lone parents financially independent in the labour market, because the level of financial support from social assistance benefits was far below the level needed.

It was when New Labour came into power that the contractualistic justifications of moving lone parents into paid work were discussed. Adopting a pragmatic view of social citizenship, New Labour made welfare benefits conditional to economic activity for lone parents, while providing governmental measures that helped make work pay and make work possible. Along the way, New Labour also made paternalistic arguments on paid work being beneficial to lone parents on both the financial and non-financial side of well-being. The measures they introduced included tax credits, childcare cost supports, case management services to enable return to employment and flexibilities in job-seeking. Although lone parents faced rather significant changes on the

conditions of benefit eligibility, it is fair to mention New Labour contributed to make paid work more plausible than before.

The Coalition government elected in 2010 introduced further changes in welfare conditionality under the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. Its main target was to combat welfare dependency and worklessness, using the behavioural conditionality of New Labour, but also by cutting public spending, as New Labour's welfare was 'poorly targeted'. The same two ideologies, paternalism and contractualism are in place, although the Coalition's contractualism emphasises the financial reward of being in paid work much more than improving supports or improving the well-being of recipients as a policy outcome. The existing welfare conditionality for lone parents got tougher, while further work incentives under Universal Credit are being introduced. The Work Programme was introduced with a great commitment to making the long-term unemployed economically active and independent through market income. Its effectiveness however, in increasing employability and employment sustainability is still in question. Although the welfare reform and supporting mechanisms are relatively recent approaches that need further evaluation, research findings anticipate under-supported income and childcare costs, and the financial attractiveness of in-work conditionality under Universal Credit, being less than commitments, and limited in childcare service provisions.

There is no doubt that lone parent families present a series of policy challenges for all governments. Yet, broadly speaking, since around the mid-1980s, there has been a commonality in the policy approaches with an increased focus on activation policies to enable lone parents to be independent of state support and to be workers and not just mothers. This drives both the public and private expectations around lone motherhood. An important question to ask is how do lone parents actually feel and experience the changes in their daily lives and well-being as a result of these expectations. How do they feel about being seen primarily as a worker and being expected to make the transition from social assistance benefits into employment? The next chapter will review the existing research findings on lone parents' experiences of moving into paid work, and discuss the gaps in the research knowledge about the impact on their well-being.

Chapter 2: The Analytical Framework of Subjective Well-Being and Literature Review

Introduction

The last chapter discussed how the behavioural social policy adopted by the coalition government has, on the one hand, problematised lone parenthood and used it as a political tool to activate the labour market, and, on the other hand, nudged individuals into paid work by arguing it would improve their own life. These approaches are reflected by the governmental commitments to improve quality of life, which are supported by the emergence of the new ‘science of happiness’ (Tomlinson and Kelly 2013).

While the UK has experienced nearly doubled economic output during the last thirty years, the political goals have been moving away from economic development and towards well-being. As many scholars and politicians, including David Cameron, argue that it is now the time to discuss not just GDP, but GWB – general well-being (BBC 2006). Again in 2010, Cameron gave a speech arguing that “[Measuring well-being] will open up a national debate about what really matters, not just in government but amongst people who influence our lives...will help government work out, with evidence, the best ways of trying to help to improve people’s wellbeing” (Cameron 2010). The need for broader measures of progress to complement GDP is also demonstrated by the UN meeting on ‘Happiness and Well-being’ in 2012, in order to better inform policy decisions (Hämäläinen and Michaelson 2014, p.3). Improving and distributing society’s well-being becomes the ultimate goal of the welfare state and social policy.

Then, would the existing literature on lone parents’ transitions to paid work support the governmental rationale on nudging them into paid work to improve their own well-being? In order to answer this question, this chapter is divided into three sections. First, it explores the conceptual scope of subjective well-being that will be used in this thesis and how it relates with other well-being measures and closely related concepts, including: quality of life, life satisfaction, and happiness. Second, it proposes an analytical framework and introduces two studies using the framework to measure the subjective well-being of lone parents moving into paid work. The final section reviews the existing qualitative evidence on the life of UK lone parents when they make the transition into work, adopting the analytical framework with an expectation that it would make the gaps in knowledge more visible.

2.1 The conceptual scope of subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is defined by European Commission as “The personal perception and experience of positive and negative emotional responses and global and specific cognitive evaluations of satisfaction with life...Simply, SWB [subjective well-being] is the individual evaluation of quality of life” (Abdallah et al. 2013, p.12). The term ‘quality of life’ on the other hand has long been cited in a wide range of academic disciplines, but there has yet to be an overall consensus on the definition in the field of social policy. It is, however, used in the same vein with other concepts like happiness, life satisfaction, well-being, self-actualisation, freedom from want, and objective functioning (Rapley 2003).

Subjective well-being needs a further discussion to establish a conceptual scope for this thesis, as the term is being used for hedonic well-being, as well as a multidimensional well-being. Subjective well-being as hedonic well-being finds its theoretical root from the two traditions of well-being: hedonism and eudaimonism (Ryan and Deci 2001). Ryan and Deci (2001) explain that the hedonism stems from the philosophy of Aristippus and argues that maximisation of pleasure is the fundamental goal in life and means of achieving happiness. This relatively narrow focus of happiness on bodily pleasures are developed by many philosophers, including Hobbes, Desade, and Bentham, and modern psychologists later expand the concept as the pleasures of the mind as well as the body (Ryan and Deci 2001). Hedonic well-being therefore judges the good and bad element of life based on subjective happiness and the experience of pleasure versus displeasure. Sirgy et al (2006) indicates that the predominant research has shaped the modern concepts of subjective well-being within the hedonic view. On the other hand, Ryan and Deci (2001) explain that the eudaimonism stems from Aristotle’s criticism on hedonism as a vulgar idea, understanding humans as slavish followers of desires. Searle (2008) indicates that eudaimonic sense of well-being is to be engaged in rewarding activities, achieving from basic needs to desires. It would lead to experiences of positive emotional outcomes, which is the psychological perspective of self-actualisation. According to Samman (2007) the current notion of subjective well-being is based on the hedonic well-being, and mainly focuses on material and social well-being. It should therefore be distinguishable from eudaimonic psychological well-being.

On the other hand, subjective well-being can also be used as a multi-dimensional concept, while maintaining its measurements on subjectivity. It is a broad use concept, embracing both traditions of well-being. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2013, p.10) defines subjective well-being as “good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences”. Subjective well-being in this view indicates the full range of well-being, including people’s experience of their life as a whole, particular domain of life, and what

eudaimonic well-being emphasises - the meaningfulness and purpose of life through engaging in rewarding activities. Ryan and Deci (2001) argue that the notion of subjective well-being understands the two traditions as distinct and overlapping concepts, as they often moderately correlate. However, according to Abdallah et al. (2013), subjective well-being is distinguishable from objective well-being, such as objective assessment of income, housing, or health. Searle (2008) also argues that subjective well-being focuses on individual desires and needs coming from one's state of mind, as well as the resources they have to fulfil those needs. The maximisation of well-being is therefore satisfying one's preference, depending on how far their desires are fulfilled, and whether or not they are able to enjoy chosen activities and relationships, and this is called happiness according to Nussbaum and Sen (1993). Another aspect of subjective well-being, according to Diener et al. (1999) is that it is a bottom-up approach to well-being, focusing on the individually judged feelings or values, and the level of satisfaction addressed from their own lives or societal structures.

This thesis sets out the conceptual scope of subjective well-being as multi-dimensional, and based on subjective measurements of substances and is based on individuals own feelings and judgments. Among several attempts of measuring the multi-dimensional concept of subjective well-being, the International Wellbeing Group (2013) introduced the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), consisting of eight domains that are meaningful on their own but which can be used to represent overall subjective well-being. This is the analytical framework of the literature review discussed in the following section. It allows us to encompass the broader definition of subjective well-being, as OECD (2013, p.12) called as 'experienced well-being' or 'subjectively measured well-being', rather than subjective well-being that can be distinguished from psychological well-being (eudaimonism), as Samman (2007) argued. The index raises respondents' satisfaction of hedonic material and social well-being (standard of living, health, and relationships) as well as eudaimonic views of well-being (achievements and spiritual/religion - see Wills (2009) for eudaimonic understanding of spiritual/ religion domain of the PWI). In addition, the nature of qualitative in-depth interviews, the research method of this thesis (see chapter three), also allows room for considering the eudaimonic psychological states of respondents, including their sense of control, self-worth and esteem, confidence, independency, and self-actualisation. For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, subjective well-being is used an umbrella term that includes the various types of self-evaluation of one's life, with an expectation that it represents a subjective picture of one's quality of life.

2.2 Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI)

The number of possible dimensions that represent one's life would be large, when each aspect of life is regarded as separate. From a parsimonious view, the international wellbeing group (2013) has successfully provided a manageable number of domains that share a great deal of its variance to represent one's life as a whole. The group is an international collaborative network assembled in 2001 with the aim of developing a brief, standard Index to measure the subjective wellbeing of the population. Seven cores and one optional domain are developed and called as the PWI. It is the first level deconstruction of the question on subjective well-being - 'How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?' The domains are as follows (The International Wellbeing Group 2013);

- Standard of living
- Health
- Achievement in life
- Relationships
- Safety
- Community-connectedness
- Future security
- Spiritual/religion (optional)

Each domain is defined based on a gestalt approach, admitting the imperfect relationship between the gestalt and aggregate approach (Cummins 1996). The gestalt approach explains that people are expected to be able to synthesise their views on how satisfied they are with the substantial divisions of their life. For example, when the single question of one domain like 'How satisfied are you with your health?' is asked, individuals would construct their own concept of health. It is then expected to bear a substantial relationship to an aggregate idea of health (Cummins 1996). The international wellbeing group admits the risks relying on the imperfect relationship between the gestalt and aggregate approaches, as different people will use their own set of components to represent life, and will weigh the components in individual ways (Cummins 1996).

There is no guiding theory on the choice of such domains, but there are two criteria to narrow the focus of domains to be the simplest conceptual construction: the domain has to be named as a broad aspect of life, while avoiding affective adjectives like 'happiness' (The International Wellbeing Group 2006). Each domain can be amenable to both objective and subjective measurement, although it is designed for the subjective perspectives of adult life. The PWI scale and the construction of the eight domains are verified using collective regressions against 'satisfaction with life as a whole', and its reliability is proved through 16 surveys of the Australian

population, conducted from 2001 to 2006, producing a maximum variation of 3.2 percentage points in subjective well-being (Cummins 2006; The International Wellbeing Group 2006).

The use of PWI in the existing literature of lone parents' transition

There are two pieces of quantitative survey research adopting the PWI domains to explore the subjective well-being and quality of life of lone parents making transitions from welfare to work (Cook et al. 2009; Cook 2012). Both are based on an Australian governmental programme, 'Newstart Allowance', which requires lone parents receiving 'Parenting Payment' to engage with mandatory job searches and/or training as their youngest child turns six, unless they are in paid work for over 15 hours a week from 2013 (Australian Government 2013). It poses a similar stance to that of the UK, arguing for the benefits of welfare to work for lone parents, in terms of improving finance as well as self-esteem. This seems similar to the aims of this thesis, but a little eased approach than the UK's Lone Parents Obligation in terms of the age threshold of the youngest child, but tougher in terms of the working hour requirement.

The first study compares the quality of life of 334 single mothers to that of the general population based on 19 surveys of 2,000 adults from 2001 to 2008 (Cook et al. 2009). The study reports that single mothers have lower levels of quality of life across all domains, but more severely in the domains of future security, personal relationships, and living standards. The study also explores whether the welfare to work policy requirement would have an impact on single mothers' well-being, and reports that those working less than 15 hours a week have higher satisfaction with their health than those working more (Cook et al. 2009). The second study examines the longitudinal changes of the subjective well-being of 136 single parents during welfare to work transitions (Cook 2012). The results show decreased levels of satisfaction in personal relationships, safety, future security, and overall subjective well-being for those in paid work, after controlling for monthly income. An income increase negatively predicts overall quality of life, while reduced income reported better PWI scores. According to Cook (2012), the increased working hours associated with negative quality of life may be due to the decreased total income after withdrawing social assistance entitlements or other subsidies. These findings are very meaningful as they directly conflict with the rationales of Australian welfare to work program, but may not translate to the UK.

The two studies provide a good reference point for this thesis. They are useful, in terms of considering 'quality of life' as a meaningful indicator to examine the success of the welfare to work policy as well as the transition itself. The two studies however possess some limitations. First, there still is room for discussions on the actual level of challenges created by the welfare to

work policy requirements that may have impacted on the quality of life of single parents, as also indicated by Cook (2012). In other words, it is unanswered whether a policy requirement, working more than 15 hours a week for example, would negatively affect single mothers to the extent to be a threat to their homeostasis of subjective well-being. According to Cummins (2010), subjective well-being is controlled and protected by a psychological device, called Homeostasis. Their homeostatically protected mood is a major component of subjective well-being. It is derived from a combination of contentment, happiness, and positive arousal, but is affected by negative challenges and leads people to the clinical condition of depression. Further studies are needed to discuss whether the policy requirement is a challenge for single mothers to treat their homeostatically protected subjective well-being (Cook 2012). Second, the quantitative nature of the two studies only allows quantifiable measurements of quality of life on a scale of 0 to 10. It is insufficient to represent lone parents' lived experiences as well as one's life as a whole, as one's life can be more than a quantifiable score. Therefore, it is still worthy to qualitatively explore their individual journeys while they are required to live up to the policy requirements of welfare to work.

2.3 The analysis of existing literature based on the PWI

As lone parenthood has been at the centre of the political discussions during the last few decades in the UK, there is much research on their transitions into paid work and the governmental supporting mechanisms. However, they largely focus on the effectiveness of welfare to work schemes and their supporting mechanisms, based on quantitative analyses, without directly asking people themselves whether their lives have got better; yet, the target population of the policy would be the best judges of their own welfare (Ravallion and Lokshin 1999).

Reviewing the existing literature based on the PWI domains, the researched areas are rather unbalanced. The eight domains can be categorised further into three groups, depending on the volume of literature:

- The well-researched domains: feeling financially better off (standard of living), achievement, and health
- The less-researched domains: relationships and future security
- The missing domains: safety, community-connectedness, and leisure (spiritual and religion)

However, it is important to note that the novelties of qualitative studies are discovering areas that cannot be explained by quantifiable numbers. The PWI's domains are designed and used by deductive quantitative approaches, where theory and hypothesis are set before the actual research (The International Wellbeing Group 2006). This thesis, however, pursues a qualitative exploration of lone parents' lives, where an inductive approach should be adopted (Bryman 2012). Therefore, the experiences of lone parents discovered from the existing literature or the empirical work may not fit within the eight domains, and may well go beyond that. The domains are therefore only used as a basic frame to discuss the literature, not to limit the discussions of lone parents' lives to fit into the eight domains.

The table below summarises the existing literature on the lived experiences of UK lone parents, during and after their transitions into paid work. The seven domains are listed because the domain of safety is rarely covered. The two domains of standard of living and spiritual/religion are renamed in the process of adoption (see each section below for rationale).

Table 2 Existing research of lone parents moving to work

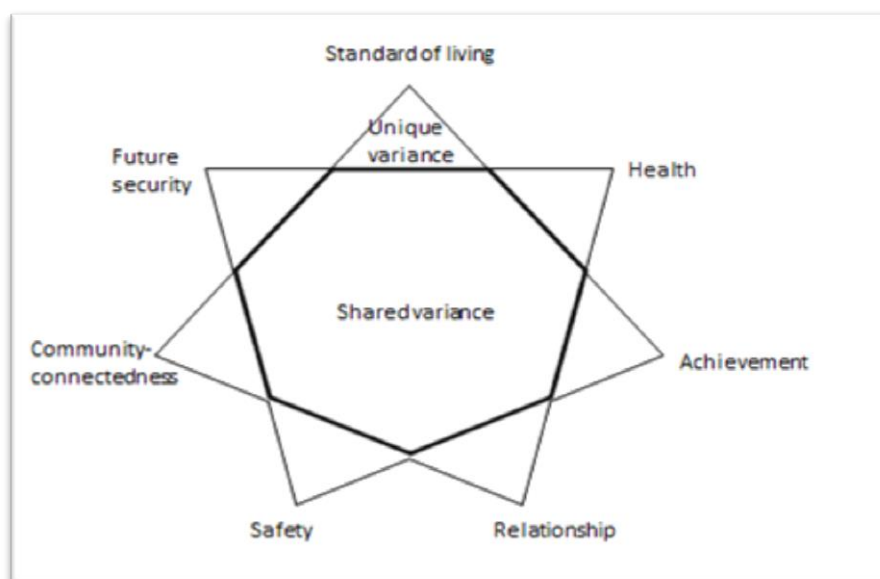
Financially better- off	Health	Achievements	Relationships
Casebourne et al. (2010)	Backett-Milburn et al. (2001)	Coleman and Riley (2012)	Bell et al. (2005)
Griffiths (2011)	Bell et al. (2005)	Evans et al. (2004)	Haux et al. (2012)
Hales et al. (2000)	Casebourne et al. (2010)	Haux et al. (2012)	McHardy (2012)
Harries and Woodfield (2002)	Cunningham-Burley et al. (2006)	Hoggart and Vegeris (2008)	Millar and Ridge (2009; 2013)
Haux et al. (2012)	Greggs et al. (2009)	Ray et al. (2010)	Ray et al (2010)
Hoggart and Vegeris (2008)	Harden et al. (2012)	Ridge and Millar (2013)	Ridge (2006; 2007)
Hosain and Breen (2007)	Hamilton et al. (2005)	Millar (2008b)	Wattis et al. (2013)
Lane et al. (2011)	Haux et al. (2012)	Yeo 2007	
Lewis et al. (2000)	Lane et al. (2011)		
McCollum (2012)	McHardy (2012)		
McHardy (2012)	Peacey (2009)		
Millar (2006; 2008a and b)	Ray et al. (2010)		
Millar and Ridge (2009; 2013)	Ridge 2007		
Ray et al. (2010)	Ridge and Millar (2009; 2011)		
Peacey (2009)	Skinner (2005)		
Ridge and Millar (2008; 2011)	Wattis et al. (2013)		

Future security	Community-connectedness	Leisure
Casebourne et al. (2010)	Haux et al. (2012)	Wattis et al. (2013)
Dewar(2012)		
Haux et al. (2012)		
Hoggart et al. (2006)		
Hoggart and Vegeris(2008)		
Ridge (2007)		

As the table two shows, some domains are well-researched, while others are not. In this regard, one might argue that a domain is better researched than others because it is a more influential aspect of one's life. This argument seems logical, but is open to debate.

The regression analysis of nine regular surveys of the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index shows that the PWI domains constantly explain about 48-52% of 'Life as a whole' (The International Wellbeing Group 2006). I have constructed a seven-point star below to visualise the result of the regression. The figure is the combination of the unique and shared variances of seven domains (for the exclusion spiritual/religion domain, see the section 'leisure').

Figure 3. The combination of unique and shared variance of the seven domains



The unique variances (seven triangles at each point) show the percentage of each domain's contribution to explain 'Life as a whole' – the importance of each domain, called sr^2 . They are unequally ranged from 0.2 – 6% (The International Wellbeing Group 2006). With unequal unique variances, one might argue that a certain domain is explaining more of 'Life as a whole.' For example, in survey one, the domain of 'standard of living' and 'achievement' explain 'Life as a whole' more than 'safety' or 'future security.' One interesting point is that the domains with higher importance scores have been relatively well-researched by the existing literature on lone parents' lives making transitions into work. For example, in the first Australian regular survey, the two well-researched domains, standard of living and achievement, have the first and third highest results of sr^2 , at .06 and .03, respectively (The International Wellbeing Group 2013). It may seem logical to argue that a certain domain explains one's life better, and that they are well-researched, but the results of the Australian regular surveys show otherwise.

The unique variance of each domain has generally a very low sr^2 score, compared to the shared variance. It means that each domain on its own only contributes a very limited amount to explain the 'Life as a whole.' As visualised in the star above, the contribution of the shared variance, which scores from 32 – 37%, is certainly more meaningful and provides better explanations of 'Life as a whole' (The International Wellbeing Group 2006). Therefore, the seven domains become more a meaning description of one's life, when they are researched together.

The following section will review the existing literature.

2.4 Making transitions to work

When lone parents make transitions from leaving social assistance benefits to paid work, they face a wide range of practical difficulties, including dealing with financial instability, to making new arrangements between work and childcare. The difficulties impact upon the well-being of lone parents not only during the process of transition, but also after moving into paid work. In the following section, the existing evidence on lone parents' transitions will be reviewed. It is, however, important to see what the transitional period would mean to lone parents first.

Defining the transitional period

In regards to the duration of a 'transition', the views are varied. A DWP report qualitatively evaluates transitional support for 73% of Job Grant recipients returning to employment (Harries and Woodfield 2002). The study conducted depth interviews with 46 Job Grant recipients including 10 lone parents. The publication introduces two notions of transitional period. One is short and covers just the financial gap between the end of benefit payments and the first pay cheque or the commencement of governmental in-work support, which takes from two to six weeks depending on the timing and method of payment (Harries and Woodfield 2002). The other is the period that lasts five to six months, as the financial difficulties may well go beyond the actual financial gap, due to unsolved debts from a long period of unemployment and/or family caring responsibilities. Such juggles make it harder for lone parents to escape from the existing burden and prevent them from building financial security for the future. Harries and Woodfield (2002) highlights that the period of transition therefore varies depending on the level of existing house debts, new expenditures created from moving to work, and the uncertainty of the wage income of the new job and tax credit.

While the transition period is interpreted as a period of financial instability and uncertainty by Harries and Woodfield (2002), this approach provides a limited implication as they only regard the financial aspects of the transition. The practical juggles that lone parents face are hardly limited to that of financial problems alone. A large portion of their juggles stems from non-financial issues such as working hours and care arrangements, emotional pressures, relationships, and quality time spent for themselves and for their family. The term 'transitional period' in this thesis therefore includes the period of financial instability and uncertainty, as well as the period needed to settle other practical and emotional difficulties that might influence their well-being.

Feeling financially better off

The PWI domain of standard of living has been renamed as ‘feeling financially better-off’ in this thesis. As theorised by many researchers, an increase in the standard of living does not necessarily lead to one’s feelings of being better off, because financial satisfaction is obtained when we compare with others around us (Veenhoven 1991). It depends on one’s comparative position, rather than the actual utility associated with consumption. Therefore, in order to capture the feelings of being better-off, both when lone parents compare it with the former experiences whilst claiming social assistance benefits, and with others around them, this thesis will use the comparable term of ‘feeling financially better-off’, rather than ‘standard of living’, with the expectation that the term represents the financial changes of lone parents identified through their transitions. While the PWI defines each domain by relying on the individual constructions of the concept, Minimum Income Standard reported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is worth to be considered for the purpose of this section. It is the income that is required to purchase goods and services needed for a minimum level of socially acceptable standard of living in the UK in 2012: food and drink, clothing, household goods and services, personal goods and services, transport, social and cultural participation, housing (e.g. rent, water, electricity, gas, council tax) and childcare (Davis et al. 2012). This tangible wealth of lone parents will be reviewed in this section.

The financial well-being of lone parents while they make transitions to paid work is the most heavily researched area among the eight domains of life. There is no doubt that financial well-being is an important area of their lives, as this is also the primary goal of welfare to work policy schemes from the NDLP to the Work Programme. Several pieces of empirical research support the positive influences on one’s subjective well-being through the financial gains of paid work. Veenhoven (1991) argues, in his study of the relativity of happiness, that happiness is a combination of both ‘the overall happiness’ (subjective well-being) and ‘contentment.’ While overall happiness is situated better with higher income levels, especially before meeting the innate needs, ‘contentment’ is calculated based on a comparison between the real life people actually have and the expectations they have on the way the life should be. Then a question can be raised of whether the UK lone parents achieve an actual increase in their income as well as feeling better-off from a comparable sense, by moving off benefits to paid work.

There are a number of studies and governmental reports discussing the financial rewards achieved by moving into paid work. A longitudinal Families and Children Study (FACS) examines the changes in family income and living standards a year after transition to full-time work¹⁰, and explores the impact of movements in and out of paid employment of families with children (Lyon

¹⁰ Full-time work is defined as working 16 or more hours per week in Families and Children Study

et al. 2008). Almost half (46%) of lone parent families are moved out of poverty by moving into work, although this figure is far below that of couple families (52%). A similar pattern is reported regarding their standards of living, as only 19% of lone parent families move out of hardship by moving into full-time work for a year (Lyon et al. 2008). Another quantitative research on the early impacts of the NDLP phase one prototype which was introduced in eight Benefits Agency districts reports a slight better result. The publication argues that over a half of lone parents who experienced the NDLP subjectively reports feeling 'financially better off', although the actual level of increased income is not achieved as much (Hales et al. 2000). A longitudinal qualitative study called 'Family-work project' conducted by Ridge and Millar from 2004 to 2007 reports a similar story. The project interviews lone parent families who moved off social assistance benefits (IS or JSA) to paid work (16+ hours a week) through three waves during 2002-03 in order to explore well-being and employment sustainability (Ridge and Millar 2008). A number of research papers have been published, including three focusing on their financial well-being (Millar 2006; Ridge and Millar 2011). Many participants agreed on their financial improvements in paid work, although there are major difficulties such as greater levels of stress, extra costs on clothes and travel, and reduced time.

If one's financial well-being is about the actual increase in their income as well as increase from a comparable sense as Veenhoven (1991) explained, what is the nature of the feelings that make some lone parents feel financially better-off, while making others not? A large proportion of the existing evidence argues that the feelings stem from their expectations, and whether their financial circumstances, that changed by moving into paid work, provided a feeling of 'contentment' in Veenhoven's word (1991).

Low expectation

Lone parents who participated in the family-work project report their feelings of being financially better-off, because they had a low baseline and expectation which stemmed from their experiences whilst claiming Income Support (Millar 2006). The financial improvements achieved by paid work are mainly about being able to pay for 'the little things'. It includes: buying home necessities like a PC and a microwave, allowing their children go to snooker with friends, enjoying little luxuries like buying a bottle of wine, having a night out, giving their children pocket money, and buying the latest DVD. But, most importantly, it means not having to keep a record every time they spend money. While they feel some financial reward, this is discussed in a minimal term, which is rather limited to 'the little things' (Millar 2006). The children also express a general financial satisfaction and acknowledge themselves as being better-off (Millar and Ridge 2009; Ridge and Millar 2008). The material improvements benefit children's social lives by providing

more chances to participate in clubs, go to cinema, and take part in other leisure activities which they were not allowed to before. The improvements also help them get out of social stigma or poor service delivery generated from free school meals. Some increased levels of social status and self-esteem are also reported for the families participated in the family-work project. Haux et al.'s (2012) longitudinal qualitative research on the journeys of lone parents on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) interviews 135 lone parents across three phases. The report indicates that some lone mothers experience relatively major financial improvements, such being able to afford holidays and paying off their existing debts as they move off benefits and into paid work.

However, the nature of such improvements and satisfaction stems from being able to afford basic necessities that have generally been taken for granted by most people. In addition, since their previous experiences whilst claiming social assistance benefits set their expectation very low, the comparative feelings of 'being better off' seem relatively easier to achieve. Therefore, it is still insufficient to argue that their financial well-being is achieved by moving into work or by increasing working hours. In addition, some contradictory evidence of financial disappointments is reported. The disappointments stem from a high expectation, which decreases with the overall value of pursuing well-being through work.

High expectations

Lone parents often report that their financial improvements achieved by paid work or increasing working hours are below their prior expectations. They are simply not as better off as they thought they were going to be.

Such feelings can be explained based on two different theories. First, they feel such a way because one's subjective well-being is not always compensated by the rewards of economic 'success', because of trade-offs made along the way, such as an increased level of stress in family and work (Ferrie 2001). Indeed, two qualitative studies interviewing lone parents under the influence of Lone Parent Obligation (moving off JSA to paid work of more than 16 hours per week) introduce similar findings (Casebourne et al. 2010; Peacey 2009). Peacey's (2009) study explores the experiences of lone parents under the welfare reform by conducting 34 telephone interviews with lone parents including one father. The study indicates that the level of income improved by getting a job or working extra hours is just not compensating everything that has been lost, such as financial gains from Income Support and quality time spent with family, while their expectations increased by working longer hours (Peacey 2009). Casebourne et al.'s (2010) DWP report evaluates the effectiveness of employment interventions under the influence of Lone Parent Obligation, based on face-to-face and focus group interviews with Jobcentre staffs and 202

lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 to 15. Casebourne et al. (2010) report a similar finding that lone parents who work between 16 to 29 hours per week have generally positive feelings on financial improvements, while those who work thirty hours often have negative views.

On the other hand, lone parents do not feel compensated because their wage and in-work supports are not enough. McCollum's (2012) research explores the effectiveness of welfare to work policies on the sustainable employment, by conducting 130 semi-structured interviews with work-welfare 'cyclers'. The research argues that while lone parents are more likely to be engaged with low paid and poor quality jobs, with little opportunities for job advancement (low pay, temporary employment, unfulfilling work and dead-end jobs), their existing debts are a big barrier to building future financial security (McCollum 2012). A DWP report qualitatively explores the effect of Lone Parent Obligation on 60 lone parents whose youngest child is aged seven or eight. They study indicates that lone parents are often not financially worse-off, but not better-off either, compared to when they were on JSA, due to remaining financial issues such as mortgages or the need of a car (Lane et al. 2011). Also, Ridge and Millar (2011) report some disappointments of lone parents participated in the family-work project, especially when financial advancements that are made in paid work do not lead to significant increases in household income due to the tapering off of in-work tax credits. While the amount of tax credits would fall as the pay rises, lone parents feel they are "working more hours for less money." Haux et al. (2012) also report similar findings; the loss of tax credits prevents lone mothers from working more hours, as it negatively affects housing benefit. The problems related to the loss of in-work benefits are also reported by Hoggart and Vegeris (2008) who address policy implications of two qualitative studies exploring lone parents' experiences during their first years in paid work. One study explores lone parents' experiences of In Work Credit¹¹ pilot, the other study focuses lone parents on the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) intervention (Ray et al. 2007; Dorset et al. 2007). The loss of in-work benefits becomes a problem, when they depend on the household income largely from a low wage and in-work benefits combined (Hoggart and Vegeris 2008). Griffiths (2011) explores the effectiveness of In Work Credit and the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents based on 66 parents including 23 lone parents. The report argues that lone parents on In Work Credit are suggested to save money by their advisors, they are only able to manage the daily living expenses based on the wage and In Work Credit combined (Griffiths 2011). Another qualitative study on governmental supports for transition discusses that immediate loss of passport benefits leads to

¹¹ In Work Credit was a tax free, non-means-tested payment of £40 a week (£60 in London) available for up to 52 weeks to eligible lone parents leaving benefits for work of 16 hours or more (Griffiths 2011). This is now stopped on 1 October 2013 (HM Government 2013e).

increased spending, such as loss of baby-milk tokens and free school meals (Harries and Woodfield 2002).

The job-ready arrangements often disrupt their household income, such as childcare and transportation. The level of cost, flexibility and quality of childcare is one of the biggest concerns and still a barrier for parental employment, according to Hignell's (2014) research based on a survey of 400 participants across 16 Citizens Advice Bureau in England. It can be a disruption in household income, as childcare often involves: upfront costs, a deposit, and extra costs for retainer fees, food and activities, and late pick-up and/ or late payment fee. There are little flexibilities, as two thirds of providers require a month or more notice for a change in care arrangements. Especially, higher quality providers are less likely to provide flexible care, but more likely to require upfront monthly payments (Hignell 2014). Other transitional costs of lone parents on JSA are identified by Peacey (2009), including up-front travel tickets for work, cost of lunch, and new clothes for work, which all usually happen before the first pay cheque is given. The existence of unexpected transitional costs, including clothes, hair-cuts, make-up, and footwear are also acknowledged (Harries and Woodfield 2002). These stresses and extra costs of employment yield feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, which impact on the overall values of being in paid work.

On the other hand, some research evidence also reports the contributions of in-work benefits, such as Working Tax Credit and In Work Credit, to lone parents' feelings of being financially better-off, especially during the first year in work (Haux et al. 2012). The tax credits are also reported as one of the biggest contributory factors for most of lone parents who assess themselves as being better off (Hoggart and Vegeris 2008). Such feelings sometimes last a long time, even after a year of In Work Credit entitlement. Two other studies conducted by Lane et al. (2011) and Casebourne et al. (2010) indicate that lone parent generally feel a smooth transition into work, thanks to the range of supports such as benefit run-ons, Job Grant and In Work Credit, Working Tax Credit, and Child Tax Credits (Casebourne et al. 2010; Lane et al. 2011).

Second, as Veenhoven's relativity of happiness (1991) argues, one's feeling of happiness is situated not only when they make an actual improvement in income (overall happiness), but also when they feel 'contentment' by comparing their income with others around them. Lone parents moving into paid work may feel that they are entitled to have a certain level of financial improvement or standard of living, like others in work would have taken for granted.

Indeed, a number of research evidence report feelings of disappointment in relation to their financial improvement and/or newly created financial concerns by moving into paid work (Ridge and Millar 2011; Harries and Woodfield 2002; Hoggart and Vegeris 2008). As lone parents start

working, it often creates a high expectation of their standard of living, not only amongst themselves, but also their family members and others around them. Lone parents feel that they should be able to achieve a better standard of living, based on the social norms. The lone mothers participated in the family–work project discuss their new plans for home improvement and redecoration, and their children talk more about holidays, leisure activities, and computer games (Ridge and Millar 2011). When children recognise they are financial better off, they often ask for more pocket money and gifts (Harries and Woodfield 2002). Some remaining demands on bills or debt repayments that are held in cheque until work begins are often reported (Hoggart and Vegeris 2008). A new expectation is also created in work, such as contributions to office collections and taking part in office social events. In addition, when a lone parent starts working, there are new forms of financial management that become accessible, as over a half of the mothers expressed concerns over the new forms of debt, such as credit card payments, personal loans, and re-mortgages (Ridge and Millar 2011). Such disappointments, created when an actual financial improvement or a standard of living does not meet the level of what people think they should meet whilst being in paid work, contribute to undermining the value of being in paid work.

The governmental support system often builds high expectations for being in paid work. Lewis et al.'s (2000) research evaluates the NDLP, based on 40 in-depth interviews with lone parents who had experience of phase one of the programmes. The research argues that the majority of participants are encouraged to move into work by receiving a 'better-off calculation' from their personal adviser (Lewis et al. 2000). The calculation is designed to motivate benefit claimants by working out all sources of income in and out of work, and by informing of financial advantages, appropriate structure of work, and vocational direction. Hosain and Breen (2007) qualitative evaluate the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents based on a number of qualitative research methods including 194 interviews across three waves as well as shadowing and observations. The report argues that while the better-off calculation itself is appreciated by lone parents and personal advisors, actual incomes reported by lone parents in work often do not live up to this hypothetical calculation (Hosain and Breen 2007). While there are some unpredictable and changeable sources of income in paid work, such as tax credits, Child Benefit, and child support, the better-off calculation has been criticised for being too simple a representation of income in work. Casebourne et al.'s (2010) qualitative study on the transitions of 202 lone parents into paid work also reports that the actual household incomes are often said to be far less than the better off calculation, due to wrongly calculated Housing Benefit. A piece of qualitative research from the NDLP reports a number of miscalculations or calculations not explained in detail, and their contributions to resignations (Lewis et al. 2000). Another qualitative study of ten lone parents on Working Tax Credit who moved off Income Support argues that they are given limited information

from their employers prior to work, or, wages are given lower than they expected due to the application of emergency tax codes (Harries and Woodfield 2002).

Uncertainties

Financial insecurities and uncertainties are noticeable worry of lone mothers especially at the early stages of transitions. Griffiths' (2011) study identifies that although lone parents feel slightly better-off through In Work Credit, it extends the duration of worry, since the In Work Credit entitlement ends in a year. In the family-work project, lone mothers express high levels of anxiety in terms of managing their finance depending on uncertain administrative processes of the benefits system (Millar 2008b). The administrative failures are very frequently reported through a number of studies, including tax credit, Housing Benefit, local council tax benefits, and child support payments, which are inaccurately assessed, delayed, wrongly paid, or not paid at all (Griffiths 2011; Millar 2008a; Peacey 2009). The project also reports a lack of information and too much complication on how total payment breaks down into different elements (Millar 2008a). Insecure or changeable wages from week to week (especially those in part-time jobs), and unreliable child support payments from former partners also contribute to the feeling of anxiety.

Whilst being in work, lone parents experience many personal changes in life, such as having a new partner, children leaving home, babies being born, changes in childcare, and moving house (Millar 2008a). The current tax credit system, however, is not designed to take into account the life changes, which cause difficulties for lone parents in understanding how the system works and expects the accurate amount of benefits. For example, a mother who participated in the family-work project has a new partner, which leads to her benefit being stopped and reassessment, while it is still the mother who solely supports her children, and the tax credit is an important factor in their household income (Millar 2008a). Ray et al.'s (2010) study also reports a similar finding. The research uses a two wave survey of the ERA to explore the experiences of low-skilled workers and their work trajectories and experiences of poverty and financial hardship. One of the two groups of people eligible for the ERA is lone parents who were almost exclusively women. The study reports that a lone parent's on-and-off relationship with the father of her three children impacts on tax credit calculation (Ray et al. 2010). When the father moved in, she was no longer eligible for Working Tax Credit, although she was the main source of income to pay bills. While about a half of lone parents make a dozen changes a year, there are still uncertainties in the tax credit system.

To sum up, the existing research finds lone parents' feelings of being financially better off works as a rewarding transition. However, such feelings do not necessarily mean that they are financially

well-off, because the rewarding scopes are often very minimal, the financial improvements do not compensate their trade-offs made by the transition, and remaining financial worries and uncertainties compromise the level of financial well-being they expected to have.

Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization 1946, p.1). The concept of health used here to discuss the subjective well-being of lone parents will therefore be a resource for people to fully function in pursuing their aspirations, satisfying their needs, and coping with the environment for a productive and fruitful life (World Health Organization 1946). In a sense of one's functional efficiency, health is a fundamental component of one's subjective well-being.

Indeed, for lone parents who move into paid work, their health is the resource to fully function in their multiple responsibilities of being a worker and a carer. Having multiple roles, however, often becomes a challenge for lone parents to fully function in a productive and fruitful life, as they often are in conflict and overloaded. The social role theory, proposed by Hibbard and Pope (1993), argues that there are two diverse impacts arising from having multiple responsibilities at once. While multiple roles may conflict, overload or negatively affects one's well-being, it can also generate positive influences on well-being through social support, resources, self-esteem, social ties, and obligations. On women's health, the cumulative and interactive effects of multiple roles as spouse, parent and worker are influential (but often negative) factors (Hibbard and Pope 1993). Greenhaus et al. (2003) also identify both direct and indirect impacts of work-life balance on one's health. Indirectly, a good work-family balance promotes one's well-being, when one role can buffer the negative experiences in any other role (Barnett and Hyde 2001, cited in Greenhaus et al., 2003, p.515). In a direct sense, balanced individuals would participate in role activities that are salient to them, and it would lead them to have less role overload, greater role ease, and less depression (Marks and MacDermid 1996, cited in Greenhaus et al., 2003, p.515).

The question is what the existing evidence indicates about the influence of having multiple roles, as a worker and carer, on lone parents' health, and whether being in paid work makes a positive change to this.

Practical juggles: finding a suitable job and childcare

When lone parents start to think about moving into paid work, they face a wide range of practical juggles which become a psychological burden. One of them is the arrangement of working hours that are suitable for childcare provisions or for finding suitable childcare which fits with their working hours.

Bell et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative research on lone parents' attitudes towards and experiences of childcare, and decisions about childcare and work, based on 78 depth interviews with 78 lone parents. The study argues that the necessary elements for a suitable job for lone parents with childcare commitments include: their own judgement on employability, location, working hours and days, and flexibility of the job. Employability refers to lone parents' confidence issues and worries about 'who would hire me', especially when a lone parent has many years of absence from the labour market, and when they find the governmental employment support system unhelpful (Haux et al. 2012). The location of work is another concern for lone parents, primarily because they do not feel comfortable being far away from their children's school or care providers. This is also linked with their other desires for working hours and time. Some strong desires for part-time (eg. that of school hours), term-time, non-standard hours, or flexible hours of work are reported, due to a lack of out-of-school care availability, high costs of child care, shift-parenting arrangements, or as a preference on parenting style (Bell et al. 2005). Some of these preferences are often based on the gendered moral rationalities of trying to be a good mother; this will be further explained below.

The location of work is also important because lone parents' means of transportation or coordination with other commitments are often difficult. According to the Scottish Executive survey, 72% of lone mothers across Scotland do not have access to a car, and feel three times more restrictions regarding their accessibility to childcare facilities, and two times more restrictions on the cost of fares, than any other groups of families in Scotland (Reid-Howie Associates 2000). It becomes a key concern when lone parents arrange their childcare with their working hours and location, as well as with everyday life like having a social life or shopping. Hamilton et al.'s (2005) qualitative research on gender equality of transportation identifies that unreliable and unpredictable time management of lone parents without a car is due to the disadvantages of public transportation systems, such as timings, routes, and cost, while those living in rural areas face a bigger problem, in terms of the infrequency and high costs. Skinner (2005) also identifies the complexity involved in practical management of childcare and employment, based on 78 qualitative interviews with mothers (including lone mothers). The research indicates the coordination points of working mothers in between their home, childcare, and work, which is a hidden but a big burden for their management of daily life. Jain's (2011)

research explores working (coupled) mothers' struggles between time-space needs, based on one-day 'creative' diaries and follow-up interviews with 11 mothers. The research describes their constraints as the "big headaches about returning to work" and it is largely affected by transportation such as road congestion, public transport reliability, and safety, especially when they rely on formal and informal childcare provisions (Jain et al. 2011, p.8).

Similarly, finding suitable childcare is another big challenge, as a wide range of elements should be considered including type, trust, safety, quality, cost, availability, and accessibility (Bell et al. 2005). The appropriateness of childcare also requires considerations for children's individual characteristics, preference, age, pace of development, and readiness. Choosing childcare is therefore not an easy decision for lone parents. While trust and safety of childcare are important components of a childcare facility, it is based not only on tangible values of providers like qualifications, accreditation, experience (having their own children), cleanliness, hygiene, and good quality facilities and activities, but also on intangible values such as shared values with childcare providers, and genuine interest in children (Bell et al. 2005). As an example, certain types of care carry social stigma. The family-work project reports that lone mothers are reluctant to use out-of-school care such as breakfast clubs, because it means 'being cared [for] differently' (Ridge 2007). A poor service delivery in free school meals causes extra reluctance in using certain types of childcare (Millar and Ridge 2009). A similar finding is reported by Casebourne et al. (2010) in that lone parents carry extra stresses of being judged from friends and neighbours for not providing direct care and using child-minders. As some of these values are hard to judge at first sight and take time to build, it generates extra stress for lone parents looking for suitable childcare while making the transition into work.

Adding up the efforts of finding satisfactory jobs as well as childcare, deciding the sequence is another concern, especially for those without back-up care. Bell et al. (2005) describes this as the 'chicken or egg' dilemma in their decision-making. A lone mother in Bell et al.'s study had to place her child on a long list and waited for a year until the care place was ready, and then made a request to Jobcentre to find a job that could pay for the nursery. Considering that jobs, especially low paid ones, often become available at short notice, finding satisfactory childcare that fits the job requirements is extremely difficult and generates huge pressure for those who are trying to make a transition.

Having multiple roles

Being in paid work affects lone parents' health and well-being both in positive and negative ways (Backett-Milburn et al. 2001). Some studies report that emotional well-being is obtained through

paid work, by feelings of increased self-esteem, feeling able to do something for themselves, and, especially, feelings of being a role model and being respected by their children (Haux et al. 2012; Lane et al. 2011). Peacey (2009) also reports similar positivity, such as having a relief from stress caused by poverty, being independent from welfare reliance, reduced boredom, and doing something purposeful and worthwhile.

On the other hand, managing multiple responsibilities can often be demanding and overloading and can have negative impacts on their health and well-being. A piece of longitudinal and qualitative research conducted between 1998 and 2000 by Backett-Milburn et al. (2001) explores the experiences of 30 working mothers with children at primary school in Edinburgh, including 15 lone mothers, working in non-professional and non-managerial occupations. The research argues that the majority identify themselves both as a care giver and an employee, and struggle to meet their expectations and responsibilities. Some increased levels of stress, role overload, tiredness, and ill-health are reported, while they feel that it is important to be 'keep going.' Peacey's study (2009) also reports exhaustion, depression, and anxiousness of lone parents, as they feel unable to give enough attention to both their work and family. Qualitative research on the work-life complexities of 23 parents, including 11 lone parents, reports feelings of fragmentation by having multiple roles at once, but not fully engaging with one role - described as 'I do bits of everything' (Wattis et al. 2013, p.11). Gregg and colleagues' (2009) research examines the impacts of policy change on lone parents and their children, and highlights that lone mothers have a higher likelihood of having increased levels of stress while juggling work and childcare commitments, even when their paid work increases household income as well as removing the symptom of unemployment effects on their well-being.

Difficulties in managing time are reported in qualitative research conducted by Harden et al. (2012), interviewing 14 working families, including five lone parents. The participants experience tightly structured time management due to competing demands in work and family, and describe it as "cram[ing] a lot into a day and a lifetime"(Harden et al. 2012, p210). The competing and challenging demands include being at school for a particular time, while being at work for required hours, and being there to pick children up from after-school care or take them to activities. The time deficit is also identified by the children of working lone mothers who report that their parents needs more time to come home, to have a laugh with their family, and to spend time together with family (Harden et al. 2012).

Impact of work on being a mother

While lone parents have difficulties in managing time and with competing demands, another frequently raised issue is their feelings of guilt and pressure to be a good mother, as theorised by gendered moral rationalities (Duncan and Edwards 1999). The theory argues that lone mothers take into account what is morally right for being a mother and for their children when considering their transition into paid work. The rationalities are non-economic understandings about what is morally right and socially acceptable, and it often is prioritised more than individual financial costs and benefits as a rational man. Duncan and Edwards (1999) argue that motherhood is a social relationship where children's needs are constituted and invoked to be met as a moral compulsion. The Mothers' self-understanding therefore forms "the moral imperative to be responsible for, and meet children's intrinsic needs" and this leads them to feel that "good mothering is meeting children's needs", while it can be negotiated, sustained, or modified in particular social contexts (Duncan and Edwards 1999, p.119).

A number of studies interpret working mothers' physical and mental well-being based on the theory of gendered moral rationalities. Cunningham-Burley et al.'s (2006) study on 30 working mothers' (lone and partnered) health supports this theory by reporting increased levels of stress and incidences of ill-health caused by the feeling of guilt for not being a good mother (Cunningham-Burley et al. 2006). The study also indicates physical and emotional stress, feelings of 'being shattered', and lack of time and energy to care themselves. One of the interviewees reports that her needs are always the last thing, while there are so many other things to look after other than the well-being of herself. McHardy's (2012) qualitative research on the quality of life of lone parents based on postal survey and one-to-one interviews with 8 lone parents also states a similar finding. The research argues that the participants perceive their own well-being as secondary to the needs of children, and it often limits their choices and freedom. It causes worryingly low levels of physical and mental well-being for lone parents, associated especially with low confidence, which becomes a barrier to accessing the labour market. According to Harden et al. (2012), lone mothers interpret being there for their children - for example being involved in extra-curricular activities - as being what a good mother should be, and feel moral guilt for not being involved enough.

Impact of caring responsibilities at work

Having the responsibilities of childcare impacts on lone parents' work in a similar way that their work impacts on their responsibilities at home, as they try to be a reliable and responsible employee as much as be a good mother. The main concern of lone parents as an employee is how their employer and colleagues would evaluate them, as being a good and reliable employee takes

account of 'being there' at work at least while other colleagues are there (Harden et al. 2012). However, Backett-Milburn et al.'s (2001) qualitative research on the views and experiences of 30 working mothers, including 15 lone mothers shows that being a reliable employee can also be hard for working mothers. Their caring responsibilities often make them arrive late or leave early, which can be evaluated as problematic and unreliable, regardless of how hard they try to make it up to them, for example, by working more hours at home. As an employee, lone parents feel they need to be reliable, by not taking time off sick too often, and by not bringing their personal or family responsibilities into work (Backett-Milburn et al. 2001). An interviewee in Harden and colleagues' research describes the situation as 'tear between the two bits of your life' (Harden et al. 2012, p.212). The circumstance is harder for lone parents with younger children who cannot be left at home alone when ill or when school closes (Peacey 2009). Some experience having their employers or workmates being deterrent against them when having sick leave (Backett-Milburn et al. 2001). Poor support from co-workers and supervisors is associated with incidences of ill-health (WHO 1979 cited in Searle 2008, p. 123), and also result in an increased level of stress for lone mothers in juggling work and childcare (Gregg et al. 2009).

The well-being of lone parents under the demanding and competing responsibilities can be analysed with Sen's 'Capability Approach' (Ingrid 2011). This theoretical framework considers one's well-being as the primary moral importance where one can fulfil their capabilities, and take the real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value (Ingrid 2011). In order to enhance the potential of individuals to secure quality of life, capabilities are one's real freedom or opportunities to achieve functions (being or doing something they value). Ingrid (2011) explains that, for lone parents in work, the functions they may value to achieve would be: a) the jobs that provide enough resources (means) for their family to live, and b) being a good mother who provides enough attention and care for their children. However, while both functions are theoretically open to them, the research evidence indicates that the two functions are not both open to them, without putting lone parents in a very difficult position in suffering from time poverty, stress, and ill-health. Since lone parents are not in a good position for being capable of achieving both functions, there is no real opportunity for achieving the corresponding capabilities for lone parents.

Achievement

Achievement is a human behaviour related to aspirations. It is defined as conscious goals of people in relation to values, which one would aspire to be appreciated for in one's present and future life (Casas et al. 2004). Whether people can aspire to achieve goals in their present or future period is closely related to their quality of life (Campbell et al. 1976, cited in Casas et al. 2004, P. 123). This section refers to lone parents' experiences in relation to achievements made in work, such as advancements in pay, promotions, and other possible progresses in work. Their quality of jobs and their sustainability will be used as a reference point to discuss their achievements in work. Although paid work has a positive relation with one's happiness level by providing a source of income, social respect and rewarding experiences (Veenhoven 1984 cited in Searle, 2008, p.90), this section is not trying to argue one's sense of achievement can only be obtained through paid work, but rather it reviews the existing evidence which mainly examines lone parents' sense of achievement around their paid work.

Haux and colleagues (2012) conducted a piece of qualitative longitudinal research on 50 lone mothers on JSA and explores the governmental support and training opportunities. The lone parents in paid work generally felt confident about their achievements and considered 'getting a job' as achieved by their own ability and prior working experiences rather than governmental supports. Indeed, lone parents' prior work experiences often play a key role as personal or professional networks or as proof of capability (Haux et al. 2012). However, one important feature here is that their experiences with Jobcentre are not appreciated as a supporting system, in terms of job searching, or contacting potential employers regarding work placements or job share. It means that the participants who made a transition are those who were already relatively close to the labour market. A few positive feelings of transition to paid work are reported, such as enjoyment, foreseen sustainability of jobs, and building confidence as well as self-respect (Haux et al. 2012).

However, there is a large volume of quantitative evidence that is reporting lone parents' employment in relation to low wage growth, shorter employment duration, fewer prospects of advancement, and high job exit rates - lone parents are twice as likely to leave their job as non-lone parents (Coleman and Riley 2012; Evans et al. 2004; Hoggart and Vegeris 2008; Ray et al. 2010; Yeo 2007). Beyond the statistics, the lived experiences of lone parents reveal qualitative impacts of such jobs on their well-being. The Haux and colleague's study (2012) report that jobs available to lone parents make them feel stuck in a job that they have never dreamed of. Some negative feelings of unhappiness and struggle are reported in relation to their low levels of earnings (around £10 per hour) and working environments where participants' skills and qualifications are not utilised (Haux et al. 2012).

In addition, lone parents generally feel frustrated in regards to the possibilities of progression in work. The employment opportunities that are available and accessible for the UK lone parents are often not a good source of income nor solely rewarding as it is. They often move to the jobs characterised with little advancements in terms of pay and stability, which cause financial disappointment even after a period of being in work. The frustrations and disappointments reduce the value of work as well as their subjective well-being. Indeed, the family-work project argues that there are narrow variations in between employment patterns of lone parents, such as working hours, locations, horizontal mobility between jobs (finding another job), and work status (maternity leave and job loss), and the actual opportunity for job 'advancements' is very little in terms of pay and job stability (Millar 2008b).

In understanding paid work of lone mothers, the conventional view based on the idea of rational economic man would understand the levels of human capital as the key determining factors of their employment related achievement, including income, job advancement, and in-work progression. However, as explained in the earlier section, Duncan and Edwards (1999) argue that the equation – the higher human capital would result in higher possibility of labour market wage – needs to take account of structural constraints in the capital as well as gendered rationalities of lone mothers. Lone mothers negotiate paid work and good motherhood in their social context about the extent to which mothering is compatible with paid work and what is best and morally right for themselves and their children. Also, the level of day care provision can be a structural constraint for a lone mother to participate in the labour market. It provides a limitation in understanding lone mothers' paid work based on their levels of human capital. However, reviewing the existing evidence, it can be concluded that while the main goal of welfare to work schemes for lone parents has been 'make work pay' and 'progress in work' as chapter one discussed, it made far less effort in changing the labour market to be suitable for lone parents than for nudging them into the labour market.

Future security

The concept of security is very much related to safety. According to Maslow (1970), security is defined as the need to maintain safety, and as a basic need for normal life, along with protection and survival (Maslow 1970 cited in González, 2012, p.254). The domain of future security shows a very high correlation with another PWI domain of safety in the Australian regular surveys. González et al (2012), in their research study on safety and future security of young people using the PWI domains, also explain that the concept of 'safety' overlapped with 'security' as well as 'needs of protection', 'surety and survival' are the prerequisites for normal life. The two concepts, however, become distinguishable when applying the subjective well-being of lone parents during

their transitions, as González et al (2012) also indicated. For example, when a lone mother moves to unstable employment and expresses a low sense of present safety and security, it could still be a source of future security as they feel their current work refreshes their work experience, which would make it easier to find another job in the future. Rather than trying to distinguish the two concepts, therefore, this section will review the existing literature on lone parents' future outlook of safety and security.

Lone parents' subjective perceptions on their future outlook are some of the less-researched areas in the existing literature. Some two pieces of qualitative research include lone parents briefly mentioning their unsecured future, due to a lack of opportunities for advancement in their employment and low level of payment.

Firstly, Haux and colleagues (2012) report the future outlook of lone parents who already made transitions, and indicate some similar findings to their views on being financially better-off. While job security and financial rewards contribute to lone parents' positive feelings on future security, many still find uncertainties and worries about their future. The uncertainties are largely associated with job security, and whether they would be able to keep their job in a long term, especially when their jobs are precarious, temporary, or are prone to having their working hours reduced (Haux et al. 2012). The unsecured future outlooks often undermine the overall value of pursuing their well-being through work. Their views on the future are also associated with the financial disappointments and/or the cycles of in and out of employment, as paid work does not lead them to feeling better-off. Second, the Family-work project explores lone parent families' experiences in insecure employments. It reports that job insecurity leads to feelings of future insecurity, not only of the lone parents, but also of their children, as they feel insecure and uncertain even after their mothers' transitions (Ridge 2007).

Even when the possibility of advancement is not provided within the job, being engaged with the right training or development opportunities often motivates lone parents to remain in work and increases the overall value of paid work. Some lone parents report their desires for training or development opportunities for future progressions (Casebourne et al. 2010), in terms of the level of payment and working hours (Hoggart et al. 2006). However, a lack of opportunity in training courses is also reported by lone parents on governmental welfare to work intervention schemes, including ERA and JSA. The ERA intervention under New Labour offered financial help for training (as well as for emergency payments) that combined with work as a longer-term strategy for lone parents to find a better job in the future (Hoggart and Vegeris 2008). However, the opportunities are often not accessible as the majority of training courses are offered in the evenings, which would require lone parents to use additional childcare and time away from home.

Similar findings of limited training opportunities are reported a few years later. While lone parents are entitled to self-refer to training courses for the first 12 months of being on JSA, the volume of training opportunities seems to be not getting better under the Work Programme. While training opportunities are still considered as important bridges that link them to a more sustainable job by refreshing their skills, several cases of disappointment are reported on Work Programme regarding a lack of in-depth training (Dewar 2012; Haux et al. 2012). Dewar (2012) conducted a qualitative study involving five lone parents on JSA in Bristol, and points out a lack of training opportunities on the Work Programme in Bristol as a key problem. Haux and colleagues' study (2012) also reports negative views of lone parents on their future security due to a lack of training or education opportunities delivered by the JSA programme or by the job itself.

As mentioned above, the two concepts of safety and security are closely related and hard to be conceptualised, investigated, analysed, and interpreted separately. Although the concept of safety as a domain of the PWI will be discussed later in this chapter, this complexity causes a problem at the stage of field work and analysis. Consequently, the two concepts are analysed together and form one finding chapter (see chapter three and six).

Relationships

Belvis and colleagues' study on the role of social relationships on one's quality of life defines the concept of social relationships as "social structures made up of contact bonds among individuals or groups of relatives, colleagues, friends and neighbours" based on reciprocal trust (de Belvis et al. 2008, p.348). Social relationships play an important role as the basic needs to fulfil one's life, in regards to providing reciprocal exchange of social support and trust (McHardy 2012). It is also an important factor on the well-being of lone parents during their journeys into work, as good quality social relationships provide social ties and trustworthiness and satisfaction with family, work, and community (Searle 2008). The existing research, however, explores a relatively limited scope of lone parents' social relationships in terms of their transition to paid work, mainly focusing whether the social relationships in work and family have helped or hindered their transition to work or the work-life balance.

The family-work project reports that the role of social relationships formed around work, family, and childcare, play a role in making lone parents' multiple responsibilities easier to deal with, especially in entering and maintaining their employment (Millar and Ridge 2009). Lone parents, for example, benefit from a shared identity of being a mother with their supervisors when their children are ill. However, as Searle (2008) indicates, having a shared value and identity often benefits those who fit, while it becomes a hurdle for those who do not. Other lone parents from

the same study experienced a lack of practical support or sympathy from their employer who has no children of their own and it leads them to feel their job is unsustainable. In one case, a lone parent is bullied at work, and the feeling of stress is identified by her child (Millar and Ridge 2009).

Being in paid work often impacts lone parents' relationships with other family members (Millar and Ridge 2009; Ridge 2006). It directly affects the quality time spent with their children, which often causes anxiety and concerns for both parents and children. Similar findings are reported by much research. Haux and colleagues (2012) identify the reduced quality time spent with children as the major concern of lone parents when they move into paid work. The mothers consider that they lose their time for parenting and opportunities to be a good mother in the exchange of earning some extra money. Having full or part-time work makes lone parents picture themselves as insufficient mother due to their insufficient caring role (Wattis et al. 2013). Their relationships with children also become a pressure, as they consider not being there for their children jeopardises it.

Lone parents' paid work changes the dynamics of informal relationships, and also impacts the well-being of their family members. Ray et al. (2010) point out that even those lone parents who move to a well-paid and stable job, full-time work, or senior position make trade-offs in their relationships with family, by becoming dependent on other family members and/or older children for childcare. A similar finding is reported by the family-work project that the responsibilities of childcare are spread around family members. It includes non-residential fathers, grandparents, and/or new partners, as well as older children who take on extra responsibilities for house chores, and managing themselves and younger siblings (Millar and Ridge 2009). Some types of childcare impact the well-being of children as well as their perspectives on maternal employment negatively, for example, as the use of breakfast clubs becomes a cause of social stigma for children (Millar and Ridge 2009; Ridge 2007). While being dependent on family members with childcare is a concern for lone parents, having a lack of informal childcare support is another problem for lone parents in making their employment sustainable. In McHardy's (2012) research on lone parents' experiences of low-paid work in a rural area, lone parents face difficulties in accessing their family and support networks due to geographical remoteness, a lack of public transport, and lack of information due to the digital exclusion. In the same vein, lone parents are also concerned about unforeseen events while they are not there, and worrying that they have no emergency back-up for their childcare (Bell et al. 2005).

The three missing domains

Analysing the eight domains of the PWI, there are three domains that have rarely been researched in the UK for lone parents moving to paid work: community-connectedness, safety, and leisure. The importance of the three domains will be discussed to argue the values of such domains in lone parents' lives while they move into paid work.

Community-connectedness

The PWI domain of community-connectedness is defined by Cummins (1996) as the constructs of social class, education, job status, community integration, community involvement, self-esteem, self-concept, and empowerment. The concept is differentiated from the domain of relationships in terms of 'hierarchy' and 'intimacy'. While the concept of relationships is based on intimacy between individuals without implied status hierarchy, community connectedness reflects hierarchical positions within community life without the idea of intimacy (Cummins 1996). The importance of community-connectedness for one's well-being has largely been theorised with one's integration with their community. It starts from Durkheim's research arguing that the greater the integration in society, the greater the immunity of individuals to suicide (Durkheim 1951). As Searle (2008) also highlights, good social relationships made in a community can benefit one's subjective well-being by providing a sense of identity, and human and physical capital. Community largely shapes stressors to which individuals are exposed and the resources available to deal with them. It also contributes to individuals' patterns of social interactions, attitudes, and expectations (McCulloch 2000 cited in Searle, 2008, p.71).

Despite the importance of community-connectedness as an influential factor on one's subjective well-being, much research identifies social exclusion as one of the distinguishable problems for lone parenthood in the UK (Barry 1998; Bradshaw et al. 2004; Gordon et al. 2000). However, lone parents' sense of community in the process of transition has not been identified by the existing literature, although it is briefly mentioned as a side story of financial well-being. For example, Haux and colleagues' study (2012) identifies that some lone parents feel a part of the society as they engage with paid work and make new friends, which makes them happier. While this research provides some evidence, there still is a large gap in this domain of lone parents' lives.

Safety

When the domain of safety is discussed to be included in the PWI, Cummins (1996) interprets safety based on the concepts of security, personal control, privacy, independence, autonomy, competence, knowledge of rights, and residential stability. Cummins's (1996) interpretation of

safety is based on a theory of sense of Coherence developed by Antonovsky, (1987 cited in Cummins, 1996, p. 305). According to sense of coherence, people learn their own ways of dealing with challenges and stressors by having repeated experiences of overcoming challenges. Such experiences build a belief system in themselves, and make their following stressors comprehensible (anticipated), manageable (having resources available to deal with it), and meaningful (feeling of making sense and worthy of commitment) (Antonovsky 1987).

Lone parents' sense of safety, that is whether they understand their transition to work as meaningful, comprehensible, and manageable, has hardly been researched by the existing literature, despite its importance on one's subjective well-being. One's physical and public/environmental safety is a deficiency need, as empirically proved by many empirical studies (Argyle 1987 cited in Searl, 2008, p.68; Sagiv and Schwartz 2000). According to Searle (2008), much like the domain of health, it is the basic needs that can often be underestimated when they are satisfied, but re-emerge when dissatisfaction occurs. As the demographic characteristics (see chapter one) show, lone parent families have more chance to be engaged with poor housing and unsafe neighbourhoods than coupled families, which jeopardises their physical and environmental safety. It has great room for further empirical contributions.

Leisure (Spiritual/ Religion)

There are some empirical studies identifying positive relationships between one's faith in religion and subjective well-being, by providing social support through religious groups (Campbell et al. 1976), imposing meaning, values, and significance for everyday life, and by benefiting health when living up to some religious norms, such as not drinking or smoking (Colón-Bacó 2010). Despite its importance, the domain of spiritual/religion was removed from the core domains of the PWI in 2013, and changed to an option domain as there are largely polarised responses from those who have a religion and those who do not (The International Wellbeing Group 2013). Therefore, this thesis applies a broader concept of leisure, as their functional similarities are proven by a few empirical studies. Several researchers consider spirituality and religion as a form of leisure activity, and as a source of positive effects for one's life, as both provide experiences of self-actualisation and finding meaning in life (Godbey 1999; Kelly and Freysinger 1999). For example, a 'flow' experience obtained from religious worship can also be found from rock-climbing (Neitz and Spickard 1990).

Lone parents' experiences of leisure while they move into paid work are, however, hardly researched. The literature on the work/life balance has made its main discussions around how lone parents are managing their two conflicting roles of being a worker and a carer. The simple

dichotomised concepts of lone parents' roles were shown in literature on the financial pressures they feel while feeding their family during the transition, arranging working hours that would fit with child care provision hours, finding a satisfactory child care provision, and transporting between the coordination points. Although some literatures among those have argued the lack of personal time and space, the amount and volume of literatures interpreting a lone parent as one in needs of personal time and space are noticeably small, compared to literatures describing lone parents as a carer or worker.

On this point, Williams (2001) maps one's needs in three areas, not two; personal time and space, care time and space, and work time and space. While lone parents' difficulties as a worker and caregiver have long been raised, their personal time and space needed to care for themselves through relationships, relaxation, life-long learning, and spirituality have not been highlighted enough in academia, or as a societal norm, and have not received much attention (Williams 2001).

Indeed, when work-life balance is discussed, time and space available for working mothers are simply a matter of either being a worker and a caregiver. For example, a qualitative study on work-life complexities identifies a lack of boundaries between working mothers' personal time and other time they spend on work/life commitments (Wattis et al. 2013). Their personal time becomes the time they spend with their children and the time to achieve more in their work life. One might argue that it is a personal lifestyle choice of using their own time either to be with children or to develop their career, whereas others might say their choice is not freely made. It could be a consequence of the labour market being too demanding for one to use their own time for relaxation or leisure. It can also be the feelings of guilt that prevent working mothers from freely using their personal space and time. A number of empirical studies support these arguments. Cunningham-Burley et al. (2006) and McHardy (2012) identify gendered moral rationalities of lone parents in terms of postponing their own needs or satisfaction as secondary thing to their children's needs. Wattis et al. (2013) report a working mother expressing concern about using her time for yoga lessons, thinking that it cannot easily be justifiable as much as spending time for work or care, especially when their pre-arranged care fails them. This leaves some room for further research, taking account lone parents as human beings in need of personal time and space.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the existing literature on lone parents' lives while making transitions into work. When applying the eight domains of the PWI, it can be noticed that the literature covers rather limited scopes of describing lone parents' lives and transitions, mainly focusing three areas

of their lives, including: being financially better-off, achievements, and health. It leaves some gaps in knowledge. There are two less-researched areas regarding lone parents' relationships and future security, and most importantly, some missing domains are raised such as community-connectedness, safety, and leisure. Further researches on these areas are required to deeply discuss lone parents' quality of life and the changes made from their transitions to paid work.

This thesis therefore aims to narrow the existing gaps in the understanding of the subjective well-being of lone parents whilst moving to work, by filling the less-researched and missing domains. In the following chapter, this thesis will therefore discuss how the empirical research will be conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology and the research process

Introduction

The last chapter reviewed the existing literature on the subjective well-being of lone parents moving into paid work, and highlighted the gaps in knowledge based on the analytical framework of the PWI. While some domains are well-researched, such as 'feeling financially better-off', achievement, and health, some are not. The subjective feelings of lone parents on relationships and future security are relatively less-researched, and the domains of security, community-connectedness, and leisure have hardly been discovered for the cases of UK lone parents moving to work.

In order to draw an overall picture of lone parents' subjective well-being while moving into work, the gaps in the less-researched and missing domains should be filled by empirical research, and this is where this thesis would like to contribute. This chapter will therefore set out the empirical research question and methods. It is divided into four sections. First, empirical research questions will be discussed and the less-researched areas of lone parents will be addressed. The second section will cover the methodological framework, including its ontological and epistemological positions, and research paradigm. Third, the actual research process will be explained, including the ethical consideration, the characteristics of the sample and its implications, recruitment processes, data collection and analysis, and dissemination. The final section discusses the methodological implications on adopting a quantitative framework like the PWI to qualitative research.

3.1 Empirical research question

The empirical work of the thesis aims to fill the less-researched and missing areas of lone parents' lives, in order to draw a big picture of their subjective well-being in the process of transition from social assistance benefits to paid work. To do so, the research questions and sub-questions are set out for the empirical study, shown in Box 2.

Box 2: Empirical research questions and sub-questions

How does the transition into paid work (or increasing working hours of more than 16 hours a week) affect the overall subjective well-being of lone mothers and their quality of life?

- How has the move into paid work from means-tested social assistance benefits affected perceived changes in overall subjective well-being in relation to important areas of finance, sense of achievement, and health?
- How has the move also affected the less researched aspects of their lives such as quality of relationships, safety, future security, community-connectedness, and leisure time?
- What are the key factors relating to moving into paid work that have influenced any change in their overall subjective well-being?
- Which aspects of their lives do they believe to be the most important to their sense of well-being?
 - o How do these most important aspects interact to affect their overall sense of well-being?
 - o How has moving into paid work impacted on that interaction, what has changed and in what ways?

The empirical research question is divided into four sub-questions. The first two sub-questions ask how lone parents' transitions into paid work affect their subjective well-being, especially in the six less-researched domains, with a primary purpose of examining their overall subjective well-being. The third and fourth sub-questions address the relative importance of each domain in explaining one's life as a whole. It is a valued discussion whether a certain domain is perceived as more or less important in lone parents' lives, as it is approached by Australian surveys based on a quantifiable scale, but not by qualitative exploration for UK lone parents.

3.2 The theoretical framework

In answering the research question, the major task is deciding a research strategy that would form a theoretical framework of the research. This section follows three key stages of research strategies, and the procedure and logic for generating new knowledge. The first and second sections set out the research strategy, through discussions of a particular way of looking at the world (ontological assumptions), as well as the ideas on how it can be understood (epistemological assumptions) (Blaikie 2007). Third, the research strategy would then lead the researcher to decide the research paradigm, a way of connecting ideas, social experience, and social reality.

Abductive research strategy

This research is based on abductive logic of research strategy as a method of theory construction. The abductive research strategy has a distinctive nature from deductive and inductive strategies. According to Blaikie (2007), the deductive reasoning begins with a pre-established pattern, or regularity, and the task of a researcher is either to demonstrate or falsify it. The inductive reasoning constructs theoretical ideas based on empirical data, which begins with the collection of data first and is followed by data analysis, and deriving generalizations. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) argue that the inductive strategy has a commitment to let theories emerge from data inductively, and therefore does not allow for adopting an analytical framework prior to data collection. Ong (2012) argues that sampling in the inductive strategy targets theory construction rather than population representativeness, and the literature review should be situated after an independent analysis. It is also the principle of the two versions of grounded theory¹² developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2000), which have their basis in the inductive logic (both versions are cited in Ong 2012: 417).

According to Ong (2012), the abductive reasoning is built upon Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (CGTM). The abductive reasoning and CGTM share a great deal of their assumptions in interpretivism, meaning that social phenomena can be acknowledged by understanding what people have constructed and then reproduced based on their own experiences and perspectives, rather than believing in an external reality out there (Blaikie 2007).

¹² According to Ong (2012), there are two versions of grounded theory depending on their assumptions. First, the Objectivist Grounded Theory Method (OGTM) developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is based on the positivistic assumption, meaning an external reality is out there and researchers can discover and record it. Charmaz (2000) provides a critique on such an assumption, and develops her own version, believing in respondent's subjective experiences and feelings. It is called as Constructionist Grounded Theory Method (CGTM). Both grounded theory methods, however, share the conceptual level of coding, writing memos, and developing categories.

This shared assumption inspired this thesis to use the qualitative in-depth interview, and thematic data analysis influenced by grounded theory. This will be discussed further below.

While CGTM is based on the inductive reasoning and emphasises the theory construction driven by the data, the abductive reasoning focuses on the data which contradict or do not fit with the existing theory. This 'surprising evidence' derived by comparing data to existing research and theories then become the starting point of theory construction (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, p.168). The aim of abductive reasoning is to "discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tacit, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, intentions and rules, which provide the orientations for their actions" (Blaikie 2007, p.90). The concepts and meanings of social actors are delivered through their language and form their understanding or explanation of the research problem. However, the subjective meanings of the actors embedded in their language are not private but are *intersubjective*, which the actors more or less share together (Blaikie 2010, cited in Ong 2012, p.423). The abductive research strategy allows a cyclic process of the meanings and interpretations between: everyday concepts and meanings of social actors' activities, lay accounts that can be generalised, and social science explanation (Mason 2002). In order to achieve this cyclic process, Blaikie (2010, cited in Ong 2012, p.424- 423) suggests six principles of abductive research strategy.

1. The entry to any social world takes account of what people can give of their own actions and the actions of others.
2. The accounts are delivered by the language of the participants, which contain the concepts and theories the participants used to construct their world.
3. However, many of the accounts are taken-for-granted and are unreflective.
4. Social actors are forced to consciously search for meanings and interpretations of their behaviours, which contain the concepts and theories to construct their world, only when enquiries are made by others (such as social scientists) or when social life is disrupted, and/or ceases to be predictable.
5. Social scientists may therefore encourage the reflection to discover meanings and theories.
6. Social scientists then put together the fragmented meanings.

The abductive logic of the research strategy is based on two fundamental positions of the researcher - the ontological and epistemological positions, which is also shared by CGTM. An ontological perspective of research refers to the nature of the social reality that is investigated (Mason 2002). The abductive reasoning is based on the perspective of 'idealists' and believes that the social reality of the external world consists of representation created in individual minds (Blaikie 2007). The external reality only exists because we think it is real, as we make or construct, rather than acknowledge a certain degree of reality independent of individual subjectivity. An

epistemological position indicates the way in which knowledge of the reality can be obtained, the way to generate data or 'theory of knowledge' in Mason's words (2002). It determines whether and how social phenomena can be known, how knowledge can be demonstrated, and what can be counted as evidence or knowledge of a social thing (Mason 2002). The abductive reasoning has its epistemological position of 'constructionism.' Social constructionism argues that it is impossible to discover an external world, if it exists at all, independently from concepts, theories, background knowledge, and past experiences (Blaikie 2007). The knowledge can only be constructed through historical, cultural and gendered ways of being. Only after the social actors construct their reality by conceptualising and interpreting their own actions and experiences, can social scientists socially construct their knowledge of social actors' realities.

The combination between the idealist ontological position and the constructionist epistemological view forms the research paradigm known as Interpretivism (Blaikie 2007). It has its origins in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, which explore, describe, and analyse the meaning of individual lived experience (Marshall and Rossman 2010). The interpretivists argue that social phenomena can be acknowledged by understanding what people have constructed and then reproduced based on their own experiences and perspectives. In the process of construction, the social actors interpret and reinterpret their own worlds and impose their own meanings for the activities. Since the process occurs before social scientists arrive, social theories of researchers which explain and anticipate the activities of social actors and their concepts and meanings should be addressed from that of the social actors (Blaikie 2007). Here, language is the medium of social interaction, between the social actors and social scientists. The perspectives of interpretivists therefore consider the interview as an important research tool, since the perceptions of social actors are a primary data sources, which need to be addressed from an 'insider view' rather than an 'outsider view' being imposed (Mason 2002).

This type of reasoning is particularly useful in this thesis, in two ways. First, the abductive strategy would allow the researcher to enter the social world of lone mothers, with some sensitising concepts learned from the literature review, as suggested by Blaikie and Stacy (1984, cited in Ong 2012, p.425). The concepts would become a guide, although it should be as nondirective as possible. The concepts can be used as the 'topic' in the interviews, which would be explored by the social actors themselves. The literature review can be conducted in parallel with the field work, as the relevance can be vague before entering the social world of the participants (Ong 2012). The understanding of the existing social theories or perspectives would help to construct the new social theory by comparing them to the data obtained. It is a major benefit of abductive reasoning that can be differentiated from inductive reasoning, which requires the researcher to obtain data first and then proceed to derive a generalisation. Second, abductive reasoning is

useful because it focuses on the intersubjective meanings of social actors embedded in their everyday language. This thesis aims to explore the experiences of lone parents, and whether their transitions into paid work have changed their everyday lives, and in what ways, and whether it is understood as an improvement as argued by the governmental rationale (see chapter one). The data will be directly obtained from what the social actors – lone mothers - have constructed and reproduced with their own language. During the transition period of lone mothers moving to work, they would have already constructed their own concepts and meanings about their experiences, which can only be delivered by their own voice. The social world they constructed and reproduced will be the best resource to see their overall subjective well-being and quality of life, which make them the judges of their own life (Ravallion and Lokshin 1999).

The abductive reasoning and the interpretivist assumptions have led us to make two choices in the field work: qualitative in-depth interviews as the data collection tool and use of thematic analysis, influenced by grounded theory. This will be discussed further below.

3.3 The field work

This section will discuss the field work, including ethical consideration, the sample, recruitment, qualitative in-depth interviews as the tool of data collection, the process of thematic coding and analysis technique influenced by grounded theory, and dissemination.

Ethical considerations

There are a number of general and specific ethical issues connected to this research. While some can be anticipated at the stage of research design, others may need moral judgements on the spot, as intellectual and practical decisions (Mason 2002). This section explains how the expected ethical issues were prepared, and what ethical principle this research follows to deal with the unexpected moral judgements.

The empirical research involves meeting lone mothers during a period of critical changes. It necessarily involves some sensitive topics, such as financial circumstances, physical and psychological health, relationships, and safety. In Wiggan's study (2005) on the employment and budgeting decisions of working families reveals that conducting an interview on these sensitive topics can potentially raise discomforting emotions such as frustration, anger, tension, and feelings of regret about their past (Wiggan 2005). This research also carries some risks of raising unpleasant emotions for interviewees, such as embarrassment, or mere inconvenience, such as boredom, frustration, and time wasting (Bickman and Rog 2008).

In order to minimise the harm, two strategies were applied. First, the research informed participants of such risks and their rights in advance using an information sheet and an informed consent form (see Appendix B and C). The information sheet explained the research details, such as the aim, the structure, procedure, topics to be covered, and the length of time required. The information sheet and consent form were written in a simple and friendly tone, to make it easy for the participants to understand. A consent form was verbally read, and then the participants were asked to sign a formal agreement on the conditions of the research, as well as being reassured of their rights in it. Of course, having a signed consent form does not mean fully informed consent has been achieved, according to Mason (2002). Due to the limited understanding and experience of respondents, the interviews in practice may be different from what an interviewee had expected. The two-way communication between the researcher and respondents was therefore available over the entire process of engagement, which allowed respondents to raise questions or concerns at any point. The consent of interviewees was frequently checked during and after the interview process, as a reminder of their right to stop, to take a rest, or withdraw from the research at any point of the process.

Through the information sheet and the consent form, the research promised a firm protection of anonymity and confidentiality. The protection of **anonymity** refers to the identity of participants to be unrecognisable. Pseudonyms were applied to all personal and other information that may link to any identification of a participant at the stage of transcribing. The personal information necessary for data analysis were vaguely described in the analysis so that no one in the interviewee's community would identify the participants. The personal information, which was required to schedule an interview, recordings of interviews, and transcription files were safely stored on the University of York server, only accessible with the researcher's ID and password by a networked computer at the University. However, due to the recruiting strategies of this research, using gatekeepers and snowballing, it is possible that some participants may be able to identify the other participants in the research. This limitation was also explained to all participants before the interview, and they were reassured that their interview would not be discussed with anyone, including those who may know they had taken part. Due to this limitation, protection of identity was dealt with in an extremely careful manner, so that no one can ever identify a particular respondent through quotes or descriptions of their experiences. **Confidentiality** refers to how the data are handled in controlling the access of others, in order to keep the interests of participants (Bickman and Rog 2008). The data obtained from the interview, including the electric voice recordings and transcriptions, were safely stored until the end of the research process in two differently pin-locked folders on the University server. The signed consent forms were stored safely in a key-locked file cabinet, located in the RCSS building (Research Centre for Social Science – a building only accessible with an ID card). No printed transcription file was left unattended. The participants were informed of the use of direct quotations for presentations and publications that can be open to the public through conferences, journals, and the thesis, but only after a thorough inspection of the anonymity of participants.

In regards to moral judgements that emerged on the spot, the researcher followed the code of practice and principles addressed by the University of York¹³, and Social Research Association Ethics guidelines¹⁴. The researcher did her best to make a comfortable environment for the participants and reassure them that their perspectives are valued for the research, by using the following: vocabulary that participants find easy to understand; speech of a friendly, gentle and direct tone; and positive body language, such as standing or sitting straight and relaxed (Bickman and Rog 2008). However, the research had a limitation that may have impacted on the quality of the interview. As an international postgraduate student, my experience and understanding of living in UK society, or a life as a human being, may differ from what the majority of the participants – UK lone mothers with young children and what they would experience and

¹³ <https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/ethics-code/>

¹⁴ http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines/


understand. This limited knowledge or familiarity with the local language and culture might have generated unintentional insensitivities in understanding, interpretation and conversation. In addition, the differences in race, age, culture, and class might have impacted on the respondents' willingness to share their experiences with the researcher. However, there is no clear evidence indicating that having a similar background with interviewees would generate any detailed or better information (Maynard and Purvis 1994). Rather, it sometimes worked in a positive way, which will be discussed further below. In Wiggan's study (2005), being different from the majority of interviewees produce rather detailed or accurate data, by addressing further details that would have been assumed as a common-sense otherwise.

The sample

This research has an exploratory nature and uses purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1990), the logic and power of purposeful sampling should be differentiated from probable sampling which selects a truly random and therefore statistically representative sample and produces a generalisation in a confident level. The purposeful sampling, on the other hand, selects a small number of information-rich cases which carry central importance for the purpose of the research, and provide in-depth illustrations (Patton 1990). This research aims to address specific characteristics of the particular group of in depth – lone mothers with young children in the process of transition from welfare to work, and this is called homogeneous sampling. In terms of 'a small number' for purposeful sampling, a number of qualitative researchers suggest a range from six to a dozen, but also loosely around 30 from a publication released from the National Centre for Research Methods (Baker and Edwards 2012). Taking account of the feasibility of time and funding, this research sets the sample number at twenty lone mothers and a number of criteria.

However, the field work experienced difficulties of finding twenty lone mothers who strictly meet the criteria and decided to expand some factors, including the research site, age of the lone mothers and youngest child, and the period since moving off social assistance benefits. In this section, we will discuss the changes made in the original sample criteria and the implications of such changes. Also, the decision necessarily involved some new data collection methods and recruitment strategies, which will be further discussed in the following section. The table 3 compares the original criteria and the characteristics of the research sample (see more details of the sample in Appendix F).

Table 3 Sample criteria changes

Original sampling criteria		The sample characteristics
1. Female lone parent aged over 25 2. Having their youngest child aged six or under 3. living in Yorkshire and Humberside 4. Had moved off social assistance benefits (IS or JSA) during last six weeks, at the time of interview		1. Female lone parent aged over 23 2. Having their youngest child aged eight or under 3. Living in the UK 4. Had moved off social assistance benefits (IS or JSA) during last 17 months, at the point of interview

1. Female lone parent aged 23 or above

The original criteria were set at 25 or above for two reasons. Firstly, they are statistically the majority, compared to lone fathers or lone mothers aged below 25. The Labour Force Survey Household data shows that the median age for a lone parent is 38, while the teenagers are only 1.4% of all lone parents (Coleman and Riley 2012, p.9). Mothers are the statistical majority at 91% of all lone parents. There are only 3% of lone parents under 25 on Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), while there are 89% of lone parents under 45 (Coleman and Riley 2012, p.31).

Second, lone mothers aged below 25 were excluded due to differences in governmental support schemes. There are differences in needs between teenage lone mothers and lone mothers over 25, so the design of governmental supports is different. Compared to those over 25, lone mothers under 25 have more flexibility in job seeking activities, and wider entitlements in education or training opportunities. For example, Income Support is equally eligible for lone mothers regardless of their age, but only those aged 25 or more are subjected to the sanction at the 20% of Income Support personal allowance rate when they fail to attend WFIs (DWP 2012a). In terms of the Work Programme, while teenage lone mothers are entitled to be transferred after nine months of being on JSA, those over 25 are subjected to being on JSA for 12 months (Coleman and Riley 2012). In addition, if a lone mother is aged between 18 and 24, there is additional help called the ‘Youth Contract’ which provides voluntary work placements, apprenticeships, and careers guidance (HM Government 2013c).

While the criteria set the age at 25 or over, the sample includes two mothers aged 23 and 24 respectively. The age of the rest lone mothers is evenly ranged from 23 to 46 and the majority (8/20) was between 33 and 37 years. While the age range of the sample met the main objective of the original criteria – excluding teenage mothers, the age of two mothers below 25 did not

influence the findings much as they had no experience of engaging with age-restricted governmental support.

2. Having their youngest child aged eight or under

The mothers were living with at least one dependent child aged eight or under, having one to four dependent children aged between 14 weeks and 24 years. The majority (18/20) had their youngest child aged six or under, two mothers' youngest children were aged seven and eight, respectively. While this is not ideal, the two mothers still bore heavy responsibilities in caring for young school age children throughout their transitions into paid work.

The age of youngest child was set at six because not many studies have yet disclosed the experiences of lone mothers with such a young child due to the recent policy change on Income Support eligibility. The existing policy evaluations have revealed a lot about the effectiveness of the welfare to work schemes for UK lone parents with their youngest child at seven and above, in terms of their expectations towards the governmental schemes (Coleman and Lanceley 2011; Gloster et al. 2010; Peacey 2009), and the actual experiences in the early stages of being in paid work obtained through JSA (Casebourne et al. 2010; Lane et al. 2011). However, there are very few studies involving those with dependent children at age five or six, and have a rather limited focus on the effectiveness of the Work Programme (Dewar 2012; Newton et al. 2012; Whitworth 2013b). This meaningful group of lone mothers, possibly with a heavier burden of child-care responsibilities, are therefore the main focus of this study.

More importantly, the experiences of this group would produce a meaningful policy implication on the current welfare to work schemes. Lone parents with their youngest child at five or younger arguably receive less pressure to leave social assistance benefits for paid work than those who have older child. The mothers with a child under five are entitled to Income Support and it requires the claimant to attend a work-focused interview at six month intervals, in general, while JSA requires two weeks. According to Haux's (2010, p. 10) study on lone parents under the welfare to work reform, the key characteristic of those lone parents not being in employment is having a child under five. With relatively less pressure, it can be argued that when such mothers decide to move into paid work, they are more self-motivated than others on JSA and/or the life of being on benefits is desperate enough to motivate them. As the twenty lone mothers with young children already achieved their transition to paid work, their experiences produce meaningful findings. These self-motivated mothers who actively made a decision to move off Income Support even when they were entitled to it arguably had a better chance to find a favourable outcome in paid work and in their subjective well-being, compared to their lives on social assistance benefits. It is very clear that they are not one of those people who choose to be on benefits as a 'life style

choice' and the welfare benefits were not feed their dependency, unlike from the governmental descriptions of benefit claimants (Daguerre and Etherington 2014; Newman 2011; Wiggan 2012). But it would mean that if an obvious problem is shared by this self-motivated group of lone mothers, it may be worse for those who are less motivated to make transitions.

The research, however, did not include the children of lone mothers in the interview, which would be one of the main limitations of this research. While Ridge and Millar's longitudinal study argues that children are valued and active members in the family, who can affect and can be affected by their parent's transition into paid work, some practical challenges have emerged to make this inevitable choice to exclude children from the sampling design (Ridge and Millar 2011). The challenges included a lack of practical guidance and training to interview such young children (Rubin and Rubin 2011), and difficulties in generating meaningful data with young children, who are difficult to build rapport with and get easily distracted even in a comfortable zone (Irwin and Johnson 2005).

3. Live in the UK

The sample consisted of ten mothers living in Yorkshire and the rest from a wide range of locations in the UK, including South East and West England, West Midlands, and North Wales. This is a result of research site expansion from the original criteria. The research originally aimed to recruit the entire sample within Yorkshire and Humberside, mainly due to two reasons. One, it was a reasonable choice for a PhD researcher with limited resources and time. As Denscombe argued, the best choice is "the least travel, the least expense and the least difficulty when it comes to gaining access" (Denscombe 2007, p.41). In addition, being physically close to the research site was expected to allow the researcher to advertise the research through off-line means, when online recruitment is not an option (eg. local nursery without a website), as well as allowing the researcher to be called on at short notice when an unexpected interview is scheduled.

However, the research site expansion necessarily involved some new data collection methods other than face-to-face interviews, such as video interviews and telephone interviews, and it made the interviews more feasible in terms of time and funding. The adoption of new data collection method and its implication will be further discussed below.

Two, having a single research site – Yorkshire and Humberside - was expected to provide coherence on the governmental supports available through the discretion of local authorities as well as private infrastructures. The Flexible Support Fund available for lone mothers on JSA can be an example, as it is controlled by local authorities regarding how to run the fund. In addition, private infrastructure and childcare costs would vary depending on the locality. However, limiting

the research site within Yorkshire and Humberside could not guarantee the coherence of governmental supports or infrastructures in the first place, as it is a large geographic area has both urban and rural diversity, including industrial and old cities, and have different levels and costs of infrastructures.

4. Started paid work within 17 months

The empirical research originally aimed to recruit lone mothers who have either started or have increased their working hours to 16 or more in the past six weeks at the point of interview practice. This relatively short period was set in order for interviewees to easily recall their past experience of claiming social assistance benefits. The six week period was also believed to be long enough to yield some meaningful life changes that would influence their well-being for the interviewees to detect the differences before and after starting paid work and predict further journey ahead of them in paid work.

The period after the transition was extended up to 17 months, mainly due to practical difficulties of finding lone mothers at such early stage of transition. The majority of the sample (15/20) were in an early stage of transition - within 6months (19 weeks), but some four mothers had longer periods of being in paid work up to 17 months and one mother left a full-time job four months ago and was not working.

However, as chapter two discussed, the transition is the period of uncertainties financially, emotionally, and physically, and shall go further than 6 months (Harries and Woodfield 2002). Indeed, some remaining instabilities and uncertainties were found from the five mothers who started their paid work more than 6 months ago and all of them understood they were still in the period of transition. These five mothers had fairly good memories of their experiences of living on benefits, but, some loss of details had to be compromised, such as the details of the administrative processes and the exact amount of financial improvements.

Other considerations: the types of benefits the sample population had left

There are on-going changes in the benefit system in the UK. Under the Welfare Reform Bill 2012, Lone Parent Obligation requires lone parents with their youngest child aged five or over to become economically active by moving from Income Support (IS) to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The system, however, is also being replaced by a simplified benefit system, Universal Credit (find the details in chapter one). Table one below explains the date of rolling-out of Universal Credit. Since this empirical study recruited participants in this fickle period of time, it is important to note the possibility that some of the participants had left a different type of social assistance benefit from others at the time of interview. Especially, the sample population living in Harrogate, who

had newly attempted claiming JSA since spring 2014, would have left Universal Credit, while the rest of sample would have left either IS or JSA. Since the empirical research only targets those who already moved off social assistance benefits, the rolling-out of Universal Credit in Harrogate would not affect any condition of the target sample. However, extra cautiousness and clarification was needed at the point of recruitment for the samples living in Harrogate area.

Table 4 The rolling-out date of Universal Credit (HM Government 2013g)

Rolling-out	Details
April 2013	Began as a pilot in Great Manchester and Cheshire (those living in OL6, OL7, M43 or SK16 postcode)
October 2013	Expanded to Job centres in Ashton-under-Lyne, Wigan, Warrington, Oldham, Hammersmith, Rugby and Inverness Applies to the new claims of unemployment benefit
April 2014	Claims will be taken in Shotton, Bath and Harrogate.
From 2014 -17	Universal Credit will be rolled out gradually to the rest of the UK, and will be completed by 2017

While the sampling criteria have been set, the research expected some diversity in the following elements, in order to involve a wide range of life styles that influence the overall subjective well-being of lone mothers in transition.

- **Type of job:** The types of jobs were not limited (controlled) as long as their former income and asset levels are within the JSA or IS entitlements.
- **Ethnicity:** The research aimed for ethnic diversity in the sample as the different life styles generated by diverse ethnicity would provide rich information, especially in the domains of health, relationships, community-connectedness, and leisure (religion).
- **Numbers and age of older children:** The numbers of children and the ages of other older children were not considered as a criterion since this research aims to explore diversity in their life style.

Recruitment

Reviewing the existing qualitative research targeting lone parents or working mothers, the major recruitment strategies are divided into three: 1) A few pieces of research obtain the details of prospective samples from related authorities, such as the former Inland Revenue Working Families Tax Credit records based on the DWP data (Harries and Woodfield 2002), and IS/JSA and Working Tax Credit records from the DWP data (Ridge and Millar 2008), or from an interest group like Gingerbread (Gingerbread 2011c; Peacey 2009). These pieces of research have direct contacts

for sample populations, and contact the sample through telephone or opt-in letter. 2) Others pass the details of the researcher onto the lone mothers via following methods:

- Jobcentre (Griffiths 2011),
- Call centres (of Gingerbread) and contact details of the samples in their prior surveys (Gingerbread 2011c; Peacey 2009),
- Posting an advertisement on lone parent related websites (Netmums and Gingerbread) (Gingerbread 2011c; Jain et al. 2011; Peacey 2009), and social network services (Facebook) (Gingerbread 2011c),
- Press release (Jain et al. 2011),
- Related local institutions (primary schools, school nurseries or childcare providers) (Jain et al. 2011; Skinner 2005)
- Information and opt-in letters (Ridge and Millar 2008)

3) Some pieces of research access their sample through snowballing strategies based on already existing interviewees (Edwards et al. 2003; McHardy 2012; Smith 2013) or as an additional strategy (Skinner 2005).

In this research, two recruitment strategies aimed to be adopted. First, the research information and the details were asked to be passed on to prospective lone mothers through gatekeepers from the related authorities, lone parents' interest groups, and local institutions (primary school, school nurseries, and child centre). Second, the snowballing strategy was planned to fill the insufficient numbers of samples, if any.

This research used gatekeepers to advertise the research details. Gatekeepers are individuals, groups, and organisations that can act as intermediaries between researchers and participants (De Laine 2000, cited in Clark 2011, p.2). They can be influential in terms of having the power to control the access to prospective participants based on their relationships of trust and respect with participants, as well as providing information and confidence about the study and its aim to the participants (Crowhurst 2013). The role of gatekeepers was therefore very critical in conducting this research because they can either open or block the gate to the participants. However, this research did not plan to ask any direct contact details of prospective samples from the related authorities or institutions, since it goes against the duty of confidentiality of the gatekeepers, while invading the right of privacy of the prospective samples.

The empirical research used the following strategy in approaching gatekeepers, adopting the hints of Clark's study (2011). When an organisation is seen as having relationships with lone mothers, the researcher contacted the organisation even they are not directly related to the topic of the research. For example, although this research is not directly related to children's activities in local

children centres, they were contacted based on an assumption that local lone mothers with children of the age group would be involved in the activities provided by the centre. The characteristics and number of organisations and strategies can be found in Appendix E. In the cases where an organisation has online access available (email address or forum space to upload an advertisement), a brief proposal of the research, opt-in letter, and contact details of the researcher was submitted to gatekeepers online. The advertisement and information sheet can be found in Appendices A and B. This strategy is less invasive for prospective samples, because it allows ethically acceptable negotiations with potential participants. The researcher then made a phone call asking for a meeting with a member of staff of the organisation, preferably one in a managerial post, to explain the aim of the research. When a meeting was successfully set up, the researcher introduced the aim and methods of the research, and asked the possibilities of involvement in the recruitment process. When an organisation agreed to engage in the recruitment, the researcher left a few printed copies of advertisement and information sheets, and contacted the gatekeepers on a regular basis for updates.

According to Clark (2011), gatekeepers are motivated to get involved when research has a political representation - which shares their values and assumptions - and when they consider that the research would benefit the participants as well as themselves. On the contrary, gatekeepers become cautious when the rationale or the methods of the research are not clear, and when gatekeepers consider practical workloads as a challenge. In order to maximise the possibility, the researcher explained the aim and expected outcome of the research as: A) This research increases public awareness on lone mothers' lives and their transitions to paid work, and what it means to force lone mothers with children as young as five to move into paid work; B) By comparing the current well-being with that of their past while claiming benefits, it raises lone mothers' consciousness of their achievements or remaining challenges, which may motivate them to move forward; C) The findings of the research make policy implications that are addressed directly from lone mothers' experiences and perspectives, which can make the transition from welfare to work smoother for the prospective lone mothers. The researcher also assured that the interview findings will not be used as any form of critique of the services provided by the organisation.

The snowballing strategy was applied alongside the main recruitment method to ensure sufficient numbers of interviewees. Snowballing is an effective recruiting strategy when time and resources are limited, and avoids a significant level of bias addressed when the recruited individuals have limited knowledge of other members of the group or the research itself. At the end of each interview, the researcher kindly asked if they know anyone who may be in a similar situation to them. When a participant knew someone who might be interested, the researcher then asked if

she would like recommend this research and pass the information sheet to that person. The researcher made all reasonable efforts to ensure that a willing participant can participate in this research. However, in order to have the manageable number of participants, the researcher asked the interviewee the number of potential participant she would like to recommend, so that the sum number of prospective participants can be reached. When this expected sum loosely exceeded 20 participants, the snowballing strategy was no longer used.

As a result, the recruitment was conducted between January and May 2014. The research participation was accessible for members of 25 parents and lone parent Facebook groups, five Yorkshire based lone parent groups and organisations, nine local out-of-school clubs, a North Yorkshire branch of a national parenting organisation, and two national lone parent organisations (see more details in Appendeix E). The social media in fact turned out to be the most effective measure, as the majority of respondents were obtained through Facebook groups. As can be seen from table 5 below, 15 were recruited via various Facebook groups for parents or lone parents, and the other two mothers contacted the researcher via two national lone parent organisations. Two mothers were snowballed, one from a council worker, who received an email advertising the research, and referred the participant by calling the researcher. Another one was snowballed from a personal contact of the researcher.

Table 5 Gatekeepers and recruitment

Gatekeeping clubs and organisations	Number of participants recruited
Facebook clubs	15
Netmums	1
Onespace	1
Snowballing	2
Unknown	1
TOTAL	20

Some 41 lone parents including two lone fathers expressed their interest in participation; seven were turned down because they were not the research target in terms of gender, family type, benefit and working status, and the age of youngest child. Some 13 mothers were lost in the process of communication. The best strategies for holding the interest of the mothers who agreed to participate were setting up interviews as soon as possible, and sending out a number of reminders before the scheduled date. Nevertheless, some still did not reply or did not show up at the agreed time and location. The interviews were conducted with 21 mothers, while one

interview was omitted later as she had no experience of receiving payment or service from social assistance benefits.

Qualitative in-depth interview

This research uses the phenomenological in-depth interview which has its primary objective to “describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” by experiencing the shared essence (Marshall and Rossman 2010, p.148). This is considered as the most suitable method for this research in two ways. First, it is a way of producing and delivering a detailed construction of the understandings of social actors. The main purpose is to uncover and describe subjective well-being that is grounded in lone mothers’ experiences and subjective perspectives. The subjectivity is what matters the most in this thesis. Therefore, the qualitative in-depth interviews will be the sole way of gathering data, which will produce quality data (Marshall and Rossman 2010). Second, it is useful to explore both past and present experiences of participants. It focuses a series of meanings in the lived experiences which have led lone mothers to certain actions and interactions (Marshall and Rossman 2010). Their actions and interactions would closely be linked around their own meanings of certain experience, so their recent experience would be easier to recall and be delivered through an in-depth interview. This research aims to explore the personal comparison of perspectives and life satisfactions between their recent past while claiming social assistance benefits and the presence of being in paid work.

A qualitative in-depth interview is defined as ‘a legitimate or meaningful way of generate data...to talk interactively with people, to ask them questions, to listen to them, to gain access to their accounts and articulations, or to analyse their use of language and construction of discourse’ (Mason 2002, p. 63-64). Here, one might argue that a qualitative interview based on interpretivism can provide all of the subjective data, but not necessarily in a legitimate or meaningful way, because their experiences or understandings in their daily lives can only be constructed and reconstructed in interviews. However, interpretivists argue that the construction and reconstruction of data addressed from socially located ‘knowers’ is the only way of ‘knowing’ the social world, because the world is ‘always already interpreted’ (Mason 2002, p. 179).

The constructed and reconstructed data produced from a qualitative interview will therefore be often situational, contextual, and interactional (Mason 2002). It is this thesis’ intention to explore as much context of the experiences of lone mothers as possible. In the process of constructing the contextual and situational knowledge, one might be concerned of a bias caused by social interactions between a researcher and interviewees (Mason 2002). However, it is an interpretivists’ assumption that the social interaction existing in an interview is not a bias which

can potentially be eradicated, because the social interaction produced from an interview cannot be separated from the interview. Interviews are always based on social interaction, regardless of how structured or unstructured an interview is. It is, however, important for the researcher to be aware the complexities of the interactions, and to understand how context and situation work in the social interactions generated in the interviews (Mason 2002).

In terms of the structure of in-depth interviews, there are some inconsistencies in the existing descriptions of qualitative researchers. Some differentiate in-depth interviews (informal, conversational interview in Patton's (1990) words) from semi-structured (general interview guide approach, according to Patton), as the former has no predetermination of topic, wording and sequence of the interview, but is based on immediate context in the natural conversation, and the depth of follow-up questions and probing (Patton 1990). Others allow in-depth interviews which have the predetermination of topics to covered and expected follow-up questions, but not necessarily the exact wording, sequence, and the depth of probing (Mason 2002; Payne and Payne 2004). While there are no clear-cut definitions between the two structures of interview, this research defines its methods as 'in-depth interview' only for the purpose of labelling the design of the interview structure. This research uses the latter description of in-depth interview, which allows predetermination of topics and expected follow-up questions, but not the exact wording, sequence, and depth of probing or follow-up. However, this description of the in-depth interview takes some of the interview techniques of Patton's (1990) 'general interview guide approach,' which is often defined as a semi-structured interview, for example, with the use of topic guide.

The topic guide outlines a set of topics to be explored. It is a check-list to make sure all the relevant topics are covered and does not necessarily involve the exact wording of questions or sequence (See the topic guide used in appendix D). It also allows the researcher to be "free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style" within the focuses predetermined to answer the empirical research questions (Patton 1990, p.238). Therefore, a rich level of follow-up questions and probing can be obtained following the main question, in order to address deep and detailed themes, concepts, and ideas on top of the responses introduced by the interviewee. Furthermore, it can elicit more details without changing the topic or focus, by filling in a missing piece, or requesting clarification, examples, and/or evidence (Rubin and Rubin 2011). The topic guide, as advised by Mason (2002) is designed to ask about the interviewee's reasoning and judgement, or about how issues are associated in certain events or situations rather than simply asking their views on X, Y and Z. This systematic and comprehensive way of interviewing is particularly beneficial with carefully predetermined boundaries of the topics to be explored. It would make

the interviewer and interviewees focus on the topics, but also allow individual perspectives and experiences to emerge, where the interviewer can determine the wording of questions, sequence, and depth of certain topics, with immediate follow-up or clarification questions (Marshall and Rossman 2010; Patton 1990).

However, the design of the topic guide for this research needs to consider that the best results of an in-depth interview come out of the rapport between the interviewer and respondent, and the trust which takes time and effort to build upon (Marshall and Rossman 2010). Without it, there is more chance for interviewees to be unwilling or uncomfortable to share their experiences which the research questions hope to explore. As this research designs an interview for each respondent, it may be hard to expect to have a firm trust from the beginning of the interview. In order to maximise the time needed to build the rapport, the first ten minutes of the interview was used for informal social interaction, which was expected to make a comfortable environment for the respondent. For this, the first part of the topic guide was designed to make conversation regarding their background, by asking the number of children and their age, and former and current job. This allowed rich social interactions at the beginning of interviews, and helped to build some rapport between the interviewer and the respondent.

However, as the research site expanded, two other means of data collection, telephone and video interviews, were adopted. This considerably influenced the quality of some interviews, including the rapport building.

A total eleven interviews were conducted face-to-face, seven were interviewed using video chatting (Skype), and two were done through telephone. The face-to-face interviews generally resulted in the best outcome, as both the researcher and interviewee tended to focus more as they presented in the same space.

The seven interviews conducted via video interviews produced relatively good outcomes compared to telephone interviews, and did not generate considerably lower quality data than face-to-face interviews. While the face-to-face interview still is a dominant research medium, a number of researchers suggest other research mediums as viable alternatives, such as telephone interviews and video chatting using modern software (Skype). The video interview especially is argued as the most feasible alternative to face-to-face interviews according to Hanna (2012), in terms of its allowance in visual and interpersonal aspects of the interaction, while it also offers the private elements of the telephone interview. In video interviews, the researcher was able to record both the visual and audio interaction of the interview by installing simple software, called Ocam (upon agreement). This benefited the data collection. The recording sound was clearer than the telephone interviews, and the screen recording showed facial expressions, which helped the

transcribing and analysis. When voice recording was not clear enough to be translated, the researcher was able to read the lip shape of the interviewee and filled the audio blank. Furthermore, the researcher tended to be less nervous, and it often provided a better chance and grounds for understanding and probing. The interview scheduling was also easier for video interviews, as last minute rescheduling is convenient and less costly. Although Deakin and Wakefield's (2013) experience of Skype interviews shows that those engaging in video interviews are less likely to show than those arranged to meet for face-to-face interviews, the exact opposite happened in this research. While three mothers did not show up at an agreed time and place for face-to-face interviews, only one did not show up for video interview.

Two telephone interviews, however, provided some limited results, as there was limited means of communication especially due to absence of facial or gesture expression. The telephone interviews were chosen as an alternative, as the means of video chatting were not available to the participants. Both telephone interviews were done using mobile phone on speaker mode, and recorded by a separate voice recorder. The connections were often not stable and voices were not clear enough. In one interview, it irritated an interviewee and led to her answers being short. Video and telephone interviews, however, saved a lot of resources and time for the interview, as face-to-face interviews required about four to five times more money and time, and had a better chance of interviewees not showing up at the agreed time and site.

The stance of the researcher

The relationship between the researcher and the researched raises an important discussion for social scientists, as the qualitative approaches, including data collection and analysis, necessarily require the researcher to have intimate and direct contact with the researched. In the case of my research on lone mothers with young children experiencing being on social assistance benefits, I was an outsider researcher. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), being an outsider does not make a better or a worse researcher, but a different one.

Being an outsider researcher was both an aid and a barrier. Speaking English as the second language became a barrier in terms of probing, as some responses that may have led to meaningful narratives were missed due to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The difficulties especially appeared when the research site expanded and two telephone interviews were conducted.

However, it also helped, when the interviewees acknowledged the researcher as an 'outsider' and voluntarily provided more detailed information that would have been considered as common sense otherwise. For example, one interviewee explained '*what being in paid work means in the*

UK' which became vital data to seeing her perspectives and attitudes towards being in paid work. Another interviewee asked the researcher if she has a child, after the researcher probed her feelings of guilt about leaving children at home during the weekends. The exchange went as follows:

Researcher: It sounds like there always is guilt?

Participant (ID 18): Do you have a child?

Researcher: No

Participant (ID 18): When you have a child, you will know the guilt is massive part of your life ... It's just a parent thing, you will always feel as if you are not doing enough.

The participant's acknowledgement of the researcher as an outsider motivated her to provide more information about being a parent, which became vital data to understand her values of parenting and paid work.

Coding and analysis

This thesis used thematic analysis, the data analysis technique influenced by grounded theory. Thematic analysis is firstly introduced by Objectivist Grounded Theory Method (OGTM) developed by Glaser and Strauss (1968), but is also used by Charmaz (2000), the Constructionist Grounded Theory Method (CGTM). CGTM shares a great deal of its assumptions in interpretivism with abductive reasoning which is the research strategy of this thesis. However, this thesis cannot be claimed to fully pursue the process of grounded theory as a research strategy. The following section discusses how far the field work was able to follow the data coding and analysis processes of grounded theory, and raises its limitations.

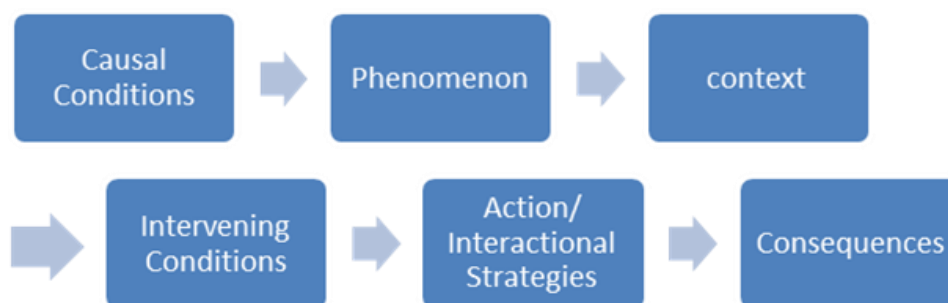
While the key principle of grounded theory remains the parallel process of data collection and coding, the field work of this thesis was not able to start coding until the data collection was completed (although full transcriptions were being produced as interviews were conducted). It was a pragmatic decision made to minimise the loss of potential participants who showed an interest in participation. Once the recruiting advertisement was uploaded, it was only effective for few days, if not hours. The interests of potential participants did not last long, and were very likely to be lost when a specific interview date was not scheduled within few days at the first communication. The researcher realised this pattern and made a pragmatic decision not to pause in between interviews for transcription and coding, because the pausing would have increased the chance of losing the potential participants who once showed their interest. Furthermore, finding lone mothers was getting harder and harder, and those who met the criteria were only a few.

This practice also provided some limitations in discovering ‘theoretical saturation.’ McKenzie et al. (1997) explains the theoretical saturation of Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded theory that the initial stages of data collection and analysis may come to a temporary stop when the categories (that open coding created - see below) have been saturated. It is the point when the additional data no longer contributes to discovering a new category (McKenzie et al. 1997). However, as a pragmatic decision was made not to pause in between interviews for coding and analysis, the researcher was not able to check if the data obtained had met theoretical saturation during the process of data collection. According to Baker and Edwards (2012), who suggested loosely around 30 interviews for a qualitative research conducted by graduate students, argue that this medium number can still be extremely valuable. The number penetrates beyond a very small number of people, but do not imposes the hardship of endless data gathering, especially when time is limited (Baker and Edwards 2012). Indeed, by the end of the 20 interviews, the researcher felt that a huge amount of useful data was generated, and in hindsight this was sufficient to answer the research question.

Once data had been collected and fully transcribed, the thesis followed the systematic steps of thematic analysis introduced by (both versions of) grounded theory. The first stage of data analysis was open-coding (McKenzie et al. 1997). The 20 full transcriptions were stored in Nvivo 10, software that helps coding and analysis of qualitative research. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts thoroughly and broke it down into segments based on its idea, event, or a concept that represented a small but meaningful part of the phenomenon. This is a category. Then, similar units of open coding were gathered and labelled as a category. The same procedure was applied for the following transcriptions, which placed a number of similar comments of different interviewees under a category. With constant attempts of open coding, the researcher was able to identify commonalities between diversities of the sample which can be then be applied to the larger whole (McKenzie et al. 1997).

The second step of analysis was axial coding. It is a process of considering the relationships between emerged categories, where the researcher selected one category and positioned it within a theoretical model, and then explicated a story from the interconnection of these categories (Creswell 2009). This process used a ‘coding paradigm’ which showed a set of possible relationships between the categories and subcategories.

Figure 4: The coding paradigm (recreated from McKenzie et al. 1997, p.191)



For example, when a lone mother's feeling of unhappiness is open-coded as a category 'Subjective Well-being', the category is linked to its causal conditions and phenomenon, such as 'leaving my child with a child-minder' and 'guilt.' It would be under another category of 'relationship with children.' Then, it is again linked with context of 'being in paid work' and the intervening conditions of 'pressures from Jobcentre.' The reactions of the lone mother, such as 'feeling depressed' would then be coded and linked as Action/Interactional strategies. The consequence would be 'having a low value of being in paid work.' This process created a story - A lone mother felt pressures from Jobcentre and started paid work, but felt guilty about leaving her child with a child-minder whilst being in paid work, which makes her unhappy and have a low value of being in paid work.

However, in the process of analysis, a problem occurred in terms of its analytical framework for the eight domains of the PWI. While the abductive reasoning allowed researchers to engage, as 'topics' of interviews or as a guide, with an analytical framework identified by the literature review before the fieldwork, the PWI adopted in this research has a highly deductive nature. Consequently, the original plan to look at the PWI domain discreetly has been abandoned in favour of an analytical framework based on abductive reasoning, involving inductive thinking and theory generation. The following section will discuss the problem in details and its methodological implications.

Dissemination

The findings of the research – mainly quality of relationships with children and social networks - are presented twice at Social Policy Association 2014 and 2015 and each paper has been accessible through the conference websites with ID and password. According to the research ethics guidebook for social scientists formed based on the ethics principles set out in the Economic and Social Research Council (The Research Ethics Guidebook, N.D), involving research participants in dissemination activity is one way of forefronting their voices. Although the research findings have yet been directly disseminated to the participants through any activity, the

researcher assured the participants and the gatekeepers that they will be informed when a publicly accessible journal is published from this research.

3.4 Methodological implications on adopting a quantitative index in a qualitative research

There are a number of indexes which represent one's subjective quality of life: eight domains of quality of life developed by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (generally referred to as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission); eleven domains of Your Better Life Index by OECD; nine domains from Office for National Statistics (ONS); and Personal Well-being Index (PWI). These indexes disaggregate domains of life into separate components and taken together within the indexes they are seen as theoretically meaningful to collectively represent one's life as a whole. These different indexes share a high degree of overlap in using similar domains (OECD 2013), but each is theoretically justified in building its own framework (index) to measure well-being.

This research study adopted the Personal Well-being Index to represent lone mothers' lives, as the PWI quantitatively proved its validity to represents one's life as a whole (as can be seen from the high score of R^2 , see chapter two). The framework was a useful tool to examine the literature and expose the existing gaps in knowledge. However, it later caused some methodological difficulties because it was applied too literally to the empirical data collection in the qualitative study and it further became a hurdle to analyse the experiences of lone mothers. The framework was therefore abandoned for the analysis of data. This decision addresses two key limitations in regard to the design of such indexes and how the deductive thinking might carry a risk to overlook some distinctive features of one's life when examining subjective well-being or quality of life.

First, the lone mothers understand their well-being based a series of their life experiences. It means that the mothers interpret a series of life events and find their own meanings from the experiences, where the meanings then become a hint to judge or evaluate their level of well-being at certain period of time. It is their 'meaning' and 'experience', because the mothers very often interpret a similar experience in very different ways based on their own values (they are often socially created or reinforced). For example, when two mothers employ a child-minder by starting their paid work, one might satisfy while the other might not, depending on their values on providing (in)direct childcare, paid work, and using child-minder as a care provision option. The mothers' subjectively reported well-being is a result of mixed experiences and meanings. A critical point here is that while the indexes treat each domain separately, the mothers' experiences and meanings are laid out over several domains and they are often largely and closely linked to one another. For example, when a lone mother feels pressures from Jobcentre to move off benefits and into work, it has effects over many aspects of their life. The consequence of 'feeling pressured' is affecting her sense of self-worth, health, and quality of relationships with children as well as

other social relationships, and the transition affects her sense of safety and security, and future outlook. The process is further impacting on her well-being and life satisfaction as a whole.

Second, some important areas of their lives often do not fit into or went beyond the eight domains of the Personal Well-being Index. A number of unexpected aspects have emerged from the mothers' lives, and have influenced on their life decisions, other life domains, and the overall well-being. Even with this small sample of lone mothers, some important aspects have emerged, including self-esteem and confidence, leisure (the PWI had religion as an optional domain, and this was expanded to leisure by this research), building a structured routine, having compatible work and care, and children's happiness.

As the domains in one's life are interconnected in complicated ways, an improvement in one domain or several domains does not necessarily lead up to an improvement in the overall well-being. Even when their paid work have contributed to an improvement in one domain, financial well-being for example, the mothers may not consider themselves being better-off, when their other aspects of their lives they value more on are not satisfied, due to incompatible work and care, insecure employment, or negative future outlook. It is the individuality of well-being, where everyone has their own meaning and judgement if their well-being has been improved as the outcome of transitions and what is good for them.

The design of the topic guide, based on the PWI, therefore interrupted the process of in-depth interviews, as it built fences in between questions which felt like it forced interviewees to keep referencing back and forth to their past responses. This sometimes interrupted the flow between the interviewer's and interviewee's discussion, an easy flow is the beauty of an in-depth interview, and unfortunately this lack resulted in some simplified responses, which were not always suitable for the deeper nature of this research. This problem was acknowledged after a few in-depth interviews, and the topic guide was amended and applied for the subsequent interviews. When an opportunity is given for further progression of this research, the design of the literature review and topic guide will require further revision. I would change my approach the next time and create a more flexible framework, rather than adopting a quantitative framework and conceptualising domains of well-being into discrete categories.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the empirical research questions and the way this research attempts to answer them. The thesis uses the abductive logic of research strategy which has its research paradigm of Interpretivism, based on the ontological position of idealist and epistemological position of constructionist.

The data collection was conducted using qualitative in-depth interviews, and resulted in interviewing 20 lone mothers. The majority were aged over 25, who lived in the UK, had a youngest child aged six or under, and they had left social assistance benefits during the last six months prior to the point of interview. Data obtained from the interviews were thematically analysed following the stages of open and axial coding, as influenced by grounded theory.

The next three chapters will present the findings.

Chapter 4: Quality of relationships

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of how the move into paid work from means-tested social assistance benefits affected lone mothers' quality of relationships and their sense of belonging. These are a part of the less researched domains of lone mothers' lives, as identified within the analytical framework of PWI in chapter two, but as discussed in chapter three, the original plan for the analysis, to look at the PWI domain discreetly, has been abandoned in favour of an analytical framework based on abductive reasoning, involving inductive thinking and theory generation. The analysis will now present mothers' experiences of moving from benefits into paid work chronologically, and will focus on the emerging concepts coming out of the data. The mothers are relying on retrospective recall to explain how they felt in the past looking back from their current situation (at the time of the interview) when the majority were in work.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First is the quality of relationship with children. This is separated out due to the distinctive nature of these relationships, as they were the main concerns for mothers in the process of rationalising whether to work or not. It will also touch upon the circumstantial changes before and after moving to work, and how they aided or hindered the quality of relationships with children. The second and third parts will focus on the influences of the mothers' transitions into work on the quality of their informal and formal adult relationships.

4.1 Quality of relationships with children

This section explores the changes in the quality of relationships between the 20 lone mothers and their children, before and after they have moved into paid work. Before considering the detail, some context will be provided in terms of the post hoc rationalisations mothers used to describe their circumstances of being on 'benefits' and choosing whether or not to move into paid work.

Mothers' rationalisations

Throughout the interviews, the majority were keen to show that they were sensitive to their children's needs, stating their primary job was looking after children. Eleven mothers felt that going back to work and sending their children off to childcare right away was morally wrong, or not what a good mother should do. For example as Amy insisted frequently:

"Childcare, that's my job, that's why I have children, I don't want somebody else bringing them up, I don't think the society is helped by women being forced back to work, when they should be at home with the children, that's my job... I didn't have the incentive to go back to work. [My children] wouldn't appreciate being sent off somebody else doing it."

[Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

But even the remaining nine mothers, who wanted to be in paid work, described how being on social assistance benefits was 'the best choice for children', even when that was not necessarily best for themselves. For example, Hana started looking for work when her youngest child reached age five, and she said:

"I didn't want to be [claiming benefits], it wasn't something I really wanted to do, but it was the best choice for my daughter at that time", and she added "if when the time where my daughter was between the ages of one to five or four, if I am in paid work then, I would have felt very guilty, because she would have to be in child-minders, nurseries, and all sort of things, she wasn't in the age where I felt that she should be doing that all full-time things." [One child aged five, works full-time]

Similarly, moving to paid work was rationalised as being good for children, as the mothers could be a good role model as well as teaching them the work ethic or helping to develop the children's cognitive and social skills in nurseries or (pre)school. It was also described as a good future investment for children.

These concerns on children's well-being also influenced their decisions regarding working hours. 15 mothers worked part time (between 15.5 -22 hours per week), four mothers worked full time

(37.5 plus hours per week), and one was not working. The 15 part-time workers said they limited working hours to be with their children but some also felt it was their 'only option', due to the high costs of childcare, or because they lacked informal childcare support. Among the four full-time workers, two felt this was their 'only option' because of a lack of part-time posts in the local labour market. Two mothers, one working full-time and the other part-time, changed their professions to work from home in order to be available for their children. Their former professions were more respected and well-paid than their current jobs.

Being an incompetent mother and poor provider

During the period of being on social assistance benefits, the lone mothers said they had enough time to engage with children in a direct way, face-to-face. However, this extensive time together was often done under financial difficulties, which could make it unpleasant. The interaction between spending too much time together and not having enough money greatly influenced the quality of relationships with children whilst on benefits.

The financial difficulties meant that they felt they were failing or incompetent mothers who were not proper independent providers. They felt they only received benefits simply because they had children. Some remembered how painful it was to say 'no' to the things their children wanted, from basic necessities like a pair of trainers, clothes, and toys, to 'luxuries' like trips out. This left them feeling guilty, as they could not put healthy food on the table, or heat the house, or keep the lights on. As Mia commented:

"I was not being a proper parent to my child, because I couldn't actually provide for her, doing what I can. I wanted to, one of the most important parts for me is to teach her work ethic, as well. You have to go and earn it. I wasn't able to do that at that time. That really upset me." [One child aged two, works part-time]

The financial difficulties negatively affected the quality of relationships with children. In a direct sense, some children became rebellious and demanding when they were told 'no' to the things they wanted. Even when children were too young to notice the financial shortage, it had some indirect effects. The majority of mothers reported high levels of financial stress relating to, squeezing daily expenses, bills, and housing costs in their tight budgets. The status of being a benefit claimant also contributed to low self-esteem and lack of confidence. The mothers said their unhappiness was often picked up by their children, which resulted in some behavioural changes like crying, worrying, and being unhappy. It could also have a knock-on effect on how mothers reacted, such as becoming snappy with children. For example, three reported how hard

it was to hide their emotions from the children, while Lucy especially regrets that her child had to witness her unhappiness:

“It’s unfortunate that she had to see me stressed, that’s not something I would ever choose, but unfortunately, not having anybody there I can run to, she did see me cry, and she did see me getting angry.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

While the financial difficulties constrained their activities and mobility, the mothers said they and their children were constantly spending time together. This had impacts on their relationships with their children, because the mothers were often emotionally unhappy and stressed, and exhausted in the circumstances. As Chloe described:

“When you are with someone for twenty-four hours, and you see each other for twenty-four hours, you do get on each other’s nerves. Even though it’s a little boy, it’s hard to not shout when there is no need, and I was finding myself doing that.” [One child aged three, works part-time]

Spending time together, on the other hand, was described as generating good memories as well. The difficult times spent on benefits brought the mothers and children closer like ‘*a little team*’ where they could support each other. Some said it provided opportunities to teach rules and boundaries, and appreciate simpler and small things, like ‘*20p sweets in a corner shop.*’ The mothers felt grateful for the quality time they had together, and some said that their older children now looked back and appreciated that time with their mother. Being on benefits also became a recovery period to be able to function again, as Sarah commented:

“The fact that I didn’t have to go to work, and I could just focus on the children, initially for the first few months, it really was very valuable ... I was able to sort of recover, from my situation, now I am, hopefully, a functioning member of society again.” [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

While limited finances and spending too much time together impacted on the quality of relationships whilst claiming benefits, the mothers experienced quite dramatic changes in their caring circumstances once they moved into work.

Quality of relationships with children whilst in paid work

All the mothers perceived changes in the quality of relationships with children as one of the key aspects of making transitions from benefits into paid work. The mothers had to provide more hours of childcare through formal or informal providers, meaning they were less involved in

providing direct care themselves. However, there were four mothers who continued to provide similar amounts of direct care as before they were claiming benefits, for different reasons. Kate and Amy intentionally chose home-based employment to provide direct care. Sarah was working for an office-less employer and had to work at home. Ava, on the other hand, could not find suitable local childcare, so she took her child to work after school finished.

For the other 15 mothers, parental involvement was now executed in more indirect ways, compared to the period being on benefits. They explained different ways of doing this, combining both formal and informal childcare. Formal care included nursery, school, breakfast and afterschool club, holiday club, and child-minder, and informal care was provided by grandparents, siblings, friends and neighbours, and older children. Even so, the mothers made efforts to provide as much direct care as possible, by choosing a job close to where the child was being cared for, arranging work shifts to meet children's pick-up time, or limiting their working hours. Generally, however, there was a shift in the type of care, from direct to more indirect. This is defined by Demo (1992) as *supportive detachment*, where mothers are still supportive, love, concern, nurture, protect, guide, discipline, and transmit norms and values to their children, but under more detached settings. It surely had an effect on the quality of relationships.

Since moving to paid work, ten mothers said the quality of relationships with children had improved. For nine mothers, they felt it was hard to decide whether their relationships were better or worse, because it showed a mixed picture of bright and dark sides. One mother had indicated that the quality of relationship got worse since moving into paid work.

Improved quality of relationship

Some 19 mothers (bar the one whose relationship had got worse) identified three factors that helped improve relationships:

- Improvements in financial circumstances
- Improvements in self-esteem and happiness
- Reduced time together

As Jennifer stated, "*Although money can't buy you happiness, it does help.*" Indeed, the mothers witnessed themselves treating their children better with more things to play with at home, more books, a nice day out, and school camps. Improved finances freed the mothers from pressures to say 'no' to the children for the things that they felt children should have been entitled to. It was

the main contributory factor to the mothers' happiness. More importantly, they considered themselves as better mothers, as they were providing with their own means. As Lucy said:

"My daughter's got her birthday coming up, her birthday presents will be paid for out of my wages, and it's not going to be the money that the government have given me. So the government aren't paying for her birthday, her birthday would be paid by me. So, it's a pretty good feeling." [One child aged two, works part-time]

The fact that they left the benefit accompanied by the financial improvements increased the levels of self-esteem and happiness. Many reported they were emotionally stable with less stress and pressure, as well as having more confidence as an adult rather than being a mother all the time. They were more patient with their children, and spending time together became enjoyable. It had another positive knock-on effect on the children's behaviour, as some mothers witnessed their children becoming more relaxed, content, and happy.

The mothers believed the reduced parental time had positive effects on the quality of relationships by providing a balance and having breaks from each other. The break meant mothers could have adult conversations and use 'a different space' in their head, which was especially helpful when their young children were challenging. Having a break could also change lone mothers' behaviours, such as becoming more patient and less snappy with their children. As Emily described:

"It's much better to be respectable in work though you're not spending more time with them [children], you're not doing half the things you do with them when I was in JSA but I think it is better." [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

At the same time, having time apart was seen as positive for children, too, as some behavioural improvements were observed. Some children became less clingy and dependent since they started formal childcare (child-minder, nursery, and pre-school), and showed positive signs of being in care, such as enjoyment and development. The formal childcare was also perceived as an important opportunity for children to socialise with their friends and respect other people. As Mia described:

"It's [relationship with her child] really benefited that the most. Because she's developed loads, by going to the child-minder, interacting with other kids, and having an opportunity to miss me, where before she just didn't have that...I realised her relationship with me was a lot better. She was glad to see me at the end of the day. We could do things. We could start going out more, doing things better. I think all around, it just made us both generally happier, a lot happier." [One child aged two, works part-time]

Having breaks from each other then made the time together more valued than before. The employed mothers started plaining their weekends more actively, thanks to their improved finances. For self-employed mothers, the work in a way forced them to set a boundary between their work and life, in order to make sure there is time solely devoted to being with their children. Some positive changes were reported due to this, for example, some children were more appreciative of the time spent together, and became more affectionate with their mothers.

The mothers perceived their limited availability for their children as an opportunity to teach the notion of responsibility as well as being a good role model. For example, Emily considered being in work as an opportunity for disciplinary actions, teaching the notion of being responsible such as allocating the hoovering, or tidying up the mess. In some cases, mothers took this opportunity to teach independence. Amy, a lone mother working from home, taught her son who was very demanding and distracting that *'mummy cannot always be there.'* It was described as heart breaking, but something had to be taught. In other cases, being in work was believed as setting up a good role model for their children to follow and to be proud of, as Kim described:

"I want my children to look up to a parent, and to be able to say, you know what, my mum has really, she looked after all four of us, she's done really well, she built up her business, she did all these by herself, there was no help from anybody, and that's I want to be able to be a role model to my kids, and say, no matter what your dreams are, if you work hard, you can achieve that." [Four children aged eleven, eight, two, and two, works part-time]

It appears that the lone mothers expressed some contradictory sentiments about the change in their relationships with children pre and post moving into work. On the one hand, 'being there' and spending time with children was rationalised as a good thing, but on the other hand many said their relationships with their children improved whilst in work because they could 'get a break' from children and spend less time together.

However, moving to work also had some adverse impacts on the quality of relationship and mothers' well-being.

Deteriorated quality of relationship: playing multiple roles

Half of the mothers reported physical and emotional difficulties, resulting from trying to provide a similar level of care as when they were claiming benefits. It impacted on the quality of relationships with the children. Sofie, for example, described her multiple roles as *"a mum, dad, counsellor, doctor, nurse, financial advisor, homemaker"*, on top of her paid work. Many reported

emotional and physical difficulties which often contributed to deterioration in the quality of relationships, as follows:

- Being exhausted
- Being deprived of each other
- Negative behavioural changes
- Feelings of guilt

At the end of working day, mothers and children were said to be too exhausted to have quality time together, especially so for full-time workers, who saw their children only for an hour or so before their bed time. As Emily explained:

“When I come home at seven or eight o'clock is my son's bed time, so he just has a quick dinner with me, an hour each week is all I see him, my little one. It breaks my heart, but I am the main provider of the family, I have to do it. I lost out a lot of my children, since I am working, I don't have time with him at all.” [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

They felt they were missing out on their children's childhood, which was seen as unfair for the children as well. Sofie, a lone mother who gave up her full-time work and ended up claiming benefits again described that full-time work and childcare were an *'unsustainable'* combination for a lone mother, because they were exhausted, depressed, and deprived of each other. Some three home-based working mothers reported difficulties in setting up a boundary between work and childcare, where the mothers were physically with the children, but could not mentally be with them. In addition, when the mothers worked at home, children often expected their mother to be the same and maintain the same levels of care and attentiveness, such as baking cakes with them. This became an extra pressure for these mothers working at home.

The exhaustion caused some negative behavioural changes in the children as well as the mothers themselves. Some children had troubles at school, becoming clingy, needy, or not listening to their mothers. Other emotional stresses were also identified, such as being moody or becoming upset as their mothers started working or increased their working hours. Some children actually asked their mothers to stop working and be with them when they were dropped off at childcare, or to reduce their hours to work part-time, as Ava said:

“My older daughter prefers me to do part time job. She says, “I want you to be part time and get paid, but you know, that's not how it works.” [Two children aged twelve and four, works full-time]

Here tension developed between the mothers and the children. The children were fighting for their mother's attention and this could be '*manifest in tantrums*', while the mothers had no extra energy for their children for things like reading a story at night, or giving them the right attention. It would then have a knock-on effect on mothers' behaviour, such as being snappy and shouting at their children.

More importantly, it was also a source of guilt for the mothers, because they felt they could not be there when the children needed them most. Some mothers were worried that leaving the children in childcare would let them think they have been rejected by their mother, or there is something more important than them. The feelings of guilt and frustration became more severe when the mothers dropped their children off at childcare in the morning, when the mothers could not make school events or meetings, and when their children became ill. The situation was even harder for mothers working atypical hours. Jennifer, who worked on Sunday at a supermarket, expressed her feelings of guilt to her children, as she felt she was taking weekends away from the children, especially when she had to ask the older son to look after the younger siblings:

"[I feel] guilty, especially on Sunday, it's horrible, because we used to go to swimming, we go to the beaches or we would go to picnics. Weekends were the time I had with children, because they are at school, now I have taken up one of those days going to work." [Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time]

The feelings of guilt obtained by not being there enough for their children, often affected their overall happiness at being in work as well as the value of work itself, as Liz discussed,

"I could go like, yeah! I am back being a valued member of society, paying my tax and national insurance, but no, I don't, because [being in work] conflicts with my role. My understanding of my role is mum, really quite badly quite sad, because I am trying very hard not to let them feel that it's a sacrifice on their part, or on mine. I am trying hard to make it normal. But it's hard to realise that you are not there enough." [Two children aged five and four, works part-time].

While the quality of relationships between the mothers and the children were largely influenced by the transitions into paid work, the influence was also identified in their adult relationships as well.

4.2 Quality of informal relationships

The next two sections explore the quality of adult social relationships of the lone mothers. This analysis follows the conceptualisations of Due et al. (1999) where 'social relations' have two dimensions: formal and informal. Informal relations are structured based on a close family relationship and/or affection, while formal relations are made based on one's position and role in society, such as through one's professions and acquaintances. The conceptualisations embrace two domains of the PWI: relationships and community-connectedness. Cummins (1996) conceptualised the PWI domain of relationships based on the existence of 'intimacy' between individuals, including with parents, siblings, and friends. They will be considered as 'informal relations' as Due et al. (1999) indicated. In regards to one's sense of community-connectedness, Cummins (1996) did not propose any conceptualisation, but left it for individuals to decide. It was expected that the sum of individual conceptualisations would lead to the aggregate concept of community-connectedness. In this thesis, one's community-connectedness will be regarded as lone mothers' formal relationships. The analysis will, however, follow the mothers' narratives about their experiences and feelings regarding their informal and formal relationships and sense of belonging to community, as they combined together to affect their well-being, rather than trying to treat them as separate domains.

In analysing these two sections, the useful concept of 'sense of community' developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) will be applied. They proposed four components, stating that a "Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan and Chavis 1986, p.9). The four components can be listed as follows:

- 1) A sense of belonging to their community (membership)
- 2) Influences to or from the community
- 3) Fulfilment of needs
- 4) Shared emotional connections

This section will start by exploring the quality of lone mothers' informal relationships, especially under the context of limited finance and time outside of childcare whilst claiming benefits. It analyses whether the influence of contexts was strong enough to become a barrier for the mothers to develop a sense of belonging, based on the four components. Then it moves on to their experiences since moving into paid work, and sees how the transitions changed the dynamics of informal relationships.

Quality of informal relationships whilst claiming benefits

The context: limited finances and time outside of childcare

The financial shortage was a common difficulty whilst claiming benefits, as 15 out of 20 agreed on its negative impacts on their informal relationships. It limited their mobility by cutting off some of their family members, especially those who lived elsewhere and cost money to visit. As Emily indicated:

“My dad, he has lost out, because I couldn't afford to go and see him, he lived in [a location], which is a good two hours' drive, and it costs seventy pounds on the train, and he is not well off financially, so yeah, you do lose out meeting the rest of the family.”

[Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

Some six mothers reported losing groups of friends, because *‘having fun was expensive.’* With limited finances, they had to make choices where keeping a relationship close by attending family or friend events such as a Christmas lunch or coffee morning could not be prioritised. Finance was a good reason for the mothers to sacrifice their socialising and to prioritise more important aspects, such as heating their house, feeding the children, and meeting daily expenses. It was perceived as *‘the right thing to do.’* As Kate discussed:

“It did affect groups of friends we had. They all carried on going to all those groups we couldn't go anymore...you just couldn't go, because it's just too expensive. So it does stop you being able to join in with things, it just affects everything.” [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

The time and effort devoted to childcare also became a barrier. When the time was there, it was not theirs to use. Their daily routines were evolved around the needs of children and paying someone else for childcare because of socialising could not be justified with the fact that they were on benefits. As Lucy indicated:

“Even if I was to have a babysitter, I don't think being on Income Support, I wouldn't be able to relax knowing that the money that is paying for my night out was coming from the government, it wasn't my money. Yeah, so I haven't been out since she was born.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

With the circumstances, the mothers expressed feelings of being isolated, stuck, lonely, and even scary. As Chloe explained:

“It was just like a vicious circle, you are just going around the circle, you've got no money to go out, you got nobody to meet anybody, because I am single, single mum, so that side of it, that was quite scary.” [One child aged three, works part-time]

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), it is an important component to have a ‘shared emotional connection’ to feel a sense of belonging to a community, which tends to be built upon shared history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. The financial and time limitations restricted their opportunities to build ‘shared emotional connections’ with family and friends, which became a barrier to building a sense of belonging in their informal community.

Feeling supported

Given the difficulties, 15 mothers received at least one form of support from their parents, siblings, and/or friends. The other five had no help because of geographical distance, absence of social networks, or because the mothers wanted to be independent or were protective of their children. The support came in many forms, including: six months upfront rent, car purchase or repairs, lending a credit card for emergencies, paying for/or inviting for dinner twice a week, supporting the use of the internet, offering to move in together, food vouchers, and weekly grocery shopping left at the front door. Indirect support was also offered, for example, Mia’s grandparents and Linda’s parents allowed them to run up a few rent arrears as they were the landlords, and Emma’s brother employed her ex-husband so that he could pay the child maintenance. In addition, relatives often got involved in childcare, job applications, as well as offering emotional support, some sympathising with the mothers’ situation. As Sofie described:

“They saw how hard I was working, and they saw how I still struggling to make ends meet, and they saw how much it was affecting [my daughter] as well. They completely supported me. They said no, this is ridiculous. You can't carry on like this.” [One child aged three, not working]

In Suzy’s case, her parents helped her to become established in their local community, when she decided to move closer to them after the divorce. Suzy was offered help with moving house from people in her parents’ church. Suzy identified herself as belonging to the church community within a relatively short period of attendance:

“I go to church...they have been really helpful, giving us furniture, playing with children at the church, the priest has been really supportive, yes, in that way, in my church community.” [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

While parental and sibling support was most common, few felt supported and accepted by their neighbours, mainly based on a long history of relationships. For example, Amy has lived in her street for seven years building up strong relationships with her neighbours. They have witnessed Amy being in paid work before, as well as on benefit now, and she does not feel judged or isolated by her neighbours because they know her well. As Amy explained:

"[My neighbours] are very accepting of me as a person, rather than me as a single parent or me as someone on benefits." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

Having good neighbours also provided a sense of belonging for Kate. Kate owned a house where her mortgage was not covered by housing benefit, which left her little choice other than selling the house and renting somewhere cheaper. Instead, she gave up all other expenses to live in her neighbourhood where she and her daughter felt comfortable and safe. As Kate described:

"After my husband moved out, the chap next door retired, he came over and said, you know, don't be on your own, if something breaks or you need men or something, there is a problem, don't just cope with it by yourself, come over and we'll help you, don't try and manage. A lot of other neighbours did similar things." [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), a sense of belonging involves feelings that one fits in the group by acceptance from the group. The support offered by their family and neighbours were a source of feeling accepted and belonging.

Feeling needy and being a burden

While the support was described as grateful as well as a sign of sense of belonging, it also led the mothers to picture themselves as being needy and a burden. As Kate and Sofie said, it could get 'too much' sometimes for their family offering support and they also felt 'too old' to be asking, especially for financial help. As they discussed:

"My mum was supportive, she was fantastic, but it did get too much for her at some point during the year...I am in my thirties, it shouldn't be kind of hold it to [my mum] anymore, I shouldn't need [my mum] for things, but I do now." [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

"I felt like a burden to my family, I am a grown woman, and I should be able to make my own way in this world by now...but I have to ask my family, and I had to ask people for help. Because you don't, you don't survive. That is the bottom line. But it's very very hard

for twenty-six year old women to ask your grandparent who are living on pension, if they can spare thirty pounds here and there.” [One child aged three, not working]

The lone mothers interpreted this dynamic of relationship as unhealthy, depressing, and left them feeling helpless. In Lucy’s case, the pressure became a reason to cut off for a while, because she did not want her parents to think she contacted them just for money:

“My dad knew the struggles I was going through, for him to turn around, and be the first thing that comes out of his mouth when I call is, how much do you need? That will hurt, that was kind of painful to hear. So I think for a couple of months, I didn't call him, if there is any contact, then he called me. Just say he didn't think, oh, she is coming to us for money again. well, no, I've never come to you for money.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

The dynamic of relationships was seen as unhealthy because the help was not exchanged based on reciprocity. As McMillan and Chavis (1986) argued, a sense of belonging to a community can be obtained, not only when one’s needs are met, but also when one can positively contribute to the community and feel they have an influence. In these cases, getting one-sided help let the mothers feel a lack of contribution or influence in their informal relationships. As a result, it became a reason for the mothers to develop a poor picture of themselves as well as a barrier to developing a sense of belonging.

Feeling stigmatised and judged

While the mothers had poor self-perceptions, they were also very sensitive about how their family and friends would picture them. A total of 15 mothers reported stigma and judgements constructed against them, as the most substantive and noticeable experiences of being a benefit claimant. They expressed feelings of being *low, embarrassed, shameful, furious, failing, and stigmatised*. It was especially difficult when their family were from good backgrounds or had generally good occupations. As Sam and Liz discussed:

“I have a lot of cousins at my age, and they all do very well professionally, you know, nurses, helping their business, so they are all trying to do really well, and succeed, and you are being compared to them, they are also wondering, they just feel like they are doing better than you.” [One child aged seven, works part-time]

“I felt, may be my own imagination, stigmatised by being on benefit, I felt like I was a bit of a black sheep [in my family], because I was on benefit not actually out at work earning

money. It seemed to underline, you haven't done very much in your life." [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

The stigma and judgements were also found among their friends, especially from those in paid work. The mothers expressed their anger about being questioned on the reasons behind being on benefits, the attitudes of friends who pitied or felt sorry for them, or thought of them as *'taking the tax money'* or *'milking the system.'* As Kate stated:

"I still do feel quite angry about it, if you took anything, because there is quite a judgement about it as well. You do kind of, a lot of mums in the playground, I know really well, they are really good friends. But quite judgemental, I just, you feel really ashamed of it, and you kind of think, I didn't do anything wrong." [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

As McMillan and Chavis (1986) pointed out, a boundary creates 'membership' and a sense of belonging for the insiders and rejects the outsiders. The stigma and judgements the mothers identified became a boundary, where they felt like an 'outsider.' In responses, the mothers changed their attitudes towards family and friends in two ways: by withholding and fitting-in. Note their responses are not mutually exclusive, meaning some often reacted in both ways.

Responses to the stigma and judgements

Withholding information related to the 'benefit' status was the most common reaction, such as limiting certain topics of conversation like their financial difficulties, benefits being late or going up and down, or hiding or lying about the status itself. As Jennifer and Suzy argued:

"I kept that quiet from my parents, I would never told them that I have two pence left... that wasn't pleasant at all, very unpleasant, an awful feeling." [Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time]

"I talk to friends a little bit, but not that much, because I didn't want to constantly feel like I was moaning about money, didn't want them to feel like I was asking for money, because I wasn't." [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

The status of being a benefit claimant also became a reason for three mothers not to pursue or postpone an intimate relationship, as they felt their statuses made them *'embarrassed'* and *'shamed.'* As Sam stated:

"I wouldn't really want to look for partner when I am on Jobseeker's, because I feel embarrassed." [One child aged seven, works part-time]

Interestingly, even with their anger against the stigma and judgement, some tried to change their behaviour to fit into the expectations of their family and friends. For example, Liz tried to fit in her brother's idea of Christmas day, getting new clothes and having a meal in a private hotel. She found herself telling herself '*I can do it, I can do it*' inwardly, but knew it was not for her. It caused extra stress, which made her take anti-depressant medication again after coming off it for a while. In Jennifer's case, she found herself acting in two different personalities depending on groups of friends. When she was sitting at Jobcentre with one of her friends, who was also on benefits, she found herself grumbling about the system and bringing each other down, but she would suddenly become a very positive and active person, trying her best at everything when she was with other friends in paid work. She described that the two personalities were developed out of shame and embarrassment, and trying to meet the expectations of her friends.

While the mothers found strains in their informal relationships due to limited finance and time, and stigma whilst claiming benefits, moving into work brought some changes to their circumstances and feelings.

Quality of informal relationships whilst in paid work

Since moving into paid work, 15 mothers perceived their quality of informal relationships were generally improved, whilst two felt it became worse, and three felt no influence of paid work. The improvements were obtained through two factors. First, improved finance provided better self-perceptions, and second, they believed the status of being an employee (or not being a benefit claimant anymore to be specific) freed them from stigma and judgements.

Feelings from how I see myself- 'Work made me a better person'

Some twelve mothers identified financial improvements since moving to work, which positively affected their quality of informal relationships. They now could do something they would have sacrificed whilst claiming benefits, including socialising, visiting family living far away, and planning holidays or activities with their family or friends. For example, Emily had six year experience on and off benefits, until she got a permanent position a year ago. She described her first visit in the last seven years to parents who live abroad with proudness and excitement:

"This is the first family holiday we had last month, I was going back to see my parents. So that was the biggest I could afford for children to let them to see my parents, we left family back in [Her home country] as well, which they couldn't see, and that is one thing I will do as a parent." [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

Even when the financial improvements could not meet complete financial independency, it still helped their quality of informal relationships, as the mothers felt more relaxed and easier when other people were around, and had more control, as Suzy and Lucy indicated:

"[Mum] is much calmer knowing that I am back to how I want to be, and being an adult, not just relying on her, and it gives us a bit of space from each other, and I am a bit more, my self-esteem is better, and so that it makes, I've got enough mental space to ask her how she is, helps to get on, like two adults rather than a parent and a child." [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

"Relationships with family members, being back at work, I am so much more relaxed in myself. I suppose I should be more stressed really, but no, I am much more relaxed myself, so I think, I am easier for my family to be around." [One child aged two, works part-time]

What is more important about being in work than financial improvements was the fact that they earned the status. While most of them did not feel massive improvements in their disposable income, and remained financially dependent on in-work benefits as well as family's childcare supports, improvements in confidence and self-esteem were still identified in most cases. Some 15 mothers reported that being in work helped them become a better person. They expressed this in many ways, including: increased 'self-esteem', 'self-worth' and 'confidence', 'more head-up', 'standing on my two feet', 'doing something worthwhile', 'accomplishment', 'having pride of myself', 'being an adult in my own right', 'being a master of my own destiny', and 'being myself again'.

While the status of being in work positively affected the quality of informal relationships by changing their self-perceptions, it was done more through how the mothers perceived other people would evaluate them.

Feelings from how other people came to see me - 'being free from stigma and judgements'

Some seven mothers reported that being in work changed how other people came to evaluate them. It was a reflection of self through their family and friends' eyes. The status allowed the mothers to feel less of a burden to their family where the stigma and judgements were attached. Now the mothers felt less cautious about the things they can discuss with their family, as they relieved their family from worrying too much about them. As Suzy indicated:

"It's just easier to talk [my parents] about other things, rather than always being about surviving, what to do next, you know, sort of taking an interest in their lives, rather than

just being so bogged down in my own.” [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

The mothers also believed they earned respect about their work, and felt their family was proud of them leaving benefits. As Linda and Emma indicated:

“When I got a job, I got myself off the Income Support, my dad, he was particularly very proud, he would tell people, he's been telling people at work, my daughter got off the benefit in just over a year, he was really proud I've done it. So there was that motivation for me as well.” [Two children aged eight and four, works part-time]

“Now I've gone back to work. They've now sort of stopped judging me quite so much...Everyone is definitely treating me a lot better.” [One child aged one, works part-time]

It could even improve relationships with ex-husbands. Kate described how she felt so reliant on her child maintenance and her ex-husband tended to use it as a bargaining tool whilst claiming benefits. Now she was in paid work, although she still received the maintenance, she felt glad that he could not do that anymore because she was now standing on her own two feet.

The status of being in paid work not only changed the dynamics of relationships, but also improved their sense of belonging. In dealing with friends, the mothers felt more confident to reach out to old friends, being a part of them again, and there were more things to talk about, as Suzy and Kate mentioned:

“I am making more effort to reach out to my old friends, the ones that I've moved away from, phoning them, Skyping them, or texting, I think I definitely went through a phase of not doing that so much, I am trying again now, a bit more contact with them.” [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

“Friends were all working, not in the same situation, I kind of felt I am back on a part of them again, like I wasn't just really pathetic, and sit around and being poor all the time.” [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

The improved confidence also allowed two mothers to think about having an intimate relationship as they had previously avoided this whilst on benefit out of embarrassment.

However, while it is quite evident that moving into work relieved the mothers' worries of how their family and friends would judge them to some extent, it was still insufficient to end the problem. There is one case that showed how merely 'moving into (any) work' could have a different result.

Jennifer moved off Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and started working at a supermarket. It was a job she was not proud of and was not enjoying it, but she felt she had no choice but to take it, due to the combination of pressures from Jobcentre and applications being rejected. Even after moving to work, Jennifer was still lying about her job to some of her friends. In regards to the two personalities she developed earlier whilst claiming benefits, Jennifer now identified herself as having one and a half personalities, since she still could not share her feelings about the job with all of her friends. The mere transition to paid work did not change much for Jennifer's relationships with her friends. This shows that any type of paid work, in and of itself, does not completely free lone mothers from feeling judged even from within their own informal relationships.

Shift in the dynamics of informal relationships

While the contributions of being in paid work were identified by the majority of mothers in improving their quality of informal relationships, it cannot be seen as a mere improvement. It would rather be a shift in the dynamics of relationships to where the mothers were more comfortable in dealing with them or were more pleased with them. There are two pieces of evidence.

First, while the mothers believed they had now achieved some independency in paid work, by not getting cash, grocery, or rent payments from their parents and siblings anymore, they were still equally dependent in different ways, mainly with childcare.

The informal relations of mothers were playing an important role as a supporting network of childcare. The existence of supporting networks for 'emergency childcare' was in fact a key factor that made the transition easier. Some 15 mothers were still dependent on at least one form of support. Twelve of these were supported by their family, friends, and neighbours with childcare, one was dependent on her mother's credit, and two were getting both money and childcare. The supports were described as lucky and much appreciated, as Jessica expressed:

"If she [my child] is ill, and she can't go to the child-minder, that will cause problems. Well, my sister will look after her, because obviously I haven't got a partner that can look after her, so my sister can look after her on odd day." [One child aged two, works part-time]

On the contrary, the rest of the five mothers were suffering from lack of a supporting network, which made being in paid work physically harder than being on benefits, as Ava discussed:

"It's a bit frustrating and again it makes me feel it would be nice to have lots of friends to ask without pressures or parents." [Two children aged twelve and four, works full-time]

The fact that having a (informal) supporting network became a crucial factor for a smooth transition means that there was a remaining dependency or at least 'the need of dependency' even after moving to work.

However, interesting quotes here are the mothers' views on the remaining dependency and its impacts on the quality of relationships. The views were often mixed and contradictory: two negatively described the dependency, although the impact of dependency on their relationships was not necessarily bad, as Sam discussed:

"I rely on [mother], that could put a little bit of pressure on her, relying on her so much, but we have a brilliant relationship." [One child aged seven, works part-time]

The other 13 interpreted their dependency (especially with childcare) as justifiable or even a positive thing, despite the strain they put on their informal relations. It was believed as the right thing, something that made their parents happier, an inevitable choice of being in work, a way of having financial independency and making progress, and a way of developing a closer bond between their parents and children. As Suzy and Mia discussed:

"My mum is just keen to support me, to go work, she felt it as a right thing, for me mentally, and also for a life actually. So she is just determined to make it work, but I do worry that it's putting a lot of pressure on her." [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

"I think that I got to rely on them [mother and aunt] a lot more. They're more than happy to do it. I do feel like sometimes I'm annoying them. "Can you just watch her [my child] while I go to work?" None of them are bothered. I think they've seen it's made me happier. I've got like, much stronger bonds with them." [One child aged two, works part-time]

The mothers were more willing to swap their financial dependency on relatives whilst living on benefits, to have more dependency on childcare, whilst achieving (some) financial independency. It provides two important implications. One, being in work was a better reason for the mothers to be dependent on their informal relations, in any form if they had to. Two, work was not a route to standing completely unsupported on one's own two feet, at least for the lone mothers.

Moving into work changed the dynamics of relationships toward where the mothers became less available for their informal relations, and its impact on the quality of relationships was not seen as

negative. Since moving to work, the mothers had reduced time to see their family or friends, they felt they were letting their family or friends down, and socialising became harder, as Hana and Liz discussed:

"I've got good group of friends ... it's changed now I don't have time to do that. It's actually harder now, to have the social side than it was before." [One child aged five, works full-time]

"Our relationship changed a bit, my mum wants to spend time with us, which now I am more consciously aware of. She is like, I hardly see you!" [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

Interestingly again, most of them perceived the new dynamic not as something that lowered the quality of relationships, because it was an opportunity to get 'more organised' and have more 'quality time' with friends. They justified their unavailability, even when it could be hard for their family or friends, as Sarah, Amy, and Emma discussed:

"When you are working, people, the society as a whole, our society in the UK expects that you won't have time for anybody, work is seen as this, all-encompassing thing, and yes, hope you have to help your family, but you are not expected to then have time for taking in stray dogs...whatever, so I think that's why I am not so bothered about the fact that I am not so available, like when someone comes around." [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

"My family find it difficult that I haven't got the time now, because I am busy, I got children, work, and house. I don't always have the wanted two hours on a night, sit and talk to people like I did have before, and they find it hard now. Because I have my evenings free, I was able to spend, because I don't have that time anymore." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

"I feel like I'm sort of letting my friends down but then I know that it's better for her [my child], it's better for me, and if they were really friends then they'd just sort of adjust with it. I can make other time for them." [One child aged one, works part-time]

While the mothers' dependency and unavailability to family and friends were once described as negative, whilst claiming benefits, being in paid work seemed to provide them a good reason to interpret similar behaviour as an acceptable or justifiable thing.

The next question is how their formal relationships in the wider community got influenced by the transition to paid work.

4.3 Quality of formal relationships

This section discusses the quality of formal relationships made based lone mothers' positions and roles in society such as through professions and acquaintances, following the conceptualisations of Due et al. (1999). In doing so, the four components to a 'sense of community', developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986), will again be applied to examine the quality of formal relationships and their sense of belonging.

Quality of formal relationships whilst claiming benefits

Feeling involved

Unlike the informal relationships which were restricted by limited finances and time, lone mothers reported affordable and accessible socialising opportunities in their community. Some nine mothers were involved in various activities, such as play groups, gym classes, church, voluntary works, and online single mothers' groups. Their participations had different reasons: it was a source fun and enjoyment, a distraction from mundane routine, a source of adult company and socialising, a way of sharing similar experiences, a way to pay back to society, and sometimes a strategic investment for the future. These were opportunities to build 'shared emotional connections' with their community, most likely based on the commonality of being a mother. It was a source of a sense of belonging for the mothers, as also discussed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as one of the four components.

For example, Kim, a mother of twins, created a group in her local community, wanting to share parental experiences of twin mothers. As Kim stated:

"I really felt like I needed to do more socialising with people that knew the situation, having two babies at the same time." [Four children aged eleven, eight, two, and two, works part-time]

The voluntary work was also a major source of a sense of belonging for four mothers. As discussed by McMillan and Chavis (1986), one can have a stronger sense of belonging when they have resources to fulfil the needs of their community, especially with an influence over the community. For example, Sarah was involved in various voluntary works: a charity administrator, a class representative for her daughter, and a neighbourhood watch representative. It was her way of contributing to society, in return for having benefits. As Sarah indicated:

“When I comment being a member of society, it was more to do with the fact that when I was on benefits I was still active... I kind of remained as a functioning member of society all the way through.” [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

However, not all mothers were active enough to create or run a local community, and the majority were rather passive participants, who simply attended what seemed accessible to them. While the most accessible activities were based on the commonality of being a mother and revolved around children, some two felt a lack of variety. As Sofie and Hana stated:

“There are mothers and toddler groups, there are many baby groups...but it's hard because the conversation always ends up about children. That's the very thing I am trying to escape.” [One child aged three, not working]

“All you do is going to places to sing nursery rhymes, or go to soft play which is, it's my idea of hell, I do it, I make all the right noises and smile, there are horrible places...I would see other adults with children quite a lot, but all they talk about is their children.” [One child aged five, works full-time]

As McMillan and Chavis (1986) discussed, one's sense of belonging gets weaker when one's needs cannot be met or one cannot feel rewarded by being involved in them. A lack of variety among the accessible activities became a barrier to a sense of belonging for Sofie and Hana, because their need to be distracted from children could not be met within their community.

Feeling shamed and embarrassed

Whilst claiming benefits, the most common feelings the lone mothers reported were shame and embarrassment, which resulted in a huge drop in their confidence level. Some 14 mothers described their feelings in many ways: *guilty, shameful, jealous, embarrassing, helpless, reliant, furious, scary, isolated, lonely, and stuck*. The feelings were often mixed as well, as Sofie on one hand felt unfair and furious about not being able to freely be a stay home mother and enjoy her children like other married mothers do, but on the other hand felt that the British public should not pay for her relationship failure.

The drop in their confidence and self-esteem surely impacted on the quality of their formal relationships as well as their sense of belonging to the community. Sometimes it was feelings of jealousy that made their socialising uncomfortable, as Clare discussed:

"I would feel like a bit jealous, not jealous, but bit of a stab, when I meet other parents, mothers at play groups, and they work, I felt like, urgg, I get a bit, urggg. There is a little dig in my side." [One child aged three, works part-time]

At other times, it became an obvious barrier for the mothers to actively participate in community activities. For example, Ava wanted to use her PhD degree to contribute to society by helping out a local survey project while claiming benefits. But, with her low confidence, she felt she was not able contribute anything to society, which discontinued her involvement in the project. As Ava described:

"I tried to be involved in things, but I think you start kind of losing confidence and feeling that you're not ready to do anything." [Two children aged twelve and four, works full-time]

Low confidence was also a barrier for Sam. She had spare time to participate in local classes and groups, but her own dissatisfaction with 'benefit status' made her not want it. As Sam stated:

"There was opportunity to socialise if you wanted to, because the time is there, and there is stuff to do in the community, but I feel, I just didn't want, that's not what I wanted, when you just accept your situation, I didn't want to accept it, I wanted to not face it." [One child aged seven, works part-time]

Having poor self-perceptions indeed became a barrier for a sense of belonging, in a way that they cannot positively contribute to the community or feel they have an influence (McMillan and Chavis 1986).

Feeling stigmatised and judged

The feelings of shame and embarrassment were not only captured within themselves, but were also felt through the stigma and judgements of a wider public, as a general view of society. As Lucy and Ava told:

"Low, embarrassed, I think there is a real stigma to be a single parent, and I think everyone gets tarred with the same brush, like you had a baby just for that you can get hand-outs, wow, no, that's not what happened at all." [One child aged two, works part-time]

"There's been this attempt to leave things towards assuming that people who were on benefits achieving to be on benefits rather than that they are having to claim benefits because they're in a bad situation." [Two children aged twelve and four, works full-time]

Among those, a few reported they were in fact 'being othered' by people in their community, due to their status of being a benefit claimant. This became a serious barrier for their community involvement as well as their sense of belonging. For example, Emma explained she felt unwelcome and judged in her daughter's play group. As she said:

"I found people looked down on me. Then I'm at home with my daughter, I might not do anything, I don't deserve it. I used to go into a playgroup with my daughter on a Monday morning and a couple of the mums there would work and they'd sit there and don't socialise with all the mums who were at home." [One child aged one, works part-time]

The stigma, judgements, and sometimes direct rejections the mothers encountered have led them feel like an 'outsider', just as McMillan and Chavis's (1986) concept of 'the boundary' creates 'membership' (sense of belonging) for the insiders and rejects the outsiders. It resulted in changing the mothers' attitudes towards their formal relations in two ways - by holding back and resisting (othering).

Responses to the stigma and judgements

While the mothers' attitudes of withholding were more common towards their informal relationships, it also appeared towards their formal relations. They tried not to expose the 'benefit status' to their acquaintances. As Liz stated:

"I am more comfortable of saying I am a lone parent, rather than I am a benefit person, because there is certain kudos attached to the label, and we are very good at doing labels as people." [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

Being dissatisfied with the stereotypes of '*people on benefits*' led some mothers to try and differentiate themselves. This behaviour is called 'othering' according to Dervin (2011), a process of imposing cultural elements to explain people's behaviour, which in turn draws a boundary between sameness and difference in order to affirm one's own identity. It differentiates between in-group and out-group, and between the self from others to reinforce and protect the self (Dervin 2011). This 'boundary' creates 'membership' for the insiders while rejecting the outsiders, which is also an important component to having a sense of belonging (McMillan and Chavis 1986).

The majority of lone mothers were sensitive about the stereotypes, stigma, and judgements attached to '*single mothers on benefit*.' Some 16 mothers described how their behaviours and attitudes are not fitting into the stereotypes. They believed general descriptions of '*people on benefit*' were people sitting back and doing nothing for society, they were drinkers, smokers, drug users, '*milking the benefit system*' and/or being on benefit as a life style choice. They felt stereotyped and stigmatised as members of this 'benefit community.' But they defined

themselves as a '**deviant**', since they were people who unfortunately ended up being on benefit as a temporary cushion, they had worked hard prior to '*the benefit period*', they tried hard to get out of the situation, and they did not drink, smoke, or take drugs.

Their deviancy expressed a strong desire to not be involved in communities which had anything to do with being on benefits. The 16 mothers had thus drawn a boundary between themselves and others claiming benefit. As Jennifer described:

"You feel a lesser citizen. You feel less confidence enjoying a conversation with new people, because they will instantly... think, scrounger, drug taker, smoker, drinker, which I am none of, and I didn't want to be thought of that way. So you feel less confident in being able to meet new people, because they will ask, and there is stigma attached to." [Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time]

Two mothers found their deviancy from their own ways of contributing to society, in the exchange of receiving benefits. As Hana discussed:

"You hear a lot about people in the media who sat around on the benefits all the time, and all they do is drink and smoke, and bullied the state money basically, I didn't want to be one of those people, I didn't want something for nothing, so me volunteering was me giving as much as I could back, well at the same time doing what was best for my daughter, so I felt I definitely given it back I don't feel guilty for being on Income Support." [One child aged five, works full-time]

Whilst claiming social assistance benefits, more than a half of the mothers reported low quality of formal relationships and sense of belonging, impacted by low self-esteem, confidence, and social stigma. The question is whether moving into work turned out to be a solution for these issues, and if so, how far, and in what sense.

Quality of formal relationships whilst in paid work

Since moving into work, 13 mothers reported improved quality of formal relationships as well as a sense of belonging, while five mothers felt it deteriorated, and three felt no influence of paid work. The improvements were said to stem from two angles: one from the status of being in work, and the second from the things allowed by the particular nature of the job.

Having 'a' job

The mothers' excitements were expressed in relation to earning the status of being in paid work, as Clare discussed:

"The knowledge that I am working again, it's not so much what I do at work, it's the fact I have a job, and I love the idea of I am an employee again, I am working for an organisation, a company. It's that really, it's not adult conversion, that's secondary I would say, the fact that I am working again." [One child aged three, works part-time]

The status was a source of confidence, which made the mothers feel they had more to contribute to society. As mentioned above, the feeling that one has an influence over a community makes one's sense of community stronger (McMillan and Chavis 1986), just as Emily felt that she now had a better relationship with her community because she could help society. As Emily stated:

"Back again, I'm back in the community, absolutely I am...it's an improved relationship with the community, with my children, with myself, much better." [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

While the status of being in work improved their self-perceptions, the mothers also identified positive changes on how other people see them. For example, Emma, who once reported she was 'being othered' by mothers in the play group, now felt more welcomed since she moved off benefits. As Emma described:

"They talk to me now they let their children hang their time with other people. It's not quite as, they'd be on one side of the room and everybody else on the other side." [One child aged one, works part-time]

The most beneficial aspect of moving into work for the mothers was, after all, the fact that they made 'an escape from the status of being a benefit claimant.' Most of them no longer felt the need to hide or lie about their status, limit certain topics of conversation, or feel afraid of meeting new people, since they were at least doing 'what other normal people' do. As Hana and Jessica discussed:

"I don't feel any better or worse, now I feel satisfied that I am not having to claiming benefits...I am not embarrassed to tell people what I do, I don't think people will going to judge me, in the same way I would say would have done before." [One child aged five, works full-time]

"[Being in work] affected my happiness, because if anyone else asks me what I do, I can tell them I do a job, you know, rather than, oh, I just claim benefits. That gives me a confidence boost." [One child aged two, works part-time]

As half of the mothers obtained improved quality of relationships and sense of belonging through better judgements of other people, it seems evident that one's evaluation of self-worth is largely dependent on their reputation, and the mothers' transitions into work seem to solve this issue to some extent.

Unfortunately, however, moving to work was not a one-size-fits-all solution, especially when the stigma the mothers experienced whilst claiming benefits was severe. The stigma left a trauma behind for Mary and Amy - a self-withdrawal. After having suffered from stigma and judgements, they changed their values not to seek an approval outside of their informal circle (old friends and neighbours) or to expand their formal relations through work. As Amy indicated:

"I have had so much grief from people judging and having their own opinion when they don't know enough, that I don't seek approval from anybody outside of my circle. So no, it (the community) doesn't particularly play any role." [One child aged two, works part-time]

As McMillan and Chavis (1986) discussed, when one is rejected once by one's community, the trauma lasts until the community can provide enough benefits to countervail the harms done by the rejection. Mary and Amy could not find a particular benefit to be involved in or to expand their relationships that would countervail their previous suffering. These cases show how long the impacts of stigma can last, to the extent where a simple transition into paid work cannot be a solution to their quality of formal relationships and sense of belonging to their community.

Having 'the' job

While the status of being in work had some positive effects, the quality of formal relationships and sense of belonging were still largely dependent on the nature of the jobs they moved into: having a good location and good people to work with, and having part-time jobs.

Good location and people

By moving to work, some mothers reported that they had a better chance to make new formal relationships. For four mothers, having a good social life was one of the main reasons for getting a job from the beginning, as they felt lonely and isolated when on benefits. While they were worried at the beginning of the work, no one in the sample expressed stress regarding their current relationships with colleagues; rather they enjoyed the adult company and conversations in work.

A few cases of expanded social relationships and sense of belonging were reported by those who were working in a good location and had good people to work with. As Wilson (2000) argued, work became a source of social integration that promoted community participation for these mothers. It became possible, for five mothers who worked in a local community centre, nursery, shop, and hospital, by having adult conversations with local people. Even though the most of the relationships stayed at superficial levels, the interaction still provided a sense of belonging to the community for the mothers. As Suzy described:

“I am working at the hospital in town, I feel very connected to the community, I speak to patients on the phone, and that's really good for me, and all the different people that work there, a lot of them live nearby, go to Pilates class in the town, I just feel like I've met a lot more people.” [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

Certain types of work also helped their sense of belonging, by increasing the chances to socialise with the people they worked with. Liz's work in a cleaning team became her main source of socialising and sense of belonging. As Liz stated:

“Instead of having social life in Facebook, I now got a bit of social life through work. I can talk about different things, we can have the music on, sing loudly, it's almost like, I am legitimately allowed to be sociable with other people.” [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

As a slightly different example, Kate, a home-based child-minder, felt a sense of belonging by receiving support from local child-minders. Getting support from fellow local child-minders affirmed her membership of the group, even when the nature of work did not necessarily provide further socialising opportunities.

The worrying fact is, however, that these improvements were made through the particular nature of the job, which means it would not necessarily improve when the nature does not allow the opportunity. While the above five mothers enjoyed widened social networks through work, the other six equally faced constraints. Their locations of work and home became barriers, as they worked in an isolated setting, from home, or relocated to an unfamiliar place. As discussed by McMillan and Chavis (1986), a lack of commonality and shared experience lowered one's sense of belonging. On top of that, socialising was still being postponed or sacrificed due to the responsibilities of childcare.

For example, Ava relocated herself in a Welsh speaking area for her work, which in turn made her and her family isolated. Ava decided not to send her daughter to a local secondary school because she did not want her daughter to pick up Welsh. Ava felt her sense of belonging was deteriorated

by relocation to a place where she did not want to share the culture (language). It also supports the findings of Voydanoff's (2001) research on family-work-community relationship, that geographic and residential mobility can disrupt social connection and lead to a closure in social networks. On top of that, Ava did not consider her work or colleagues as her community, because she did not have much chance to socialise with them due to childcare responsibilities. Similarly, Linda's work also did not provide any further sense of belonging, because she worked in an isolated area and lived somewhere she found very few single mothers in. In Ava and Linda's cases, the nature of paid work did not create any new relationships, but became a disruption to their quality of formal relationships and sense of belonging.

Being in part-time jobs

Another factor that influenced the quality of relationships after moving into work was the working hours. Three mothers reported improvements, thanks to their part-time posts (19 hours or less a week). Entering those part-time jobs did not stop them from participating in their community activities. Clare, for example, described that she was now involved in her play group and mother group as much as when she was on benefit, thanks to her part-time job.

An adverse case was shown by Hana and Sarah. It is of course not a new idea that women tend to decrease their community participations as they start paid work, and that's what happened to them (Brannen and Moss 1998, as cited in Voydanoff 2001; 1622). For example, Sarah identified herself as an active member of society whilst claiming benefits, participating in various voluntary works and communities, including: an administrator of a charity, a neighbourhood watch representative, a class representative for her child, a member of gym classes, and a member of a choir. Now the charity administration became her paid work, but she gave up a huge part of the rest of the voluntary works, because she felt more legitimate reasons to focus on the paid work than the non-paid work. As Sarah indicated:

"[Community involvement] is worse now, because I have to be at home from nine thirty to two thirty, four days a week, I suppose if anything has made me more isolated, but if I was going to an office and meeting with every other people, that would be different, it's just because I am working from home on my own, and that would be the same if I was not a single parent." [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

Hana, a full-time administrator for a law firm, could no longer make spare time to mingle with other parents in the school. The long working hours, on top of housework and childcare, negatively impacted her sense of belonging to the school community. It physically limited her from having 'shared emotional connections' with other mothers at school. As Hana stated:

“Less than I was before, being a single parent in a school and working, I don't get to see the other parents in the school...I just don't have that familiarity of saying hello to them when we drop off or pick up.” [One child aged five, works full-time]

The fact that an improvement can only be achieved when the particular nature of jobs allowed it shows how easily this improvement can be disrupted when the nature changes.

Conclusion

The lone mothers' transitions into paid work contributed to making improvements to some extent, in regards to the quality of their relationships with children, and with formal and informal relations. Improved relationships with children were reported by half of the mothers, as a result of improved finances, having a break from each other, and increased confidence. Some negativity also existed for the other half, due to exhaustion, feelings of guilt and unhappiness, and negative behavioural changes of children while the mothers played multiple roles at home as well as at work.

While the mothers suffered from a lack of money and time outside of childcare whilst claiming benefits, their informal relationships, family and friends, played important roles for supporting them with finance, childcare, and emotions. But these supports often became a strain and a reason for the mothers to picture themselves as a burden. It was also grounds to be stigmatised or judged, even by their close relations. Overall, the transitions to paid work improved the quality of informal relationships for 15 mothers, in three ways: the improved finance allowed the mothers to feel like they had achieved some level of independency from their family and friends; their confidence and self-esteem got better; and most importantly, the mothers felt free from stigma and judgements by leaving the status of being a benefit claimant.

Unlike the cases of informal relationships, where a lack of money and time became a strain, a few affordable and accessible ways of building good quality formal relationships through local community activities were reported whilst claiming benefits. However, they tended to be revolving around children, and it often limited mothers' choices and desires to be distracted from it. In addition, the social stigma and judgements identified within the circle became a cause of low confidence, shame, and embarrassment. Unlike dealing with family and friends where the mothers tried to fit-in, they withheld the 'benefit' status or postponed making new relationships, while differentiating themselves from the stereotypes of 'people on benefits.' Both strategies the mothers employed to deal with their informal and formal relationships damaged their well-being, in two different ways. The 'withholding' and 'othering' that the mothers employed to deal with

their formal relationships became a source of feeling '*lonely*' and '*isolated*', while the strategy of fit-in caused extra stress for the mothers to be an expected member of their family and friends.

As a result of moving to paid work, 13 mothers reported improved quality of formal relationships and sense of belonging, thanks to the status of being in work and other benefits allowed by certain natures of the job. However, these improvements are still limited. Firstly, because the improved confidence and self-esteem are not a mere result of moving to work, but also a result of the removal of benefit status. Secondly, quality formal relationships were reported only when the nature of jobs allowed it.

Chapter 5: Use of non-obliged time and allocation of leisure

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis to address one of the less-researched aspects of lone mothers' lives - the use of spare time and allocation of leisure, during the transition to paid work. It will start by introducing the traditional and current definitions of leisure, and how and whether the leisure activities described by the lone mothers fit into the current notion of leisure. It then discusses their time availability and restrictions, and changes in the types of leisure activities after moving to work, and what it meant to the lone mothers.

What is perceived as leisure?

The traditional definition of leisure became problematic with its construction on a notion based on 'non-work' or 'antithesis of work', which were interpreted as activities that are freely chosen and intrinsically motivated in non-obligated time (Lewis 2003; Quinn 2013). The traditional notion met its end, with the absence of two sensitivities. One is a gendered notion of 'free choice', because women do not often have free choice in their use of time in the traditional non-work zone (home). The second is an absence of psychological state of mind, such as enjoyment and self-expression. In order to enhance the sensitivities of the notion to gender and psychology, Lewis (2013, p. 345) defines the concept of leisure with three components:

- 1) Non-obliged time
- 2) Activities that are freely chosen
- 3) Activities associated with a sense of enjoyment

The intention is to use Lewis's (2003) conceptualisation for the analysis of the leisure of the 20 lone mothers while making a transition to paid work.

In order to discuss the three components, it is useful to introduce a current debate over a blurred distinction between leisure, work, and care, and how far the notion of leisure should be applied (Lewis 2003; Perrons 2000; Quinn 2013). Perrons (2000) provides an example about a blurred boundary, when paid work becomes a source of socialising and self-esteem as well as a break from housework for working mothers, or when childcare can be enjoyable because they are having fun together. Here, Lewis (2003) and Quinn (2013) draw a boundary for leisure when an activity meets all of the three components above. According to Lewis (2003), paid work can be as purely pleasurable and enjoyable as leisure, but this is due to other reasons as well, such as a sense of achievement, self-esteem, or value placed by society. In addition, it is very hard to

separate one's paid work from the extent of obligation and constrained choice. Therefore, in this case, paid work is short of two components to be a pure leisure activity. The intention is to adopt this somehow 'strict' conceptualisation to analyse the ideas of the leisure of the lone mothers.

Use of non-obliged time

In order to explore the lone mothers' use of leisure, they were asked two questions; whether they had leisure time for themselves while making their transition from being on social assistance benefits to paid work, and if so, how they used it. The answers were varied. Some activities were easily predictable and explainable with the traditional definition, whereas others raised some new discussions of the current notion of leisure.

The activities shared in common were watching TV and DVDs, listening to music, talking to family and friends, spending time with children, walking around town, shopping, meditation, and going swimming or to the gym. The activities for leisure sometimes expanded beyond the common ones, such as taking educational courses, doing voluntary work, housework, and paid work. For example, two mothers described their housework as leisure, like cleaning and tidying up, because they enjoyed them. In Amy's case, when she is done with cleaning her own house, she extends it to a friend's house. The cleaning activity is also her coping mechanism. It supports the findings of Quinn's (2013) research on the role of leisure activities that serve as coping mechanisms. Here, although the distinction is blurred, housework is a leisure activity for Amy because it is done in her non-obliged time, freely chosen (especially cleaning for her friend's house), and out of enjoyment.

Paid work, education, and voluntary works in non-obliged time

Paid work was seen as leisure for two mothers, Kim and Emma, because the nature of their jobs was relaxing and enjoyable. As Kim described:

"My leisure time now is when I am at work, that's my only time away from the children, which is a way of my leisure time because it's quite relaxing, and I really enjoy it." [Four children aged eleven, eight, two, and two, works part-time]

The enjoyment and relaxation that were given to Emma and Kim made them consider their jobs as leisure. It also supports the findings of Perrons (2000) that paid work can 'rest' women, as a source of socialising and self-esteem. However, Emma and Kim's idea of leisure cannot be defined as leisure for two reasons. First, while their paid work could be as enjoyable and freely chosen as other leisure activities, the activities were done in obliged time, which does not meet the first

component of leisure developed by Lewis (2003). Second, considering work as leisure may have come out of their low expectations. This idea of leisure was pictured with how the rest of their day after work was packed with housework and childcare. Then the paid work could have become an alternative concept of leisure for Emma and Kim, because that was the only time they had away from children or housework.

What is quite unfit in the traditional definition and currently not being discussed in the new definitions, is considering educational courses and voluntary work as leisure. A total of eleven mothers were using their non-obliged time to be involved in self-learning/educational activities or voluntary work for different reasons. They were a means of distraction from boredom, a sense of achievement, investment for their future careers, refreshing work experiences, and a way of paying back to society in exchange for the social assistance benefits. These activities were done in their non-obliged time, and were intentional, motivated, and satisfying. However, they cannot be interpreted as leisure, because they were not purely for enjoyment or pleasure, as conceptualised by Lewis (2003) and Quinn (2013). For example, Amy is currently teaching herself crochet in her non-obliged time, but, it is also a business item for her future.

“At night, when the children go to bed, that's my time. I do a lot of crochet, this needling blankets, which I am doing, I am actually teaching myself, I have been doing for a couple of months now, because that's going to be something else I will be selling on [an online shop].” [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

As another example, Hana used her non-obliged time for a voluntary work to get some refreshed work experience, and preparing her for the time when she can be in the labour market.

“I had small amount of leisure time, when my daughter was seeing her father, I used to spend it volunteering most of the time, I felt that that was best thing for me to be doing when I went back to work, then I at least I had some current working experience.” [One child aged five, works full-time]

Liz also got involved with several voluntary works in her non-obliged time as a means of distraction, but also for productive and meaningful use of her time being on a social assistance benefits.

“I got involved with time bank, run through [a local organisation]...a great way of us getting out about, stopping me being lonely, mixing with other adults in productive, creative in our time.” [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

All of these educational activities and voluntary works were done in their non-obliged hours, but they cannot be defined as leisure under the strict conceptualisation of Lewis (2003), because there was a mixture of other purposes embedded in the activities.

Illegitimacy to have fun, or just an alternative leisure

Among the various activities engaged in by the lone mothers in their non-obliged time, there was a consistent emphasis on 'productive' activities, such as education or voluntary work, rather than enjoyment-centred activities. This tendency in their discussions may imply three very interesting aspects.

First, some differences in their tone are identified when the lone mothers describe their two different types of leisure - 'productive' activities and enjoyment-oriented activities. Whilst being on social assistance benefits, the mothers dominantly discussed their engagements in purposeful, productive, and meaningful activities such as education and/or voluntary work. More importantly, there was reluctance identified in describing the use of non-obliged time for enjoyment-centred activities, such as watching TV, or walking around charity shops. These activities were described with terminology that implied unproductivity or dissatisfaction, such as '*doing nothing*', '*just being lonely*', or '*bumbling around*.' The lone mothers tried to prove that they were using their non-obliged time for 'society-valued activities', which can be seen as more legitimate, meaningful, and productive, especially while being on benefit. There were hidden pressures on doing something 'useful.' Admittedly, it could be argued that the lone mothers were just being sensitive to be productive because they were interviewed and questions may embed some hidden pressures on how they used their own free time. But equally, they could have been pressured by the social stigma and judgements they suffered while being on benefits, which then led them to be sensitive to prove that they achieved some good use of time, rather than merely getting help.

Second, when the mothers discussed their leisure whilst being in work, three pointed to their paid work as a source of fun. Two of them described the nature of the job as relaxing and enjoyable, while the other one indicated that she was now legitimately allowed to be sociable with other people. For these three mothers, the paid work may have allowed them 'the legitimacy to have fun', or at least 'the legitimacy to discuss about having fun.' The paid work may have relieved the mothers from the pressure (or stigma and judgements) to be productive, to some extent, as they earned the status of being in paid work as well as the right to have fun.

Third, after moving into paid work, as a direct opposite of leisure activities described whilst being on benefits, the lone mothers' use of non-obliged time were dominantly described as enjoyment-centred activities. It may be for two reasons. First, simply because the majority (seven out of

eleven) who engaged with education or voluntary work stopped such activities after they started paid work. Second, similar to considering paid work as an alternative to leisure, they may have had low expectations about the quality or quantity of leisure, because the time and space available for their leisure were scarce, This would then lead them to pick whatever time they had left with being away from children or housework (which will be discussed further under 'types of leisure allowed').

Then, how is this tendency to pursue purposeful activities influenced by their transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work?

Restrictions and types of leisure whilst on benefit

Being on social assistance benefits, ten mothers agreed to having a good amount of 'spare time', where they could squeeze their leisure activities in. Some three felt that they had plenty of their own spare time to the extent of having '*too much to handle*', and seven discussed having some amount of time, but had to make extra effort to secure it. The rest of the ten mothers described having very limited time for themselves due to various restrictions, such as finance, housework, and childcare responsibilities.

Restrictions on money and space

The lone mothers mainly faced restrictions on money and space (mobility). The non-obliged time was generally available, to the extent that it was problematically too much for three mothers. They suffered from a lack of structure and productivity in their routine, as Emily and Sam described:

"Leisure time when you are in JSA you are home, morning to evening to night...I had too much of time in hand, again it was a problem, because I'd get bored and I'd be stressed out and I'd be depressed. I'm doing nothing constructive." [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

"You just feel like you've got nothing to do, there is only small, you can clean the house when your child is at school, so I felt worthless, and there is nothing to do in the house." [One child aged seven, works part-time]

The restrictions became a barrier for the mothers to use their own non-obliged time in the way they wanted. The lack of spare funds restricted their mobility as well as socialising opportunities, which in turn restricted her relationship. As Sofie indicated:

“If I had more money, I can afford a baby sitter, and then I can have more leisure time, and then I might be able to meet someone, and if I can meet someone, maybe I can find a partner, and if I have a partner, maybe I can have more help with juggling work and child.”

[One child aged three, not working]

The lone mothers also suffered from space and mobility restrictions, where they had young children to look after at home, mostly as their sole responsibility. It also supports the findings of Quinn (2013) that there is little time available for mothers to be at home in self-determined ways. As Jessica and Suzy described:

“No [I do not have leisure time], because I always got my daughter, so everything will have to evolve around her. Because I am a single mum, I haven’t got anyone to look after her for few hours so I could go out and do something.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

“I get the evenings, but it doesn't really feel like leisure, it more just feels like, kind of collapsing the heat being really tired, or just feeling a bit lonely, it's not nice sociable activities. So I tend to be sort of fed up to, I don't know, do something nice, probably just stick the TV on.” [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

In one case, Jennifer’s responsibility did not end with childcare or housework, because she considered her JSA commitments of job searching as full-time job, where she was expected to spend all of her extra hours on it.

“Sit on the computer and look for jobs, and that's four days a week. Then one day off, in the middle of the week was the one I did all the stuff like, washing up, ironing, cleaning, and all. It wasn't so much of leisure time where I would do lunch with my friends. No, it wasn't structured as it is now”[Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time]

Such restrictions allowed the mothers to engage with certain types of activities in their non-obliged hours.

Types of leisure activities allowed while being on benefit

The restrictions on money and space allowed very limited types of leisure activities; mostly these were purposeful, informal, and fragmented kinds. As mentioned above, eleven lone mothers had purposeful use of non-obliged time through self-learning, education, and voluntary work in which they could justify their time away from children. These were the only regular and formal¹⁵ uses of

¹⁵ Formal leisure activities are defined as organised or structured based on rules and goals, often including a formal leader, coach or instructor. The informal activities are spontaneous with little or no planning ahead (King et al. 2009).

non-obliged time the mothers had, apart from one exception. Sam infrequently went London with her children to see her sister. However, in Sam's case, although her trip was a freely chosen and enjoyable activity in the non-obliged time, as discussed by Lewis (2003), it was still very purposeful leisure with a legitimate reason, and not completely free from her childcare responsibility.

Other types of leisure activity were very informal. Some were regular and informal, such as going to the gym four times a week, Friday DVD night at home, and single mothers' group meetings. They were mostly done by those who had informal and regular childcare support from the children's father and/or the parents of the lone mothers. The other activities were irregular, informal and fragmented into pieces, such as watching TV, listening to music, and reading books in the evenings when the children were in bed, going around local charity shops, and cleaning when the children were in school or care. Some three mothers had leisure mixed with their childcare. The mothers visited their friend's house with children for a bottle of wine or tea, while looking after their friend's children and their own children together. Although there is a blurred boundary between care and leisure, the activity cannot be seen as enjoyment-oriented leisure, because they were not completely free from childcare, which also affected their choice of activity, time, and space.

The next question is how their use of non-obliged hours is transformed as they start paid work.

Restrictions and types of leisure whilst in paid work

Entering paid work changed many aspects of the lone mothers' lives, in regard to their resources, time availability, and space. As a result, the majority, 14 mothers experienced decreased amount of time for leisure, as well as a decrease in its quality. The rest of the six mothers enjoyed better quality of leisure time based on a structured routine, financial resources, and childcare support.

Time, space, and money restrictions

The lone mothers encountered different, and often more types of restrictions, when moving to paid work. The major difference was, unsurprisingly, time restriction, as 14 mothers reported decreased amount of non-obliged time and its quality. They simply did not have spare time for themselves after paid work, housework, and childcare on their own. For example, Sofie had to give up her full time work and made her way back to Income Support, because her life in work became financially and physically unsustainable. Sofie found herself and her daughter getting into more debts and became exhausted. She described:

"If I wasn't at work, I was looking after her. That was my life. Work or my daughter, as a single parent, you don't time to yourself." [One child aged three, not working]

The circumstances of mothers in part-time were not so different. Jessica, a support worker working 22.5 hours a week, found not much spare time could be squeezed in between her paid work, housework and childcare.

"Not really, because I am only home at Tuesday and Thursdays, I catch up with my washing, pay my bills, do shopping. I suppose there are weekends but again, because I am a single mum, when I am at home, [my daughter] is with me all the time, so, there is not really any leisure time." [One child aged two, works part-time]

Space restriction was a bigger barrier for mothers who worked from home, due to difficulties in setting a boundary between being a mum, a worker, and just themselves. Kate, a child-minder working up to 55 hours a week, described that her long working hours took up her own time as well as family time.

"To get more of [leisure time] could be quite good, bit of time for just mine, may be a bit more of time for just me and my own children, because we are together, but I mind children all week." [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

As another example, Sarah, a charity manager working from home, found the same space barrier to securing her own leisure time, because the job often goes beyond the set hours.

"I've been really working hard trying do just my hours, but...there always going to be the times when I have to work outside of my hours." [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

Money was perceived as a solution to the space restrictions, for example, by hiring someone for childcare. However, in most cases, they still could not afford or justify the costs of childcare with the level of income currently coming in. As Kim discussed:

"I am definitely sacrificing me-time, but that's mainly, if I need me time, it means it's come at cost, might have to get somebody to come on and look after the children which means I have to pay a babysitter, so you know, it's things you've got to wait, like is it worth me doing something or having to myself." [Four children aged eleven, eight, two, and two, works part-time]

The financial issues themselves were still a barrier for pursuing leisure time, even after moving into paid work. For example, the cost of fuel was a barrier for Suzy to pursue a leisure activity in a way she wanted.

“Not really [have leisure time], I quite often just go to bed early, really, it's partly because I can't still afford to heat the flat very warm, so I just go to bed because it's nice and warm rather than sitting around the living room.” [Two children, three year old twins, works part-time]

Better leisure with resources and structure

On the other hand, the other six mothers reported they enjoyed better quality of non-obliged time in paid work, based on their structured routine, improved finances, informal childcare support, or free time at costs. Four of them considered their leisure now more valued and structured. They were satisfied with the way it worked out, regardless of the physical amount of time reduced. As Mary and Lucy described:

“It is more valued time than, just been on [having] all the time in the world, just sit and do nothing. Now I sort of value my time, when I get to sit do nothing for half an hour, it's lovely.” [Three children aged thirteen, five and four, works part-time]

“I am better with my time management now. I use my time more wisely. It's all because of that structure [provided by] going into work.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

The quality of leisure was especially increased when there were material resources and childcare supports. Mia sent her daughter to her mother's house every other weekend, and now she felt she could actually do something for her during those nights

“I can actually like go out and do something with it, because I have got a bit of cash to be able to go out. It's probably still the same amount of time, but it feels like more, because I don't just sit in the house like I would be.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

For the other two mothers, the quality of leisure was achieved with extra effort or at a cost. Sarah carefully arranged childcare and her leisure time ahead, because the amount of non-obliged time had decreased since she started working.

“There is no spontaneity in my life, but that kind of has to be when you are on your own with children, you have to have someone to look after them, so that you can go out and things.” [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

Linda, on the other hand, decided to give up a bulk of her freelancing work as well as her income coming out of it, in order to have some leisure time secured for her.

“My work had built up a lot, which is obviously good in money wise, but it was kind of taking away all my leisure time, like I said, I was literally working all day, pick up the kids from the school, tea, homework, back, and immediately have to work until midnight. That's why I stopped quite a lot of it, and I'm going to feel it financially, but I now have my evenings back, where I can actually sit down and watch TV, which I think you need to do, you need to relax a bit.” [Two children aged eight and four, works part-time]

The changed circumstances of being in paid work influenced the types of leisure that the mothers enjoyed in their non-obliged hours.

Type of leisure allowed in paid work

The restrictions remained, and were newly created by moving to work, which limited the non-obliged time as well as the activities that the lone mothers could enjoy. Unfortunately, as a result, being in paid work could not change much of the types of leisure the lone mothers were allowed to have. Few mothers stopped purposeful activities, voluntary work, and education courses, as they met the goal (getting a job), while the majority kept a part of their purposeful use of non-obliged time, while devoting a decreased amount of time to such activities. While paid work was understood as more justifiable than leisure, the fact that the mothers were squeezing purposeful activities into their limited non-obliged hours made it even clearer that the purpose of such activities was more of an investment (eg. desires to progress at work or in other field), rather than enjoyment. This distinguishes the purposeful use of non-obliged time from enjoyment-oriented leisure activities, because there are society-led values embedded on top of their enjoyment.

Apart from the purposeful activities, the other leisure activities of lone mothers were still very informal, irregular, and fragmented, with one exception. Emily achieved a formal holiday away from home, while the rest mothers pursued their leisure inside their local boundary. Emily was originally from a country outside of the UK, and she went there with her three children for the first time in the last seven years. It was a family holiday, but at the same time it was a family visit and a religious ceremony for her children, which were very purposeful, justifiable, and not completely free from childcare.

Other leisure activities in paid work were rather informal in nature. The informal but regular activities included the single parent's group twice a month, going to gym four times a week, a lunch break at work, and choir. These activities were done based on careful arrangements for childcare ahead of time. Others were very informal, irregular and fragmented into pieces, such as watching TV in the evenings, going for swimming when childcare was supported, cleaning, going to cinema, hanging out with a boyfriend at home, and visiting a friend's house. For example, Kim,

a freelancing health therapist, listened to music in the car during the waiting time before her treatments.

How, then, are these restricted types of leisure activities understood by the mothers themselves?

Perceptions towards having less leisure

When the lone mothers described their leisure time and activities, the term 'sacrifice' was often used. They shared similar perceptions towards the sacrifices they made, which was a moral obligation of prioritising the need of children over their needs for leisure. The ethics of care was found from many discussions on 'this is being a mother.' As Amy and Chloe indicated:

"I don't want to go out again, my children are my children, paying babysitters while I go out is not my, I can do as much as I like when they've left home." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

"It's just what you do, shouldn't mind really, you have to sacrifice a lot when you have a child." [One child aged three, works part-time]

Some three mothers said they willingly gave up their leisure, because they already experienced freedom when they were young. The socialising became less important, as Clare described:

"I don't have quality, I don't have time for myself really. But to be quite honest with you, I had so much freedom in my life, I had it for thirty seven and half years. I don't sit here and thinking, 'uh, I want to go out'. No, I am totally okay with it, because I am older mother. I've done everything." [One child aged three, works part-time]

They felt the sacrifices of leisure time were made for more important values and a better future, such as security, paid work, and raising children right. As Mary and Emily discussed:

"I think I can sacrifice my own time really, you know, I can potentially give up the courses if necessary...to security working all the time." [Three children aged thirteen, five and four, works part-time]

"Okay. Fair enough, you don't have time for yourself, but end of the day you've achieved something. You're doing what is the right thing. Going to work, come back, looking after the boys, the home, everything." [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the influence of lone mothers' transitions to paid work on their use of non-obliged hours and allocation of leisure.

The lone mothers' sensitiveness towards the status of being on social assistance benefits or in paid work largely influenced their perceptions on a wide scope of their lives. The status indeed impacted on how the lone mothers described their activities during their non-obliged time. When being on benefits, purposeful and productive use of non-obliged time, such as taking on educational courses or voluntary work, was dominantly discussed. The enjoyment-centred activities, such as watching TV or walking around charity shops, however, were described reluctantly. It seems the purposeful use of non-obliged time, especially on benefits, provided the mothers with more justification towards their time away from housework and childcare, compared to the enjoyment-oriented activities. In other words, the size and impact of pressures obtained from the status of a benefit claimant made certain types of activities during non-obliged hours unjustifiable.

After moving to paid work, the descriptions of enjoyment-centred activities became dominant in the discussions, implying that the status of being in work may have justified such activities, by relieving their pressures to be productive. Indeed, some mothers reported their paid work as leisure, because it was often relaxing and enjoyable, but it also allowed them the legitimacy to have fun, or at least to talk about fun. Moving into paid work did not have much of an influence on the types of leisure they had, since their leisure activities have always been dichotomously divided into two: activities that are purposeful and productive, or enjoyment-oriented activities that are informal, irregular, and fragmented into pieces.

Chapter 6: Feelings of safety and security, and health

Introduction

This section discusses whether and how transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work influence lone mothers' sense of safety and security, and health. The PWI, which framed the topic guide of the interviews, originally recognised the concepts of safety and future security as two separate domains. The lone mothers were therefore asked two separate questions: 'how would you see your current safety?' and 'how would you consider your future security?' The two concepts, however, are closely related, as the construct of 'safety' has been used to measure the concept of 'security' (González et al. 2012). The two concepts have also shown high levels of correlation in the Australian regular surveys, adopting the PWI. González et al (2012) explain in their research study on the safety and future security of young people that the concept of 'safety' overlaps with 'security' as well as 'needs of protection' and 'surety and survival', and that these were the prerequisites for normal life. Similarly, the answers given by the 20 lone mothers used the term 'safety' and 'security' interchangeably, alongside other descriptors like 'stability' and 'having a structure' in one's life.

However, there was a distinction between the mothers' views of present safety and security and that of their future, as González et al (2012) also indicates. For example, when a lone mother moved to unstable employment and expressed a low sense of present safety and security, it could still be a source of future security as they felt their current work refreshed their work experience, which would make it easier to find another job in the future. Therefore, this section will not try to distinguish the two concepts, but will follow the mothers' feelings of safety and security as they express it, and analyse them in chronological order, starting from how they felt whilst on benefits.

The lone mothers' sense of health will be discussed in relation to their sense of safety and security. The subjectively reported health implies the status of the lone mothers' resources to fully function in their multi-responsibilities of being a worker and a care-giver, as defined by the World Health Organization (1946). It is a fundamental component of one's subjective wellbeing, especially in pursuing their aspirations, satisfying needs, and coping with the environment for a productive and fruitful life.

Note that they are recalling how they felt in the past looking back from their current situation at the time of the interview when the majority were in work.

6.1 Safety and security whilst on benefits

Feeling safe and secure mattered a lot to the 20 lone mothers, as eight mothers considered it as the most important factor that affected their quality of life during their transition. The notion of safety and security was described using various terms, including the feeling of being protected, stable, financially secure, or having a structure in the daily routine. They were important enough for some mothers to give up preferred, better paid, or more closely located jobs.

The experiences of living on social assistance benefits largely affected the lone mothers' sense of safety and security in both positive and negative ways: some eight mothers felt protected, while the rest of the twelve mothers felt the exact opposite, and to some extent expressed fear or feeling frightened. The table below summarises the number of respondents regarding their feelings of safety and security.

Table 6 Feeling of safety and security whilst being on benefits

Group	No. of respondents
Feeling protected	8
Feeling frightened	12
Total respondents	20

Feeling protected

The eight mothers reported that money and time given by the benefits were the main contributing factors to their sense of safety and security. The social assistance benefits, made through Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), as well as Housing Benefits, Child Benefits, and tax credits were understood as a form of governmental protection. The mothers were given fortnightly payments which helped them with their living expenses and bills. As mentioned repeatedly in the previous chapters, getting financial help from the government was not exactly '*an ego booster*' for the mothers. Relying on the state made them feel like '*a loser*', although the mothers at the same time interpreted this as something that had to be done to survive. Even so, the financial support was described by the eight mothers as protection and a relief, which were said to be comprehensible and appreciated. As Liz discussed:

"It is a regular known income, so having that made me feel safe, that's what made feel secure...you got that amount, and if that fluctuates, they will tell you. I felt a lot more informed, manageable, that was the basis of my security." [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

The time away from the labour market given by the benefits was also interpreted as meaningful. It was described as a *'recovery period'* from post-divorce difficulties by providing opportunities for the mothers to be engaged with counselling or parental training; it was also a chance to get used to a new life and place, especially after a geographical relocation. Furthermore, it was also the time that the mothers had to be there for the children while they were young and needed their mothers the most. As Linda stated:

"When I left [previous location outside of the UK], it was very sudden and horrible, the circumstances of the separation from my ex-husband...it was great to be arrive in [current location] where actually have that support available...having help for single parent was just invaluable. I've always [been] grateful for that really." [Two children aged eight and four, works part-time]

For six mothers, the period was said as the time they could use to explore career options and invest in further education, training courses, or self-teaching. This, in turn contributed to their sense of future safety and security. It was described as a good use of government funding, since they found themselves a step closer to the labour market as they progressed. Some of these mothers seemed to have pre-existing concrete employment plans prior to their benefit period, and this also contributed to their feelings of future security. As Kim and Kate discussed:

"I already had my future plan laid out, because I had my degree, I had my other qualifications that I know that once I was ready to get back to work, I would work self-employed anyway." [Four children aged eleven, eight, two, and two, works part-time]

"Going to all the child-minder courses help, because it gave, I could see there is an end to it, and that was really good." [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

Of course not all mothers made such positive comments; some reported the exact opposite and felt frightened.

Feeling frightened and insecure

The rest of the twelve mothers reported feelings of insecurity and lack of safety whilst on benefits. Their feelings were described in quite serious terms, such as being worried, anxious, scared, and frightened, and this seemed to come from three main sources: difficulties in understanding the benefits system, inadequate benefits, and insecurity with regards to housing.

Difficulties in understanding the system

The nature of the benefit system itself was a source of insecurity, due to its unreliable and incomprehensible nature. The system was perceived as complicated and hard to understand, and beyond their control. As Sarah discussed:

“It was very scary, because it was so hard to understand, I am not very mathematical. Also just their system wasn't very straight forward, things like tax credit, hard to understand, you don't really know for sure, if they are saying is correct, just makes you scared.” [Two children aged six and five, works part-time]

The mother's also commonly felt the system was changeable in nature, which became a source of fear for some as it was seen as being solely dependent on a rapidly changing political discourse. As Ava described:

“At the moment that anyone who sought any kind of benefits can't really feel safe because there's obviously a lot of change going on, so no one really knows where it's headed. People aren't getting much chance to say how things affect them and whether they can cope with the changes that are being imposed. So I didn't feel safe in the sense of having long term security...It's you're totally dependent on someone else deciding whether you have eligibility there.” [Two children aged twelve and four, works full-time]

Financial and housing insecurities

The level of benefit payment was an issue negatively affecting their sense of safety and security on a daily basis. Six of the twelve mothers reported it was simply too small to manage a household budget with rent, bills, and daily expenses. The mothers described experiences of credit cards *'maxed out'*, having bank loans, rent and bill arrears, and money borrowed from family and friends. A few said they were lucky to have some savings which they were using whilst being on benefits. Their situations were described as scary, and having constant worries and struggles to *'make the ends meet'*, and this kept them from sleeping at night.

The level of payment became a problem for a variety of different reasons: for two mothers, the system failed to take into account the structural difficulties in their income. Both mothers had very unstable child maintenance payments from their children's fathers which could not be solved through the Child Support Agency. Sofie applied for a discretionary housing benefit payment for the amount of her rent that exceeded the benefit cap. This got declined based on her child maintenance payments, but these had not been paid over the last three months. The tightness of

payment was seen as 'unsustainable' threatening their feelings of future security. As Sofie repeatedly insisted throughout the interview:

"I think I thought, god, don't they have it easy, you know, some women maybe have a child to get a council house, to sit on their backside, is it a way of securing future. Absolutely not, absolutely not! You can't secure a future." [One child aged three, not working]

For Sofie, paying the rent was a severe difficulty due to the housing benefit cap, which covered only one third of the rent (and due to this her application for discretionary housing benefit got declined). She was therefore topping it up out of her Income Support, which was already tight to manage her bills and daily expenses. As described by Sofie, however, being financially tight was the cost she was willing to pay to live in a safe neighbourhood. She insisted that it was her decision as well as her right to raise her child in a safe neighbourhood where she did not have to worry about her child being 'beaten up on the street.' If keeping her and her child in a safe area meant not having enough food on the table or being financially secure, 'so be it' she said. Sofie, however, also described how scared and anxious she was about her financial situation and the creation of more debts the longer she stayed on benefits (largely due to the housing cost). It was a difficult trade-off she made, because she would rather be scared about finances than be scared for her and her child's physical safety.

Similarly, Kate made a trade-off by sacrificing her financial security for her family's physical safety. Kate owned the house she was living in (on a mortgage), which was the reason she had a reduced amount of Income Support. Her Jobcentre advisor suggested that she sell the house so that she could get a private rental property and receive full housing benefit, but Kate instead let herself suffer financially in order to keep the house. As she discussed:

"I do feel safe here on my own at night. I don't feel worried about being, coming back here later night or anything like that...I wouldn't have sacrificed it for anything, I would gone back to my old job and sacrifice everything else, because I would want to live here no matter what, that's like my last resort." [Two children aged six and five, works full-time]

Kate insisted she was 'physically safe' all the way throughout the transition, because she 'made' it so. Yet another three lone mothers described how their geographical locations were not safe places to raise their children. This was due to high rates of drug use, violence, and people with troubles. The location of their housing was a huge source of insecurity for these mothers, and they felt that even their physical safety was at risk.

Living in a safe environment/home was therefore vitally important to feelings of safety and security. But whilst owning a home could potentially offer physical safety for some, it could also create financial insecurities because of reduced benefit payments. This was the case for three mothers whose benefit payments were reduced due to ownership of a home, which in turn made their daily expenses unmanageable. As described above, Kate made trade-offs to remain living in her privately owned house, but for Jennifer and Suzy they owned a house elsewhere, which was taking a long time to sell and both received reduced benefit payments because of this home ownership. For Jennifer this was partly because she was also receiving rent from the tenant living in her house which reduced her JSA, but it was not enough for her and her three children to live on. Jennifer ended up having to use her savings, which gave her a great sense of insecurity. For Suzy, she partly owned a house with her ex-husband in France, which they were trying to sell, but she was more fortunate than Jennifer because Suzy's landlords were her parents who were pleased to help Suzy out and allowed her have a few rent arrears.

While the last two mothers were fortunate enough to have savings or a landlord on their side, it shows how home ownership interacts in complex ways with the benefits system to the potential detriment of mothers' feelings of safety and security. These three cases show that 'home ownership' does not always equate with having an additional financial resource that can be used by mothers to support themselves, at least not without generating a great deal of fear, anxiety, and insecurity. The way the benefit system uniformly treats all private home ownership as a realisable asset misses the point, as it can also be the 'family home' and as such it can offer lone mothers both physical safety and a sense of future security. Some felt so strongly about their home, that they were prepared to run up debts and even go without sufficient food in order to protect it. But on top of the financial insecurity and physical safety issues related to housing, there were extra pressures identified to make the experience of 'claiming benefits' very negative in terms of feeling safe or secure and being able to sustain the time on benefits.

A lack of sustainability while being on benefits

Two issues were raised by the mothers, which made them feel that there is a lack of sustainability whilst claiming benefits, and this negatively affected their feelings of safety and security. These issues were: negative experiences in using Jobcentres, and pressures to take 'any job'.

Negative experiences of using Jobcentres and claiming benefits

As discussed in detail in the previous two chapters, the lone mothers were sensitive about the social stigma constructed around being one of '*people on benefit.*' The fact that they were sitting

in the waiting room at the jobcentre with others on benefits, being called like a student, and being treated like a scrounger, were said to be unsafe and degrading. As Sam and Emily stated:

“The whole experience, I didn't, I didn't like come in [the Job centre]...having to sit down with these people, some of them like alcoholics, drug abusers, to be honest, just be honest. So having to stand there, with these kind of people, and then it just makes you think about your life, made me think about my life, you know.” [One child aged seven, works part-time]

“[Sitting at the Jobcentre] is terrible, when I go to do the sign on, I felt so intimidated, I would dread it... It's the people there, they are all from different walks of life, I can't be with them, I am sorry, but I tried to be, but I got a lot of pride to be...I didn't do something to look down upon being on benefits.” [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

Compounding this feeling, however, was a sense of being physically unsafe when attending the Jobcentre to sign-on. As Jennifer said:

“Physically, I didn't feel safe when I went to the job centre. Because you have two great big bumming security guards down there, because obviously, I suppose, trouble does kick off. I only saw trouble twice I think in there. I don't think I felt safe.” [Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time].

Another factor that made the mothers insecure was some inappropriate attitudes used by staff through the process of signing-on and during work-focused interviews at Jobcentre. Some six of the twelve mothers who felt unsafe reported being questioned and scrutinised about their life and behaviour in quite aggressive manners. They were described as ‘embarrassed’, ‘looked down on’, ‘degraded’, ‘scared’, ‘intimidated’ and had their ‘integrity questioned’ by the way they were treated. It was more severe for the three mothers who were on JSA than the others on IS, as the JSA required the mothers to be more active in job searching activities and applied stricter conditions of being on benefits.

For example, Sam and Amy felt embarrassment when their names were shouted in public and when they were told what to do. Amy especially was asked to apply for jobs and go to interviews even when she was eight and a half months pregnant. She knew no one would hire a pregnant woman, but had no choice but to act on the requests of Jobcentre in order to receive the benefit payments. She felt it was degrading and meaningless, because she only did it for the advisors to ‘tick the boxes.’ As Amy discussed:

“You have to do so much that everything is questioned, everything about what you are doing, and your integrity is completely put out for some stranger to sift through...They

actually do make you feel worthless.” [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

Jennifer had an argument with her advisor at Jobcentre, who said she had not made enough applications and intimidated her by threatening to stop the benefits. Jennifer felt it was unfair because she was applying for all the jobs that would fit the care arrangements of her three children. For Sarah, she had mixed feelings about being questioned by Jobcentre. Sarah went to speak at a conference in America without reporting it to Jobcentre, but they looked at her online social network page, and questioned her about it. Sarah said it was horrible to be *‘snooped around’*, but understood the scrutiny was a good measure for people committing a fraud. Whilst these experiences of using Jobcentre were unpleasant, they also generated feelings of insecurity because the mothers felt pressured to ‘take any job’ and thus remaining on benefits was unsustainable.

Pressure to take ‘any job’

The ‘unsustainability’ of being on benefits was described through their financial and physical insecurity and stigma. Furthermore, the pressure to go back to the labour market forced some lone mothers to take ‘any job.’ They considered taking working hours that would not fit their childcare and/or housework commitments (full-time or working atypical hours), settling for a job that was a backward step in payment and position, or a type of job that was not preferred. Some nine mothers reported that they considered taking ‘any job’, and four of them actually moved to a job that would not fit.

The nine mothers had different reasons for considering taking ‘any job’, including the labour market structure where part-time jobs during school hours were not easy to find. However, a more common reason was the pressure they got from Jobcentre. As Emily said:

“They could stop my benefit any time, they could ask me to go on any job, at any part of the world, within [my area], I had offers to go to [other places far from the location], any of those places, for placement. They would not understand the fact that I am struggling with my children, and they just, for their rule and regulations, just book me in any training or job, that's where I don't feel safe.” [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

The four mothers who ended up taking a job knowing it would not suit them were all either in their final year of Income Support eligibility, because their youngest child was aged above four, or receiving JSA, where the pressure became more severe. The jobs were described as something that they could find no future security or long term interests in, or as something that did not

match with their aspirations. It was largely due to the pressure at Jobcentre where they were led to believe their eligibility would end soon. As Jennifer and Liz insisted:

"I applied for jobs that even though I didn't think they were going to give me a huge amount of satisfaction...I didn't want to be on Jobseeker's any longer, I thought I am going to take anything that was offered, whilst I look for something else... It's just a stopgap at the moment." [Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time]

"There is a job, you are having it", that was the pressure I was put under...They do like, there are plenty of jobs out there, yeah, but not the ones that fit with family life, so that weight of responsibility started pressing heavily again...even though I was given the benefit by the government, but I was still a human being with feelings, ambitions, desires, needs, and dream. My dream is not to be a cleaner." [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

The mothers described their attitudes towards this as taking *'any job that reaches the minimum wage'*, *'pay the bills'*, or *'whatever came in my way'*. Their mind-sets were influenced by a few external, practical as well as internal factors. The mothers were worried about their circumstances, as they have been out of the labour market for a while, and had relatively little experience in their chosen field. Their time availability for paid work also limited their choices in the labour market, as they were only available part-time, during school hours, and within their local areas. They were often unavailable for a job that involved over-night working, and needed to take time-off for emergencies. The internal reasons were different. For example, Jennifer was ready to take any job, as a *'bridge'*, only because she wanted to put the jobcentre behind her, where she felt humiliated and suffered from low levels of financial benefits. For Amy, a job was a job, something needs to be done to make sure the children are okay. As she discussed:

"[A] Job is a job, every role has their, that point, clean toilet is still something that needs to be done, and should be appreciated on top of, I mean I've done gardening, I've done all sorts to bring the money in, it does depend on making sure that [the children] are okay." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

Taking *'any job'* in one case, however, turned out to be unsustainable. The following story of Sofie makes an implication about how damaging it can be to their subjective well-being, when people who are not ready to move into the labour market are forced to do so by having their sense of safety and security shaken off through reduced benefit payments or pressures from Jobcentre. It is important to note, however, that Sofie was chosen to be invited into the research, based on her recent experiences of moving into paid work, but she did not fit the criteria of the research at the point of the interview. While the criteria is set as lone mothers who have recently moved off

social assistance benefits to paid work of more than 16 hours a week, Sofie was already back on Income Support after being in paid work for a while. Therefore, introducing Sofie's case is neither to say Sofie's experience would be repeated by the rest of the 19 mothers, nor to say it is representative of the experiences of other mothers who participated in this research.

The story of Sofie: I can't just take any job!

Sofie had a stable professional career with good money (£2,100 a month). The job, however, involved long working hours and shift work. It was thought to be incompatible with her childcare commitments, as she could not find any child-minder who was willing to take her child during atypical working hours, and it was felt unfair to her child as well. Sofie decided to leave the job and signed up for Income Support. Living on Income Support, Sofie found herself being financially desperate, but felt lonely and depressed, and guilty about taking 'tax money'. She did not enjoy her life on benefits, because she has 'always worked' and the way people and the media describe lone mothers on benefits was not who she was. She actively looked for a job, but there was not much she could do without making huge compromises. After nine months of struggles, she decided to settle in a full-time job which involved five years of career and wage back-steps, earning £1,150 during term time only.

The job, however, brought whole new difficulties and problems. The administrative transition was hard, as her in-work and housing benefit recalculations got delayed. She was exhausted and stressed, which directly caused her overactive bladder and increased her dose of medication for depression. She found herself being marginally better-off financially, in exchange for '*never see[ing] [her] child.*' She was unhappy and tired all the time, which her child picked up on and resulted in behavioural problems. They were deprived of each other and were not having any quality time, because all Sofie could do during weekends was catch up with sleep and do housework. This unsustainability forced her out of the job and got her onto Income Support again. This is what Sofie explained about what resulted from her experience of 'settling-in any job':

"People say to me, just get any job, take any odd job, you can't take any odd job when you are a parent, single parent, because it doesn't work like that.

When you start working as a single parent, everything changes, you submit and become eligible for working Child Tax Credit, and Housing Benefit recalculated, everything changes. It really messes you up, and actually any change in your circumstances with benefits sets you back, so you are constantly chopping and changing between jobs. You genuinely do end up worse off, because by the time the changes taking place come into effect, you've been out of pocket for weeks if not months. So, if I take any odd job, and I have three weeks I realise that [my child] is unhappy with a child-minder, it's not paying me enough

to get by, then I have to [go] back to Income Support. I would be then more out of pocket than if I would have just stayed on Income Support that entire period, and waited for the right job. That I really wish, these so called policy makers would understand that, I can't just take any job. It's about sustainability. It's come to be sustainable.” [One child aged three, not working]

Thus, the whole experience of claiming benefits, and the eligibility criteria that went with it, exerted pressures in numerous ways, which made the mothers feel insecure about their futures. Some were more pragmatic than others and accepted that taking any job was a stopgap at least, whilst others felt they had to make big compromises in terms of working hours, type of job, and level of payment. However, this pragmatic attitude backfired for Sofie. In any event, whilst they descried how they felt when actually claiming benefits, they also discussed how they gave a lot of thought to their employment prospects and the practical aspects of finding suitable work to fit with childcare responsibilities.

Matching childcare and work

When the mothers were thinking of going back to paid work, two big worries occurred: A) *'Will I ever going to find a job?'*, and B) *'What am I going to do with kids?'* The two big questions were said to be hanging over their heads during the whole period of being on benefits.

Among the twelve mothers who felt insecure and unsafe while on benefits, seven reported their concerns about the future. They felt the benefit period was *'a matter of survival'* and a *'week to week'* life. It was described as being stuck in a vicious circle where they did not have a clear vision of what to do next. The seven mothers reported their worries and uncertainties regarding how long they would be out of work, would they survive, and would it be possible to find the right job for them. They rarely got job offers, one job that was promised was turned down, and there was no guarantee that their business would turn out to be successful for those who had plans for self-employment. The more they got rejected from job applications, the more they felt anxious, embarrassed, stuck, and in a panic. They believed their status as a benefit claimant, especially those on JSA, negatively pictured them as an applicant, because the status itself became evidence of shortages in recent work experience. Knowing their benefit eligibility would end soon created extra worries and anxieties. The seven mothers described not being able to find any present or future security under the current job market, as Jessica and Mia discussed:

“You just think that you are going to be on it forever and nothing is going to change. You don't really dream about the future. You live week to week, you can't make plans. You just wait for your next benefit.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

“Every time I got work, didn't hear back from a job offer, I thought, oh my god, maybe I'm not going to be ... I'm not going to live like this forever. I thought I might even have to move back with my parents or something. That was awful.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

For the majority of mothers, there was a general concern about working restricted hours due to childcare responsibilities. They believed it made them less competitive in the labour market, and in most cases the mothers were looking for working hours to coincide with childcare or school times, but neither was certain. As Clare explained:

“I can only offer part-time, I have no car, so there are these limitations obviously, so loads of interviews...people don't realise how difficult it is, so I am not just pick up the job in a shop, I can't, because it's weekend work, it's evening work, or it's in an area I can't get to.” [One child aged three, works part-time]

Even when the mothers were ready to settle for alternatives, such as a full-time job, atypical hours, or low payment, finding good childcare arrangements and the cost of them became an issue to be anxious about. As Emma indicated:

“To be honest, once they turn five and they're in full time school but there isn't enough jobs out there to cover the working hours. Because your kids are only in school those certain hours you have to work more hours or different hours to when they're in school. You've still got to find child care.” [One child aged one, works part-time]

Amy also described her anxiety about being pushed into paid work, which meant for her losing time with the children and asking someone else to do her primary job. As she mentioned:

“No [I do not feel safe], because you have to jump through so many hoops, and there was always that thought of, if they make me go back to work, a) am I going to be mentally stable enough, b) what am I going to do with my kids? I don't have support network. That scared me, because I would have to plan my children off on to somebody else, and that's really what I didn't want to do.” [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

From the mother's accounts, it seemed being on benefits and continuing to meet the eligibility criteria tended to be a time of great anguish and uncertainty. Though the regular income was appreciated and provided some security, only a few reported the time on benefits as being in anyway beneficial to their sense of security and safety. It could give mothers some time to think about their future and recover from past events. But to gain this benefit it would depend on the age of the children at the time of claiming, and, given the eligibility criteria for JSA, would not offer such respite to those whose youngest child was aged five or older, even when they might

desperately need it. The next section considers how and whether things improved once the mothers were in paid work.

Safety and security whilst being in paid work

As soon as the lone mothers made their transitions into paid work, they often faced the most vulnerable period of the journey, which lasted from two weeks to more than three months. Among the 20 mothers, only four reported smooth transitions, while 16 mothers experienced difficulties in this period.

Feeling vulnerable during the first few weeks

The main sources of vulnerability found from the 16 mothers were financial vulnerability due to income disruption and feelings of uncertainty due to incomprehensible in-work benefits.

Financial vulnerability

The lone mothers felt that the benefit system could easily go wrong and/or payments could be delayed, which caused worry and anxiety about their transitions to paid work and in-work benefits. There was very little trust in the system; even the four mothers who described themselves as having a smooth transition indicated that they were surprised by having a smooth transition.

The income disruption occurred during the period of benefit recalculations - between the termination of benefits and the first pay cheque or in-work benefit payment. A total of nine mothers shared their experiences of having financial difficulties in the gap. This was mostly the case for those who worked part-time work and were still entitled to in-work benefits (eight out of nine). The benefits stopped on the day they started working, and the first pay slip kicked in few weeks later. During the gap, some mothers were said to survive by depending on Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit, which only covered bills or '*nappies, wipes, and milk.*' There were run-ons of housing benefit and council tax credit, which were supposed to last up to four weeks after the termination of benefit eligibility to fill the gap, but they often got delayed as well.

The income disruption often took more than three months to be sorted. While a few mothers who were paid weekly were in a better position to manage, the majority were paid monthly and/or had their first few weeks as a non-paid training period. While the actual income gap lasted about three months, the financial difficulties took longer to catch up, even after the in-work

benefit and housing benefit got sorted and paid as a lump sum. The mothers ended up using their savings if they were lucky enough to have some emergency cash, or went back to their family's support, food banks and grocery vouchers from the family and children centre, crisis loans from Jobcentre, or faced rent and bills arrears. It was described as a big source of being worried, anxious and scared as they were largely relying on the benefit. As Mia and Chloe discussed:

"They immediately stopped Income Support, and it took six weeks to set up the Working Tax Credit. During that time it was a real struggle... that was really hard. I was having to like, rely on family. We did pay it all back in as lump sum. Just two months later." [One child aged two, works part-time]

"Difficult thing about that was the change from not working and getting a job, and having the gap between not having any money, because there is no help that way. But the Child Tax Credit that I get now I am working, they paid me that weekly just help me pay my bills...it will be a couple of months, until I got myself on normality, because if you borrowed off some money off my mum, I still got to pay her back." [One child aged three, works part-time]

The gap between the termination of benefits and the first pay cheque was at best comprehensible, since the mothers were warned by their advisors that the recalculation process would take up to four weeks to get sorted. However, some mothers faced unexpected stressors during the period, such as overpaid benefits. Two mothers reported that they found themselves owing a few hundred pounds of Income Support, council tax, and housing benefits, since they were overpaid. For Amy, the hassle she experienced was not yet resolved at the point of interview, which was five months after her transition. She was still keeping all the documents to prove her working hours, in case something went 'wrong' again. Recalling the stress she was under motivated her to participate in this research. As Amy discussed:

"It has been very hard, which is one of the reasons why I was quite happy to do this interview, because it happens, there is no fluidity to it, you know, you are either a dole dossier who don't deserve it, it's given it grudgingly, or someone who genuinely does want to do what's right and try, and it still don't go right. It's not always the case of how it is on TV." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

Whilst the financial vulnerability caused stress and worry, the uncertainties of in-work benefits that the mothers were expected to newly register were a source of fear.

Incomprehensible in-work benefits

There was little understanding of in-work benefits and how much money they would be entitled to. Although mothers said that their personal advisors were there to help, the interventions of advisors at this stage were often limited to provisions of explanation and advice, rather than a solution to the mothers' financial uncertainties.

Five mothers indicated they were in the reassessment period of their benefits at the point of the interview, but were not aware of when exactly the in-work benefits would kick in, how long they would be delayed for, or how to deal with rent and bill arrears in the meantime. For example, Liz had no idea how much exactly she would be better-off by after all the in-work benefits were sorted. She was originally told by her advisor that she would be £80 a week better off. However, she got a call from the council saying that her council tax went up from £20 to £80 a month, based on her first wage slip, meaning she was only £30 better off a week by working 16 hours. She had no idea if she would be able to pay the rent and manage daily expenses, and the call had reduced her to tears, and made her feel pressured and anxious.

Clare also shared her experience of not knowing how much money she would end up with, and if she was going to meet the next rent. As Clare said:

"I only started three weeks ago, I am really new to what's happening financially. I know the housing allowance...I think it's going to be a little delayed, which is annoying. I spoke to my advisor, the lady said, oh maybe you can talk to the landlord, but there is no way I am going to, I am committed to pay my rent on time, I am not going to start messing anyone around." [One child aged three, works part-time]

The mothers' difficulties also appeared elsewhere, when they were required to deal with paper work to claim new benefits which they found stressful and exhausting. They were required to answer difficult questions, make attachments of evidence, and send the form back and forth until it was satisfied. There was an advocacy service to help them, but they believed it was something they should not need help with to fill-in. The financial gaps, as well as difficulties in understanding the new system, added additional stress for the mothers on top of their new practical juggles as they started working, such as new childcare and commuting arrangements, housework, and settling into the new work place.

Feelings of being safe and secured whilst in paid work

Being in paid work, some ten mothers reported that things had improved, or had remained at a good level of safety and security, as shown in the table below. The main contributing factors of the ten mothers were their secure employment and increased control over money.

Table 7 Feeling of safety and security whilst being in paid work

Group	No. of respondents
Feeling safe and secured	10
Feeling worried	10
Total respondents	20

Secure employment

The secure employment was said to be the most influential factor of their sense of safety and security. Among the ten mothers, nine of them were in a permanently employed post, which was understood as a rare opportunity in the current job market, especially for the mothers who could only offer part-time during office hours. As Lucy and Emily discussed:

“I've got job security, that's it, it's permanent job, I signed the contract and everything, obviously if I do anything they have to sack me for, then it's going to be down to me. But no, I am not planning on doing anything like that. So yes, job security.” [One child aged two, works part-time]

“My job makes me feel safe, okay, I know twenty years from now I know, once I'm permanent I will be on board with them. That's like I said, not the best of pay, but benefits, sick pay, all the benefits. I can actually start planning my life now.” [Three children aged twenty-four, nineteen and six, works full-time]

Even when the job itself could not provide full financial independence or satisfaction, being in work still meant a sense of safety and security for the future. Four mothers reported their sense of safety and security in several ways: for Jessica, it was being able to put the scrutiny of the jobcentre behind her; for Ava, it was passing her probationary period and obtaining recent work experience which would put Ava, Jennifer, and Linda in a better position to find another job. Ava also considered her security and future outlook to be in a better position, because she can look for another job when the contract terminates. As she described:

“I know that at least for the next two and a half years I have something. I guess the thing is once you are in a job, it does make people feel better, makes you look better in applications for a job, which isn't really fair.” [Two children aged twelve and four, works full-time]

The job situations were not interpreted as an ideal scenario, but it was said to be the way the labour market worked now, which in the end contributed to their sense of safety and security

about the future. For Jennifer, earning even the minimum wage meant she had more time to look for a better job whilst being able to pay the bills and stop using up her savings. Also, she did not have to feel pressured to meet the requirements of the jobcentre in terms of the number of applications and fortnightly interviews.

More control or more money?

The level of financial contribution toward a sense of safety and security is interesting. Ten lone mothers felt a sense of security because of the control over money that they achieved through paid work, even when they did not necessarily feel massive improvements in their disposable income (only three said their income had improved). It was firstly because the financial improvements had not yet kicked in, because some of them started working only a few weeks ago at the time of interview. Second, it was because the level of financial improvement made was not significant enough. However, the fact that they achieved some level of control over money was a source of security, regardless of how much they were better-off. Five of them felt they were now independent and had more control over their money as well as their life, since their behaviour was no longer watched or controlled by the government.

They had high expectations, too, of the amount of money they could earn and what they could do with it to enhance their futures. Seven mothers reported being able to make a plan to pay off their debts, catch up with mortgage payments and bills, and perhaps save for a car. Five also discussed investing in their own as well as their children's future. For example Emily's plan was to be an accountant, and she was now able to pay the fees for a higher level of training. Emma was going to a college once a week for a diploma at the point of interview, and her next goal was a degree. She knew she could have earned a bit more money instead, but it was seen as a long-term plan for her future, as an alternative for if her current work did not work out. As Emma stated:

"If I don't study, although I could earn more, a lot more in the short term, there's like that cut for the future. I want to be able progress there's like that cut for the future. I want to be able to progress, get more under my belt so that if the business doesn't become successful I have other options and I don't have to go back on benefits." [One child aged one, works part-time]

The earnings also allowed mothers to save up for their children's futures, such as school camps, learning a musical instrument, and University. As Amy described:

"My daughter is planning on going to University, so once the debt's paid off, that's going to be the next thing, is making sure she is financially secure to do what she wants to do,

and then when she's done that, it will be [a younger child]'s turn. I have a lot of incentive to make this work." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

In addition, the mothers anticipated the possibility of increasing working hours so that they can earn more as their children get older and go to a nursery or school. They had plans to increase working hours at their current post, look for another full-time post, or take an educational course to climb up the career ladder in their field. As Mary described:

"I imagine once [the youngest child] starts full-time school, which in September, I would wait until the hours become available, or I would do another job that I could work around the school. I just imagine that I wait until [my child] in full-time and then took it further" [Three children aged thirteen, five and four, works part-time]

Feelings of being unsafe and insecure whilst in paid work

On the other hand, there were still ten mothers who described how their feelings of safety and security had deteriorated or remained low since moving into paid work. The main contributory issues were insecure employment and difficulties in childcare arrangements.

Certain types of employment often became a source of insecurity, in terms of the contracts, work prospects, and levels of payment. Liz, for example, had a letter of employment, not a contract, which made her monthly wage unknown, and also impacted on her council tax and Housing Benefits. As Liz discussed:

"I don't have a contract of employment, so I don't have regular wage coming in...It's really emotional rollercoaster. I will never going to be in the housing market, I'm never going to be able to mortgage, so my life will be within rented property." [Two children aged five and four, works part-time]

Hana indicated her sense of safety and security did not necessarily improve by going to work. Although being on benefits made her 'stand still' and not make any progress, she was at least financially safe in daily life, thanks to the governmental protection. After moving into work, Hana felt the exact same amount of insecurity and worry, due to job cuts in her field.

The level of payment was also a source of insecurity, especially for those who were in part-time jobs that meant they remained dependent on some benefits. As Clare discussed:

"It's a bit up in the air, I am working part-time, there is no way I can live off in this salary, so I am very much dependent on the state still, not like I am financially independent, I don't know...So I don't feel totally safe." [One child aged three, works part-time]

The low wages also negatively affected their future security. Some six mothers, especially those in part-time posts, shared their anxiety regarding the level of income being too small to see a promising future. A sense of future security was hard to achieve when they were still financially dependent on the state, and permanent employment was not guaranteed. Also, there were job cuts in their company, and childcare arrangements were not stable.

Childcare arrangements were also a source of insecurity, especially for those mothers who did not have other support networks as back-up in case of emergency. Sofie and Liz for example, worried that if their child became ill they would have to take time off work, and they could lose money, but also end up with bad reputations from employers. Whereas, Chloe and Jennifer felt they had to make sure their working hours were exactly 16 a week, since the childcare might end up costing more than her hourly rate:

“The payment of nursery or preschool, because that's extremely expensive, that is quite frightening really. I mean, some days if they do want you to work extra, I have to turn them down because when I work, I worked for nothing, because it costs me twice as much in childcare.” [One child aged three, works part-time]

Compared to the mothers' sense of safety and security, their subjective sense of health seemed more sensitive and responsive to the changes they experienced, meaning more mothers provided answers that leaned to one side regarding the impacts of transition.

6.2 Reported health whilst being on benefits

Overall, the vast majority (19 mothers) reported dissatisfaction with their health while being on social assistance benefits, as it impacted both their mental and physical health.

Feeling depressed and stressed

Having mental and emotional difficulties were common issues among the lone mothers, as a total of 14 of them reported signs of depression or high levels of stress. Among those, eight were on prescribed anti-depression tablets. The rest of the mothers did not approach their GP, because they did not want to make the mental issue official, or went to GP, but not diagnosed as a clinical depression. The mothers perceived some circumstantial causes, which were said to be closely related to the status of being on benefits. These included: financial pressures of budgeting and restrictions on mobility, the stigmatised status of being a benefit claimant, and worries about their employability. While the most frequent stressors were mentioned as financial and mobility restrictions, the mothers could not single out any particular cause. There were rather multiple difficulties combined together which affected their emotional stability. As Lucy and Jennifer discussed:

"When I wasn't working, it was just there constantly, and there was nothing I can do to get away from it. So that's why I got to that point where I was like, crap, I think I've got depression.... I was very emotional, tired quite a lot, but I didn't know whether that was down to having a little toddler and just being exhausted by looking after her, or if it was something internal." [One child aged two, works part-time]

"The depression...it was a matter of a month after I stopped working at [my former employment], that they up the dosage. Because I was beginning to feel like it stopped taking as much effect. I was beginning to feel down again, so maybe that was something to do with [being on benefit]." [Three children aged fifteen, ten and eight, works part-time]

Two of them indicated their stigmatised and pressured status as a benefit claimant as a direct cause of depression, on top of the other existing stressors of financial pressure, restrictions on mobility, and being an unemployed person. Sofie, who once moved to full-time employment but made her way back into Income Support, found a cause from judgments against a benefit claimant, as she stated:

"I take [low dose of citalopram], because it just helps me cope with the responsibilities, pressure, and judgements from people. I still feel quite paranoid, I feel like people look at me in certain way." [One child aged three, not working]

Liz also identified two contributing factors that stemmed from her benefit status towards her anxiety depression, such as a pressure to fit into her brother's ideal Christmas day dinner as well as regular visits to Jobcentre. The two pressures came together, she found herself having an emotional crisis, and ended up having prescribed medication.

Among 14 mothers who had signs of depression, only three mothers found their causes elsewhere. One mother found her cause from the trauma of a difficult break-up, although *'being on benefits did not help.'* Two of them reported that their depression was an old problem and that the benefit period was a buffer since their mental health was not stable enough to go out to work. As Amy discussed:

"Because I had a lot of depression, a lot of going to work was quite daunting for me, so being able to be at home and be with the children worked out well for me anyway." [Two children aged sixteen and three, works part-time]

The circumstantial difficulties the mothers faced whilst claiming benefits were also closely related to their physical health.

Having poor physical conditions

Fewer mothers than those had emotional health problems, only eight mothers reported being on benefits physically affected their health, mainly due to financial shortages. The most common problem was related to food consumption patterns. A total of seven reported that they had to suffer from not having enough food and having too much unhealthy food. They reduced the amount of food they ate, in order to make sure their children got the right nutrition, which often made their meals comprised of left-overs from the children's lunch or a skipped dinner. When they did grocery shopping, they explained they had to choose a cheaper version of every food purchased. Some went to food banks where the available food stuff tends to be *'just calories'*, such as sponge, big puddings, and custards, rather than fresh vegetables. Only two mothers actually applied and got help from the Healthy Start Voucher, which could be used to purchase fresh vegetables and fruit. Two mothers reported *'comfort eating'* and *'eating for the sake of eating.'* It was seen as less to do with financial shortage, and more to do with emotional instability and low self-esteem. The mothers found themselves *'comfort eating'* especially when they had to spend long hours at home, not being distracted from their pressures and worries. Other health problems also existed due to financial shortage, such as going through a winter without the heating on, not having any resources (trainers, training suit, or gym membership) to exercise, and suffering from Asthma while living in a damp house.

Among the eight mothers with physical health difficulties, three mothers reported a clinical health problem they already had, although being on benefits made it worse. Emma had a thyroid condition that increased her appetite. As she felt more hungry than usual, not having enough food made her worse in dealing with her circumstances. Chloe had diabetes, where a healthy food intake was essential. There was a list of things the hospital wanted her to eat, which could not be covered by her shopping budget. Emily had a broken back which she could have used as an excuse to have a rest, but she could not look after herself, since she was committed to look for jobs and look after her three children.

Reported health whilst being in paid work

Since the mothers moved into paid work, ten mothers recognised the positive contributions of the transitions toward their mental or physical health, while one was able to maintain a good level of health all the way. Out of 14 mothers who reported signs of depression or high levels of stress whilst being on benefits, eight mothers reported a decreased level of stress or lowered dose of anti-depressants. They reported an increased level of self-motivation to be a better and healthier person, increased levels of self-esteem, and increased confidence and happiness. They found themselves dealing with their stress more easily and achieving emotional stability. The increased level of confidence sometimes changed their attitudes toward their anti-depressants, as Amy now considered getting medical help was not a sign of weakness like she used to think in the past when on benefits.

Physical health was also positively affected by moving to work, as it often provided good chances to walk when commuting, or standing while working, and it was a good distraction from comfort eating. Chloe's diabetes got improved with a lowered blood sugar. The financial improvements allowed the mothers to be able to afford gym membership and fitness classes, and healthier and fresher food like fruit and vegetables, which in turn had positive synergy on their mental health and emotions.

However, the other ten mothers indicated that their health either got worse, or was still bad in different ways. The most common physical difficulty the mothers still suffered was exhaustion due to overloaded responsibilities in paid work as well as at home. Some seven mothers reported other health issues, directly related to long hours of work and shift work, such as a disruption in sleeping patterns due to shift work, a reduction in the hours of sleep, feeling '*restless and fast-paced*', and an overactive bladder. It was more frequent among the full time working mothers, as four out of five full-time working mothers reported this issue. As Hana, a full-time administrator and Kim, a part-time self-employed alternative health therapist discussed:

"I am always tired, because I am working long days and I am getting home and then I am trying to do everything I haven't been able to do in a day that I normally done." [One child aged five, works full-time]

"I am just tired, I am just incredibly tired, but that's because I have been doing quite a few evenings, and then I find it difficult to switch off when I get home, it's not as easy to say, I will just go home and fall asleep." [Four children aged eleven, eight, two, and two, works part-time]

Other physical health issues were reported due to a lack of time to look after themselves. Three of them indicated having less time to exercise or to prepare proper food, not having enough time off work, and getting poor vision due to sitting in front of the computer for long hours. All three of them were working full-time, above 37.5 hours. For example, Ava shared her story of irony. Ava, a scientist, found herself financially better off now being in paid work, but had a lack of time for housework. She said take-away foods were her option. She knew it was not healthy eating manufactured food, especially because she had a Vitamin E deficiency where healthy food intake was essential. However, it was said to be equally not healthy to spend all time she had on chopping vegetables instead of spending it with her children. This can be a typical example of how the mothers would react when the need to care for the children conflicted with the care for themselves.

Relationship between a sense of safety and security, and health

The research findings are short of evidence to fully argue a connection between a sense of safety and security, and health of the lone mothers throughout their transitions to paid work. It is partially because of the limitation of the topic guide, which conceptualised each domain of life as discrete categories. The interview questions were not designed for the participants to easily make connections in between different life domains. One way of looking at the relationship is, however, to see the difficulties the lone mothers were under and how they impacted their sense of safety and security, as well as their health.

A few circumstances were identified to have an impact on both the mothers' feelings of safety and security as well as their reported health throughout the journeys of transition. Whilst being on benefits, financial shortages and pressures and the stigma attached to the status have negatively impacted on their sense of safety and security as well as their sense of health. As discussed earlier in this chapter, financial shortages have not only made the mothers *'scared'* and *'insecure'*, but have also negatively impacted on their physical health as they were unable to afford *'healthy food'*, even when it was an essential for some mothers' clinical conditions. While

the stigmatised and pressured status of being a benefit claimant was described as a direct cause of depression for some mothers, on top of the financial pressure, restrictions on mobility, and being an unemployed person, they were also discussed as what made the mothers '*insecure*'.

What made the mothers feel safe and secure also positively affected their emotional and physical health. As the mothers moved into paid work, twelve mothers reported some improvements in their sense of safety and security, thanks to secure employment, financial improvement, relieving the burden of being a benefit claimant, and buying some time to prepare for a better future. Some eight among them reported an improvement in their emotional health and described similar contributions to the improvements. The mothers indicated that being in paid work increased their levels of self-esteem, confidence, and happiness, and also decreased their level of stress and lowered their dose of anti-depressants. Thanks to the financial improvements, some mothers were able to afford gym membership and fitness classes, and healthier and fresher food like fruit and vegetables.

Conclusion

The mothers' subjective senses of safety and security as well as of health were a result of various circumstantial aspects they went through during their journeys of transition. While the relationship between the two domains is not clear, it seems obvious that the circumstances the mothers faced over the transitions influenced both their sense of safety and security as well as their emotional and physical health.

Being on social assistance benefits, the lone mothers' senses of safety and security, and health are seemed to be largely dependent on how they perceived the nature of the benefit system and the level of benefit payments. While eight mothers felt protected by the governmental funding in their week-to-week life and time outside of the labour market, it was not comprehensive protection for the other twelve mothers. The nature of the system was felt to be incomprehensible, and the benefit payments were unstable and controlled by rapidly changing political discourses. The interventions of Jobcentre often created extra stress themselves by creating pressure for the mothers to jump into jobs even when it might not fit their circumstances and responsibilities. The direct or indirect contributions of financial struggles and emotional stressors on physical and mental health were identified by 17 mothers, often to an extent where prescribed medicine was needed.

Since the mothers moved into work, the majority, especially those who were part-time and still eligible for in-work benefits, faced the most vulnerable time of the journey. The period was described as such due to financial instability during the benefit recalculation period and a lack of

clarity in the system. The recalculation of in-work benefits was often delayed, messed up, over paid, and required complicated paper work. They were described as incomprehensible and unmanageable stressors, when they had enough to worry about with their new setting in paid work, such as childcare arrangements, housework, and being an employee.

Even when the recalculation got sorted, not all mothers reported that they achieved satisfactory levels of safety and security in paid work. While a half of the mothers reported they had improved or remained safe and secure since their transitions, the other half experienced very different aspects of being in work. The sources of safety and security were secure employment and improved control over finance. The fact that they had now got a job meant a refreshed work experience, relief from putting the scrutiny of the jobcentre behind, and increased control of their finances regardless of the level of increased disposable income. It seems like moving into paid work clearly contributed to the mothers' future outlook, rather than their present safety and security. The majority reported an increased sense of future security, with possibilities to progress at work or increased working hours in the future. However, their sense of safety and security were largely obtained based on secure employment such as a permanent post and relatively secure benefit eligibility due to the age of their youngest child.

When the mothers were not lucky enough to get stable employment or had a young child, their stories would largely be different. The other ten mothers described the journey as unsafe and insecure along the way, but for different reasons: the unstable system which could not guarantee the mothers' in-work finances (especially for part-time workers); the labour market structure which rarely provided stable or promising jobs for the mothers who could only offer limited working hours or time; and the limited free childcare hours which would make them worse off by working more hours. It also negatively affected their future outlook, in terms of having too small a salary to pursue a future (too small to get into the housing market, get a car, or to get a financial independence), having uncertain contracts, or little possibility of progressing within the job.

The causes of emotional and physical difficulties, however, seem to be different from that of safety and security. While many still feel unsafe and insecure after moving into paid work, due to low level of income, job instability, low possibilities of progression within work, and difficulties in childcare arrangement, being in paid work seems to positively contribute to their health (more to their mental health than physical health). It stemmed from a combination of two aspects of being in work. Physically, the mothers were now able to afford more attention to their health, especially their physical health, through gym membership, more walking and exercise, healthier food, and positive distractions in work. More importantly, however, the improvement in their confidence and self-esteem contributed to their mental health and overall subjective well-being, through a removal of the stigmatised status of being a benefit claimant or an unemployed person, removal

of pressures from Jobcentre, and professional recognition from the work. Even those mothers who reported their current physical status as still being poor (due to the exhaustion of playing multiple roles and having a lack of time to care about themselves) still considered themselves to be happier overall in being in work. It implies that the mothers prioritise their paid work over their physical health, which often undermines the importance of physical health.

Chapter 7: Discussion of the key findings

Introduction

This thesis originally adopted a quantitative PWI as a framework to explore the literature gaps of lone mothers' transitions to work and to design a qualitative topic guide for interviews. The literature review based on the framework indicated six less-researched areas of lone mothers' lives during their transitions to paid work, which would contribute to their overall subjective well-being. They are: quality of relationships, community-connectedness, safety, future security, health, and leisure. The topic guide and interviews were therefore designed to explore these less-researched areas. The framework became problematic during data analysis, however, as the experiences and feelings of lone mothers which form their subjective well-being are not easily separated into the eight domains of PWI (see chapter three for detail). Strict adherence to the framework was abandoned for the analysis which instead followed lone mothers' experiences and feelings in a more chronological order. The findings chapters were therefore structured based on their experiences and feelings, which resulted in three main themes: quality of relationships, leisure, and sense of safety and security. Some new concepts also emerged from the analysis and produced useful explanations of their experiences and feelings.

This chapter discusses the key findings and emergent concepts arising from the analysis. In the first two sections, it explores the dynamic shifts that occurred in the quality of relationships with children and with social relations, and how the shifts affected the mothers' subjective well-being. The third section discusses the leisure of lone mothers, where similar feelings and experiences reported in the second section can be reflected in a very different way. The fourth section explores their sense of safety and security, and the contributions their paid work made to that.

7.1 Time, sacrifice and quality of relationships with children

The quality of relationships with children plays an important role in the rationalising process of mothers about choosing whether or not to take up paid work. The mothers are generally sensitive to the needs of their children, and an ethic of care is repeatedly expressed throughout the interviews. Their care concerns are reflected in their work preferences, such as working hours, days, and choosing particular types of jobs. Part-time posts during school-hours were preferred, although some ended up taking full-time or atypical hours of work, as inevitable choices. These rationalisations echo the previous work of Bulanda and Lippmann (2009) and Duncan and Edwards (1999), where lone mothers applied an ethic of care argument to rationalise the different care decisions they made as they moved into paid work in order to provide good mothering as well as invest in their children's future.

Being supportive but exhausted in paid work

While the mothers put the needs and well-being of children at the centre, entering into paid work results in a shift in the form of care provision, from direct to indirect care. A wide range of indirect childcare was arranged and delivered, through informal care supports by grandparents, siblings, older children, and neighbours, as well as formal care, including (pre)school, breakfast or after-school clubs, nursery, and child-minders. Some mothers made themselves physically accessible as well whilst being in work, by working from home, or working somewhere close. Even so, the majority of mothers reported significantly reduced time spent with children, due to the shift in the type of care provision. In this regard, however, some contradictory sentiments are expressed by the mothers, with their quality of relationships with children pre and post moving into work. On the whole, while 'being there' for children was once rationalised as being a good mother whilst claiming benefits, the reduced amount of time spent with children was now understood as a 'break' from children, and as a positive contribution to the quality of their relationships as well as their own and children's well-being.

It is useful to understand the apparent contradiction that exists with reduced contact time between the mothers and children, by exploring the conceptualisation of parental involvement (Lamb et al. 1987, cited in Demo (1992, p.112). Lamb (1987) notes three types of parental involvement: one is *engagement* which includes direct face-to-face care of children, another is *accessibility* which is about being available to meet the needs of children irrespective of giving direct care, and the other is *responsibility*, where parents are accountable for making arrangements and organising resources to meet children's welfare. There are expressions of all three components in these mother's accounts of their relationships with children. But, it appears that they tend to move away from describing their involvement as *engagement* through face-to-

face direct care when on benefits, to one involving more aspects of accessibility and responsibility once they moved into work. For example, when they described their financial support for the children to be socially benefitting from formal childcare (and unable to give direct care themselves), they were being responsible for two aspects: the costs of care, and social and cognitive development of their children. Indeed, new responsibilities seem to emerge for some in relation to teaching their children work ethics and being a good role model. This transition of parental involvement has been defined by Demo (1992) as *supportive detachment*, where mothers are still supportive, and also love, concern, nurture, protect, guide, discipline, and transmit norms and values to their children, but under more detached settings, such as through day care, (pre and after) schools, and baby sitters. It means that the lone mothers were able to justify the reduced time spent together because they still found themselves being supportive to their children under more detached settings, using formal and informal childcare provision.

There is, however, an adverse impact of 'supportive detachment', where the detached settings become pressures for the mothers and the children. Some emotional and physical difficulties were reported by half of the mothers, such as being exhausted, being deprived of each other, having negative behavioural changes in the children with knock-on effects on mothers' behaviours, and feelings of guilt. These findings echo Greenberger and O'Neil's (1990, cited in Demo 1992, p.113) introduction on adverse impacts of the *supportive detachment*, based on a quantitative survey based research on 323 couple and single working parents' with three or four year old child. Greenberger and O'Neil's (1990) research discusses the parental concerns on the well-being of their children and orientation to work. According to the research, with increasing roles and over-commitments, supportive detachment partially generates adverse impacts on maternal well-being, such as physical role strain, depression, and a wide range of negative physical symptoms (back pain, stomach ache and flu).

One interesting point is that, the amount of time the lone mothers in this research managed to provide direct care is not a clear indicator of the quality of the relationship between the lone mothers and children. It means that a preferred type of paid work, like part-time work, could not guarantee the quality of relationships the mothers had with their children. When the lone mothers rationalised their working arrangements, such as working days, hours, office-based, or home-based, their main concerns were the quality of relationships with children and their well-being. However, the ten mothers who reported an improved quality of relationship are not necessarily those working part-time or working from home, and similarly, not everyone in full-time work reported their quality of relationship as deteriorated. This implies two aspects of the mothers' well-being. First, it could mean that the lone mothers tried to strategically reallocate their limited time to meet a similar quality of relationship with their children, regardless of their

working hours and arrangements, while sacrificing other things, such as their own leisure, housework, or social life (see chapter four and five for evidences). Second, it can also be argued that those in full-time work may have made more sacrifices by meeting a similar quality of relationship.

While the quality of relationships with children does not necessarily negatively impacted by the maternal transition to paid work, it may be due to the underpinning sacrifices the mothers made by the supportive detachment and the moral rationalities. A concerning aspect about the well-being of the mothers is, however, that the prioritisation of children's needs and paid work become a good reason for the mothers to overlook their own physical and emotional health (see chapter six).

7.2 Stigma, self-esteem and quality of adult relationships

The process of how one's status comes close to defining one's worth and value has a direct relation to esteem. Weber defines one's 'status' as a quality of social honour, or a lack of it, and something that is "determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour" (Gerth and Mills 1948, cited in Spicker 1984, p.159). Therefore, different levels of social estimation of honour embedded in one's status largely affect one's self-worth and value, and in turn, one's self-esteem. Indeed, being on social assistance benefits has a major impact on lone mothers' subjective well-being, in terms of lowering their self-esteem. The mothers use a number of terms to describe their feelings – *guilt, shame, jealous, embarrassment, helpless, being reliant, unhappy, depressed, and unjustifiable* – and these represent how far the status of benefit claimant becomes damaging to their subjective well-being. According to Scheff (1988), the commonly reported feelings of the mothers, *shame* and *embarrassment*, are social emotions, and rooted in the processes through which the mothers internalise how they imagine others seeing them (Scheff 1988, cited in Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, p.41). Such feelings clearly show that the mothers understood their status as a social dishonour.

A quality of social dishonour according to Spicker (2011, p. 108), has developed with the notion of social identity. Walker (2014, p50) explains Goffman's (1963) notion of social identity which defines someone as a person based on the mix of roles, attributes, and sense and self. It includes physical activities, professional roles, and the concept of self, where a discrediting attribute create stigma and change one's social identity (Stuenkel and Wong, 2012). Indeed, the status of a social security benefit claimant in the UK is very much related to the negative social estimation and social stigma. Shildrick and Macdonald (2013) explore the denial of poverty and the condemnation of the undeserving poor, based on interviews with 60 people experiencing poverty. The study introduces the results of British Social Attitudes survey and argues that the majority theorised individual responsibility of inequality and poverty rather than structural redistribution, and two-thirds of the British public think that unemployment benefits are too high and discourage them from finding jobs (NatCen 2010; 2012, cited in Shildrick and Macdonald 2013: 297). This shift in the public opinion is working well together with governmental efforts to individualise and stigmatise welfare reliance as well as to reduce welfare spending. Daguerre and Etherington (2014) argue that social security benefit claimants are described as an illegitimate burden on society and tax payers, and the blame lies with their own behavioural problems. Wiggan (2012) indicates that state financial support is thought to be encouraging these behavioural problems, by enabling non-working individuals' to care for children or relatives staying at home. These discourses legitimise re-commodification of benefit claimants, even at the margins of the labour market. Patrick (2015) and Whitworth (2013) point out the 'othering' approach and stigmatising

tactic in popular and policy discourses where benefit claimants have been differentiated from hardworking tax-payers and described as 'scroungers'.

A few studies have shown the social stigma felt by lone parents themselves, in regards to their family status as well as their dependency on social assistance benefits. The lone parents themselves feel the negative portrays in the media, as 89% of 800 single parents in 2008 find themselves being pictured as 'scroungers' and 'bad mothers' (Gingerbread 2009). Harkness and Skipp's (2013) qualitative interviews with twenty lone mothers in and out of work clearly show the lone mothers' awareness of the negative rhetoric from both government and the media, and the labels they were under, as a drain on society, something to be discouraged, and scroungers. Gingerbread's (n.d.) 'let's lose the labels' campaign launched for the 2010 election introduces the severity of misconceptions where lone mothers are described as those who bring up criminals, the cause of breaking down the traditional values, scouring the hard-working taxpayers. It clearly shows the trap lone mothers got into where they are scroungers if they do not work, but neglecting children if they do. The experiences of lone mothers under the impacts of such discourses - the demoralising rhetoric and the othering and individualising processes - however remain under-explored.

In this section, this thesis aims to discuss how lone mothers' status as benefit claimants affected their self-esteem and confidence, and the quality of their adult relationships in which their stigmatised status became very much visible and was damaging to relationships.

Feeling needy and stigmatised

As discussed in chapter four, the mothers' social relationship play a key role in everyday life of the mothers and is an important determinant on their subjective well-being in both practical and emotional ways. The important role of wider social relationships as supporting networks for lone mothers is well documented by existing literature. Duncan and Edwards (1999) call this 'social capital', where social organisation of – norms, values, expectations and social support – are situated to facilitate co-operation and trust between people for their mutual benefit. The role of social capital often goes beyond that of the human capital – individual and personal resources - for lone mothers, as the cumulative social capital in one neighbourhood would lead to economic health of the locality as well as one's economic behaviour and ability to take a job. Lone mothers' perceptions of their social capital can also be a key factor that explains their negotiation of motherhood and paid work. Klett-Davies (2007) explores the negotiation of motherhood of 70 British and German lone mothers and categories them into three types depending on their perception on supporting network: the pioneers, the strugglers, and the copers. While the

pioneers have little reliance on their support network, the strugglers would find a lack of social network being lonely, and feel they have failed to meet the expectations of their supporting network and the copers would rely on the supports of their family and friends.

However, as the status of being a benefit claimant becomes a social dishonour and stigma for lone mothers, the damages were found in the mothers' in their quality of social relationships, as Goffman (1963) theorised the notion of stigma inherently relational and social, which disqualifies one's full social acceptance. The lone mothers found themselves as being a needy member of family and friends, and very cautious and morally struggled about asking for supports. This pattern echoed the findings of Daly and Kelly's (2014) research on low income families and their wider family relationships and support. When the support is asked and made from wider family members, it requires careful considerations of 'intrinsic quality of the relationships', such as the strength of the tie, the degree of dependability, and the level of trust and confiding, and the sense of being accepted. Even so, 'support is not costless' (Pahl and Spencer 2004, cited in Daly and Kelly, 2014: 111 and 128). The costs are made on their own health and well-being, in terms of their self-esteem, lack of independence, and shame and embarrassment. These are often reflected and described in self-deprecating ways, such as being shameful as an adult and being a needy and demanding member of family and friends (Daly and Kelly 2014). It severely damages lone mothers' self-esteem as well as become a barrier to position themselves within their family and friends.

There was a general sensitivity among the lone mothers regarding how other people would see them. They were very conscious about negative judgements received from family and friends, through direct and indirect comments and expressions. It was often a vague hostility that the mothers felt, which was also described as being 'may be my *own imagination*', as the mothers were very sensitive about how others would judge their marital and benefit statuses. They felt they were sometimes treated awkwardly or in a degrading manner, they had to make careful conversations and behaviours, people questioned them about their reasons for being on benefits, or felt other mothers do not want to hang around in the same play group. It is fair to note that the circumstantial difficulties including financial and childcare dependency on family and friends, time deprivation, restricted mobility (due to limited financial resources), unstructured routine, and a lack of feeling they have achieved anything or contributed anything were damaging to the mothers' social dishonour, along with the claimant status itself. However, these practical difficulties are inseparable from the negative social image of the status, as altogether these contributed to form the picture of being a benefit claimant. As a result, when the mothers received benefits, they felt the need to hide their status, lie about it, avoid certain topics of conversation, cut-off existing relationships, and postpone making new ones.

The mothers felt negative judgements from a wide range of people, from family, friends, and neighbours who had a close relationship with, but also from people in a wider circle, such as colleagues, acquaintances, and the general public (through media and political discourse). When a person has a series of experiences of social dishonour, like the lone mothers had, this process of stigmatisation is defined as a 'moral career', according to Goffman (1963, cited in Spicker 1984, p.139). The moral career has three dimensions, and one of them is the distance between a person who is stigmatised and others who hold negativity towards the person (See Pinker 1971 for the other two dimensions, depth and time). Pinker (1971) argues that, as the distance increases, an individual's personal characteristics are more likely to be concealed by the stigma, and it becomes the social identity of the stigmatised person. Unfortunately, at least for the lone mothers who participated in this research, people with a relatively shorter distance, such as family and friends, were also active participants in the process of stigmatising the mothers. Thus, their social relationships, even with close relatives, were severely affected and restricted purely because of the stigma attached to being a benefit claimant.

The mothers' reactions towards the judgements were, however, very different depending on the distance of the relationships. In dealing with family and friends, the mothers suffered from extra stresses as they tried to fit-in and acted on the expectations of family and friends to be a member of the group. For people with a greater distance, such as acquaintances, new people, and the general public, the mothers cut-off some existing relationships or postponed making new ones. It means that the mothers acted in more active and resistant ways towards stigma by cutting-off or delaying the relationships when there was a greater distance between themselves and the stigma holders, while acting in rather covert or passive ways of fitting-in or acting on expectations, when it is received by people who are emotionally closer.

One interesting aspect here is that the mothers tried very hard to differentiate themselves from '*other people on benefits*' in the process, because their appearance, behaviours, or values did not fit into their own perceived stereotype of a benefit claimant. Such behaviours reflect the notion of 'othering', and, according to Dervin (2011), it is a process of imposing cultural elements to explain people's behaviour, which in turn draws a boundary between sameness and difference in order to affirm one's own identity. It differentiates between in-group and out-group, and between the self from others to reinforce and protect the self (Dervin 2011). While 'othering' was one way the mothers found to be resistant towards the stigmatisation, it was still done due to the underpinning feelings of shame and the social emotion that is formed by how the mothers imagined others seeing them (Scheff 1988, cited in Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, p.41). This 'othering' is well explained by Shildrick and Macdonald's study (2013). With the shame and stigma of poverty and unemployment, the people who are experiencing poverty tend to differentiate and

distance themselves from other 'below' or 'subordinate' people (disidentification process), and want to belong to a group of 'ordinary and average types' (identification process). In doing so, they necessarily create the groups of people who 'have to' be financially, culturally, socially and morally below them, and this pressure to dissociate becomes stronger when the honest portrayals of the poor are hidden under the 'scrounger' discourses. Therefore, as much as it seems to be that these mothers are resisting the stigma, this action of 'othering' does in fact stem from the same root – feelings of shame, embarrassment, and sensitivity toward the social stigma. Although 'othering' is more frequently adopted when the mothers deal with people at a greater distance, some apply 'othering' to enable them to be around and be an expected member of their family and friends. It was one way of 'fitting-in', and wanting to prove they do not fit into the stereotypes. It means the mothers are both on the receiving end of the stigma and judgements, as well as taking part in them. It often produces further damages on the stereotypes, as the mothers still believed they were pictured, as a mother called it, as a 'dole dossier' by their relations, regardless how hard they tried not to be one of the stereotypes.

The social stigma and judgements obtained by the lone mothers' personal relations as well as the political rhetoric are generating a wide range of damages on their subjective well-being. It does not only negatively affect their quality of relationships but also their leisure and a sense of safety and security which will be discussed further in this chapter. This raises an important message for policy makers to reconsider the stigmatisation tactic to get people off benefits (see chapter eight).

Feeling less stigmatised and legitimate in paid work

The transitions into paid work were believed by the mothers to make positive improvements to their quality of adult relationships, and in turn their subjective well-being. However, arguing the contribution of transition as a sole factor to improve one's quality of relationships is an over estimation. It can be argued in two ways.

First, the main contribution of their new status, being in paid work, only remains to partially remove the stigma and judgements the mothers used to suffer, rather than improving their quality of adult relationships as a whole. In other words, the improvements are not in fact done by the new status (being in paid work), but by (partially) removing the damages of the old status. In addition, while the mothers felt they are now on '*the other side of the fence*', and the transition can be seen as an effective contribution (by relieving the stigma), it is still at best an incomplete one. The experiences of stigma often leave their trauma behind, just like Mary and Amy who decided to make a self-withdrawal, by changing their values not to seek approval outside of their close circle, after having suffered from stigma and judgements. In other cases, the stigma of being

a benefit claimant has been converted into a different form of stigma, when the job the mothers moved into does not meet their satisfactory level. As Jennifer said, she still lied about her job due to embarrassment. The mothers were still suffering some level of stigma or a trace of stigma even after moving to paid work. When Pinker (1971) explores the duration of stigma as one of the three dimensions, he argues that while some forms of stigma are permanent, such as deformity, others are temporary, like the one associated with benefit status. It seems, however, obvious that the stigma does not often end when the stigma-holding status terminates, and the after effects of stigma even last longer than the duration of the stigma itself for some of the lone mothers here. One thing that should be noted is that these mothers were already in paid work at the point of interview. The majority had already made their transitions within the period of claiming Income Support, where the job searching requirements are not as active as for those who are on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). We can only imagine how much others would suffer when their circumstances only allow them to stay on social assistance benefits, and how the stigma and judgements would work on their subjective well-being, including the quality and quantity of their social relationships and interactions.

Second, the positive contributions of transition are an over estimation, because they are largely made by allowing the mothers to build justifications and legitimacy for their behaviours, which were once unjustifiable whilst claiming benefits. The main contribution of transition observed by the mothers is its role to remove some causes of their low self-esteem, especially their financial dependency on family and friends. The mothers believed they achieved some level of independency, as they do not get help with cash, grocery, or rent payments from their parents and siblings anymore, and it relieves the tension and strain of their social relationships. It should, however, be seen as a shift in the dynamics of adult relationships, perhaps to a way the mothers felt more comfortable or justifiable with, rather than an independency achieved through their paid work. One way of identifying this new shift in their relationships is their remaining dependency on childcare.

The mothers' adult relationships, family, friends, and neighbours, played an important role as a supporting network of childcare. This echo some existing knowledge of the positive influences of having social networks on one's paid work. Haux (2012) explains that the childcare as well as financial supports from family, employers, and colleagues contribute to make lone mothers' experiences in paid work positive. This also goes the other way around, as being in work also have positive effects on their relationships with colleagues and other adults (Harkness and Skipp 2013).

The more important aspect here is the shift occurred in the form of supports, from finance to childcare. In paid work, the mothers reported the involvement of multiple social relationships arranged or cooperated for childcare, including grandparents, the ex-partner or the current

partner, older children, neighbours, friends, and supervisor and colleagues. The childcare support is often the only way where the mothers are able to manage or sustain both work and care. The absence of such supporting network became a central barrier for the mothers' take up of paid work as well as their competitiveness in the labour market. It means that the mothers were equally (often more) as dependent as before, but in a different form. The frequency of dependency in fact increased for some mothers.

Even so, the majority of mothers changed their attitudes to dealing with their remaining dependency. They appeared to be more willing to swap their financial dependency for childcare dependency, and childcare was interpreted as justifiable, inevitable, and even healthy for themselves as well as for their relations who were supporting with childcare. While the family and friends' supports are never costless as mentioned above, financial help seems to be costing more on their self-esteem than childcare supports for the mothers in this research (Pahl and Spencer 2004). It was a symbol of them leaving benefit status, making progress, and becoming independent. It means being in work is a better reason for the mothers to be dependent on their family and friends, in any form if they had to. The status of being a benefit claimant or not seems to be a strong indicator as to what is justifiable or not, since the same behaviour of dependency was once seen as being needy or a burden, whilst being on benefits but not so when being in work. The fact that being in work is a better reason to be dependent proves how much the mothers were sensitive about the stigma attached to the status. Paid work is therefore not a route to standing completely unsupported on one's own two feet, at least for the lone mothers, but arguably one way in which they could justify a 'good reason' for remaining dependent. Some mothers did worry though, about the burden placed on grandparents as a result.

With similar logic, another form of legitimising behaviours is built based on the status of being in paid work, in regards to their availability to family and friends. It justifies other contradictory sentiments expressed pre and post transition, behaviour that was unjustifiable (not being available) whilst claiming benefits becomes legitimate as they earn the status of being in work. Being in paid work changes the dynamics of relationships toward where the mothers become less available to their family and friends, but its impact on the quality of relationships is not necessarily seen as negative by the mothers. Their unavailability was understood as reasonable, because it would make the mothers more organised and have more quality time with family and friends, even though it could be hard for their family and friends. Similar to the way the mothers understood their continued dependency, their unavailability which was once described as negative whilst claiming benefits, became an acceptable and legitimate thing. At the centre of this justification, being in work played a great role. The mothers applied the same justification logic to their leisure time.

7.3 Quality of leisure

While the status of being a benefit claimant plays a great role as a social dishonour, one way of 'othering' can also be identified from how the mothers form their activities during non-obliged hours. The activities the mothers reported whilst claiming social assistance benefits can be divided into two: those that fit into the definition of leisure and others that go beyond the definition. According to a definition introduced by Lewis (2013), leisure is a freely chosen enjoyment-centred activity in non-obliged time (Lewis 2003; Quinn 2013). It therefore differentiates enjoyment-oriented leisure activities from paid or non-paid work and care. The activities enjoyed by the lone mothers that fit into the definition include: watching TV and DVDs, listening to music, talking to family and friends, walking around town, shopping, meditation, and going swimming or to the gym. Mothers however described other 'enjoyable' activities in their non-obliged time that went beyond the definition of leisure and these involved: cleaning or tidying up, spending time with children, self-learning, taking educational courses or doing a degree, and voluntary work. These activities often have purposes other than pure enjoyment, such as responsibilities, commitments, and future investments.

The mothers' sensitivities about their social dishonour are shown through their different tones in describing their leisure activities. The activities the mothers reported whilst claiming social assistance benefits mostly do not fit the definition, as they tend to be very purposeful like self-teaching, education, and voluntary work. It is another form of 'othering' themselves from 'others on benefits', by wanting to prove their deviancy among the group as someone who uses their time in productive and meaningful ways, who invests in future progression, and uses the good time and money given by the social security system. With the same othering logic, the mothers show reluctance while describing enjoyment-oriented leisure, such as watching TV or walking around town, with terminologies that imply unproductivity or dissatisfaction, such as 'doing nothing', 'just being lonely', or 'bumbling around'. One might interpret such dominant use of purposeful activities in non-obliged time as alternative leisure being taken when their daily routines were fully filled with responsibilities and commitments. However, the reluctance shown in the descriptions of enjoyment-oriented activities implies that the purposeful activities are seen as more legitimate justifications for the mothers for taking time away from their commitments and responsibilities. It was therefore done (or at least were expressed in the interviews) in order to prove their deviancy, under the pressures of social stigma and judgements, rather than as alternative leisure.

Feeling legitimate to enjoy leisure in paid work

As the mothers moved into paid work, there was a shift in terms of the activities done in the non-obliged hours as well as in the tone mothers' used to describe their activities. The mothers stopped or noticeably reduced their time devoted to the purposeful activities, voluntary work and education courses, after moving into work. One might interpret this as being reduced as a result of the mothers meeting their purpose (getting a job) or as a result of their overall non-obliged hours being reduced by moving to paid work. However, it can also be interpreted as the paid work relieving the mothers from the pressures of pursuing productive and meaningful uses of time – the measures the mothers adopted in order to prove their behaviour as not fitting into the stigmatised stereotype. The second interpretation can in fact be very persuasive, when taking into account the tone of the mothers when describing enjoyment-oriented activities.

The mothers appear to be less reluctant to discuss enjoyment-oriented activities whilst being in paid work, as something needed or a great relief from their tiring routines. The activities themselves however still remain informal, irregular, and fragmented. The mothers usually squeeze such activities in between their responsibilities and commitments, such as watching TV after children go to bed, or walking around shops between their grocery shopping and picking up children. However, it seems clear that the status of being in paid work makes them feel less guilty about their enjoyment-oriented activities.

The more concerning aspect in their concept of leisure is that they now often considered their paid work as leisure. While they described paid work sometimes as relaxing and enjoyable, it still cannot be seen as leisure under the definition developed by Lewis (2003), since by its nature, it involves responsibilities and obligations. Even so, it provides great legitimacy. Some mothers reported that they now had the '*legitimacy to have fun*', or at least the legitimacy to discuss having fun in the interview, whilst being in paid work. It shows the status of being in paid work not only plays an important role in relieving the mothers from the pressures to use their non-obliged time in productive and meaningful ways, but also in giving them the right to have fun, as they earn the status.

The shifts that occurred in the form of activities and the tone of describing such activities, implies three important points about lone mothers' leisure. First, the mothers feel obliged to make good use of time which was 'given' by benefits, and to justify their time away from housework and childcare. Second, it makes the mothers find more legitimacy and justification in using their non-obliged time for doing something meaningful, productive, and purposeful whilst claiming social assistance benefits. Third, the lone mothers are not in a good position to fully pursue a freely chosen and enjoyment-centred activity even after moving into paid work, regardless of their intentions to pursue purposeful activities in their non-obliged hours.

7.4 Sense of safety and security

While a number of the lone mothers (eight out of twenty) consider a sense of safety and security as the most important factor that affected their quality of life, they faced a series of stressors which shake the foundation of their sense of safety and security over the transition to paid work.

Stressors whilst living on social assistance benefits

The source of stressors for the lone mothers whilst living on social assistance benefits has a wide range. The unmanageable financial shortages play a great role. While the financial difficulties of lone mothers living on benefits have well been explored by existing knowledge (Millar 2006; Haux et al. 2012; Patrick¹⁶ 2015 – see chapter two), welfare reforms under the last Coalition and the new Conservative governments take little account of the gendered nature of such difficulties. A gendered analysis of Women's Budget Group (Annesley and Himmelweit 2010) interprets the Coalition's Spending Review and Emergency Budget 2010 as an approach that fails to understand its gendered impacts. The analysis argues that lone parents – the majority of whom are women – will suffer most from reductions in public services and falls in welfare spending, including Child Benefit and Housing Benefit. Things have not changed much since the new Conservative either. The Women's Budget Group's (2015) analysis of the Autumn Statement and Spending Review 2015 reports that further cuts in public spending will disproportionately impact on the security of daily lives. Low income women will be losing the most, mainly lone mothers.

Adding up to the financial difficulties, the lone mothers found a lack of sustainability in their lives on benefits due to a series of negative experiences. They faced some degrading treatments and pressures from Jobcentre, whilst constantly worrying about the incomprehensive nature of the benefit system and political discourses. While the stigma and judgements the mothers sensed in their formal and informal relationships made them feel 'embarrassed', and 'shameful', the treatments and pressures received from their advisors at Job centre went beyond, and made the mothers feel 'scared' and 'intimidated' on top of their embarrassments. When the stigma and judgements were received in their relationships, it was associated with their self-esteem and confidence, but when they were received from the governmental agency, it shook their fundamental sense of safety and security. These negative experiences often became a strong motivation for the lone mothers to move off social assistance benefits, by severely impacting their sense of safety and security. Having their sense of safety and security threatened whilst on benefits largely influence on the mothers' choice of jobs, where they consider jumping into 'any job', knowing it would not fit their desires, needs, or circumstances. However, it has consequences.

¹⁶ Patrick's (2015) research on lived experience of welfare reform qualitatively explores the difficulties of welfare recipients, but not all interviewees are lone mothers

Sense of safety and security in paid work

The lone mothers had a clear notion of secure employment. They are the jobs that involve permanent or long-term contracts, provide stable money, and are compatible with their other needs, desires and commitments (such as childcare, housework, and educational courses). Even when the job itself does not provide a satisfactory level of payment, it can still be a source of security, as long as it can be compatible with their other needs and desires. The mothers could instead count on further improvements in the future by increasing working hours over time when their children reach school age, obtaining educational qualifications, or refreshing their work experiences.

However, obtaining 'secure employment' was understood as a rare opportunity for the lone mothers in the current job market. The mothers found themselves less competitive in the current dynamics of the labour market, due to their unavailability for atypical hours, night shifts, or full-time work, and their lack of recent work experience. The type of jobs the mothers moved into are largely associated insecurity, in terms of its contract, work prospects, and level of payment. Some mothers started their paid work based on a letter of employment rather than a proper contract, not knowing exactly how much they would be better (or worse) off after calculating the wage and in-work benefits. Some were experiencing cuts in their field of work, and possibilities of progression within the job were unclear. It seems it is the nature of a lone mother's employment which determines her sense of safety and security, rather than a mere transition into 'a job'. Having difficulties in childcare arrangement were also a source of insecurity, especially for those mothers who did not have other supporting networks as a childcare back-up in case of emergency (see Skinner 2003 and Bell et al 2005 for the importance of this emergency back-up care for working mothers).

Many studies highlight how the employment patterns of lone parents are closely associated with financial insecurity, short job retention, and little in-work progression. While lone parents have a similar rate of entering into employment, they are twice as likely to leave paid work than non-lone parents, and it is especially frequent for those who have moved into a job that is associated with low-pay and poor prospects (Bell et al. 2006; Evans et al. 2004; McCollum 2012; Ray et al. 2010).

More importantly, however, the insecure nature of jobs available to lone mothers reflects the gendered nature of the labour market. A study on lone mothers' journeys of moving to work, conducted by Haux et al. (2012), reports the uncertainties and worries of working lone mothers about their long-term job stability. Harkness and Skipp (2013) provide empirical data to support that lone mothers are typically engaged in part-time and low paying occupations and around one third of employees are in personal service or sales jobs, and 25% are in administrative

occupations. As more recent evidence, Jaehrling et al. (2015) quantitatively demonstrate the employment patterns of single mothers in the UK, where they carry a greater risk of involuntary termination, moving back into unemployment or inactivity, and engaging unstable employment, compared to partnered mothers. Kowalewska (2015) explores how lone mothers' income and incentives change depending on the working hours and wage rates. The study argues that the effects of tax and benefit measures of the Coalition government on employment sustainability and 'make work pay' are still weak, and only contributed to increase work incentives for mini-jobs (fewer than sixteen hours a week).

Lewis (2007) and MacLeavy (2007) once interpret English welfare to work policies as a gender-blind approach which assumes equal economic activeness between all men and women and fails to recognise the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. Policy practices only recognise work in the formal economy while demoting other kinds of work, including especially the caring work (both cited in Smith et al. 2010). The gendered nature of the labour market is still less recognised under the new Conservative government. A recent report on the impact of changes in the benefits system (JSA) on women published by the Fawcett society (Ariss et al. 2010) argues that while the terms of JSA appear to be gender neutral, women and men experience two very different processes of seeking work through JSA and there is little understanding of such differences within the JSA processes. Women are more likely to have factors that affect their job seeking ability as well as engagement with Jobcentre Plus, due to such as caring responsibilities and domestic violence. In the labour market, women are more likely to engage with part-time work and low paid jobs and have a restriction in their working hours and time due to caring responsibilities.

The disadvantaged positions of lone mothers in the benefits system as well as in the labour market have another consequence. The respondents in this study experienced their own vicious circle - having their sense of safety and security shaken-off whilst on benefits, considering or jumping into 'any jobs', and not being able to achieve financial and job security even in paid work. While this circle resulted in moving back to Income Support again for one mother in this research, there are many existing studies supporting this pattern. Stewart's (2014) research based on the British Household Panel Survey explores lone parents' predominant share of unstable - moving in and out of work - trajectories over the last fifteen years. A similar pattern is shown in Scotland by Harkins and Egan (2013), where a larger proportion of lone parents are experiencing low-pay and unemployment cycling. Harkness and Skipp's research (2013) argue that the worsening economic climate as well as welfare to work regime created an environment where lone mothers feel more pressure than ever to move into paid work regardless of the 'fit' with caring hours and responsibilities and skills. As highlighted here - some respondents were willing to take 'any job' to

move off benefits regardless of the long-term prospects or secure nature of the employment. The labour market that the lone mothers were entering into was therefore problematic and created its own insecurities. Other research by Shildrick et al. (2010) explains the mechanisms behind recurrent poverty, in the low-pay, no-pay cycle. Their interviewees found that the jobs available to them were less likely to lift them out of poverty, due to the temporary and insecure nature of employment. The fact that this pattern of cycle is dominantly shared by lone mothers implies that the capacity of doing or sustaining work is inseparable from household income, the intensity of caring duties, and the availability of supporting networks (Shildrick et al. 2010; Stewart 2014).

Conclusion

The original aim of this thesis is to answer the following research question, *How does the transition from social assistance benefits into paid work affect the overall subjective well-being of lone mothers and their quality of life?*

The evidence here suggests that the answer to the question would be, that their subjective well-being and quality of life are not necessarily improved or deteriorated, but are transformed into different ones over the course of the transition. The status of being in work helps the mothers achieve several improvements in their subjective well-being. They find more control over their finances, feel financially less dependent on their family and friends, and are able to teach work ethics and be a 'proper' provider for their children. Their self-esteem and confidence are improved by being relieved from the burden of living with the social stigma and judgements attached to being a benefit claimant, and they consequently report an improved level of emotional health, as well as report more legitimate justifications for their leisure activities in non-obliged hours.

In the process, however, the mothers pay the price, making trade-offs in other aspects of their lives. The mothers remain equally dependent on their family and friends with childcare and often remain financially dependent on in-work benefits, especially those who move into part-time jobs. They exchange opportunities for providing direct care with the side effects of indirect care, such as physical exhaustion and deprivation of time spent with their children. Their leisure activities still remain informal, irregular, and fragmented, or the paid work itself becomes leisure as it is the only time they have for themselves away from housework and childcare, or the mothers find more legitimacy in having purposeful leisure activities. The nature of their job still has an important effect on their well-being, in terms of social relationships and sense of safety and security. It is therefore a gross over simplification to argue a mere transition to (any) paid work would achieve a better quality of life or well-being for lone mothers.

Overall, the evidence here shows that lone mothers may not be 'better off' in work either financially, emotionally, socially or physically. What is clear however is that they are 'better-off' being free from the stigma of benefits. This stigma is damaging to their social relationships (even with their closest relatives), to their sense of self-worth, to their sense of entitlement to leisure time, and even to some extent to their sense of safety and security as the threat of benefit sanctions and the uncertainty of future rule changes and political directives hang over them. This raises a very important question, is it time for policy makers to take seriously the damage they are causing to lone mothers and children as a result of their deliberate stigmatisation tactics to get people off benefits and into work? This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore the question of *How does the transition from social assistance benefits into paid work affect the overall subjective well-being of lone mothers and their quality of life?* It adopted a qualitative research method, interviewing in-depth some 20 lone mothers where the majority had at least one child aged six or under and who had recently returned to work (in last 6 months), working at least 16 hours per week. The empirical work was based on an analytical framework adapted from the PWI and this led the development of the research instruments, a topic guide, and the questions for analysis.

This final chapter will revisit the gap in knowledge, and discuss the limitations of research methods. Then it considers the findings arising from the research and the implications in the political context, and sets out future research areas that may be fruitful for further enquiry.

A gap in knowledge and research methods

In answering the research question based on the existing literature, a gap was found when applying the analytical framework of the PWI. The index proposes eight domains that represent one's quality of life as a whole, and has been used, in an Australian context, to measure the subjective well-being and the quality of life of lone mothers during their transitions into paid work. Following the literature review on the evidence of lone parenthood, the author further categorised the eight domains depending on the volume and depth of the existing knowledge, as follows:

- Three well-researched domains: financial circumstances, achievement, and health
- Three less-researched domains: relationships and future security
- Three missing domains: community-connectedness, safety, and leisure

The empirical research questions and topic guide were designed to mainly explore the less researched and missing domains of lone parents' lives since their transitions from social assistance benefits to paid work. An original aim of the empirical research was to explore the lives and the subjective well-being of lone mothers as a whole since their transitions to paid work, by filling the gaps in the existing literature. However, as discussed in details in chapter three, some limitations were identified due to the deductive nature of the PWI and the application of the strict framework was abandoned for the analysis which instead followed lone mothers' experiences and feelings in a chronological order. The finding chapters are therefore restructured based on their

experiences and feelings, which produced three main themes: quality of relationships, leisure, and sense of safety and security. Some new concepts also emerged and produced useful explanations of their experiences and feelings and these were discussed in chapter seven. These are revisited here but with the focus on policy implications of the research findings.

Policy implications of the research findings

Chapter one discussed how lone parenthood in the UK has historically been problematized in two main ways: as a moral panic undermining marriage that is thought to form the basis of a 'stable society' and, as a financial burden to society and the tax payers. A recent acceleration of this problematisation has emerged in regards to a political need to portray benefit claimants as an illegitimate burden on society (Daguerre and Etherington 2014).

Welfare dependency is still claimed to be a problem of lone parenthood, although the focus has been on their behavioural problems compounded by the generous welfare benefits. While unemployment and poverty are described as an individual failure, welfare dependency is assumed and stigmatised as a 'life style choice.' Such lifestyle is said to be a 'poor substitute for a working life' which produces 'social costs of failure' (DWP 2010b, cited in Wiggan 2012, p.388). The generous welfare benefits are therefore considered as an 'unfair advantage' that feeds the dependency, and low out-of-work benefits and sanction regimes are the right measures to encourage the claimants to accept a 'reasonable' job (Daguerre and Etherington 2014; Newman 2011). In the process, benefit claimants have been differentiated from hardworking tax payers, as Whitworth (2013a) points out, as a process of 'othering' of benefit claimants. Another DWP report, *21st Century Welfare*, argues that there should be an increased "fairness between different groups of benefit recipients and between recipients and the taxpayer", and "clear expectations about what claimants need to do in return for the support they receive" (DWP 2010a, p.24 and p. 28). It implies that benefit recipients are not tax payers, or at least not 'proper' ones, and that they are the ones who mainly receive the 'support'. This approach of 'othering', or 'shirkers and strivers' narratives according to Patrick (2015), stigmatises those who are on social assistance benefits as well as those who have had previous experience of receiving it.

Such stereotyping and labelling in political rhetoric has effectively been delivered by the media, and has influenced a shift in public opinion that "fraud is rife and people are lazy" (Public and Commercial Services Union, cited in Etherington and Daguerre 2015, p.21). Lone parent claimants have therefore carried social stigma in two ways, by not forming a family type that would work for creating 'greater longevity and stability' in society and by being a burden on tax payers and on society as a whole (DWP 2012b, p.16). This double whammy arguably would provide room for

policy makers to defend and support policy measures to push claimants off benefits and into paid work, and legitimate stricter welfare conditionality and tougher benefit sanctions for lone parenthood.

Indeed, there has been constant emphasis on lone mothers to make contributions through paid work rather than being a stay-at-home mother and claiming social assistance benefits. A number of policy measures have been introduced to make more lone parents ready and push them into the labour market, from as early as when their youngest child reaches the age of one. As chapter one discussed in detail, the previous two governments, New Labour and the Coalition, started with changes in the benefit entitlements of lone parents on the grounds of them being lone parents, by lowering the eligible age of the youngest child, increasing the frequency of mandatory Work-focused interviews, and introducing WRAs (DWP 2014). The new Conservative government, which came into power in May 2015, introduced further conditionality for lone parents. Chancellor George Osborne's Summer Budget 2015 speech made it clear that lone parents will be required to look for work as soon as their youngest child reaches three in order to claim Universal Credit. This new plan is being legitimised with the introduction of free childcare up to 30 hours a week for 'hardworking families' of three and four year old children, starting from 2017 (Osborne 2015).

The stigmatising and 'othering' approaches of political rhetoric as well as policy measures based on such rhetoric become a powerful tool to shift public opinion, and provides further room for stigmatisation of benefit claimants, who are already agreed on as a undeserving group, the 'them' who are unlike 'us'. It fed the wrong stereotypes of benefit claimants, including those who define themselves as a deviant person among the 'people on benefits'. Severe impacts are being generated by social stigma and judgements on the lives of lone mothers as benefit claimants, while the difficulties that lone mothers experience whilst claiming benefits are largely overlooked in the political discussions. Therefore, the following section will start by discussing two meaningful implications of the research findings - the damages of social stigma that have appeared on the lone mothers' lives, and their transitions, which can be claimed to be driven by humiliation and fear.

The damages generated by social stigma

The damages of social stigma appeared in many aspects of the lone mothers' lives. The most damage was done to their self-esteem and confidence, which in turn negatively impacted their quality of relationships, sense of belonging, health, and leisure.

While being in paid work was tied to being a responsible member of society, as well as a sign of good motherhood, being on social assistance benefits and being a stay-at-home mother became a financial burden to society and a sign of an irresponsible mother (See chapter four and seven). It negatively impacted the lone mothers' quality of relationships with their children and in turn their subjective well-being. The mothers pictured themselves as poor providers and mothers, and generally felt unhappy with their lives on benefits. The feelings resulted from a combination of various circumstances of living on benefits, including limited finance, mobility, and a lack of structure in the daily routine, as well as stigma and judgements attached to their status. The mothers found their unhappiness being picked up on by the children and resulted in the children's behavioural problems, which then led to another knock-on effect on mothers' mood.

The damages also appeared in the quality of informal and formal relationships of the mothers. They not only felt 'being othered' by their close relationships, but also pictured themselves as needy members of the family and amongst their friends. Low self-esteem and confidence prevented them from reaching out to their family and friends, or from taking part in voluntary activities in their communities. The mothers believed that they were being stigmatised and judged by the general public as an underclass group of society whose lifestyle choices are associated with drinking, smoking, taking drugs, and sitting on their back and doing nothing. It made the mothers feel the need to hide or lie about their status, restrict certain topics of conversation, and cut-off or delay their relationships. It generated extra stress when the mothers responded to the stigma by fitting-in to the expectations of their family and friends, or by cutting-off or delaying their formal relationships. For some mothers, it became the main cause of their emotional difficulties including depression and stress. As one of the coping mechanisms of stigmatisation, the mothers adopted the approach of 'othering' themselves from 'other people on benefits', as they believed their behaviours, attitudes, and appearances were different from them. It means the mothers are both on the receiving end of the stigma and judgements, as well as taking part in them.

The stigma and judgements the mothers felt were strong enough to make them form their leisure activities in certain ways. The mothers found little legitimacy or justification for pursuing enjoyment-oriented activities, and reported the use of the majority of their non-obliged hours with purposeful, meaningful, and productive activities, which were inseparable from caring and housework responsibilities or future investment.

As Whitworth (2013a) discussed, the contractualist discourse considers paid work as the only way to be equated to contributions, and implies other activities such as unpaid care work or voluntary work as valueless. This pattern of stigmatisation contains an implication that being in paid work and making their contributions through taxes are more legitimate, valuable, and something that should be prioritised over being in non-paid work and making contributions through voluntary

work or care work. This massive prioritisation of paid work under the current economy and political rhetoric has been ignoring the fact that being in paid work is not the only way to contribute to society. For the lone mothers, contributions have already been made through their extensive voluntary work and care work for their children. It builds up the notion that paid work is superior to non-paid work, which also implies that the lone mothers' legitimate period of 'care time' while being on Income Support is in fact less valuable than their time (or others') being in paid work.

Transitions being driven by humiliation and fear

The two governmental approaches, the strong paternalism and stigmatisation and 'othering' tactics, are being used to drive lone parents off social assistance benefits and into paid work. The paternalism describes paid work as an essential route to achieving the quality of life of benefit claimants, including lone mothers, by improving their physical and emotional well-being. The stigmatisation and 'othering' tactics are being used to legitimise the welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions, under the assumption that the problems underpinning the benefit claimants are behavioural in nature and amenable through a mixture of incentives and sanctions (Newman 2011; Watts et al. 2014). The combination of the two approaches sends a political message that it is right to swing a large stick (sanctions), because it would ultimately make benefit claimants happy.

The findings of this research, however, show that these two policy goals, improving the well-being of benefit claimants and controlling the access to the welfare to do so, can be competing against one another. The conditioning welfare and sanctions are being legitimised with deliberate stigmatisation as a political need, and it severely damages the well-being of lone mothers, not only in terms of their self-esteem and confidence, but also by shaping their identity in certain ways. As we have witnessed, the mothers described themselves as poor providers or poor mothers, needy members of their families and friends, and as underclass citizens within their formal and informal relationships. It damages their identity as a mother and a caregiver, and humiliates them with the label of a dole dossier, where they constantly feel the need to prove otherwise. The impacts go further than damaging their identity, and shaking their sense of safety and security. The mothers found a lack of sustainability in their lives on benefits, as they felt scared and intimidated by the incomprehensible benefit system and the degrading treatments and pressures from Jobcentre. It plays a great role in scaring the mothers off benefits as well as undermining their fundamental right to be safe, secure, and to live.

The two drives of transition to paid work - humiliation and fear - are the current policy measures to get lone mothers into paid work. Is it really fair to describe the lone mothers who have committed their time to childcare as dole dossers, just because they are not paying taxes through paid work? Should it be the role of policy to drive their transitions by fear and humiliation? If not, should lone parents' access to welfare be treated differently when they have caring responsibilities for young children?

The next question is whether a transition would amend 'the problems of benefit claimants' and make them achieve the quality of life, and heal the damages done by the stigmatisation of being a benefit claimant.

Is the overall well-being of lone mothers improved or legitimised by taking up paid work?

As much as the political rhetoric of problematisation made room for welfare conditionality and tougher sanctions, this is also based on a paternalistic assumption that the government knows better about what is good for the benefit claimants (Daguerre and Etherington 2014). There has been an increasing emphasis on the role of the welfare state in creating and distributing well-being to their citizens (Pacek and Radcliff 2008), and David Cameron (2010) is quoted as saying that "we've already got some very strong instincts - even prejudices, sometimes - about what will improve people's lives, and we act on those instincts...having the purpose of a job is as important to the soul as it is to the bank balance, and it's there in our hugely ambitious work programme to get people off welfare". Nudging benefit claimants into paid work is being discussed as a critical measure to meet this overarching goal of social policy, and in making their quality of life and well-being better (Tomlinson and Kelly 2013, p.152).

The paternalistic approaches imply that all paid work is considered to be beneficial, where people can see the clear rewards from taking ALL types of work (DWP 2010a; Whitworth 2013a). The benefits of being in paid work remain actively advertised under the Coalition government, and the following are only a small part of them.

"Work remains the best route out of poverty". (HM Government, 2014, p.106)

"The income [work] brings, can change lives – boosting confidence and self-esteem, providing a structure to people's lives and giving them a stake in their community". (DWP 2012b, p.10)

"The benefits of work are far wider than just remuneration. We know that work provides a sense of purpose and personal responsibility and enables parents to act as role models for their children". (DWP 2012b, p.37)

“Work has wider benefits for communities, fostering aspiration in young people and breaking the cycle of worklessness and entrenched poverty that has become a feature of too many communities in the UK”. (DWP 2012b, p.37)

This rhetoric is consistent with the previous Labour government’s approach too, which became the starting point of this research.

*“Work is good for you: people who work are **better-off financially**, better-off in terms of their **health and well-being**, their **self-esteem**, and **future prospects** for themselves and their families. Work promotes **choice and independence** for people, supports our society and increases **community cohesion**. ... Work is also good for society as a whole. Both economic prosperity and fairness dictate that everyone who can work should be expected to do so, especially where people would otherwise be seeking to be supported through taxpayers’ money.” (DWP 2007b, p.23)*

The statements provide a paternalistic justification of paid work on the grounds of helping benefit claimants, including lone mothers, not only in financial ways, but also by improving their physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

On the surface, the lone mothers who participated in this research agreed, to some extent, on the positive effects of being in paid work on their well-being. Some 15 of the 20 mothers reported that their subjective well-being had consequently improved, when they compared the recollections of experiences and feelings whilst claiming benefits with their current status of being in paid work. The improvements were expressed in many ways, including *‘being happier’* or *‘having better quality of life’*. Even the other five mothers who reported their well-being had not improved agreed that moving to paid work was a positive decision. But, the transition itself did not make them happier, since they found themselves pursuing a career they did not aspire to, or they had to make sacrifices for in other aspects of their lives.

However, claiming the transition into paid work as the sole contribution in increasing their subjective well-being is an over estimation in two aspects. Firstly, the nature of improvements is largely associated with the removal of the stigma and judgements attached to the status of being a benefit claimant rather than the paid work itself. Second, the improvements are largely associated with legitimacy and justification of behaviours which were once unjustifiable or unhealthy whilst claiming benefits. These two natures of improvement appear well in many aspects of their lives, including their self-esteem, relationships, safety and security, and health, which mean the improvements used as the governmental rationale for promoting paid work are in fact over-estimated or misinterpreted.

Limited nature of improvements

The most benefited aspect that the mothers reported was an increase in their self-esteem and confidence, which were believed to make their lives generally happier, and to improve the quality of relationships with children, family and friends, and even with other informal relations around them. It also helped their sense of belonging to their community. However, the nature and the extent of improvements in their self-esteem and confidence are still incomplete in two ways.

First, the improvements stemmed from the removal of the status of being a benefit claimant, which is where the stigma and judgements were attached. The improvements in self-esteem and confidence meant the mothers felt they were now at '*the other side of the fence*' where they would not be judged based on their status of being a benefit claimant. This nature of improvement indicates that the status is the main cause of their low confidence, as the status shapes their identity as poor mothers, needy members of their families and friends, and underclass citizens. Putting it in a simpler way, the improvements are the result of escaping the identity of a '*dole dossier*', rather than the outcome of being in paid work.

Second, while the governmental paternalism argues that paid work should boost confidence and self-esteem, and increase community cohesion, it is rather an incomplete argument when considering the side effects of stigmatisation and judgements. Community cohesion is one of the governmental rationales of promoting paid work for lone parents, and defined as a society where a common vision and sense of belonging exist in communities, where different backgrounds and circumstances of people are appreciated and valued (Communities and Local Government 2007). The influence of stigma that the mothers suffered whilst claiming social assistance benefits become a barrier to build a sense of belonging, as it leaves a trauma that prevents some mothers from seeking any further approval outside of their close relationship circle even after moving into paid work. The after effects of stigma even last longer than the duration of the stigma, and negatively impacts their quality of relationships as well as sense of belonging.

Building justifications and legitimacy around the paid work

One may argue that the transitions to paid work themselves made positive contributions to the mothers' self-esteem and well-being, regardless of whatever nature the improvements stemmed from. However, having improved self-esteem as a result of being free from stigma and judgements cannot be claimed as a major improvement, because it was partially achieved by building justification and legitimacy for their behaviour, which was once unjustifiable whilst claiming benefits. One good example is their feelings of independency. Independency is also said

to be one of the governmental rationales for promoting paid work. The mothers felt proud of having achieved financial independency from family and friends, even when they still remained dependent on childcare, and the frequency of dependency was increased for some mothers. It is a shift in the form of dependency to a way that the mothers felt was more justifiable, rather than independency achieved through paid work. Their changed attitudes in dealing with their remaining dependency can be evidence of their justification and feelings of legitimacy. The mothers appeared to be more willing to swap their financial dependency for childcare dependency, and interpreted it as justifiable, inevitable, and even healthy for themselves as well as for their relations who were supporting with childcare. This strongly argues against the governmental rationale of paid work as a route to achieve independency, as it would arguably be a way in which the mothers could justify their remaining dependency. Similar justifications appeared in their availability to family and friends after moving into paid work. Being in paid work changes the dynamics of relationships towards where the mothers become less available to their family and friends, and it was understood as reasonable. Similar to the way the mothers understood their continued dependency, their unavailability, which was once described as negative whilst claiming benefits, became acceptable and legitimate behaviour.

The same justificational logic provides an explanation for the contradictory sentiments expressed pre and post transition in regards to the mothers' leisure activities. The mothers' enjoyment-oriented activities became a form of relaxation during their limited non-obliged hours in paid work, while the same activities were pictured as unproductive and meaningless whilst claiming benefits. Some mothers found legitimacy in having fun within their paid work. The status of being in paid work seems to be a strong indicator to judge what is justifiable or not, even for their freely chosen activities in non-obliged hours.

The legitimacy of paid work sometimes became a reason to overlook their own health, while the emotional and physical well-being is one of the governmental rationales for promoting paid work. While the mothers reported improved mental health from earning the status of being in paid work (especially due to increased levels of confidence, self-esteem, and happiness), their physical health was said to be deteriorated. It was due to a lack of time for taking care of themselves and the stresses of playing multiple roles. This echoes some of the previous research, including the social role theory of Hibbard and Pope (1993), research findings of Haux et al. (2012), and Lane et al. (2011). Responsibilities and time spent in paid work often conflicted with the time needed to look after themselves as well as their children, which in turn made them feel overloaded, exhausted, restless, fast-paced, and stressed, just as the social role theory revealed (Hibbard and Pope 1993; Peacey 2009). Even though the social role theory indicates some positive effects of having multiple roles (as it develops a good balance and buffers individuals from the effects of

negative experiences in any one role) (Barnett and Hyde 2001, cited in Greenhaus et al., 2003, p.515), this optimistic assertion was not commonly experienced by the mothers in this research, especially by those in full-time posts. Indeed, paid work sometimes became a break for some mothers, as well as their children, from constantly spending time together. As chapter four discusses, it contributed more to ease their relationship with children rather than to improve the mothers' physical health. The concerning aspect is that being in paid work seems to provide a legitimate reason for mothers to sacrifice or overlook their physical health or time to take care of themselves. In addition, when their health related requirements conflict with their responsibilities at work and the needs of the children, the mothers often choose the latter, adopting the moral rationality. Unlike the governmental argument, moving into paid work does not play any particular role in improving the mothers' physical health.

Paid work is not a one-size-fits-all solution for lone mothers

While the lone mothers received social assistance benefits, a number of pressures were discussed, which led the mothers to consider jumping into 'any job'. As discussed in chapter six and seven, the mothers' feelings of unsafety and insecurity were a big part of the motivation to move off benefits. They believed the benefit system has an unreliable nature, especially under the current political rhetoric. They felt anxious about having limited competitiveness and disadvantages in the labour market as well, due to gaps in their career and the responsibilities of housework and childcare. The financial pressure created by insufficient benefit payments, administrative failures which interrupted their benefit payments, and high childcare costs also contributed to the sense of unsafety and insecurity. The level of benefit payments is set for a life that fits into a pre-designed box, where (partial) home ownership or health issues that require a special diet are not taken into account. On top of these, the stigmatisation and judgements were a major motivation to move off benefits, as they were not only obtained from their formal and informal relationships, but also from the general public which were effectively delivered through the media and political discussions. The combination of pressures shook their sense of safety and security whilst claiming benefits and forced them to consider taking 'any job' which involved career back-steps against their will, in terms of payment, position, task, and working hours.

Taking any job had a great risk of being a problem that threatens the well-being of the lone mothers in so many ways. It is not only because the nature of improvements in their self-esteem were incomplete or because the mothers built justifications and legitimacy through paid work as discussed above, but also because 'any job' does not guarantee any of the governmental rationales for promoting paid work.

While an increase in self-esteem is one of governmental rationales for promoting work, a job could equally become another source of embarrassment and shame when it does not meet their satisfactory level. It then produces a transformed version of stigma which is nothing more than the stigma the mothers suffered when they were a benefit claimant. In this sense, the governmental assertion on the role of paid work in increasing one's self-esteem becomes blurred again.

Being in paid work does not guarantee improved quality of relationships or a sense of belonging either. While some mothers felt superficial improvements when they were fortunate enough to work in a sociable setting, such as in a local shop or hospital, this fortune was not allowed for everyone, especially those who worked in isolated settings or relocated themselves for paid work. Limited hours and more responsibilities from being in paid work negatively affected the mothers' sense of belonging by restricting the community activities and voluntary work that they used to contribute with whilst claiming benefits. It was, however, seen as justifiable as the mothers found more justification and legitimacy in prioritising their paid work over their activities and contributions in the community.

While the main motivation for the mothers to move off benefits was the sense of unsafety and insecurity, paid work was unfortunately not a route to guarantee a sense of safety and security for all. It remains largely dependent on the nature of the jobs the mothers moved into. When a job involves instability, such as, a field which has had recent lay-offs or budget cuts, a job with a limited period of contract, or a job without a proper contract, this became a greater sense of unsafety and insecurity. However, while the mothers found little possibilities of progression at work, they still seem relatively optimistic about their future security, as paid work is believed to allow the mothers to invest in their own future as well as that of their children, through further training, education, refreshed work experience, and by increasing the hours of work in the future when their children reach an age to go to school on their own. While the nature of job largely decides the level of present safety and security, the governmental rationale on future prospects seem to have legitimacy agreed by the mothers.

As discussed above, the political rhetoric on welfare conditionality have conceptualised the problems of welfare dependency as individual problems which can be 'amenable' by changing individual attitudes, behaviours, and incentives. This justified the policy measures which placed less effort on removing structural barriers and making employment more sustainable than the effort of pushing the claimants into the labour market. Patrick (2015) interprets this as supply-side strategies which focus on increasing individual employability work-readiness and motivation to find a job, while neglecting demand-side supports, such as the availability of work and childcare, and employers' behaviours. Bussi (2014) explains the supply-side approach based on two

typologies: on the one hand it targets 'work-first' to prompt welfare recipients a quick and cost-efficient integration to the labour market, and on the other hand invests on human capital to address individual barriers to work by providing trainings and education. While the individualising problematisation of welfare dependency and supply-side strategies predominantly occupy the current discourses, the findings of this research suggested the importance of the role of demand-side of strategies, including jobs that are compatible with childcare, affordable childcare especially in cases of emergencies, the availability of decent and stable jobs in the local labour market in terms of its contract type and future progression.

Further research

This research can claim to make a noble contribution by providing the lived experiences of the less researched areas of lone mothers' lives, such as their quality of formal and informal relationships, leisure, and safety and future security. Some emergent concepts such as stigma and justification are also discussed in terms of the damages to their subjective well-being and the decisions made in their daily life over the transitions. However, although the original aim of the research was to draw the lives of lone parents as a whole by filling the gaps in the less researched areas, it still remains to reveal a part of their experiences and feelings. It therefore calls for further research opportunities on the lives of lone parents facing conditional welfare and their transitions in to paid work.

There are still less-researched areas of lone mothers' transitions that need further quantitative and qualitative investigation, including their health, sense of achievement, and community-connectedness. However, these concepts need further exploration in themselves. It was difficult to define them and apply them in a way that made them meaningful to talk about easily in terms of how they fitted into the everyday lives of lone mothers.

The most popular governmental rationale of welfare conditionality - paid work as a route out of child poverty, particularly requires further research. The rationale leaves out important forms of well-being, deprivation of direct care of children, and the potential adverse impacts or limited attachment on physical and mental well-being of the mothers and children. According to Main and Besemer (2014), the concept of poverty can be approached as a broad and multidimensional concept, which includes not only the deprivation of material well-being, but also social exclusion and well-being. While the lone mothers argue that they are deprived of having quality time spent together as a family or are deprived of opportunities to provide direct care after moving into paid work, it could also be another form of poverty, transformed from material kind to poverty of time

or care. The governmental approaches that push lone parent families into paid work may then restrict the fundamental right of maternal care, under the name of 'what is right (or good) for lone parent families' based on the paternalist approach. Furthermore, the damages being produced for the children of lone parents require further research, as Bradshaw and Main (2014) argued, children are also active members of families who feel worry and embarrassment about financial circumstances.

Appendices

Appendix A: Advertisement – for postings on webpages and emails

Are you interested in joining a research study on single mothers returning to work?



If yes...please read on



My study wants to understand more about what it is like for single mothers returning to work. I would like to find out:

- How easy it was to get a job.
- What it is like being in work.
- How happy you are with work and family life.

The aim of the study is to build a better picture of the lives of single mothers to help improve the policies aimed at helping them get back to work.

Please take part if you are a single mother and you:

- recently returned to work – or are about to return to work
- recently received Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance
AND
- Have a child aged 6 years old or younger.

What do I do to get involved?

It's simple, just contact me by email or phone (see below). I will then arrange to interview you at a time and place that suits you best. The interview will be a friendly chat lasting about an hour and I will give you **£10** as a thank you for your time. My name is Miyang. I am a doctoral student and my study is ethically approved by the University of York and supervised by Dr Christine Skinner in the Department of SPSW.

Contact me to take part or for more information:

Miyang Jun, Phone: 07807941165, Email: mj521@york.ac.uk.

Supervisor Dr Christine Skinner (01904-321251) Email: Christine.skinner@york.ac.uk

Appendix B: Information sheet

Are you interested in the lives of single mothers and happiness?

: A Research Project - Single mothers and their life satisfaction in work

Who am I?

Hi, my name is Miyang, a student at the University of York. I am doing a research project for my doctorate, supervised by Dr. Christine Skinner, at the same University.

This project investigates what life is like for single mothers as they move from social security benefits into paid work. I am interested in finding out how their day to day lives have changed since moving onto paid work and how happy and satisfied mothers are with their lives in comparison to how they felt when they were living on benefits.

The study is important because it aims at increasing public awareness on any changes in single mothers' satisfaction with their family lives when they move from benefits into work. The research could lead to policy changes that would benefit single mothers facing a transfer from benefits to paid work.

This research will be more beneficial with your contribution. Please help this research by taking apart in an hour interview, if you,

- recently returned to work – or are about to return to work
 - recently received Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance
- AND
- Have a child aged 6 years old or younger



If you want to take part – what will you do?

If you would like to participate all you need to do is give me about an hour of your time so I can come and talk to you in a quiet place about your own experiences of moving from benefits into work. You can choose a place and time suitable for you - I will come to you at your convenience. My contact details are on the back of the page. Please contact me by text, a phone call, an email, or even a letter (whatever is easiest for you) and we can arrange a date and time for the interview. To thank you for your participation, you will receive **£10 cash** when we meet for the interview.

How will your details be protected?

This research is supervised by my supervisor, Dr Christine Skinner as well as the ethical committee, at the University of York, so I can assure you this research is legally and ethically acceptable. However, I would like to address the following information for you, making sure that you feel confident that it is safe to talk to me.

- You may decide to stop at any time without explaining why.
- You can ask anything you mentioned be withdrawn or destroyed.
- If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can refuse to answer or respond.
- **You will be paid for your contribution, even if you would like to do any of those above**

I will ask for your permission to:

- Record our conversation so I can listen to it later and write down what you have said.
- I will keep this recording and a written copy in a safe, password locked place.
- I will not tell any of your words or ideas to anyone in your community who might know you are taking part.
- I would like to quote your words and ideas in the final research report, presentations, and in articles, but I will write it in such a way to make sure that your personal identity is protected. Your real-name, real-age, and real place to live will not be used. So no one should be able to easily identify you from my writings and presentations.

My contact details are,

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at:

Miyang Jun

Phone number: 07807941165, Email: mj521@york.ac.uk

Address: Research Centre for Social Science, 6 innovation close, Heslington, York (Yo10 5ZF)

This research is being supervised by Dr Christine Skinner. For your information,

Dr Christine Skinner (christine.skinner@york.ac.uk)

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York, Heslington, York (YO10 5DD)

If you wish you make a complaint about my conduct, please contact:

Interim Ethics Committee

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York, Heslington, York (YO10 5DD)

Thank you for your consideration



Appendix C: Informed Consent form for Participation

This is a research project conducted by Miyang Jun, a doctoral student at the University of York. The project is called 'single mothers and their life satisfaction in work'. The researcher will read out the following questions to make sure the participant understood the condition of the research before the interview begins. A verbal consent and signed form will be kept by both the researcher and the participant.

I am now doing an interview with _____ (name of participant) on _____ (day and date), at _____ (time) and this is to ask her the verbal consent regarding the interview.

I would like to thank you for your time and participation.

I would like to record your verbal consent on the following questions. If you agree with the following questions, please sign at the bottom of the consent form.

- Are you voluntarily participating in this interview?
- Do you understand our conversation will last about an hour?
- Do you understand that you can refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw and discontinue at any time without saying why?
- Do you agree on recording our conversation so that I can listen to it again later and write down what you say, and keep this recording and the written copy in a safe, password-locked place?
- Do you understand that your words and ideas may be quoted in the final research report, presentations and in articles, but your personal information will be firmly protected?
- Do you understand you will be given a £10 in cash (or equivalent)?
- Have your questions or concerns on participating in this research fully answered, to your satisfaction by the researcher?

Signature Date

Printed Name and signature

For further questions or concerns, please contact:

Miyang Jun

PhD research area 4, RCSS (Research Centre for Social Science),

6 innovation close, Heslington, York, Yo10 5ZF

Phone number: 07807941165, Email: mj521@york.ac.uk

Appendix D: Topic guide

Introduction to Respondents:

The aim of this interview is to talk to you about your recent experiences from moving off benefits into paid work and how that has affected your life satisfaction and happiness.

Please note that each interview will last about one hour and I would like to discuss the following 4 topics:

1. Experiences and satisfaction when you move off from benefits
2. Experiences and satisfaction now on paid work
3. Influences of the changes on your overall life satisfaction
4. Your efforts in improving your satisfaction

The introductory procedures (5 minutes)

- Thank interviewee for taking part in the research
- Explain purpose of research: I would like to talk about your life in general and satisfaction from your own perspective. This interview is an opportunity for you to have a say about how you felt when you were on income based benefit and how your experience and perspective changed at present in paid work (more than 16 hours a week). Any aspects of your life that you think important enough to affect your life could be discussed.
- Reassure confidentiality, and discuss pseudonyms: any specific information you mention such as name and location will be transcribed as random alphabet, and the recorded data will be stored very securely.
- Any questions or concerns?
- Read out the consent form and get a verbal and signed consent

Respondent information (5 minutes)

I would like to begin the interview by asking some basic facts about you and your family.

- Names, Age, and Place to live, family members
 - Who lives in the house with you?
 - Living environment (rural/ urban, transportation, childcare facilities/ school, shops nearby)
 - Number of children and their age

- Any other house members?
- Education Qualifications:
 - School/ College/ University
 - Any Vocational training/ qualifications?
- Employment status, previous and current job:
 - Previous jobs (what you did, date started and finished it and numbers of hours per week)
 - Reasons to leave the previous job
 - Type of current jobs (what you do)
 - When did start?
 - How many hours a week?
 - How far is it from your home?

Thanks for providing me with those details. As you know the main thing I want to talk to you about is your experiences of moving into paid work and how you feel about that. So the rest of the interview is just like having a friendly chat. Just to remind you there is no right or wrong answer, I am really interested in you and your experiences and would like to hear about that.

TOPIC 1: Experiences and satisfaction when you move off from benefits

(Openings) Can you begin by telling me the details of when you move off from the benefits and why it happened?

- Type of benefits, for how long?
- How did 'being on a benefit' affect your life?
- The reason of leaving the benefit(s)
 - Did age of child – force a move into work?
 - Self-motivated?
- What did you expect when you knew you were going to leave the benefit?
 - Relationship (Intimate relationships, children, other family member, friends)?
 - Community involvement and leisure (Time/ money investment for your own benefit)?
 - Safety (Physical and public/ environmental safety, privacy, independence, autonomy) and future security (Future needs and protection)?

- How did you feel?
 - Happy to be working? Not sure?
 - Worried – making the transition?
- Any help you get during the move, and how?
 - Jobcentre plus advisor? Work programme?
 - Practicalities - Child care? Job interview preparation?, Transportation?

- Any new/ old benefits you are still on?

TOPIC 2: Experiences and satisfaction now on paid work

Now, I would like to move on to your current life on paid work. Compared to your life on the benefit, how does being on paid work influence on your life?

- The key areas of your life that is important to your current life satisfaction?
 - Relationship
 - Community involvement and leisure?
 - Safety and future security?
- What does it mean to you
- How satisfied are you now on the key areas you mentioned?

TOPIC 3: Influences of the changes on your overall life satisfaction

Thank you for sharing your key areas in your life, let's talk about how these areas affect your overall life and happiness?

- Among the key areas you mentioned, what is most/ least influential area?
- Did it change while you move off from benefit to work?
- How did it affect your other areas of life?
- How did the changes affect your overall life satisfaction?

TOPIC 4: Your efforts in improving your satisfaction

Let's move on to the final topic, would you tell me if there are any aspects in your life you want to improve, for now or for your future?

- How likely can they be met?
- Do you employ any coping mechanisms, when you feel unsatisfied/ stressed, to make your life more satisfied?
- Are they meaningful stresses?
- How did the mechanisms work while you transfer from benefit to work?

Summary (5 minutes)

Now I would like round up the interview with few questions, in case I have missed something important here,

- Is there any other area in your which affects your general life satisfaction?
- Any questions or concerns?

Thank and close

Appendix E: Contact points and strategies

	Contact point	Strategy
Local lone parent groups	25 Yorkshire-based (lone) parents Facebook groups	These are closed Facebook groups for local lone parents. Advertisement of the research and invitation letters was posted and potential respondents were able to get in touch with the researcher directly through Facebook message.
	Five Yorkshire-based (lone) parents group and organisations (On-line group)	An entry letter was sent through email (Appendix E), and a phone call was made for a confirmation whether they have received the email. In the phone call, a meeting was asked for an opportunity to explain the research in person.
	Local branch of a national organisation (Netmums, North Yorkshire)	An advertisement in the 'meet-a-mum board' and 'Local offers' section was posted (£10 and VAT)
Local out-of-school clubs	Nine out of school clubs are contacted, and none of them provided care under three year old	An entry letter was sent through email and post (Appendix E), and a phone-call was in 3 days for a confirmation whether they have received the email/post. In the phone call, a meeting was asked for an opportunity to explain the research in person.
National organisation	Onespace.gov.uk, (http://www.onespace.org.uk/)	Introduce the research and leave the contacting details of the researcher in the 'Introduce yourself' section and 'Forum-Chit chat' space in the website
	Gingerbread (http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/Forum/topics.aspx?ForumID=44)	Introduce the research and leave the contacting details of the researcher in the 'Forums- public discussions' space in the website

Appendix F: The sample

The sample consisted of 20 lone mothers who were living with at least one dependent child aged eight or under. Respondents were recruited from a wide area of Yorkshire, West Midlands, South West and East England, and North Wales. Table one below shows the locations and number of respondents.

Table 8 Locations and number of participants

Location	No. of respondents
Yorkshire	10
West Midlands	1
South West England	3
South East England	5
North Wales	1
Total	20

The ages of the lone mothers ranged from 23 to 46 at the point of interview (Table two). The number of dependent children ranged from one to four, and the ages of children ranged between 14 weeks and 24 years. Total number of children was 36 (Table three).

Table 9 Age of respondents

Age of respondents	No. of respondents
23-27	4
28-32	2
33-37	8
38-42	3
43+	3
Total	20

Table 10 Number and age of dependent children

No. of children	No. of respondents
1	9
2	7

Age of dependent children	No. of children
< 1	1
1 – 4	15

3	3
4	1
Total	20

5 – 10	12
11 – 15	5
16- 20	2
20<	1
Total	36

The majority of respondents were skilled and unskilled workers who worked part-time ranged from 15.5 to 22.5 hours a week. Some four mothers had full-time work, ranged from 37.5 to 55 hours a week (Table four and five).

Table 11 and 12 Types of work and working hours of the participants

Types of work	Professional	2
	Skilled worker	9
	Unskilled worker	8
	Unemployed	1
Total		20

Weekly working hours	Full time (37.5-55)	4
	Part time (15.5 – 22.5)	16
	Unemployed	1
Total		20

The period since the mothers moved off social assistance benefits and into paid work varied from two weeks to 17 months.

Table 13 The period since moving off social assistance benefits

The period since moving off social assistance benefits	No. of respondents
< 4 weeks	8
5-8 weeks	1
9-12 weeks	1
13-16 weeks	1
16-19 weeks	4
20 + weeks	5
Total	20

Abbreviations

CGTM	Constructivist Grounded Theory Method
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ERA	Employment Retention and Advancement
GDP	Gross Domestic product
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
MUD	Moralistic and Underclass Discourse
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGTM	Objectivist Grounded Theory Method
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PWI	Personal Wellbeing Index
RED	Redistributive and Egalitarian discourse
SID	Social Integrationist Discourse
WBG	Women's Budget Group
WFI	Work Focused Interview
WRA	Work Related Activity

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