

**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD**

**Earning and caring in families that have experienced divorce: a study  
of family law, social policy and family practices**

**Laura Davies**

**September 2012**

**The University of Leeds  
School of Sociology and Social Policy**

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that  
appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work  
of others

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is  
copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without  
proper acknowledgement

© 2012 The University of Leeds and Laura Davies

## *Acknowledgements*

My first thanks must go to my supervisors, Professor Bren Neale and Dr Kirk Mann, for sharing their academic expertise and guiding me through the challenges of the PhD process. Kirk also supervised my undergraduate dissertation and Bren my MA dissertation, so we have had many hours of supervision meetings together over the years. Particular thanks must go to them both for the support they gave me during a very difficult second year of study. Both went far above and beyond the call of duty in the care and concern they showed towards me.

Without the willingness of my research participants to give their time, sharing their thoughts and experiences there would be no thesis. I am thankful to each and every one of them for helping me to broaden my understandings. I trust that in the pages that follow I have conveyed their stories accurately.

I would also like to extend my thanks to academic colleagues, students and support staff in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds where I have been a student for the past nine years. All have helped me in my learning, providing stimulating conversation, support and friendship. My thanks go also to the ESRC for financial support without which neither the MA nor the PhD would have been possible.

I am fortunate to have the support of some wonderful friends, and I'd like to extend my thanks to them here. They are too many to list by name, and in any case I cannot possibly decide the order in which their names should go. They know who they are, and their unfailing support is appreciated. The phone calls, messages, meals cooked, coffees, beers, and occasional shoulders to cry on have made the pressures of being a lone parent PhD student manageable rather than crushing. I'm sure they will all be pleased to know that they can finally stop asking me 'how is it going?' and 'have you finished yet?'.

The most special of thanks go to my own family. To my parents, Ruth and Derek Davies, who have loved and supported me always and who have taught me, along with my two brothers, what it is to be a family. To my wonderful daughter Lily Pass, without whom I doubt I would have made this journey. She has put up with many hours of me being busy, stressed and with my nose in a book. I am looking forward to spending more time with her now that the writing is finally finished.

## **Abstract**

Much of current welfare policy directed towards the support of lone parents is intended to encourage earning as a primary responsibility for all, regardless of responsibilities for care. This thesis sets out to explore how these policy discourses diverge from or converge with the lived experiences of a sample of divorced or separated parents. The thesis analyses how individuals and their families experience the policy and legal process in the context of increasing levels of welfare conditionality. The ways in which the underlying assumptions inherent in these discourses intersect with the choices and preferences of the participants and their children are explored. In doing so, the thesis investigates the current gaps in knowledge around the potential impact of these policy developments on lone parents, non resident parents and their children as they re-negotiate their family lives post separation.

The thesis contends that policy and legal structures could take a much greater account of care as both a practice and an ethic. A more holistic welfare policy model which regards interdependency as positive rather than negative could be fostered if we recognise that human flourishing comes from our relationships with others. I argue that the focus on employment as the primary duty appears to be informed by a flawed understanding both of the complexities of family relationships and of the realities of managing paid work alongside responsibility for domestic and care work as the sole adult in the home.

## **List of abbreviations used in the text**

AFDC Aid to Families with Dependent Children

CMEC Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission

CSA Child Support Agency

DSS Department of Social Security

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

FIS Family Income Supplement

HMRC Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

JSA Jobseekers Allowance

NHS National Health Service

PR Parental Responsibility

PRWORA Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Conciliation Act

TANF Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

TUC Trade Union Congress

USA United States of America

UK United Kingdom

WFTC Working Families Tax Credit

## Table of contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
List of abbreviations used in the text	4
Chapter 1. Introduction: research themes and rationale for the study	9
1.1 Literature review: introduction	10
1.2 Lone parent families in the UK	11
1.3 Family law: The Children Act 1989 and Parental Responsibility	12
1.4 The ethics of care: the theory of care	13
1.5 Care as both ethic and practice	15
1.6 Key tensions between the ethic of care and the ethic of work	18
1.7 Changing patterns of employment participation, gender and care	19
1.7.1 The breadwinner model: gendered divisions of labour?	19
1.7.2 Maternal employment: a gender neutral family model?	20
1.8 Welfare-to-work	23
1.9 Lone parents, employment and poverty	23
1.10 The historical development of welfare-to-work	26
1.11 Moving towards welfare conditionality in the UK	32
1.12 The Freud Report: recommendations and implementation	35
1.13 Economic factors affecting (un)employment: problems with the welfare-to-work approach?	37
1.14 Other considerations in employment decision making	39
1.15 Making work pay?	41
1.16 Commodifying childcare	42
1.17 Tensions between employment and caring activity: the problem of time	43
1.18 Questions raised by the literature	44
Chapter 2.	47
2.1 Research questions	47
2.2 Research strategy and methodology	47
2.3 Data collection	48
2.4 Sampling: the intended sample	50
2.5 Sampling: the actual sample	55
2.6 Negotiating the gatekeeper relationship	56

2.7 Research participants	58
2.8 Data collection and analysis	61
2.9 Ethics	66
Chapter 3.	70
3.1 The emotional aspects of negotiating parental care and support after separation	70
3.2 Ongoing relationships with ex partners: co-operative or problematic?	71
3.3 Financial provision, child contact and ‘shocks’	76
3.4 Coping with stress and the importance of networks of care and support	84
3.5 The circumstances of the separation	89
3.6 Relationships of care - what do we mean by care?	91
3.7 Chapter conclusions	93
Chapter 4.	95
4.1 Practical challenges in combining paid work and family care	95
4.2 Fitting paid work around family life: the experiences of participants	97
4.3 Caring for older children and teenagers	101
4.4 Transport and localities	103
4.5 Managing child care arrangements	105
4.5.1 Case study: Debbie	105
4.5.2 Case study: Hafsa	107
4.6 Private and public transport	109
4.6.1 Access to transport: the importance of car ownership	109
4.6.2 Not having access to private transport	113
4.7 Managing complex daily journeys	115
4.7.1 Case study: Chloe	115
4.8 Managing lives within and across localities	117
4.9 The importance of home-spaces	119
4.10 Temporal challenges in the lives of lone parents: what is time?	123
4.11 Clock time	125
4.12 Family time	128
4.13 Managing time as a non resident parent	130
4.14 Future-time: aspirations and making plans	132
4.15 Chapter conclusions	139

Chapter 5.	142
5.1 Being a parent: managing family life	142
5.2 Working and caring: negotiating a balance	144
5.3 Commitment to career	145
5.4 Parenting, the home and domesticity	148
5.5 Parenting style and ‘preference’: pre separation parenting styles	151
5.6 On being a good parent	162
5.7 Chapter conclusions	169
Chapter 6.	172
6.1 The dynamics of combining working and parenting	172
6.2 A brief revision of the policy position	173
6.3 Experiences of claiming benefits and tax credits	176
6.4 Experiencing welfare conditionality	178
6.4.1 Fiona: Jobseekers Allowance	178
6.4.2 Chris: Income Support	182
6.5 Applying for and managing a tax credit claim	183
6.6 Engaging with training and education	186
6.7 Chapter conclusions	190
Chapter 7 .	192
7.1 Changing times, changing welfare policies	192
7.2 Policy for lone parents: a return to the debates	192
7.3 The 2010 Election: policy consensus?	193
7.4 Coalition policies	196
7.5 Universal Credit	198
7.6 Mini-jobs or quality jobs?	201
7.7 Child Maintenance	202
Chapter 8.	
8.1 Conclusions	204
8.1.1 Moral decision making and the ethic of care	204

8.1.2 How did participants balance their caring and earning responsibilities after separation or divorce?	206
8.1.3 Disjuncture between policy assumptions and lived experiences	208
8.1.4 Good work?	210
8.2 Policy implications	212
Appendix One	217
Pen portraits of research participants	217
Appendix Two	227
Interview questions	
Appendix Three	230
Vignettes	
Bibliography	234



## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction: research themes and rationale for the study**

This thesis examines the experiences of divorced and separated parents in relation to policy discourse: as such it makes an important contribution to knowledge by acknowledging and exploring the complexity of family circumstances and the impact they may have on decision making at the household level, whilst understanding these decisions in relation to policy changes that occurred during the study period. Whilst important policy research focussed on exploring the experiences of lone parenting and the welfare policies that may support them is already in existence (see for example Churchill, 2008; Gingerbread, 2012; Millar, 2005; Millar and Ridge, 2008 and 2009; Ridge, 2009; Ridge and Millar, 2011; ) this study differs in that it attempts to fill the gaps in knowledge about the interactions between the constellation of policy interventions and practical circumstances within which families live their lives. Whilst traditional policy research tends towards a focus on the impact of specific interventions, this study aims to develop understandings of how individuals experience and negotiate a policy system made up of a variety of discrete policies. Focussing the research around the experience of a divorce or separation provides a useful analytic lens for studying policy impact as the separation event creates a situation in which family practices (Morgan, 1996) need to be re-examined and reformulated as the family begins to establish new ways of living in separate locations. Thus, the divorce event illuminates some of the complexities of managing parental earning and caring responsibilities. Although the popular image of lone parenthood has a long standing but inaccurate association with young, never married parenthood (see for example Brown, 1989; Roseneil and Mann, 1996), the thesis is concerned with examining the experiences of those parents who have previously cohabited or been married. The statistical picture of contemporary family life tells us that around half of those parenting as the lone adult in the household do so as the result of a divorce or the ending of a cohabiting relationship (National Statistics, 2012).

Balancing these key, and potentially conflicting, responsibilities can be complex and for parents of limited financial means the decision to separate may be made more problematic by the need to negotiate financial and caring responsibilities from a starting point of already limited resources. For more affluent families the need to split this across two households presents a different but equally challenging issue thus the inclusion of participants with a range of income levels enabled the investigation of a

broad range of economic and material circumstances. The thesis acknowledges the notable shift away from two parent, one family households with children as the norm as a key site of research interest and as a central concern for contemporary policy development. Between 2001 and 2010 the proportion of households with dependent children consisting of married couples with children fell from 65.4 per cent to 60.4 per cent whilst the proportion of lone parent family households rose from 23.6 to 25.5 per cent in the same period. There was also an increase in co-habiting households with children in the same period, as the proportion of families of this type rose from 10.9 to 14 per cent (Beaumont, 2011). These findings indicate that research exploring the ways in which families negotiate and organise their earning and caring labour outside of the nuclear family is both timely and important with this thesis making a contribution to knowledge development in this area. The role of sociology in political debate can be the representation of the diversity of structurally determined social opinion (Wiles, 2004: 32); this thesis seeks to examine the experiences of the participants and reflect upon these in relation to policy discourses around work and care.

## **1.1 Literature review: introduction**

After briefly outlining the statistical picture of family composition in the UK in the opening decades of the 21st Century, this literature review chapter sets out and reflects upon three broad areas of literature that form the policy and theoretical background of the empirical research and the thesis. The first section outlines the key family law structures governing divorce, the care of children, Parental Responsibility and child maintenance. Secondly, attention turns to an examination of the ethics of care literature highlighting the key ways in which this theoretical approach differs from and challenges the work focussed approach underlying contemporary policy making. Section three goes on to discuss the development of conditionality in public welfare entitlements and welfare-to-work in the UK. Initially it sets out the policy and theoretical contexts of the study by examining the development of welfare-to-work policies under the 1997-2010 New Labour administration and the rationales presented for increasing work compulsion for welfare recipients. These are explored in the context of wider labour market and social structures, with the significance of these welfare reforms for lone parents a central concern of the thesis.

In exploring the literature, a key site of interest is developed which examines the way in which feminist ideals about the place of work in the lives of women and their ability to

achieve financial independence intersect with the development of paternalistic models of welfare in which a responsibility to seek employment in the paid labour market is seen as central in reducing dependency. As social feminism has developed from feminism, socialism and social liberalism, activists have sought to challenge the gendered division of labour that underpins gender inequality (Orloff, 2008: 1). Some feminists have contended that women's equality depends on their reaching parity with men in the public sphere, in which the labour market is central (Gornick and Meyers, 2007) with some suggesting that the avoidance of economic dependence on a male partner through engaging with employment was a key feminist message adopted by non-activist women in the 1970s and 1980s (Chafetz, 1995; Scott, 1999). This focus on work as a key symbol of freedom and equality is seen by some to have eclipsed the important role of care in everyday life; they argue that care is central to the human condition and throughout the lifecourse we will all both receive care and provide care for others (Kittay, 2001; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; West, 2002; Williams, 1999, 2001 and 2004a and 2004b). These issues are explored in this chapter with special attention paid to the tensions between work and care in the lives of lone parents.

## **1.2 Lone parent families in the UK**

The organisation of care and paid work present particular challenges for those parenting alone and continue to be a major concern for policy making. In 2009 there were 2 million lone parents in the UK just over one quarter of all households with children was a lone parent family at this time, a figure that has remained constant since 2000 (National Statistics, 2010; Haux, 2011: 148). Of these families, 90 per cent were headed by women with 40 of these lone parents having previously been married. Although the popular image of a lone parent is of a never married and very young woman, the data tells us that the median age of a lone parent in the UK is 37 (ibid.).

These data would suggest that some of the moral panic concerned with lone parenthood that conceptualizes all lone parents as young, never married, providing unstable environments for their children and forming an underclass (see for example Murray, 1990) may be inaccurate. In focussing the empirical research underpinning this thesis on the study of families in which the parents have previously been married or cohabited and are now separated or divorced, the aim is to provide an examination of the experiences of the group making up the largest proportion of those raising children in one parent households today.

### **1.3 Family law: The Children Act 1989 and Parental Responsibility**

Historically, family law held a key function in setting out the responsibilities of men for their wives and children after divorce. The individualisation of women in law was a gradual and still incomplete shift, beginning with married women's property laws at the end of the nineteenth century and the equalisation of grounds for divorce in 1923 (Lewis, 2001b: 98). As the dependency of childhood lengthened, residential custody of children began to fall more often to mothers, but they did not gain full equality with fathers in their rights as parents until the Guardianship Act 1973 (Maclean and Richards, 1999). The notion that marriage was the central mechanism by which women and children would be supported is also evident in the Divorce Reform Act (1969). The Act was predicated on the presumption that after divorce fathers would be disengaged from their former wife and children, and that the nuclear family model would later be reconstituted on the remarriage of the former spouses to new partners (Neale and Smart, 1999). However, as the divorce rate increased, expectations of marriage as a life long union began to decline as there was a shift towards treating divorce as a normal event (Smart, 2004) and a normalisation of a greater diversity of family types began to emerge.

In respect of divorce cases, family law is now increasingly focussed on responsibility particularly in respect of making arrangements for financial provision for any children of the marriage. A moral panic around lone parenthood and its impact on public expenditure had developed during the 1980s (Fox Harding, 1993) and, by the late 1990s, divorce had become emblematic of the failures of modern society (Smart, 2000). Concerns about some absent fathers who failed to provide for their children and about lone mothers becoming dependent on state support led to this moral outrage and the Child Support Act (1991) aimed to formalise the ongoing financial responsibilities of parents towards their children (Williams, 2004). This is particularly the case for non resident parents with the detail of the Children Act (1989) placing parental responsibility at the heart of family law.

The Children Act formalised the notion of Parental Responsibility (PR). Section 2 of the Act sets out that parents who are married when the child's birth is registered automatically acquire PR, indeed English law retains the presumption that a husband is the legal father of any child born to his wife (Bainham, 2003). According to section 4

of the Act, an unmarried father may attain PR by registering the birth with the mother or at a later point through the use of a PR order. Each person holding PR may exercise it autonomously in the absence of the other (Harris and Scanlan, 1991; Day Sclater and Kaganas, 2003) and, in the case of divorce, PR means that issues in respect of children could be organised around the perspective of responsibility and child welfare rather than abstracted parental legal rights (Day Sclater and Kaganas, 2003). PR has two key functions. Firstly, it establishes that the care of children is the responsibility of parents, not the state, and that parents must continue to behave dutifully to their children after a divorce or separation (Eekelaar, 1991). A central aim of the provisions of PR was to give equal status, in law, to both mothers and fathers, ending the perception of a bias towards mothers in legal proceedings in divorce and encourage fathers to maintain involvement with their children after divorce (Day Sclater and Kaganas, 2003). The joint registration of birth continues to be a key priority in establishing joint parental responsibility (DWP, 2007a) and, within welfare policy more generally, there is an increasing focus on financial support as a key responsibility for parents with care too. Along with the Child Support Act (1991), the Family Law Act (1996) appeared to be aimed towards the establishment of a more gender-neutral parenting model in which the 'good father' would be actively involved in caring and financial support after divorce (Collier, 1999). Indeed, the Acts go some way towards negating any ambivalence about what it means to be a 'good father' after separation or divorce as roles and responsibilities are formally outlined in these pieces of legislation (Gatrell, 2005: 75). The focus on the financial responsibilities of all parents has been conceptualised as a shift from a male breadwinner model towards an adult worker model in which both men and women are regarded as earners (Lewis, 2002; Williams, 2004). The Children's Act (1989) sought also to place an increased focus on the nurturing and caring responsibilities of both mothers and fathers (Hearn, 1998: 55) by emphasising the rights of the child to enjoy an ongoing relationship with both parents after divorce.

#### **1.4 The ethics of care: the theory of care**

The ethics of care literature holds a theoretical position that is clearly distinct from the ideas that inform work focussed policy making discourses. Indeed, some commentators (Tronto, 1993) have proposed the ethic of care as a counter to the masculinist work ethic (Fine, 2007). For Collier, (1999) these tensions are illuminated in the contradictory demands placed on fathers, in which they are required to both work for (as a breadwinner) and work on (as an active parent) as central parts of 'doing' fatherhood.

Whether there is a diametric opposition between work and care is also questioned by the care literature which explores the distinctions between caring for and caring about (Noddings, 1984). The ethics of care recognises interdependency as a central tenet, identifying a relationship between labour market and caring activity as mutually supporting. Care is thus a complex and multi layered concept as Fine outlines here,

“care is at once an activity or a form of work, as a system of social relationships that extends from the intimate and personal to a broader set of ties acknowledging our mutual dependency, and an ethical position that involves an approach to the self and a commitment to others” (Fine, 2007: 4).

Understanding care as an ethic requires a recognition that different actors have differing moral agency and so calls for a ‘new politics of need interpretation’ (Sevenhuijsen, 2002: 134). Theoretical understandings of an ethic of care were developed from the work of Gilligan (1982) in her critique of Kohlberg’s study on moral development, identifying gender difference in interpretations of justice and morality. His work was based on an exclusively male sample and found that when boys were presented with a ‘moral dilemma’ they were more likely to frame their responses in an ethic of justice. In her work, Gilligan found a ‘different voice’ informing the moral reasoning of girls who conceptualised their moral responses within a need to preserve and nurture human relationships. This alternate morality was labelled as an ethic of care and relationship (Tronto, 1993: 78) a notion that has continued to exert influence on feminist thinking ever since. Because it begins with and from a relational ontology, the ethic of care develops a radically different account of the relationships between obligation and morality and between politics and responsibility. The concept that individuals can exist only through and within their relationships with others and because they are part of the networks of care and responsibility is a central tenet of the ethic of care (Sevenhuijsen, 2002: 131; Tronto, 1993; Ellis, 2004: 34). For parents at the point of separation or divorce then, family lives need to be re-negotiated in ways that recognise the interdependency of the relationships within the family and beyond. Sevenhuijsen (2002) has argued that politics should safeguard responsibility and relationships in human interaction, and there is some shift towards these ideas in the undertakings of family law reform at the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, the concept of Parental Responsibility is explicitly outlined in terms of responsibilities and the primacy of

relationships (Children Act, 1989). The detail of the Act appears to be based on promoting a shift away from adversarial legal proceedings and focussing on what could be achieved through a process of trusting the moral capacities of individuals and of listening as a practice of democratic citizenship (Sevenhuijsen, 2002: 132-133).

## **1.5 Care as both ethic and practice**

Care is central to the human condition: we will all at varying points in our lives both need care and be compelled to provide care for others (Kittay, 2001; West, 2002; Williams, 1999; Williams, 2001; Williams, 2004). Care giving can be regarded as crucial labour as without care in infancy survival is not possible. Without care throughout our childhood and into adulthood we could not develop into autonomous individuals or be equipped to take on any of the responsibilities that are required for the success of a liberal political economy (West, 2002: 88). An approach based on children as the primary site of care needs can be problematic however, because it has the potential to exploit women's caring labour in the name of child welfare and because it assumes care is a largely transitory period after which the cared for will become a 'useful' citizen. It has been argued that a morally decent society must care for dependent persons without taking into account their potential to be productive, for example the elderly or those living with long term ill health or disability (Kittay, 2001).

The webs of care that make up the human experience have been described as an 'infinite spiral of relationships', an acknowledgement that our interdependencies stretch both into the past and into future generations (ibid.). A functionalist definition of care, suggests that care can be conceptualised as a response to the particular subset of basic human needs that make us dependent on others (Bubeck, 2002: 165). An ethic of caring presents a moral question because a decision must be made whether or not to provide care, but in viewing care as a practice we can see that the decision to care may not always result from a conscious moral judgement. Embedding theoretical understandings of care as both practice and ethic allows us to understand that whilst a moral decision can be made whether or not to provide care, in practice we are often compelled by the situation to ensure that care needs are met (Tronto, 1989). In fact, the non provision of care can lead to serious harm or death and thus taking the action to care has a particular urgency (Bubeck, 2002: 168). This definition also acknowledges that activities expressive of an emotional bond should not automatically be conceptualised as caring activities. However, it suggests that caring involves an active 'doing' embedded in a

level of intimacy requiring face to face interaction between carer and cared for (Bubeck, 2002: 164-166). Williams (1999) has argued that “the care relationship is often but not always an intimate one; the intimate relationship is usually, but not always, a relationship of care” (Williams, 1999: 678), an approach that allows us to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex interactions of caring within the family lives of divorced and separated parents and their children.

In respect of child care provision, child care is deemed to be necessary in order for women to access labour market opportunities, and so is conceptualised as a service to the parent, the broader economy and society rather than the child (Fine, 2007: 143). Market based care provision is embedded in an understanding that care does not automatically or necessarily suggest or require the presence of an emotional bond between carer and cared for. By positioning care as a service than can be bought and sold in the market, it can be seen to relate to and be more closely aligned with a masculinist ethic of justice than a feminist ethic of care. Indeed, when care is performed for pay it shifts from being an activity of care into an activity of work (Mink, 1998), and it is the absence of an emotional or relational bond and the direct exchange of money for service that makes it so. The gendered distinction between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ (Noddings, 1984) introduced earlier is central to understandings here. In subcontracting caring work to another, a crucial step in the care relationship is absent. Caring about is associated with recognising that a need for care exists. Caring for can be seen as the next step in the caring process and is distinctive from caring about because it involves recognising that a need exists, but also assuming responsibility and responding to that need (Ellis, 2004: 32). From this develops a process of care giving in which activity is undertaken to meet the needs that have been established to exist (Ellis, 2004: 32; Tronto, 1993:106-107). The complexities of the differences between caring for and caring about become apparent when we consider that a non resident parent could be said to ‘care for’ their child whilst seeing them rarely, but the notion of caring in the sense of ‘looking after’ implies a face to face interaction. In this sense, care is conceptualized as an activity (West, 2002: 163) and can be seen as involving some level of on going responsibility and commitment (Tronto, 1989: 102).

The ethic of care can be seen as being explicitly gendered, and in the case of caring for children after divorce, the proportion of children living primarily with their father remains small indicating that gendered notions of caring relationships continue to



inform both family practices (Morgan, 1996) and the framework of family law. Research indicates that men are more likely to view themselves as more individualised and objective and frame their morality in terms of justice. In contrast, women were found to more often identify the self in terms of connections to others, an understanding grounded in interdependence, and a morality of caring (Tronto, 1993: 79). Indeed, ideals of femininity are often characterised by their association with the provision of care and services for others (Bubeck, 2002: 176). The caring work that women do and the self realization that they draw from it becomes reinforced by as well as shaping their gender identity. We can see that central to the ethic of care is the way that it can be situated in the assumption of certain key values. The values of attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness along with additional values of trust, honesty, respect and relational autonomy together make up the ethic care (Sevenhuijsen, 2002: 133; Williams, 1999: 678).

Caring relationships therefore are made up of a series of complex (and gendered) interdependencies. Whilst women are positioned as largely responsible for 'doing' care on an unpaid basis this creates a new flow of interdependency between partners as women carers become dependent on men to provide economic support so that they are able to respond to the care needs of others (Bubeck, 2002). As the primary beneficiary of caring work is not the carer herself and, whilst being in a position to provide care may be experienced as empowering or rewarding in emotional terms it cannot be said to be mutually beneficial in material terms. Rather it represents an asymmetrical transaction of material benefits (Bubeck, 2002: 167) A lack of autonomy associated with decision making around caring and the lack of material benefit to the carer and because it must accommodate the demands of others (Bubeck, 2002: 168) create a web of interdependencies. This contrasts strongly with assumptions present in moral philosophy and traditional economic thought that we are all rational autonomous actors meaning that they do not adequately address questions that are raised by the situating of care as a process of meeting the needs of others (Tronto, 1989). The inequalities, dependencies and abuses of power that can arise from care and caring relationships represents one of the key dilemmas of care (Williams, 2004: 76).

The assumption that morality is concerned with interactions with other morally autonomous actors is made complex in considerations of care precisely because of the

unequal relationship that often exists between the carer and the cared for (Tronto, 1989: 104). This unequal power relationship enables situations of dependency and authority to emerge (Tronto, 1989: 108) which Ellis (2004) suggests can give rise to a power dynamic of paternalism-maternalism (Ellis, 2004: 31). However, others have argued that developing an understanding through the ethics of care would enable recognition that dependency does not necessarily constitute a barrier to the development of autonomy (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 140). Developing the feminist ethics of care to view caring as an important human value could lead to an appreciation of the existence of mutual dependency without seeing negativity in the dualism between dependency and autonomy.

### **1.6 Key tensions between the ethic of care and the ethic of work**

Capitalist economic principles are based on the centrality of the market and this position is fundamentally incompatible with the view espoused by the ethics of care in which relationships of caring are of central importance. Indeed, it could be argued that the increasing primacy of the marketplace and the uncertainty that this can create in the lives of citizens (Bauman, 2007) can lead to a greater need for caring bonds to be established as human relationships shift towards individualism and become increasingly uncertain (Bauman, 2003). Market principles and the commodification of work to allow consumption dictates that not only is caring be a private matter but also that caring has no financial value. This is at odds with the central tenet of the ethics of care in which it seeks to understand and value on care arguing that activities and occupations other than an engagement with the paid labour market could and should be considered as 'work'. A system of social organisation that situates dependency on others for sustenance or for income as grounds for exclusion from the full rights of citizenship creates substantial risks of gendered inequality and poverty (Kittay, 2001: 528). In Giddens's Third Way, care is conceptualised in terms of a negative freedom, an entity which obstructs self fulfilment. This interpretation sits in opposition to the ethic of care which argues that good care is indispensable in creating human flourishing (Sevenhuijsen, 2002: 134).

Here lie connections with wider conceptions of citizenship in which the interplay of rights and responsibilities are based on the primary responsibility to engage with the paid labour market. Obtaining income in socially approved ways is seen as key to both access to resources and the attainment of full social citizenship (Kittay, 2001: 528) and

this is largely supported by contemporary welfare ideology. Constructing a welfare state around the assumption that making a social contribution is only possible through an engagement with the paid labour market is problematic as it obscures the social and economic contribution made by those who undertaking unpaid caring and domestic work (Young, 2002: 42). An engagement with a caring role that is not recognised as work has the potential then lead to the systematic denial of those rights of citizenship that are conditional on an engagement with the paid labour market. The next section examines these key concepts in relation to the changing nature of women's labour market participation before developing a discussion of the key ideas informing the development of work centric welfare policies.

## **1.7 Changing patterns of employment participation, gender and care**

### **1.7.1 The breadwinner model: gendered divisions of labour?**

From the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the efforts of the labour movements and some parts of the feminist movement granted women the opportunity and the obligation to care for their children with the role for men largely framed as that of a worker in the paid labour market. The development of the nuclear breadwinner family model was influenced also by the rise in the nineteenth century of the domestic ideal of middle class life in the nuclear family (Hendrick, 1997). The establishment of a patriarchal welfare state (Pateman, 1987) positioned wives as the financial responsibility of husbands with state policies reinforcing gender difference through sustaining a male breadwinning/female caregiving model (Orloff, 2006). The British welfare state gave primacy to men's position as citizen-workers, with policies directed at women focussed on their roles as wives and mothers (Pateman, 1987). The breadwinner wage, pensions and maternity leave can all be seen as expressions of the recognition that women needed to be freed from the obligations of paid work in order to provide care and that men had a responsibility to seek employment in order to support a dependent wife and children. These structures led to the financial dependence of women on their husbands (Knijn and Kremer, 1997: 329) and the establishment of financial responsibility as a central obligation of fatherhood. This male breadwinner model, central to the post-war welfare settlement, was based upon a presumption of full and regular employment for men and the existence of stable family units in which women (and children) were provided for via their husbands' earnings and social contributions (Lewis, 2001a: 153).

These labour market and policy structures enabled men to be released from a responsibility for domestic and caring work by providing working men with a family wage and other social security benefits which gave them access to the caring and domestic work of a woman within the family (Sevenhuijsen, 2000: 23), whilst women were able to trade their domestic labour for financial support from a male partner. In this sense, marriage and the nuclear family model can be seen to offer a partnership model in which gendered responsibilities were, apparently, clearly defined. However, we know that in many families these responsibilities were not demarcated so precisely with labour market participation the norm and a necessity for many women, particularly in lower income groups (VanEvery, 1999; Hakim, 2000). So, although this male breadwinner model only described a proportion of families practices throughout the twentieth century with this proportion somewhat larger in the post war decades, it was highly influential and became widely accepted as an ideal type (Lewis, 2001b). Alongside the social policies and labour market structures which encouraged this gendered division of labour, was a tax system constructed in such a way as to encourage men to seek work outside of the home and women to concentrate on the domestic sphere. Joint taxation of husbands and wives was enduring and remained the rule until 6 April 1990 when the option to be taxed separately was introduced (Mumford, 2006: 189-192).

### **1.7.2 Maternal employment: a gender neutral family model?**

Since the early 1970s, however, rates of maternal employment have been steadily increasing with many households in the UK moving towards being resourced by two earners rather than conforming to the male breadwinner/female homemaker model. This decline in the household resourcing model in which women specialise in domestic labour and men in earning (Duncan and Irwin, 2004) was marked by the rise in female labour market participation. During the 1980s dual earner families became the majority group amongst two parent families (Irwin and Bottero, 2000: 262) and by 2002 three quarters of co habiting or married couples and 56 per cent of those with children of pre school age were supported by two earners (Harkness, 2003: 152). Across the thirty OECD countries the rate of maternal employment reached 71 per cent for mothers with one child and 62 per cent for mothers with two or more children (Gornick and Meyers, 2007: 7) with the female employment/population ratio at 56.7 per cent over the OECD countries by 2012 (OECD, 2012). Research on women's increasing labour market

participation did not, however, produce evidence that men and women had reached parity in the labour market. Irwin and Bottero's (2000) analysis identified that a relatively small number of women were employed in high status full time employment, with the majority of employed women with young children employed in low paid and part time work at the time of their study. More recent data suggests that women with children remain less likely to be employed in the paid labour market than other women or men and that when they are employed they generally work fewer hours and earn lower hourly wages (Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel, 2007: 55). Gornick and Meyers (2007: 3) also note that for many families the time demands of caring for young children may mean that full time work can be impractical (see also Skinner, 2005 for discussion of the complexities of managing employment and childcare). Nevertheless, combining paid work with motherhood has become largely accepted as the norm (Mahon, 2009) with earlier research indicating an increase in the belief that young children were not harmed by their mother's engagement with paid work (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004).

However, the labour market position of mothers is not straightforward. The 'cost' of motherhood has long been known to be high in financial terms (see Waldfogel, 1998 for a review of the earlier literature) with some research suggesting that in the UK a woman with two children born when she is aged 25 and 27 could expect to earn only 58 per cent of a non mothers earnings in her lifetime (Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel, 2007: 76). We know that the increasing labour market participation of women during the 1980s and 1990s did not result in the degendering of care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997: 356) with women retaining primary responsibility for caring in many households. Whilst there has been an increasing interest in policies that would erode the gendered division of labour by moving women into the public sphere and the paid labour market, this has only more recently been accompanied by greater efforts to encourage men to take up responsibilities to provide care (Orloff, 2008: 1). This has become a central concern of those who see the sharing of domestic labour as central to the erosion of some of the difficulties experienced by women who find themselves responsible for the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989) of undertaking both caring work and paid work. However, research from the early 21st century suggests that responsibility for care and domestic work remains largely with mothers and any movement from fathers to increase their involvement on the domestic sphere is taking place only slowly (Warren, 2003; Breen and Cooke, 2005; Scott, 2006; Gornick and Meyers, 2007). The way in which women's

participation in public life through their engagement with the paid labour market has not been matched by changes in responsibility for care either in the home or in public and community life has been described as an ‘incomplete social revolution’ (Fine, 2007: 153). Others have argued that policy development under the New Labour administration whilst *presented* in gender neutral terms, has in practice done more to promote women’s dual responsibilities for earning and caring than to make provisions for men to become more involved in the care of their children (Kilkey, 2006). Yerkes et al. (2010) argue that it would be more accurate to suggest that there has been some modification to the breadwinner model with policy making operating within a male model of work that further reinforces gender roles rather than any transformation of the gendered division of labour. The kinds of family policies that have been explicitly targeted towards fathers, such as the introduction of statutory paternity leave, are perhaps best described as “rather minimalist” (Daly, 2010).

The persistence of gendered inequalities in the labour market too, despite the increasing labour market participation of women, is borne out by evidence from research. This suggests that due to the historical lack of formal childcare provision in the UK on becoming parents women have experienced a cultural tradition in which full time care of pre school children by their mother has been regarded as ‘best’. In contrast to women’s shift in focus towards care at the time of family formation, fathers have been more likely to increase rather than modify their labour market attachment on becoming a parent (Sümer et al., 2008: 368) in line with cultural traditions and the intrinsic connection of the fathering role with providing for a family. These apparent gendered differences are of particular interest in the context of this research as notions of the behaviours constituting ‘good’ mothering or fathering may inform some of the decision making of individual mothers and fathers at the household level. Maternal and paternal identities have been bound up with gender, with ‘good mothering’ seen to involve the practices of caring for and devoting time to children whilst ‘good fatherhood’ has been connected with the nuclear family ideal of providing financially for a wife and child (Cancian and Oliker, 2000; Neale and Smart 2002; Tronto, 1989).

Despite the gendered breadwinner/homemaker arrangement becoming increasingly rare in industrialised countries, workplace structures and social policies have remained based on the assumption that men are committed to employment and women to the home (Gornick and Meyers, 2007: 3). Sevenhuijsen argues that it is possible that the gendered

nature of the division of domestic and earning responsibilities within the family may be more closely related to the hegemony of the work ethic than in any inequity between fathers and mothers in individual families. In considering men's and women's employment behaviours in this way, many of the issues facing lone parents can be placed in the wider context and addressed by employment practice and legislation to address these concerns for all parents, not just those that are parenting alone (Sevenhuijsen, 2000: 20). Whilst work life balance policies theoretically exist in order to allow both men and women to balance their work and home life, they tend to be regarded by employers as policies which are directed towards women rather than as policies that could address some of the wider structural issues of working practices that are incompatible with care (Gambles et al., 2006; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Significantly, major policy developments in the US and the UK in recent years have focussed increasingly on employment as a key responsibility with scant attention paid to the need to provide care. The most striking development to impact upon lone parents is the increase in conditionality in respect of claims to public welfare through a focus on welfare-to-work.

### **1.8 Welfare-to-work**

'Welfare-to-work' refers to those policies which seek to move those that are dependent on public welfare into a position of relative financial independence through engagement with the paid labour market. The primary aim of welfare-to-work policies is to reduce unemployment and to address worklessness (Bryson, 2003: 79). The OECD has defined the common principle which informs these labour market activation policies as making receipt of benefits conditional on the recipient demonstrating that they are actively seeking work or improving their employment prospects and the provision of pre-employment services and advice to aid people in their search for work (OECD, 2002: 9 cited in Daguerre, 2004: 42).

### **1.9 Lone parents, employment and poverty**

From the time of their election in 1997 New Labour's childcare and family support strategies had a clear anti poverty focus, promoting parental (and maternal) employment and raising children's educational attainment. Lone parent households lacking paid employment were seen as a significant explanatory factor in child poverty rates in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s and mothers, whether partnered or not, were regarded as potential workers in New Labour's workfare focus in social policy (McDowell, 2005:

370). The Third Way rhetoric of New Labour claimed that the welfare state created dependency and trapped poor households (and particularly lone parent households) in poverty. When compared to couple families, more lone parents remain persistently on a low income over time (DWP, 2010a). The way out of this was paid work (Daguerre, 2004: 48) with mothers' employment regarded as being central in achieving the child poverty targets set by government (Lloyd, 2008: 480). Lone parenthood increasingly became a concern of economic and employment policy rather than an issue for welfare policies (Himmelwiet et al, 2004: 11).

As discussed previously, the employment rates of married mothers had risen significantly in the preceding thirty years. However, the employment rate for lone mothers was lower in the 1990s than it had been in the late 1970s (Gregg and Harkness, 2003) and this was especially pronounced amongst women with low levels of educational qualifications (McDowell, 2005: 368). The UK differed from almost all other OECD countries in having employment rates for lone mothers so much lower than for other mothers (Gregg et al., 2009: F38). By 2007 the employment rate of UK lone parents was 57 per cent falling slightly to 56.3 per cent in June 2008 (Office for National Statistics, 2008). This stood in comparison to an overall employment rate for people of working age of 74.1 per cent in the three months to January 2009 (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

Moving lone parents into the paid labour market was regarded as a central part of any attempt to address the issue of child poverty because, Gregg (2008) argued, if lone parents had the same employment rates as the rest of the population then 300, 000 children would be lifted out of poverty (Gregg, 2008: 26). With the eradication of child poverty a key government strategy, this appears to provide some support for the work focussed policy reforms discussed in this chapter. The risk of poverty was known to be twice as high for children in a lone parent family than in a two parent family with worklessness a more significant factor in poverty for lone parent families and working poverty the key factor for couple families (Cooke and Lawton, 2008: 7). For those mothers in low paid and part time work the financial transition to lone parenthood from a two parent household may be hindered by their lack of status in the paid labour market and thus an inability to earn an income sufficient to support themselves and their children. The inequalities between lone parents at various points of the income continuum is further revealed by the knowledge that poorer lone parents are less likely



to receive financial support from their child's other parent. Skinner and Meyer (2006) found that "lone mothers who are already better off (relative to other lone mothers) are more likely to receive child support (maintenance), and this finding is consistent across income measures and the different ways to divide income groups. This may reflect assortative mating, in which better-off mothers are associated with better-off fathers, who are more likely to be employed and more likely to pay" (Skinner and Meyer, 2006: 219).

The merging of the right wing perspective that lone parents are a burden on the state and the left's perception that addressing the poverty and disadvantage of children in lone parent families was a matter of social justice led to the development of policies to encourage paid work (Himmelweit et al, 2004: 246). Increasing levels of welfare benefit have been discounted as a way of addressing this poverty with two primary mechanisms via which an increase in out of work benefits is claimed to reduce work incentives: the substitution effect in which the gap between incomes in and out of work reduce, and the income effect in which extra income benefits for those out of work reduce work incentives (Dickens and Ellwood: 2003: 299). Encouraging lone mothers to seek paid work may also impact on the financial support that is available to them through maintenance payments from their child's other parent. A factor in higher rates of child maintenance receipt amongst these lone mothers may be related to their own engagement with the paid labour market. Employed mothers have a greater incentive to seek payment from their child's other parent as it directly increases their household budget. For mothers in receipt of means tested benefits this is not the case, with maintenance payments directly reducing their entitlement to welfare benefits (Skinner and Meyer, 2006: 212).<sup>1</sup>

In 2003 Gregg and Harkness noted that the target for New Labour was to move 70 per cent of lone parents into work by 2010. The achievability of this target appeared to be supported by the evidence of the previous decade in which the employment rate of lone parents had risen from 42 per cent in 1993 to 53 per cent in 2002, a rate of increase more than twice that of the population as a whole (Gregg and Harkness, 2003: 98). Following the introduction of New Deal incentives to seek employment, there was a concentration of non working lone parents in rented housing, who were also less skilled

---

<sup>1</sup> changes in policy have now altered this, allowing parents with care to keep all maintenance paid by their child's other parent, without impacting on their entitlement to welfare benefits.

and therefore a group for whom work incentives remained weak (ibid.). This illustrates the importance of reforming policy in ways that take into account the real employment status and prospects of lone parents. For those with low or no educational or professional qualifications positing movement into the labour market as the solution to poverty could be less than straightforward and not financially viable at the household level especially when housing costs are taken into consideration. The introduction of Tax Credits was New Labour's principle policy vehicle for addressing this issue with eligible lone parents moving into paid work also entitled to an In-Work Credit of £40 per week (£60 in London) during their first year of work (DWP, 2008: 16).

### **1.10 The historical development of welfare-to-work**

New Labour's Tax Credit schemes were explicitly developed to encourage and activate labour market activity by providing enhancements to income for low and part time earners by constructing an active welfare subject (Williams, 1999). Initially they were designed to move lone parents out of the benefits system and into work, they were later extended to include couple families outside of employment (Daly, 2010: 436). Outside of the UK, active labour market policies have a long history and are particularly evident in Scandinavian welfare states (Adler, 2004: 87) with the Scandinavian model focussing on gender symmetry. This approach sought to support and encourage both men and women to take a position in the paid labour market in addition to holding responsibility for performing caring activity. In Sweden, social-democratic policies have been developed to support mothers' employment, provided better care services and resources for children and also encouraged fathers' caregiving (Orloff, 2008: 5). There is a clear distinction between the welfare states of the Scandinavian countries that would be described by Esping-Anderson (1990) as social democratic and those of the Anglo Saxon countries that would be described as liberal (ibid.). It has been suggested that the US and the UK have a common central design in the form of a historical distinction between routine social security programmes (those that are universal) and stigmatized welfare policies such as benefits for those who are not engaged with the paid labour market (King, 1995: cited in Daguette, 2004: 52) with US models having had a significant effect on policy in the UK in recent years. In these liberal welfare regimes, benefits cater for the low income and working class with policy making informed by work-ethic norms (Esping-Anderson, 1990).

The development of the conditional approach to welfare is based upon the assumption that work is the best route out of poverty, with the issue of poverty to be addressed not via increased rates of public welfare, but by moving the workless into paid employment. Mead, contends that poverty is primarily a behavioural problem caused by the poor themselves and their lack of connection with or commitment to the paid labour market, their poverty stemming from a failure to take advantage of opportunity rather than a lack of opportunity (Mead, 1991). The rationale for work compulsion policies is permeated by this notion that poverty and the resultant disadvantages that the poor experience, are caused primarily by a lack of work, either because an individual does not work at all or because they do not work enough. In this interpretation, the problem of poverty can, therefore, be addressed by the poor making efforts to work harder and longer to increase their income (Mead, 1997). The focus on paid work in the activation model of welfare reform also has clear foundations in the principle that work, regardless of the income it provides, is a good in and of itself. Paid work is presented both as a duty and a personal good (Bowring, 2000; Waddell and Burton, 2006; Black, 2008). As Lister (1999: 234) has argued, governments have elevated paid work to “the supreme expression of citizenship responsibility” as the notion of ‘work’ becomes limited to simply having a job (Young, 2002: 47).

There are, Bauman (1998) contends, two basic premises of the work ethic: firstly that one must give in order to receive later and secondly that it is wrong to be satisfied with what one already has to the extent that one stops striving to work to achieve more. This view, based on the idea that work has some intrinsic value and that the notion of the work ethic has grown out of a battle for subordination and control, represents a way of ensuring that the working classes accept the “ethical nobility of working life, a life neither noble nor responding to their own standards of moral decency” (Bauman, 1998: 8). The concept of the work ethic and its centrality to the development of modern capitalist economies has historical links with the Protestant ethic examined in Weber’s (1905) “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” in which work was conceptualised as a moral duty.

Paid work has been and remains a central element of the development of modern capitalism and consumer society - without income it is not possible to participate in the prevailing culture of consumerism that characterises the economies of the industrialised world. As Fitzpatrick (1998: 26) has argued, the development of twentieth century

social welfare is “very much a child of industrial capitalism and has internalized most, if not all, of the aims and assumptions of its socio-economic surroundings”. Within this environment the poor can be seen as failed consumers, operating outside of mainstream society on two levels: firstly by not engaging with a duty to work and secondly by not being a part of a society in which consumption is central (Bauman, 1998). The concept enables some understanding of the ideas behind a discourse which sees welfare dependency and worklessness as problematic by illuminating the ways in which financial independence through engagement with the paid labour market has become a central part of citizenship. As Fraser and Gordon (2002: 33) argue, industrial capitalism and the hegemony of wage labour occludes and devalues unwaged domestic and parenting labour. Welfare dependency has been regarded by Mead (1997) and Murray (1990) as a major social problem in the US, a problem which they contend is caused not by a lack of employment opportunities but as a result of behavioural problems arising from a low work ethic (Daguerre, 2004: 44).

Links with citizenship status are clearly evident in discussions of the importance of paid work in the US with Mead arguing that forcing public welfare recipients to adhere to work conditions effectively re establishes their right to be regarded as citizens (Dwyer, 2004: 268) in a citizenship model which regards work as a primary civic duty (see Marshall, 1950). The full rights of citizenship are not available to those who do not work, even if they are engaged in caring. The demands of care are often such that care is undertaken at the cost of labour market participation so reducing the citizenship status of caregivers. As we will all need and give care at various points in our lives we can see that care is thus not a women’s issue but a citizenship issue (Knijn and Kremer, 1997: 331-2).

In the US the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Conciliation Act (PRWORA) which was incorporated in 1997 effectively removed the right of families to seek cash assistance from public welfare (Wiseman, 2003: 37). PRWORA introduced Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) which is based firmly on a model of limited entitlement and work enforcement through the imposition of a limit on the length of time public welfare could be claimed for. It seems that the primary goal of this reform was to reduce the welfare rolls - Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls peaked at 14,225,591 in 1994. AFDC was replaced by TANF and by June 1999 claimant numbers had fallen to less than 6.9 million (Weaver, 2000: 343). The

critical difference in these policy approaches was that under AFDC benefits were an entitlement, whilst under PRWORA time limits were introduced, placing a life time maximum on the number of years that an adult could claim welfare for and an increased focus on enforcing work related activities (Deacon, 2001).

This model of welfare was condemned by Mink (1999: 171) who argued that the Act was “the most aggressive assault on women’s rights this century”. Her criticism was not limited to the Act itself but also the lack of response from the feminist community to its treatment of poor single mothers and their rights to care for their children as they choose. Predicating an entitlement to public welfare on the responsibility of claimants to seek paid work is bound up with assumptions that the only valid social contribution is that made through engagement with the paid labour market: this obscures the social contribution made by those engaged with unpaid care and domestic work (Young, 2002: 42). This debate is further complicated by the centrality of claims to the right to work of the feminist movement during the 1970s, with some feminists suggesting that the denial of access to work directly impeded womens’ equality with men (Mumford, 2006: 200, Lister, 1999: 233). As engagement with paid work amongst mothers becomes widespread and normative, support for welfare policies that support full time child raising declines (Fraser and Gordon, 2002: 31). Focussing on the ideal of equality as equality within the labour market means that mothering work must be managed so that mothers can be free to engage in market work. Excluding care from normative definitions of work renders an engagement with care as insufficient to constitute a claim to the full rights of citizenship: these remain conditional on an engagement with the paid labour market. In these conditions, a lone parent faces a double bind. If time is devoted to market work, she is unable to perform her caring role, but if she focusses on her caring responsibilities she is unable to support herself and her family financially. The challenge of managing dependency is thus a key challenge (Fineman, 2002: 226) especially when we consider that welfare benefits can provide a means of escape from “undesirable dependency upon oppressive relationships” (Williams, 1999: 676).

Mink (1999) suggested that the work requirements of the Act injured mothers’ rights to decide for themselves whether or not to seek employment outside of the home. This illuminates the complexity of decision making as parents must balance work requirements that may not be compatible with their desire to care for their children themselves rather than placing them into formal childcare. In addition, she argued that

rather than promoting women's financial independence, the Act actually served to promote women's financial dependence on men, via the inclusion of a clause that supported the right of partnered women to stay at home to raise their children whilst insisting that lone mothers must seek work outside of the home (172). With recognition that some feminist women had protested against the terms of this Act, their number were too few to make any real impact and Mink writes that many "were more concerned with reconciling welfare with feminism than with defending the rights of poor single mothers to receive it" (Mink, 1999: 176). Here, a clear tension is illuminated between the ideals of feminism suggesting that women's independence can be achieved through their paid work and the knowledge that for some women a right to public welfare is necessary in order to sustain themselves and their children financially.

There are difficulties in this feminist conception of independence in reconciling with the rights of women to public welfare. The ways in which public welfare can be seen to entrench dependency through modelling a situation in which the state takes a patriarchal role as provider of financial support to the household are at odds with feminist ideals of female independence. By positioning the state in the role of provider of material needs, welfare can be seen to reduce women's autonomy and independence (Tronto, 1993; Mink, 1999). Women who occupy a disadvantaged position in the labour market may face constraints on their behaviour and choices through their connection with public welfare, particularly as the levels of conditionality attached to their claim increase.

There are three main factors evident in concerns around dependency, all of which are arguments that have been employed by welfare commentators at various points on the political spectrum. These factors are that welfare promotes dependence on the state rather than economic independence; that it has discouraged poor women from controlling their own fertility and that it compensates for the sexual and paternal irresponsibility of some individual men (Mink, 1999: 176). Welfare dependency has been regarded as a major social problem in the USA and writers such as Murray (1984) and Mead (1986) based their critiques of US welfare on the problem of dependency (Daguerre, 2004: 44). Although there are clear differences in Mead and Murray's analyses of dependency, particularly in the way they view human nature, they are in agreement that dependency is a de facto problem (Fraser and Gordon, 2002). Murray's policy prescription is informed by his belief that the poor are motivated by self interest and will therefore respond rationally to improve their circumstances. Mead, however,

argues that the poor will not take advantage of opportunities to improve their position unless they are compelled to do so (Deacon, 2001: 5). Regardless of the intricacies of the discourse, both Murray and Mead advocate welfare reform policies that control the decisions women make about caring for their children in a way that is inherently unequal. Race and class distinctions have a clear impact on the extent to which individual women are affected by these reforms (Orloff, 2008: 19).

Other opponents of Mead's view argue that the 'success' of workfare policies in the US may be more closely aligned to the expansion of the US economy during the 1990s and in-work financial support rather than welfare reform itself. Neubeck (2006) has argued that lone mother headed families in the US do not easily find employment and adequate wages, with many ex-welfare recipients having neither employment nor a known source of income. Others have suggested that in the late 1990s as many as 40 per cent of those leaving the welfare rolls in the US did not do so because they had reached financial independence but because they had transferred their dependence from public welfare to support from family or boyfriends (Besharov and Germanis, 2001: 54). Neubeck's (2006) research revealed that those who did find paid employment frequently found that their wages were insufficient to provide food, housing and healthcare for themselves and their children. This suggests that the relationship between policies focussed on compelling an engagement with the paid labour market and poverty is complex with the possibility that welfare-to-work may simply shift dependence of the vulnerable onto informal provider or leave families to struggle with limited resources. It has been argued by Williams (1999) that the US policy approach neglects to consider that a workers independence is supported by those who care for their children or provide other domestic services, precisely the kind of support that may be absent in a single adult family household. Without placing welfare reform policies within the wider economic context of current labour market conditions it is not possible to assess their effectiveness in moving the poor out of poverty and into a position of relative financial independence.

The developments in US welfare policy discussed here, had a significant influence on policy thinking in the UK. This process has been described by Driver (2004) as the setting in of a "North Atlantic policy drift" as social democratic welfare thinking guided the development of New Labour's welfare reforms. It is to consideration of developments in welfare conditionality in the UK that this chapter now turns.

## **1.11 Moving towards welfare conditionality in the UK**

After their election in 1997, New Labour began to tackle unemployment and poverty by utilising redistributive measures administered via the tax and benefit system and through the promotion of an active welfare state. These approaches make the receipt of public welfare contingent on participation in work related activities, an approach that is closely aligned to the American (Daguerre, 2004) and Australian (Skevik, 2005) models of workfare. Conditional entitlements to public welfare in the UK were not new however, with concerns about welfare dependency developing during the late 1980s and early 1990s leading to the tightening of eligibility and the strengthening of conditionality (Trickey and Walker, 2000). Welfare reforms were governed by a neo liberal route which focussed on self sufficiency through paid work (Daguerre, 2004: 44; Young, 2002: 41). The New Labour approach attempted to develop a distinctive form of welfare contractualism, departing from the neo-liberal workfare model by focussing on reciprocal responsibility in which government and claimant had a set of rights and responsibilities (Sage, 2012).

Before 1997 there was clear evidence from North America that the employment choices of lone parents were particularly sensitive to financial incentives and that personal advisors to welfare claimants had a potential role in raising their employment levels (Greg and Harkness, 2003). This has been taken as an indication that a similar system of compulsion could be effective in raising employment levels in the UK. The principal aim of welfare-to-work policies has been to reduce unemployment and tackle the wider problem of worklessness (Bryson, 2003: 79). Behind this stands the notion that work is good for us - evidenced by a review authored by Waddell and Burton (2006). They suggested that work is generally good for health and wellbeing with employment and socio-economic status key drivers of social gradients in health with work playing a central role in meeting psycho-social needs in those societies where employment is the norm. A focus on the centrality of paid employment connects with the liberal socialist approach of New Labour in which economic justice was seen to be achieved through the linking of entitlements to income to citizens responsibilities to make productive contributions.

New Labour framed unemployment as a behavioural problem via the development of two broad categories of explanation those which focused on the character of unemployed people and those which were concerned with the demotivating effects of



long term unemployment. These demotivating effects may include declining morale, material resources and social contacts or capital (Bryson, 2003: 81). The idea that worklessness is a behavioural problem was clearly illustrated by the DWP argument that:

“People are just as likely to make decisions based on what they have always done previously, what instinct or impulse tells them to do, or what they perceive their neighbours or friends generally do. People may also fail to get around to taking action on the things they know they should through inertia, or due to short-sightedness they may fail to see the value of things that are in their best interests over the long term. All of this means that in some instances, people make choices that are consciously opposed to their ‘objective’ self interest” (DWP, 2008: 15).

Here the inference is that the workless poor require compulsion to return to the labour market and that this is ‘for their own good’. In this way both categories of behavioural theory are evident, both the character of the unemployed and the demotivating effects of unemployment are drawn upon here, particularly in respect of cultural attitudes to employment. There is some recognition that individual preferences may not correspond with the work requirements of welfare policy but those not oriented to the paid labour market are considered to be acting in opposition to their own best interests. There is little space for freedom of choice in respect of caring and earning decision making for those who are in receipt of public welfare payments.

In focussing on the ‘problem’ of worklessness welfare reform is posited as a paternalistic support mechanism to assist the whole family through increasing the work rates of lone parents –it is for the good of their children as well as themselves. Mead (1997) contends that non working households are more likely to raise children that do less well at school and who may experience later disadvantage in the job market themselves as they have been raised in a culture in which paid employment does not have a central position. Being engaged with the paid labour market has been regarded as essential in creating a sense of social worth, economic participation, usefulness and social inclusion (Bowring, 2000: 310) and these factors have all influenced the adoption of the measures to promote work focussed policy strategies in the UK.

Social exclusion was a key concern of the New Labour government with paid employment taking a central place as a key indicator of inclusion. This approach was based on the assumption that work offers benefits such as status, increased income, social interaction and participation in the norms of society (Perkins, 2007: 17). Both the US and European social democratic focus on labour market insertion influenced the development of Third Way welfare in the UK, with the central focus on paid work as a strategy for tackling social exclusion and the shift from a breadwinner to an adult worker model (Lewis, 2002). As Lister (2001) has argued, there appears to be an assumption that it is through paid work that benefit recipients are offered “opportunity and an exit from social exclusion” (432). However, there are dangers in equating paid work with social inclusion in the name of the work ethic as it may deflect attention from the wider inequalities of the labour market and involve the deployment of punitive measures (ibid.). Indeed, positioning labour market participation as an expression of individual choice or agency (Daly, 2011: 4-5) has developed assumptions that non participation can also be cast a choice in welfare reform discourse as the individual is deemed to be responsible for their (un)employment status (Page, 2009; Davies, 2012).

The concern that lone parent families lacked financial resources and were thus at risk of social exclusion appeared to be a key driver behind the development of New Labour’s welfare conditionality. The shift was clearly framed by a discourse concerned with child poverty as the movement of lone mothers from welfare and into the paid labour market represented one of New Labour’s key strategies for tackling the intergenerational transmission of deprivation (Deacon, 2002). Welfare policy departed from the welfare society of the past in which some groups from exempted from participation in the paid labour market due to a recognition that they were making a socially valid contribution in other ways, either as women engaged in familial or informal care work or because they had previously made a contribution through their prior employment. (Knijn and Kremer, 1997): Lone parents were now one of the main groups to be targeted by activation policies in the UK (Millar, 2008: 4)

For lone parents the shift in policy discourse towards conditionality appeared to endorse the view that acting as carers is not an adequate basis on which to make a claim to public welfare, nor are the practical constraints involved in parenting alone considered as valid reasons not to seek paid employment. Additionally, the policy focus appeared to be predicated upon the importance of future outcomes and the impact of worklessness

and poverty on the child as an adult of the future in line with a strategy based on child centred investment. However, positioning the child as a citizen worker of the future rather than a citizen child of the present may impact on the quality of their childhood as a result (Lister, 2003 and 2006; Ridge, 2007; Millar and Ridge, 2008; Williams, 2004a).

The shift towards an increased emphasis on the ethic of work for all and a decline of the role of the state as a support mechanism for those unable to work due to their responsibilities for caring is clear. One of the key goals of government policy has been to make employment the norm for lone parents, with the benefit system providing only temporary support during periods of unemployment (Millar and Ridge, 2008: 104). This presents particular practical difficulties for those parenting or caring alone and presents work and care as diametrically opposed activities with paid work taking precedence as the key duty. Neo liberal policies have increased the emphasis on the market and individual effort as the primary way of achieving an adequate standard of living with the emphasis of welfare provision shifting away from support for the poor towards an emphasis on support for the working poor (McDowell, 2005: 366).

### **1.12 The Freud Report: recommendations and implementation**

The Freud Report (2007) was central in proposing increased conditionality in welfare entitlements in the UK and has been criticized by Grover (2007) for a fixation with supply side economics and a focus on the centrality of work as the only valid social contribution. Those without paid employment are conceptualised as ‘work-rejectors’: those who will not work rather than those who are unable to secure employment due to a lack of available jobs, barriers such as discrimination and those who do not regard employment as an important part of their self identity (Grover, 2007: 536).

The recommendations of the Freud report appear to be focussed most centrally on reaching the government target of achieving 80 per cent employment rather than tackling in-work poverty. Grover (2007) has argued that this is evident due to the reports focus on tackling worklessness among groups that have previously been entitled to state support due to their status, for example as lone parents, or due to ill health: there is now a focus on moving these groups into paid work. There are clear links to the idea that unconditional entitlements are responsible for entrenching benefit dependency (Dwyer, 2004: 268). The focus was very firmly upon the notion of public welfare dependency - women’s financial dependency on the men with whom they may live was

not part of the conceptualization of dependency put forward by the Freud report (Campbell, 2008: 467). Market dependency, whether as individual women or through the support of a partner, was, as had been noted by Williams (1999) some years earlier, regarded as inherently superior to dependence on the state.

The policy shift appeared to endorse that view that any contribution made by lone parents as a carer outside of the paid labour market is not an adequate basis on which to stake a claim for public support (Dwyer, 2004: 279). In this way the right to care for one's own children has been posited as a choice only available to those who are able to do so without recourse to public funds for support. White (2003) has argued that in order to satisfy the principle of fair reciprocity the choice to care for one's own children must not be a mere lifestyle choice and parents must be prepared to be accountable to the wider community in the way they raise their children if they expect to receive state support to do so (Deacon, 2007: 483). The practice of giving care remains a responsibility of women and this in turn entrenches their dependency on men to provide support for their financial needs (Bubeck, 2002) which presents a clear problem for lone parents. Nor is womens' dependency on a male earner addressed by the Tax Credit system which, through basing claims to entitlement on household rather than personal income, means that partnered women may have less incentive to seek paid employment and so remain dependent on their male partners for financial support (Lewis, 2001a: 162) a decision that may have a negative effect on their financial position if they later become a lone parent. The primary focus then is on moving welfare dependent mothers into paid work, rather than encouraging employment for all women.

Following on from the recommendations of the Freud Report in 2007 the Gregg Report on Welfare Reform was published in December of 2008 (Gregg, 2008). The report signalled that the recommendations in the Freud Report would be incorporated into British welfare reforms. The focus of these reforms was firmly on the movement towards conditionality with public welfare recipients to be placed into three categories: the Work Ready Group, members of which are considered to be immediately ready for work and placed within a welfare regime similar to that of the current Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) in which claimants must provide evidence that they are actively seeking work; the Progression to Work group in which it is recognised that an immediate return to work is inappropriate. For this group conditionality will reflect the claimants "co-ownership of the return to work process" with an expectation that plans to

return to work in the future will be made. The final ‘no conditionality’ group will not be subject to any conditionality requirements. However, this group is expected to be very small and will include those claiming Employment and Support Allowance (previously Incapacity Benefit), certain carers and lone parents with children under the age of one (Gregg, 2008).

### **1.13 Economic factors affecting (un)employment: problems with the welfare-to-work approach?**

Conditional entitlements to public welfare assume that employment opportunities are available to those who seek them and that those without employment could find it if they engaged in a job search. Economic theories of unemployment, however, suggest that it is caused by deficiencies in the labour market supply and demand – simply, unemployment occurs when there are more workers than jobs available. This may occur on a national level during a recession or on a localised basis where there is a mismatch between job and labour availability (Bryson, 2003: 79). Programmes that are designed to work with job seekers who are experiencing severe personal barriers to employment (and this would include lone parents with responsibilities for caring) are generally supply side driven and do not take into account demand side factors such as the availability of work, broader labour market factors or other barriers such as a lack of suitable childcare or access to transport facilities (Perkins, 2007: 16). Additionally, there is a link to wage theory approaches which suggest that some public welfare dependency results from a labour market which does not offer sufficient remuneration to encourage those in receipt of public welfare to move into paid work. There are also challenges in defining a contribution to society, and conflating a contribution only with paid work marginalises those who do not undertake labour market activity.

Bonvin (2008) argues that labour market activation policies must take into account both the resources and the opportunities that are available. Activation policies are based on a rather simplistic notion of responsibility which has participation in the paid labour market at its core (Bonvin, 2008: 367). Mead (1997) has argued that the problem with wage theory approaches is that if poor adults are not employed in the paid labour market then low wages cannot be the cause of their poverty. Simply increasing levels of conditionality and compulsion is not sufficient to address the problem of poverty that is related to worklessness, it is contingent on the availability of employment opportunities at an accessible skill level and a level of remuneration sufficient to at least match the

standard of living achievable whilst in receipt of public welfare. This economic rationality is central to the problem of the 'benefit trap' where individuals are unable to earn more in the paid labour market than they are entitled to in welfare: the development of the Tax Credit system was intended to ensure that individuals would be better off in work than as benefit claimants (Campbell, 2008: 463). The UK's Working Families Tax Credit system again demonstrated the influences from the US through the modelling of these credits on the US Earned Income Tax Credit scheme (Adler, 2004: 98). The system offered some recognition that work incentives can be weak for lone parents, particularly if they do not possess educational qualifications or experience in the paid labour market and that further financial incentives to seek work may be necessary in order to encourage them to take up paid work (Gregg and Harkness, 2003).

The existence of Tax Credits (working Families Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit) to assist lower earners provided one way of addressing issues of individual earnings capacity and the benefit trap and offered an acknowledgment that independence through employment in the paid labour market can be incomplete. For lower earners there remains a need for state assistance to top up wages to a level that is sufficient to support a family. In this way the Tax Credit system could be regarded not as a support to families and individuals but as a support to business by subsidising wage costs that may otherwise be too low to attract a worker. Mumford (2006: 193) has argued that not only do Tax Credits force people to accept low paid work by ameliorating the effects of low wages but they also provide employers with the ability to pay low wages, trapping people in insecure low paid part time work with no incentive to increase their hours due to the way the credit reduces in line with increases in earnings. Dean (2007) has likened this to the Speenhamland system that was in operation in the late eighteenth century, a system of poor relief that provided a top up to the starvation level wages that were paid to farm labourers. He suggests "That something so like the Speenhamland system should have become ideologically acceptable under post-industrial capitalism is indicative of a supply-side economic orthodoxy that no longer has need of a reserve army of labour in order to keep wages low and which assumes that low-paying employers must be enabled to compete in a global market economy" (Dean, 2007: 278). Some commentators have suggested that precarious or poor quality employment, characterised by low pay and skills with part time and/or variable hours may become a key feature of future labour markets (TUC, 2008; Clayton and Brinkley, 2011; McCollum, 2011; Standing, 2011) with these types

of work likely to be particularly challenging for lone parents to sustain (Browne, 2012; Davies, 2012).

### **1.14 Other considerations in employment decision making**

The New Labour and current Coalition government focus on employment appears to be based on an assumption of the universal model of the rational economic man and the rational legal subject (Barlow et al., 2002; Wiggan, 2011). However, the basing of policy development on the assumption that we are all rational economic actors had earlier been undermined by research suggesting that women make their employment decisions based on a moral rather than an economic rationality (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and by a deeper consideration of the wider factors in employment decision making. That women's employment decision making is rational but not always economically rational is also supported by Glover (2002) and Williams (2004) whose research found that this moral reasoning is based on understandings of what makes a good mother and how that fits with work rather than focussing on the financial rewards that work may bring (Williams, 2004: 77). Hakim (2000) posits a ranking of preferences by which women make decisions regarding their employment and caring responsibilities. On a continuum from the home centred woman, with a low commitment to paid employment, to the work centred woman, with a low commitment to reproduction with the adaptive preference sitting somewhere in the middle, Hakim suggests that women in the adaptive group are highly responsive to policy change. These changes may be in educational, employment or welfare policy, with preference theory suggesting that women's decision making is primarily influenced by a need to balance and make compromises between these two part so their lives. Underpinning the conceptualisation of decision making in this way, is an implicit recognition that employment and caring activities sit in opposition to one another, being a site of conflict which needs to be negotiated. In addition, Hakim's preference theory has been criticised for an over-emphasis of choice and a neglect of consideration of wider structures and social policies that may influence decision making around employment and care (Lewis, 2003a; McRae, 2003; Fine, 2007).

In moving beyond economic models and towards a consideration of more micro processes helps to reveal the extent to which personal circumstances and the practical constraints of caring responsibilities can influence individual employment decision making. Indeed, we see a return here to one of the key sociological debates concerning

the interplay between structure and agency in decision making (Bourdieu, 1977). In considering how parents may need to negotiate practical circumstances such as access to child care alongside their parenting style and a wider policy framework there is a central concern with seeking to understand the balance between the influences of structure and agency. Whilst there are distinctions between the experiences of those moving from welfare-to-work in the US and the UK issues such as access to affordable childcare are likely to bear similarities on both sides of the Atlantic. Both Ridge (2007), in the UK, and Scott et al. (2005) in the US, found evidence that the use of informal childcare involving friends and relatives are key strategies for managing paid work. Whilst it is not always known exactly who is providing this care there remains a risk that work focussed welfare reforms could mean that some of these carers are themselves compelled to return to the labour market thus reducing the availability of this type of support for working parents. This type of informal childcare is particularly important when employment does not provide a significant increase in the family standard of living after the costs of working such as childcare and travel have been taken into account. In these circumstances, it may be more rational economically to refuse to accept employment and continue to depend on public support, especially if some practical difficulties and time stress are anticipated if employment is accepted. These circumstances have the potential to reveal an array of tensions when attempting to balance the dual demands of household resourcing and family care.

A study by Ridge (2007) exploring the experiences of mothers returning to work after a period in receipt of Income Support, found that some children noted that their mother's transition into employment had led to some basic economic benefits, such as more food. However, for others the financial improvements experienced as a result of mothers returning to work were more limited, for example in the case of the quality of housing and the physical environment. Overall, Ridge (2007) found that for women leaving Income Support for low paid work, the financial benefits of the transition were limited with consideration also needing to be made of the potential creation of a new set of expenses when moving from welfare into the paid labour market. These may be a direct consequence of employment, for example the costs associated with making a journey to a place of work, or indirectly such as a loss of entitlement to free school meals for their children and the reactivation of debt repayments (Millar, 2006). These factors are significant for households managing on a limited income and need to be incorporated into any analysis of the financial impact of a return to work.



In research with Millar, Ridge found evidence that women try to reduce the negative impact of their work on their children by trying to find employment that is school hours only or by working well below their capacity (Millar and Ridge, 2008: 113). Their findings support those of earlier research conducted by Grant et al. which found that 3.6 million part time workers in the UK, of whom 2.8 million are women, were working below the potential that they had previously demonstrated in other jobs. This equated to a rate of 51 per cent of all part time workers working below their capacity (Grant et al., 2005: 41) further supporting the contention that employment decision making may not adhere to economic rationality and that a commitment to caring has effects on labour market behaviours.

### **1.15 Making work pay?**

Initiatives such as the minimum wage and the extension of training and educational development for those who are not working have been used in an attempt to address some of the challenges faced by those working part time or for low pay. At the time of writing in 2012 the UK minimum wage is set at £6.08 per hour for workers aged twenty one and older. At this level, financial independence is unlikely to be achieved through wages alone and those working in low waged employment are shifted a position of worklessness towards being part of the working poor who remain in receipt of financial support from the state in the form of Tax Credits or Housing Benefit. The inadequacy of the minimum wage as a family wage was illuminated by Cooke and Lawton (2008) who calculated that a lone parent with two children under the age of eleven would need to work 52.1 hours a week at the minimum wage to avoid poverty through their wages alone. In a two parent family with the same number of children a single earner would need to work 79 hours per week at the minimum wage to avoid poverty (Cooke and Lawton, 2008: 46). The Working Time Directive, however states that an employee's maximum hours (including overtime) should not exceed 48 hours in any seven day period, although opting out of the Directive is possible if the worker wishes to (Working Time Directive 1998, II, 4 -1). These figures demonstrate very clearly the disjuncture between living costs and wage rates, and show the essential nature of the support of Tax Credits in sustaining families in which the main earner is employed at the minimum wage, as it is not possible for a low waged single earner to generate sufficient income to support a family from wages alone.

## **1.16 Commodifying childcare**

For parents, it is crucial that they are able to negotiate a balance between their caring and earning responsibilities, and we know that within co-habiting and marital relationships this balancing often operates as an interdependent relationship. Whilst women retain primary responsibility for undertaking caring on an unpaid basis, in turn this makes women dependent on men to provide economic support in order that these care needs can be attended to (Bubeck, 2002: 167). The policy focus has been centrally concerned with moving the place of care from the domestic sphere to the market by expanding childcare provision to enable women to enter the paid labour market. This approach is evident in welfare reforms which adhere to an assumed universal breadwinner model and in the expansion of commercial and state childcare provision. Fraser (1994) identified that the key features of the universal breadwinner model were based on an assumed gender equity in the labour market: in this model all able bodied adults would be able to support themselves and their families through engagement with the paid labour market. In order for this to take place, childcare in this model needed to be contracted out to the market and performed by others for pay (Fraser, 1994). This process also had the consequence of creating labour market opportunities working in child care services that were primarily taken up by women, who made up 98 per cent of the childcare workforce in 2008 (Daycare Trust and TUC: 2008)

The universal breadwinner model adopted in the welfare reforms performs the function of commodifying care in order to give women the space to pursue employment (Orloff, 2008: 9) but does little to support their rights to care for their own children (Gornick and Meyers, 2007: 18). This approach aligns with the more general move away from the principle of state support through public welfare and towards a system of increased market reliance, an approach that is complementary to market focused welfare reforms. Family based caring, such as looking after our own children in the home, involves love, activity and relational bonds and has been characterised as a “labour of love” (Graham, 1983). However, because of the relational bonds, it is not usually considered to be work although we know that care is deemed to be work when we pay someone else to undertake it on our behalf (Mink, 1999: 134). In this conceptualisation, it is the absence of an emotional or relational bond that shifts care from a moral imperative into work and this may affect the quality of the care that is provided. However, when care is moved to the market, it is still not highly valued. This is evident in the low wages paid to those employed in care services (Williams, 2004: 30). McDowell (2005) has argued

that the commodification of care for children “disconnects childcare from its naturalised association with mother love and care, and all the associated feelings of duty, obligation, pleasure, desire, guilt, and ambivalence that the individual care of a child by its mother raises” (McDowell, 2005: 367). These concerns are shared by Himmelweit et al. (2004) who suggest that childcare is not an ordinary commodity as it “determines the life quality for the young, fragile and vulnerable” (260).

Childcare provision in the UK is resourced for lower income families by Child Care Tax Credits which can be used to pay for up to 70 per cent of total costs up to a maximum of £175 per week for one child and £300 for two or more children (HMRC). The charity Daycare Trust found that the average annual expenditure on childcare for a child under two in England was £5, 103 in 2012. For school age children attending a holiday club or playscheme in England the average cost was £99.87 per week (source: daycaretrust.org.uk). It is possible to see clearly that families with a larger number of children can experience real disincentives to seek employment outside of the home as the relative costs of childcare increase in relation to the number of children for whom childcare is needed.

### **1.17 Tensions between employment and caring activity: the problem of time**

Lone parents may experience disadvantages that extend beyond low income when compared with two parent households. Two parent households may possess advantages via their greater access to financial resources through their employment, whether actual or potential, whilst also holding a temporal advantage in that there are two parents with time to devote to children’s care and activities. Without networks of practical support, childcare and either decent wages or financial support in the form of welfare benefits, lone mothers cannot match married parents ability to secure the resources that are needed when raising children (Albelda et al., 2004: 3). Gillies and Edwards (2006) have argued that Coleman’s social capital model suggests that “The absence of fathers through family break up, and the commitment of mothers to full time employment is seen as amounting to a structural deficiency, depriving children of necessary developmental time with their parents” (Gillies and Edwards, 2006: 44). Having time to spend with children is also a crucial element of supervisory parenting, Research suggests that supervising children is central to fostering their development of self control and acceptable behaviour (Boutwell and Beaver, 2010; Lexmond et al, 2011).

Research indicates that those children who are closely monitored and supervised are less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour (JRF, 2005) and so managing the balance between caring and earning is a particularly pertinent issue for those parenting with limited time resources. Key elements of supervision, such as knowing where children are, with whom and what they are doing are more difficult to execute from the workplace than the home and so present a key site of tension for working parents.

In addition, children's developmental time outside of the family can also be impacted by lone parenthood. Children's extra curricular activities may be unaffordable to households where only one or no adults are employed and an ability to engage with these activities may be impeded by a lack of mobility due to care responsibilities for other children within the household. Earlier research has found that the children of lone parents can experience disadvantages related to time as a resource. Ridge (2007), for example found that in lone parent families where the lone parent is in paid employment there is an increase in domestic work undertaken by children who also take more responsibility for caring for younger siblings. This finding highlights the ways in which the interdependencies of family relationships and family life are - for children as well as for adults - relationships of care. Children's engagement with caring responsibilities to support their parents labour market activity, however, may limit their ability to take part in leisure activities, which are regarded by some as a key developmental opportunity for children and thus a central part of being a good parent. Giving children the 'best start' in life is regarded as a central element of being a good parent (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and providing both cash and care for the 'priceless child' (Zelitzer, 2004) is a key ambition of many parents, and one that is likely to be highly challenging for those negotiating their family responsibilities after a separation or divorce.

### **1.18 Questions raised by the literature**

The literature reviewed here raises a number of questions to be addressed by the fieldwork. Issues surrounding work and care are complex and individual level decision making need to be viewed in the context of ideas around what it means to be a 'good' parent and wider labour market structures affecting the availability of employment opportunities. A central consideration for the proposed research is to explore the extent to which idealised models of women's employment as a symbol of their empowerment and independence can be applied to women who hold a disadvantaged position in the

labour market. There is a clear tension between attempts to construct women's equality within a system of beliefs that assume the right to compete in the free market economy with the fact that for some women this is not possible due to their inability to access the labour market through a lack of qualifications, responsibility for childcare or both. My reading of the literature suggests that welfare reforms and employment policies which focus on the centrality of paid work neglect to consider the complexities of managing both employment and caring responsibilities, particularly for those parenting alone. The hidden nature of much care work has meant that those who care and those who are cared for do not achieve full rights as citizens creating persistent inequalities in a welfare structure in which the worker-citizen paradigm is dominant. The ethic of care literature provides an important theoretical model in which it is identified that the key underlying reason for these (often) gendered inequalities lies not in the nature of the work that we do but in the social value that is placed upon it. As Williams had noted in earlier work, "it is ironic that those who are claiming welfare are seen as dependent, no matter how fully engaged or responsible for others they may be, whilst those who are market dependent are seen as independent" (Williams, 1999: 676).

In consideration of the role of state intervention into people's lives, key gendered issues are raised as we know that many women do depend on state support and without it they would experience a decline in their standard of living (Whelehan, 1995: 34). Alongside this knowledge remains the central concern and ambition of liberal feminism that women should seek to engage with the public sphere in addition to their domestic and caring responsibilities (*ibid.*) even though the tasks of caring for children are known to be time consuming and require forward planning and effort (Standing, 1999: 116). As discussed in this literature review chapter, a number of policy interventions in the form of wage top-ups such as tax credits were developed by the Conservative governments of the 1980s, New Labour and continue in the welfare reforms of the Coalition government. Whilst the introduction of these interventions goes some way to address some of the challenges associated with the financial impact of moving from welfare into paid work, practical considerations such as the availability of appropriate childcare are likely to remain a key consideration for parents moving towards work. As Sevenhuijsen (2000) has argued, the view that paid employment is the primary duty represents a failure to take account of feminist theories of labour and care and a focus on the centrality of paid employment continues to neglect the important role of care in all of our lives. Structuring policy in order to enable as many people as possible to combine

caring and employment over the life course would represent recognition that care is an important human practice (ibid.). In attempting to unpack some of the ideas informing the work ethic and the ethics of care whilst exploring the tensions between the two approaches as both ethic and practice, the research set out to explore the ways in which participants combine these activities. A key concern is in examining the extent to which current policies either support or hinder their efforts to take on their dual responsibilities as earners and carers, and the 'fit' between individual preferences and the ideas underpinning contemporary policy making. The following chapter outlines the methodology of the empirical phase of the research outlining the rationale for the project, and the processes of data gathering and analysis.

## **Chapter two**

### **2.1 Research questions**

To what extent do current policy devices support and/or discourage caring and earning practices within families that have experienced separation or divorce?

How do policy, personal choice and practical constraints interact when reorganising a family after divorce?

Do current policy assumptions reflect the lived realities of separated and divorced families today?

### **2.2 Research strategy and methodology**

The empirical phase of the research set out to answer the primary research questions by utilising a qualitative research strategy. This approach was selected as it is considered to be well suited to research with a focus on interpreting the social world (Bauer et al., 2000: 7) and a key focus of the thesis was in exploring the experiences of participants in negotiating their lives in the context of a framework of welfare policies. Whilst quantitative research methods are invaluable for research exploring certain aspects of the social, the use of experiments, official statistics and survey data is methodologically inappropriate for some social research tasks, such as those that constitute the key focus of this project (Silverman, 2001: 32). The qualitative interview was chosen as the key method of empirical data collection as it allows participants to provide detailed descriptions of their social world and enables the researcher to examine social contexts and social processes (Bryman, 2008). Qualitative research methods are particularly well suited to research such as that undertaken in this thesis, in which the key research questions sought to answer questions that aimed to understand the ways in which social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005)

The research examines the subjective experiences of the research participants in the context of the structures within which their lives are constructed (Silverman, 2005), with the structure of welfare policies a key site of interest. In comparing the accounts offered by participants with the assumptions inherent in policy discourses, the research sought to illuminate both the potential effectiveness of policy interventions and the ways in which policy shapes the social. Examining the interactions between these policy interventions in the lived experiences of participants played a key role in the data

analysis phase as the analysis focussed on exploring the ways in which parents framed their descriptions of their decision making. Researching in the qualitative paradigm assumes a construction of reality by exploring and examining the subjective constructions of participants and by conceptualising the research process as a constructive act (Flick et al., 2004: 8). Therefore, for this project the use of a qualitative research strategy was considered highly appropriate owing to the ways in which it can illuminate the structure/agency dualism, and develop an understanding of the complexity of the lived experience as shaping and being shaped by the social world (Bourdieu, 1977). This illumination enabled, during the data analysis phase, the development of explanations and understandings of the ways in which social actors' thinking and decision making is influenced by power structures such as the policy structure (Lauder et al., 2004: 7). This research set out to explore the ways in which parents re-negotiate their responsibilities for caring for their children and resourcing their households after a separation or divorce. Whilst the research has a policy focus it is informed by sociological understandings of family life, working at the boundaries of the two disciplines to examine some key questions around the nature of policy making and family experiences.

### **2.3 Data collection**

The thesis is based upon data collected via a series of interviews with divorced or separated parents. Alongside this data collection method, a study of the development of contemporary welfare reform policies was carried out to examine whether there was a 'fit' between lived experiences and the presumptions underlying the welfare reform agenda. A key intention of the research programme was to illuminate some of the complexities that exist within the current welfare system. Whilst previous scholarship has a tendency to focus on particular policy interventions. I sought here to highlight the ways in which these types of policy research projects do not adequately study the nuanced inter relationships between different policy vehicles.

For example, a lone parent living with their children and not in paid work could be entitled to receive either Income Support or JobSeekers Allowance (dependent on the age of their youngest child), Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit if a tenant or Support for Mortgage Interest if a home owner, Council Tax Benefit, Education Benefits (such as free school meals, assistance with the costs of school uniforms and transport to school) and possibly maintenance payments from their child(ren)'s other parent whether



via a voluntary agreement or administered by the Child Support Agency. If in paid work, the same lone parent's income could be made up of wages and (dependent on level of income) Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Childcare Tax Credit (if paid childcare is used whilst the parent is at work). If on a low income then Housing Benefit may be payable if the parent is a tenant. Whether in work or not, if the home is owned with a mortgage, then Support for Mortgage Interest may be applied for to cover the costs of the interest element of the mortgage, although no capital payment can be made with this and the assumed interest rate may be lower than that actually paid by the mortgage holder. If household income is low enough for the parent to be eligible for Child Tax Credit but not Working Tax Credit (for example if the parent is on low income and their hours do not meet the 16 hours threshold for Working Tax Credit to be paid) the package of education benefits may be available. Again, maintenance may be received through a voluntary or CSA arrangement. The complexity of this system of benefits may be difficult to negotiate on becoming a lone parent after separation or divorce with lone parent charities expressing concern that some may not be aware of all they are entitled to (One Space, 2012). Making the assumption that lone parents receive maintenance when calculating benefit rates is particularly problematic, as only 38 per cent of lone parents actually receive it and of those 40 per cent receive less than £10 per week (Gingerbread, 2012). This is a key reason why an exploration of the relationships between benefit entitlements is important as a lack of understanding of the precarity of lone parents financial situations may be a key factor in establishing the levels of support that do, or do not, exist for policies which offer financial support to lone parent families. It is also important to recognise that there exist a complex set of relationships between benefit entitlements<sup>2</sup> where entitlement to one benefit provides the claimant with automatic eligibility to receive others. For example, receiving Income Support as a lone parent automatically entitles the claimant's children to receive educational benefits such as free school meals and vouchers towards the cost of school uniforms.

The research sought to recognise the complexities of the interactions between differing policy interventions and develop understandings of parents experiences of managing a household budget in which there may be numerous sources of income and explore the impact that this has on employment decision making. Focussing the research and analysing the data in this way meant that it was necessary to conduct in depth interviews

---

<sup>2</sup> the Universal Credit system is intended to address some of these concerns. Please refer to the Chapter 8 for discussion of the proposals.

with a relatively small sample, the rationale for which is discussed in the following section. In addition to the data collected during the research interviews, the thesis also draws on an initial and ongoing process of literature review. Before the fieldwork was undertaken, a review of academic and policy literature was conducted and this is included in the thesis as a literature review chapter. As the research unfolded and as welfare reforms took place both in the initial New Labour administration and, after 2010, in the newly formed Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition this review of the policy and academic literature continued. This allowed analysis of the qualitative data to explore and examine how these welfare reforms might impact on the individual circumstances of the research participants as they described them, as well as enabling discussion of the welfare reform programme in the interviews themselves.

## **2.4 Sampling: the intended sample**

Initially the intention was to interview a sample of twenty parents according to the sampling framework set out below. The small sample size was necessary as the nature and intention of the qualitative research programme was based around the collection of rich and detailed data that could be analysed and understood in its contextual and nuanced complexity. This was the primary focus of the research and, although some generalisation from the findings was likely or indeed inevitable (Williams, 2000), developing ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) rather than generalisable findings was the aim of the thesis. With the key site of analytic interest the exploration of the complexity in individual accounts, a focus on the quality of the data was of much greater importance than the quantity of participants in the sample. Within this methodological framework, the management of a corpus of qualitative data larger than this was deemed unrealistic and would have had a negative impact on the analytic purpose of the research. A purposive sampling strategy was employed with potential participants screened by telephone or email to ensure that their circumstances fit with the desired sample. Theoretical sampling was used with participants selected according to their (self reported) life experiences and subsequent relevance to the research questions (Mason, 1996: 92-4).

The primary characteristic necessary for inclusion in the sample was that:

**Each participant must be divorced or separated from their child(ren)’s other parent.**

Having been married was not a condition for inclusion in the sample, but having previously co-habited with the other parent was. The rationale for this was to enable discussion in the interview and exploration in the subsequent data analysis of the ways in which the transition from a two parent to a one parent household may affect care and employment decision making. Key questions in the interview included asking about any change of employment status, location or caring responsibilities after the separation had taken place.

Whilst one theme of the research was to explore the impact of legal structures on these decision making processes I proposed that it was not necessary for the parents to have been married to have experienced the legal process. The rationale for this is that the research is not a piece of legal research in the sense of being concerned with the mechanics of the legal process in dealing with the ending of a marital relationship. The perspective of the research is firmly located upon the experience of caring for children and managing employment or welfare benefit receipt after the end of a committed co-habiting relationship. These were examined both in the case of negotiating practical issues such as deciding where children would live after separation, how contact and/or shared residence could be managed and making arrangements for the division of assets acquired during marriage or cohabitation.

The division of the assets such as housing was of particular analytic interest due to the potential effect that this could have on employment decision making and the future housing tenure of resident and non resident parent. Housing tenure may also impact upon employment decision making as those in the rented sector may need to balance a changed entitlement to Housing Benefit on moving into paid work and those with a mortgage may have heightened attachment to the paid labour market owing to the lack of financial support available to pay mortgage costs. For example, a thirteen week waiting period is attached to claims for Support for Mortgage Interest and the rate payable is fixed regardless of claimant's actual mortgage costs. From 1 October 2010 SMI the standard interest rate was set at a level equal to the Bank of England's published monthly average mortgage interest rate of 3.63 per cent (Direct.gov, 2012) which could be less than the actual rate paid on a commercial mortgage loan. Assistance with rental costs, however, can be met immediately if entitlement to Housing Benefit is established.

For non married parents, restructuring their parental relationship after a separation may feature some additional complexities, as they do not need to negotiate a legal process of formally ending the relationship. The publication of a family policy review paper in 2007 (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2007) identified a number of ways in which parents could be encouraged to maintain their responsibilities to their children, and joint registration of birth was seen to have an important symbolic role in promoting this (ibid; DWP, 2007a). Whilst married couples and single mothers have been automatically recognised as holding parental responsibility for their children, it is only since 2003 that unmarried fathers PR has been granted on the inclusion of their name on the birth certificate at time of initial registration or through its later addition. Mothers did retain the right to register the birth of the child alone and not name the father although the 2007 Green Paper identified that this should ideally be limited to situations where there was "good cause to do so" (DWP, 2007a: 3). Being formally registered as the parent of a child conveys the responsibilities, rights, duties, powers and authority indicated in section 3 of the Children Act (1989) and represents a central way in which parenting is legally structured. In the present research, it was necessary to explore how those in non marital relationships might negotiate the end of the relationship, as the lack of legal status of a cohabiting relationship can mean that their position is much more precarious than for their married counterparts, particularly in relation to rights to property, assets and the payment or receipt of maintenance.. As Sir Nicholas Wall, head of the Family Law Division, has argued, cohabitees (and particularly women cohabitees) are seriously disadvantaged if they separate after having children (cited in Owen, 2011).

The decision to include in the sample participants who have not previously been married is to provide data which includes wider experiences of contemporary parenting practices and enable a fuller analysis of the issues and a wider perspective on the primary research questions. As 47.2 per cent of births in 2011 were to unmarried parents (Office for National Statistics, 2012a) developing policy analysis without the consideration of the circumstances of non married parents would represent a neglect to consider the complexities of contemporary family life.

### **The separation to have occurred not less than six months prior to participation in the research project**

This condition was made for practical and ethical reasons. The research did not set out to examine the divorce process itself therefore it is appropriate to allow a period of time to

pass, in order that the family has had some opportunity to settle into their new pattern of life, before being asked to take part in the research sample. Additionally, as the experience of participating in a qualitative research process involves a process of self reflection on the part of the participant it was considered ethically inappropriate to engage families in research whilst the divorce process is ongoing. In practice, as the research project unfolded, it was found that many of the participants were still experiencing a process of separation many months, or years after the decision to separate was made. This was an important and interesting analytic and methodological finding, the degree of which had not been anticipated at the research design stage.

**All participants to have cohabited with their child(ren)'s other parent for at least one year after the birth of a child**

The key analytic framework for the project lay in examining the ways in which parental caring and earning responsibilities were negotiated after separation. Therefore it was important that participants had previously lived with a partner after the birth of a child. As the research sought to explore the extent to which policy discourses fit with contemporary family practices, this element of the sampling strategy enabled an exploration of how the separation has the potential change orientations towards earning and caring and the ways in which policy 'fits' with experiences within intact families. Additionally, some revealing and important analysis of participants ideas about what constitutes 'good' mothering and fathering and the effects of these on orientations to employment and caring was enabled by ensuring that participants had previous experience of parenting in a two adult household.

**Participants to not currently be cohabiting with a partner**

As the research was primarily concerned with the management of earning and caring responsibilities in households with only one adult present, those who had re-partnered and were now in a new co-habiting relationship after divorce were excluded from the study. Some participants were involved in new relationships or actively seeking them through, for example, online dating websites. With the exception of James, those who were in new relationships all presented them as being personal rather than step-parenting relationships and the time spent with the new partner was separate from the time spent with children. Exceptionally, James, a non resident parent, discussed the impact of his new partner on the potential for the future shared care arrangements of his

sons and believed that balancing full time work with shared care would only be possible if he was in a co-habiting relationship.

For those whose children spent regular time with their other parent, maintaining separation between family life and a new relationship was relatively easy to manage. However, some participants, such as Charlotte, found managing their new relationship difficult as they had little or no time when their children were not with them. Whilst research on caring and earning in step or blended families and the processes of re-partnering after separation or divorce would be extremely valuable, it was beyond the remit of this project to explore these issues in depth here.

#### **At least ten to be the primary residential parent**

The sample included both resident and non resident parents. This enabled an analysis of the experiences of both mothers and fathers: the exclusion of non resident parents from the sample would have made it much more difficult to do this, as over 90 per cent of lone parents are women (Office for National Statistics, 2012a). In order to explore the lived experience of family and welfare policies it was necessary to include non resident parents. Whilst they are not directly targeted or supported by policy to the same degree as resident parents, it was important to develop understandings of their experiences in order to contextualise experiences and decision making. Although shared care is often posited as the 'ideal' post separation division of childcare responsibility this is not recognised in current welfare policies under which only one parent may seek financial support for their children from public welfare and the Tax Credit system. It is possible that this may translate to a significant financial disadvantage for non resident parents, particularly if they aspire to share the care of their children. One of the vignettes proposed a shared care arrangement and asked participants to consider the policy implications of this to explore this issue.

#### **Of these at least five to be currently employed (either full time or part time)**

The inclusion of employed resident parents enabled discussion of the practical considerations of combining paid work with caring for children alone such as access to childcare, financial implications of engagement with the paid labour market and the Tax Credit system. A sample with a range of educational and work experiences was recruited in order to examine the ways in which these factors may impact upon employment decision making. Recent reformulation of the welfare system has focussed

primarily on active labour market policies, those which specifically seek to move claimants out of the welfare system and into paid employment. These reforms appear to be based on an assumption that claimants will act in a way that is economically rational and that any increase in income, however small, that may be gained by securing paid employment will act as an incentive to do so. So, this research set out to explore the extent to which decision making around employment adheres to this model of economic rationality or whether, as has been suggested by prior research (see Duncan and Edwards, 1999), families operate a different kind of rationality that is more complex than consideration of financial factors only.

**At least two primary residential parents to have changed their employment status after divorce**

This was intended to enable discussion of the participants reasons for changing their employment/carer status after a divorce and to illuminate some of the differences between employment decision making in two parent and one parent families both from an emotional and a practical perspective.

**At least five participants to be a non resident parent**

Non resident parents were included in the sample to enable an exploration of the experiences of the policy and legal process from the perspective of a parent who does not share a home with their child(ren). Issues such as managing shared care with employment and the financial implications of non residential parenting were explored as well as their responses to questions regarding the payment of maintenance

**Of these, at least two to be currently employed**

This was intended to enable an analysis of the practicalities of maintaining contact with children who live elsewhere whilst employed. The inclusion of these participants was also intended to enable some discussion of the financial impact of the payment of maintenance for children who live elsewhere.

**2.5 Sampling: the actual sample**

Not all of the sampling criteria were met. Some major challenges were faced when recruiting the sample despite the use of numerous recruiting techniques. These included making contact with community and support organisations and centres, displaying information leaflets/posters in spaces frequented by those with children, contacting

schools directly, contacting the mailing lists of a support group for student parents, placing a request for volunteers on an online parenting forum, making contact with the regional organiser of a lone parents support group and attending a meeting of a fathers rights group. These attempts to recruit potential participants were supplemented with the snowballing technique (Bryman, 2001). None of these approaches yielded many participants with some bringing none at all. Additionally a number of parents made initial contact, expressing interest in taking part and then appeared to change their minds at a later date, no longer responding to email or telephone calls. Some potential participants agreed to meet but then did not arrive. Still others wished to take part but did not 'fit' the criteria - in each of the cases where this happened the lack of 'fit' was due to them having re-partnered. Not reaching the target sample was not a challenge that had particularly been anticipated, the research having been approached with a high degree of confidence that it would be possible to reach the number of participants planned for, as the number sought seemed to be fairly small. However, difficulties in recruiting participants seems to be an unavoidable aspect of managing a qualitative research sample. As the thesis was primarily concerned with developing and analysing rich and detailed data, a purposive sampling strategy had been applied and no new insights were arising from the later interviews the small sample size was not considered problematic (Ritchie et al., 2003).

## **2.6 Negotiating the gatekeeper relationship**

Making contact with formal or informal gatekeepers can be a key way of recruiting potential participants. Although I had not conceptualised the sought sample group as typically 'hard to reach' (Hemmerman, 2010), in practice the time constraints on their lives meant that it was difficult to access and negotiate interviews with this group. In the fieldwork phase of this project attempts were made to negotiate contact with gatekeepers from differing points on the continuum of formality to informality (Emmel et al., 2007). These included a member of administration staff at a higher education institution who was willing to send an email to student parents on my behalf. This was the only successful strategy of using a gatekeeper and this approach yielded a number of participants. I also made contact with the regional organiser of a lone parents support group, a lone parent herself who undertook this role on a voluntary basis. She was initially very keen to help me make contact with parents and to be interviewed herself, however, despite numerous telephone conversations and email exchanges and two visits to her home, we never actually met. Demonstrating very clearly some of the challenges



of maintaining family relationships as a lone parent, around the time of the research she was heavily involved in caring for her own parents and simply did not have the time available to be interviewed or to assist me in finding other participants. This experience illuminated some of the temporal challenges of managing qualitative research, as in this case the potential of this gatekeeper relationship to lead to new research participants was inhibited by particular time pressures in her life at that time. This was a real blow in terms of recruiting the sample and at this point I turned to other methods of making contact. Keen to find a way of meeting a number of lone parents from a particular locality I then decided to try and access potential participants through a lone parent group that I had found advertised online and that had regular meetings at a community centre. Here another unexpected issue was encountered with a gatekeeper. I found out where and when the group met and went along with some information about the project, hopeful that I would be able to make contact with some parents who may be interested or would know others who were. I had already decided that, despite being a lone parent and thus technically able to join the group in this personal capacity, I would be upfront about my intentions and reveal my researcher identity immediately. However, this had the unexpected consequence of making it impossible to access the meeting, with the reception staff refusing to let me through to the room where the (supposedly public) meeting was held. I left a leaflet, asking this to be passed on and later followed this up with a telephone call but to no avail. I considered at this point returning to the meeting on another occasion and not disclosing my researcher identity but decided that this would be in contravention of my own ethical code, even though within the realms of research ethics it may have been permissible to use this as a method of negotiating a gatekeeper.

One participant was reached through my attendance at the meeting of a fathers' rights group. Prior to attending the meeting I had contacted the group organiser and was invited to attend the monthly meeting, held in a local pub. By chance, it happened to be the Annual General Meeting and so the meeting was particularly well attended. Whilst there initially appeared to be wide interest in the research from the group, only one father actually went on to be interviewed. At the meeting I was, somewhat unexpectedly, asked a number of direct questions about my identity, both personal and professional, and found that in order to gain the trust of the group quite detailed answers were expected. My answers to these questions, that I was a lone parent and that my child's father had chosen not to have any continued involvement in her life seemed to elicit

a sympathetic response. However, there seemed to be a clear expectation that I would express support for some of the legal campaigning issues around which the groups identity was formed and some suggestions were made alluding to the ways in which my academic expertise could be used to assist with campaigning. I agreed to make an enquiry regarding use of the University library resources but did not commit to anything further, primarily as I did not wish to develop an ongoing role within the group.

## 2.7 Research participants

In total, 14 participants were interviewed. Their key features are shown in the grid below, with all names being pseudonyms. More detailed pen portraits of the research participants can be found in Appendix One.

Pseudonym	Parent with care or non resident parent?	Employed or not currently in paid work?	Studying?	Number of and age of children	Time elapsed since separation
Simon	non resident parent	employed full time	no	daughter 19 step daughter 13 daughter 6	From first partner 16 years  From second partner 18 months
Jenny	parent with care	employed part time	no	daughter 17 son 10	10 years
Debbie	parent with care	employed part time	no	son 5 daughter 2	18 months
Susan	parent with care	not currently in paid work	no	son 17	Almost 17 years
Chris	parent with care	not currently in paid work	no	son 6 son 4	12 months
Fiona	parent with care	not currently in paid work	yes, part time degree	son 14 son 11	9 years
James	non resident parent	not currently in paid work	no	son 5 son 3	12 months

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Parent with care or non resident parent?</b>	<b>Employed or not currently in paid work?</b>	<b>Studying?</b>	<b>Number of and age of children</b>	<b>Time elapsed since separation</b>
Chloe	parent with care	not currently in paid work	no	daughter 11 son 9 son 4 son 2	From first partner 7 years  From second partner 12 months
Amy	parent with care	not currently in paid work	yes, full time degree	daughter 14 son 9 daughter 6	13 months
Sarah	parent with care	regards full time postgraduate degree as full time work	funded full time postgraduate degree	daughter 6	15 months
Hafsa	parent with care	employed part time	funded undergraduate degree (NHS bursary)	daughter 8 daughter 5	3 years
Diane	parent with care	employed part time	yes, part time degree	daughter 12	3 years
Anne	parent with care	employed part time	no	son 11	5 years
Charlotte	parent with care	not currently in paid work	no	daughter 11 son 7	2 years

When it became apparent that the proposed sampling criteria would not be met, some consideration was given to the possibility of boosting the sample by examining data archived by projects in the Timescapes Data Archive (see [Timescapes.leeds.ac.uk](http://Timescapes.leeds.ac.uk)). Using this resource could have enabled a broader sample to be created, boosting the corpus of data, and may have enabled the inclusion of a larger number of fathers in the sample. However, the decision not to proceed with this avenue of enquiry was made. The changing nature of policies during the period of research field work (and, later, in

2010, a change of government) would have made the analysis of the data highly problematic as the data would not have been collected during the same time period. As the primary focus of the research was to explore the lived experiences of participants in relation to contemporary policy discourses and developments, this lack of temporal ‘fit’ around when the data were collected would have been especially problematic. The purpose of the research was not to draw statistically representative conclusions and so maintaining rich and detailed data was considered more important than the size of the sample itself. Once the interview stage of the research began it became apparent that although small in size, the characteristics of the sample of parents were highly appropriate for the subject of study under investigation. A broad range of experiences and situations were represented by participants with the sample including both resident and non resident parents, those in paid work, some who were studying and some who were in receipt of out of work welfare benefits. The participants were from a very wide range of financial backgrounds. For example, one resident parent lived in a detached home in an affluent suburb which she had bought outright with her divorce settlement, whilst another lived in a very sparsely furnished house on a large inner housing estate, the property being acquired after reaching Priority Extra status on the local housing register after a period of homelessness. Only one participant had remained in the family home with the children after separation., with all other parents with care having moved to a new home with their children on separation. Both of the non resident parents in the sample had remained in the family home after the separation with their former partners moving to new rented homes along with the children. The diversity of participant experiences was highly beneficial for the exploration of the research questions, as it generated a data set that was extremely rich thus enabling the analysis to explore how lived experiences might differ for those with different levels of financial resources and living situations. As will later be discussed in the empirical chapters of the thesis, a particular point of analytic interest lay in the common threads of shared experience, such as the challenges of balancing paid work with domestic and child care responsibilities, that were present across the sample despite an apparently wide range of family situations being represented. This suggests that some of these core experiences and challenges need to be considered when making policy that directly impacts this group.

## **2.8 Data collection and analysis**

The primary method of data collection was through the use of semi structured interviews with both male and female parent participants. The interviews varied in length, with most lasting around 90 minutes, however some lasted much longer. The semi structured interview was chosen as the method of data collection as it is recognised to be a highly effective way of exploring and developing understandings of the interviewee's inner state by allowing the researcher to reach the reasoning behind their actions and feelings (Seale, 2002: 202). In line with a feminist tradition in qualitative research in which research participants are viewed as partners in the research process (Mauthner, 1998), some of the interviews diverged from the design of the interview schedule as some participants treated the research interview as a therapeutic experience. This seemed to be the case with those participants whose relationship had ended in and continued to be marked by a high level of complexity and emotional distress, and so it felt appropriate to provide a space for these participants to share and discuss the experiences that they attached importance to. A reflexive approach was needed in these cases as care was taken not to present myself as a therapist or counsellor as to do so would have been outside of the 'contract' of the interview situation (Kvale, 1996: 157) whilst remaining sensitive and empathetic to the experiences being described.

From the interviews, rich contextual data were developed which enabled the exploration of the primary research questions whilst also providing personal and subjective accounts for analysis in relation to policy and legal discourses. The depth of the data collected through the use of the interview method allowed the development of understandings of the family based motivations and decision making processes in relation to work and care (Lewis, 2003a: 58) that comprised a central area of research enquiry. In this way, the process of researching within the qualitative paradigm was of particular relevance to this project because of the ways in which it can help to draw a focus on the processes, meaning patterns and structural features that shape the social (Flick et al., 2004: 3). The approach was therefore capable of producing data that could be interpreted to both answer the primary research questions and to assist in the development of understandings of the ways in which decision making at the household level either converges or diverges from behavioural assumptions inherent in the policy making process.

As the instrument for the collection of data as the interviewer (Flick, 2002; Punch 2006) the intention was to create, via the semi structured nature of the interview a “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess, 1984). Interviews were selected as the data collection method as they allow exploration of the motivations and other factors involved in the decisions participants speak of during the interview process (Hakim, 1987: 36) and yield rich data for analysis (Lewis, 2003a). This deep rich data then allowed, during the analysis phase, the development of understandings of the motivations and decision making processes (Lewis, 2003a: 58) of the research participants. In coding the interviews, the initial approach was to code thematically, identifying the key issues that each participant discussed and gave priority to in their responses to the interview questions. In some ways, this approach takes inspiration from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). although it could not be described as a strictly grounded theory approach as the analysis developed from the taking of a low rather than high stance to theory generation in line with an abductive strategy (Blaikie, 2000). In viewing the social realities and lived experiences of research participants as a central area of enquiry this approach recognises that the meanings and interpretations that people give to their lives arise from the knowledge, symbolic meanings, motives and rules that arise from their social experience. The role of the social researcher then, is to attempt to develop understandings of the action that ensues and create a social scientific account that is informed by this socially constructed mutual knowledge (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Blaikie, 2000; Mason, 2002; Ong, 2011).

One of the key strengths of the interview as a data collection method lies in its interactivity enabling the collection process to combine both structure and flexibility. This allows for some personalisation of the individual interview, enabling the participant the freedom to speak freely and the researcher to probe more deeply as issues arise (Legard et al., 2003: 141). This proved to be a particularly important element of the research design once I was out ‘in the field’ undertaking research interviews and in some interviews the topic guide was followed only loosely as the participant told their story in their own way. One interview in particular was notable for the way in which the participant took the opportunity to tell her life story. It was clear that in order to feel comfortable relating her often distressing story, it was important for her to feel in control of the interview situation so that she could make the choice to share those experiences with me as a researcher. The value of the chosen research methodology was very clear here, and enabled me to respect the needs of the participant

in the interview process whilst also gaining her important insights into the key issues with which the research was concerned.

In most interviews the participant reported in their responses to a series of questions a story that could be broadly conceptualised as a life history, illuminating the ways in which family formation and separation are experienced as a set of social processes rather than discrete events. Moving back and forth through time to ensure that I fully understood their life experiences was a key device employed by participants as they sought to convey the complexities of their life histories and the circumstances of their family separation. As a narrative process then, the semi structured interview format enabled me to contextualise these biographical processes against the background of discrete and general circumstances such as the policy process and other structures (Flick, 2002: 103) which were a key site of exploration for this research project. The use of the life history as a narrative approach by participants in crafting their responses to the interview questions aligns with the analytic approach of the abductive strategy. It recognises and acknowledges the agency of human actors to create, live and tell their own life experiences in a way that is meaningful to them and is informed by their own life experience (Mason, 2002). The abductive strategy allows the data developed in the telling of these stories to be understood in the context of the participants lived experiences and locate them in the context of the interpretive frameworks of both lay and social science accounts (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

A key element of the research was concerned with exploring the ways in which the contemporary policy framework interacts with the preferences of parents in their negotiations of working and caring roles within the family. A central purpose of the research was to explore the ways in which current policy developments either complement or stand in opposition to the desires of families in negotiating their family practices and the extent to which the 'choices' made by families are shaped by a need and/or desire to conform to the normative framework that a welfare policy structure creates. The primary aim then was to uncover and examine the decision making process itself and illuminate the factors that influenced this rather than to create statistical pictures of the prevalence of types of caring and earning behaviours reported by the parents taking part in the study. Whilst these statistical pictures can be of enormous value to the policy making process they are not appropriate in the context of this

research. Rather, the research endeavoured to examine the ways in which the social realities of participants that are produced and reproduced during their everyday lives align with policy assumptions and to explore the extent to which they are shaped by policy. A qualitative approach is clearly the most appropriate strategy for developing this type of knowledge as it generates data that is rich, contextual and detailed and recognises that social reality is made up of meanings and interpretations that are created through shared interpretations; in this way the research is aligned to the idealist ontology (Blaikie, 2007: 17). The research is therefore aligned to a constructionist perspective in which knowledge is regarded as the outcome of the process by which people make sense of their encounters with the physical world and the people who inhabit it (ibid.).

The design of the research questions allowed both an evaluation of the shape of the policy framework from the perspective of service users that is the parents who gave up their time to take part in the study, and an analysis of the ways in which policy creates and sustains certain family practices. One of the key intentions of the research design was to not separate out a single policy intervention for analysis, in recognition of the complexities of the ways in which welfare provision plays out in the reality of family experience. Although there was considerable variation in household income and other indicators of wealth, such as housing tenure, across the sample, all participants had some experience of claiming welfare benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support or Tax Credits. In this way the research was able to explore how participants experienced making claims for this type of support and also their understandings of the ideologies that inform different approaches to welfare provision. For this element of the research, a combination of semi structured interviews (see Appendix One) and the presentation of vignettes (see Appendix Three) as a discussion prompt were used. These short stories featured characters in specific circumstances (Finch, 1987: 103) in which a decision needed to be made about employment and caring responsibilities. Participants were asked to comment on what would be an appropriate course of action thus enabling participants to comment on situations outside of the boundaries of their own specific experiences. Whilst vignettes are often used as a tool for gathering data in attitudinal research (Schoenberg and Ravdal: 2000) they were used in a different way in this project. Rather than providing the core method for data collection, they were used as a way of focussing the interviews on issues of a practical nature, by asking the research participant to comment on a childcare or employment 'dilemma'. For example, some



vignettes invited participants to make a decision about employment that would be faced by a parent who was subject to Jobseekers Allowance conditionality rules, whereas others asked them to consider how wage levels might impact on employment decision making or how policy could support shared care. The use of the vignette as a research tool proved to be a particularly useful way of prompting exploration and discussion of a range of situations and circumstances that were outside of the research participants own experiences. This generated useful contextual detail on participants perspectives towards the idea that policy should in anyway be prescriptive about how, when and if lone parents should be encouraged or compelled to enter the paid labour market.

Data analysis was approached with an abductive approach. This is considered to be the most appropriate for the type of research undertaken here due to its association with the interpretive tradition. In the interpretive tradition the process of moving between concepts and meanings described by participants as 'lay' accounts and the types of explanations developed by the academic discipline of social science develops theoretical conclusions clearly informed by empirical research findings (Mason: 2002: 180). The primary aim of the abductive strategy is concerned with describing and understanding social life in terms of social actors' motives and understanding (Blaikie, 2007: 8): a primary aim of the research. From this, social scientific theory can be developed. The exploration of the motives and understandings underpinning the caring and earning behaviours of the research participants was central to answering the research questions posed by this project. The selected approach enabled the construction of theoretical explanations that are based on the accounts offered by the research participants thus enabling exploration, description and understandings of the social worlds inhabited by the participants who took part in the study (Blaikie, 2000: 124). In reporting the findings of the empirical research, some case studies are used to present and contextualise the experiences of participants. The use of case studies is particularly valuable because it enables the study, analysis and reporting to understand the links that exist in the experiences of participants (see for example Yin, 2009). As a primary aim of the research was to develop understandings of the inter-relationships between different elements of the participants lives, case studies proved to be a highly effective way of presenting the analysis and discussion of the interview data.

## 2.9 Ethics

Consideration of ethics is central to the design and conduct of all social research but takes on an extended importance in any research design with QL elements when ethical decision making can be both pro-active and re-active (Neale and Hanna, 2012). Christians (2005) has argued that there are four primary ethical considerations when undertaking qualitative research: informed consent, the opposition of deception, privacy and confidentiality and accuracy. In addition to following these primary principles, the empirical research that informs this thesis adhered to the ethics code supplied by the ESRC, by whom the research studentship was funded (ESRC, 2010). As a research student of the University of Leeds, I was bound also by the ethical code of the University in partnership with whom a process of application for ethical approval was followed and granted (Ethics Approval Number AREA 09-012). Consent forms in plain English were used to ensure that participants were clearly informed as to the purpose of the research and all were made aware that they may withdraw from the research at any time without any consequence. At each interview I offered, as a matter of course, to read through the consent form for the participant. This was to ensure that any participant who was unable to read the form themselves would not suffer any disadvantage in their understanding of the documentation. It was also important that participants understood the potential, or perhaps more accurately, the lack of potential, of the research to have any substantive impact on the policy process and this was explained verbally to all participants prior to the interview taking place. This transparency as to the substantive impact of research was also identified by Patrick (2012a) and Emmel et al. (2007) as an important element of behaving ethically in the researcher and participant relationship, due to the risk that the participant may make the decision to participate based on an over estimate of the potential impact of academic research.

Ethical considerations were central to the design of the research programme and the way in which the fieldwork was conducted and a reflexive and flexible approach to ethics was needed in negotiating relationships with participants and ensuring that their safety and confidentiality was respected and protected. This was particularly important in this research as the focus of the research on family life after a relationship breakdown meant that participants shared elements of their experience that were sometimes distressing or painful. For example some participants shared their experience of domestic violence, whilst others had experienced financial difficulties or their own or a partner's mental health issues and it was essential that in the context of the interview I

was able to respond sensitively. Appreciating the importance of ethics as situated and context specific rather than fixed and rule bound was a key consideration in ensuring that these challenges were met appropriately (Neale and Hanna, 2012; Wiles, 2012). Ethical reasoning and practice then, rather than taking a contractual approach, needs to be processual and temporally situated (Neale et al., 2012) and thus more flexible. This reflexive approach to ethics is demonstrated in my treatment of one participant's data in the writing up of the thesis. At the interview I had concerns that the participant's mental health appeared to make them particularly vulnerable, and so the decision was made that their data would be included in the general analysis but that I would not refer directly to specific elements of their interview data in the empirical chapters or as a case study.

In some situations, the interview developed into a more relaxed conversation and I shared some of my own experiences with participants where and if this seemed to be appropriate. In some of the interviews, participants became visibly upset when recounting details of their lives and experiences, and some cried. If this happened, I offered to end the interview if the participant wished, although none did. One participant wished to take a break, and we did this and I did my best to comfort her until she was ready to talk again. These experiences highlight the importance of retaining a flexible approach when conducting research interviews and treating the interaction as a collaborative one. It is crucial to acknowledge that in asking participants to share details of their lives that may be upsetting or distressing the researcher is thus obligated to accept a caring responsibility, at least in the immediate location of the interview itself. In this way, the research adopts a feminist methodology, by paying attention to reflexivity, power relationships, the voices of both participant and researcher and recognising the importance of emotions in the research process (Mauthner, 1998: 48).

In the context of this research, one practical way in which an ethical approach to the research design was taken and the potential support needs of participants were considered, was through the anticipation of some of the support needs that may arise from the interview conversations. A lone parent for many years myself, I have experienced homelessness, periods of time being reliant on welfare benefits and tax credits as well as balancing the care of my daughter with study and paid work. These experiences of the kinds of issues that some of the participants discussed in the interviews meant that I was able to respond sensitively and with empathy, offering

understanding of the issues discussed in the interviews, as well as some support in terms of directing participants to appropriate sources of information and assistance. Prior to the fieldwork taking place an advice and information sheet had been prepared, detailing the contact numbers and websites of a range of a local agencies, including both statutory and voluntary agencies. These were passed on to participants for their reference, and some commented that this was a very useful resource. As the information sheet contains the details of a number of local agencies a copy has not been included in the appendix, as this would reveal the location of the research site and potentially compromise participant confidentiality. One participant appeared to be in need of some more specific guidance on a particular issue and so in this case, the interview was followed up with some further correspondence after I had had the opportunity to locate some appropriate information for her. In this particular case, I was able to pass on the details of a service I myself had made use of, and found extremely helpful, in the past.

In addition to ensuring that an ethical approach to research occurs in the design and fieldwork stages, it is important that this commitment continues during the data handling and analysis phase and beyond the end of the projects active life. The interview data will continue to be protected in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that all electronic data is encrypted and stored on a password protected computer with any hard copies stored in a locked filing cabinet with all identifying information removed. At the transcription stage, all interview data were anonymised through the application of pseudonyms in order to protect the identities of participants and their families. In addition, any potentially identifying information, such as places of work, education and residential addresses have been obscured in the thesis and the interview transcripts. Whilst transcribing, careful attention was given to ensuring that whilst specific details were obscured the contextual detail of the information was not lost. So, in cases where participants were discussing geographic locations care was taken to create an anonymising note which maintained this detail. To achieve this, the online mapping application Google Maps was used to calculate distances between locations, so that some understanding of the geographic spaces within which lives were lived could be developed during data analysis without any risk of revealing specific location identities. Each anonymised transcript has sections with notes indicating the distance the participant lived from their former partner, other family members and places of work or study, for example. This proved to be an important analytic tool, as the places and spaces of participants' lives

informed understanding of the contexts of their family and friendship networks and work-life balancing, key themes in the analysis discussed in the empirical chapters which now follow.

## **Chapter Three.**

### **3.1 The emotional aspects of negotiating parental care and support after separation**

This chapter explores the importance of emotional circumstances as a factor in the (re)negotiation of parenting after a separation or divorce. Separation and divorce are conflicts deeply rooted in emotion, and detaching from these in order to negotiate lives as co-parents can be extremely challenging (James, 2003: 136). These emerged as an important theme for research participants for a number of reasons. Firstly, that an ongoing situation of sharing care, which is often presented as the ideal post separation arrangement for arranging child care responsibilities, depends on a high level of co-operation between the two parents. Secondly, it is recognised that divorce or separation, in common with the formation of the relationship in the past, is a profoundly emotional experience and that these emotional experiences can impact on the ability of one or both ex partners to maintain a relationship in the future. Thirdly, there is recognition that in a variety of ways the patterns of behaviour that contributed to the end of the marital or co-habiting relationship or emerged during the process of separation can carry on afterwards and this can lead to ongoing difficulties for parents who are attempting to co-parent. In practice this can mean that the ending of the marriage/co-habiting relationship does not signify an end to the relationship between parents and so any difficulties therein may remain in the short or long term, thus impacting on the ability to parent co-operatively into the future (see Smart, Neale and Wade, 1999). These three reasons are linked to the finding that the quality of the pre divorce co-parental relationship impacts on the quality of the post divorce relationship (Harvey, 2006: 252).

Those participants who reported a relatively amicable separation tended to continue with this level of co-operation when renegotiating their roles and responsibilities after separation. These factors may also be linked to the expectations of each parent as to the future direction of their parental role. Research in the US context has found that co-parenting after separation is correlated to levels of parental communication as well as parental perceptions of the long term value of establishing a co-parenting relationship with an ex spouse (Ganong et al, 2011). So in this way we can conceptualise divorce and separation as a transition in relationship rather than as the end of the relationship. This subtle yet important distinction has been reflected in the reconstitution of family law during the 1990s, by the end of which divorce had become redefined as “an issue between parents rather than a matter for husbands and wives” (Smart, 2004: 402) with

concomitant effects on discourses around rights and increased emphases on parenting and child welfare (ibid.).

### **3.2 Ongoing relationships with ex partners: co-operative or problematic?**

Previous research by Neale and Smart (1999) found that if contact and residence had been arranged through a legal process or through a process of bargaining between parents, then whether or not the ongoing relationship was amicable had little influence on the amount of contact that took place. However, in this sample only Charlotte and Fiona had negotiated these issues via the courts and, in Fiona's case, this had happened not at the point of separation but later in response to a specific incident. There is insufficient data therefore to make an assessment of this aspect of the contact arrangements described by participants. Amongst the parents who took part in this study there were found to be three primary 'types' of post divorce/separation relationship: those where a good level of co-operation and sharing of the care of children is described; those where the ongoing relationship is described as difficult or problematic and some sharing of responsibilities occurs; and those where the relationship is difficult or problematic and no or very little sharing of responsibilities is reported.

In this sample, Simon is unusual in that his experience straddles two of these groups. He has children from two previous relationships one of which is extremely co-operative and friendly with shared care taking place, and one of which is more problematic but with shared care still attempted. The more difficult parenting situation has the added complication that this child (now in her late teens and studying at university) grew up some distance away in a neighbouring county and Simon is not able to drive. However he does describe having made considerable efforts to retain a parental relationship with this child and has undertaken to be responsible for the care of this child, making a long journey on public transport in order to take care of her and spend time with her. This more difficult relationship was the first relationship in which Simon was a father and, reflexively and thoughtfully, he describes having learnt from his experiences of post separation parenting in his first family and has applied this learning in the hope that this will help him to avoid some of these conflicts and difficulties in his second family. Simon displays a particularly child focussed approach to his parenting, a factor possibly influenced by his employment position as a children's centre worker in which he plays a role in developing projects aimed at engaging fathers with their children.

The interviews with parents reveal the ongoing impacts of the emotional issues around divorce and separation, with some parents describing sustained difficulties in their relationships with ex-partners long after the establishment of two households. Some of these issues are due to ongoing relationship dynamics, others are due to ‘shocks’ such as the introduction of new partners and new children to one or other of the households. Research by Peacey and Hunt (2009) also identified non resident parents’ new relationships as affecting the quality and quantity of contact, with children rarely viewing the new partner positively. However, all of these findings point to the importance of understanding family practices in the context of relationships both within and without the immediate residential family unit, from the perspectives of both adults and children.

In order for children to maintain an ongoing relationship with their non resident parent both parents are required to engage in some negotiations around the practical arrangements for the children’s care . The principles underpinning shared care, often posited as the ‘ideal’ post divorce child caring situation, are based on broad assumptions that see co-operative relationships between ex partner s as both desirable and possible. It is important to recognise that ‘shared care’ does not necessarily mean an equal sharing of responsibilities or shared residence but that each parent will have some time during which they are responsible for the care of the children. Participants in the study reported a range of levels of contact between children and non resident parents and a range of levels of co-operation between non resident parents and parents with care. For some contact is regular and reliable, for others it is irregular and/or unreliable. In some cases the absence of involvement of a parent corresponds to an absence of financial support too. For example Charlotte reports no ongoing contact but does receive financial support via a Court Order and Susan reports no ongoing contact with her child’s father nor the presence of any financial support from him. However, she reports that this situation is preferable, responding to a question about whether the absence of her son’s father is acceptable to her by saying “*that’s the way we want it*”.

Those participants reporting no real difficulties with maintaining a relationship with their child(ren)’s other parent appear to be those who are the most settled with their new identity as a divorced or separated parent. It is not possible with this limited data to comment on the direction of causality but it seems that managing an ongoing



relationship is linked to levels of contentedness with the end of the relationship and trust in an ex partner. For example, Debbie reports a highly co-operative trusting relationship with her ex husband who has keys for her home and takes care of the children there every week so that she can accommodate a shift pattern at work. Although she suggests that he “*doesn't do a lot*” to assist with the children, what seems to be important for the success of the co-parenting relationship is the level of trust that exists between them. Debbie has no concerns about him holding a key for the former marital home, in which she continues to live with the children nor any worries about his ability to take care of the children in her absence. Despite very complex childcare arrangements (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) Debbie and her ex husband are managing to co-parent effectively and she comments that,

*“its bizarre, I think its better now, I think we get on better than we did previously”*

Debbie

Debbie, like others who seem to be coping well with lone parenthood, seems to be comfortable with this identity and has an independent outlook. Although the initial shock of her husband's wish to leave the family home to live elsewhere was hard to deal with she reflects that after a couple of months it was “*fine*” and that both she and her ex husband felt that they should have made the decision to separate sooner. Having maintained largely separate social lives during their marriage, coupled with Debbie's experience of living alone with the children for half the week whilst her husband worked away from home, meant that the transition to parenting across two households had been relatively smooth. She had also maintained the greatest continuity in the practicalities of daily life of all of the participants and so had not needed to cope with moving to new home, finding new work and establishing new networks of support after the end of her relationship.

Sarah reports a similarly co-operative and friendly relationship with her ex partner, in which they both endeavour to put the needs of their daughter first, although they had needed to adapt to numerous practical changes after their relationship ended. Maintaining a co-parenting relationship is not unproblematic, however, due to the 250 mile distance between their respective locations, but at the time of interview a daily telephone call and fortnightly weekend visits are taking place. She comments that

*“we actually do get on really really well now we’ve separated [laughs] and I think just cos I don’t hold on the anger anymore, he can’t upset me in those ways anymore because I just kind of got my independence now” Sarah*

This comment illuminates the ways in which Sarah experienced the end of the cohabiting relationship with some relief. She describes the difficulties she experienced in sharing care with her daughter’s father when they lived together and how unsatisfied she felt with her sole responsibilities for childcare and domestic work. This was the case even though both she and her partner had been employed outside the home, as her ex partner worked long and very unpredictable hours, often at night, and so was unable to commit to any childcare responsibilities. Sarah, highly qualified and with clearly defined career plans, had been obliged to only accept work that fitted with the childcare that was available and so the transition to managing the practicalities of daily life as a lone parent had been less difficult for her than for some of the other parents in the sample,

*“nothing really changed in a way because I was living like a single parent anyway and I’d got everything set up that he wasn’t a part of because he could never contribute in anyway and you know he was so unreliable. So yeah, I suppose my life didn’t alter that much in a practical way. It altered more psychologically in that I wasn’t carrying around this resentment and this anger” Sarah*

For both Sarah and Debbie then, the end of the marital or co-habiting relationship has led to the establishment of a new ongoing relationship which they view as ‘better’ than the one that preceded it. Both of these participants appear to have focussed on negotiating new relationships with ex partners for their children’s benefit, and it seems to be the lack of conflict around this that has enabled them to work towards an arrangement that works for their particular circumstances. This approach, coupled with high levels of commitment to the same aims from their ex partner has enabled them to manage the shared care of their children effectively.

Those participants who had experienced difficulties in maintaining co-operative relationships with ex partners tended also to describe a longer process of separation and a higher degree of conflict. Recognising that divorce or separation is a process rather than an event is crucial to understanding the complex nature of the reorganisation of

family life after separation. Not only must financial and practical arrangements be made, along with negotiation about the care of children, but the parental relationship as it exists between the separating couple must also be re-established. These factors are central to some of the complex difficulties arising in any attempts to define legal frameworks around divorce. As an event that is rooted in emotions, divorce is often characterised by conflict and the opposition of interests (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 116) and in order for parents to negotiate an amicable relationship in regards to the care of their children they must be able to see the needs of their children as separate from the divorce itself (James, 2003). For some of the participants in the study this had proved extremely difficult and the friction was ongoing months or years after the physical separation from the marital relationship.

For James, the non resident parent of two sons, the conflict with his ex partner is a cause of considerable ongoing stress. His sons' mother is not a British national and he expresses concerns that she will move away from the UK with the children, meaning that his involvement with them would reduce considerably. James reports that he needs to be

*“very careful what I do in terms of my future relationships. Erm child support and also ....my agreement to look after the children and by that I mean if I am seen to not accommodate my partner's, me ex partner's wishes in terms of looking after the children there's a strong possibility that she'll just decide to leave”* James

This feeling of powerlessness underlies James' description of his role as a father throughout the interview and he comments that this contrasts with the *“tremendous amount of power”* his ex partner holds. This can be seen in terms of his role after separation and in the contributing factors to the separation which was immediately preceded by severe financial pressures due to his redundancy and incidents in which his ex partner was violent towards him. Since separating he has felt very little control over the daily lives and futures of the children, and the absence of a co-operative relationship with his ex partner has made the shared parenting extremely difficult. Significant in James's story is his lack of confidence that his relationship with his children's mother will improve and his alignment with an ethic of justice. He describes the injustice he sees in a welfare system that has *“rewarded”* his ex partner for walking away from their relationship and feeling that he is

*“almost a hostage to the law surrounding leave to remove and by that I mean that I’m held to ransom over money, over my relationships, moving on, with what I do, what decisions I make. I’m held to ransom by it because I know that should there be an application of leave to remove, I have such a slim chance of defending an application that my children be relocated” James*

Of interest in James’s notion of justice is that his preference for joint legal status with his ex partner is set against his concerns that he would not be able to combine full time employment with joint physical custody. This approach aligns with the preferences which have been expressed more generally by the fathers rights movement in the past (Brophy, 1989) and illuminates the ways in which policy has not developed in ways which have enabled men to combine working lives with involved care of their children (Kilkey, 2008).

### **3.3 Financial provision, child contact and ‘shocks’**

The relationship between financial provision and child contact is imbued with tensions. There is an obligation for a non resident parent to make financial provision for his or her children, enshrined in law in the Child Support Act 1991. Later, the establishment of the Child Support Agency in 1993 confirmed that financial provision was a central duty of parenthood. However, whilst this responsibility for the financial support of children existst even where no physical contact occurs between non resident parent and their child, when regular overnight contact of two or more nights per week does occur the value of payments reduces in recognition of the shared caring that takes place. With the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act (2008) setting out an outline for a redesign of the child support system, the Child Support Agency later became the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (CMEC). CMEC was itself abolished in July of 2012 as part of a restructure in which its functions were transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions. Within the discussion of the participants views here, the agency is referred to as the CSA to reflect the way the research participants spoke about the agency in the interviews.

Financial support is described as problematic by several study participants, with Sarah and Debbie the only resident parents reporting no problems with maintenance since separation. Sarah’s arrangement with her ex partner appears to be based entirely on

trust, with his financial contribution taking the form of payments for her car, its service contract and her mobile phone. Sarah describes no concerns with this and feels confidence in her ability to trust her ex partner to make these payments as agreed. Their relationship appears to have many positive features and both are committed to managing the situation as well as they can, despite the rather difficult circumstances. Debbie also has a trust based relationship with her ex husband with his financial contribution taking the form of the mortgage payment on the home in which Debbie and the children live. As with their arrangements for sharing care and arranging contact, they seem to have made satisfactory arrangements also for their finances.

For Hafsa's family the lack of financial contributions from her ex husband is a continuation of the pre divorce situation, where he had not supported the family financially, and the responsibility had fallen to her alone. During the marriage she had resourced the household via benefits and her own paid work and, perhaps because of this experience, it seems that Hafsa has accepted that her children's father will not contribute and so does not have an expectation that he will do so. At the time of the interview she does not believe that he is in paid work and although the Child Support Agency had attempted to find him they had not been successful. Hafsa comments

*“well the CSA are looking for him but I mean you know if he's not working they're not going to get any money are they? It's as simple as that”* Hafsa

Her ex husband also has very little physical contact with their children, having seen them only three times in the previous year. Despite Hafsa's acceptance that caring for and providing for her children is her responsibility alone, she is highly reflective about her family situation and is aware that the absence of their father may lead to ongoing emotional difficulties for her daughters; this is a matter of considerable concern for her. The difficulty of this situation is intensified by her worries that her ex husband's drug use means that is not able to provide a safe environment for their daughters to visit, leading to a tension in her concerns that his absence could cause difficulties alongside her more immediate concerns about their safety.

Diane also reports a very complex emotional background to her separation, her marriage having ended after she was a victim of domestic violence. The severity of this is evident when she explains that when she told her ex husband that she wished to be divorced she

*“honestly believed he would kill me”*, and had chosen to raise this difficult discussion whilst he was in the bath, a situation in which she felt he was physically vulnerable to mitigate the risk of a physical fight occurring. Despite these serious difficulties in the history of their relationship she and her ex husband had attempted to maintain a co-parenting relationship after they separated for the benefit of their daughter, even though at times this was difficult. A key factor that had been helpful in creating distance between the two parents and limiting the rise of conflict in making these arrangements was to give considerable power to their child to decide when to visit her father. James also describes using this strategy to limit conflict between himself and his ex partner, placing the onus on the children to decide whether they wished to spend time with their mother or father. Managing their ongoing relationship and ensuring their child was at the centre was an important part of Diane’s parenting as she describes here

*“he always puts himself first so that, so there are times when there are problems cos he’ll do something that’s really ridiculous and it causes problems for our daughter and he treats it as though its still some sort of, still an argument between me and him whereas its not. I’m focussed on our daughter”* Diane

More recently the power given to Diane’s daughter to make arrangements to see her father had been affected by the remarriage of the father and subsequent birth of a new child. A key concern for Diane had been that this had not been handled by her ex partner in a way that gave concern to the impact these events could have on her daughter, who was aged eleven. Her ex partner had not told their daughter that he was going to remarry and she found out about it only when she discovered photographs of the wedding on the computer she used when she went to stay at his house. In addition to this, he had made the decision not to tell their daughter that a new child was expected until very late in the pregnancy, so leaving her with very little time to absorb this information before the child was born and thus the situation being experienced as a ‘shock’. This had resulted in their daughter being very upset and she was, at the time of the interview, refusing to see her father. It was clear from the way Diane discussed these issues that they had had a real and serious impact on her and her daughter and the way in which her ex husband had chosen to deal with them was much more of a problem than the facts of the remarriage and new child themselves. As she explains, if things had been handled differently then her daughter may well have been excited at the prospect of the arrival of a new sibling rather than experiencing this as a distressing event and she could have supported her daughter through the changes in her family.

Of significance here also is that Diane reports that her ex husband's remarriage and the birth of the new child had impacted on the payment of maintenance.

*"he said "oh I'll give you the money" but then its never materialised and I've never had any money from him since before Christmas. I've been borrowing money and that's another pressure on me at the minute. If I'd known she was pregnant, if I'd know he was getting married, I'd have had some warning that maybe this was on the cards"*

Diane

So, just at the time that her daughter needs extra support to cope with the changes in family life, Diane herself is faced with a reduction in her income that makes managing her household budget extremely difficult. This has led to an increase in her own stress levels as she deals *"with the emotional for my daughter, [and] the financial fall out"* Diane is one of the few participants who directly discusses the ongoing impact that the separation has had on her own mental health, which she describes as *"atrocious"*, feeling the pressures of life's demands acutely

*"I just feel like I'm not doing anything properly. I'm not being a proper mother (starts to cry) It's just such a struggle..."* Diane

Amy also reports high levels of stress in managing the demands of parenting, maintaining a relationship with her ex husband and her studies at university. Like Diane, she has had to readjust her family routine to accommodate her ex husband's new relationship and the decline in his time spent with the children that this has led to. She describes that her three children used to have occasional over night stays with their father in his rented room, although they never stayed all together as he was living in shared accommodation and did not have sufficient space to take them all together. Although this arrangement did not leave her with any time without responsibility for the care of at least one child she did feel that he was making a contribution to their care and that it was important for the children to spend time with their father.

However, by the time of interview, this over night contact had ceased. The children's father had established a new relationship and this new partner was now living with him in his rented room, meaning that there was literally no space in which the children could

sleep. Amy reports that there had also been a number of occasions on which the children's father had been free from work but had prioritised his new relationship and chosen to spend this time with his girlfriend instead. This was experienced by Amy as a way in which her ex husband was able to maintain control of the situation: by moving on with his own life and establishing this new relationship he had made it more difficult for her to do the same by shifting responsibility for the children back to her. As the non resident parent he had the ability to do this whereas she, as resident parent, lacked power in these negotiations. In addition she tells me that her ex husband had told their fourteen year old daughter that he would no longer see her or her siblings if Amy established a new relationship. This had led to Amy feeling trapped and angry as she was very keen for her ex husband to take responsibility for the children. When asked to describe her relationship with him she says it is

*“strained, intense, bitter”* Amy

These comments illuminate the ways in which the emotional impact of a separation is bound up with practical changes in family life. Although Amy had been separated from her husband for more than a year emotions were still very strong and the recent addition of her husband's new partner had created additional emotional and practical pressures. Amy also reports difficulties with maintenance payments emerging alongside the establishment of her husband's new relationship

*“It's another issue going on he's now trying to cut the maintenance payments... meaning I'm fifty pounds or less well off per week meaning £200 less a month roughly, meaning I can't pay my bills”* Amy

This comment illuminates two central issues around the payment and receipt of maintenance. Firstly, all of the parents in the sample who received maintenance payments from their ex partner regarded this as a very important part of the family income and secondly, that the payment or non payment of maintenance was a way in which non resident parents were perceived by resident parents to retain power and control. By withdrawing maintenance payments it was possible for the non resident parent to create immediate financial difficulties for the resident parent, and these difficulties could last some time even if the resident parent made the decision to make a claim via the Child Support Agency, as the claim could take some time to be processed.



Interestingly for two parents in this sample the withdrawal of maintenance was linked to the establishment of a new relationship, thus indicating that for some parents there may be a sense of ‘moving on’ at this point and a wish to leave old responsibilities behind. Another parent reports that prior to the establishment of a formal maintenance agreement her ex partner would refuse to pay maintenance, for example, if she was taking the children on holiday, she believes that this was because he felt that if a holiday was affordable for her then the maintenance was not really ‘needed’.

Although, theoretically, the resident parent is able to make a claim for maintenance via the Child Support Agency, in practice this process can take a considerable length of time and does not address the immediate and often significant difficulty of an unanticipated drop in household income. However, the experiences of the parents in this sample suggest that even when a CSA calculation has been made there is no guarantee that any payment will be received by the parent with care

*“we’ve tried informal arrangements....and it didn’t work and there’s now a formal CSA arrangement. There was one for quite a long time and that wasn’t paid and they reviewed it and increased it and again it’s just not being paid....I’ve had a very very small amount of money in seventeen years. I’ve had maybe three or four payments and it’s just a joke really” Jenny*

Although Jenny’s experience of claiming maintenance for her two children through the CSA was not a satisfactory one, Fiona reports a good experience noting that making a claim via the CSA has made a positive difference to her life. After a number of years dealing with an informal arrangement with her ex partner in which *“he hardly paid me anything and it was really sporadic”* she now received maintenance via the CSA saying

*“there’s no reason not to. And yeah, they can get upset and get angry but it just gets taken out of their wages....you know its your money, you’re entitled to it and you shouldn’t have to stress about it” Fiona*

It seems that that the CSA are most effective in collecting maintenance when the non resident parent is in regular employment and thus easy to trace through the tax or benefit system. The record of collections success from more complex cases has been

described as ‘dismal’ by James and Perrin (2009) who note that between 2003 and 2006 there was a maintenance backlog of £3.5 billion of which 60 per cent was deemed uncollectable (ibid.), and this is reflected in the information provided by parents in this sample. There was a general reluctance to make use of the agency which seemed to largely be based on the perception that the process was complicated and unreliable and had the potential to have a negative impact on relationships with ex partners. Of those using, or attempting to use, the Agency those whose ex partners were self employed or not in paid work did not report a positive experience. In contrast, Fiona’s ex partner is employed full time in a professional occupation and so in her situation the CSA system for making a deduction directly from the non resident parent’s wages and transferring the payment to the parent with care is effective. Jenny reports that it is difficult to make a claim for maintenance although her ex partner’s self employment appears to provide him with a decent level of income and has allowed him to purchase a property in which to live. Hafsa’s ex husband, as noted previously, is not in regular employment nor in receipt of welfare benefits and so cannot be assessed by the CSA at all. Others report that their ex partners financial situation means that they are simply unable to contribute in this way. For example Chloe’s ex husband has spent time as an inpatient for an ongoing mental health condition and is unable to sustain paid employment, and Chris’s ex partner is also unable to work due to ill health. Both comment that they could not expect their ex partner to make maintenance payments, because they recognise that they cannot afford to do so, even though this does contribute to both Chris and Chloe lack of financial resources and security. This indicates that formulating policy, in particular the setting of benefit levels, around the assumption that maintenance will be received would be highly problematic for these parents and has the potential to impact negatively on the household incomes of the poorest families.

A different perspective on the Child Support Agency and the payment of maintenance is offered by one of the non resident parents in the study. James is the non resident father of two sons and, at the time of the interview, is not in employment after being made redundant shortly before separating from his ex partner. He does have what he describes as “*independent means*” acquired from rental receipts from property that he owns and lets out. He believes, incorrectly, <sup>3</sup>that due to his ex partner’s status as a benefit

---

<sup>3</sup> In the past child maintenance has counted as income when assessing the award of Income Support, Employment Support Allowance and Income Based Jobseekers Allowance. However, this has not been the case since 12 April 2010.

claimant, involving the CSA in their maintenance arrangement would reduce the amount that she received and so they have decided not to involve the agency and make a personal agreement instead. James explains that they have worked out the amount payable using the CSA calculation formula although it is interesting to note that whilst he frames his comments in the language of fairness to his children, he is adhering very strictly to the detail of the CSA formula and reducing the value of payments to reflect the time his children spend with him in line with an ethic of justice,

*“on benefits she’s short of money so it works out better for the children if I give money through a voluntary agreement and at the moment I’m adhering to the 17 and a half per cent of my income after tax. That’s the formula I should be paying under the CSA rules because I have them one night a week. It would be 20 per cent but its reduced by a seventh” James*

The experiences of parents in the sample indicate that there is a complex interdependence between maintenance payments and family relationships. Indeed, research by Peacey and Hunt (2009) made similar findings, particularly in relation to ‘keeping the peace’ by not pursuing maintenance from a non resident parent or not doing so because they believed that the non resident parent could not afford to pay. In the present sample, where the ongoing financial support of children is negotiated from within a co-parenting relationship based on trust and mutual responsibility, there is no reported need for the involvement of the Child Support Agency. Problems around the receipt of maintenance appear to arise from within issues in personal relationships, whether because one or both parents has established a new partner or had more children or because financial issues have become a site of conflict in which one or both parents use them as a tool of control. For example, Charlotte indicated that her ex-husband’s secretive and controlling way of dealing with money after their divorce was simply a continuation of the way in which he had managed the finances during the marriage. She had only managed to reach a financial settlement with her ex-husband after a protracted series of interventions from the courts.

Proposals to reform the maintenance system around the assumption that parents will be able to come to collaborative agreements in respect of the financial maintenance of their children (DWP, 2011a) therefore appear misguided. The data analysed here suggest that those parents who are able to reach collaborative agreements already do so, only

approaching the Child Support Agency for assistance when agreements have broken down or cannot be made. Proposals to introduce a charging mechanism for the services of the Agency to encourage families to reach their own agreements represents a failure to recognise that the use of the Agency is already borne out of necessity. All of the parents in this sample had attempted to negotiate agreements independently first, only seeking a formal agreement when this had failed. That several parents with care in this small sample had given up on the pursuit of maintenance entirely suggests that they would be unlikely to consider paying the proposed upfront application charge of £100 (reduced to £50 for those in receipt of benefits) (DWP, 2011: 21). This has the potential to contribute to serious financial hardship, as is the case with Chris and Chloe who continue to manage with an extremely low level of income.

### **3.4 Coping with stress and the importance of networks of care and support**

The presence of networks of care and support for the parents in this sample is central to their ability to cope with the demands of caring of their children. As being a lone parent or a non resident parent was not the path that the parents in the study had originally chosen or expected their life to take meant that a period of emotional adjustment needed to take place. Some parents, for example Sarah, reported a high level of satisfaction with the new arrangements, regarding her new separated status as preferable to the difficult relationship, in which conflict around parenting and employment responsibilities were dominant, that she had lived in prior to making the decision to separate from her daughter's father. Those parents reporting the highest levels of practical and emotional support appear to have the highest level of satisfaction with their daily lives with those with little or no ongoing support reporting higher levels of stress and difficulty in their attempts to manage their multiple responsibilities. The support received by participants came from a variety of sources, with informal support from friends and family members and more formal support from professionals such as school and childcare staff all playing a role. For those participants who had retained a positive relationship with an ex partner this was also cited as a key factor in managing life. For Simon, Sarah and Debbie relationships with ex partners were central sites of support and mutual care.

Participants defined support in different ways. For some, practical assistance with the care of children made the difference between being able to combine paid work and care

of children or enabled children to take part in extra curricular activities that would otherwise have been unmanageable. A number of parents relied on friends and family members to fill the gaps where paid childcare was not accessible or available. For example, Jenny refers to the help that her mother has given in providing the transport needed for her daughter to play in a school sport team. Although Jenny is a car owner and the sport practice took place outside of her working hours she was unable to collect her daughter afterwards as it ended after her younger son had gone to bed. Unable to leave him in the house unsupervised she relied upon her mother to provide this help so that her daughter was able to be a team member. This illuminates one of the hidden practical difficulties faced by those parenting alone, showing that the absence of another adult with whom to share responsibilities can impact not only on parental ability to engage with social activities but also on children's engagement with activities outside of school time. For others, the assistance took the shape of taking and/or collecting children from school whilst parents worked. This ongoing and regular help made the difference for some parents between being able to sustain paid employment or study and their ability to engage with social activities. Some parents had anticipated and planned their lives around the availability of support as a key part of decision making after separation. Sarah, for example, when deciding where to live after separating from her daughter's father, had specifically chosen to return to live close to her family so that this support would be available to her. Support was not necessarily practical in nature, and most participants noted that emotional support and friendship were hugely important both for themselves and their children.

Diane's struggle to cope with the demands of parenting after a separation illuminates the ways in which managing and balancing caring and earning can have negative impacts on emotional as well as physical well-being in a lasting way. Supporting her daughter through the transition to high school whilst also managing the emotional impact of her ex husband's establishment of a new family was clearly extremely difficult and, even before the formal interview had begun, Diane had begun to talk about the stress she was experiencing. When these difficulties at home are placed in the context of the need to balance the additional pressures of her degree study, paid employment and her significant financial worries it is clear to see the considerable challenges that Diane was experiencing in her life.

Charlotte, the mother of two children who have no contact at all with their father, also comments on the stress that the sole responsibility for their care brings to her life. She talks about the relentlessness of her parenting responsibilities which are exacerbated further by her additional responsibilities for the care of her own elderly parents and experiences some of these pressures acutely. Although her parents have been and remain emotionally supportive their advancing years mean that the practical support that they are able to offer is quite limited and they also live some distance away which makes day to day assistance with childcare quite difficult. Charlotte, like Diane, recognises that the demands of her parental role have a negative impact on her health, describing conversations she has had with her GP

*“I mean I’ve had one or two female doctors er “do you ever feel like you can’t cope?”.... you know “are you depressed?” and I just said “I don’t have time to get depressed!”...and I’ve got to cope....and occasionally I’ve said to them “well what can I do?” and they have nothing to offer”* Charlotte

This recognition that she has no option but to cope with the demands of her responsibilities is indicative of the intensity of the practical demands on Charlotte’s time. This was tempered by her concerns that an admittance that she was struggling to cope would lead to the involvement of social services who could potentially remove the children from her care. Her need for practical assistance was relatively modest, she suggests that having one night a week free of responsibility for her children would enable her to feel more balanced and give a sense of having had a break. This was not something that she had, to date, been able to access as she was unable to afford to pay for a babysitter from her limited household budget. Like Diane, Charlotte had experienced difficulties in accessing regular maintenance from her ex husband, despite his own very comfortable standard of living. As noted in the preceding section on financial support, these concerns had recently been addressed through the family courts and she was now in receipt of regular maintenance payment. However, as she was not currently in paid work her household income had not improved significantly and she was still struggling to manage on a much reduced income after her divorce.

Lacking both practical and emotional support was a common and linked theme, and those who reported good levels of practical support also reported feeling emotionally supported too. When these were absent, the challenges of daily life were felt keenly.

Amy, a British woman recently returned to the UK after many years living abroad, had not yet had an opportunity to establish a network of local support. As a result she lacked practical assistance with daily childcare tasks and had to rely heavily on her eldest daughter to take care of her two younger children. Although she was herself confident that her fourteen year old daughter was capable of managing these tasks she remained concerned that this view may not be shared by others

*“for getting myself a babysitter in the evening I’m doing something possibly illegal in that when I go out for the evening, which is very very rare, my daughter, my fourteen year old daughter is my unpaid babysitter” Amy*

Amy is keen to point out that these evenings out generally are for events such as attending parents evenings at her children’s schools, and as such cannot be considered to be social events. These comments clearly illuminate the very limited scope of daily life that Amy experiences, in which social activities and company are absent, in addition to the sense of responsibility she feels for her children. This may contribute to her reliance on her eldest child for emotional support and company, indicating in the interview that her daughter is aware of many of the details and circumstances surrounding her divorce.

Susan, the mother of a sixteen year old and a lone parent for the whole of her sons life, reported the absence of a support network. Although she had family living locally she was not close to them, having ended contact with her mother and brothers some years previously after a complex family dispute. Her closest relationship had been with her father who had now passed away and this meant that she managed her family life alone and lacked the day to day support that other parents in the study relied upon. Without any practical or financial support from her son’s father Susan is the most ‘alone’ lone parent in this study. Although most parents in the study had supportive friendships in addition to close relationships with their wider family, Susan also lacked this, reporting that she did not really have any close friends at all. She indicated that this was a consequence of her separation from a partner (not her son’s father) in very difficult circumstances, some years ago during which her friends chose to support her ex partner

*“so I haven’t got any really and so I don’t really know anybody over here. I, I had to move out of the area cos so many people were helping them and er I moved I didn’t know a single person in this town when I moved here” Susan*

This comment sheds light on the ways in which a divorce or separation can involve the loss of a much wider range of social contacts, with the loss of friends and wider family contacts occurring alongside the end of the primary relationship. For Susan, her decision to move to a new town, away from her old life had resulted in herself and her son becoming quite isolated. She had coped with this isolation by spending a lot of time studying or engaged with her plans to pursue postgraduate study. As her son was older the lack of support posed less of a practical problem than it might have done had she been caring for small children but the lack of emotional support remained an issue for her.

Moving away from an old life and starting again in a new location had also been experienced by Sarah, although she had not moved to an entirely new locality. After spending a decade living and working in London she had made the decision to return to the north of England where she had grown up. Sarah explains that this choice had been informed by financial concerns in addition to her wish to be closer to her family; owning her own home would not have been possible had she remained in London and this had been an important consideration for her particularly as she had chosen to return to education and thus a much reduced level of income. Although Sarah had moved some distance after separating from her ex partner, she had been able to establish supportive friendships with other parents at her daughter’s primary school. Sarah reveals that many of these friends are also lone parents and, as such, they understand some of the specific pressures of parenting alone

I- do you help one another out?

*“yeah, sometimes like with childcare and things and just the fact that you can, you know the frustrations turn into humour because you, you know you both know these frustrations so well and that you kind of bounce them at each other. So yeah, its supportive in that way” Sarah*



However, Sarah does also point out that the ability to help friends was limited by individual responsibilities, with the loneliness of evenings at home alone one problem that could not be resolved through friendships with other parents

*“we can’t keep each other company because our kids are in bed. Cos you can’t really get your child out of bed and kind of wander down the road for a cup of tea with your friend. So its like we all kind of live in this isolated world but that we’re not that isolated because we all know each other is” Sarah*

These comments illuminate the importance Sarah places on feeling a sense of belonging and solidarity with a group of people who understand her lifestyle. Knowing that these friends exist is as important as the more tangible help and assistance they may offer to her. Likewise, Jenny comments that having recently moved to a new home, whilst a largely positive step, had meant moving away from the daily support and companionship of her *“single mummy friends”* in her previous location. Whilst these friendships endured, the frequency of contact and the ability to offer mutual practical support had decreased. Although Jenny was hopeful that she would be able to establish new friendships as she settled into her new home, she recognised that this would take time.

Sarah also received practical and emotional assistance from her mother who was willing and able to offer this, largely because of her close proximity and the fact that she now worked part time. This support was absolutely central in Sarah’s ability to manage the demands of her full time postgraduate study, with her mother taking responsibility for collecting her daughter from school on some days of the week. Despite the considerable distance at which Sarah and her daughter lived from the child’s father, he maintained regular contact and provided regular and reliable financial support. The combination of these factors enabled Sarah to feel that generally she was coping well with the demands of her life and she reports a largely good natured and co-operative relationship with her ex partner.

### **3.5 The circumstances of the separation**

Several parents in the study reported a separation from their child(ren)’s other parent in which a key feature had been a high level of conflict. Broadly, those parents who had

experienced a relatively amicable separation had maintained a co-operative and amicable post separation relationship. However, for those whose separation had been characterised by a high degree of conflict establishing an ongoing relationship of shared parenting was more problematic. Additionally, for the parents in this study the quality of the relationships in the family pre separation appear to have impacted on the long term ability of the parents to continue parenting together after deciding to live apart. This point is made by Sevenhuijsen (1998) when she argues that “if it becomes possible for children to maintain caring relationships with both parents during marriage, decisions surrounding separation and divorce will acquire different dimensions” (112).

Of the parents in this study two cited domestic violence as a key factor in their separation from their child’s other parent; one had become a resident parent after his children were removed from the care of their mother by social services; one reported deciding to leave her partner after discovering she was expecting a second child and others reported different, often complex difficulties as contributing to their separation. Whilst in the context of this study the small sample size means it is not possible to draw any meaningful analytic conclusions about any particular factor as a ‘cause’ of a divorce and subsequent consequences for establishing post divorce family life it is nevertheless important to consider these circumstances for two key reasons. Firstly, that the behaviours displayed by the ex partner may render it difficult for parents to entrust the care of their children to them, regardless of their legal status as an equal other parent. Secondly, for those whose relationships with ex partners continued to be difficult the level of conflict made, in some circumstances, a co-operative co-parenting relationship extremely difficult to manage. Four parents in the study reported either no contact at all between their ex partner and their children or very rare contact with the absence of responsibility displayed by the other parent highly evident.

Jenny, Susan, Charlotte and Hafsa all describe this type of relationship with their ex partners, in which their child’s other parent bears no responsibility for their day to day care whether in a practical or financial sense. For Jenny, as well as for Hafsa, this represents a continuation of the pre separation relationship in which her partner had contributed little to the household, including financially, being in employment only sporadically. Jenny describes the relationship here

*“it was a bit of an on off relationship and it always, to be honest I’ve always thought of myself as a single parent in some ways in that I always did everything really...including the financial stuff...he lived in my house...and we had a relationship. He was obviously their dad and it was a loving relationship but erm I did all the household finances and all the shopping, he did some of the cooking and I did the cleaning and about ninety per cent of the childcare too” Jenny*

The absence of sharing responsibilities extended to Jenny lacking confidence in the father’s ability to care for the children and she reveals that at one point she had to change her working hours as she had concerns about the care he was giving to their eldest child whilst she was at work. She chose instead to use paid child care, feeling that this offered better quality and more consistency of care. In these circumstances it is possible to see that the presumptions inherent in policy formulations about shared care do not always translate effectively in family life. Maternal concern in respect of fathers perceived abilities to offer adequate care of children have previously been identified in research in which mothers identified fathers lack of experience in child caring, their prior lack of commitment to their children and their scant potential to act as good fathers in the future as key barriers to any legal system which seeks to operate from a presumption of shared care (Day Sclater and Kaganas, 2003). Welfare concerns seem to be far from rare with Peacey and Hunt (2009: 88) reporting that 24 per cent of resident parent respondents in their national survey had had concerns at some point about the care of their child. Although Jenny expresses a preference herself for greater involvement from her children’s father he is not willing to engage with the family at this level and so Jenny is left with no option but to care for her children alone. She describes the impact that these struggles have had on her life

*“I have no expectations anymore whatsoever....we have been through so much trying to establish a good relationship, contact, maintenance etc and it, it was just, it proved erm, it was really unhealthy for me and for everybody involved so we’ve moved on yeah. Drew a line and moved on” Jenny*

### **3.6 Relationships of care - what do we mean by care?**

In the discussion above it has been illustrated that ongoing relationships of care are central to the success of co-parenting after divorce or separation. Giving care directly through attending to the needs of children and in providing financially for them can be

seen as a central duty of parenthood. Examining these responsibilities in a wider context it becomes clear that caring for children is a highly important human endeavour; quite apart from the act of meeting the immediate needs of individual children it constitutes a contribution to society by ensuring its continuation (Mullan, 2010: 114). The ethics of care literature discussed in the literature review chapter identifies the interdependent nature of caring relationships as being characterised by reciprocity.

It is crucial, however, to note that for the parents in this study the daily care of their children was not a choice. As lone parents there was an element of compulsion (Tronto, 1989) to ensure that the care needs of their children were met because of their position as the sole adult on the household. For parents such as Hafsa, Charlotte, Susan and Jenny whose ex partners chose to take no or very limited responsibility for their children this compulsion to care was absolutely not negotiable as the daily care of their children was entirely left to them. This activity based 'taking care of' their children is distinct from (non activity based) 'caring about' because it involves a process whereby it is acknowledged that a need exists, assuming responsibility for and responding to that need (Ellis, 2004: 32). From this point caring work is undertaken to ensure that these needs are met (Ellis, 2004: 32; Tronto, 1993: 106-7). Engaging with these processes of caregiving is what defines their responsibilities as mothers. In this way we can see that care is an activity (West, 2002: 163) involving on-going responsibility and commitment (Tronto, 1989: 102) and is a central part of the human condition; we will all need and be compelled to provide care throughout our lives (Kittay, 2001; West, 2002; Williams, 1999, 2001 and 2004). However, in these mothers' situations their ex partners appear to feel no such compulsion and have disengaged from their roles in taking care of their children.

Here care is conceptualised as both ethic and activity, based on the premise that these two definitions of the term are inextricably linked. Caring activities are not simple obligations, rather they have a moral quality and are negotiated in terms of what is felt to be the 'proper thing to do' (Williams, 2004b: 17). For Sevenhuijsen (1998: 107) the ethics of care involves responsibilities and relationships in place of the discourses of rules and rights evident in an ethical framework of rights. In addition, she argues that care ethics are bounded to particular and definable situations rather than in some abstract and formal framework and that the ethics of care constitute a moral activity

(ibid.). So we can see that in this conception care and relationships are connected in an “infinite spiral of human relationships” (Kittay, 2001: 536). Therefore it is necessary to discuss care both theoretically in terms of the type and quality of post divorce family relationships, and also offer recognition that the quality of these relationships may impact upon the care giving capacities of family members. As Mullan (2010: 114) recognises, the chief input of care is time (in this case parental time) and the output is the care that is received . These are both relational qualities.

### **3.7 Chapter conclusions**

The data analysis in this chapter has identified clear links between parental responsibilities to children and the rights of children to maintain relationships with their parents. In approaching this distinction from the perspective of the feminist ethics of care we can see that in the case of family life the nexus is complicated by the relational nature of these responsibilities and rights. The child may not claim their right to an ongoing relationship with their parent if that parent does not undertake to maintain their responsibility to offer a relationship to that child. In this way it is possible to see the intensely complex nature of any attempt to apply a legal structure to the web of human relationships. The family has long been seen as a site of dependency in which care and financial provision are exchanged, so revealing that interdependency is a complex human phenomenon and an inevitable part of the human condition (Fineman, 2001: 28). That in order to give care one must be able to access financial resources is central to this understanding (ibid.). So in this way it becomes clear that some financial resource is required in order to sustain a relationship of care. The central point to be made here is that practical care giving is not something that can simply happen outside of the constraints of financial arrangements, and for the parents in this study the presence or otherwise of financial support from either wages, ex partners or welfare benefits had a significant impact on the way they were able to care for their children.

All of the parents in this study describe a powerful desire to care for their children, but in addition to this they also are compelled to take care of them, with this compulsion amplified for those participants whose ex partner did not maintain an ongoing relationship with the children. So we can see that the decision to attend to the needs of children was not one that was freely taken but rather a duty, albeit one discharged with love. These important emotional dimensions have been explored here with some of the problems inherent in providing legal regulation and financial support in these areas

illuminated. This chapter has begun to identify some of the practical challenges that were experienced by participants in managing their family life and it is to further consideration of these that the following chapter turns.

## **Chapter Four.**

### **4.1 Practical challenges in combining paid work and family care**

This chapter introduces the tensions between paid work and care that were revealed by the research participants in their interviews. Moving lone parents into the paid labour market has been a central part of strategies to tackle child poverty (Gregg, 2008) and work is presented as a 'good' in and of itself (Bowring, 2000; Waddell and Burton, 2006; Black 2008). As the employment rates of mothers have risen, there appears to be a rising expectation that parenting can and will be combined with paid work, even though the employment rates of lone mothers had actually fallen between the late 1970s and the 1990s (Gregg and Harkness, 2003). This suggests that combining employment with caring as the lone adult in the household is particularly challenging, as throughout this same period credits such as the Family Income Supplement and later Family Credit and the current Tax Credit system had been developed to offer financial incentives to lone parents to engage in paid work.

Participants did not lack commitment to the principle of paid employment but this had to be managed alongside the needs of their children and the presence or lack of childcare provision was a central factor in informing employment decisions. The parents in the research reported that practical considerations were of primary importance in their employment decision making. Indeed, regardless of the wider context of their experiences managing the practicalities of daily life always 'trumped' preferences for at home or working parenthood and financial considerations. As the sole adult in the household they reported a need to ensure that the requirements of paid work were manageable along side their responsibilities to their children. This involved more than a simple consideration of whether the working hours would fit in with school hours or the childcare that was available to the family and were especially complex for those who did not have a closely involved ex partner or local family who were willing or able to offer support. Whilst some of the participants in the study retained a co-parenting relationship with their ex partner this was not the case for all; involvement of the other partner ranged from day to day involvement with caring for children to total absence. Unsurprisingly these differences made for considerable variation in the extent to which a parent could rely on the other for support with looking after the children, with even those who maintained regular and amicable relationships with ex partners sometimes reporting that this was not a reliable source of support for childcare responsibilities. In addition, not all of the parents interviewed lived close to their child's other parent

meaning that their involvement was necessarily less frequent and in practical terms could be more difficult.

For example, Sarah had returned to the North of England from London when she separated from her daughters father, citing a desire to own her own home, be close to her family and to take up the offer of a funded PhD place as her reasons. Whilst her relationship with her daughters father was friendly - in fact she says that they get on much better post separation than they did before - the distance means that he is unable to be involved in the day to day care of their six year old daughter. Sarah explains that he is supportive of her role as a lone parent in other ways such as by providing reliable financial support but the day to day care and decision making is her sole responsibility. So, she has needed to establish a network of practical support in her new city in order to ensure that she has people to ask for occasional help with taking or collecting her daughter from school and other childcare tasks. Her own mother also provides some practical help being on hand to collect Sarah's daughter from school when Sarah is unable to do so and also offers a family presence at school events when Sarah is unable to take the time off work, although this not alleviate the guilt she felt when she had to miss the mother's day assembly at her daughters primary school

*"I was on a training course, could not get out of it, so my Mum had to go and I was like "Oh my God!" and it's things like that that you just think God! Er you know things like that really pull at you and you think if I had more flexibility. And you know, don't get me wrong a PhD's probably the most flexible post I've had in such a long time, erm since being a parent and it's fantastic but there are times when it's not flexible"* Sarah

Another reason for parents reporting seeking work close to where their children went to school, so that they could attend as many of these ad hoc events as possible. For example, Fiona explains that in her prior employment she used to be able to manage this by taking all her breaks for the day in one block and popping out from work to attend events such as sports day. The co-operation and flexibility of her manager was essential in enabling this. Other research exploring mothers experiences in employment has identified this need for flexibility as crucial because caring responsibilities cannot always be predicted and planned for. Being able to negotiate around start and finish times, being able to reduce hours during the school holidays, or take advantage of flexi-



time in order to take children to medical appointments for example are major benefits for those balancing caring and earning (Jenkins, 2004: 120).

Nevertheless, simple geographical proximity to the other parent did not always mean that relationships were amicable or mutually supportive. Chris, the resident father of two boys under the age of five described how although his children's mother lived on the same estate, literally around the corner from his home, he felt that she was not a reliable co-parent. He had created his own network of friends and received support from the local Children's Centre to care for his sons but did not have a shared responsibility with his children's mother, from whom the children had been removed by Social Services. Amy, a mother of three children, also had her ex husband living nearby (less than a mile from her home) but felt that she could not rely on him to assist with caring for the children, partly because he worked shifts and partly, she felt, because he was unwilling to commit to a regular responsibility for any of these tasks. Charlotte, the resident parent of two children, explained that whilst her ex husband lived only four miles away he chose to have no contact with his children at all, not even responding to their attempts to contact him by telephone. She was supported by her parents, both in their eighties, although this relationship was changing as their care needs increased along with a decline in their ability to assist with the care of their grandchildren.

Other parents in the study reported differing levels of parenting responsibilities for the non resident parent which illuminates the need for policy to respect differences in family shape rather than working from an assumption of ongoing practical and financial support from the non resident parent.

## **4.2 Fitting paid work around family life: the experiences of participants**

Finding work that fitted in with caring for children was a major consideration for the parents in this study. Whether they were currently in employment, studying or based at home full time all the parents made reference to the difficulties of finding work that they could undertake alongside looking after their children. For participants in the study managing paid work alongside caring for children was a significant daily challenge with a number of key strategies for resourcing the household whilst also being available to attend to the care needs of children identified. For those in education, considerations of

their future employment opportunities were influenced by the practical considerations of how flexible these potential careers might be.

Fiona, studying with the Open University, planned to establish her career once her sons had left home, seeing caring for them as her primary role until then. She had spent the fourteen years since her eldest son was born working in a variety of part time jobs and was in receipt of benefits at the time of the interview. Fiona explains the way in which she applied a complex set of considerations when assessing the suitability of a potential job. The most important for her had been the location of the job, she describes how she had “*always tried to work as locally as possible*” so that unforeseen incidents such as one of her two children being sent home from school because of sickness were manageable. This strategy was also noted by Millar and Ridge (2008) who found evidence that women attempted to negate the impact of their working on their children by searching for employment that was school hours only or by working below capacity. Their findings echo earlier research conducted by Grant et al. (2005), and cited in the literature review chapter in which it was found that 3.6 million part time workers in the UK, of whom 2.8 million are women, were working below the potential that they have previously demonstrated in other jobs.

Fiona tells me about a job she had when her children were at primary school, cleaning and serving in a bar that was right next to the school her children attended and how well this fitted in, especially as she had been able to negotiate working exactly school hours. Finding employment close to home and childcare was a key strategy of mothers in this sample and has been identified in other research as a key way in which a balance between the constraints of time, care and employment are managed (Jain et al., 2011). Charlotte and Diane also report currently being in employment that is below their demonstrated educational or experience level whilst Chloe, Susan and James report not currently being in any employment, although all are graduates. Susan and James were seeking work at the time of the interview whereas Chloe, the resident parent of four children was hoping to undertake the postgraduate training needed to become a teacher in the next academic year.

Chris, the resident father of two children and not currently in employment explains that he would only consider employment that was very close to his home so that he could

minimise the amount of time his children spent in childcare. He is very focussed on his role as a parent and does not feel that it would be appropriate to place them in childcare,

*“I couldn’t just throw, I couldn’t give the kids to someone and then say “right there you go, this is so and so. I’m off to work now” Chris*

The expectations of JobCentre staff as reported by Fiona, who is in receipt of JobSeekers Allowance at the time of the interview, do not fit with this parental preference for local employment. She tells me that she has been informed by staff that she should be prepared to travel up to an hour each way for work which would mean being away from home for eleven hours and leaving her children on their own after school for almost three hours every day. She does not consider this reasonable.

Finding employment that was flexible to the sometimes unpredictable demands of children was also a concern and central challenge in managing paid work alongside their care. Fiona described a strategy she had developed for managing working for an employer who was not flexible with regard to her need to take time off when her children were ill. If she realised that one of her children was unwell she would go to work anyway,

*“sending them to school knowing that they’re ill and knowing that you’re going to get a phone call in an hour saying “they’re ill” but it’s easier to go to work and let your manager take that or whoever, phone call” Fiona*

she would then go and collect the child from school and take them into her place of work so that her employer could ‘witness’ that the child was really unwell

*“[son would] sit there for a bit till I’ve convinced someone that “Look! He’s ill! And I need to take him home!” Fiona*

Her struggles with this issue had ultimately led to her leaving her job without having a new job to go to and she had been in receipt of JobSeekers allowance for seven months as a result of this decision

*“my son broke his arm and I went in ten minutes late – I’d rang up and said it’s, I’ll be you know, ten minutes late – and they really were hard on me and that was [laughing] the final straw that broke the camels back and I handed my notice in”* Fiona

This lack of understanding of the sometimes sudden need to attend to children who are unwell or when childcare arrangements fall apart is in sharp contrast to the experience of Debbie who describes her employer as *“really good”* considering herself *“very lucky”* that her employer has family friendly policies. At the time of the interview she had recently needed to make use of her dependants leave entitlement when her friend suffered a bereavement and was suddenly unable to take care of Debbie’s children as she usually did:

*“their policies are very good, I never had a problem, I rang my manager at nine o’clock and just said “I’m sorry, I can’t come to work my child... I had a friend who was going to take her to nursery and she’s let me down and I can’t come in” and she said ‘that’s fine’”* Debbie

Debbie regarded this employer flexibility and understanding of her dual role as employee and mother as a major benefit as it had enabled her to continue in the job she had held before she separated from her ex husband. This had the added advantage that having worked there for a considerable length of time she had worked up to the top of her pay scale meaning that she is able to earn what she considers to be a decent salary. However, it is interesting to note that she does not comment that her employers policies are what she thinks should be the norm, rather that she considers herself to be *“lucky”* to be employed by a company which has a commitment to family friendly working.

Simon also had the benefit of flexible and family friendly working in his employment with the local authority. He and his ex wife had shared taking time off to care for ill children before they separated and continued to do so after the separation. In addition to this he had also, when needed, travelled to a different county to care for his older daughter if she was ill and her mother needed to go to work. He comments that

*“I cannot remember any time when I’ve had special leave turned down by the council for looking after children who were sick”* Simon

However, whilst the local authority as an organisation had procedures in place to ensure that these parenting responsibilities and the principle of shared care were supported, Simon explained that some individual members of management did not share this view and had not always been sympathetic. He describes how in a previous employment role his line manager had told him that she had never taken time off when her children were poorly and simply sent them to school anyway with the inference that he should do the same. Simon opposes this view strongly saying:

*“ My responsibility is to my children, my family. Not to work ”* Simon

and

*“ Work have to accept that I’m a dad and I’ve got responsibilities ”* Simon

### **4.3 Caring for older children and teenagers**

Welfare policies that seek to place work requirements as a central tenet of the conditionality approach currently make distinctions based on the age of the youngest child. These are informed both by the knowledge that employment rates of lone parents with older children tend to be higher (Haux, 2007: 3) and the assumption that as children grow older their care needs reduce. Contemporary welfare policy no longer awards (inactive) Income Support to lone parents with a youngest child aged five or over, requiring instead that they make a claim for Jobseekers Allowance with attendant work search requirements (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011: 105). Prior research indicates however, that the age of the child is only one of several factors that need to be taken into consideration by lone parents in employment decision making (see for example Ridge and Millar, 2008) and this is borne out by the participants in the present sample. Whilst childcare for younger children was generally accessible to parents, although it could be expensive and inflexible to non standard hours, those with older children and teenagers reported a total lack of childcare availability for this age group. The assumption that once children reached secondary school age there was no further need for childcare provision was challenged by participants in the research either from the way they reported their own experience or from their response to a vignette. Diane, whose daughter had recently made the transition to high school had found that this had not been the straightforward move that she had hoped for and had wanted to be able to be at home for her.

*“If I’d known what this year, this move to high school was going to be like, I almost feel as if this is more critical this year that I’m there for her emotionally and all the rest of it than some of the others”* Diane

The vignette posed a situation in which a child of eleven came home from school and was alone for one hour and forty five minutes before their parent returned from work. Chris, the resident father of two children responds,

*“I would never let my eleven year old, especially with people nowadays round in’t streets. No, I couldn’t leave ‘em on their own”* Chris

Chris feels that thirteen or fourteen would be a more appropriate age for this kind of responsibility whilst other parents suggested that it may be appropriate in some cases for a child to come home alone after school but that this was dependent on the maturity of the child and the parent was best placed to judge this. Simon for example, suggests that appointing a neighbour or other local parent to be on hand in the case of an emergency and instilling some “home alone” rules for the child could make this an acceptable solution for a working parent of an older child. However, he acknowledged that this may be problematic for those who do not have local networks of care and support.

Fiona reporting facing difficulties in accessing childcare for her sons now that they were both over the age of eleven. The transfer to high school had brought an end to the before and after school clubs to cover the beginning and end of the standard working day that she had used whilst her sons were at primary school. Whilst she was happy for her fourteen year old son to be responsible for the younger one on occasion, she was not content for this to be a regular arrangement and certainly not for a whole working day during the school holidays,

*“if I left them alone the whole day (youngest) would end up going off with (eldest) and his mates probably and maybe getting up to things....[laughs]”* Fiona

Ensuring that her children did not get into trouble was a key concern for Fiona and she explains that this has much to do with the fact that she was a young parent, having become pregnant with her first child when she was sixteen. Her concern to prove that

she could be a good parent was a very conscious one as she explains that it is very important to her that she brings up her children as well as she can,

*“I was pregnant at sixteen and that I mean wasn’t something I chose but I thought then the best thing I can do is bring my kids up properly and that they’re not going to go on and cause trouble or....erm riot or knock of school or whatever you know”* ” Fiona

These concerns were in addition to her feeling that it was simply wrong to place the responsibility for childcare onto one of her children, feeling that this would mean a curtailment of the older child’s freedom to establish a social life of his own. In response to a vignette, Chris, as well as others agrees that asking an older child to take care of younger siblings regularly is

*“not fair on the elder child. She has to miss out on what she’s doing with her friends to look after. Like I say, I don’t think that’s fair.....eventually the oldest child probably might resent the other one cos she’s missing out on so much so no I don’t think, don’t think that’s a good idea”* Chris

#### **4.4 Transport and localities**

Transport and the concept of locality arose as a key theme for research participants when describing their daily lives. Integrating the care of their children with employment or study was framed by the spaces in which lives were lived, as parenting, and motherhood particularly becomes defined by multidimensionality and mobility (Murray, 2008: 55) with transport playing a key role in enabling the management of the multiple roles parents play (ibid.). A number of parents in the sample describe the complexity of their daily routines and how seemingly simple tasks such as the journey to transport their children to and from school could in reality be quite complicated. In this way we can identify the ways in which caring is spatially located. As an activity, caring is constituted in the places in which it occurs (Parr and Philo, 2003; Barker, 2010) and so the spaces and places of daily life are linked. Daily journeys, and the additional layers of complexity they add to the daily routine and the way in which mothers were largely responsible for managing them were identified in Skinner’s (2005) research as a key consideration for parents managing childcare and employment.

A variety of strategies were employed by research participants for managing these challenges; some ensured that the geographical spaces of everyday life were as small as possible to make it possible for journeys to be made on foot whilst some relied on public transport and others had more complex arrangements across multiple locations for which car ownership was essential. These decisions were also influenced by other considerations such as access to childcare and the perceived quality of local schools. For all the parents in the sample there was a sense of balancing the needs of children with what was reasonably practicable in every day movements around spaces and places.

Not only were spaces and places significant for the management of daily activities but they also influenced the relationships of care and support that were available to parents and their children. Those participants living close to family members and/or supportive and helpful friends generally described that this proximity enabled them manage more complex daily routines as practical help was available. This practical help ranged from regular help with child care to providing lifts in the car to children's activities or the supermarket for example. Ongoing supportive relationships often also included emotional support and companionship. However, simple geographical proximity was not always indicative of the presence of support with Hafsa receiving little ongoing help and support from her extended family, although they lived close by. Chloe, who had four children to two fathers lived close to her younger children's grandparents who offered help with them but did not maintain the same relationship with her older two children. Her own parents and her older children's extended family lived several hundred miles away and whilst emotionally and financially supportive as well as providing somewhere to go for a holiday, helping with the practicalities of daily life was not possible.

Further analysis and exploration of lived geographical spaces illuminated that proximity to the child's non resident parent did not necessarily indicate the level of involvement that existed, with one resident and one non resident parent reporting very regular contact taking place despite considerable distance between homes. In these cases, this was made possible by the commitment of either the non resident father being willing to travel to visit this child, and a parent with care who travelled regularly with their child to the city where her daughter's father lived to enable them to spend time together.



In contrast to this finding, that contact was highly dependent on an ongoing commitment to make contact a priority, several resident parents reported limited or no contact between their child(ren) and their other parent even though they lived in the same locality or city. This would support the finding noted in Chapter 3 of the thesis that the ongoing relationships within the family have real significance for the ongoing nature of parenting, care and support.

## **4.5 Managing child care arrangements**

### **4.5.1 Case study: Debbie**

*“so yes they do get passed from pillar to post at the moment. On a Thursday they, I think [my daughter] has three childcarers in at some point during the day, if you talk about friends taking them to school then obviously a childminder and her granddad picking her up so it is pretty, it was a bit of a nightmare to start with [laughs]” Debbie*

Debbie’s childcare arrangements are made possible by the presence of certain key factors. These are similar to those identified in Skinner’s (2005) discussion of a case study family with complex daily journeys,

- The close proximity of the home, the parental workplaces, and the childcare and early education settings
- The parents’ access to independent private transport resources
- The father’s ability and willingness to help transport children
- The ability and willingness of both parents to dovetail their working hours to a finely-tuned level
- The support from employers (flexi-time hours for the mother and permission to leave work early for the father)
- And the support utilised from social networks

(Skinner, 2005: 112)

Although the cited work was focussed on couple families, these key factors remain central in managing dual employment after divorce and separation as revealed by the interview data in this study. Debbie was the only participant in possession of all of these factors, and interestingly her family also had the most complex daily routine. Her job

was the one that she had held before before separation and so many of these arrangements had already been in place when her husband still lived in the family home and had been adapted to account for the change in residential circumstances after they separated. Although he now lived a short drive away, he owned a car and was willing and able to continue his involvement with the children's daily routines. In the present sample Debbie was unusual in that both she and her ex husband had continued with pre-separation patterns of employment rather than the resident parent making changes to their employment pattern, as was the case with all the other families in this study, although this necessitated a very complex set of practical arrangements.

Whilst her employer offered a number of family friendly working policies, as the resident parent of two children aged eight and four, Debbie still needed to manage a complex childcare network in order to maintain her employment whilst also ensuring that her children's care needs were attended to. Although her working hours were regular they were not the same every week as she describes here

*"[I work] twenty five hours a week, three days which are Monday, and Tuesday till six and on a Thursday nine till five then I work one Saturday in three then have the Thursday off"* Debbie

Managing this complex schedule relied on the involvement of the children's father, two paid child minders, a friend, a pre school nursery and the children's paternal grandfather with Debbie's elder child at school. The complexity of these arrangements is described by Debbie as *"a logistical nightmare"*. On Monday and Tuesday mornings, the children's father comes to Debbie's home at 7:00 so that she can arrive at work by 8:00. After ensuring that the children have eaten breakfast he then takes them to the first child minder, who will later deliver the eight year old to school, at 8:00 before going on to work himself. Later in the day the children's father collects the two children from the child minder at 16:00 and returns to Debbie's home to prepare a meal for the children before she returns from work and he returns to his own home. On Thursdays Debbie takes the children to her friends home at 8:00 and the friend takes the eight year old to school and the four year old to nursery. Then at 11:45 the four year old is collected by a child minder (this is the second child minder, not the one employed on Mondays and Tuesdays). Later in the day the children's paternal grandfather collects the eight year

old from school and then at 16:45 he also collects the four year old from the child minder and takes the children to Debbie's home where he begins to prepare their meal. Debbie returns from work a short time later.

These extremely complex arrangements were the result of some careful negotiation on Debbie's part who had, in the previous year, needed to change the pattern of her working hours in order to accommodate the care needs of her children. The use of a child minder, whilst offering the benefits of care based in a domestic environment and the provision of services such as taking and collecting children from school, and Debbie's childcare preference for these reasons, can have the disadvantage of not being particularly flexible. This is demonstrated by the need for Debbie to employ two child minders; the first was not able to accommodate Debbie's children on Thursdays as she had reached the limit of the number of children she was permitted to take care of on that day. Despite having an involved ex partner, a flexible employer and her father in law living close by who was both willing and able to assist with child care, the sustenance of Debbie's part time employment is dependent on this very complex web of paid and unpaid care. This is manageable because all of the people involved in the care arrangements are reliable and Debbie and the children live only a short distance from their father and grandfather who are both committed to the care and support of the children.

#### **4.5.2 Case study: Hafsa**

Hafsa was studying full time in addition to working part time and also experienced some the challenges in managing the childcare needs of her two daughters. Unlike Debbie, Hafsa has little family support and her daughter's father has no involvement in their upbringing. As a career focussed mother she was managing the considerable demands of a full time medical degree and part time paid work by studying. Her children were both at primary school and making use of the before and after school care offered there in addition to studying in the evening when her children were sleeping was a key strategy for balancing paid work with lone parenting. Working part time as a member of the local hospitals bank nursing staff provides much needed extra income Hafsa and means that she also relies on baby sitters to ensure that her daughters are cared for whilst she works in her paid employment. However, this is offset against the cost of and unreliable nature of finding babysitters, especially as Hafsa often worked into the night when more work was available and the hourly rate of pay was higher. She

described often needing to rely on favours to cover her childcare needs whilst she worked and that this could be difficult because she had two children. A particular difficulty for Hafsa lay in the financing of this childcare. A claim for Childcare Tax Credit can only be made in order to pay for registered childcare such as a nursery, child minder or after school club and is not responsive to irregularity in working hours. As the majority of Hafsa's paid work took place outside of the operational hours of standard childcare provision and baby sitting is an unregulated area of childcare provision Hafsa was not able to claim assistance to help with the costs of this. This was a cause of ongoing stress in Hafsa's life and made her paid work especially difficult to sustain. The absence of registered childcare to cover atypical hours is a real problem for parents working regular evening and weekend hours or shifts, as has been identified by Singler (2011). Availability of childcare that was responsive to her needs was identified by Hafsa as a key area in which policies could be developed to support her families circumstances;

*“There should be 24 hour childcare! Why is there no 24 hour childcare?....It's probably because there aren't enough single parents doing shifts isn't it!” Hafsa*

The contrast between her evening and weekend childcare needs and the childcare that is available within standard working hours is stark, and Hafsa reports very good experiences of the wrap around care that was available at her daughters' school and the financial support that Childcare Tax Credit provided to pay for it. This indicates that child care provision and/or employer flexibility is a key factor in enabling parents to manage paid work.

The difficulties that Hafsa has experienced in finding appropriate childcare are not specific to lone parents, shift work clearly makes for a more complex set of childcare requirements and this is likely to be a difficulty for two parent families as well. Charlotte also reported difficulties in accessing childcare to cover shift work. In a previous employment role in which she was working at the time of her separation from her ex husband, she was often required to work until seven or sometimes eleven o'clock in the evening or was required to work on Saturdays. As she relied on her ex husband to take care of their two children at these times she describes that she knew she would have to look for new employment once she was living alone with her children as it was not practical for this arrangement to continue.

## **4.6 Private and public transport**

### **4.6.1 Access to transport: the importance of car ownership**

Sheller and Urry (2000) identified the car as being highly significant in transforming the experience of space in the city. Those participants who owned a car described this as being a major factor in enabling them to manage daily life with their children, in line with Sheller and Urry's (2006) contention that mobility can be conceptualised as a resource that not all are in possession of. Other research indicates that car ownership is positively correlated with employment participation (Scheiner and Holz-Rau, 2012), perhaps unsurprisingly given the high costs of purchasing and maintaining a car. Several participants felt very strongly that they simply would not be able to manage their daily routines without private transport and car ownership was sometimes described in quite emotional terms, indicating the attachment that parents had to this form of transport

*"I think the car is like my other best friend! I don't know how I'd manage without it, I really really don't....its absolutely essential in the day to day"* Jenny

The freedom it gave Jenny to manage her day to day routines was significant. She describes that even though the largest part of her journey to work was undertaken by train the car was needed to drop her son at school and then drive to the train station.

*"I drive to the train station which is not brilliant but it means I can actually manage dropping him at school and getting the train on time and getting to work on time...it just makes everything possible and doable without being a complete drag and nightmare"*  
Jenny

Some parents in the study engaged the assistance of older children in managing the school journey but for Jenny this is not possible. Jenny has two children and, although one is in her teens and so is somewhat more independent, she attends school some ten miles away (the family have recently moved) and makes this journey by school bus. This necessitates leaving home early in the morning and not returning until long after her younger sibling has finished his school day so Jenny is unable to call on her to help with dropping off or picking up from school each day. This means that Jenny must find a way to manage the morning routine, getting her son to school and herself to work on

time without help and the car is needed in order to do this. Although when her children were younger she had managed their daily lives on public transport, since then the routine had become more complex and spread out over a much larger geographic area, which contributed to the need for a private vehicle.

Hafsa, commuting daily in order to attend her university course, also indicates that managing daily life would not be possible without owning a car. Although the distance from her home to the university was relatively short at around nine miles, a particular consideration is that her children's before and after school care is located about three miles in the opposite direction to university from her home, adding an additional six miles to the journey. With the journey to university taking about 45-50 minutes driving at peak time, travelling in one direction to drop off her daughters and get to university on time was not manageable if she had to use public transport. Unlike some university courses which have limited contact time and thus afford students some flexibility around when to travel, Hafsa is a medical student and often has to travel at peak times, especially in the morning. She describes that without access to her car this would be unmanageable

*“not at all no...no, as a single person I'd get the train yeah, but not with children. It'd be impossible” Hafsa*

Relying on private rather than public transport seems to allow parents to manage more complex lives across multiple locations. For those like Hafsa, Jenny and Sarah who commuted to work or places of study the flexibility of private transport was central in enabling them to manage daily life. Daily movements are bounded by the timetables of employment, the school day and childcare. Running late to collect children from childcare was not only stressful but also expensive. Fiona recalls regularly being fined £10 per child on each occasion that she was late to collect them from their after school care.

Sarah, commuting daily to her place of study, has a car and this enables her to drop her daughter off at school daily on the way to work, she feels this is important for her daughter and also for herself to maintain a connection with day to day school life. However, even with a car it is not possible to drop her daughter at the school breakfast club and travel to her place of work for nine o'clock: Sarah is only able to manage the

daily drop off at school because she is a postgraduate student with a relatively flexible timetable that does not require her to be at work for nine except on rare occasions. In her circumstances, the need for a reliable car is recognised and supported by her ex partner who finances the vehicle.

For other parents taking part in the study, the lack of private transport limited the area within which they could reasonably look for work. Chris, for example, living on an inner city estate considered the four mile journey into the city centre to be too far to travel for work, whilst Chloe and Fiona both noted the restricted geographical area in which they could reasonably travel on public transport as a key difficulty in finding employment. Although Jobcentre staff had advised Fiona, who was on the JSA regime that she should extend her job search to include all areas within an hours travelling time she was not willing to do so due to her concerns that if there was an emergency or her children were taken ill at school it would take too long for her to reach them. Not having access to a car can then be seen as a key barrier to employment. It has the potential to constrain job opportunities due to the smaller geographical space possible to commute to, intensifying the problem of lack of time for those with caring responsibilities (Bashir et al., 2011: 2). This is reflected in the findings of this study.

Moving to a new home after separation could also intensify the need for private transport as is described by Charlotte, who moved to a village approximately four miles from the marital home after separating from her husband. Keen to ensure that the children retained some stability during this time she had kept them at the same primary school and at the time of interview had been making the daily journeys from her new home to and from school by car for two years. Although her eldest child would be moving to a local high school at the beginning of the next academic year, Charlotte had planned to continue to make this journey for a further four years until her younger child was ready to move to high school. For this reason she had prioritised the purchase of a new car so that she had access to safe and reliable transport. However, she had recently managed to secure a place for her younger child at a school local to their new home. Although she regarded this as a positive development this change was also associated with some concerns particularly around the need for both her son and herself to make new friends and establish a new support network. It is important also to recognise that accessing local school places is not always straightforward as, especially for younger children, this relies on places being available in the new preferred school.

These stories reflect and support the findings of Skinner (2005) noted above who found that this co-ordination of the daily journeys associated with children's needs were a central part of managing daily family life. Characterised in her article as 'co-ordination points' she notes that what, to an outsider, can appear to be straightforward journeys, such as dropping off or collecting children from school are actually part of complex chains of movement. Interestingly, Skinner found that, contrary to 'common sense' expectations, these journeys were somewhat more straightforward for those who worked full time because hours were more likely to be fixed thus making daily journeys more routine. In contrast, those who worked part time, as the participants in my study did, had more complex coordinations to make due to the variation in their daily or weekly routines. These findings challenge the idea that part time work is the 'ideal' solution for helping those with care responsibilities to combine them with paid work (see Warren, 2004 for discussion of part time work as a 'balancing' strategy), even though all the participants here saw well remunerated part time employment as their preferred way to balance home and working life.

Debbie's working hours, described in a case study earlier in this chapter, although part time, involve a very complex transport and childcare arrangement and she describes the days when she works as "*a bit of a mad rush*" even though her place of work is only a ten minute drive from home. Having previously managed the family's daily journeys on foot and by public transport Debbie feels that this is much easier now she has passed her driving test and bought a car. In addition she has the benefit of a car sharing arrangement with a colleague and access to parking at her place of work, both of which may not be possible for people working in other types of job role. Although she does not reveal a great deal about the family finances, it seems that Debbie's part time work and the continued financial support of her ex husband who is a senior manager in a national company have enabled her to undertake the costs of learning to drive and financing a vehicle. These benefits of a more comfortable standard of family income were certainly not available to all the parents in the study, and it is to a discussion of the experiences of those managing without private transport that this chapter now turns.



#### **4.6.2 Not having access to private transport**

A lack of access to private transport represented significant challenges for some parents in the study, both in terms of managing daily life at present and in thinking about moving into or changing their employment in the future. Not having access to a car has previously been identified as a significant factor in social exclusion (SEU, 2003; Bradshaw et al. 2004) and this is borne out in the stories of the participants in this study. Not having access to a private vehicle means that journeys often take longer, cannot be made effectively at the times needed, are costly (particularly for those with a number of children), and in some cases even relatively short journeys require changing buses due to the absence of direct routes. The time spent walking to and from, as well as waiting at, bus stops or train stations also needs to be added to expected journey times as Simon identifies here when describing the journey he made when collecting his eldest daughter from where she lived with her mother

*“Cos you get the train to [town] and then you can wait 45 minutes [there] for the train to [where my daughter lived] and then you’re waiting for the next train back which could be an hour before so its not the actual travelling time its the time in between, its the waiting time in between” Simon*

The research location, a large city in the North of England, has both bus and train transport available for public use but does not, as in some cities, have a Metro or tram system. So we can see that the problem is not simply the inability of individual parents to drive but the combination of restricted time available when travel is fitted around care responsibilities and the extended time journeys take when they are made by public transport (Skinner, 2005: 114). It is known that having a car has a significant impact on economic self sufficiency (Sandoval et al., 2011: 354) and those participants reporting not having a car in this study include those with the lowest incomes.

Several participants spoke of the practical difficulties of moving around locations on public transport, such as Amy who lives in a suburb around three miles from the centre of the city

*“my other two children go to a school in [area] which is a three mile distance from home. There is no school bus, there are no town buses...I would have to take a bus into*

*town to find an adequate place where I can change buses to get another bus to where they go to school....Its an impossible task” Amy*

Although she had previously had an arrangement with her children’s father around the use of a car, at the time of interview this had become difficult and she was expecting to have to manage the journey by public transport in the future. As a full time university student Amy felt unable to meet the costs of purchasing a car herself describing this as *“financially....an impossible task”* and so was attempting to reduce the length of this journey by searching for school places for her children that are closer to home. Not only was the complexity of this journey time consuming but it also restricted the likelihood of her children being able to make the journey to and from school independently in the future as they grew older so she was very keen to find them space in a local school.

The ongoing need to escort children to and from school seems to be influenced by the decline of children’s independent mobility with the number of children of 10/11 (primary school leaving age) making journeys independently declining significantly over the last twenty years. Escorting these journeys has opened up new caring spaces and additional responsibilities for parents (Barker, 2010: pp 1-2) which add to the tasks and daily pressures of child care responsibilities.

The intensification of “car culture” (Bradshaw et al., 2004: 79) alongside spatial planning of city geographies in which employment and housing are not proximate, increases the difficulties for families and individuals without private transport. For the participants in this study these difficulties presented daily challenges and were a major factor affecting their employment decision making. These challenges were particularly significant for those such as Chloe, Chris and Fiona who not only do have a car but also do not hold driving licenses. The process of acquiring independent transport in the near future was, for them, unlikely due to the high costs of learning to drive although Chris indicates that he hopes to learn to drive within the next year. The costs of learning to drive are considerable and making steps towards having independent transport involves much more than simply funding a series of driving lessons. These costs were simply out of reach financially for those depending on benefits for their income as Chloe points out

*“I don’t have a driving licence, or money to do driving lessons, or money to buy a car even if somebody paid for the driving lessons! [laughing]” Chloe*

It is noted that the difficulties in managing paid work alongside family life whilst reliant on public transport are not exclusive to households with only one resident adult. Fiona recalls attempting to manage employment, studying and caring for the children without a car when she had lived together with her children's father

*“Yeah, I remember mad arrangements yeah and then I had to like get the bus home and usually cos the traffic was so bad I remember I'd have to get off stops before and run home and then I could take over from [their dad] so he could go to erm the supermarket [where he worked] and that being just ridiculous for the amount of hours. I didn't work much and the amount of hassle involved!”* Fiona

## **4.7 Managing complex daily journeys**

### **4.7.1 Case study: Chloe**

Chloe described a lengthy school journey that she undertook twice a day every day and on one day a week three times as she had a young child in a half day nursery session once a week. The journey to school requires the family to leave the house at quarter past eight to ensure that the children are at school for nine o'clock. She does not get back home from the trip with the younger children until about quarter to ten, a round journey time of one and a half hours. In practice this means that on four days of the week she spends three hours making the journeys; on the other day four and a half hours are spent making these school journeys. Chloe is very aware that making this journey by car would save a huge amount of daily time with the round trip journey taking just twenty minute on those occasions when a friend with a car is able to give her a lift.

Not only are these journeys very time consuming, they also account for a significant proportion of Chloe's weekly budget

*“it costs me £18.50 a week for a Weekly Rider for myself.....[my eldest daughter] has a half fare pass and it's £8.00 for a weekly ticket for her and [my eldest son] I don't think is entitled to one cos you have to be eleven so it's £2.00 a day for his child day rider so that's £18.00 for the children and £18.50....plus when [middle son] turns five or looks five....that will be another ten pounds for him”* Chloe

The £36.50 is paid from Chloe's tax credit entitlement for her children of £180 per week and she says:

*“when I have to start paying for [middle son's] bus fare I am not sure I will be able to afford to go on sending them to that school.....that'll be £45 a week just on bus fares and I spend a hundred or so pounds on food and then the incidentals like clothes, birthdays. I really don't think I'll be able to do it but I'm hoping that [he] won't grow too much till next year when hopefully I'll be able to get a job”* Chloe

For Chloe, managing the time consuming and expensive journey to take her children to school each day, the choice had been framed by the function of the wider policy environment. Her elder children had already changed primary school once when a school closure programme had forced the closure of the school that they had originally attended. They had then moved to a primary school within walking distance of their previous home. The move had been successful, the children had settled well and the journey on foot was manageable. However, after waiting for a social housing transfer on grounds of overcrowding for a number of years, Chloe, her children and her (now ex) partner had been offered and had moved to the property in which they now lived, some distance from the school and certainly too far for the younger ones to walk. Reluctant to move the children from a school where they were now settled, she had decided to manage the journey in order to maintain the continuity of their education and their social relationships.

This enables us to see that the interactions between different policy arenas can have unexpected and complex effects on individual family lives, Chloe's 'choices' being seriously constrained by her lack of control over where she was housed and the ongoing impact of an earlier school closure on children's education. In addition to these complex concerns, the school closer to Chloe's home does not have a nursery attached

*“Which next year would make it, as a non driver, very very difficult. I'd be in the situation again where they'd be going to school and I'd have to get [youngest] to nursery somewhere else at the same time and that would become physically impossible as well and just the whole thing is a right mess!”* Chloe

This experience helps us to see that deciding where to send children to school involves a range of considerations and that some parents, such as Chloe, are prepared to manage complicated and challenging daily routines if they perceive that this is the best thing for their children. In this particular situation, the spread of ages of the children presents an additional challenge as they are not all at the same location for school or nursery whilst the timetabling of the school day does not allow Chloe to co-ordinate the pick up and drop off of all of her children. Managing lives across multiple localities was a common experience, and it consideration of this element of daily life that we turn now.

#### **4.8 Managing lives within and across localities**

So, we can see that a key question clearly linked with transport when exploring the management of daily lives for the participants in the study was the size of geographical space in which life took place. Some participants, such as Sarah, operated within a very large geographical area, living in one city in the North of England, attending university in another and travelling fortnightly with her daughter to London to facilitate contact with her daughter's father. Others, such as Chris, inhabited a much smaller space with most of his daily life occurring within the boundaries of the inner city estate in which he and his children, his ex partner and his father lived.

Some participants had made choices, particularly around the location their children's education, that appeared to make the management of their daily lives more complex. However, exploring why these decisions had been made revealed the presence of a 'weighing up' of the relative advantages and disadvantages of sending them to school outside of walking distance from the home. For example, Susan describes initially sending her son to a school in a neighbouring local authority because she perceived it to be "nicer" than the local schools and later, when this didn't suit him, struggling to afford to pay for private education for him. Hafsa also describes a desire to send her daughters to school in an area that was 'better' than the one in which they could afford to live framing her choice of school for her daughters as a way of mitigating the potentially negative effects of living in a 'less desirable' area on their social upbringing and as a matter of social justice.

*"I've bought this house and I wish I hadn't bought it in this area now but you know I'll be in a position to move hopefully later, and I want to move the kids to a decent area*

*where you don't have people swearing on the street corners and there's good schools. I mean they go to an outstanding school, like an OFSTED outstanding school in [neighbouring town] which is like quite a nice middle class area...its a ten minute drive but I'm prepared to do that to give them the best chance....so I'm sorry I don't see why children in [neighbouring town] should get a better education than my children because of where we live" Hafsa*

Wishing to do one's best for the children was presented as a central part of being a 'good parent'. Sarah, in explaining her decision to move from London to the North of England, describes the importance of making this move for the quality of the housing she could afford and 'better' wider local environment that it provided for her daughter. This reasoning was, she explained, also understood by her daughter's father who accepted the move despite the considerable distance it placed between himself and their child. Managing their ongoing relationship across this space was made possible by the ongoing co-operation of Sarah who travelled fortnightly to London with their daughter, dropping her off with her ex partner, and then going on herself to spend the weekend with friends. The agreement that Sarah did the journey whilst her ex partner paid for the costs is described as satisfactory and Sarah explained that they both felt that it was important to maintain this for the sake of their child.

One of the non resident parents in the study, Simon, has two children from two relationships and has experience of shared care across both large and small geographical areas. His first child, now at university, had lived for most of her childhood in a neighbouring county. As a non driver this had presented some real challenges for Simon, particularly due to the absence of a direct train service connecting the two cities. In contrast to this experience, after the end of his later marriage he and his ex wife had continued to live very close together, thus enabling a much more straightforward sharing of care responsibilities. Their respective homes, his daughter's school and her childminder were all located within about a three mile radius. This made it possible for these journeys to be managed fairly easily either on foot or by bus and so Simon had been able to maintain a greater level of daily involvement in the care of this younger child. Although he was in the process of putting his home on the market at the time of the interview he intended to remain living within this local area so that he could continue this close involvement. These arrangements are in huge contrast to the three hour journey he had undertaken by train to collect his older daughter for weekend visits

and enable him to maintain an active daily parenting involvement with his youngest daughter.

#### **4.9 The importance of home-spaces**

Moving home after separation was a common experience for participants. Of the resident parents, only Debbie and Diane had not moved, remaining in the family home with the children their ex husbands moving to new homes. Chris had been housed by the local authority after becoming the resident parent of his two sons, having previously been homeless for several months and ‘sofa surfing’, sleeping wherever he could. Contrary to more general assumptions that resident parents retain the family home after divorce or separation, the two non resident parents in the sample, James and Simon had both retained residence in the family home after separating from their partner or wife and their children had moved out with their mother to a new home. In Simon’s case this decision was based on his ex wife having established a new relationship as well as her being the higher earner. In James case, the reasons for this were unclear although he does comment that he owns “*a portfolio of properties*”, running a business as a landlord and that his ex partner now lives in (other) rented accommodation.

Managing to afford two homes is a key financial challenge after divorce or separation as resources need to be spread over two households and, if regular overnight contact for children is to be maintained, these need to be of sufficient size to provide space for children to sleep. Those families with higher levels of income, such as Debbie’s, were able to manage this reasonably well. She remained, with the children, in the family home. Her ex husband continued to pay the mortgage on this property in addition to meeting the rental costs of a three bedroomed house for himself which also provided the children with a bedroom each when they stayed there with him. Diane had also stayed in the family home after separating from her husband, he had moved to a new home in a nearby town; like Debbie, this seems to have been possible due to a relatively comfortable family income.

These choices of where to live were influenced by a range of practical and financial considerations. Diane suggests that her ex husband may have

*“wanted to move into [city] ...the sort of lifestyle he likes to live but I think to be near [daughter] that’s why he chose [there]”* Diane

An additional perceived benefit of this move in Diane's case was that although nearby, the village in which she lived and the town in which her ex husband lived were sufficiently separate as to afford each of them some space and privacy from each other. As their daughter was a little older at twelve, there was some potential for her to make some visits to her father independently and this was further facilitated by the two locations being connected by a direct train link.

Accessing new accommodation as a newly separated parent could be difficult, as Amy describes. During the process of her separation she had returned with her husband to the UK and moved into a new home with him and the children. Unable to acquire a tenancy on her own, due to her lack of employment and thus having no income, she describes having acted strategically, and later

*"I basically played my ace card and forced him to move out. So...he moved out and since then I've been separated in all senses"* Amy

An effect of the precarity of the family finances was that when he did leave the family home her ex husband was not able to afford independent accommodation for himself. He remained living very locally, about a quarter of a mile away, but moved into a room in a shared house which impacted on his ability to have their three children stay overnight with him. This experience illuminates the difficulties of spreading resources across two homes and the associated effects that a lack of access to adequate housing could have on ongoing parent-child relationships.

Chloe was living in a particularly difficult situation at the time of interview, having separated from her younger children's father, but was still living in the same house with him. This was a situation over which she had little control and she was waiting for him to leave so that she could gain some space from the difficulties of the relationship and also so that she could make a benefit claim as a single parent which she expected to improve her income quite significantly as their household was currently assessed as a family unit, although the finances were not shared.

Those who had moved to new locations needed to re-establish networks of friendship and support as well as managing the other changes that separation brought. Amy, for



example, lacked practical help and support and she explained that this was due to her having moved fairly recently to a new area (in fact a different country). One parent had moved to a new rented home from her marital home, having made these arrangements without telling her husband that she was planning to leave. She described secretly moving possessions to the new house whilst her husband was out or at work and that the removal van was at the end of the road as she told her husband that she was leaving. In this way the move symbolised a new start and freedom from an unhappy marriage, but also a loss of status, moving from a detached, owned home to a smaller rented home in a less expensive location. Since that time, the divorce settlement had enabled her to move to a new owned home and this enabled her and the children to feel more settled and keeping her children at the school in their old village, along with her car ownership, had enabled her to maintain her own and the children's friendships.

Shared care arrangements were also subject to change, long after separation, as mothers or fathers moved home. For example, Fiona's ex partner had originally taken care of their sons from Wednesday evening until Friday but, over time, this commitment had diminished and eventually ended when he moved home to a new town about twelve miles away

*"He used to live really nearby so I mean that's why I stopped the overnight during the week cos they just had to get up too early you know to get to school....they'd need this and that and they'd have forgotten that and all their coats and shoes and everything would be at his house and he'd never return anything...I thought it was just messing them around"* Fiona

Equally for Simon, currently sharing care and living very close to his ex wife and their daughter, this arrangement was likely to undergo some changes in the near future. He was, at the time of interview, putting his home up for sale in order to release his ex wife from the mortgage so that she could buy a different property with her new partner. Although the relationship remained very amicable Simon was unable to keep his home because,

*"the bank won't give me the mortgage in my name because it goes over past my retirement"* Simon

He was therefore looking for a new home and intended to remain living locally so that the shared care arrangements could continue. This was a source of sadness for Simon as he was very attached to the home plus it provided ideal accommodation for him and space for his daughters to come and stay with him

*“the most stressful part is thinking right I’ve got to sell the house and the house I love, a big house with all these bedrooms, I’ve got to sell the house now maybe. What to do with myself? But I’ve made the decision now I’m going to rent a flat, a two bedroomed flat for a year and just kind of put the money I get from the house which isn’t very much cos I’m going to lose on the house as well, its the first time I’ve lost on a house”* Simon

Providing space for his daughter was his primary concern when thinking about a new home and he has decided that her having a bedroom of her own is essential even if the rental is only short term because *“its a long time in a child’s life isn’t it”*. In this way Simon demonstrates his very close attention to his children’s needs and positions himself as a very involved and attentive father (see Gershuny, 2001). His commitment to maintaining involvement extends also to his step daughter who, although not staying with him regularly, is invited to do so if she wishes. Having the physical space to maintain these relationships is very important to him as he regards this regular overnight contact as a central part of his fathering role and the maintenance of domestic intimacy with his children.

James, the other non resident parent in the study also invokes the importance of time together as a central component of his fathering, drawing on sociological ideas of the connections between involved fathering and intimacy (Dermott, 2003 and 2005). Adapting to the loss of daily time with his sons has been difficult for him and he explains that this feeling was amplified as shortly before separating from his partner he had been made redundant and he had taken on a full time caring role at home whilst his partner worked outside the home. He described how he had found that

*“I actually enjoyed looking after the kids better than my old life”* James

Adapting to the new situation in which he takes care of his sons from 3pm on Fridays until 6.30pm on Saturdays and also on Tuesdays from 3pm until 6.30pm means that

James he feels he misses out on the “little things that happen every day”. This is difficult for him because of his feeling that

*“Its the little things that matter...its the small things that make a meaningful relationship. Erm I don’t see them every day so I don’t get to know the little stories that happen during the day. These are the things you miss out on” James*

These experiences support the suggestion made by Williams (2008) that the fathering role is dictated largely by the circumstances of family life and that fathers, whether living with or separately from their children, have constrained choices in so much as

“Fathers are aware of the existence of ideal types of fatherhood that inform them what they should do but what they actually do is the result of circumstances that, in many ways, they do not choose. Thus, fatherhood is increasingly individualized and, to the extent that fathers are forced to respond to situational circumstances, it is highly reflexive” (Williams, 2008: 490)

#### **4. 10 Temporal challenges in managing family life: what is time?**

As discussed in the preceding section, balancing time and the spaces of daily life was a key challenge in maintaining parental and family relationships for all of the research participants. The following section of the thesis aims to explore the dimensions of time and the challenges managing it can present for those who are parenting after separation or divorce. Time arose as a major theme in the analysis, as participants discussed their lives across multiple temporalities and attempted to co-ordinate their lives in line with the regulation of daily schedules.

Gershuny (2003: 1-2) argues that all of human life relates to rhythms generated by ‘time-givers’, whether as the demands of an employer, the temporal rhythms of sun and moon and the rituals of family life alongside the more ‘objective’ tempo of clock time. For Adam (1998), time is conceptualised as being made up of time frame, temporality, timing, tempo, duration, sequence and temporal modalities to create a ‘timescape’. Time then is experienced on multiple levels through the temporal rhythms of daily life (Southerton, 2006: 436) and there is often conflict between the temporal demands of different aspects of life. In the work of Bourdieu (1977), the passage of time is presented as a central feature of practice, both as a constraint and a resource for social

interaction (Jenkins, 2002). For mothers particularly, there is perceived to be a care time deficit as they attempt to balance their caring responsibilities with the demands of paid employment (Maher, 2009) with this tension likely to be even more pronounced for those parenting alone after a divorce or separation. Empirical findings discussed in this chapter indicate that for both mothers and fathers, and parents with care and non-resident parents alike, there was a powerful sense of relationships with children being mediated by clock time. Separation or divorce meant that time with children needed to be defined, negotiated and shared in new ways. In the presence of ongoing conflict between the parents, negotiating and managing this could represent a key site of tension as notions of what was a 'fair' division of time with the children were bound up with ideas about taking responsibility for the children and the sharing of caring and earning labour.

Managing time as a central aspect of daily life, with competing demands on time was presented as a key challenge by all participants in the study. All participants spoke explicitly and implicitly about time management as a central aspect of their parenting. For some, this challenge was exacerbated by the need to balance complex daily timetables whilst for others, time was experienced as challenging because there was too little stimulation in the day. This was a particular problem for Chloe, a graduate who desperately wanted to work but was currently unable to manage this alongside the care of her four children. All participants had experienced their divorce or separation from their child's other parent both as an event *and* as an ongoing process of negotiation and change that had created additional difficulties for the management of time. Where time was perceived to be short or pressured, managing children's lives across localities and in accordance with the routines of two separate households was often difficult and sometimes fraught with tension. Several parents reported that this was a source of friction and arguments with their ex partner as they attempted to re-negotiate their responsibilities in the immediate aftermath of separation or later as the care needs of their children changed. This had the effect of creating a sense that not only care responsibilities but time itself needed to be shared with the other parent so that both children and parent felt that they were properly involved in each others lives. The temporal qualities of caring and relationship building were also present in feelings of guilt and stress expressed by parents who lived apart from their children or who spent long periods of time at work. For these parents, there was a sense of conceptualising time as a finite resource and needing to balance how this time was spent so that

responsibilities for both earning and caring could be met. The sense that time was something of which there was 'never enough' (Daly, 2001) was felt particularly acutely by those parents who were managing paid work alongside the care of their children.

#### **4.11 Clock time**

Wiggan (2010) suggests that processes of industrialisation have produced a conception of time that is increasingly commodified in line with the demands of the labour market. In these circumstances, clock time, necessary to regulate the working patterns of employees in industrial capitalist modes of production became something which rather than passing, becomes spent (Thompson, 1967: 61). Managing the demands of work time, particularly where they do not fit neatly with children's needs arose as a key theme in the accounts of the research participants. As paid work is frequently characterised by rigid time-space boundaries it is challenging to reconcile this with the rhythms of childcare, school timetables and family provisioning (McKie et al., 2002: 912). Participants reported challenges in finding work that fitted in with times that children were at school, for example because the job required them to be available to start early in the morning or to work into the evening or at the weekend. Some parents, such as Fiona in a job she had held when her children were younger, had managed to negotiate working hours to suit the school day. This had been possible largely due to the understanding of her manager. Other parents, such as Hafsa reported ongoing struggles to find childcare to cover the working times of her shift pattern as discussed in the case study earlier in this chapter.

The increasing flexibilisation of labour markets along with the right to request flexible working could be seen as beneficial to parents as they attempt to balance work and care. However, these changes have disproportionately benefited highly trained and highly skilled workers as firms seek to increase the retention of a skilled workforce (Cawston et al., 2009: 9). For the types of part time and/or low skilled paid work often accessed by lone parents, particularly if they are moving from welfare into paid work, the benefits of flexible working are more difficult to access as the locations and timings of paid work are singular and fixed (McKie et al., 2002: 912). This indicates the ways in which a focus on 'flexibility' in labour market opportunities may hide some of the negative features of insecure employment behind an apparently family friendly, flexible hours veneer. There is some evidence to suggest that synchronising work and family time is more challenging for low paid workers (Warren et al., 2010: 197).

This commodification of time presents particular difficulties for those engaged in caring activity whether or not they are also attempting to manage paid work. This is due to the habitation of multi layered temporalities such as the needs of children which change over time, other elements of the family schedule such as school or childcare and any employment that members of the household undertake. As carers, parents must manage time by creating it in anticipation and preparation for problems that may arise (Wiggan, 2010: 637) whilst the temporal tasks associated with caring need to be considered when managing clock time. Central to this is the need to anticipate contingencies, monitor daily needs and engage in long term planning (McKie et al., 2002: 917). Maher (2009) suggests that temporalities of care are complex and a strategy for managing the conflicting temporalities of work time and care time may be to increase the focus on the cumulative value of the time that is given. The challenges for the parents in the study who were attempting to co-parent were considerable as sharing time as a resource had to be balanced with these conflicting temporalities. The experience of time was varied. For those such as Charlotte, parenting entirely alone due to the complete absence of their child(ren)'s other parent, time was experienced as being in deficit, something which needed to be caught up with in order to reorder the balance between work, care and leisure. For others, such as Chloe who wished to be in paid work but was not able to reconcile her four children's schedules with paid work at present, time hung heavily as she lacked the stimulation she desired from paid work (Brannen, 2005: 117).

For some of the parents in the sample employment decision making had clearly been informed by the shape of policy which formulates entitlement rules around clock time. In particular the number of hours worked per week was a key way in which parents adapted their behaviour to fit with tax credit rules. Working Tax Credit becomes payable at two thresholds: when a lone parent works sixteen hours per week or more with an additional payment made if a lone parent works thirty hours per week or more. Although the 2012 Budget made some changes to the hours thresholds for partnered parents, most significantly an increase in the lower hours threshold to 24, and introducing a rule that in households with two working parents at least one must be working 16 hours or more, the qualifying hours for lone parents remained unchanged (HM Treasury, 2012). Fiona described how in the past she had negotiated these rules by patching together two or more part time jobs in order to meet the sixteen hour threshold. She was in receipt of JSA at the time of interview and faced considerable

difficulties in seeking new work that provided enough hours to qualify for Working Tax Credits which she regarded as a very necessary to boost her income. In particular she identified the problems she faced in applying for jobs that did not specify the number of hours per week she would be expected to work, or when the work would take place. She explained that it was common for job vacancy adverts to specify that applicants "*must be flexible...[but] you just can't be flexible really*". She described this type of flexible work as constituting a large proportion both of the type of vacancies advertised in her local Jobcentre and of the types of jobs which she had the skills and experience needed in order to apply,

*" like in the Jobcentre every job is you look at is like kind of two days over seven but that's all it will, I mean it won't specify any further...you know that might be Saturday and Sunday, it might be Monday and Tuesday"* Fiona

This reflects the ways in which policy which is supply side driven and does not account for demand side factors such as the barriers to work that are often faced by lone parents, especially in relation to transport and childcare (Perkins, 2007: 16). Fiona, keen to find work, explained that she had telephoned to enquire about several of the jobs she had seen advertised to see if she would be able to manage the required hours. However, she had felt that this created a poor impression of herself as a potential employee as by asking for special consideration before she had even applied for the job she was making it clear that she would not be willing to be flexible in employment. Not only did this mode of working present challenges when considering how she would balance her working and caring time, there was also a risk of being in a precarious employment situation which, as the only earner in the household, she was concerned about. Those employed in irregular or casual work, are classified in employment law as 'worker' rather than 'employee'. This means an associated reduction in rights and status in employment law, most significantly that the employer is under no obligation to offer work and the worker is not obliged to accept it and also that any written contract with the organisation describes the working relationship as either 'casual', 'freelance', 'zero hours' or 'as required' (TUC, 2011). Fiona considered that work of this nature would be especially difficult to manage, both because of the problems of not being able to plan ahead for childcare, but also because of the lack of job and income security. As the sole earner in the household, having a precarious income was very challenging. Fiona feels strongly that employers could do more to retain lone parents as employees, suggesting

that their experiences of managing a home and childcare as the only adult at home could make them capable and reliable employees.

Another parent, Jenny, had specifically sought work with a thirty hour contract as this made her eligible for the enhanced rate of Working Tax Credit and thus increased the financial benefits of work, even though this reduced the time that she had available for her two children. Although she indicated that when she had started this job the trade off between extra hours and increased income had seemed worthwhile, in retrospect she did not feel that the small financial benefit was worth the additional pressure of managing a thirty hour working week. Along with commuting, taking and collecting her younger to and from school and managing her domestic responsibilities she felt that this was too long a working week. At the time of the first interview Jenny was beginning to think about looking for a new job as her fixed term contract would shortly be ending, and was hoping to find a part time job with reduced hours so that she could be more available for her children.

#### **4.12 Family time**

Spending 'quality time' with children was presented by all the participants as an important part of their parenting and of family life. As Daly (2001) has noted, the idea of quality time is bound up with a romanticised and idealised image of family life in which time spent together serves to create a sense of collective wellbeing: the notion of 'quality' can be both descriptive and prescriptive. Creating family wellbeing was, for those parents managing complex or difficult circumstances after separation, both a key aim and a challenge, especially if they were struggling to cope with the new shape of their family post separation. The sharing of time together and time without activity for simply being together is seen to be the key feature of quality time (Sullivan, 1996). Urry (2002: 262) suggests that quality time can be associated with an obligation to spend time with family or friends but, in common with the findings of Southerton (2006: 448), quality time was conceptualised by participants as time spent playing with children, going on family outings or simply spending time together away from the distractions of work or other commitments. For participants in this study, just being in the physical space of the home together was not sufficient to constitute family time, there needed to be space to focus on giving children attention. As well as co-presence constituting a central element of some of the tasks of care-giving (McKie et al., 2002), parenting was interpreted by participants as demanding an element of quality in the time spent together



too. Amongst the rush and scheduling of daily life, participants spoke of the pockets of time in which they enjoyed their children's company and family relationships were developed. In this way, quality time was conceptualised as being both about the enjoyment of time spent together in the present and as the creation of family memories which were often connected to parents own childhood experiences (Daly, 2001). Chris, spoke of the way in which he and his children had fun together saying "*they love to wrestle*" and described the simple pleasure of days out together at the park. Although money was very tight in his household he emphasised the importance of spending time with his sons as a key part of nurturing them and being a 'good' parent. He also described his plans to take his sons on a holiday to the seaside, recalling the enjoyment he also had in these types of holidays as they provided a link between his own childhood memories and those he hoped to create for his sons.

Other parents also focussed on the creation of shared time and memories as central to their experiences of family life. Susan is very clear that despite having worked in a demanding and full time job throughout her son's childhood, time was always devoted to her son at the weekend and in the school holidays, describing this as precious "*mummy and [son] time*". Sometimes, the amounts of time spent together in this way were small but were focussed around a shared interest or television programme. For example Jenny describes spending time with her two children enjoying watching *The Simpsons* as important because it connected the family group in spite of the large age gap and differences of interest between her two children. These activities were of central importance in creating space outside of the doing of family life in order to just be together. For parents who experienced significant time pressure such as Hafsa, not having time to, for example, sit and watch television with her daughters was presented as a significant difficulty in balancing family needs with the demands of paid work and study. This created tension for Hafsa as she was aware that spending time, and particularly that which could be seen as 'quality time' was a key symbol of family life (Daly, 2001) Not having this added to her concerns that as a lone mother, she was not providing a 'proper' family life for her daughters. Diane, managing a similarly complex daily schedule in which she balanced paid work, study, child care and commuting, described tearfully her fear that she did not have time to do anything "*properly*" as she struggled to manage the demands on her energy and her time.

Some parents noted the importance of their own childhood experiences in shaping their views about family life. For example, Sarah described how she and her siblings had spent a lot of time alone without adult supervision whilst her parents were at work and that this had contributed to her own decision to be present in the home as much as possible whilst her own daughter was growing up. Sarah laughingly describes her home life as “*me, my daughter and the cat*” and outlines the small ways in which she creates a sense of security and warmth in the home. She does this through the establishment of shared routines around mealtimes, her daughter’s evening bath and a story in bed. In this way, time made available to children can be seen to be a central signifier of care taking place whereas the earning function was often more detached and more difficult to conceptualise as being about caring. In this way co-presence as an indicator of caring illuminates the complex relationship between temporality, space and activity in family life. In a sense, care is assumed to be taking place only when carer and cared for are in shared spaces and this reinforces the (often gendered) distinction between caring for and caring about (Noddings, 1984) discussed in the literature where care and financial provision are seen as distinct activities.

#### **4.13 Managing time as a non resident parent**

For the two non resident fathers in the study time was a major factor in the way they felt that their relationships were defined. For James, attempting to share care with an ex partner with whom the relationship was difficult, time with his sons was highly regulated by clock time and when asked about his parenting in the interview he described in some detail the schedule he had arranged with his ex partner.

*“I take them Fridays from school, 3 o’clock, and drop them off 6.30 Saturday evenings...I also take them Tuesday from school until bed time which is 6.30...the reason I don’t take them more is because I’m looking for a full time job. If I take on a full time job then I would not be able to see them on a Tuesday night and I wouldn’t collect them from school on a Friday and it would mean the children would be just getting used to a routine where I was taking care of them half the time and...then it would mean I’d have to stop that and that would be disruptive to the children’s routine”*

James

Managing his sons routine is important to James, and as he describes his concerns about managing potential future employment it is clear that he needs to consider both the

present and future when making arrangements with his ex partner and in managing his search for paid work. What is particularly interesting in his account is the way in which he presents his concerns about the relationship between present and future care arrangements and his employment. Although not in paid work at the time of the interview, his identity remained primarily bound up with his former and hopeful future identity as worker and family breadwinner to the extent that even though he was *available* to spend more time caring for his sons, he chose not to do this because he expected to return to work full time.

The other non resident parent in the sample, Simon, enjoyed an amicable co-parenting relationship with his ex wife and felt it was important to maintain his involvement with the everyday caring work in order to share both this and the 'quality time' with his ex wife. Although he also discussed his time with his child with reference to clock time, noting that at present *"she comes to me on Friday...goes home about 6 o'clock on Saturday"* these arrangements were fluid and adaptable to the needs of his daughter and the work demands of both his ex wife and himself. As they had always shared her care whilst both working full time Simon and his ex wife were accustomed to negotiating their responsibilities and their daily schedules and had continued to do this after separation. By approaching their co-parenting in this way, they were able to manage the complex and challenging nature of parenting across multiple locations and in accordance with the temporal rhythms of their lives. A key feature that Simon identified as important in making this co-parenting possible was that both he and his ex wife were employed in occupations that allowed some flexibility. As employees of the local authority they were able to use employee benefits such as flexi time to fit their working hours around their caring responsibilities. Simon also felt that the fact his employer had a policy of supporting shared care was a benefit to him.. Recalling a time when his daughter and step daughter had both been unwell with chicken pox one after the other, he explains how he and his ex wife had been able to manage this

*"so for two weeks both me and her mum were like basically like taking two days off here and then have two days at work and then two days off again and that went on for about three weeks really with 'em"* Simon

A key difference in these two accounts was that James' relationship with his ex wife was still fraught with difficulty and so he felt that firm timetabled arrangements

represented some certainty in his relationship with his sons. Simon, in a very cooperative relationship with his ex wife, was able to allow this flexibility because there was a shared responsibility and shared trust between himself and his ex wife in respect of their parenting. Although elements of his separation from his ex wife had been extremely difficult and he mourned the loss of the co-residential relationship with his child their shared commitment to making a positive future for their child informed their daily arrangements.

#### **4.14 Future-time: aspirations and making plans**

The importance of future plans is clear in the telling of each participants life story and each reaches beyond their current identity and situation into what might become in the future thus creating a narrative for their life story (Adam and Groves, 2007: 151). In this way we can see the ways in which longitudinal research is particularly powerful in exploring family life and relationships in examining ‘future-creating actions’ (Adam, 2008: 11) that make up our own past, present and future as well as those of others (ibid.). The stories that participants told were woven from their reports of how things had been in the past, their interpretation of these events, discussion of the present and their plans and hopes for the future. As the focus of the interview was around their experiences as separated or divorced parents most participants reflected on their past relationships and the impact these had had on their lives. The way their relationship with their child(ren)’s other parent impacted on their present circumstances and future plans was discussed in Chapter 3. An additional concern for some participants, with the issue most pressing for those who were in their forties or fifties at the time of interview, were centred around future financial status. Not having, or not being able to afford a family home was expressed as a concern along with concerns about managing after retirement (see also Campbell, 2008). Those who had been outside of the paid labour market for long periods of time whilst caring for their children were aware of the impact that this would continue to have into the future, with some never expecting to reach the point of feeling financially comfortable. Whilst the younger parents were also committed to improving their income in the future, those who were in their twenties or early thirties, such as Hafsa and Fiona, felt that there would be time to do this even if it they had to wait until after the children were grown up to establish themselves in their careers.

Beyond the daily routines in which clock and care time were balanced, participants spoke of time in a variety of ways. Many of the participants spoke in some detail of plans for the future and framed this as being part of the family project in which children also played a part in working towards parents' future employment. This could be for example, older children helping to care for or entertain younger children to enable parents to manage study. The ways in which an engagement by a lone parent with the paid labour market involves the wider family has been conceptualized by Ridge and Millar (2011: 89) as the 'family-work project'. Acknowledging the inter-relationships between past events and future plans was central to the ways in which participants shared their life stories and future hopes for themselves and their children. This is of particular importance when considering the lived experiences of divorced and separated parents as the ending of their relationship represents an unanticipated and unplanned event that has significantly changed the course of their family life.

In this sample only Susan indicated that she had expected to raise her child alone and that she had actively chosen this path for herself and her son. All other participants had expected to raise their child(ren) in a cohabiting and/or married relationship and so the way in which the separation had changed their anticipated future added an additional dimension to the way in which this future is planned for and experienced. For some, particularly those whose former relationship had been marked by high levels of conflict, gaining the freedom to take charge of decision making for themselves and their children outside of the marriage or co-habiting relationship, was regarded positively. However, for others 'taking charge of life' in this way was regarded and experienced as risky as they needed to make significant changes to the way they managed and planned their lives (Giddens, 1991). Unplanned events or changes in relationships that had not been anticipated or chosen (for example in cases where the decision to separate had been made by the other partner) had, in these participants stories, altered the expected trajectory of their lifecourse. Experiencing the loss of an intended or expected future in this way presents a new balance of risks and opportunities that need to be reflexively negotiated (ibid.) a process which could go on for a prolonged time. Contrary to the findings of Shirani and Henwood (2011: 60) who found that the separated fathers in their study adopted a strategy of not planning for the future after the interruption of and subsequent change in their planned lifecourse, the parents in this study continued to plan for the future, often describing quite detailed plans, especially in terms of their future employment. This suggests that, unlike the non resident fathers in Shirani and

Henwood's (2011) study, who used non-planning as a coping strategy, the presence of children in the home of the resident parents in the current sample may be a key driver towards a future focussed attitude.

Despite what were, for some participants, very challenging circumstances most had a broadly optimistic view of their future, citing plans to change job or move to a new home. Ambitions to buy a home when this could be afforded were particularly important to those who were living in private rented accommodation. The three participants living in social housing made no mention of future plans to buy property. This may be due to the favourable conditions of their tenancies in terms of security of tenure and their relatively low rental costs when compared to the private rented market. The standard use of assured shorthold tenancies in the private rental sector introduced by the Housing Act (1996) gives only very limited security: tenants cannot be evicted in the first six months and thereafter only two months notice needs to be given to end the tenancy unless a new agreement is signed (Communities and Local Government, 2007). For Local Authority tenants, after successful completion of a one year introductory tenancy, a secure tenancy is automatically granted which gives the tenant the permanent right to occupy the home provided the terms of the tenancy agreement are met. It seems likely that the difference in security may impact on decisions whether or not to pursue future home ownership. It is interesting to note however, that Susan living in a privately rented home after a number of years as a home owner, found that the flexibility that this provided to her was welcome. She was making plans to start post-graduate study she was able to consider making an application to universities across the country as she was not tied to a location by home ownership. As her son had now left school and was attending a further education college, this flexibility offered her a new sense of freedom, which she welcomed.

Regardless of current financial circumstances, improving the family finances in the future was presented as a significant hope by all participants and a major reason for engaging in training, education and paid work. Parents in the sample came from a broad spectrum of economic backgrounds. For example, one mother had bought a detached home in an affluent suburb without a mortgage after receiving her divorce settlement, whilst another father's entire income was made up of welfare payments with no maintenance received from his sons mother. A common experience however, was that all felt that money was tight in their household. In fact, some of the parents who

expressed most difficulty and dissatisfaction with their financial circumstances were those with relatively higher incomes and material standards of living. For these parents the adjustment to managing as a lone parent had been a more significant change than for those who were accustomed to managing a limited income before separation or divorce and acted as a key driver towards a desire to improve their financial situation. Fiona and Chloe, for example, had lived on a low income throughout their children's lives and so were accustomed to managing a budget, having developed strategies for coping such as never getting in to debt and managing children's material expectations. As Chloe says *"I'm quite good at shopping for bargains in terms of food...I can make £80 stretch a long way in Morrisons!"*

The only parent who did not discuss future plans for employment, training or a desire to move to a different home was Debbie. The only resident parent in the sample to have continued to live in the family home after separation, Debbie had also continued to work in a job that she had done for a number of years that she enjoyed and paid well, as she had done before separating from her husband. Research by Ridge and Millar (2011) suggests that sustaining previous employment after a separation is not always manageable with half the women in their study reporting having left a job at or around the time of their separation. Only Debbie and Simon had continued to work in their previous employment after separation, and although Simon was currently living in the former marital home he was making plans to sell and move into rented accommodation.

Retaining both the former marital home and her job contributed to Debbie's experience as the most settled of all the participants. Unlike other participants who needed to secure new housing, leave positions of employment or make a claim for welfare benefits, after separation she was able to maintain continuity in many of her own and her children's daily routines. Although not having support locally from her own family who lived some considerable distance away, she enjoyed the support of her ex father in law and numerous friends. These factors, along with having both secure housing and employment and a steady and reliable arrangement with her ex husband in respect of the care of the children and financial maintenance payments, were all key factors in the ongoing stability of her family circumstances. Although there were elements of Debbie's life that were challenging, in particular managing a complex schedule of work, childcare, school and children's activities she had strategies in place for managing these demands on her time and coped well with them. Her ex husbands ability and

willingness to schedule his own employment in order to continue to care for the children in the early mornings on Debbie's work days was a significant factor in enabling her to balance employment with being the resident parent. It is interesting however, to note that although Debbie's ex husband is one of the most actively involved non resident parents discussed by participants in the sample, she does not consider that he is properly fulfilling his caring responsibilities. She comments that she has had to work hard to get him to continue with daily care responsibilities and that she feels he could and should do more. Debbie's ability to manage a complex employment and childcare situation suggests that challenging practical circumstances in terms of time management can be ameliorated by networks of care and support. However, it needs to be recognised that in order to provide this support others need to have the time available in order that they can do so and without the practical support of local friends and family sustaining paid work could be a real temporal challenge.

In the accounts of the other participants in the study, it was the sense of security and permanence around paid work, income and home that Debbie was experiencing that they were attempting to work towards. Levels of stress were often exacerbated by concerns about future and present security. The desire for stable employment and housing was seen as a central way of achieving a more settled life and establishing a less vulnerable economic and social positioning. In their research Ridge and Millar (2011: 94) identified a desire for security as a key motivation for engagement with the paid labour market with secure housing seen as an aspirational goal, indicating to the outside world that a level of success had been achieved. However, being a lone parent home owner was not straightforward for the participants in the study with the need for permanent or more secure housing felt most acutely by those who felt that their housing situation was insecure either because they lived in private rented accommodation on a short term tenancy or because they had serious concerns about their ability to continue meeting the mortgage payments on an owned home. The financial commitment of buying a home with a mortgage on a single income was experienced as risky especially when employment was part time or insecure. Diane, for example discusses the possibility of needing to sell her home in the near future due to her money worries and Simon has already taken steps towards putting his home on the market. In Diane's case, the mortgage payments had previously been manageable on her income from part time work and maintenance payments from her ex husband. However, the maintenance payments had reduced and become unreliable after he remarried and had another child



and she was no struggling to maintain her financial commitments. Fiona's need to find new employment was amplified by her concerns about meeting the mortgage payments for her home. Although it is probable that Fiona would be eligible to receive Mortgage Interest Support she was reluctant to do so. Her concerns lay in managing the balance between current financial hardship and future financial security and she was worried that making a claim now may have a negative impact when she needed to negotiate a remortgage when her current deal ended,

*"I don't want my mortgage lender knowing I haven't got a job! [laughs]"* Fiona

Nevertheless, home ownership was a key aspiration largely connected with a wish to establish a permanent family home. Avoiding the insecurity of assured shorthold tenancies had been a key consideration for Sarah and Hafsa who had both purchased a home and moved to more affordable areas before embarking on their courses of education to avoid the need to live in rented accommodation which was regarded by most participants as undesirable. Amy, living in private rented accommodation on a short term tenancy considered it to be an unsuitable form of housing for a family and spoke of the poor quality of housing that was available in her area.

In contrast, Chris, a local authority tenant, expressed no future plans to move from his home. Although he acknowledged that it was not in a desirable area, it was located on one of the 'better' streets of a large inner city local authority estate. He had good relationships with his neighbours and as his father lived nearby and he could walk easily to the school and children's centre nursery that his sons attended, he intended to remain here. As he had previously been homeless, his home was a significant symbol of security and he placed high value on the permanence it provided for himself and his sons. Likewise, Chloe, also a local authority tenant expressed no wish to move home. This may be influenced by the security of tenure and affordable rents in the social housing sector which provided them with a different level of security from those in the private rental market and allowed the permanence of place that was desired. Both Chloe and Chris did, however, discuss plans to return to college or university and train for a specific job which they perceived to be well paid at some point in the future. As the two families living on the lowest incomes of all parents in the sample, making steps towards paid work were presented as important ambitions for their futures and indicated their

commitment to a future focussed on making progression towards a better life for themselves and their children.

Some of the participants had very clear plans of how they hoped to improve their circumstances in the future and had already begun to make steps towards accomplishing these ambitions by attending university. This was perceived to be an essential step in order to increase their chances of acquiring well paid work and in this respect it is clear that these parents had a perception of the importance of higher education in accessing better remunerated employment. Several parents spoke of a wish to engage in a 'career' rather than a 'job' with higher education seen as the key route into well paid work and a worthwhile use of time now in order to improve future prospects. A career was conceptualised as being a job that offered security, and was linked to particular skills and qualifications. It was important also for participants to set an example to their children by working towards future goals, and this was another clear motivation for engaging in future focussed strategies even if they proved challenging in the short term.

There was no guarantee of secure employment however, with one parent, Jenny, having already completed a degree as a mature student whilst her children were at school, facing the end of a fixed term contract and unemployment shortly after the time of the first interview. Although she experienced a real sense of achievement in successfully completing her degree course, this was, by the time of interview touched with the knowledge that this had not had the significant impact of improving her job prospects as she had hoped. Her lack of geographic mobility meant that her job search area was restricted and this impacted on the career benefits that her education had given her.

Another parent who had chosen an educational route was Amy, who, wishing to move into an area of work for which an undergraduate degree and a Masters degree in a specific subject was needed, had returned to study at some considerable cost. This was a particularly difficult route for her to take as she was ineligible for student financial support as she had already received financial assistance to study for a first degree some years ago. Her decision to manage this difficult financial situation was presented as being a key element of long term plans including achieving financial independence, which was especially important for Amy as financial difficulties in the form of her ex husbands gambling problem had been a major factor contributing to the breakdown of her marriage. Research by Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey (2009) adds to this analysis in

suggesting that mature learners with caring responsibilities make decisions about their education that are informed by a broader set of considerations than simply economic benefits. This is supported by my findings here, where, although future career and thus greater potential income is presented as a key driver, other considerations are made too. These included decisions about where to study being informed by children's social and educational needs alongside an assessment of the opportunities and risks associated with studying. So, the time needed to complete a course of study both in present terms of the time committed each week to studying and the time out of the labour market and the accumulation of debt were assessed in order to calculate the potential risks of taking this route (Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey, 2009). Alongside this, considerations of which university to apply to, the distance from home and time commitment of the course were made by participants when assessing whether undertaking study would be manageable. For example, Chloe, keen to undertake a PGCE course at some point in the future, had already made the decision to only apply for a place at a university in her home city, so that she would not have to find the time and money needed to manage commuting to another city. Hafsa, undertaking a medical degree and commuting to her university, described how despite the very heavy workload she was able to manage her studies as she was able to study at home, in the evening when her children were sleeping. Although this enabled her to manage her children's needs and the demands of her course, it did mean that she had no time available for herself and she described being frequently exhausted. She felt that the potential for a rewarding high status career was worth the trade off of limited time in the present although she identified that working at home could be experienced as a double edged sword making the negotiation of work and non work time blurred and difficult to negotiate (Brannen, 2005:116).

#### **4.15 Chapter conclusions**

This chapter has discussed some of the key practical constraints that were reported by parents as informing their employment and caring decision making. Integrating these parts of their lives represented significant challenges for the parents in the sample and these have been explored here. Some of the challenges revealed were of a practical nature, literally how to manage the demands of paid employment alongside the demands of family life and caring for children. Mobility and access to childcare represent the two key constraining factors on women's labour market activity patterns (Murray, 2008). Others were associated with individual participants moral frameworks and the ways in

which these were sometimes incompatible with the requirements of employment focused welfare policies. This suggests that, rather than a simple calculation of economic rationality, parents must make decisions informed by a more complex practical and moral framework (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Carling, Duncan and Edwards, 2002). The research findings discussed here would support the assertions of this earlier research, finding that the reports of the participants in this study tell a much more complex and nuanced story than one of simple mathematics.

For parents, geographies of care are informed by local cultures of parenting and expectations relating to employment participation and good parenting (Barker, 2010). The findings presented here support those of other research which indicate that combining paid work with caring creates complex time-space needs and constraints that can be affected by access to and the reliability of the available transport options (Jain et al., 2011). One of the key practical challenges described has been in the management of daily lives across multiple locations, especially when journeys needed to be undertaken on public transport. Parents who had access to a car or had managed to place tight boundaries around the spaces of daily life, reported more straightforward experiences in combining earning and caring responsibilities. The presence of support from their child's other parent or a wider network of family and friends was a key factor in enabling daily routines to be managed. When families had moved home after separation, the lack of this local network of support and friendship could present a key challenge. Decision making about location was not always straightforward. For example, the descriptions of Charlotte, Jenny and Chloe of the distances their children travelled to school indicate that they had favoured maintaining continuity in their children's education and social networks over practical concerns about managing travel. Coordinating and managing travel across the spaces of everyday life highlights the challenge of managing time (Jain et al., 2011). For many of the participants, managing their responsibilities not only within the boundaries of physical locations, but also within and across time arose as a key element of their negotiation of their daily lives.

This chapter has also identified the ways in which the multi-layered concept and experience of time informed and shaped the lives of the participants, noting the ways in which time, space, place and family relationships are linked in highly complex ways. Becoming a divorced or separated parent had, for most, represented an unplanned for event, which required the re-negotiation of family responsibilities in the present and

changes to plans for the future. Sharing care responsibilities, resourcing the household and establishing future security could be challenging in the face of the rigidity of clock time, daily routines and employment or welfare requirements. Some parents had responded to these challenges by making plans or taking action to engage in education or training in the hope that this would lead to greater financial security in the future. Others, already in paid work, negotiated complicated and challenging daily routines in order to ensure that their children's care needs and timetables were attended to whilst they met the demands of their employment. For non resident parents too, time represented a key challenge, as they parented from a separate location and often within a limited timeframe. The differing experiences of James and Simon illuminate the significant challenges of being an active parent in a space that is restricted by both clock time and location and the importance of relationships with former partners in mediating time spent with children. In the chapter that follows attention is turned to developing understandings of the ways in which the research participants manage and negotiate practical considerations whilst also trying to behave in a way that fits with their morals, preferences and ideas about being a good parent.

## Chapter Five.

### 5.1 Being a parent: managing family life

For the parents in the study the conflict between their desire to care for their children and the need to resource the household presented a key challenge. The need to discharge these two responsibilities simultaneously provides some significant temporal and practical challenges that are explored in more detail in other chapters. The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which ideas about what it means to be a ‘good’ parent influence the ways in which the parents in the sample talked about these decisions and the ways in which their ideas about their parenting role had changed after separation or divorce. Becoming a separated parent offered an opportunity for parents to reflect on the ways in which they manage their family life. For some parents in the study, this change was preceded by a period of dissatisfaction with how employment and care were managed in the pre separation family. Not all of these parents reported positive change after separating and all reflected upon the challenges and constraints that impacted on their ability to be the kind of parent that they wished to be.

Parental decision making has a moral quality (May, 2008; Smart and Neale, 1999) and so reflects the way that these moral decisions impact on the way people ‘do’ family life (Morgan, 1996). Finch and Mason (1993) recognised that the performance of family life is negotiated contextually and this can be identified in the experiences of the participants in this research. Whilst all strive to be what they conceived of as ‘good parents’ to their children this was clearly contextual and needed to be performed within the boundaries of their lived experience. Actual behaviour should not then be taken as evidence of a particular orientation, although it is important to recognise that there is a clear relationship between orientations and decision making (Finch and Mason, 1992: 14). According to May (2000: 473), a range of moral approaches influenced primarily by social norms and the ethic of caring for children inform a variety of models of ‘good’ motherhood. So decisions need to be made that take account of what people wish to do and what they feel they ought to do (see Duncan et al., 2003) and research indicates that these decisions can leave mothers feeling stressed and guilty about the choices they make (Duncan et al., 2003: 325; Sutherland: 2010; Yerkes et al., 2010: 422). Fathers too may find that awareness of different types of fatherhood informs them of what they *should* do whereas what they *actually* do is the result of circumstances outside of their choosing (Williams, 2008: 490 emphasis in original). This conflict is likely to be intensified for fathers living apart from their children after a separation or divorce, and,

in this sample, both non resident fathers speak of the difficulties of being a parent from a position of physical distance. The focus of these concerns lies in their understanding of good fatherhood as being about physical presence in the child's daily life. James points out that this is one of the key challenges of being a non resident parent, and this is supported by findings from other research projects (Dermott, 2008: 117). Simon benefits from a very amicable relationship with his ex wife and both are committed to ensuring his continued presence as an active and involved father. So, unlike James, he does not report finding that his fathering is mediated by an ex partner who is hostile to his continued involvement. However, he too has experienced the difficulties of maintaining a parental relationship at a distance and engages with a number of practical strategies to sustain the caring that is so important to the kind of father he aims to be. These strategies are exemplified in the following quotation where he discusses how the practical nature of the care he provides for his daughter both asserts his position as caring father whilst also affirming the shared nature of his parental responsibilities with his child's mother,

*"I'm with her one day a week or two days a week and its easy for me to say "oh yeah, we'll do all the fun things. I know! Lets go and do all these fantastic things!" and her mum's kind of having to bath her and feed her and get her clothes pressed and everything else and "oh I'll go to my dad's cos my dad's fun"" Simon*

Simon presents here an ethic of responsibility in which he sees respecting and maintaining a good working relationship with his daughter's mother as a key part of being a good father. As his employment allows for some flexibility he maintains his caring responsibilities hoping that this will help him to avoid some of the difficulties often associated with being a non resident parent such as a lack of involvement in the minutiae of every day events and routines (Dermott, 2008: 117). Simon's approach differs considerably from that described by mothers in the sample who largely report that ex partners and husbands lack this type of involvement in the daily care of their children. Indeed, Amy identifies a very similar list of domestic and care tasks when describing the types of activity that her ex husband does not engage in,

*"I have been solely looking after their washing, their ironing, their getting ready, their brushing their teeth, their having a bath. All of these. He doesn't have the children overnight so I'm a permanent babysitter for my children do he can have a night life*

*and...the fun and I'm in a corner with the responsibility. But he's using the fact of taking the children to school as being where I am asking too much of him!" Amy*

The contrast between these two comments illuminates not only the practical challenges that can arise when caring is not shared, but the negative impact that this can have on the relationship between the parents. So caring is not just about undertaking tasks to meet care needs, but a central part of nurturing ongoing relationships within the family.

## **5.2 Working and caring: negotiating a balance**

Increasing expectations that parenting can be combined with the care of children and that the mothers of young children will engage in paid work represent shifting norms (Irwin, 2004: 1.9) and mean that consideration of whether to be an at home or working parent is made. For mothers in particular this decision impacts on the construction of their identity, as either mother or worker and also places them spatially, either at home or at work (Dillaway and Pare, 2008: 438). The challenges of combining work and care are intensified by the lack of work-life balance policies, and can lead to the placing of unrealistic demands on parents who are attempting to combine employment with child caring (Yerkes et al., 2010: 416). Ba' (2010) has argued that reconciling work and family is an area in which the practical needs of children must be treated alongside emotions and loyalties. Therefore the complexity of individual experiences and circumstance need to be taken into account in order to understand how, and indeed if, successful balancing can be achieved.

In this research only one parent in the sample had never lived with her son's other parent. All other participants had spent time living with their child(ren) and partner before separation and so part of the process of separation had involved a renegotiation of parental duties and responsibilities often also involving a change in employment status. Although all parents in the sample recognised that resourcing the household was a part of their parental responsibilities, all emphasised the need to balance this with the care of their children. Rather than becoming easier as children grew older, in actuality balancing became more complex and contested as children grew older and parents needed to assess their child's changing needs and balance this with the economic needs of the household and the demands of paid work. In response to vignettes as well as reflecting on their own circumstances, it was common for parents to acknowledge that older children may not be mature enough to be left alone at home whilst parents were



out at work or that it may not be appropriate to expect them to do this even if they were capable. These responses indicate beliefs about what it means to be a 'good parent' and about childhood more generally. Children being in need of time, care and attention is linked to ideas about childhood as a period of dependency and expecting children to care for themselves, being at home along after school, preparing meals and caring for siblings was deemed inappropriate by the majority of parents. The age at which they thought this was acceptable was generally three to four years after childcare provision effectively ends.

One parent, Chris, living on a low income social housing estate on the edge of the city expressed additional concerns about the safety of children, indicating that he believes the street is an unsafe place for children to be unsupervised. In this approach to parenthood an active and protective role is emphasised, a theme also taken up by other parents who described keeping children safe from potential harm as a central parental duty. Harm was conceptualised in a variety of ways, with emotional nurturing seen as a key component of parenting and of particular importance for children who had experienced a parental separation. As well as managing the practical tasks of daily life, time also needed to be found for listening to and caring for children's emotional needs. These needs were largely unpredictable, with Fiona noting that being present after school was a key time for talking with children and she felt that being available in this way for her two sons was a central part of being a good mother and sustaining her family life.

### **5.3 Commitment to career**

The mother who had been a lone parent for most of her son's life demonstrated the greatest commitment to career, perhaps owing to her always having held primary responsibility for resourcing the family. She demonstrates a number of the characteristics associated with Hakim's (2000) 'work-centred' ideal-type in theoretical conception of preferences as a key indicator of employment behaviour. None of the other parents in the sample could be said to fit with Hakim's (2000) home-centred type although some were indeed home centred in terms of the the practical nature of their every day lives. It is important to distinguish here between the practical impact of the spatial location of parenthood and a preference or orientation. Several mothers in my

sample spoke of being physically located within the home as being a result of their childcaring responsibilities rather than due to a significant desire to be a home based parent. Some described the intensity of their parental role as being challenging and, in some cases, oppressive. Using Hakim's typology then most could be said to be adaptive, wishing to combine work with parenthood and demonstrating an interest in work but not totally committed to a career. This was especially the case where there was perceived to be a potential conflict between the demands of employment and the ways in which they wished to care for their children. With the notable exception of Chris, a resident father committed to caring for his sons at home full time, all of the parents in the sample stated that would have either have engaged with employment (if they were currently not working) or would have worked more hours in the presence of more childcare options.

It is important when using Hakim's typologies to inform analysis of the ways in which divorced and separated parents demonstrate their commitment to paid work to recognise that they are operating from within a highly constrained position owing to their position as the sole adult in the household. In order to appreciate the complex relationships between choice, needs and preference a more nuanced approach is necessary. Not only is the very concept of preference and thus 'choice' problematic due to the inference that it is somehow 'free' rather than contextual or relational (Smart and Shipman, 2004: 493) but Gilbert (2008: 36) argues that "preferences are wants ordered according to how much they are favoured at the time choices have to be made". Thus it is suggested that practical constraints at the moment of decision making impact strongly on whether wants are acted upon. 'Wants' then can be seen as ideals that are limited by the day to day realities of family life. Therefore it is more accurate to think about the decision making of the parents in the sample as a process of balancing, rather than the enactment of preference. The different approaches and strategies for balancing responsibilities can best be understood as existing along a continuum between a strong affiliation for employment and a preference for home based care. This has previously been conceptualised by Ba' in research with partnered and middle class parents (2010 and 2011) as an emotional focus on a particular point on an integration-separation continuum. Those who see family and work as different spheres feel emotionally close to the family, whilst integrating individuals do not experience work and family as contrasting spheres, defining their identity through work but remaining emotionally close to the family. I suggest then that those parents positioned towards the centre of the

continuum offer potential to understand the degree of conflict that can occur when attempts to balance and/or practical constraints enforce a position or choices that are not preferred. As Glover (2002) has argued, a 'balance model' which takes account of cultural, institutional and structural factors offers greater recognition of the importance of retaining balance in the household than explanations based on a dual role theory which delineates between domestic and paid labour.

Unlike the partnered mothers who form the subject of Hakim's (2000) theorising, it may be that rather than prioritising a work centred or home centred parenting position, lone parents experience very powerful practical constraints which significantly impact on the freedom of decision making in this area. Many of the parents in the study who were trying to balance paid work and/or study with the care of their children describe this as a juggling act. Both Chloe and Fiona had left courses of higher education because they could not balance the demands of the course with the care of their children in a way that was acceptable to them and several others described this balancing as seriously challenging. Balancing the demands of activity outside of the home with child care is challenging for all parents partnered or not. Research evidence suggests that sharing care with a residential partner can be central to attempts to balance home and work life and the absence of this support, even for partnered parents, can make combining the two problematic (Yerkes et al., 2010: 421-422). Likewise, McRae's (2003) analysis of longitudinal data found no support for Hakim's (2000) contention that women have genuine unconstrained choices in how to live their lives (McRae, 2003: 318). For lone parents these difficulties can be further intensified with a preference for paid work possibly constrained by a lack of childcare availability and a preference for home centred parenting constrained by a financial need to engage with paid work. Exemplifying this position in the present sample is Fiona, who wishes to engage in full time professional work but has postponed the realisation of this ambition until her children have left home because of her need and desire to be present in the home to care for them. These constraints are not limited to lone parents with Crompton and Harris (1998) reporting that similar sets of constraints exist for partnered mothers too. A key tension exists not only in practical terms for the parents in the present sample but also in terms of the way they perceive themselves as parents. As Glover (2002) identified the balancing these roles as both worker and as parent involves a complex interplay of structural factors and individual agency with balance an object of their decision making.

## **5.4 Parenting, the home and domesticity**

How parents perceive their responsibilities is clearly impacted by ideas about childhood and the connection between childhood and home is highly significant. Childhood has become increasingly domesticated, with children's emotional and social development seen as being best accomplished within the home and in the care of their mother (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 276-7). 'Traditional' ideals of motherhood are thus seen as being about presence in the home (Boris, 1994) and so are particularly connected with middle class ideals around married parenthood, with a male breadwinner pattern of household resourcing. Prior to the industrialisation of labour markets both mothers and fathers were involved with the day to day care of children, with this made possible by employment that was largely home based. The movement of employment opportunities into the public sphere removed men from the home and created gendered divisions around the breadwinning model (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 142; Sutherland, 2010: 314). This type of household structure is associated with intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and is child centred with mothers seen to be responsible for both the emotional nurturance and practical caring of children (Hays, 1996; Johnston and Swanson, 2006). Maintaining this depended upon a parents, usually a mothers, presence in the home to fulfil a set of child rearing responsibilities that are more complex than ever. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 129) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 90) suggest, the tasks of good parenting include a whole range of activities from the correction of defects to the enhancement of skills, both sporting and academic. This type of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003) through the use of enrichment activities is a (class specific) indicator of good mothering (Vincent and Ball, 2007: 1068). It is often posited as the 'ideal' form of motherhood, however it is known to adhere more closely to 'middle class' ideals (ibid.; Lareau, 2002) with working class mothering practices being considerably less structured in these ways not least due to the long tradition of mothers in lower income families being engaged with the paid labour market (see Tilly and Scott, 1978). There is a real tension here for parents as they balance these involved forms of parenting with paid work not least because, as Vincent and Ball (2007: 1069) have identified, this concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2002) comes at a financial cost in addition to the more practical concern that someone is required to be available to take children to their activities. Indeed, (Gillies, 2005) found that an important aspect of working class parenting was in teaching children how to negotiate their disadvantaged position. For example, parents in the sample were all keen to

encourage their children to do as well as they could academically, sometimes travelling to schools that they perceived to be 'better' than the local ones and raising children with the expectation that they would go on to university and establish professional careers as they grew up.

Motherhood as a full time activity is impacted by the ways in which the main carer increasingly acts as the child's assistant as childhood becomes less natural and more staged (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 131). Children are thus viewed as being in a state of becoming rather than one of being (Hendrick, 1997: 2; Jenks, 2005: 53) with the process of growing up being delineated by stages of competence and knowledge (Hendrick, 1997: 4). This is challenged somewhat by the development of the 'new social studies of childhood' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) in which it is argued that the child should be understood as a 'being' in its own right. Nevertheless, the child continues to be regarded as different from an adult and as being in a distinct life phase. Parenting is then increasingly conceptualised as a 'job' of which an assessment of parental 'quality' can be made rather than simply as a relational bond between parent and child (Gillies, 2008: 1080).

The idealised model of the male breadwinner household with a home-making and child care centred mother was never the norm for large sections of the population (Lewis, 2001a: 153). There is evidence also to suggest also that the 'decline' of the breadwinner model in the latter part of the twentieth century has been overstated and could be better be described as a modification (Crompton, 2002; Yerkes et al., 2010) leading to the adult worker model that has largely been assumed in policy formulation in recent years (Duncan et al, 2003: 310). Changing patterns of household resourcing have also influenced changes in family relationships, affecting both the timing of family formation and relationship patterns within households (Irwin, 1999).

By the latter part of the twentieth century social changes saw the movement of large numbers of women into the labour market, with the influence of second wave feminist ideologies seen to be a key driver of these changes. As an engagement with the paid labour market increasingly became viewed as a symbol of women's independence and the labour involved in running a home viewed as drudgery, women's movement into the paid labour market symbolised mother's and women's freedom via their attainment of economic independence, power and control over resources (Warren, 2007: 320).

Groundbreaking studies such as Oakley's (1974) study exploring the sociology of housework and essays such as those included in Malos's (1980) collection, in which housework was conceptualised as a political issue, were influential in valorising paid work and focussing an analysis which described women's domestic labour as a largely negative experience. In the context of this research these works are significant owing to the way in which the day to day care of children is part of the job of looking after the home; it is extremely difficult to separate domestic tasks from child care tasks, especially when children are small. Thus, child-caring has continued to be subsumed into the domestic category.

Some of the advantages of conceptualising motherhood as work recognised by Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2002: 209) are that it makes the labour visible, resists sentimentalisation, attributes status to mothers and recognises the economic significance of the work that they do and resists naturalising motherhood. However, a key challenge exists in marrying up the care of children as a labour of love with the day to day tasks of taking care of the home and finding an acceptable conceptualisation of these two allied areas of parental duty. It is instructive here to consider again the distinction between 'caring for' and 'caring about' (Ungerson, 1983) as dimensions of parenting. Perceiving of these elements separately is shared by parents in the present study who regarded an unequal sharing of the daily tasks involved in caring for a family to have been a problem in their co-habiting or married relationship. None spoke of the existence of problems involving their ex partners 'caring about' the children prior to separation, although some did note concerns about post separation behaviour being indicative of a lack of caring about children's feelings.

Women's association with this area of life has led to their actual physical presence in the home being associated with the social construction of good motherhood in addition to their holding a biological status as mothers (Rich, 1977). 'Being there' for children is a key element of the practices and relationships of family life (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002: 210) and as we have seen, is discussed by the parents in this sample as being a key part of being a 'good' parent. In recent years there has been significant attention given to the decisions that women make in respect of their decisions to be employed outside of the home or to focus on motherhood as a full time occupation (Gatrell, 2005: 58). In contrast, the expectation that fathers will be involved in paid work as their major contribution to family life remains and mothers continue to hold

responsibility for undertaking the greater proportion of childcare (Dermott, 2008: 77). With even the most involved fathers in Dermott's study, mothers and their position in the family were conspicuously present in the fathers accounts of their parenting (Dermott, 2008: 79). Like the three fathers who took part in the present study, the fathers interviewed by Dermott for her study felt that although there was little gendered distinction to be made about their own parenting practices this may not be the case for the wider population. It is interesting to note here that none of the mothers interviewed in my study felt that their and their ex partners parenting position were undifferentiated along gender lines and several explicitly acknowledged the ways in which their domestic life with ex partners had operated along a traditionally gendered sharing of duties. Indeed, in some interviews it emerged that mothers felt that their ex partners had made very little contribution at all to the household and childcaring work; although of course it is not possible to verify these reports it is clear that this was their lived experience and thus should be recognised as legitimate.

### **5.5 Parenting style and 'preference': pre separation parenting styles**

Pre separation parenting styles were primarily based around a gendered division of labour for the parents in this sample. With the exception of Simon and his ex wife who had shared responsibility for both earning and caring, most mothers had been primarily responsible for household and caring work and this was not usually correlated to employment status. No participant reported any negotiation about this and this is seen in the way Debbie describes how the care of her two children and the care of the home were coupled when her husband was still living in the family home. As he regularly worked away from home a division of labour had quickly developed which Debbie describes as

*"Very stereotypical you know. He was responsible for the garden and all the DIY and I did all the domestic cooking, cleaning"* Debbie

Likewise, Chloe reports that there had never been an active negotiation of responsibilities and that *"it just fell into that pattern"* with both of her previous partners. Her husband is described as being more *"biddable"* and thus more willing to share in housework tasks when asked directly to do so whereas this did not occur with her later co-habiting relationship.

Sarah also reports a gendered split of parenting duties despite her own full time employment prior to separation and exemplifies this finding. The division of responsibilities have continued now that she lives apart from her daughter's father with Sarah holding total responsibility for the daily care of their daughter. Whilst living together both she and her ex partner had worked full time, she in a professional occupation and her ex partner running his own business. In many ways, this can be seen as a very 'modern' sort of dual career household with Sarah's regular salary being essential in supporting the family whilst the business was established

*"I was the one bringing in the regular steady money. Erm you know, we could rely on this £2000 every month that goes straight in the bank whereas he, his was kind of hit and miss"* Sarah

Sarah was working standard office hours whilst her ex partner's business meant that his hours of work were very unpredictable and he was frequently at work throughout the night and at the weekend. The outcome of this was that Sarah was responsible for all of the daily care of their daughter such as picking her up from and dropping her off at school or her childcare provider and therefore needed to arrange her working hours around the needs of their daughter, only accepting work that fitted in with childcare. In addition, because of his very long hours of work, Sarah also held responsibility for all the domestic and household chores feeling *"like a single parent in a relationship"* and she considers this imbalance of responsibilities for family life to be a key factor in the breakdown of their relationship

*"it was never an equal household and that's one of the things when we separated that I said. I just want an equal partner in life, that's all I wanted"* Sarah

The responsibility of mothers for not only the doing of but also the organising of childcare and domestic work is documented in other studies (see for example Windebank, 2001) and in Sarah's case has been a key factor in the end of her relationship. It is apparent here that one of Sarah's expectations of her relationship was an assumed shared responsibility for family life; as she and her (then) partner had both been engaged in full time paid work she expected that a sharing of domestic responsibilities would occur too. Duncan et al. (2003) have previously identified that, like Sarah, women face an increasing discrepancy between their expectations of



equality and the unequal and gendered division of labour they experience with their male partners. The relationship was a long standing one, she explains that they had been together for nine years and had lived together after the birth of their daughter for about four and half years. The major contributing factor in the ending of the relationship from Sarah's perspective was the lack of shared responsibility for parenting and their home life and the lack of negotiating power she felt to be able to change this due to the unpredictable nature of his work and she describes feeling "*absolutely furious*" about the situation. A solution that had been offered by her partner was the employment of a cleaner to lessen the burden of the domestic work but this did not lessen Sarah's dissatisfaction because she did not interpret this as him making a proper contribution, rather it was seen as evidence of his ability to use his employment status and the earnings that it brought to 'duck out' of sharing the tasks with her. This would align with findings from van Hooff (2011) who suggests that the employment of domestic help is a strategy that removes rather than resolves the situation of an unequal sharing of domestic tasks and also notes the finding of Gregson and Lowe (1994) that the employment of domestic help can lead to the total withdrawal of men from domestic work. The employment of domestic help may also serve to reinforce the notion of domestic tasks as something with which women need help (Hardill et al. 2006) so shifting these tasks to be a part of mothering and not a responsibility of the father.

Other findings from van Hooff (2011) and Thebaud (2010) that align with Sarah's experience indicate that women having careers equal to those of their partners does not lead to significant changes in the gendered division of household labour. This is supported by a wealth of research which indicates that women's movement towards a dual earner model has not been matched by men's movement towards a dual carer one, although some argue that whilst slow, the changes are occurring (Sullivan, 2000; Lewis, 2001; Warren, 2003; Breen and Cooke, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Scott, 2006; Gornick and Meyers, 2007). Research based on the analysis of time use data indicated that in the main areas of domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child care and shopping men's time contribution had increased,. However, the picture was complex and it was found that, for women, their contributions to cooking and cleaning tasks had decreased whilst for childcare and shopping it had increased (Sullivan, 2000: 447). Hochschild's (1989) study actually found that as women's earnings increased there was less sharing of domestic work with none of the husbands who earned less than their wives sharing responsibility for household tasks. This may indicate that some men and women attempt

to “compensate for deviance” (Thebaud, 2010: 331 ) by reverting to gendered positioning within the family. Owing to the longstanding association of the responsibility for breadwinning with a masculine identity (Connell, 1995; Warren, 2007) this can be an important way for men to reassert the masculinity that is lost when a wife or female partner takes engages with the breadwinning role (Hochschild, 1989; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). Several other mothers in the sample spoke, like Sarah, of not only holding responsibility for the *doing* of domestic and childcaring work, but also the management and co-ordination of them. This has been described by Haicault (1984) as the ‘*charge mentale*’, literally the mental burden associated with thinking about and balancing the families needs with household work, care and emotion work alongside paid work. This was recognised by Glover (2002) as impacting on women’s challenges in balancing family life with employment.

Fathers lack of engagement with caring and domestic work was not always related to their status as full time worker, however. Chloe explained that prior to separation and whilst he was employed full time the father of her two younger children had been responsible for cooking some of the evening meals and some cleaning tasks such as vacuuming but had never engaged in some routine childcare tasks such as bathing the children and putting them to bed. His engagement with these household tasks had altered little when he lost his job with the exception of an increase in his share of the cooking. Chloe notes that this was a task that he actively liked and that this may have impacted on his willingness to do it regularly. This is a theme common to other research in this area (van Hooff, 2011) which suggests that cooking is increasingly regarded as a leisure and lifestyle activity (Hollows, 2003; Aarseth and Olsen, 2008). Although Aarseth and Olsen (2008) suggest that men’s increased involvement in this aspect of caring for the family may indicate an increase in the sharing of domestic labour this is problematised by van Hooff’s (2011) contention that this particular task can also be construed as leisure. It is apparent however, that considering food preparation to be a leisure activity is not a universal interpretation of the task with. For example, Charlotte regarded the preparation of meals to her ex husbands taste to be an onerous and hugely time consuming task and one that she expresses relief at being freed from now they are no longer living together.

Chloe also notes the importance of the extent to which agreement existed between a couple as to the acceptable standard of housekeeping that needed to be kept. She

comments that in her earlier marriage both she and her husband were unconcerned with domestic work and were *“lazier and less houseproud”*. She attributes this to their young age and suggests that she would not be happy to live in those circumstances now that she was older and her desire for a clean and tidy home was greater. She Being able to negotiate an acceptable standard however was an important theme, not just in housework but also in sharing childcare and in several of the families there was a blurred edge between what constituted domestic work and what could be categorised as childcare. When asked about the division of labour several sought to clarify the question seeking to understand the distinction that I as the interviewer had made between these tasks. This suggests that there is no clear definition between those tasks that can be directly attached to the needs of children and those which can be categorised as non child related household tasks. In addition to this unclear boundary, it seems that taking care of household work is something that can be difficult to negotiate with several participants commenting that there had not been any discussion in their co-habiting relationship about who would be responsible for these tasks and that the person who undertook them just ‘ended up doing them’.

Dissatisfaction with the sharing of the responsibilities of home and parenting appears to have been a contributing factor in the breakdown of several of the relationships in the sample. Exceptionally Simon reports a high degree of co-operation and sharing and his reaction to some of the interview questions indicates that he feels it rather obvious that this would be the case. As a dual earner couple, both employed full time, he and his ex wife had both taken on responsibility for considerable childcaring and domestic duties and he indicates that there was no expectation from either of them that the other ought to take on certain tasks. For example, he explains that cooking the evening meal would be undertaken by whoever got in from work first rather than it being a designated task for either himself or his ex wife. This sharing of responsibilities appears to be central to Simon’s expectations of how family life should operate rather than something that he sees as being unusual

*“You just do it don’t you. You’d cook, whoever’s home first would cook the meal yeah”*  
Simon

The pattern of shared care of their child continues now they are separated and he considers the sharing of these duties as central to his fathering style and to ensuring that

his younger daughter is comfortable and well cared for. In this way Simon has a particularly care focussed approach in which he sees his position as nurturer as being more important than his place as financial provider. This ethic of care for his family extends beyond his children to include his step daughter, his eldest daughter's (now a young adult) partner and his ex wife and her new partner. This is indicated when he describes his feelings about his ex wife's new partner, with whom she is now expecting a baby, in very positive terms

*"her boyfriend, he's a really nice bloke and that and I'm sure that he'll make a great dad as well. Because he is so nice to my kids and so I just know that. So I always think I'm very lucky that she's with somebody who's actually nice and decent not some idiot.....so I think it will be ok"* Simon

The three adults in this complex family situation have established a friendly and caring wider family network in which to care for their children which appears to be underpinned by a shared ethic of care and mutual responsibility.

The intertwining of these parental responsibilities is recognised by the parents who took part in the study and several report that a perceived unfair division of domestic labour in the household had been a factor in their dissatisfaction with their marital or cohabiting relationship. Charlotte explains that her ex husband had expected her to take total responsibility for caring for their two children, giving the example that when they were very young she was expected to take them to the supermarket with her even if he was at home and could have taken care of them for an hour. Implicit in this is the attitude that caring for them was her responsibility and he should not be expected to care for them during his time off from work. Sarah indicates that her partners lack of engagement with any household duties was a major contributor to the breakdown of their relationship and Jenny reports that her ex partner had had little involvement with the day to day care of their children to the extent that she had placed her eldest child in nursery care when she was at work, even when the child's father was at home and (presumably) could have taken care of her.

For the parents in this sample there were a variety of parenting 'styles' expressed with some parents clearly aligning with the idea that good parenting means presence in the home. The notion that childhood and thus parenting take place in the privacy of the

domestic sphere is connected to a particular, idealised and institutionalised model of childhood (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002: 203). Being a good parent is primarily about putting children first (May, 2008) and several participants expressed this view, particularly in respect of the care of younger children. Others felt that their place as provider had equal or greater status in their assessment of how best to 'do' family life. Several parents experienced a tension in managing these sometimes conflicting responsibilities whilst some also spoke about the importance of maintaining their own personal identity through their engagement with paid work. Diane, for example describes the powerful relationship between her sense of self and her identity in the workplace,

*"I've realised since that taking that job away from me, my job was me. My job was my self esteem and not having that anymore I was powerless and I was a nobody and as a mother you are a nobody, you're nothing. People don't even know your name. You're [child's] mum"* Diane

An association between work status and a sense of personal identity was expressed most powerfully by parents with higher level qualifications and suggests that the attainment of these qualifications had been driven by a desire to have a career that offered status in addition to income. For example Debbie, highly committed to her paid work describes having been "keen" to return to work after maternity leave and identifies her parenting style as someone who was "never going to be a stay at home mum". However, now that she is responsible for resourcing her own household rather than sharing the earning with a residential partner, she indicates that "if I had a lower paid job I would definitely stay at home" in order to have more time available to care for her children and run her home. She believes that she is a better mother for engaging with paid work, because it gives her social interaction, a sense of personal identity and intellectual stimulation although she does miss her children during the time that she is at work. For Debbie, her decision making needs to take account of her own needs as well as those of her children and she feels she would not be doing herself justice if she did not maintain her paid employment. She exemplifies the ways in which successful balancing can offer benefits beyond the financial and she believes that she has "the best of both worlds" because "I love my kids but sometimes I needs to get away from them". Others, notably Hafsa, Susan, Sarah, Chloe and Amy also conceptualised their engagement in, or desire to be engaged in, paid work in terms of their own need for something more than motherhood.

Amy describes finding being at home with the children as “*boring*” and is very keen to find work when her youngest child is old enough to go to school. so that she can interact with other adults. She describes her belief that the key benefits of being in paid work, apart from more money, would be “*sanity...and there’s self esteem as well*”. These women all had or were working towards degree level (or higher) qualifications and were hoping to combine a career with parenthood at some point in the future.

Indeed, distinguishing between a ‘job’ and a ‘career’ is explicitly noted by some parents as the reason for their steps into education as mature students. Three parents in the sample who had had their children in their late teens viewed success in education and employment as a way of proving their abilities after their education was halted after the birth of their children. The long term goal is regarded as being important enough to defer the benefits of increased income that work may bring whilst at the same time managing some of the disadvantages of being in paid work, most notably a lack of time at home with children or to undertake household tasks. Several parents also alluded to the importance of ‘setting a good example’ to their children through their pursuit of a career, with Amy expressing this most directly when she says

*“I know you have to work to be able to get anywhere and if you want to teach your children anything valuable then it should be..I mean, I’ve got two girls, I’ve got to teach them that a woman can have it all. She can be a parent, she can be left, she can be mistreated but she doesn’t have to take it. She can make something of her life, she can go back to school later. She can hold a full time job...Even to my son, its important that he realises as well that women don’t just erm take, sit back and accept the things that happen to them....Its a moral obligation ” Amy*

In speaking in this way she clearly aligns herself with a feminist position in which paid work constitutes an important marker of women’s independence and autonomy whilst it can also be combined with motherhood. This focus on promoting the importance of sustaining an independent income contrasts powerfully with the way she describes having taken care of her own children in their early years. She had taken eleven months of leave from the family business after the birth of each child, and had breast-fed all three children, as had been her choice and her husband’s expectation

*“I was playing the game of being the faithful wife and mother, being home, doing my duties...I accepted the role [and] he expected me to” Amy*

The change in her focus from caring to earning as central to her mothering is informed by her experiences of becoming a separated mother, and she now views the reconciliation of these two responsibilities as central to this new position. She comments that having to “do a lot more” is the major change since separating from her husband, indicating that negotiating a balance between earning and caring constitutes a challenge in respect of time. Her determination to make a success of managing her studies and eventually establish a career alongside caring for her children has been a struggle for Amy, but is clearly informed by her wish, and need, to be financially independent and demonstrate to her children that motherhood and career can be combined.

In contrast, Charlotte has a much less defined connection to the paid labour market. Within her marriage, her parenting was defined by her responsibilities for caring for her children. Although she had engaged in some paid work, this had not been her primary role in the family. Having been a home based mother when her children were small she has found the adjustment to needing to be in paid work challenging, in particular the ways in which this has led to a decrease in the time she has available for domestic work and to pursue her own interests. As her ex husband had established a very successful career with high earnings she had not, had she remained in the marriage, expected to need to work for financial reasons and so this change represented a significant change in her expected pattern of daily life. Although Charlotte had undertaken some part time work during her marriage she presented this as being for herself, to give some additional interest and identity outside of being a mother rather than for financial reasons. As a result of these experiences she, like Amy, feels a powerful responsibility to provide her daughter with the tools and advice necessary so that she can balance her own work and family lives when she is an adult. Specifically, she is encouraging her daughter, aged eleven at the time of the interview, to pursue a high earning career such as medicine or law so that she has the financial resources necessary to either buy child care and domestic services or work part time when she has a family of her own. This approach is a key part of Charlotte’s approach to being a good mother and she takes care to ensure that I have understood this, following the interview with an email reiterating the importance of this point to her parenting style. Like many other mothers in the sample

Charlotte recognises the importance of preparing her daughter for the possibility that she may also be a lone parent and so aiming for a well paid job contrasts powerfully with Charlotte's own position in the labour market as a relatively low earner.

Only one parent expressed a commitment to paid work that was not in significant conflict with a desire to be based at home for her child. Susan demonstrates a very committed orientation to work, describing herself as a "*workaholic*" and has worked full time for most of her sixteen year old son's life, although at the time of the interview was not in paid work and was making plans to return to full time post graduate education. Susan demonstrates a number of the characteristics associated with Hakim's (2000) 'work centred' ideal type in theoretical conceptions of preference as a key indicator of employment behaviour. She describes her orientation to paid work as being absolutely central to her identity, commenting that her own mother had given up work to care for children and that she herself "*wouldn't have survived in those days!*".

However, the decision to work full time is described in terms of the care needs of her son who Susan chose to send to a fee paying school which she felt was better able to meet his special educational needs and where he got "*the best start in life*" and "*he really really thrived*". The private school system also had some benefits for Susan in terms of her managing her work life, such as a longer school day and the option for occasional boarding if her work took her away from home. However, this came at the considerable cost of £12, 000 per year and so being in full time work was necessary in order for this to be afforded and she describes the hectic and very busy work schedule she undertook to finance this, at times juggling full time study with full time teaching work. She describes having no regrets about having taken this decision and comments that if she had another child she would take the same course of action again. A particular benefit of the school that her son had attended was that it offered extensive wrap-around childcare, which had helped Susan to manage the demands of her job. Although her son's time at school was extensive, one of the benefits of the private school system for Susan's family life was the long holiday which gave her the opportunity to spend time with her son away from the demands of her teaching job and his school routine. In this way she was able to balance the conflicting demands of an involving career and sole responsibility for her son. Although in certain respects Susan's parenting style appears to have been influenced by her own desire to focus on her career she views this as being a way of doing her best for her son and constructs it



as a model of responsible parenthood. Having been an employed mother does not, in Susan's view, conflict with being a good parent and she is keen to emphasise the close relationship she enjoys with her son, describing the way in which Sundays have been reserved as family time. In describing her approach to parenting she indicates that she has prioritised caring for and providing for her son, whilst also maintaining an authoritative position

*“you might have a good relationship with them but you are not a friend, you're a parent. And as a parent you have to be prepared to stand firm, to make management decisions...because that is your responsibility as a parent” Susan*

James, a non resident father, describes his family's decision making around paid work in terms of the need to behave in a way that maximised household income and in doing so had adhered to the model of economic rationality. As the higher earner he had worked full time whilst living with his partner and their children and she had been home based taking care of their young children. This was not a decision that either James or his ex partner was especially happy about and this aligns with the findings of Williams (2008: 490) who found that the fathers he interviewed felt that their location as involved or breadwinning father was structured by circumstances outside of their personal control. Likewise Dermott (2008) suggests that for many men the need to earn money provides a reason for paid work when other aspects have disappeared and Segal (2007) provides assessment of the ways in which men's changing relationship with the labour market has occurred alongside changed perceptions of their fathering identity. James describes here the problems associated with his breadwinning role in his family prior to separation

*“My ex partner was not happy...at the fact that she was at home all the time....I wasn't entirely happy that I was working maybe 50 hour weeks, we neither of us was happy but unfortunately necessity just dictated that I had to go out to work and do these hours and my partner had to stay behind and look after the children” James*

In James' family there had been a reversal of this arrangement shortly before he separated from his ex partner when he was made redundant from his job. His ex partner was able to secure paid employment through an employment agency and he was not, so he took care of the children whilst she was at work, enjoying this new position in the

family. However, his ex partner had not been happy with this arrangement and found not seeing the children whilst she was away from the home working to be difficult. James, who remains unemployed at the time of the interview, clearly sees the full time care of children as being incompatible with full time work and explains that he limits the time for which he is responsible for the care of his sons so that their routine will not be disrupted when he secures full time employment again. He comments that a shared care arrangement with his ex partner would only be manageable if his girlfriend moved in with him and was willing to take on some child care responsibilities. So, despite saying that he feels that there should not be a gendered split in domestic and childcaring responsibilities, in reality he seems to view shared care as only possible when or if he co-resides with a new partner. Interestingly, he does recognise that his ex partner is unlikely to secure well paid employment and that she lacks incentive to work full time but does not suggest that a shared care arrangement might make this more manageable for her. Rather, he seems to accept that her main duty lies in providing caring for their children and that this may be combined only with part time work at some point in the future. What is so interesting about James' story of caring for his sons is the extent to which he expresses these very gendered views around care, suggesting that he could only take more responsibility for the daily care of his children if his new partner was willing to help. However, he also comments that he finds the contention that women should be focussed on caring for children that "*a lady's job was in the kitchen*" to be "*quite offensive*" and that the ideal situation would be for a fifty-fifty share of those tasks directly associated with caring. In this way we can see that his spoken view does not align with the choices he makes within his own family. James appears to operationalise a complex moral rationality where he sees his status as a man as being bound up with his responsibilities as a breadwinner. This creates an unresolved conflict with his desire to have some caring involvement with his children in light of his apparent belief that women have a natural affinity towards caring.

## **5.6 On being a good parent**

Being a good parent was a key part of negotiating family life after divorce or separation, although the parents in the sample presented a variety of different ways of doing family life (Morgan, 1996) and so being a good parent. For fathers and mothers the tasks and responsibilities associated with being a parent include both working for as economic provider, and working on as an active parent (Collier, 1999: 47). These two categories bear significant similarities to those discussed by those writing from the perspective of

the ethics of care when distinguishing between caring for in which the action needed for care to happen is taken, and taking care of which is seen to be constituted in the definable routine activities of caring work (Sevenhuijsen, 1999: 5).<sup>6</sup> Whilst mothers have been routinely depicted as taking primary responsibility for the ‘doing’ of care, fathers position has been constructed by their role as provider (Collier, 1999: 49). At the point of separation or divorce there is both an imperative and an opportunity to reconstitute these responsibilities as the shape of family life is re-negotiated. Both mothers and fathers in the sample described the changes which took place in the way they parented after the separation, with these reflecting some wishes for things to be different whilst also recognising the constraints that separated parenting placed on managing family life.

Being a good parent is explicitly linked to ideas about the constitution of childhood, in particular the ways in which childhood is regarded as a distinct phase of the lifecourse, a shift associated with the transition to modern society (Aries, 1962). During the nineteenth century children’s position shifted from one in which they held economic value (as workers) to a position where they were perceived to be economically worthless but emotionally priceless (Zelitzer, 1985). The child thus moved “from obscurity to the centre stage” (Jenks, 2005: 58). Or, as Bauman (2003: 42) describes it, from a time when children were economic producers to a time when “the child is, first and foremost, an object of emotional consumption”. For family life this has major consequences, as the child is seen to be in need of attention, entertainment and, crucially, time in order to flourish whilst at the same time the parent hopes that the child will bring them fulfillment and happiness. Ridge (2007: 400) and Millar and Ridge (2008:105) argue that the policy focus on moving parents into paid work rather than on allowing them to make the decision to engage in full time at home parenting positions the child as citizen worker of the future rather than citizen child of the present and that this may impact on the quality of the childhood that they experience.

This point is illustrative on two key ways. Firstly, it is informed by a perception of childhood as a time in which the child is in need of parental attention and also supports the notion that the child has a central position in family life. Unlike the position of the child in the pre industrial phase, the fertility decline has increased the focus on the child as an object of love and so the very notion of childhood ‘quality’ is an issue of concern. From the 1920s onwards new trends in child caring saw the task of raising children

elevated to a new status as scientific baby care methods which conceptualised parenting in a new way - as a job - were promoted (Hendrick, 1997: 28). New forms of bringing up children with deliberate and considered awareness of their age and development moved the tasks of parenthood beyond the simple provision of sustenance, moral guidance and some supervision towards a duty to give them the best start in life (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 87-90). The level of parental involvement in giving this best start is variable of course, but has, at its most intense, been characterised by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 117) as “parenting mania” and is associated with well educated urban women who become mothers later in life.

For Fiona, being a good mother is a central ambition. Having given birth to her first child whilst still in her teens herself she expresses a powerful commitment to ensuring that her children are raised well. She equates this with being present in the home to provide supervision and discipline. Although she had displayed a clear commitment to paid work in the past and has ambitions for a future career this is presented as being secondary to her desire and duty to be at home to offer care to her children and she conceptualises raising children in this way as an occupation which takes up a significant amount of time. Her parental style is described as one of being present and available,

*“putting them first. I’ve always been, wanted to put them first and be here for them...if they need me to be here and if I have to be skint then I’m skint [laughs]. I think its better I’m here than the money”* Fiona

She recognises also that opportunities to spend time with children have boundaries, making reference on several occasions to childhood as being a time to cherish and feeling that parents should have the opportunity to enjoy their time with their children whilst they are young. As one of the younger parents, and having two of the older children, in the sample she anticipates being able to establish a career and earn what she refers to as “*proper money*” when her sons have left home. In this way we can see that Fiona has prioritised her role as an involved and authoritative parent in a highly responsible way. Her attitude to motherhood is that the role is multifaceted, being about presence in the home, care, control and discipline with financial provision a duty but not the primary one. She rationalises this by suggesting that having a good income increases in importance as children grow older, when they may need parental support to attend university or to purchase a first home. In deferring her employment ambitions she has

made a conscious decision to place her own plans and desires as secondary to the needs of her two sons and has also accepted that this choice has meant living with very limited financial means for the duration of their childhood. However, she does not regard herself as a passive recipient of welfare. Throughout the children's childhood she has held numerous part time jobs, sometimes holding more than one job concurrently in an attempt to patch together sufficient hours to meet the eligibility requirements of Working Families Tax Credit. Her ambition to develop a career in the years to come is not defined solely by her desire to achieve personal financial security but about paying back into the system that has supported her and her two sons,

*“by that point.....to have got a degree.....And to earn proper money after that and pay it back cos I'll still have thirty at least years of working”* (Fiona)

This sense of receiving welfare and paying tax indicates that Fiona is highly engaged with a reciprocal notion of citizenship that is wider than a simplistic notion of the concept that fetishizes paid work as the primary indicator of active citizenship (see Patrick, 2012b). She regards her raising of her children into adults as a key role for which state support should exist, and fully intends to 'pay back' into the system when she is able. This understanding of children's dependency as a temporary phase is shared by a number of parents in the study who comment on the need to be present for younger children and the gradual reduction in the need for this constant presence as children grow older and become more independent. However, there is no agreement across the sample as to the age at which this occurs with most parents agreeing that this is highly dependent on the maturity and personality of the individual child. Parents themselves are regarded as being best placed to make these assessments.

Spending time with children and the importance of this aspect of being a good parent is shared by all the parents in the sample although this was presented in a number of different ways. Debbie sees parenting as being about providing children with experiences and opportunities and describes finding the time and making the effort to take her children to places such as museums and libraries, in the way that her mother had taken her when she was a child. Providing children with these outings is presented as an aspect of good parenting that encompasses social and educational activity as well as continuing family traditions and creating shared experiences. Debbie also frames her use of childcare whilst she is working in the same way seeing this as having benefits for

her children that reach beyond someone simply taking care of them whilst she works, citing in particular the social benefits that interactions with other children can bring.

In contrast to those parents who were balancing employment with caring responsibilities, Chris has adapted from being in full time work whilst in a relationship with his sons' mother to being at home full time with them and meeting all of their daily care needs himself. Raising his two young sons on a local authority estate on welfare benefits, Chris is explicit that he is prepared to suffer financial hardship in order to be available to care for his sons. Whilst he acknowledges that more money would be a benefit, he regards being there for his sons as the most important thing he can do and describes that he goes without things he needs himself in order to provide for the boys out of his budget. His limited income means that some of this unmet needs are quite basic. For example he tells me that he needs new shoes for himself and will use the small token of thanks that I give him for his participation in the interview to start saving for them. However, he manages his budget carefully to ensure that his sons do not go without the things that they need, indicating that he has already started to buy school uniform for the following school year so that he does not have to purchase this all at once. Although being in paid work would improve his financial situation, his sons have had a difficult start in life and he sees it as his role as their father to always be there for them and offer the care and attention that he feels they need. The care that is needed is significant, and in some respects greater than would be expected for one of his children. His five year old son has problems sleeping and has never slept through the night often waking with dreams that frighten him. He is unable to get to sleep on his own so Chris says, every evening

*"I just lay with him, just lay with him on sofa and make sure he just goes to sleep.....He never goes to bed on his own. Never."* Chris

In addition to this tiredness meaning that managing a job could be difficult, Chris also explains that he finds it difficult to trust other people to look after the children. The only member of his family living locally is his father who is disabled and, whilst able to help out with transport as he has a car, is not available to help out with childcare meaning that Chris would have to use paid childcare in order to go out to work and this is something that he is not prepared to do until his children are older. His eldest child's ongoing health and behavioural issues require a greater level of care than would be

expected for a child of his age. Chris therefore needs to be actively involved in the emotional and physical care of his sons, a responsibility which requires him to be at home with them at the moment. For Chris being a good parent is about supporting and caring for his children and he associates this with being physically present in the home even if this means that the family face other disadvantages such as a low income. He says *“What’s more important? Your kids or money?!”* and is prepared to make material sacrifices himself in order to parent in this way, as he points out for him *“kids come first, then you come second. That’s the way I see it”*.

For non resident father James not being present to take part in his sons’ daily lives is one of the hardest parts of adjusting to post separation parenting

*“its the small things that make a meaningful relationship. Erm, I don’t see them every day so I don’t get to know the little stories that happen during the day. These are the things that you miss out on”* James

He tries to deal with this issue by seeing his sons regularly and often, even if this for only short periods of time. This is fulfilled via the maintenance of a routine in which he collects them from school twice a week and cares for them at his home. Although he is committed to the principle of sharing care with his ex partner and is an active member of campaigning group Families Need Fathers James does not currently see that an increase in his contact and care of his children is possible due to his search for a new job. This clearly illuminates the ways in which expressed preferences do not always translate into change and/or action towards change in family life.

Being a good parent for Chloe is about being present and available to her children and also providing them with a pleasant home in which to live. Alongside this she speaks about the importance of having fun with her children and finding the time to play with them. In her family, with children ranging in age from two to eleven this means playing imaginary games and engaging with them at their level of understanding. In this way she has encouraged the development of good relationships between her children whilst also recognising the diversity of their personalities and needs. She considers that as children grow older they can benefit from some freedoms and responsibilities but that the physical presence of a parent in the home is essential in order to properly care for

children until they are in their teens. The exception to this would be during the times that children are away from the home at school or nursery.

Physical presence in the home is emphasised also by Sarah and this position appears to be connected to her own experiences as a child. She describes how her parents both worked full time and that she and her siblings returned from school alone every day

*“there wasn’t a lot of looking after us to be honest erm my mum didn’t get home till about six thirty, we’d already have made our dinner so in many ways her way of parenting wasn’t the best” Sarah*

The impact of these experiences is that Sarah has made considerable efforts to be a ‘present’ parent whilst also pursuing her own considerable employment ambitions. Practical ways in which she manages this are to ring fence time to devote to her daughter and create a new family home for them in their new location in which her daughter feels safe and comfortable

*“We’re together every morning and we’re together every evening and we always have our routine of bath time, story and bed and that’s always me and her, completely undivided attention” Sarah*

Wishing to parent from a position of presence had not always been anticipated, and this finding was also made in other research by Jenkins (2004). For example, Diane, who had worked at a senior level before her child was born had expected to employ a full time nanny and return to work six weeks after her birth. However, after her daughter was born, her ideas about parenting changed completely,

*“I had her and thought, ‘oh my god! I can’t leave you! I can’t hand you over to a nanny!” Diane*

and

*“I found the emotional pull was incredible, the emotional pull to stay at home and be there for her. I felt like nobody would care for her and love her the way I did” Diane*



For Diane, however, this decision to take care of her daughter herself whilst she was small had had a serious impact on her career. She describes how when she wished to return to paid work she was unable to secure a job at her previous level as the recruitment criteria had changed and she was now considered unqualified as she did not have a degree. The financial costs of making the decision to care for her daughter as a home based parent were considerable. When asked if, with the benefit of hindsight, she was glad that she had taken this time out of work to care for her daughter she responds

*"no, no I'm not. I regret it a lot"* Diane

Prior research by Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel (2007) found that the financial costs of motherhood were considerable and this was certainly Diane's experience as she slipped from the full time senior management position she had held prior to motherhood into insecure part time employment by the time of the research interview. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 where the dynamic relationship between employment and caring is explored.

## **5.7 Chapter conclusions**

This chapter has explored the ways in which parenting was conceptualised by the research participants. There was a clear focus in all of the interviews for parents to regard being a good parent as being made up of a wide range of behaviours and qualities. Being present in the home, providing practical care and support and earning money were all perceived to be central responsibilities. However, it is clear that these responsibilities can be in conflict with one another, particularly in terms of the time needed to perform and manage them, as will be explored in the following chapter.

In the case of lone parents particularly, there is an increasing expectation that parenting will, can and should be combined with paid work as examined in discussion of welfare reforms in Chapter 1 and Chapter 7. Analysis in this chapter has indicated that despite parents expressed commitment to paid work, practical constraints had the potential to seriously inhibit the practical expression of preferences for paid work. Conversely, welfare policy making structured around the demand that parents adhere to the adult worker model (Lewis, 2002; Duncan et al., 2003) could then inhibit the fulfilment of desires to be active and present parents in the home for both resident and non resident

parents in the sample. Those parents, such as Fiona whose own parenting preference was strongly aligned to presence in the home, were acutely aware that there was an increasing expectation that they *should* engage in paid work whenever possible. Whilst individual parents in the sample were able to articulate clearly their own preferences for either work-centred, home-centred or adaptive decision making (Hakim, 2000) they were, however, reluctant to prescribe how others ought to behave. This indicates that they held the view that parents should be free to make choices that suited themselves and their families needs. Hafsa's response to a vignette that,

*"she should do what she wants. Its not for me to say what any other parent should do"*

Hafsa

was typical of these responses. Some framed their responses to the employment and care dilemmas posed by the vignettes as *what they themselves would do* in the given circumstances, but within the sample there was a widely held view that the choice ultimately lay with the parent. This suggests that, within this small sample at least, the parents were not supportive of welfare policy making that sought to compel work focussed decision making amongst those with caring responsibilities.

As a result of changing perceptions of what it means to be a 'good parent' it seems that the mothers in this sample are moving towards an increased focus on paid work whilst the men move towards prioritising caring as a key part of their fathering in their descriptions of their behaviours and aspirations. In this way we can see that there is an aspiration towards the establishment of a more gender neutral 'parental' role. For non resident parents, balancing work and care could also be complex, as is indicated for example by non resident father James's reluctance to increase his caring responsibilities lest these be unmanageable when he returns to full time employment. The data analysed here indicate that it seems that mothers still report being responsible for the bulk of caring work, except in the case of Simon who demonstrates an ethic of care both in the way he undertakes caring work, and in the way he manages his family relationships. With the exception of Chris's family where the children were placed in his care as a result of intervention from social services, these gendered patterns of care have been borne out in the shape of the household after divorce with children's primary residence being with their mothers and reflect a continuation of the patterns of caring and earning that were established prior to separation or divorce.

The ideal solution to discharging the multiple responsibilities of parenthood identified by parents in the study was to combine work and care via an engagement with part time work that fits with children's daily timetables and routines. Managing employment in this way appears to allow parents to be present to perform caring work and act as a parental presence in the domestic space whilst also pursuing employment as a source of identity and fulfilment as well as a financial resourcing strategy. Most of the parents taking part in this study advocated engaging in some paid work when it was compatible with family care needs. However, welfare policy is increasingly formulated to encourage and even compel recipients to adhere to particular types of employment behaviour. It is to the consideration of the dynamics of balancing earning and caring responsibilities within the context of the UK welfare policy framework that the following chapter turns,

## **Chapter Six.**

### **6.1 The dynamics of combining working and parenting**

This chapter explores the dynamics of combining paid employment with looking after children in the lives of divorced or separated parents. The choice of the word “dynamics” to describe the way the two roles may be combined is significant as it recognises and reflects the way in which both the challenges and potential benefits of combining work and care are not static. Rather, the data collected suggests that the interactions between the sometimes competing demands of parenting and employment have a more fluid quality. This recognition of the fluidity of parental needs in accessing paid employment whilst looking after children is influenced by the understanding that, over time, the care requirements of children change and the reshaping of the timetable of the daily life, as dictated by school hours and the availability of childcare, alters parents ability and willingness to engage with the paid labour market. Taking this life course approach enables the development of more complex and nuanced understandings of the ways in which choices to engage with the paid labour market can be governed by practical as well as moral considerations. A clear example of this is evidenced in the interview data through the discussion of vignettes; the age of the child or children involved in the situation described in the vignette altered the participants perception of the appropriate response to the situation, thus suggesting an appreciation of the changing needs of children over time. In some cases this distinction was made after further questioning by the interviewer but in others was commented on directly by the participant without any prompting, thus indicating that this can be a key element of decision making around employment and care. Although there was some variation in the ages at which, for example, participants felt that children could safely be left alone for short periods of time, all participants offered comments which reflected their belief that the needs of children differed according to their age. Of particular interest were comments from Sarah who indicated that she felt an eleven year old would best be cared for by a child minder for the two hour period between his return from school and his mothers return from work even though she herself had been at home without parental supervision (although with her siblings) for longer than this each day at the same age. However, she does acknowledge that she feels her mother, who like Sarah worked full time when Sarah and her siblings were children, practised a style of parenting that was “*not the best*” and was not the way in which she chose to care for her own daughter.

Particular to the situation of those parenting after a divorce or separation is the way in which a relationship with an ex partner can have an ongoing impact on decision making long after the divorce event itself. Some participants in the study reported ongoing difficulties with negotiating responsibilities for the children, in some cases a number of years after separating. For those parents maintaining a parenting relationship with an ex partner the changing circumstances of the other parent can also have an impact, for example if the other parent remarried, had another child or altered their employment status. The shared parental relationship means that, even when the non resident parent has no day to day contact at all, the connection between the households endures and the decision making of one can have significant impact on the other. These factors and their influence on managing paid employment with care responsibilities are explored elsewhere in the thesis.

## **6.2 A brief revision of the policy position**

Welfare reform in recent years has become increasingly based on an expectation that parents should engage with the paid labour market in much the same way as those without children. Prior models of welfare in which lone parent status acted as an automatic passport to entitlement to income support and various associated benefits such as Housing Benefit and Educational benefits including free school meals and school uniform voucher schemes have been phased out under the New Labour government of 1997-2010. Until October of 2008 the presence of a child under the age of sixteen residing in the home with a lone parent entitled the parent to claim Income Support to which no work requirements were attached. This change in 2008 was the first time that eligibility of lone parents to the assistance set out in the 1948 National Assistance Act was restricted (Haux, 2010: 1). After this date a phased reduction of entitlement was set in motion reducing the age of the qualifying child to twelve in October 2008, ten in October 2009 and seven as of October 2010 (DWP, 2007b: 14). Lone parents were thus no longer entitled to make a claim for Income Support and were instead eligible to make a claim for Jobseekers Allowance, a benefit with job search conditions attached. Later tightening of conditionality required lone parents with children between three and six years old to participate in work related activity and lone parents of children aged one and two to attend regular work-focussed interviews (DWP, 2009).

This decline in the categorisation of lone parents as exempt from work requirements appears to be part of a broader project of “reforming welfare around the work ethic” (Lister, 1999) in which all citizens are cast as potential members of the paid labour force. Indeed paid work has been conceptualised as the key route into the inclusion of citizenship (Dwyer, 2004; Marshall 1950). It is important to note that this pressure towards engagement with paid work is not exclusive to lone parents, this same principle is increasingly applied to those who would previously have been supported by welfare benefits due to a long term health condition or disability.

Alongside the decline in entitlement to state support has developed the expectation that the labour market behaviour of lone parents should mirror that of partnered parents. As noted in the literature review, during the latter part of the twentieth century there was a significant increase in the employment rates of mothers of dependent children with four in six mothers in employment in 2002, up from one in six in 1951 (Hansen et al., 2006). These increasing rates of maternal employment appear to have led to an increased expectation that parenting can and will be combined with paid work even though the employment rates of lone mothers had actually fallen between the late 1970s and the 1990s (Gregg and Harkness, 2003). These expectations appear to have had some influence on the development of an insistence, through policy legislation, that lone parents seek paid work. The normalisation of both maternal employment and parenting in one parent households has led to the loss of the status of single mothers as somehow vulnerable and in need of special protections. Therefore the space has opened for the removal of support for single parent households through the policy process and consequent redefinition of lone parenthood as a personal experience rather than a social problem. Thus, the attendant difficulties in resourcing the household have been placed as a concern for the individual rather than the wider community. In re-categorising lone parent households in this way the policy framework has shifted focus towards reasserting the financial obligations of non resident parents (most often fathers) towards their children coupled with the introduction of increased levels of financial support for those resident parents who do engage with the paid labour market.

It has been noted that welfare reforms under New Labour did facilitate the greater choice of lone parents in making paid work more viable and attractive than it had been previously through the introduction of, for example, the National Minimum Wage, Tax Credits and the National Childcare Strategy (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011: 279). The

introduction of tax credits was of particular importance in addressing the ‘benefit trap’ and ensuring that those working part time or for low pay would be better off in work (Campbell, 2008: 463). However, Rafferty and Wiggan (2011) have drawn attention to the tensions inherent in these attempts to implement a ‘choice agenda’ in a policy environment framed by increasing levels of compulsion. The impact that this focus on paid work as a key element informing the anti poverty strategy of third way politics under New Labour’s government (see for example Lister, 1998 & 2003; McDowell, 2005; Williams, 2001 & 2004a) has had on those lone parents who do not engage in paid work and support their household via making a claim to the benefit system is to entrench their economic marginalisation. The focus on paid work as the route out of poverty for lone parent families has the effect that those lone parent households who do not engage with paid work have, if not supported by maintenance from an ex partner, significantly lower incomes than other groups. In the discussion that follows, the impact of maintenance receipt and non receipt on the experiences of Chris and Fiona are identified. Policy making has continued to entrench the relative disadvantage experienced by those outside of the labour market via the offers of financial incentives through the Tax Credit system designed to entice parents into employment with considerable further movement in this direction proposed by the Coalition Government’s Welfare Reform Bill (2011) and Universal Credit (DWP, 2010)

The work focussed approach supported by financial enticements to enter the labour market assumes that employment decision making is economically rational and that with sufficient financial enticement lone parents will take the decision to return to or join the labour market for the first time. However, this ‘rationality mistake’ was identified and criticised a number of years ago for being framed by mistaken beliefs about the ways in which household level decision making takes place, and because it fails to take into account the complex practical and moral frameworks that underpin these decision making processes (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Carling, et al., 2002). The research conducted here supports this assertion, finding that the reports of the participants in this study tell a much more complex and nuanced story than one of simple mathematics when deciding whether or not to engage in paid work. Some participants, such as Chris and Fiona were involved in making the active decision to live on a severely limited income in order to focus on the care of their children. These preferences and discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. This chapter now turns to a

consideration of the experiences of participants of negotiating the welfare benefits and tax credits systems.

### **6.3 Experiences of claiming benefits and tax credits**

The proposition that financial incentives act as a key driver to encourage the take up of paid employment seems at first glance to be fairly self evident. If engaging in paid work leads to a significant increase in household income then it would seem reasonable to assume that the majority of people would take up the opportunity to be financially better off and these ‘carrots’ are a key aspect of work focussed policy making that seeks to encourage individuals to (re)engage with the paid labour market. The first part of the examination of these assumptions is undertaken here with close attention to the interview data provided by Chris and Fiona, two resident parents who, at the time of interview were in receipt of benefits.

Fiona, the mother of two boys aged eleven and fourteen, was in receipt of JobSeekers Allowance. This is a benefit paid to those who are categorised as unemployed and as such has job search conditions attached, with the requirement that the recipient attends the Job Centre fortnightly and provides evidence that they have been “actively seeking work”. Chris also has two sons, aged two and five. As he has a child under the age of seven he is in the group of lone parents entitled to receive Income Support, which has only limited job search conditions attached (lone parents of younger children are required to show a commitment to “preparing” for a job search). This distinction appears to offer some support for the idea that younger children have greater care needs than older children, so recognising that the care needs of children are fluid rather than fixed with the attention required declining as children grow older.

Therefore Chris and Fiona are able to provide some contrast between the two regimes, with Fiona also able to offer some retrospective thoughts on her experiences of receiving Income Support when her children were younger. Fiona tells me that she separated from her son’s father about nine years ago and has over that time financed her household through a combination of part time work, benefit receipt and student loans, in addition to a period more recently when she lived with a partner who made some financial contribution to the household. Whilst living together both she and this partner were in paid work however this relationship had now ended and she was solely responsible for resourcing the household. Other significant differences in Fiona and



Chris's circumstances are that Fiona owns a home with a mortgage and receives reliable maintenance via the Child Support Agency at a reasonably high level from the father of her children who holds a full time professional job. She does not receive Support for Mortgage Interest although she believes she would be eligible to do so. She explains that she has decided not to make a claim as she is concerned that receipt of this benefit may have negative implications when she needs to negotiate a new deal with her mortgage lender. Instead, she is currently managing to pay the mortgage from her income of Jobseekers Allowance, Child Tax Credit and maintenance whilst hoping to secure some paid work in the near future.

Chris is a local authority tenant living on a large housing estate on the fringes of a large city. The rent for his home is paid via a claim for housing benefit. Unlike Fiona, he receives no maintenance from his sons' mother who is also not in paid employment and in receipt of benefits. These distinctions are significant as they translate in practical terms into significantly different levels of household income with Chris managing his household on the absolute minimum income possible as the lone parent of two children. At this level of income Chris's household budget is very tight indeed. He describes simply meeting the basic needs of food for his children and paying household bills as difficult with incidental spending on days out and new clothes simply not possible. These difficulties were shared by participants in a longitudinal study conducted by Ridge and Millar (2011) in which they report that families living on income support reported not being able to meet the most basic of household costs, including in some cases the cost of food. There seemed to be a lack of understanding amongst some of the other participants in the present sample of just how low benefit-only income can be with Amy indicating that she feels she would be better off if she was entitled to income support rather than being eligible for (and thus obliged to accept) student finance. In direct contradiction to this view, Chloe reveals that when she was a student she was much better off than she was whilst managing on benefits alone

*"I have found when I've been a student I've been hugely better off then, because I've been a student with children they give you some lovely grants for being a mature student and having responsibilities. Its made no end of difference, they even pay childcare out of that. I've been able to clear various debts and spend money like I've never been able to before (laughing) so its benefited me even though its not working as such"* Chloe

This offers further evidence that lone parents are a far from homogenous group with substantial differences in financial circumstances existing even in this small sample. Another perspective on benefit levels is given by non resident father James who believes that his partner had been enticed to leave the family home along with their children due to the availability of welfare benefits and the encouragement of a group of mothers she had met at a community group. He feels strongly that if the welfare system was not there to support her as a lone parent then she would have been obliged to remain in the family home and work through the difficulties in their relationship.

## **6.4 Experiencing welfare conditionality**

### **6.4.1 Fiona: Jobseekers Allowance**

Fiona, as a recipient of Jobseekers Allowance, is obliged to seek paid employment as a condition of benefit eligibility. In discussing her employment history it becomes evident that she has a strong desire to support her family through her earnings. She has had a number of part time jobs over the years she has been a lone parent, sometimes holding two jobs concurrently in order to meet the sixteen hour requirement in the working tax credit rules. In this way it is possible to see that Fiona has a strong preference towards paid work, although she has never had a full time job, regarding part time work within school hours the ideal employment situation for herself and her children. She reports finding the job search requirements of the Jobseekers Allowance regime inflexible and unrealistic for lone parents. This pressure to take up employment was also reported by some participants in a Gingerbread study (Peacey, 2009) who found that pressure to find and take up paid employment came from four main sources. These were identified as external and overt pressure from staff at the Jobcentre Plus, pressure from wider societal norms that suggest that adults should engage in paid employment, internal pressure from the lone parent themselves as a result of these external pressures and the pressures built into the Jobseekers Allowance regime in the form of fortnightly sign-ons, requirement to prove evidence of a job search and the threat of financial sanctions if the requirements of the regime are not met (Peacey, 2009: 49).

At the time of the interview it was the start of the school summer holiday, which lasts six weeks in England, and this was a time of year at which Fiona said the Jobcentre staff were particularly inflexible in respect of her job search. She tells me that she does not feel that these sort of factors are taken into account with the expectation that she would

take full time employment continuing despite the lack of childcare for older children severely restricting her potential availability for paid work

*“I think the only thing they can sort of discuss with me then they’ve said is working full time so we’ve just got to go through with this pretense every time I’m there that…… they’ll print off a few full time jobs for me and I’ll go “great! I’ll apply for this” and put them in the bin, cos I’m not, I don’t want to work full time at the moment, it’s, I think [youngest son] is too young still.”* Fiona

She has experienced the Jobseekers regime as one in which the primary motivation is to move claimants into any employment with little regard for the the quality or practical manageability of that job alongside the responsibilities of lone parenting. A particular concern for Fiona when considering any job opportunity is the length of working day and the time she would be away from the home. Recent welfare reforms mean that only parents with a youngest child aged 12 or under may restrict their hours of availability for work to school hours. Once the child reaches thirteen they will no longer be permitted to do so (Jobseekers Allowance Regulations, 2010: SI2010/837). In addition, the regulations set out the JSA claimant must be willing to accept a journey of one hour each way to a place of work in the first thirteen weeks of a claim, extending this to one and a half hours thereafter. Whilst there is provision for some flexibility for those with caring responsibilities and space for some consideration of of the time taken dropping off and collecting children from childcare this remains at the discretion of Jobcentre Plus advisors (Kennedy, 2010: 17).

Although her sons are eleven and fourteen, Fiona does not accept that it would be appropriate for them to come home to an empty house every day or to be responsible for getting themselves to school and locking up the home in the morning. She is aware of no childcare provision in her area for children beyond primary school age, other than activities in the school holidays which invariably do not cover a full working day. Although her youngest child is only eleven, she has been told by staff at the Jobcentre that in addition to looking for full time employment she must also be prepared to travel for up to an hour to her place of work. Whether this is a misunderstanding on her part, or she had been given incorrect information by Jobcentre staff is unclear. However, she was concerned about these rules for three key reasons. Firstly, that this could mean that she would be absent from the home from eight o’clock in the morning until seven

o'clock in the evening; secondly that she would be a long way from the children if, for example, one of them was taken ill during the day or she needed to attend an appointment at the school for them; thirdly that this length of working day would not leave her with sufficient time to complete the required work for her Open University degree which she was working on in the hope that she would be able to establish a more satisfying and lucrative career in the future. Fiona was dealing with the pressures of tightening welfare conditionality by appearing to comply with the work requirements whilst quietly ignoring the demands to seek work that conflicted with her parenting preferences, and hoping that she would find more manageable employment in the near future. Having spent much of her adult life working in unskilled, low paid and part time employment her desire to complete her studies and move into a professional occupation is a key ambition of Fiona and she does not seem to envisage significantly increasing her household income until she has gained her degree.

Whilst she is willing to consider all types of employment and at the time of the interview is hopeful of securing a job at a supermarket which is opening in the immediate vicinity of her home, she considers that the quality of employment secured would have an impact on the likelihood of her being able to maintain that employment. Interestingly she does not seem to equate quality of employment with wage level, rather her primary consideration is in respect of how well a job would fit in with her responsibilities as a mother, suggesting that she is not likely to be particularly responsive to financial incentives. In describing her experience of engaging with the job search requirements attached to receipt of Jobseekers Allowance she suggests that Jobcentre staff are primarily focussed on moving people into work without consideration of the long term sustainability of the role that they move into. She feels that the role of the Jobcentre should be much more focussed on guiding people into sustainable employment so that the practicalities of managing paid employment alongside lone parenting can be considered and addressed. This concern with employment maintenance is starting to become incorporated into policy debates alongside growing recognition of the importance of security of employment in maintaining living standards and improving future options (Ridge and Millar, 2011: 86) A real concern for Fiona is that the process of moving into employment from a position of benefit receipt can be far from a smooth process financially and she regards this a disincentive to take on insecure or temporary work. So even if paid work could lead to an increase in income this financial incentive had to be offset against any short term

financial vulnerability that may result from accepting the work. She describes submitting a claim for Jobseekers Allowance and finding that the receipt of money did not start immediately. This posed difficulties in meeting her own and her children's basic needs

*“the procedure takes so long, it took, it took about four weeks from me applying for Jobseekers until they officially said I was on it..... so for four weeks there wasn't, there wasn't anything and then it took them another four weeks to actually pay me anything”*

Fiona

This experience means that Fiona is reluctant to close her claim for welfare benefits until she is sure that she has a secure and manageable job. It is her experience that this opposes the working practices of Jobcentre staff and she suggests that the lack of understanding of the realities of parenting alone displayed by some Jobcentre can be problematic. She describes how one member of staff had told her that she must apply for agency work as she had at that point been in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance for more than six weeks

*[I'd] been on it six weeks at that point, [the Jobcentre said] that I've got to apply for agencies now. I said “well what's that kind of thing?” she said “well they'll just ring you in the morning and give you, you know a days work” and it's like to be advised of that just before the summer holidays is just stupid”* Fiona

This type of agency work is likely to be particularly difficult for lone parents to engage with due to the irregularity and ad hoc nature of the work that employment agencies offer, although there is evidence to suggest that this is the type of work likely to be entered after long periods outside of the labour market (Centre for Social Justice, 2011). Childcare needs to be sourced and booked in advance and paid for whether it is used or not so it would not be possible to have childcare arrangements in place 'just in case' some work became available. Parents in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit are likely to face specific difficulties in accessing employment of this type as a parent must be in employment in order to be eligible to receive this credit and without it would not be likely to have the means to pay for childcare.

This illuminates some of the practical issues around seeking work as a lone parent and the way in which the support and guidance given by Jobcentre staff needs to be more clearly targeted towards the particular needs of this client group. Whilst it may be appropriate to suggest engagement with employment agencies as a job search strategy to people who are partnered parents or do not have children, this is simply not regarded by Fiona as a practical option for those with the sole responsibility for the care of children. The unpredictable nature of the hours of work and the unreliability of income make these types of unemployment largely unsuitable for lone parent households and this is something that Jobcentre training guidelines need to take account of in order to effectively deliver the agenda of moving lone parents into paid employment.

#### **6.4.2 Chris: Income Support**

Chris, as a recipient of Income Support, had no such job search conditions attached to his claim and at the time of the interview he reports being totally focussed on the care of his children. Despite his very low household income he is currently not responsive to any financial incentives to return to paid work. Although he describes some prior work history in unskilled and low paid jobs he has not worked in paid employment since becoming the resident parent of his two young sons. Despite reporting some financial difficulties in managing his household on a severely limited income he does not plan to return to paid work until his children are older and intends to return to education firstly in order to retrain. Despite his financial difficulties Chris remains unmotivated by financial incentives to return to paid work at the present time, being entirely focussed on the care needs of his two sons. He does not indicate how he intends to support the family when he returns to education, but has identified both the college and the course he would like to attend and seems to assume that he will be able to continue his Income Support claim whilst training. Unlike Fiona, he does not report any issues in managing his benefit claim beyond struggling with filling in the paper work, a concern that is shared by other participants in the study when discussing their experiences of managing tax credit and benefit claims. However, unlike other participants who suggested that the complexity of the systems and incomprehensible paper work are the cause of these difficulties Chris views these difficulties in the context of his own low level of education describing himself as *“not the brightest lad in the world”*. He copes with these difficulties by asking his sister to assist with filling in the forms, and although not comfortable speaking on the telephone, must also deal with making phone calls to manage his claim. An interesting comment from Chris illuminates the way in which he

does not frame his receipt of welfare benefits in terms of rights, rather he says that each year when he renews his claim, he is relieved when it is accepted and that the family will be “*all right*” financially for another year. This reflects his experiences of ongoing financial uncertainty and anxiety, which are shared by a number of other participants in the study as they attempt to manage their family lives on low and apparently unreliable incomes.

For Chris, the decision to focus on the care of his children is partly informed by their specific care needs. The children had come to live with him after being removed from the care of their mother by social services and he reports considerable extra caring duties to manage their responses to a very unsettled period in their young lives. Although Chris reports that he is coping well with the children and that they are becoming more settled this extra care and attention, especially the care his elder son requires during the night, inhibits his ability to engage with paid work at the present time. Chris demonstrates a clear commitment to caring for his sons and describes his decision to do so as the only option for himself and his family and one which overrides all other concerns. He intends only to return to paid work when the children are both older and more settled and appears to have no knowledge that welfare reforms may require him to make this move before he feels ready to do so.

### **6.5 Applying for and managing a tax credit claim**

All of the resident parents in the study were in receipt of tax credits, whether as a student, an employee or linked to a benefit claim with the exception of Susan. Although not in work at the time of the interview she was supporting herself and her son with the proceeds of a house sale and was claiming a small pension. She had no wish to make a claim for financial support and was proud of having “*never claimed benefits in my life*”. Some parents regarded tax credit payments as welfare benefits whereas others did not view them in this way and would not have chosen to categorise themselves as benefit recipients. Although these payments were universally acknowledged as making a significant contribution to the household budget the process of submitting a claim was noted as being highly complex and often problematic. These problems appear not to be specific to the sample in this research with the complex nature of the tax credit claims process explored in considerable detail in a case study report by Millar (2011).

Debbie, the mother of two children and employed part time, reported the difficulties in submitting a claim that had arisen during the period when she and her husband were separating. She had attempted to make a claim as a lone parent but as her husband was at that time still on the electoral roll at the family home (although he was living elsewhere) she was accused of fraud and had to undertake the lengthy exercise of proving that hers was a genuine claim and she was indeed a lone parent. This process took four months and required the involvement of the ombudsman, during which time she received no payments. Even after this the problems were not fully resolved,

*“eventually they did resolve it but it just sort of literally it was one thing after another that went wrong. They overpaid me, they underpaid me, they put money in my bank account that I shouldn’t have had.....and they’re asking for figures..... “what are you going to be earning in the next twelve months?” No idea!”* Debbie

Debbie acknowledges that it was her own persistence and intelligence that enabled her to eventually sort things out and set up the claim properly. She suggests that other parents may not feel able or have the skills needed to do this, describing the claim forms as *“shocking”* and the overall process of claiming as *“a farce”*. Reflective of the seriousness of the difficulties that problems making a claim can create and the impact that this experience has had on her is the language she uses to describe how she felt when she received an overpayment

*“they’d overpaid me so I was frightened this year, I was absolutely paranoid”* Debbie

Debbie’s fear was grounded in the possibility that her tax credit payments would stop whilst the overpayment was recovered. As the tax credit payments made up a significant part of her household budget this could have led to serious hardship despite her being in paid work and receiving reliable maintenance from her children’s father. For parents without these other sources of income the loss of or a reduction in tax credit payments could have an even greater impact as will be shown in discussion of Chloe’s circumstances later in this chapter.

Charlotte also reports difficulties in making a claim for tax credit during the period when she and her ex husband were separating. In her circumstances she and her ex husband were both still living in the family home but her ex husband had withdrawn all



financial support for Charlotte and their two children. This left her without any income at all which meant she struggled to meet her children's most basic needs for food. In these circumstances it is possible to see the dangers inherent in the Coalition Government proposal to introduce the Universal Credit which relies on household means testing and is proposed to pay to a nominated individual within the family unit (Welfare Reform Bill 2011), with the Women's Budget Group (2011) expressing concerns that this will lead to one member of the household gaining total control of the finances. Charlotte had to wait until she had left the family home to achieve any access to money from welfare benefits or tax credits and managed to provide for her children in the interim by taking on casual cleaning work. She did not receive regular maintenance payments from her ex husband until after a difficult and protracted custody battle in the family courts.

Another participant in the study, Chloe, had experienced falling between claimant categories and was in this position at the time of the research interview. The mother of four children, she had recently separated from the father of the younger two but he had not yet left the family home. She explained that they had not run their finances jointly during their relationship and she was supporting herself and her four children on tax credit and child benefit alone. Her younger children's father was living in the family home and claiming Jobseekers Allowance and her elder children's father paid only sporadic maintenance as he had a long standing and serious mental health condition which made it difficult for him to sustain paid employment. This meant that after paying for food and the bus fares needed to get the children to school there was nothing left to cover any other costs and Chloe's financial situation was extremely precarious. She expected to see a rise in her income when her ex partner left the home as she would then be entitled to make a claim for Income Support as a lone parent but she had no control over *when* her ex partner would choose to leave and until then she was resigned to managing on a very low income indeed. She had previously experienced significant hardship when she had experienced problems making a claim for benefit and tax credits,

*"I don't like claiming tax credits, largely because they mess it up with frightening regularity so they overpay you or underpay you or randomly stop the payments and leave you with nothing"* Chloe

Asked to elaborate whether this had really been a random occurrence or if this had happened due to a change in circumstances, she indicates that both circumstances had occurred, and left her in serious financial difficulties,

*“on the occasion they messed it up for no particular reason they just randomly wrote to me and said ‘we’ve cancelled your claim’... it took six, seven weeks to sort it out and I had to actually send my oldest two children to stay with my mum and dad for a couple of weeks because I couldn’t afford to feed them and my nice mother in law took me to Netto’s and got every buy one get one free going and gave all the free ones so me and [second youngest child] could eat. It was really disgraceful and shaming and I hated it more than anything else”* Chloe

The experiences of the three mothers discussed here illuminate some of the complex financial difficulties that can arise as a relationship ends. Disentangling a co-habiting or marital partnership can be a complex and slow process, fraught with emotion and conflict and negotiating financial separation is not straightforward. The lack of flexibility in benefit and tax credit entitlements had led to real hardship as well as worry and stress for these women. Achieving financial independence and being able to move away from a need to claim benefits and tax credits was a key ambition shared by participants in the research. Although they welcomed the financial support provided by tax credits when they were in low paid or part time work, those participants who did not have a steady job all described their engagement with a long term plan to improve their career prospects.

## **6.6 Engaging with training and education**

Hafsa, Amy, Chloe, Diane, Fiona, Sarah, Susan and Chris are all, at the time of the interview, either engaged in a programme of study or plan to retrain before seeking employment. The levels of study range from working towards a PhD (Sarah) to plans to attend a local college to train as a hairdresser (Chris). Other participants were engaged in degree level study, whether as a full or part time attendance course or studying from home with the Open University. Whilst Chloe was not currently enrolled on a course, she had fairly recently attained her degree and was hoping to be accepted on a Postgraduate Certificate in Education, the UK teacher training course and Jenny had recently gained her degree and was now working in a related role.

For Fiona, the plan to improve her career prospects was a very long term one. She had previously attempted to complete a degree on a full time attendance basis but she explains that this was not sustainable alongside her responsibilities to care for her, then quite young, sons and the ongoing complexities of her relationship with their father and his new partner. She had left this degree course after she became aware that her youngest son was being physically disciplined by his father's new partner when he was going to visit them. Unable to resolve this issue between themselves, Fiona had turned to the family courts for assistance and had not been able to manage dealing with this and caring for her sons in addition to her studies. However, her determination to get her degree is unflinching and at the time of the interview she is working towards a degree with the Open University with ambition to have completed this course by the time her sons have grown and left the family home. For Fiona this would represent an element of getting her employment and career "*back on track*". She had become pregnant with her first child at sixteen having previously expected to follow a conventional trajectory into the sixth form, university and then into a career. Her pregnancy had changed these plans and so the completion of her degree represented a significant ambition both in a personal sense and also as part of her sense of responsibility to her wider community and as a way of setting a good example to her children.

Hafsa, who is in the first year of study for a medical degree at the time of interview, is also engaged with a long term project to move into a career that is in line with her academic potential. She describes having been a very able school student who had gained a place at an academically selective grammar school but had not made the transition to university after school, instead choosing to marry whilst still in her teens and starting a family shortly afterwards. Like Fiona also a mother whilst still in her teens, she describes an enduring sense of not having reached her potential which led to her decision to engage in a number of courses of further education whilst her two daughters were young, one of which led to her qualifying as a nurse. These decisions were informed both by her own desire to establish a career and her realisation that her husband was not willing to support the family financially. After qualifying as a nurse she took on the role of breadwinner before the marriage ended. She describes that whilst working as a nurse she felt that she was capable of the level of work that was required of a doctor and so took the decision to return to university to retrain. This plan meant that Hafsa was not only undertaking a very long course of study but also seriously limiting her income for this time. She describes how even after qualification it would

take some considerable time before she was able to return to the level of income she had commanded as an experienced nurse working nights at her local NHS hospital. However, her ambition to set a good example to her daughters of what can be achieved through hard work is very powerful and she regards this as a key part of her role as a mother.

Chloe, as the mother of four children, has experienced some significant challenges in her educational journey her first child being born whilst she was a university student in her late teens. After two breaks from study, transferring to a different university in a new city and the birth of two more children she finally finished her degree just a few weeks before the birth of her fourth child. The dedication that this reflects is significant and demonstrates her enduring commitment to improving her employment prospects. She explains that she hopes to return to education when her youngest child is a little older and wishes to complete a Post Graduate Certificate of Education and qualify as a primary school teacher. This long term goal is informed by her experiences of working within a school as a teaching assistant and her circumstances as a lone mother of four children with the term time working pattern significantly more manageable than one which requires school holiday childcare. Chloe expresses a real desire to engage with the paid labour market but experiences some serious challenges in making this a reality. Managing the daily routines of four children including a school run which takes over one and half hours each day leaves little time for paid work at present but her ambition to support her family through her eventual employment is central to her plans for the future.

Also committed to improving her financial situation through study and paid work is Amy who is close to the beginning of a proposed four year period of study at the time of the interview. She is following a degree course and intends to also complete a Masters degree in order to gain the academic qualifications she requires to work full time in an industry she already has some practical experience of. Amy has experienced the loss of income after becoming a lone parent as a real struggle having enjoyed a very comfortable standard of living when living together with her ex husband and their children. She and her husband had owned and managed successful businesses and the loss of this secure income is a real pressure in Amy's daily life, an experience that is shared also by Diane and Charlotte who had both also previously enjoyed a substantial household income. Of particular frustration in Amy's journey towards securing paid

employment is the knowledge that she already has the skills needed to work in her intended career and has undertaken some short term contract work for a large company, but lacks the official qualifications that are an entry requirement for the industry.

The increasing focus within the labour market on formal qualifications, especially those of degree level, had also posed problems for Diane when she attempted to return to paid employment after a period of caring for her daughter when she was young. Previously employed at a very high level of management in the finance industry she had taken an extended period of leave to care for her young daughter for five years. Later, when her daughter was older she attempted to return to work and discovered that recruitment procedures had undergone huge revision and she was no longer considered qualified for her previous position. Not having been to university was a significant disadvantage now that *“the world and his dog has got a degree”* and in addition she had been outside of the paid labour market for a number of years and her skills were considered out of date. Diane describes the process of attempting to return to the labour market as very frustrating as she applied for numerous jobs unsuccessfully often not being able to secure an interview. She was finally able to negotiate her way through the recruitment process for a job in the financial sector only to discover that the pay was significantly less than she had been expecting

*“I had all these interviews and psychometric tests and all the rest of it and they were raving, they thought I was brilliant but there was never any mention of filthy lucre you know. And I thought oh well I’ll wait and see, cos I just well, £13, 000 never entered my head!”* Diane

This drop in income was explained to her as normal for women returning from maternity leave by the recruiting member of staff who told Diane that she had also experienced a similar loss of level when she herself had returned to employment after having children. For Diane, previously employed at such a senior level previously, this crash back to the bottom of the salary scale was both totally unexpected and truly shocking. Her experience illuminates some of the challenges of returning to paid work after time away from the labour and her subsequent acceptance of a job well below her demonstrated level of experience placed her within the group of women working below capacity (see Grant et al., 2005). After a period in employment and some time spent working in Europe, Diane was now undertaking a part time degree course alongside part

time paid work in the hope that she would be able to secure more lucrative employment in the future. However, she was finding this extremely stressful, particularly due to understaffing in her current workplace leading to her having a very high workload alongside an ongoing threat of redundancy. An additional source of concern is the time that it will take to complete her degree as Diane is in her early fifties and is aware of the difficulties of beginning a new career at this stage of her life.

Sarah also frames her return to education in terms of her potential future earnings. Before separating from her daughters father she had been employed full time in a professional career in which she had been promoted and reached an above average salary. However, after the separation she felt it important to increase her earnings potential still further and returned to the North of England to undertake study for a PhD. Unlike others in the sample who were funding their studies through student loans or part time work, Sarah finances her study via funding from a research council. This is significant as this takes the form of a stipend whereas those parents in the sample who are using student loans to finance undergraduate study will be required to pay back these loans in the future. Although Sarah has experienced a drop in income after separating from her ex partner she has been able to mitigate the loss of some of this income by moving to a cheaper area of the country and is also in receipt of reliable financial support from her daughter's father.

## **6.7 Chapter conclusions**

This chapter has considered the experiences of participants in managing the dynamics of caring and resourcing the household. It has acknowledged the complex relationships between being in paid work, undertaking a course of education and making a claim for financial support from welfare benefits and tax credits. Engaging in education is a key future focussed strategy and one that represented a key aspect of parental desire to provide for their family, and make positive plans for the future. (see also Chapter 6). The commitment that parents in education show to their studies indicates that they believe that gaining more qualifications is the key to securing more secure and better paid employment and achieving financial independence. The evidence suggests that those lone mothers in low paid and/or part time work rarely escape poverty through earnings alone (Gardiner and Millar, 2006) and it is only with the addition of tax credits, other benefits and maintenance are added that the household income can move above the poverty line (Ridge and Millar, 2011). So in this way we can see that adopting a

strategy to increase future earnings, even if this means living on a limited income in the short term, may be a significant step towards safeguarding the family from future poverty.

Although the support of welfare benefits and tax credits is welcomed by the parents, they are all hoping to reach a point in the future where they no longer need this support. For those who had experienced problems in making a claim such as Chloe, Debbie and Charlotte, as well as for Chris who seemed unsure of his entitlement to support, dealing with the stress and worry of making a claim had added to their difficulties in managing family life and making the transition to parenting in a lone parent household. The following chapter revisits the policy debates visited in the literature review chapter. Continuity and change in the welfare reform projects of Labour and the current Coalition government are examined and consideration is given to the experiences of participants in light of these developments.

## **Chapter Seven.**

### **7.1 Changing times, changing welfare policies**

An additional temporal consideration in the research programme was a rapidly changing policy framework. At the outset of the research New Labour's welfare reforms were underway, approximately halfway through the research programme, in 2010, a general election led to a change of government and further welfare reforms. The following chapter offers a policy update, reflecting upon the changing policy landscape and its potential impacts on the parents who took part in the study.

### **7.2 Policy for lone parents: a return to the debates**

The literature reviewed in the opening chapter of the thesis demonstrated the clear focus on the development of policies to incentivise paid work in approaches to welfare for lone parents in recent years. Focussing on paid work has been described as an individualized approach promoting, as part of active citizenship, a "duties discourse" (McKie, 2002: 917). In this, paid work is conceptualised as the central duty, and as the literature indicated, there is a declining level of financial support for lone parents not engaged with paid work as policies are formulated to 'make work pay'. Participation in paid work was central to the anti poverty (and, more specifically, the pledge to 'end child poverty') strategies of New Labour's Third Way (Lister, 1998 & 2003; McDowell, 2005; Williams, 2001 & 2004a). An additional effect of these policies is that as they widen the income gap between employed and non employed lone parents by offering financial incentives to encourage paid work the income gap is widens, leaving those not in paid work further behind. As noted in the literature review chapter, this presents a key site of tension as the widening of the income gap presents a challenge to the central New Labour pledge to "end child poverty".

These types of work focussed policy interventions have been in existence in some form or another since 1971, although initially the Family Income Supplement (FIS) was intended to be only a temporary measure to address the problem of family poverty. Whilst the number of families in receipt of FIS were initially quite low, with 71, 000 recipients in 1971, by 1999 there were 780, 000 families in receipt of Family Credit, the replacement for FIS introduced in 1988. After the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) by the New Labour government in 1999 the numbers of families in receipt almost doubled again (Dilnot and McRae, 1999) . This aligned with one of the key New Labour election manifesto pledges, which was to help single parents back in to



work. There was a clear focus on the importance of paid work as a route out of poverty and social exclusion with the policy paper *Supporting Families* (1998) proposing a range of interventions to help parents balance paid work with raising their children. One of the key policy mechanisms here was Working Families Tax Credit which, in 1999, replaced Family Credit as the key in work ‘top up’ benefit for low income working parents with a child aged under sixteen or nineteen if that child was in full time education at A level or equivalent standard. It was available to both lone parent and couple families as long as one adult member of the household was in paid work for sixteen or more hours per week.

As was seen in the earlier literature review in Chapter 1, the focus on paid work as a central plank of welfare policy intensified after the publication of the Freud report in 1997 and the Gregg report in 1998 wherein paid work was presented as the key duty of all responsible citizens regardless of their responsibility for care. Political leaders from the three main parties (see Cameron, 2011; Clegg, 2011; Miliband, 2011) have all argued recently that long term unemployment is a problem associated with a lack of individual responsibility, an approach informed by assumptions that the individual is responsible for their own (un)employment status (Page, 2009). As this adult worker model is assumed in which labour market participation is cast as an expression of individual choice or agency (Daly, 2011: 4-5) then, by extension, an (assumed) decision not to participate is also cast as a ‘choice’ in these welfare reform discourses. A focus on tackling welfare dependency via encouraging an engagement with paid work leans heavily on the notion that the labour market itself will act as a source of protection from income insecurity (Breitkreuz et al., 2010: 44) alongside the idea that users of welfare state services should be regarded as reflexive agents (Redmond, 2010). Placing the blame for circumstances of unemployment at the feet of the individual, without acknowledging structural causes or barriers (Lister and Bennett, 2010) engenders an individualisation of social risks (Ferge, 1997; Dean, 2007b) and a shift away from a rights based welfare model.

### **7.3 The 2010 Election: policy consensus?**

Marking the end of the thirteen year New Labour administration and the beginning of a new era in British politics, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government was formed. Post 1997, there had developed a level of consensus about the need for conditionality in welfare reform with Coalition policies following the course

set earlier by New Labour (Deacon and Patrick, 2011) and Iain Duncan Smith, now Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, was a vocal proponent of work focussed welfare reform. Work produced by his think tank, The Centre for Social Justice, in 2009 had developed a blueprint for how these reforms might play out (Centre for Social Justice, 2009) and argued for a radical overhaul of the whole benefits system (Sainsbury, 2010). By 2009 the three main parties, along with the National Audit Office, the Work and Pensions Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee had all endorsed the push towards a reform of the benefits system (Sainsbury, 2010). In the run up to the election both Labour and Conservative parties had illustrated manifestos with welfare reform proposals which envisioned a future in which welfare-to-work was presented as the cornerstone of welfare reform (Labour Party Manifesto, 2010; The Conservative Manifesto, 2010).

The direction of this change had been set many years previously during the Thatcher administration (Hills, 1998; Page, 2011). Later, Labour planned to restructure the welfare state around paid work through a focus on changing cultures amongst recipients and administrators of welfare and the removal of ‘passivity’ from the old system a central aim (DSS, 1999; 23-24; Stepney et al 1999). The broad aims intended in this reformulation of welfare principles towards in-work support included making work a more financially attractive and viable option, and thus ensuring that households had at least one adult in paid work (Bennett and Millar, 2005: 31-32) in a model of reciprocal responsibility (Sage, 2012). The phased reduction in age of youngest resident child required to remain eligible for Income Support began in October 2008 reducing the age to 12 and by October 2010 only lone parents with a child under the age of seven remained in the Income Support claimant group (DWP, 2007b: 14). All others (who were not assessed as being eligible for disability related benefits, for which tightening of eligibility was also occurring) were transferred to Job Seekers Allowance and required to engage with its job search requirements (Welfare Reform Act, 2009). These changes indicated a clear shift away from the principle that lone parents should be supported to remain at home to care for their children (Haux, 2010: 1). A number of research papers published by Millar and Ridge disputed claims that paid work was the solution to lone parent family poverty, reporting research findings that financial gains were often limited especially when placed in the context of the wider practical impacts of lone mothers engaging in paid employment outside the home (Millar, 2006; Ridge, 2007; Millar and Ridge, 2008). Ongoing research continues to affirm these findings

(Ridge and Millar, 2011) and this is also supported by the findings of the empirical research informing this thesis.

By the 2010 election campaign the campaigning message from New Labour was clear: “tough choices” needed to be made to “increase fairness and work incentives” (The Labour Party Manifesto, 2010, 0:6) as “all those who can work will be required to do so” (The Labour Party Manifesto, 2010, 2:2). Responsibility would be “the cornerstone of our welfare state” (The Labour Party Manifesto, 2010: 2:3) and, if elected, Labour promised to “consult on further reforms to simplify the benefits system and make sure it gives people the right incentives and personal support to get into work and progress in their jobs” (ibid.). Although the policies proposed in election campaign materials do not always translate into substantive policy, the language used by both Labour and Conservative parties was notably similar in tone. Later research by Prospect and YouGov indicated that there was high level of public support for the principle of cutting welfare spending, with welfare reform plans tapping into a widespread public desire for a reduction in provision (Kellner, 2012). This approach was consistent with earlier commitments from New Labour to “make work pay” (Driver, 2009). In addition, Labour proposed to continue to investigate the possibility of introducing a single working age benefit to avoid the need to move between benefits as circumstances change (DWP, 2008a), as had been suggested by Freud in his 1997 report.

Simplifying the benefits system is a goal that has long been shared across the party political spectrum (Bennett, 2012). The Conservative party advanced proposals for a single Work Programme which would include all people of working age not in paid work thus abolishing the long standing bifurcation between the unemployed and those exempt from work requirements such as disabled people, those with long term ill health and lone parents. The programme would subcontract welfare to work functions to profit making companies who would be tasked with ensuring that the unemployed were assisted to return to paid employment. In addition, Conservative proposals included forcing long-term benefit claimants on to community work programmes, losing the right to claim out-of-work benefits until they agree to do so. Refusal to accept “reasonable job offers” would lead to the forfeit of benefits for up to three years (The Conservative Party Manifesto, 2010: 16). Of particular significance for lone parents was the intention to end the couple penalty in the tax credit system signalling that “we value

couples and the commitment that people make when they get married” (The Conservative Party Manifesto, 2010: 41).

Both parties proposed the attachment of compulsion to claims for out of work benefits with Conservative party recommendations advocating the implementation of time limits and sanctions for non compliance with work requirements (The Conservative Party, 2008). Labour made similar proposals, with those unemployed for two years guaranteed a job placement which would be mandatory, with benefits cut as a sanction for failure to engage (The Labour Party Manifesto, 2010: 2:3). In many respects, the welfare reform proposals of both parties were very similar, both in terms of their practical content and the rhetoric underpinning them (Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Haux, 2011).

#### **7.4 Coalition policies**

Following the May 2010 election a Coalition government was formed, the first for over fifty years. In the days following the election, agreements were made which resulted in the formation of a Cabinet staffed by key Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers. Almost immediately a programme of cuts to spending scheduled to take place between 2010 and 2015 began to be announced via the Budget (HM Treasury, 2010a) and Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2010b). Reforms were to be wide ranging and included changes to public services, tax credits, welfare benefits and a range of other family support services (Churchill, 2012). The Coalition approach to welfare has been described as a “principled opposition to universalism” (Horton, 2011: 113) in which popular welfare programmes, such as Tax Credits will be gradually sliced away in order that no individual cut generates significant public opposition (ibid.). The proposed cuts serve to residualise welfare by creating an environment in which old distinctions about whom is deserving and whom undeserving are re-asserted and public welfare provision becomes stigmatised (Mann 1992; Horton, 2012). As Ferge (1997: 27) identified some years ago, welfare benefits can be trimmed more readily and with less opposition if they serve only poorer or less powerful groups. This process of retrenchment and restructuring was framed by a discourse focussed on the ‘need’ to reduce the deficit (Taylor-Gooby, 2012). The scale and extent of the cuts have been described as,

“cumulative, abrupt and substantial....the reforms also include a far-reaching restructuring of state services, involving significant transfers of responsibility

from the state to the private sector and the citizen” (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2010: 4).

There is evidence to suggest that these changes will damage the living standards of the poor leading to an increase in poverty and inequality (Taylor-Gooby, 2012): lone parents (as well as single pensioners) have been identified as the key groups for whom there will be the greatest reduction in living standards as a result of Coalition cuts, particularly because as lone parents are often poor, cuts will have a proportionally greater impact on their income (Women’s Budget Group, 2010). Indeed, analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the Coalition’s tax and benefit changes will increase both absolute and relative poverty (Brewer et al., 2011). An increase of £30 in the child element of Child Tax Credit in 2011 and a further £50 in 2012 were announced, although the Women’s Budget Group analysis found that the impact of this small increase would be outweighed by reductions in the childcare element of Working Tax Credit (Women’s Budget Group, 2010). Other family policy changes include the restriction of Sure start maternity grants, the abolition of the health in pregnancy grant (a one off payment of £190 made when the 25th week of a pregnancy was reached), in addition to wider changes such as the establishment of a ceiling for the value of housing benefit claims (HM Treasury, 2010a).

These cuts were followed in October’s Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2010b) with the freezing of the basic and thirty hour elements of Working Tax Credit for three years from 2011-12 and the reduction of childcare Tax Credit to cover only 70 per cent (down from 80 per cent) of childcare costs from April 2011. The real cost of this is likely to be accentuated by the disconnection between wage rates and childcare costs. Research from the Daycare Trust (2012) indicates that typical childcare costs have risen faster than the average wage as the average cost of a nursery place for a child over two has increased by 4.8 per cent since 2010 whilst the wage growth rate for the same period was just 2.1 per cent. Previously universal Child Benefit is to be removed from households with at least one higher rate tax payer in January 2013 (HM Treasury, 2010b). Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies indicates that the cumulative impact of these changes will mean that lone parents are one of the groups disproportionately affected by budgetary changes under the Coalition (Browne and Levell, 2010).

Alongside extensive spending cuts, welfare reforms including the creation of a single welfare-to-work programme, removal of the 12 month wait for referrals to welfare to work programmes for those with “the most significant barriers to work” and a commitment to welfare conditionality (HM Government, 2010) were announced. For lone parents further tightening of eligibility rules are forthcoming as the Welfare Reform Act (2012) will restrict the ‘no work related requirements’ category to those with a child under one with lone parents of children between one and three years of age obliged to take part in work focussed interviews and, as children grow older, to take part in ‘work preparation’ (ibid.). Alongside these changes is the proposal to apply an cap of £26,000 as the maximum a household, regardless of family size or housing costs, may receive in welfare payments. This cap is equivalent to the average wage earned by households in paid work without taking into consideration the number of children in the household (DWP, 2011b) and is expected to affect 67, 000 households when it is implemented in 2013/14 (Joyce, 2012).

In conjunction with these cuts to welfare and services the Coalition announced increases in childcare provision for ‘disadvantaged’ two year olds. From 2012/13 fifteen hours per week of free early education would be made available in addition to the already available fifteen hours for three and four year olds (HM Treasury, 2010b). Although these provisions may appear to offer some support for parents who wish to seek paid work or are already in employment it is important to note that the free provision is for fifteen hours per week. This is one hour less than the sixteen hours per week that must be worked in order to become eligible for Working Tax Credit, a wage ‘top-up’ that is especially important for those moving from welfare into low paid employment or already employed in work with low pay. This type of policy incoherence arose as a key pragmatic issue for participants in the study, as they attempted to balance the participation rules of individual policies alongside the demands of their children’s needs and the types of employment and/or childcare that were actually available in their local area. These empirical findings were discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 to 7.

## **7.5 Universal Credit**

In recognition of some of these issues, a central aim of the Conservative proposals for a Universal Credit is to effect a simplification of the benefits system and to ensure that work always pays and that it is seen to pay (DWP, 2010b). Proposed by Secretary of

State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith and explicitly designed to “produce positive behavioural effects” (DWP, 2010c: 2), the reforms seek to place work at the centre of the welfare system (ibid.). However, the benefit is to be far from ‘universal’, indeed it could more accurately be described as a “super-means-tested-benefit” (Bennett, 2012: 16). Roll out of the Universal Credit will begin in October 2013, via a gradual phasing in of the benefit to new claimants initially with all welfare recipients to have been transferred to the scheme by 2017. The Universal Credit scheme has a number of linked central targets which include simplifying the current system (seen to have high costs both in terms of benefits themselves and their administration) along with tackling error and fraud, low work incentives and the problem of a hard core of ‘workshy’ claimants (Sainsbury, 2010). Simplification of the currently complex benefit system will occur through the combining of income related Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support, income related Employment and Support Allowance along with Tax Credits and Housing and Council Tax Benefit. As the majority of lone parents currently receive one or more of these benefits it is likely that large numbers of lone parents will go on to claim Universal Credit in the future (Haux, 2011: 157).

The key argument presented by the Conservative party and Lord Freud, now Minister for Welfare Reform, as underpinning the introduction of Universal Credit is the desire to increase work incentives and diminish some of the problems associated with marginal deduction rates as low paid workers increase their hours. A marginal deduction rate is the proportion of each additional pound in earnings that is lost to increased income tax, National Insurance contributions and reductions in benefit and Tax credit entitlements and can be as high as 90 per cent, representing a serious financial disincentive to take on extra hours of work. Primarily, the current system is regarded to be failing to “generate positive behavioural effects” (DWP, 2010a: 10): the Universal Credit is explicitly designed to produce them (DWP, 2010a: 2). These ‘effects’ are conceived of primarily in terms of reducing welfare dependency (Wiggan, 2011) with the Conservative’s welfare reform policy remains committed to an analysis which regards incentivising paid work as the key function of welfare reform. Public Welfare dependency is conceived of as being harmful and illiberal, with a focus on self reliance and self sufficiency without recognising that for many, the receipt of services and welfare benefits are crucial in creating this independence (Horton, 2012; White, 2010). As the Universal Credit will be means tested and paid whether recipients are in paid work or not, one of the key intended features of the reform is that it should make

the transitions between work and non work smoother. Concerns raised in prior research indicating that the movement from benefits to paid work can be difficult due to changes in payment processes and gaps between benefit payments stopping and wage payments commencing could be addressed by this simplification. This element of the proposals has been welcomed, particularly as we know that lone parent poverty is particularly persistent (Haux, 2011: 148).

For lone parents some other important changes will be brought by the introduction of Universal Credit, notably the allowance for the first time for financial support for lone parents to assist with childcare costs when they work less than sixteen hours a week. Under the Tax Credit regime, support for childcare costs is only available to parents working more than sixteen hours and so there was little incentive for a lone parent to engage in paid work for fewer hours than this as, unless it was extremely highly paid work, the costs of childcare would be prohibitive. In addition, benefit withdrawal rates mean that in the current system mini-jobs are rarely financially viable (Bennett, 2012). Dealing with this barrier to work is regarded as being central in incentivising lone parents to (re)engage with the paid labour market in light of evidence suggesting that managing low paid work and childcare is particularly challenging (CAB, 2008). This is borne out by the findings of this thesis, in which participants were well aware of the sixteen hours rule and reported specifically searching for jobs with this number of hours or combining a number of low hours jobs to reach this hours threshold. However, concerns have been expressed that whilst the introduction of this support for parents working in mini-jobs is welcome, the overall spending proposal does not allow for an increase in overall spending, with reductions in support for child care costs applied elsewhere. Whilst there may be some increased incentive for parents to engage in mini-jobs, the costs of this will be borne by other parents already in paid work, who will experience a reduction in their entitlement to assistance with childcare costs. Childcare is a substantial cost for parents of young children with research from Save the Children in September 2011 finding that childcare costs were comparable in size to their rent or mortgage payments for four out of ten families (Save the Children, 2011). In addition to the problem of childcare costs, research from Gingerbread and the Resolution Foundation suggests that even if a lone parent finds a mini-job, although they will be better off than if they engaged in no work at all, they will still remain below the poverty line (Hirsch, 2011: 3). There is something of a tension here in the stated intention of the policy, which is to incentivise employment by making work pay and the actual effects



of the policy in practice. Concerns have been expressed that whilst the Universal Credit may make some contribution towards relieving the poverty of low waged workers, it may also have the effect of perpetuating employment insecurity by ‘topping up’ low wages and supporting the increased flexibilisation of the labour market (Dean, 2012). Additionally, an impact assessment from the DWP found that although 5.5 million households will see either no change, or an increase in their entitlement to benefit after the roll out of Universal Credit, 2 million households, 1.1 million of them households with children will see a decrease in their entitlements and therefore a drop in their income (DWP, 2011b).

### **7.6 Mini-jobs or quality jobs?**

Additional potential problems with the notion that mini-jobs will provide a step into the labour market for lone parents lie in the assumption made that these types of jobs actually exist. Data from the Office for National Statistics (2012b) shows an increase of 71, 000 in the number of people in part time employment from the three months to September 2011 to December 2011. However, Clayton and Brinkley (2011) suggest an increase in the demand for such jobs will not necessarily lead to employers arranging work to accommodate this, with historical data suggesting that between 1993 and 2008 the number of employees working less than sixteen hours actually fell (*ibid.*). There is also some evidence from Hales et al. (2007) to suggest that mini-jobs do not provide a stepping stone to longer hours employment and that making this shift may be complicated by a need to make new childcare arrangements (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011: 101).

Entry level employment of the type likely to be accessed by those who have been outside of the labour market for a period of time has some key characteristics that may make it particularly challenging for lone parents to sustain. The type of employment entered after a long period outside of the labour market is often low paid; has variable, temporary, part time, long or unsociable hours; is labour intensive; low skilled and has a high staff turnover (Centre for Social Justice; 2011: 14). Lone parents face additional challenges as job seekers owing to their need to find flexible work and source and pay for childcare in a highly uncertain labour market (Browne, 2012: 3). Others have identified these same features as characteristic of ‘poor quality’ jobs (McCollum, 2011) with some commentators suggesting that this type of precarious insecure employment (TUC, 2008; Standing, 2011) may become a key feature of future labour markets

(Clayton and Brinkley, 2011). It is well documented that many of those leaving welfare for employment return to welfare soon after, with ongoing and frequent shifts between work and welfare over long periods of time: sustaining employment is more likely if the job is secure and the employee well suited to it (McCollum, 2011). This suggests that rather than simply focussing on moving lone parents off welfare and into paid employment, a key challenge lies in addressing some of the demand side issues of improving the availability and accessibility of decent employment opportunities (Women's Budget Group, 2010) and improving employment sustainability and job retention (Millar and Bennett, 2005). The Coalition welfare reforms are largely underpinned by the assumption that in order to find work, all that is required is a commitment from the unemployed person to seek work along with 'support' from a Work Programme provider. This assumption which has been spelled out explicitly by both Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith (2011) and Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Liam Byrne (2012), does not acknowledge the discrepancy between the numbers of people unemployed and the jobs that are available. Data from the Office for National Statistics in December 2011 indicates that whilst 2.64 million people were unemployed, there were just 455, 000 vacancies in the three months to November 2011. By September 2012, the number of unemployed had fallen slightly to 2.59 million, with 473, 000 vacancies in the three months to August 2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2012c).

## **7.7 Child Maintenance**

Further important changes in policy include proposals to alter the structure of the Child Support Agency, introduce a charge for the administration and collection of child maintenance, and encourage parents to make arrangements without using the agency. Child maintenance payments, along with Child Benefit, are to be excluded from Universal Credit calculations, as is currently the case in calculations of entitlement to Tax Credit (Puttick, 2012).

In May 2012, Margaret Hodge, in her capacity as Chair of the committee tasked with assessing the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, revealed that outstanding payments totalled £3.7 billion, with only £1 billion of that considered collectable (Lister, 2012). The proposal is to charge parents a £100 application fee to use the service, with a reduced rate of £50 for those in receipt of benefits, as well as an ongoing charge of between 7 and 12 per cent of any monies

collected. In cases where the agency is operating a full collections service (that is to say, calculating, collecting and transferring the maintenance payment from non-resident parent to parent with care) both non resident and parent with care will be required to pay a fee (DWP, 2011a: 22). Again, there appears to be policy consensus across the political spectrum: the charging mechanism was introduced by the Labour administration but never used (Guardian, 2012).

The stated intention of these charging proposals is to encourage parents to make informal arrangements wherever possible and promote “collaborative parenting and an ethos of parental responsibility” (DWP, 2011a: 10) with the fee structure intended to “encourage this behaviour” (DWP, 2011a: 27). However, the research participants in this project indicated that, in line with the findings of other research (see for example, Peacey and Hunt, 2009), maintenance could be a key site of conflict both at the time of separation and in the longer term. For others, pursuing a claim for maintenance was not seen to be worthwhile, particularly if the non resident parents income and therefore potential contribution was small and so it seems unlikely that they would be willing to pay to use a maintenance collection service. Research from the DWP found that receipt of maintenance was patchy, with 37 per cent of their respondents saying that they were supposed to receive it, and only 41 per cent of those respondents saying that they usually received all of it (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011: 32). Not receiving the agreed amount of maintenance was an experience reported by participants in this study although those with an ex partner employed and working regular hours, reported that after making a claim for maintenance through the Child Support Agency their maintenance receipt had stabilised. For those such as Jenny, Chris and Hafsa who had an ex partner who was either not in paid work, or working in non-standard employment maintenance receipt, even with the involvement of the CSA could not be relied upon. So it remains a possibility that the charging proposals will do little to assist those parents for whom maintenance is a site of conflict whilst those who are already managing to maintain a collaborative relationship with an ex partner will be largely unaffected by the changes.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **8.1 Conclusions**

A key aim when undertaking the collection and later analysis of the data that informs this thesis was to identify, illuminate and explore the complex, nuanced and context specific ways in which individuals and their families negotiate their lives from their position within the policy framework. The primary research questions set out in Chapter 2 demonstrate the scope of the research and this final chapter sets out the key findings and conclusions arising from the fieldwork that informs the thesis.

#### **8.1.1 Moral decision making and the ethic of care**

An alternative morality has previously been identified as informing decision making around work and care (Glover, 2002; Williams, 2004) as parents attempt to balance their responsibilities. As noted in Chapter 3, parental decision making itself has a moral quality (May, 2008; Smart and Neale, 1999) as parents, and their children, negotiate family life. As caring activities are not just obligations, but retain a moral quality, they are negotiated in terms of what is felt to be the 'proper thing to do' (Williams, 2004: 17), and this research found that each participant had a strong moral sense of the type of parent they wished and hoped to be. This thesis contends that an ethics of care involving consideration of responsibilities and relationships in place of the discourses of rules and rights (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 107) has the potential to represent a framework for welfare policy that more adequately reflects and supports the realities and diversities of lived experiences.

Understanding family life primarily in terms of relationships allows for consideration of the ways in which lived experiences are bounded by qualities related to time, space, place and individual circumstance, as has been illustrated in the empirical chapters of the thesis. This approach allows for the acknowledgement that a feature common to all of the participants' experiences is the positive impact on their lives of relationships that have at their centre, a focus on care and support. Not only were these relationships important to participants in their experiences of feeling bonded to and supported by others emotionally, but they were also found to be highly important in allowing a separated parent to combine work and care effectively. Those parents who lacked emotional and practical support from their relationships with friends or family members reported significant difficulties in balancing their responsibilities as parents, which impacted on their abilities to manage paid employment alongside the care of their

children. Work focussed welfare reforms may not be appropriate in these circumstances, by adding further stresses and strains to already struggling households.

Although the Conservative party had previously suggested that any future work requirements for lone parents would “reflect the limitations that good parenting places on the ability to work...[and they will] not be forced into a position where they have to work hours that are completely incompatible with good parenting” (Conservative Party, 2008: 35) later welfare reform proposals suggest that these flexibilities will be rather limited in practice and lone parents may find that a requirement to undertake paid work undermines their ability to parent in a way that is in line with their own moral and ethical framework (Duncan et al., 2003). Employing policy approaches which seek to encourage and/or compel lone parents to enter the labour market by invoking a moral standpoint about the goodness of paid work are likely to pose particular problems where they challenge the moral view of parents themselves and prevent them from making choices about how best to care for their families.

Unlike the types of economically rational behaviour assumed by contemporary policy making, we can see then that caring and employment behaviour is constrained by a variety of practical and moral or emotional factors. In contrast to the assumptions in work focussed policy making, for the parents in the sample economic considerations were presented as *a* driver but not *the* driver of employment behaviour. Although all parents in the sample expressed a desire to work, this needed to be balanced with the care needs of their children. The duty to provide this care was not simply a desire, but something which they were compelled to do. So, parenting and employment behaviour retains a dynamic relationship, much like the dynamism of the relationships between members of the family. As the participants’ experiences clearly demonstrate, if one parent chose to withdraw from their parenting responsibilities as a non resident parent ceasing to provide care or financial support, the other had no choice but to deal with whatever practical or emotional circumstances this gave rise to.

A key constraint, in both emotional and practical terms then, was the quality of the ongoing relationships that could be developed and sustained between the parents and any new partners. These were central to satisfactorily managing family life after divorce or separation. It was not the change in family shape *per se* that was experienced as problematic but the ways in which the parents and their children were able to manage

these changes. In the experiences of participants, managing these changes depended on both parents being able to prioritise caring activity, both for their children and by establishing new ways of supporting one another as parents. For example, Simon, Sarah and Debbie had all managed to negotiate mutually supportive, respectful and caring relationships from within which they were able to continue to co-parent their children alongside their ex partners. This contrasts with the discourses underpinning policy development which fail to consider the influence that the emotional aspects of relationships can have on family life after divorce or separation. Where relationships were characterised by ongoing conflict and/or a lack of mutual responsibility and support, then practical issues presented a much greater challenge. Where parents attempted to work co-operatively to support one another, such as in Simon and Debbie's families, practical concerns were described as being more manageable.

### **8.1.2 How did participants balance their caring and earning responsibilities after separation or divorce?**

It was found that participant's orientations to paid work and the opinions they expressed about what they felt constituted good parenting were influenced by a wide range of factors. These included their prior engagement with the paid labour market, their relationships with and the support provided by ex partners and other members of their family in addition to the principles of the dominant welfare paradigm and local labour market opportunities. Those who had always expected to combine paid work with parenthood such as Sarah, Susan and Debbie, tended to describe their experiences of doing so more positively. These mothers were highly qualified and so their actual or potential career opportunities were likely to be well remunerated, as well as providing some level of job satisfaction. Their experiences also suggest that maintaining a pre-existing career after a separation may provide for a very different kind of employment experience when compared with attempts to establish a career after the separation had taken place. It is notable that Debbie, despite depending on a highly complex schedule involving multiple child care providers in order to sustain her long established job, reports that she finds this fairly manageable. In contrast, for those attempting to set up new employment and child care arrangements post separation, the experience was often described as being much more challenging, for example in the cases of Charlotte and Hafsa, whose arrangements were discussed in a case study in Chapter 4. This may be because rather than adapting pre-existing arrangements as Debbie had done, they were attempting to fit together new paid work and/or courses of study with new childcare

arrangements. Another participant, Sarah, had made major changes in her life after her separation, moving to a new location and changing her occupation. However, she had done so in a way that actually simplified her practical arrangements by moving to a new role with greater flexibility as well as moving closer to her family who were able to help to care for her daughter. Making these major changes was possible largely because of her privileged educational and social position. As a highly educated professional woman with a supportive family and former partner as well as good financial resources, she had the ability to make choices to suit her new situation as a separated mother. In contrast, parents such as Chris and Chloe lacked the ability to make these kinds of choices because, for example, their location choice was constrained by their status as local authority tenants and, in the case of Chris, a lack of educational qualifications limited his access to paid employment.

Other parents, such as Charlotte whose husband was a very high earner and had been the breadwinner during their marriage, found that her attempts to balance work and care after divorce and the associated lack of time it left for herself was a real challenge. As she had not expected to need to combine paid work with parenting, making this adjustment was difficult for emotional as well as practical reasons. Her difficulties were intensified further by her sole responsibility for her children's care as her former husband had not retained any contact with their children. These findings support the notion that parents have some degree of preference for either paid work or at-home parenting and suggest that being required to behave in contravention to this preference could be problematic for individuals and their families. However, there is a further layer of complexity that is not acknowledged in Hakim's preference theory (2000).

The findings reported and discussed in detail in the empirical chapters have shown that the practical challenges and constraints involved in the development of these family practices are interwoven with the emotional and moral thinking from within which parents approached their decision making. Using qualitative interviews as the primary research strategy enabled the production of rich data which captured and revealed the complexity of participant experiences whilst also providing the flexibility to adapt questions in the data gathering phase to reflect emerging findings and individual experiences. There is clearly scope for further research in this area, both in examining the pragmatic approaches to negotiating the challenges of family life after separation and divorce, and also in developing further understanding of the intersections between

the practical and the moral in negotiating responsibilities for caring and earning. It would be beneficial for further research in this area to take a qualitative longitudinal approach (Saldaña, 2003; Farrell, 2006) as this is known to be a particularly effective way of developing understandings of the dynamic nature of family decision making that could inform future policy making.

### **8.1.3 Disjuncture between policy assumptions and lived experiences**

The primary conclusion of the thesis is that the assumptions underpinning current policy making do not reflect the lived realities of the divorced and separated families that took part in the research. Although a small study such as this one can make no claims towards being representative of all families, it is important to note that despite the diversity of family circumstances represented in the sample, none of the participants found that balancing paid work with family care was straightforward. As was noted in the literature review, the policy framework is predicated on the assumption of a rational, methodical progress through the lifecourse and underpinned by the assumption that decisions are made in a way that can be responded to by concrete policy proposals with behaviour responsive to being shaped by welfare. ‘Nudging’ welfare recipients towards desirable employment behaviour is a libertarian paternalist approach (Wells, 2010) which echoes Mead’s suggestion that behaviour can be influenced via “help and hassle” (Mead, 1997: 61). Underlying this approach is a focus on the central importance of paid work as a responsibility of the individual both to the family and to the state.

An engagement with paid work is held up as the key marker of the good citizen (see Lister, 1999 and Young, 2002). To this end, a variety of policy interventions have been developed to encourage engagement with paid work, through the mechanisms of increased welfare conditionality and in-work support, such as tax credits. The central tenet underlying these neo-liberal economic policies is that the market both *is* and *should be* the best source of financial support to the family, as citizens are compelled to regard the labour market as the source of protection from income insecurity (Breitkruz et al., 2010). As discussed in Chapter 1, since the development of New Labour’s Third Way in the late 1990s there has been a significant increase in this focus on the paid labour market as the key site of income security for all. This has been expanded to include those previously regarded as having a legitimate reason not to be involved in paid work due to disability, health condition or caring responsibilities, a process that has gathered pace with current welfare reforms (Welfare Reform Bill, 2011). Indeed, lone



parenting in particular has become a focus of economic rather than welfare policy (Himmelweit et al., 2004) in line with broader policy trends in which financial responsibility rather than care responsibility has been positioned as the central parental duty for both non resident parents and parents with care (Child Support Act, 1999; Williams, 2004; Churchill, 2011). Lone parents who are not engaged in paid work are now regarded as unemployed, rather than being exempt from work requirements as they had been in the past in a policy system which gave greater recognition to their caring responsibilities (Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Haux, 2010).

The rhetoric of New Labour's Third Way claimed that an over generous provision of welfare created dependency, trapping the poor in a position of poverty, that would be then be passed on to their children via processes of the intergenerational transmission of deprivation (Deacon, 2002). This was a major concern in light of a wider policy focus on child poverty and social exclusion, with data indicating that lone parent families were particularly at risk of experiencing enduring poverty. New Labour's flagship New Deals were intended to move individuals, including lone parents, who had previously been supported by out of work welfare benefits into paid work to relieve the 'burden' of their support on the welfare state and tackle the poverty of lone parent families (Daguerre, 2004; Lloyd, 2008). A number of policy interventions to address the problems of the poverty trap and make low paid work a financially viable option were introduced. For the parents taking part in this study, the most important of these is certainly the expansion of the Tax Credit system which provides wage 'top-ups' to low earners as well as support to help meet the costs of childcare. In a single earner household the costs of childcare were simply prohibitive, and we have long known that lone parents face particular difficulties in moving off welfare and into work because of the rates at which welfare entitlements are withdrawn as earnings rise (Bennett, 2012). For the parents in this study, Tax Credit payments were a welcome and essential part of their income, without which they would be simply unable to meet the costs of the childcare they needed in order to be able to work. Tax Credits were not regarded by the participants in the study as welfare benefits (although a small number did concede that they should be regarded as such) because they were connected with the idea of work and thus held little of the stigma sometimes associated with the receipt of out of work welfare benefits. With the exception of Susan who was very resistant to the idea of claiming any state support, all of the parents with care who took part in the research were in receipt of tax credits at the time of interview.

### 8.1.4 Good work?

However, the drive to move lone parents into paid work has been driven by more than a desire to address their higher rates of poverty. Paid work was posited as having a range of benefits beyond the financial, as paid work was seen as being a central element of social inclusion (DSS, 1999; Bowring, 2000; Lister, 2001; Perkins, 2007), fostering good health and well being (Bowring, 2000; Waddell and Burton, 2006; Black 2008) and re-establishing the rights of citizenship (see Marshall, 1950; Mead, 1986, 1997, 2011, Dwyer, 2004). The parents who took part in the study agreed that an engagement with the paid labour market was something to be aspired to and those who were not in work hoped that this would change in the future. Indeed, they hoped to access the benefits of good quality work in aspiring to well paid and hopefully secure careers and most were taking active (although sometimes small) steps towards reaching these goals. Other research would suggest that this is a positive strategy as attempting to balance work and life in part time low paid employment is recognised as being qualitatively different from attempts to do so in the context of ‘middle-class’ working patterns (Grabham and Smith, 2010: 85). Some have suggested that the wider benefits of employment described as creating good health and wellbeing (Bowring, 2000; Wadell and Burton, 2006; Black, 2008 ) and presented in support of work focussed welfare reforms, are not available to those working in low paid and low skilled employment (Crisp, 2008: 101). Prior research also indicates that it is rare for lone parents to escape poverty through paid work alone (Ridge and Millar, 2011) with this finding borne out by the findings of the present research project. It would be beneficial to parents then, if support was available to help them to engage in education and support their aspirations to establish a career rather than the currently narrow focus on moving people away from welfare and into paid work. As paid work has been increasingly positioned as a central duty to oneself, ones family and wider society with non work increasingly conceptualised as a behavioural problem for which responsibility lies with the individual (Page, 2002), being out of work has come to be viewed more negatively. Those not in paid work, such as Chloe, Chris and Fiona felt that there was an expectation that as ‘good’ parents they *should* be in paid work, even where practical circumstances meant that this was currently difficult or impractical and even if this was not their own preferred style of parenting.

As noted in Chapter 7, the central aim of increasing conditionality and encouraging an engagement with paid work has endured and been enhanced by the policy making of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition that was formed after the 2010 election (DWP 2010; Welfare Reform Bill, 2011). The focus on unemployment as an individualized problem has also continued and has gained traction across the political spectrum as the leaders of the three main political parties have argued that a lack of employment can be directly conflated with a lack of individual responsibility (Cameron, 2011; Clegg, 2011; Miliband, 2011). As noted in Chapter 7, there is considerable policy transfer between the two administrations, particularly in the area of welfare-to-work on which both administrations have sought and followed the advice of David (now Lord) Freud, author of the highly influential Freud Report in 2007. The approach advocated continues to be based on the presumption that not only can (and does) the labour market provide the kind of employment opportunities that will give a realistic chance of achieving financial independence but that lone parents have equal access to these opportunities when compared to those without the responsibilities for the care of others. This thesis challenges that view by identifying the particular challenges that arise for those attempting to renegotiate caring and earning responsibilities after divorce or separation.

The problem of job sustainability was also identified by the participants in this research as a key challenge. Several parents in the sample reported having attempted to sustain paid work on a number of occasions, but practical circumstances had meant that maintaining their employment had been extremely challenging or impossible. As noted in the case study in Chapter 4, the conditionality requirements of Jobseekers Allowance can mean that parents feel pressured into accepting work that does not fit well with their caring responsibilities. This poses a problem because there is evidence to suggest that 'cycling' between paid work and welfare can be a problem. Sustaining employment in the longer term is more likely if a secure job can be found that the employee is well suited to and fits well within the context of their life (McCollum, 2011). A number of parents in the sample expressed concerns that frequent changes in circumstances had the potential to create complex difficulties with their benefit or tax credit claim and that this was a real source of worry and stress. It could also cause financial hardship as high levels of child poverty are particularly associated with frequent transitions in and out of paid work (Magadi and Middleton, 2005). The Universal Credit proposals discussed in Chapter 7 are intended to address some of these issues, particularly as they wrap

together the currently wide range of benefits and tax credits into a single payment mechanism.

These research findings therefore challenge the view underlying work focussed policy developments that employment decision making for those with caring responsibilities is straightforwardly economically rational (see also Barlow et al., 2002) and thus responsive to financial inducements. They also refute the notion that an individual's desert to support from welfare can be evaluated according to their obedience to the moral norm of paid work (Dean, 2007), as the parents in the study were actively engaged in caring work. The empirical data that forms the basis of this thesis does not support the notion that work-focussed policy making can adequately address the needs of those who experience a family separation for a number of reasons. Responsibility for the care of children may, as seen in policy discourse, present a *practical* barrier to securing and maintaining paid work and indeed it did do so to some degree for all of the parents in the study. In some cases, such as Chloe, a mother of four, care responsibilities were a major practical barrier to her aspirations to a career. However, these care responsibilities also presented a *moral* problem when welfare rules prescribed behaviour that did not fit with an individual's sense of the 'proper thing to do' (Williams, 2004b: 17). For the participants in this study, the 'event' of separation and the reconstitution of family life thereafter was intimately bound up with moral, ethical and emotional circumstance in addition to pragmatic and practical concerns. This means that a prescriptive, work focussed policy approach lacks the holistic responsiveness that is required to respond to the diversity of family circumstances, individual moral views and wider labour market realities.

## **8.2 Policy implications**

Conceptualising a divorce or separation as a time bounded event is problematic and it is more appropriate to understand it as an ongoing shift in circumstances that continues to impact on family life and decision making in a sustained and ongoing way. I suggest that conceptualising a divorce or separation in a family with children as a process rather than an event (Morrison, 1995) should be used as a central analytic tool for creating a conceptual framework through which to develop understandings of the dynamics of family relationships over time. Family and relationships were experienced as fluid arrangements as the participants in the study made their decisions about employment

and the care of their children from within particular sets of circumstances situated within the temporal, physical and practical circumstances of their lives. The complex negotiation of family relationships both at the time of separation and into the future, meant that their employment decision making could not be understood as a simple response to financial need or welfare conditionality. Rather, participants were involved in an ongoing process of negotiation between personal preference, the dynamics of their family relationships, structural constraints and welfare policy behavioural requirements. Whilst policy responses in the form of active labour market programmes aim to effect behavioural change through a combination of help, advice and guidance (Skevik, 2004), the lived experiences of the participants in this study indicate that integrating employment and caring activity remains a significant challenge. Developing policies with primarily economic goals rather than welfare considerations at their heart means that the complex contexts within which lives are lived are not adequately considered or acknowledged. Key practical factors influencing ability to manage paid work alongside family care have been identified as access to transport and access to childcare, a finding which echoes those of Murray (2008), Jain et al. (2011) and Skinner (2005).

Although it is noted that steps have been made towards developing childcare provision and providing support through Childcare Tax Credit to meet the costs, these policy interventions lack adequate grounding in contextual understandings of the everyday practicalities of family life. Accessing appropriate and affordable childcare was presented as a key barrier to paid work by all the parents who took part in the study, and was a particular worry for those seeking new employment at the time of interview. After a long period outside of the labour market the types of jobs entered are often characterised by low pay; variable, temporary, part time, long or unsociable hours; is labour intensive; low skilled and has a high staff turnover (Centre for Social Justice; 2011: 14) and this is the type of employment that participants in the study felt was the hardest to manage alongside the care of children. Variable hours are particularly challenging to manage alongside child care that needs to be booked in advance and paid for whether the place is used or not.

For the participants in the study, co-ordinating their children's transport needs and meeting the costs of public transport or car ownership was a further serious challenge that remains unacknowledged in work focused welfare reforms. The task of ensuring that children were delivered to childcare or school on time, followed by parents arriving

on time at their place of work, means that parents have more complex and travel requirements than workers without children, a feature that needs to be addressed when formulating work requirement rules. Some consideration of appropriate travelling times is permitted in the administration of conditionality requirements of Jobseekers Allowance. However, the parents in this study highlighted that it was not simply a case of ensuring that they could manage childcare and work on the ordinary days, but that the anxiety of managing a long journey by public transport if, for example, their child was taken ill or had an accident, was a major concern. The need to be present and available for children was presented by the parents in the study as a central parental duty, and one that did not balance comfortably with travelling out of the local area without the means of independent transport. These concerns did not necessarily decline as children grew older, with Fiona describing her need to be in the local area in case of problems with her teenage sons in the periods of time after school had finished and during the school holidays.

Part of New Labour's welfare reforms was the introduction of eligibility criteria in which lone parents are compelled to make steps to enter the paid labour market when their youngest child reaches a qualifying age (DWP, 2007; Welfare Reform Act, 2009; Haux, 2010). These have been retained and tightened further by the Coalition Government (Welfare Reform Bill, 2011). However, as indicated above, in this research sample parents did not describe a decline in the need for care and supervision of children as they grew older, rather they felt that the supervision of teenage children was a key aspect of effective parenting. Although there is little recognition of the need for adequate supervision of older children and teenagers in welfare reforms, it was brought to the fore by Cameron in his response to the riots that took place in English cities in the summer of 2011 (Cameron, 2011) illuminating the tensions that parents exist when trying to balance their multiple responsibilities. It was also found that enforcing an engagement with paid work for parents who were struggling with the ongoing impacts of their divorce or separation could create practical and emotional difficulties for parents. This finding indicates that framing welfare policy around the application of age based rules in respect of work requirements is highly problematic as the age of participant's children bore little relation to their ability to manage paid employment. Indeed, as children grew older some parents felt that being in paid work became *more* difficult as childcare provision for children over the age of eleven is almost non-existent.

Making policy in this way therefore reflects a flawed and incomplete understanding of the realities of parenting after a separation or divorce. An over focus on the individualised ideal of the adult worker model in which labour market participation is cast as an expression of individual choice or agency (Daly, 2011) reflects the inaccurate assumption that non participation in paid work is also a freely made choice. For the participants in this study, decision making around work and care needed to be understood within the multi faceted and multi layered contexts of the interplay between the constellation of policy vehicles, individual preferences, children's needs, practical constraints and the emotional challenges faced by children and parents after a separation or divorce.

In order to understand employment decision making we therefore need to develop approaches which acknowledge that conceptualising these decisions as preferences or choices is too limited a framework from which to fully understand and interrogate the lived experiences of post-separation family life. Whilst parents may have a *preferred* position, this is better thought of as an *ideal* whilst in practice, they must operate from within a complex situation of preferences, practicalities and emotional contexts. These preferences or ideals then are just one element of a much wider picture that needs to be brought into consideration as the performance of family life is negotiated contextually (Finch and Mason, 1993). Although some parents taking part in the research would have preferred to be in paid employment, they were unable to balance this with their caring responsibilities: in these cases practical considerations overrode these elements of preference because care is crucial and time critical labour the non provision of which can cause harm (Bubeck, 2002). The ways in which the patterns and rhythms of daily life are regulated by the care needs of children illuminates these practical challenges clearly as was discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

In setting out the conclusions and reviewing the evidence that constitute the thesis, this chapter has illustrated the disjuncture between participants reported experiences and the assumptions underpinning contemporary policy making. The central claim of the thesis is that the formulation of welfare policy intended to address the needs of divorced or separated parents does not adequately reflect the diversity of circumstances and needs that exist in the lives of separated or divorced families. The family practices (Morgan, 1996) described by research participants are largely concerned with balancing the

competing demands of an engagement with the paid labour market and the care needs of children. This stands in a position of contrast to a welfare policy framework based on a discourse which elevates the position of paid work to that of the key duty not only of a responsible parent, but of the responsible citizen. As welfare policy for lone parents is increasingly formulated around economic rather than welfare principles (Himmelweit et al., 2004) as the welfare state contracts, lone parenthood has been redefined as personal experience rather than a social ‘problem’ deserving of support from the state (Davies, 2012) and lone parents have lost their status as a ‘vulnerable’ group in need of financial protection by the state (Haux, 2010).

However, this narrow focus on paid work represents a key site of tension for those with responsibilities for the care of children because care needs are often immediate, time critical and are not negotiable. The care needs of children are also subject to change over the course of childhood, as children grow up and family relationships and circumstances change and develop over time. Insisting that parents consider work as the central priority therefore risks increasing the already significant challenges experienced in managing family life after a divorce or separation, both in the immediate aftermath of the separation itself and into the future.

For the parents in the sample, an ideal welfare policy framework would recognise caring activity as a worthwhile contribution, deserving of support, and would retain sufficient flexibility to be adaptable to unanticipated changes in family circumstances. Whilst all of the parents were committed to the idea of seeking employment, they were equally resistant to the idea that this should be enforced by welfare policy, suggesting that each parent is best placed to make their own judgement about the appropriate work/care balance for their own family circumstances. Without employment opportunities and appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare parents could not and would not engage in paid work even if they were committed in principle to the idea of an engagement with paid work: policy responses to these practical needs were welcomed. However, this research indicates that in addition to addressing these practical needs, recognition is also required of the complex and significant ways in which moral and ethical positions and the shape of family relationships impact on caring and earning behaviour after a divorce or separation.



## **Appendix One**

### **Pen Portraits**

#### **Chloe**

Chloe is the resident parent of four children under the age of eleven. She herself is under thirty, her first child having been born whilst she was at university when she was eighteen. Chloe married this child's father and went on to have a second child with him. Later, they separated after difficulties in the relationship. Her husband also experienced some mental health difficulties at around this time. Chloe retained an amicable relationship with her ex husband and speaks of him with affection during the interview, although this had not always been so amicable and there had been periods of difficulty in the past. Chloe and the children did not live in the same city as her ex husband, but he continued to provide what practical and financial support he could. His mental health had continued to be problematic and he had periodically spent time as an in-patient in a psychiatric unit and this had at times restricted both the financial and practical support he had been able to offer to his children.

Chloe had since re-partnered and had younger two children and had lived for some years with this new partner and all of the children. There was a clear distinction within the family between the children from her marriage and those from the later relationship, with the more recent partner not considering himself a parental figure for the older two children. By the time the research interview took place, this relationship had also ended. At the time of the interview although emotionally separated, the physical separation of the household was incomplete and they were still living within the home they shared with the children whilst trying to lead separate lives. This was a source of considerable stress for Chloe (and undoubtedly for her ex partner too). A particular practical difficulty was that his residence in the family home meant that she was unable to claim benefits as a lone mother, although he had ceased to support the family financially, having recently lost his job. So, at the time of interview she was managing on a severely limited income made up only of Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit, her ex partner was not sharing the Jobseekers Allowance that he was in receipt of.

As a local authority tenant she lived in an area that she had not chosen and did not like, although she was glad to have finally acquired a tenancy on a larger home, having lived in a severely overcrowded home for many years. Chloe had been an 'at home' parent for most of her adult life, although there were periods when she had been in paid work.

She expressed a strong preference for paid work, indicating that she felt restricted by her caring responsibilities and frequently bored by the monotonous nature of her daily life. Since having her children she had completed a degree, and hoped to return to education to study for a PGCE and become a teacher. At present the practicalities of daily life were too complex to allow this, and she spent a considerable amount of time each day managing journeys to her younger children's school by bus but she hoped that as the children grew older she would be able to achieve this. Although Chloe has a close relationship with her parents and sibling, they do not live locally and so are unable to assist with looking after the children.

### **Jenny**

Jenny is a resident mother of two children. Her eldest child, born when Jenny herself was still a teenager, is 17 at the time of the interview, and her son is aged 10. She had lived with the children's father in the past, although he had always retained a home of his own and the family home was a social housing tenancy in Jenny's name only. At the time of the interview, Jenny and her children had recently moved to a small town and away from the inner city in which they had lived for the previous 17 years. Although this move was welcomed, providing a much improved physical environment, it had involved moving away from a supportive network of family, friends and neighbours who Jenny had been able to rely on for assistance.

Her children's father did not provide regular financial support nor did he have regular contact with the children or take a substantial role in their upbringing. Contact over the years had been sporadic and unreliable and although Jenny had attempted in the past to make a claim for Child Support via the Child Support Agency, this had not resulted in support being paid and, at the time of the interview, she was no longer pursuing maintenance. Jenny is close to her own parents, especially her mother, and they are supportive of her and the children, in practical and emotional ways.

Jenny was committed to paid work, having returned to work when her first child was of pre school age and had often been in employment whilst also being a lone parent. She had also studied for and achieved a degree as a mature student and was hoping to develop a career in an area related to her studies. At the time of the interview she was approaching the end of a fixed term contract and was worried about being able to find other work when this ended. Although she knew from prior experience that she could

manage on welfare benefits, she did not want to return to Jobseekers Allowance as she felt that after spending a number of years studying this would feel like a regressive step.

### **Sarah**

Sarah is the resident parent of one daughter, of primary school age. She is a highly educated woman, already holding an undergraduate degree and a Masters degree; at the time of the interview is engaged in a PhD programme.

After separating from her partner, Sarah had moved from the south east and returned with their child to the north of England for a number of reasons. These included wish to be close to the support of her family, to undertake her PhD study and to live in an area where she could afford to own her own home. Living close to her mother means that she is able to rely on her for practical assistance with raising her daughter.

Sarah is highly committed to her career, and had worked throughout her daughter's life with the exception of the first year of her life when she was on maternity leave. At times, she had been the primary earner, but in recent years as her ex partner's business had become more established he had become the primary earner. Sarah enjoyed an amicable co-parenting relationship with her child's father and whilst it had not always been easy to co-parent at a distance they were both committed to making it work. Sarah facilitated contact by travelling back to the south east with their daughter regularly so that she could spend time with her father, taking the opportunity to visit her own friends at the same time. Financial maintenance arrangements were informal but reliable and the relationship was characterised by a high level of trust between the two parents.

### **Debbie**

Debbie is the resident mother of two young children, one at primary school, the other of pre-school age. She has an undergraduate degree and has worked long part time hours in a job that she enjoys for a number of years. Previously married, she and the children continued to live in the former marital home after she separated from her husband, her ex husband living a short drive away. Their relationship is now focussed on the children and there is a pattern of shared care. Debbie's ex husband's father lives very locally and takes an active role in caring for the children and continues to be a source of emotional

support to Debbie. Her own family live at some considerable distance so this relationship is a particularly important one.

Debbie is highly committed to her job. She enjoys the work, the financial rewards and feels that she has been able to achieve a good balance between her family life and her work. Her ex husband is a high earner and makes a reliable financial contribution which provides a good level of financial security for Debbie and the children.

### **Chris**

Chris, a young man in his mid twenties, is the resident father of two young children, one pre school age and one having just started primary school, who live primarily with him. He also has an older son, but does not talk about him in the interview and it is not clear whether he has an ongoing relationship with this child or not.

The relationship with the younger boys mother is difficult, although she lives extremely locally, literally just around the corner. She has some ongoing difficulties with her mental health and the children and come to live with Chris as a result of an intervention from social workers. After a period of homelessness during which he 'sofa surfed' at the homes of friends, taking on the care of the children meant that he was able to secure a tenancy on a local authority home on a large inner city housing estate. He reports being well supported by staff at a local children's centre and is close to his next door neighbour who is also a lone parent. His own father lives nearby and is able to offer some help, although he has a physical disability and is not able to care for the children independently. Other family members are also supportive, although not local.

Chris is not working at the time of the interview and is highly committed to being an at home parent whilst his children are small. His entire income is derived from welfare benefits and he receives no maintenance from his sons' mother. Financially this is very difficult, but he is prepared to manage this in order to be at home for his sons. He hopes to return to education with a view to returning to work at some point in the future but this is not a priority at the moment. One of his sons has some behavioural difficulties and Chris does not feel that he would be able to offer the care he feels his children need if he was also working outside the home.

### **Fiona**

Fiona is in her early thirties, and the mother of two sons aged 11 and 14. She is the resident parent. She became pregnant with her first child whilst she and her partner were still at school, and the relationship with the children's father lasted for a number of years. During the early years of their children's lives, he completed his degree and worked part time, and Fiona focussed on caring for the children whilst also working part time herself. Since separating, she had continued to work part time, and was also studying for a degree with the Open University.

Fiona owns her home with a mortgage in the city she has lived in for her whole life. She has a network of supportive friends and family both locally and further afield and her ex partner lives in a neighbouring city with his new wife. She has a reasonably amicable relationship with her ex partner, although this has not always been the case. He works full time in a well paid job, and Fiona receives, via the CSA, regular maintenance payments for their sons. She is committed to paid work, and is keen to establish a career at a later stage of her life when she has completed her degree studies and her children have left home. At the time of the interview she is not in paid work and is in receipt of JobSeekers Allowance and subject to the associated job search requirements. For the moment, her priority is to find work that enables her to earn some independent income whilst also allowing her to be at home for her children. She does not wish to work full time at present as she feels that it is important to be at home as much as possible for her children, and is not happy about leaving them regularly without adult supervision.

### **Susan**

Susan is in her forties and has one son aged 17. She is the resident parent and has been a lone parent for most of her son's life. She has previously cohabited with a partner who was not her son's father, but this relationship ended in difficult circumstances some years ago.

Susan has a high level of education, holding an undergraduate degree and an MSc and is also hoping to complete a PhD in the near future. She is highly committed to paid work and has worked full time throughout her son's life. This has enabled her to pay for him to attend a private school which had the benefit of providing him with additional support for his learning needs and access to occasional boarding facilities when she needed to travel or work long hours. Although previously a home owner, at the time of

the interview she and her son are living in privately rented accommodation after moving to a new town after the end of Susan's co-habiting relationship. At the time of the interview Susan is not in paid work nor in receipt of welfare benefits. She is living on savings and a medical pension whilst looking for a funded PhD project to apply for.

Susan's relationship with her family is complex. Her father is no longer living and she has no ongoing relationship with her mother or either of her brothers. She describes having few friends and appears to lack a support network. Her son's father is not present in their lives, providing neither financial, practical or emotional support.

### **James**

James is a non resident parent of two young sons. He sees his sons regularly and has a defined arrangement for sharing care with the boys mother, although the children are with their mother for the majority of the time. His ex partner lives locally and is in receipt of welfare benefits. He pays maintenance according to the CSA calculation formula but via an informal agreement with his ex partner.

James has an undergraduate degree and has previously worked in a professional occupation but had been made redundant some months before separating from his ex partner. Remaining out of work at the time of the interview, James is earning money from a portfolio of properties that he owns and lets out and pays maintenance for his son's based on these earnings. His relationship with his ex partner is extremely difficult and there has been considerable conflict, including some domestic violence perpetrated by his partner prior to their separation. As his ex partner is not British, he fears that she will return to her home country with their children and having sought legal advice, believes that he would not be able to challenge this if she chose to go.

James parents live locally and offer some support. However, he feels unable to increase the time he spends caring for his sons unless he either continues to not work full time or his new girlfriend moves in with him and takes on some responsibility for the care of his children. As his ex partner is unwilling to allow him more time with the children at present the arrangements for sharing care look unlikely to change in the near future.

### **Simon**

Simon has two daughters and one step daughter. His eldest daughter, aged nineteen, is now at university, but during her childhood had lived with her mother in a neighbouring county. The geographical distance between them as well as a difficult relationship with this child's mother has meant that maintaining a relationship with her has not been easy. However, now his daughter is older, they are close and see each other regularly. Simon's younger daughter, aged six, and step daughter, aged thirteen, live locally with their mother, Simon's ex wife. His relationship with his youngest child's mother is very co-operative and they share the care of their daughter, who spends regular time with Simon. His step daughter also comes to stay with him sometimes, although does this less often as she gets older. He is highly committed to being an active, involved parent and sees being involved in regular caring activity as a central part of his identity as a father. This sharing of responsibilities is a continuation of the patterns of shared caring and earning that were established during the marriage.

Simon works full time, but benefits from a flexi-time arrangement with his employer. This means that he is able to manage his time in a way that allows him to be involved in taking and collecting his daughter from school and her childminder. This is also made possible by the fact that he and his ex wife live close together, and he also works close to where they live.

### **Hafsa**

Hafsa is in her late twenties and is the resident parent of two daughters aged eight and five. Her daughters live with her and currently have no contact with their father. Hafsa indicates that this is his choice, although her concerns about the potential risks to her children's welfare from an ongoing relationship with him means that she is not actively encouraging him to re-establish contact. Her concerns are centred on their safety as she is aware that her ex husband sometimes uses illegal drugs. No maintenance is paid, and Hafsa does not believe her ex husband to be in regular paid work.

Hafsa is studying to be a medical doctor, having previously trained and worked as a registered nurse. Her training is supported by an NHS bursary although she also works part time for a nursing agency to support her income. As a home owner, and needing to maintain a vehicle to manage her commute to university maintaining a decent income is extremely important to her. She is highly committed to her career and is very keen to become financially independent, and support her family through her earnings.

Hafsa has a difficult relationship with her family, who are not always supportive, although they live locally. As a divorced Muslim, she has experienced some difficulties within her religious community, and most of her support comes from other young mothers. She has good supportive relationships with close friends, although the support is of an emotional nature rather than as practical assistance with the care of her children.

### **Anne**

Anne, a woman in her mid thirties, is the resident mother of an eleven year old son. She has been separated from her ex-partner for five years, and he has retained some contact with their son. This is largely visiting contact rather than a shared care arrangement. Anne receives some maintenance payments from her ex partner, but these are sporadic and therefore she tries not to rely on them.

She works in unskilled employment, on a shift basis, usually working 30 hours a week. With the assistance of tax credits, this produces an income on which she can manage her household reasonably well. As a local authority tenant, she has a secure home, which she finds affordable and is in an area that she likes. Although the relationship with her ex partner is not easy, and they find it difficult to co-parent co-operatively she is keen for him to retain involvement in their son's life. The support of her mother and some close friends who live locally, enables Anne to negotiate a reasonable balance between her employment and care responsibilities.

### **Amy**

Amy is the resident parent of three children, a daughter aged fourteen, a son aged nine and a daughter aged six. She, her children and her husband previously lived in another European country but returned to the UK after experiencing financial difficulties in the family business. She later discovered that these financial difficulties had been exacerbated by her husband's gambling problem, of which she had been unaware. She lives with the children in a privately rented home in an inner city suburb.

Amy already has a degree, but is studying for a second degree and plans to do a Masters degree too. Her pursuit of these educational qualifications is a career focussed move, and she has already identified both an area of work, and some companies that she would



like to work for when she graduates. She is highly committed to her career, and regards demonstrating financial independence to be a key attribute of a good mother.

Her relationship with her ex-husband is not easy, and she does not find him to be a reliable co-parent. She believes that he prioritises his new relationship and paid work over his responsibilities to his children, and this is an ongoing source of friction. Amy lacks a local support network and relies heavily on her eldest daughter for practical and emotional support. She is also experiencing financial difficulties, and this is a cause of considerable stress. Currently she is unable to manage paid work alongside the care of her children and her studies and is supporting the family with her student loan, tax credit and Child Benefit payments and maintenance which is sometimes paid by her ex husband.

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte is the mother and resident parent of two children aged eleven and seven. She lives in an affluent suburb in a home that she owns outright, having purchased it with the financial settlement from her divorce. This settlement was reached after a lengthy court battle with her ex husband, during which she discovered that he was much wealthier than she had previously realised, as he had taken charge of the family finances during the marriage. Her ex husband no longer maintained any contact with their children, although he lived only a few miles away in the former family home. Although she had previously tried to persuade him to take more responsibility for the children, she is no longer doing so.

Charlotte struggles to cope with the demands of parenting entirely alone. Although her parents live reasonably nearby and are supportive, they are elderly and gradually their relationship is changing as they become more in need of care themselves and less able to take care of their grandchildren. A lack of personal time is one of the key challenges that Charlotte faces, and having moved to a new village after separating from her ex husband, she lacks a network of support in her local area.

Charlotte has previously worked part time in various administration and secretarial roles, but would prefer to be a home based mother. She is attempting to set up a childminding business to enable this balance of caring and earning responsibilities.

## **Diane**

Diane is the mother and resident parent of one daughter, who is aged twelve. Diane herself is one of the oldest parents in the sample and is in her mid fifties. Prior to the birth of her child, Diane had been highly committed to her career, reaching a senior management post in the finance industry. However, after the birth of her daughter she had taken some time out of the labour market to care for her, and had not been able to find work at the same level of seniority since. She is now working in a part time administration post, and studying for a degree. This reduction in her income is a real challenge and Diane has serious financial concerns. She is considering selling her home in order to relieve these pressures.

Diane has a complicated relationship with her ex husband, and does not think that he has always behaved well in respect of the care of their daughter. Their marriage had featured some serious incidents of domestic violence and this continues to impact on their co-parenting relationship. Diane has previously had mental health difficulties and is noticeably anxious and stressed during the interview. She lacks a support network, and appears to be struggling to cope with the demands of her course, her job and caring for her daughter along with the challenges of the ongoing relationship with her ex husband.

## **Appendix Two**

### **Interview Schedule**

Thank you for giving your time to be interviewed. I do appreciate it. Just to remind you again that your participation is voluntary, if you don't wish to answer any question please just say so and also that you may stop the interview at any time without giving me a reason. Is that ok?

Firstly, can I ask you to tell me about your family - your children that live in this household or elsewhere, their ages and how many nights a week they spend living here with you?

And are those children at school full time or at nursery or a childminder (age dependent)? Check: is this early years provision (ie short sessions only)?

I know that you are separated from their mum/dad. Can you tell me how long you have been separated/divorced?

I'd like to talk to you mostly about how you manage looking after your children and any paid work that you may do. So things like the kind of working arrangements you had before you separated, who looked after the kids, that sort of thing. Could you tell me about that.

So can you tell me how you worked that all out? How you decided who would do what?

After you separated, how did you decide who the children should mainly live with and how has this worked out for you all?

So, after you separated and organised where the children would live and when they would see their other parent, did you change your working/caring pattern?

Are you able to share the responsibilities of working and caring with the children's mum/dad? (for example do you work when they are at their house/share the pick ups from school/nursery?)

Is this arrangement similar to that of your friends/family? Do they support you to do this (either emotionally or practically)? Would you say that their views have affected your decisions?

Can I ask about maintenance? Do you receive it (no figures!) and how this might have affected your decisions about work?

Did the benefit or Tax Credit system have any influence on your decision to work or not work? (especially in relation to number of hours worked, 16/30 hour boundaries). Why?

Do you think these systems helped you to do what you wanted to do in relation to combining working and caring for your children? Or has there been an element of compromise? Why?

What would be your preference with the age your children are now - ft work, pt work, at home with the children, something else?

Do you know about any changes to the benefit system that may impact on your families arrangements for work and care?

How do you feel about this? What would you like to see change?

Can I ask what kind of work arrangement you think would be best for you? Not just the job itself but the kind of hours, the type of job and the childcare arrangement that you think would suit you and your family best? Or perhaps not to work at all at the moment? Would this be achievable for you?

What is childcare provision like in your area? Would you use it?

What kind of job opportunities do you know of that are available locally to you?

Would you be able to access them - qualifications, experience, transport?

Is this something you'd like to do?

What changes do you imagine will happen in relation to your paid work as your children grow older? Do you have plans or worries about the future?

We have come to the end of the interview, but before we finish can I ask if there is anything that you would like to add? Perhaps something that you wanted to say but haven't had the opportunity?

## **Appendix Three**

### **Vignettes**

#### **1**

Susan is a lone parent and has two children of 7 and 9 who both attend primary school. She does not work at the moment but has been offered a full time job as an admin assistant a distance of five miles from where she lives and the children go to school.

It would mean that the children would need to be looked after (by a childminder) from 8.15am and again after school until 5.45pm. They would need full time childcare in the school holidays.

Should she accept the job? Why?

#### **2**

Veronica is a lone parent and has one child of 11 who has just started secondary school. She is not currently employed but has just applied for and been offered a full time job four miles from home.

If she accepts the job her son will need to lock up the house in the morning and when he comes home from school will be alone for one hour and forty five minutes before Veronica gets in from work. She does not know of any local holiday playscheme that would accept a child over 11 and does not have any family locally that could look after him in the holidays. There is no “wrap around care” at his school as he is now at secondary school.

Should she accept the job? Why?

#### **3**

Tracy has three children aged 1, 3 and 6. She works as a solicitor three days per week and on these days the younger children are cared for by a childminder who also takes and collects the eldest from school. On the other two days she is at home with the younger children and takes/collects from school herself.

A promotion has been offered to her but this would mean working full time. The younger children would then need to go to the childminder full time (8 - 6.30 every day) and the eldest would be taken to and collected from school every day by the childminder and cared for full time in the school holidays.

Should Tracy accept the promotion? Why? (*Would it make any difference if her children were 10, 12 and 15?*)

#### **4**

Nathan is a lone parent and has one daughter who is 3. He is working full time at the moment and his daughter is at a day care nursery. He would like to stop working and look after his daughter full time at home. He is entitled to Income Support as a lone parent and also Tax Credits and Housing Benefit so would be able to manage financially.

Should he give up his job? Why?

#### **5**

Nancy is a lone parent with two children aged 13 and 15. She currently works full time as a care assistant. This includes shift work and she would like to reduce her hours to sixteen a week so that she can spend more time with her children. She has worked out that with Tax Credit she will not be much worse off financially.

Should she reduce her hours and claim the Tax Credits? Why?

#### **6**

Hannah is a lone parent and has one son who is three years old. She works 20 hours per week and until now her Mum (the child's grandmother) has been caring for him whilst she worked. Her Mum is now moving away and will no longer be able to take care of him. Hannah does not want her son to attend paid childcare and is considering leaving her job and claiming benefits instead. She would be entitled to Income Support, Tax Credits and Housing Benefit.

Should she give up her job? Why?

**7**

Hafsa is a lone parent with two children aged 5 and 8. She is a qualified and experienced project manager and used to earn a substantial salary but now that she is lone parent she wants to work part time. She cannot find any part time work in her field at her current level. A part time job is available as a project assistant on a much lower salary and if she took this job she would be entitled to Tax Credits which would enable her to manage financially.

Should she apply for this job and claim the Credits? Why?

**8**

Pat has two children who are 5 and 7. They live with her from Monday afternoon when she collects them from school until Thursday when she drops them off at school in the morning. They are then collected from school by her ex husband (their Dad) who cares for them from Thursday after school until he takes them to school on Monday morning.

Pat works on a nightclub bar on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings whilst the children are with their Dad and he works Monday to Thursday in a warehouse during the day.

As the children spend the most nights with their Dad he is regarded as the main carer and is able to claim Tax Credits. Pat does not think that this is fair as the children also spend three nights a week living with her.

Who should be able to claim Tax Credits in this situation? What about maintenance payments?

**9**

Annie is lone parent and has four children aged 7, 9, 12 and 16. She is not working at the moment but is looking for a job. She is only applying for jobs that offer term time only working so that she can look after the children in the school holidays.

Should she also look for all year round jobs? Why?



**10**

Frank is a lone parent and has two children who are 7 and 14. He has just moved to the area after separating from his ex wife and has no family or friends locally. He is keen to get back to work and is looking for a full time job but is concerned about after school and holiday care.

He is considering relying on the 14 year old to take and collect the younger child from school and take care of her in the school holidays.

Is this a good idea? Why?

## **Bibliography**

Aarseth, H. and Olson, B. M. (2008) 'Food and masculinity in dual-career couples' *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2008, 17, 4, pp. 277- 287

Adam, B. (1998) *Timescapes of Modernity. The Environment and Invisible Hazards* London: Routledge

Adam, B. (2008) 'Future Matters. Futures known, created and minded', *21<sup>st</sup> Century Society, Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences*, 2008, 3, 2, pp. 109 – 224

Adam, B. and Groves, C. (1997) *Future Matters: Action, Knowledge, Ethics* Leiden: Brill

Adler, M. (2004) 'Combining welfare-to-work measures with tax credits: A new hybrid approach to social security in the United Kingdom' *International Social Security Review*, Vol. 57, 2/2004

Albelda, R., Himmelweit, S. and Humphries, J. (2004) *The dilemmas of lone motherhood: key issues for feminist economics* in *Feminist Economics*, 10, 2, 2004, 1-7

Aries (1962) *Centuries of Childhood* New York: Vintage Books

Ba', S. (2010) Meaning and Structure in the Work and Family Interface in *Sociological Research Online*, 2010, 15, 3, 10

Ba', S. (2011) 'Symbolic boundaries: integration and separation of work and family life' in *Community, Work and Family*, 2011, 14, 3, pp. 317-334

Bainham, A. (ed.) (2003) *Children and Their Families: Contact, Rights and Welfare* Oxford: Hart

Barker, J. (2010) '“Manic Mums” and “Distant Dads”? Gendered geographies of care and the journey to school' in *Health and Place*, 2010, 10, pp. 1-9

Barlow, A., Duncan, S. and James, G. (2002) *New Labour, the Rationality Mistake and Family Policy* in A. Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds.) (2002) *Analysing Families: Morality and Rationality in Policy and Practice* London: Routledge

Bashir, N., Crisp, R., Gore, T., Reeve, K. and Robinson, D. (2011) *Families and work: Revisiting barriers to employment* Sheffield: DWP

Bauer, M. W. Gaskell, G. and Allum, N. C. (2000) 'Quality, Quantity and Knowledge Interests: Avoiding Confusions' in M. W. Bauer and G. Gaskell (eds.) (2000) *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound* London: Sage

Bauman, Z. (1988) *Freedom* Milton Keynes: Open University Press

Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* Buckingham: Open University Press

Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* Cambridge: Polity

Bauman, Z. (2007) *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty* Cambridge: Polity

Beaumont, J. (2011) *Households and Families. Social Trends 41* London: Office for National Statistics

Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995) *The Normal Chaos of Love* Cambridge: Polity Press

Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Reinventing the Family: In Search of New Lifestyles* Cambridge: Polity Press

Becker, G. S. (1976) *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* London: University of Chicago Press

Bennett, F. (2012) 'Universal Credit: overview and gender implications' in M. Kilkey, G. Ramia and K. Farnsworth (eds.) *Social Policy Review 24. Analysis and debate in social policy, 2012* Bristol: Policy Press

- Besharov, D. J. and Germanis, P. (2001) 'Welfare Reform: Four Years Later' in D. J. Besharov, P. Germanis, J. Hein, D. K. Jonas, and A. L. Sherman, (eds.) (2001) *Ending Dependency Lessons from Welfare Reform in the USA* London: Civitas
- Bennett, F. & Millar, J. (2005) 'Making work pay?' *Benefits* 2005, 13,1, 28-34
- Black, C. (2008) *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow* London: The Stationery Office
- Blaikie, N. (2000) *Designing social research: The logic of anticipation* Cambridge, MA: Polity
- Blaikie, N. (2007) *Approaches to Social Enquiry* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bonvin, J. M. (2008) *Activation Policies, New Modes of Governance and the Issue of Responsibility* in *Social Policy and Society*, 7, 3, 367-377
- Boris, E. (1994) *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Cambridge: University Press
- Boutwell, B. B. and Beaver, K. M. (2010) 'The intergenerational transmission of low self-control' in *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 47, no 2, pp. 174-209
- Bowring, F. (2000) 'Social exclusion: limitations of the debate' in *Critical Social Policy*, 2000, 20, 3, pp. 307-330
- Bradshaw, J., Kemp, P.A., Baldwin, S. and Rowe, A. (2004) *The Drivers of Social Exclusion* London: Social Exclusion Unit
- Brannen, J. (2005) *Time and the Negotiation of Work-Family Boundaries: Autonomy or Illusion?* in *Time Society* 2005, 14, 113-131

- Breen, R. and Cooke, L. P. (2005) 'The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Labour' in *European Sociological Review*, 2005, 21, 1, pp. 43-57
- Breitkruz, R. S., Williamson, D. L. and Raine, K. D. (2010) 'Dis-integrated policy: welfare-to-work participants' experiences of integrating paid work and unpaid family work' in *Community, Work and Family*, 2010, 13, 1, pp. 33-69
- Brewer, M., Browne, J. and Joyce, R. (2011) *Child and Working Age Poverty from 2010 to 2020* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies
- Brines, J. (1994) 'Economic dependency, gender, and the division of labor at home' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, 1994, 100, 3, pp. 652-688
- Brophy, J. (1989) 'Custody Law, Child Care and Inequality in Britain' in C. Smart and S. Sevenhuijsen (eds.) (1989) *Child Custody and the Politics of Gender* London: Routledge
- Brown, J. (1989) *Why don't they go to work? Mothers on benefit* London: HMSO
- Browne, J. (2012) *The Impact of Austerity Measures on Households with Children* London: Family and Parenting Institute
- Browne J. and Levell, P. (2010) *The distributional effect of tax and benefit reforms to be introduced between June 2010 and April 2014: a revised assessment* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies
- Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods* Oxford: University Press
- Bryman A. (2008) *Social Research Methods* Oxford: University Press.
- Bryson, A. (2003) 'From Welfare to Workfare' in J. Millar (ed.) (2003) *Understanding Social Security* Bristol: The Policy Press

Bubeck, D. C. (2002) 'Justice and the Labour of Care' in E. F. Kittay and E. K. Feder (eds.) (2002) *The Subject of Care. Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* New York: Rowman and Littlefield

Burgess, R. G. (1984) *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research* London: Routledge

Byrne, L. (2012) *A William Beveridge for this century's welfare state*. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/02/beveridge-welfare-state-labour-revolution> [accessed 02/01/12]

Cameron D. (2011) PM's speech on the Welfare Reform Bill 17 February 2011 Available from <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-welfare-reform-bill/> [Accessed 05/01/12]

Campbell, M. (2008) 'Labour's Policy on Money for Parents: Combining Care with Paid Work' in *Social Policy and Society*, 7, 4, pp. 457-470

Cancian, F. M. and Oliker, S. J. (2000) *Caring and Gender* London: Pine Forge Press

Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds.) (2002) *Analysing Families: morality and rationality in policy and practice* London: Routledge

Cawston, T. , Haldenby, A. and Nolan, P. (2009) *The End of Entitlement* London: Reform

Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Dynamic Benefits: Towards welfare that works* London: Centre for Social Justice

Centre for Social Justice (2011) *Creating Opportunity, Rewarding Ambition. The Value of Entry Level Employment* London: Centre for Social Justice

Chafetz, J. (1995) 'Chicken or Egg? A theory of the relationship between feminist movements and family change' in K. Mason and A. M. Jenson (eds.) *Gender and Family in Industrialised Countries* Oxford: Clarendon Press

Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act (2008) c. 6. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/6/contents> [accessed 15/04/12]

Children Act (1989) c. 41. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents> [accessed 3/09/12]

Child Support Act (1991) c. 48. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/48/contents/enacted> [accessed 3/09/12]

Christians, C. G. (2005) 'Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research' in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Third Edition London: Sage

Churchill, H (2008) 'Being a responsible mother: New Labour policy discourses versus lone mothers' contextualised accounts', in J. Bridgeman, H. Keatingm and C. Lind (eds.) *Responsibility, Law and the Family* Ashgate: Publishing

Churchill, H. (2012) 'Family support and the Coalition: retrenchment, refocusing and restructuring' in M. Kilkey, G. Ramia and K. Farnsworth (eds.) *Social Policy Review 24. Analysis and debate in social policy, 2012* Bristol: Policy Press

Citizen's Advice Bureau (2008) *CAB Evidence Briefing Barriers to work: Lone parents and the challenges of working*

Clayton, N. and Brinkley, I. (2011) *Welfare to What? Prospects and challenges for employment recovery* London: The Work Foundation

Clegg, N. (2011) Nick Clegg's speech to Spring Conference Available at [http://www.libdems.org.uk/speeches\\_detail.aspx?title=Nick\\_Clegg](http://www.libdems.org.uk/speeches_detail.aspx?title=Nick_Clegg) [Accessed 20/12/11]

Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data Analysis: Complementary Strategies* Thousand Oaks CA: Sage

Coleman, N. and Lanceley, L. (2011) *Lone parent obligations: supporting the journey into work* London: DWP

Collier, R. (1999) 'Men, heterosexuality and the changing family (Re)constructing fatherhood in law and social policy' in G. Jagger and C. Wright (eds.) (1999) *Changing family values* London: Routledge

Communities and Local Government (2007) *Assured and Assured Shorthold Tenancies. A guide for tenants* London: Department for Communities and Local Government

Connell, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities: Knowledge, Power and Social Change* Cambridge: Polity Press

The Conservative Party (2008) *Work for Welfare: REAL welfare reform to make British poverty history* London: The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party Manifesto (2010) available at [http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/04/Conservatives\\_launch\\_election\\_manifesto.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/04/Conservatives_launch_election_manifesto.aspx) [accessed 30/08/12]

Cooke, G. and Lawton, K. (2008) *Working out of poverty: A study of the low paid and the 'working poor'* London: IPPR

Crompton, R. and Harris, F. (1998) 'Explaining Women's Employment Patterns: Orientations to Work Revisited' in *British Journal of Sociology*, 1998, 49, pp. 118-136

Crompton, R. (2002) 'Employment, flexible working and the family' in *British Journal of Sociology*, 2002, 53, 4, pp. 537-558

Daguerre, A. (2004) 'Importing Workfare: Policy Transfer of Social and Labour Market Policies from the USA to Britain under New Labour' in *Social Policy and Administration*, 2004, 38, 1, pp. 41-56



Daly, K. J. (2001) 'Deconstructing Family Time: From Ideology to Lived Experience' in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2001, 63, 2, pp. 283-294

Daly, M. (2010) 'Shifts in family policy in the UK under New Labour' in *Journal of European Social Policy*, 2010, 20, 5, pp. 433-443

Daly, M. (2011) 'What Adult Worker Model? A critical look at recent social Policy reform in Europe from a gender and family perspective,' *Social Politics*, 2011, 18, 1, pp.1-23.

Data Protection Act (1998)  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/ukpga\\_19980029\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/ukpga_19980029_en_1) [accessed 15/05/09]

Davies, L. (2012) 'Lone parents: unemployed or otherwise engaged?' in *People, Place and Policy Online*, 2012, 6, 1, pp. 16-28

Daycare Trust (2012) <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-survey-2012.html>

Day Sclater and Kaganas (2003) 'Contact: Mothers, Welfare and Rights' in Bainham, A. (ed.) (2003) *Children and Their Families: Contact, Rights and Welfare* Oxford: Hart

Deacon, A. (2001) 'The Realities of Welfare Reform: Some Home Truths from the USA?' in D. J. Besharov, P. Germanis, J. Hein, D. K. Jonas, and A. L. Sherman, (eds.) (2001) *Ending Dependency Lessons from Welfare Reform in the USA* London: Civitas

Deacon, A. (2002) *Perspectives on Welfare: Ideas, Ideology and Policy Debates* Buckingham: Open University Press

Deacon, A. (2007) 'Civic Labour or Doulia? Care, Reciprocity and Welfare' in *Social Policy & Society* 6:4,481-490

Deacon, A. and Patrick, R. (2011) 'A new welfare settlement? The Coalition government and welfare-to-work' in H. Bochel (ed.) *The Conservative Party and Social Policy* Bristol: The Policy Press

Dean, H. (2007a) 'Poor Parents? The realities of work-life balance in a low-income neighbourhood' in *Benefits*, 15, 3, 271-282

Dean, H. (2007b) 'Social Policy and Human Rights: Re-thinking the Engagement' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2007, 7, 1, pp. 1-12

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln Y. V. (2005) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* London: Sage

Department for Work and Pensions (2007a) *Joint birth registration: promoting parental responsibility* London: HMSO

Department for Work and Pensions (2007b) *Ready for work: full employment in our generation* Norwich: HMSO

Department for Work and Pensions (2008) *No-one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*. Public Consultation Richmond: OPSI

Department for Work and Pensions (2009) *Welfare Reform Act* London: HMSO

Department for Work and Pensions (2010a) *Universal Credit: welfare that works* London: The Stationery Office

Department for Work and Pensions (2010b) *21st Century Welfare* London: The Stationery Office

Department for Work and Pensions (2011a) *Strengthening families, promoting parental responsibility: the future of child maintenance* London: TSO

Department for Work and Pensions (2011b) *Household Benefit Cap: equality impact assessment* London: DWP

Department of Health (1998) *Supporting families - A consultation document* London: Home Office

Department of Social Services (1999) *The Changing Welfare State: Opportunity for all. Tackling poverty and social exclusion (Cm 4445)* London: Stationery Office

Dermott, E. (2003) 'The 'Intimate Father': Defining Paternal Involvement', *Sociological Research Online*, 2003, 8, 4

Dermott, E. 'Time and Labour: Fathers and Childcare' in L. Pettinger, J. Parry, R. Taylor, and G. Glucksmann (eds.) *A New Sociology of Work?* Oxford: Blackwell

Dermott, E. (2008) *Intimate Fatherhood A Sociological Analysis* Oxon: Routledge

Dickens, R. and Ellwood, D. (2003) 'Child Poverty in Britain' in R. Dickens, P. Gregg and J. Wadsworth (eds.) (2003) *The Labour Market Under New Labour* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Dillaway, H. And Pare, E. (2008) 'Locating Mothers: How Cultural Debates About Stay-at-Home Versus Working Mothers Define Women and Home' in *Journal of Social Issues*, 2008, 29, pp. 437-464

Dilnot, A. and McRae, J. (1999) *The Family Credit System and the Working Families' Tax Credit in the United Kingdom* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies

DirectGov (2012) *Getting help with your mortgage interest payments* available at [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On\\_a\\_low\\_income/DG\\_180321](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On_a_low_income/DG_180321) [accessed 01/09/12]

Divorce Reform Act (1969)

Driver, S. (2004) 'North Atlantic drift: welfare reform and the Third Way politics of New Labour and the New Democrats' in S. Hale., W. Leggett and Martell, L. (eds.)

(2004) *The Third Way and beyond: criticisms, futures, alternatives* University Press: Manchester.

Driver, S. (2009), 'Work to be done? Welfare reform from Blair to Brown' in *Policy Studies* 30,1, pp. 69-84.

Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. (1999) *Lone mothers, Paid work and Gendered Moral Rationalities* London: MacMillan

Duncan, S., Edwards, R., Reynolds, T. And Alldred, P. (2003) 'Motherhood, paid work and partnering: values and theories' in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2003, 17, 2, pp. 309-330

Duncan, S. and Irwin, S. (2004) 'The Social Patterning of Values and Rationalities: Mothers' Choices in Combining Caring and Employment' in *Social Policy and Society* 2004, 3, 4, pp 391-399

Duncan Smith, I. (2011) *Reforming our Pensions and Welfare System*. Available at [http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2011/03/Iain\\_Duncan\\_Smith\\_Reforming\\_our\\_pensions\\_and\\_welfare\\_system.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2011/03/Iain_Duncan_Smith_Reforming_our_pensions_and_welfare_system.aspx) [accessed 02/01/12]

Dwyer, P. (2004) 'Creeping Conditionality in the UK: From Welfare Rights to Conditional Entitlements' in *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 2004, 29, 2

Economic and Social Research Council. (2010) *Framework for Research Ethics* [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)

Eekelaar, J. (1991) 'Parental Responsibility: state of nature or nature of the state?' in *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 1991, 13, 1, pp. 37-50

Elias, N. (1991) *The Society of Individuals* Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Ellis, K. (2004) 'Dependency, Justice and the Ethic of Care' in H. Dean (ed.) (2004) *The Ethics of Welfare: Human Rights, Dependency and Responsibility* Policy Press, Bristol

Emmel, N., Hughes, K., Greenhalgh, J. and Sales, A. (2007) 'Accessing Socially Excluded People - Trust and the Gatekeeper in the Researcher-Participant Relationship' in *Sociological Research Online*, 2007, 12, 2. Available at <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/2/emmel.html>

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* Cambridge: Polity Press

Family Law Act (1996) c. 27. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/27/contents> [accessed 1/09/12]

Farrell, S. (2006) *What is qualitative longitudinal research?* LSE Methodology Institute, Papers in Social Research Methods, Qualitative Series, Paper 11

Ferge, Z. (1997) 'The changed welfare paradigm: the individualization of the social' in *Social Policy & Administration*, 31, 1, pp. 20-44

Finch, J. (1987) 'The Vignette Technique in Survey Research' in *Sociology*, 1987, 21, 1, pp. 105-114

Finch, J. and Mason, J. (1992) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities* Oxon: Routledge

Fine, M. (2007) *A Caring Society? Care and the Dilemmas of Human Service in the 21st Century* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Fineman, M. L. A. (2001) 'Masking Dependency: The Political Role of Family Rhetoric' in E. F. Kittay and E. K. Feder (eds.) (2002) *The Subject of Care. Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* New York: Rowman and Littlefield

Fitzpatrick, T. (1998) 'The implications of ecological thought for social welfare' in *Critical Social Policy*, 1998, 18, 54, pp. 5-26

Flick, U. (2002) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* London: Sage

Flick, U., von Karndoff, E. and Steinke, I. (2004) 'What is Qualitative Research? An Introduction to the Field' in U. Flick, E. von Karndoff and I. Steinke (2004) *A Companion to Qualitative Research* London: Sage

Fox Harding, L. (1993) '“Alarm” versus “liberation” ? Responses to the increase in lone parents. Parts 1 & 2' in *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 2, 3, pp. 101-112 and 174-184

Fraser, N. (1994) 'After the Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State' in *Political Theory*, 1994, 22, pp. 591-618

Fraser, N. and Gordon, L. (2002) 'A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State' in E. F. Kittay and E. K. Feder (eds.) (2002) *The Subject of Care. Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* New York: Rowman and Littlefield

Freud, D. (2007) *Reducing dependency, increasing opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work. An independent report to the Department for Work and Pensions* Leeds: DWP

Gambles, R., Lewis, S. and Rapaport, R. (2006) *The myth of work-life balance: the challenge of our time for men, women and societies* Chichester: John Wiley

Ganong, L. H., Coleman, M. and Jamison, T. (2011) 'Patterns of Stepchild–Stepparent Relationship Development' in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2011, 73, 2, pp. 396–413

Gardiner, K. and Millar, J. (2006) 'How low-paid employees avoid poverty: An analysis by family type and household structure' *Journal of Social Policy*, 2006, 35, 3, pp. 351-369.

Gatrell, C. (2005) *Hard Labour: The Sociology of Parenthood* Maidenhead: Open University Press

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures* New York: Basis Books

Gershuny, J. (2001) *Changing Times* New York: Oxford University Press.

Gershuny, J. (2003) *Time, through the life course and in the family* ISER Working Papers  
Number 2003-3

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* Cambridge: Polity Press

Gilbert (2008) *Researching Social Life* London: Sage

Gillies, V. (2005) 'Raising the 'meritocracy': parenting and the individualisation of social class' in *Sociology*, 2005, 39, 5, pp. 835-853

Gillies, V. (2008) 'Childrearing, Class and the New Politics of Parenting' in *Sociology Compass*, 2008, 2, 3, pp. 1079-1095

Gillies, V. and Edwards, R. (2006) 'A Qualitative Analysis of Parenting and Social Capital: Comparing the work of Coleman and Bourdieu' in *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 2, 2, 42-60

Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice. Psychological Theory and Women's Development* Harvard: University Press

Gingerbread (2012) *Statistics* available at  
<http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/content/365/Statistics> [accessed 4/07/12]

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company

Glover, J. (2002) 'The 'Balance Model': Theorising Women's Employment Behaviour' in A. Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds.) (2002) *Analysing Families: Morality and Rationality in Policy and Practice* London: Routledge

Gonzalez-Arnal, S. and Kilkey, M. (2009) 'Contextualizing Rationality: Mature student carers and higher education in England' in *Feminist Economics*, 2009, 15, 1, pp. 85-111

Gornick, J. C. and Meyers, M. K. (2007) *Institutions that Support Gender Egalitarianism in Parenthood and Employment* available at <http://www.havenscenter.org/realutopias/2006>"  
<http://www.havenscenter.org/realutopias/2006> [accessed 15/08/12]

Graham, H. (1983) 'Caring: A Labour of Love' in J. Finch and D. Groves (eds.) (1983) *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring* London: Routledge

Grant, L., Yeandle, S. and Buckner, L. (2005) *Working Below Potential: Women and Part Time Work Working Paper Series No. 40* Sheffield Hallam University: Centre for Social Inclusion

Greenstein, T. N. (2000) 'Economic Dependence, Gender and the Division of Labour in the Home: A Replication and Extension' in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 2000, 62, 2, pp. 322-335

Gregg, P. and Harkness, S. (2003) 'Welfare Reform and the Employment of Lone Parents' in R. Dickens, P. Gregg and J. Wadsworth (eds.) (2003) *The Labour Market Under New Labour* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Gregg, P. (2008) *Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support* Richmond: Office of Public Sector Information

Gregg, P., Harkness, S. and Smith, S. (2009) *Welfare Reform and Lone Parents in the UK* in *The Economic Journal*, 2009, 119 (February), F38-F65

Gregson, N. and Lowe, M. (1994) *Servicing the middle classes: class, gender and waged domestic labour in contemporary Britain* London: Routledge



Grover, C. (2007) 'The Freud Report on the future of welfare to work: Some critical reflections' in *Critical Social Policy*, 27, 4, pp. 534-535

Hakim, C. (1987) *Research design: Strategies and Choices in the design of social research* London: Allen and Unwin

Hakim, C. (2000) *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century. Preference Theory* Oxford: University Press

Hales, J., Tipping, S and Lyon, N (2007) *Mothers participation in paid work: the role of 'mini-jobs'* DWP Research Report No. 467

Hansen, K., Joshi. H. and Verropoulou, G. (2006) *Childcare and mothers' employment: approaching the millennium* National Institute Economic Review, 195, no 1

Hardill, I., Dudleston, A. C., Green, A. E., and Owen, D. W. (1999) 'Decision-making in dual career households', in S. Bowlby, S. Gregory and L. McKie (eds.) *Gender, power and the household*. Basingstoke: Macmillian

Harkness, (2003) 'The Household Division of Labour: Changes in Families' Allocation of Paid and Unpaid Work, 1992-2002' in R. Dickens, P. Gregg and J. Wadsworth (eds.) (2003) *The Labour Market Under New Labour* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Harris, P. M. and Scanlan, D. E. (1991) *Children Act, 1989: A Procedural Handbook* London: Butterworths

Haux, T. (2010) *Activating lone parents: An evidence-based policy appraisal of the 2008 welfare-to-work reform in Britain* Essex: ISER Working Paper

Haux, T. (2011) 'Lone parents and the Conservatives: anything new?' in C. Holden, M. Kilkey and G. Ramia (eds.) (2011) *Social Policy Review 23 Analysis and debate in social policy*, 2011 Bristol: Policy Press

Hays, S. (1996) *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* Yale: University Press

Hearn, J. (1998) 'Troubled masculinities in social policy discourses: young men' in J. Popay, J. Hearn and J. Edwards (eds.) *Men, Gender Divisions and Welfare* London: Routledge

Hemmerman, L. (2010) 'Researching the Hard to Reach and the Hard to Keep: Notes from the Field on Longitudinal Sample Maintenance' in F. Shirani and S. Weller, (eds.) *Conducting Qualitative Longitudinal Research: Fieldwork Experiences* Leeds: Timescapes Working paper Series no. 2 pp.7-19. [www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk)

Hendrick, H. (1997) *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* Cambridge: University Press

Hills, J. (1998) *Thatcherism, New Labour and the Welfare State* Casepaper, Case/13 London: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion

Himmelweit, S., Bergmann, B., Green, K., Albelda, R., the Women's Committee of One Hundred and Koren, C. (2004) 'Lone Mothers: What is to be done?' in *Feminist Economics*, 2004, 10, 2, pp. 237-264

Himmelweit, S. and Sigala, M. (2004) 'Choice and the relationship between identities and behaviour for mothers with pre school children: Some implications for policy from a UK study' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 2004, 33, 3, pp. 455-78

Hirsch, D. (2011) *Childcare Support and the Hours Trap* London: Resolution Foundation and Gingerbread

HMRC *Working Tax Credit – Help with the costs of childcare* <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets/wtc5.pdf> [accessed 13/08/10]

HM Treasury (2010a) *Budget 2010 HC 61* London: The Stationery Office

HM Treasury (2010b) *Spending Review CM7942* London: The Stationery Office

HM Treasury (2012) *Budget 2012 HC 1853* London: The Stationery Office

Hochschild, A. (1989) *The Second Shift* New York: Avon Books

Holloway, S. L. And Valentine, G. (2000) 'Spatiality and the New Social Studies of Childhood' in *Sociology*, 2000, 34, 4, pp. 763-783

Hollows, J. (2003) 'Oliver's twist. Leisure, labour and domestic masculinity in The Naked Chef' *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2003, 6, 2, pp. 229-248

Horton, T. (2011) 'The fight for universalism: cuts, targeting and the future of welfare' in *Public Policy Research*, June-August 2011, pp. 105-114

Housing Act (1996) c. 52. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents> [accessed 08/08/12]

Irwin, S. (1999) 'Resourcing the Family: Gendered Claims and Obligations and Issues of Explanation' in E. B. Silva and C. Smart (eds.) (1999) *The New Family?* London: Sage

Irwin, S. (2004) 'Attitudes, Care and Commitment: Pattern and Process' in *Sociological Research Online*, 2004, 9, 3

Irwin, S. and Bottero, W. (2000) 'Market Returns? Gender and theories of change in employment relations' in *British Journal of Sociology*, 2000, 51, 2, 261-280

Jain, J. Line, T. and Lyons, G. (2011) 'A troublesome transport challenge? Working round the school run' in *Journal of Transport Geography* 2011, 19, pp 1608-1615

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood* Cambridge: Polity Press

Jenks, C. (2005) *Childhood. Second Edition* London: Routledge

Jenkins, R. (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu. Revised Edition* London: Routledge

Jenkins, S. (2004) *Gender, Place and the Labour Market* Aldershot: Ashgate

Johnston, D. D. and Swanson, D. H. (2006) 'Constructing the "Good Mother": The Experience of Mothering Ideologies by Work Status' in *Sex Roles*, 2006, 54, 7, 8, pp. 509-519

Jones, J. and Perrin, C. L. (2009) 'Third time lucky? The third child support reforms replace the Child Support Agency with the new C-MEC' in *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 2009, 31, 3

Joyce, R. (February 2012) *Observations: reflections on current events. Thoughts on a benefit cap* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2005) *Findings. Parental supervision: the views and experiences of young people and their parents* York: JRF

Kellner, P. (2012) 'A Quiet Revolution' in *Prospect Magazine*  
Available at <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/a-quiet-revolution-britain-turns-against-welfare/> [accessed 21/04/12]

Kennedy, S. (2010) *Lone parents with younger children: the progression to work pathfinders SN/SL5534* Available at [www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05534.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05534.pdf) [accessed 12/18/12]

Kilkey, M. (2006) 'New Labour and Reconciling Work and Family Life: making it fathers' business?' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2006, 5, 2

Kittay, E. F. (2001) 'A Feminist Ethic of Care Meets the New Communitarian Family Policy' in *Ethics*, 2001, 111, 3, pp. 523-547

Knijn, T. and Kremer, M. (1997) 'Gender and the Caring Dimension of Welfare States: Toward Inclusive Citizenship' in *Social Politics, Fall 1997, 4*, pp. 328-361

Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* Thousand Oaks: Sage

The Labour Party Manifesto (2010) available at [www.labour.org.uk/manifesto](http://www.labour.org.uk/manifesto) [accessed 1/09/12]

Lareau, A. (2003) *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life* Los Angeles: University of California Press

Lauder, H., Brown, P. and Halsley, A. H. (2004) 'Sociology and Political Arithmetic: Some Principles of a New Policy Science' in *The British Journal of Sociology, 2004, 55, 1*, pp. 3-22

Legard, R., Keegan, J. and Ward, K. (2003) 'In-depth interviews' in J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (eds.) (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice* London: Sage

Lewis, J. (2001a) 'The Decline of the Male Breadwinner Model: Implications for Work and Care' in *Social Politics, 2001, 8, 2*, pp. 152-169

Lewis, J. (2001b) *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar

Lewis, J. (2002) 'Individualisation, assumptions about the existence of an adult worker model and the shift towards contractualism' in A. Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds) (2002) *Analysing Families: Morality and Rationality in Policy and Practice* London: Routledge

Lewis, J. (2003a) 'Design Issues' in J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice* London: Sage

Lewis, J. (2003b) 'Economic Citizenship: A Comment' in *Social Politics, 10, 2*, pp. 176-185

Lexmond, J., Bazalgette, L. and Margo, J. (2011) *The Home Front* London: Demos

Lister, R. (1998) 'From equality to social inclusion: New Labour and the welfare state' in *Critical Social Policy*, 1998, 18, 55, pp. 215-225

Lister, R. (1999) 'Reforming Welfare Around the Work Ethic': new gendered and ethical perspectives on work and care' in *Policy and Politics*, 1999, 27, 2, pp. 233-246

Lister, R. (2001) 'New Labour: a study in ambiguity from a position of ambivalence' in *Critical Social Policy*, 2001, 21, 425

Lister, R. (2003) 'Investing in the citizen-workers of the future: Transformations in citizenship and the state under New Labour' in *Social Policy and Administration*, 2003, 37, 5, pp. 427-443

Lister, R. (2006) 'Children (but not women) first: New Labour, child welfare and gender' in *Critical Social Policy*, 2006, 26, 2, pp. 315-335

Lister, R. and Bennett F. (2010) *The new 'champion of progressive ideals* London: Renewal

Lister, S. (2012) *£3.7bn owed in child maintenance by absent parents* Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/37bn-owed-in-child-maintenance-by-absent-parents-7765665.html> [accessed 20/05/12]

Lloyd, E. (2008) 'The Interface between Childcare, Family Support and Child Poverty Strategies Under New Labour: Tensions and Contradictions' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2008, 7, 4, pp.479-494

Lutz, M. A. (1999) *Economics for the common good: two centuries of social economic thought in the humanistic tradition* Oxon: Routledge

Maclean, M. and Richards, M. (1999) 'Parents and divorce: changing patterns of public intervention' in A. Bainham, S. D. Sclater and Richards, M. (eds.) *What is a Parent? A Socio-Legal Analysis* Oxford: Hart

Magadi, M. and Middleton, S. (2005) *Britain's Poorest Children Revisited: Evidence from the BHPS 1994-2002 Research Report Three* Loughborough: Centre for Research on Social Policy

Maher, J. M. (2009) 'Accumulating Care: Mothers Beyond the Conflicting Temporalities of Caring and Work' in *Time & Society*, 2009, 18, 2, 3, pp. 231-245.

Mahon, R. (2009) 'The OECD's Discourse on the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life' in *Global Social Policy*, 2009, 9, pp. 183 - 204

Malos, E. (1980) *The Politics of Housework* Berlin: Schocken

Marshall, T. H. (1950) *Citizenship and social class and other essays* Cambridge: University Press

Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative Researching* London: Sage

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching* London: Sage

Mauthner, M. (1998) 'Bringing Silent Voices into a Public Discourse: Researching Accounts of Sister Relationships' in J. Ribbens and R. Edwards (1998) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research* London: Sage

May, V. (2008) 'On Being a 'Good' Mother: The Moral Presentation of Self in Written Life' in *Sociology*, 2008, 42, pp. 470-486

McCollum, D. (2011) "'An acceptance that it's just your lot I suppose': reflections on turbulent transitions between work and welfare' in *People, Place and Policy Online*, 2011, 5, 3, pp. 149-160

McDowell, L. (2005) 'Love, money and gender divisions of labour: some critical reflections on welfare-to-work policies in the UK' in *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2005, 5, pp. 365-379

McKie, L., Gregory, S. and Bowlby, S. (2002) 'Shadow Times: The Temporal and Spatial Frameworks and Experiences of Caring and Working' in *Sociology*, 2002, 36,4, pp. 897-924

McRae, S. (2003) 'Constraints and choices in mothers' employment careers: A consideration of Hakim's Preference Theory' in *British Journal of Sociology*, 2003, 54, 3, pp. 317-338

Mead, L. M. (1986) *Beyond entitlement: the social obligations of citizenship* New York: The Free Press

Mead, L. M. (1991) 'The new politics of the new poverty' in *Public Interest*, 1991, 103 pp.3-20

Mead, L. M. (1997) *From Welfare to Work: Lessons from America* London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit

Miliband, E. (2011) *Responsibility in 21st Century Britain, Speech at Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre, 13th June* Available from <http://www.labour.org.uk/ed-miliband-speech-responsibility,2011-06-13> [Accessed 12/12/11].

Millar, J. (2008) '*Work is Good for You*' *Lone Mothers, Work, Children and Well Being Social Security and Health Working Paper* Helsinki: Kela, Research Department

Millar, J. (2011) 'Tax credits: a close up view' in *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 2011, 19, 1, pp. 39-50

Millar, J. and Ridge, T. (2008) 'Relationships of Care: Working Lone Mothers, their Children and Employment Sustainability' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 2008, 38, 1, pp. 103-121



Millar, J. and Ridge, T. (2009) 'Relationships of care: working lone mothers, their children and employment sustainability' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 2009, 38,1, pp. 103-121

Mink G. (1999) 'Aren't poor single mothers women? Feminists, welfare reform and welfare justice' in G. Mink (1999) (ed.) *Whose Welfare?* Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Morgan, D. H. J. (1996) *Family Connections* Cambridge: Polity Press

Mouzelis, N. (2007) 'Habitus and Reflexivity: Restructuring Bourdieu's Theory of Practice' in *Sociological Research Online*, 2007, 12, 6, 9

Mullan, K. (2010) 'Valuing Parental Childcare in the United Kingdom' in *Feminist Economics*, 2010, 16, 3, pp. 113-139

Mumford, A (2006) 'Working Towards Credit for Parenting: A Consideration of Tax Credits as a Feminist Enterprise' in A. Diduck and K. O'Donovan (eds.) (2006) *Feminist Perspectives on Family Law* Oxon: Routledge Cavendish

Murray, C. A. (1984) *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* New York: Basic Books

Murray. C. A. (1990) *The Emerging British Underclass* London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit

Murray, L. (2008) 'Motherhood, Risk and Everyday Mobilities' in T. U. Priya and T. Cresswell (eds.) (2008) *Gendered Mobilities* Aldershot: Ashgate

Neale, B and Flowerdew, J. (2003) 'Time, texture and childhood: the contours of longitudinal qualitative research' in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* Vol. 6, 3, pp. 189-199

Neale, B. and Hanna, E (2012) *The Ethics of Researching Lives Qualitatively Through Time Timescapes Methods Guide Series Guide No. 11* Leeds: Timescapes

Neale, B., Henwood, K. and Holland, J. (2012) 'Researching lives through time: an introduction to the Timescapes approach' in *Qualitative Research*, 2012,12, 1, pp. 4-15

Neale, B. and Smart, C. (1999) 'In whose best interests? Theorising family life following parental separation or divorce' in S. D. Sclater and C. Piper (eds.) *Undercurrents of Divorce* Aldershot: Ashgate

Neale, B and Smart, C. (2002) 'Caring, Earning and Changing: Parenthood and Employment After Divorce' in Carling et al. (eds.) (2002) *Analysing Families: Morality and Rationality in Policy and Practice* London: Routledge

Neubeck, K. J. (2006) *When Welfare Disappears: The Case for Economic Human Rights* London: Routledge

New Economics Foundation (2005) *Behavioural economics: seven principles for policy makers* available at <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/behavioural-economics> [accessed 02/05/12]

Noddings, N. (1984) *Caring. A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* Berkeley: University of Los Angeles Press

Oakley, A. (1974) *Housewife* London:Penguin

OECD (2012) *Employment Rate of Women* Available at [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/employment-rate-of-women\\_20752342-table5](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/employment-rate-of-women_20752342-table5) [accessed 01/09/2012]

Office for National Statistics (2008) 'Lone Parents in Employment' Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=409> [accessed 8/04/09]

Office for National Statistics (2009) 'Unemployment' Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=12> [accessed 8/04/09]

Office for National Statistics (2010) *Social Trends no. 40* Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/social-trends-rd/social-trends/social-trends-40/index.html> [accessed 25/08/2012]

Office for National Statistics (2011) *Labour Market Statistics, December 2011* Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/december-2011/index.html> [accessed 06/01/12]

Office for National Statistics (2012a) *Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012* Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/lone-parent-families-with-dependent-children-in-uk-near-two-million/famandhousenr0112.html> [accessed 25/09/12]

Office for National Statistics (2012b) *Labour Market Statistics, February 2012* Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/february-2012/index.html> [accessed 26/09/12]

Office for National Statistics (2012c) *Labour Market Statistics, September 2012* Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/september-2012/index.html> [accessed 25/09/12]

One Space (2012) *Financial support available to lone parents available at* <http://www.onespace.org.uk/benefits/financial-support-available-single-parents> [accessed 26/09/12]

Ong, B. K. (2011) 'Grounded Theory Method (GTM) and the Abductive Research Strategy (ARS): a critical analysis of their differences' in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2011, 1-16, *iFirst Article*

Orloff, A. S. (2006) 'From Maternalism to "Employment for All" State Policies to Promote Women's Employment across the Affluent Democracies' in J. D. Levy (ed.) (2006) *The State After Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization* Harvard: University Press

Orloff, A. S. (2008) 'Feminism for a Post-maternalist Era: Gender Equality Projects in Europe and America' Paper presented at "Challenging Boundaries" Social Policy Association Conference, University of Edinburgh 23-25 June 2008

Owen, B. (2011) *Top judge wants fair shares for unmarried couples who break up* in <http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2011/feb/03/fair-shares-cohabitees-family-law-reform?>

Page, R. M. (2009) 'With love from me to you: the New Democrats, New Labour and the politics of 'welfare' reform' in *Benefits*, 2009, 17, 2, pp. 149-158

Page, R. (2011) The Conservative Party and the welfare state since 1945 in H. Bochel (ed.) *The Conservative Party and Social Policy* Bristol: The Policy Press

Parr, H. and Philo, C. (2003) 'Rural mental health and social geographies of caring' in *Social and Cultural Geography* 4, 4, pp. 471-488.

Pateman, C. (1987) 'The patriarchal welfare state: women and democracy' in K. Nash (ed.) *Readings in Contemporary Political Sociology* Oxford: Blackwell

Patrick, R. (2012a) *Recruiting and Sustaining Sample Populations Over time: Possibilities and Challenges Timescapes Methods Guides Series 2012 Guide No. 3* Leeds: Timescapes

Patrick, R. (2012b) 'Work as the primary 'duty' of the responsible citizen: a critique of this work-centric approach' in *People, Place & Policy Online*, (2012, 6, 1, pp. 5-15

Peacey, V. and Hunt, J. (2008) *Problematic Contact after Separation and Divorce* London: Gingerbread

Peacey, V. and Hunt, J. (2009) *I'm not saying it was easy...Contact problems in separated families* London: Gingerbread

Perkins, D. (2007) 'Improving Employment Participation for Welfare Recipients Experiencing Severe Personal Barriers' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2007, 7, 1, pp. 13-26

Poder, P. (2008) 'Bauman on Freedom - Consumer Freedom as the Integration Mechanism of Liquid Society' in M. H. Jacobsen and P. Poder (2008) *The Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman. Challenges and Critique* Aldershot: Ashgate

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2007) *Building on Progress: Families* London: Cabinet Office

Punch, K. F. (2006) *Developing Effective Research Proposals. Second Edition* London: Routledge

Rafferty, A. and Wiggan, J. (2011) 'Choice and Welfare Reform: Lone Parents' Decision Making around Paid Work and Family Life' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 2011, 40, 2, pp. 275-293

Ramesh, R. (2012) *Tory peer threatens to lead revolt over Child Support Agency charging fees* Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/jan/25/troy-peer-revolt-csa-fees> [accessed 01/02/12]

Redmond, G. (2010) 'Children's agency and the welfare state: Policy priorities and contradictions in Australia and the UK' in *Childhood*, 2010, 17, 4, pp. 47- 484

Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Edwards, R. (2002) 'The individual in public and private. The significance of mothers and children' in A. Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds.) (2002) *Analysing Families. Morality and rationality in policy and practice* London: Routledge

Ridge, T. (2007) 'It's a Family Affair: Low Income Children's Perspectives on Maternal Work' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 2007, 36, 3, pp. 399-416

Ridge, T. (2009) 'It didn't always work': Low-income children's experiences of changes in mothers' working patterns in the UK' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2009, 8, 04, pp. 503-513

Ridge, T. and Millar, J. (2011) 'Following Families: Working Lone-Mother Families and their Children' in *Social Policy and Administration*, 2011, 45, 1, pp. 85-97

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. and Elam, G. (2003) 'Designing and Selecting Samples' in J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (eds.) (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* London: Sage

Rich, A. (1977) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* New York: Bantam Books

Roseneil, S. and Mann, K. (1996) 'Unpalatable choices and inadequate families. Lone mothers and the underclass debate' in E. B. Silva (1996) *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood* London: Routledge

Sage, D. (2012) 'Fair Conditions and Fair Consequences? Exploring New Labour, Welfare Contractualism and Social Attitudes' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2012, 11, 3, pp. 359-373

Sainsbury, R. (2010) '21st Century Welfare - getting closer to radical benefit reform?' in *Public Policy Research*, 2010, 17, 2, pp. 102-107

Saldaña, J. (2003) *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change Through Time* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Sandoval, J. S. O., Cervero, R. and Landis, J. et al (2011) 'The transition from welfare-to-work: How cars and human capital facilitate employment for welfare recipients' in *Applied Geography* 2011, 31, pp. 352-362

Save the Children (2011) Parents crippled by childcare costs available at [www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/2011/09/Childcare-costs-pushing-kids-into-poverty](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/2011/09/Childcare-costs-pushing-kids-into-poverty) [accessed 05/08/12]

Scheiner, J and Holz-Rau, C. (2012) 'Gendered travel mode choice: a focus on car deficient households' in *Journal of Transport Geography*, 2012, 24, pp. 250-261

Schoenberg, N. E. & Ravdal, H. (2000) 'Using vignettes in awareness and attitudinal research' in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2000, 3:1, 63-74

Scott, J. (1999) 'Family change: revolution or backlash in attitudes?' in S. McRae (ed.) (1999) *Changing Britain Families and Households in the 1990s* Oxford: University Press

Scott, E. K., London, A. S. and Hurst, A. (2005) 'Instability in Patchworks of Care When Moving from Welfare to Work' in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2005, 67, pp. 370-386

Scott, J. (2006) *Family and Gender Roles: How Attitudes Are Changing* GeNet Working Paper No. 21, September 2006

Seale, C. (2002) 'Qualitative Interviewing' in C. Seale (ed.) (2002) *Researching Society and Culture* London: Sage

Segal, L. (2007) *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Sevenhuijsen, S. (1998) *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics* London: Routledge

Sevenhuijsen, S. (2000) 'Caring in the third way: the relation between obligation, responsibility and care in Third Way discourse' in *Critical Social Policy*, 2000, 20, pp. 5-37

Sevenhuijsen, S. (2002) 'A third way? Moralities, ethics and families: an approach through the ethics of care' in A. Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds.) (2002) *Analysing Families: Morality and Rationality in Policy and Practice* London: Routledge

Sheller M, Urry J, 2000 'The city and the car' in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2000, 24, pp. 737-757

Sheller, M. and Urry, J. (2006) 'The New Mobilities Paradigm' in *Environment and Planning A* 2006, 38, pp. 207 - 226

Shirani, F. and Henwood, K. (2011) 'Continuity and Change in a qualitative longitudinal study of fatherhood: Relevance without responsibility' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 2011, 14, 1, pp. 17-29

Sigle-Rushton, W. and Waldfogel, J. (2007) 'Motherhood and Women's Earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic Countries' in *Feminist Economics*, 2007, 13, 2, pp. 55-91

Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction* London: Sage

Singler, R. (2011) *Open all hours? Flexible childcare in the 24/7 era* London: The Daycare Trust

Skevik, A. (2005) 'Women's Citizenship in the Time of Activation: The Case of Lone Mothers in "Needs-Based" Welfare States' in *Social Politics*, 2005, 12, 1, pp. 42-66

Skinner, C. (2005) 'Coordination Points: A Hidden Factor in Reconciling Work and Family Life' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 2005, 34, 1, pp. 99-119

Skinner, C. and Meyer, D. R. (2006) 'After all the policy reform, is child support actually helping low-income mothers?' in *Benefits*, 2006, 14, 3, pp. 209-222

Smart, C. (2000) *Divorce in England 1950-2000: A Moral Tale?* Centre for Research on Family Kinship and Childhood. Working Paper 20

Smart, C. (2004) 'Changing Landscapes of Family Life: Rethinking Divorce' in *Social Policy and Society*, 2004, 3, 4, pp. 401-408



- Smart, C. and Neale, B. (1999) *Family Fragments?* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Smart, C, Neale, B. and Wade, C. (1999) *Divorce and Changing Family Practices*  
Leeds: University of Leeds, Centre for Research on Family, Kinship and Childhood
- Smart, C. And Shipman, B. (2004) 'Visions in monochrome: families, marriage and the individualization thesis' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2004, 55, 4, pp. 491-509
- Smithson, J. and Stokoe, E. H. (2005) 'Discourses of Work-life Balance: Negotiating 'Genderblind' Terms in Organizations' in *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 2005, 2, pp. 147-168
- Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *Making the connections: Transport and Social Exclusion*  
London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- The Social Security (Contribution Conditions for Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance) Regulations (2010) no. 2446 Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/2446/made> [accessed 01/09/12]
- Southerton, D. (2006) 'Analysing the Temporal Organization of Daily Life: Social Constraints, Practices and their Allocation' in *Sociology*, 2006, 40, 3, pp. 435-454
- Standing, K. (1999) 'Negotiating the Home and the School: Low Income, Lone Mothering and Unpaid Schoolwork' in L. McKie, S. Bowlby and S. Gregory (eds.) *Gender, Power and the Household* Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Standing (2011) 'Behavioural conditionality: Why the nudges must be stopped - an opinion piece' in *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 2011, 19, 1 pp. 27-38
- Stepney, P., Lynch, R., and Jordan, B. (1999) 'Poverty, exclusion and New Labour' in *Critical Social Policy*, 1999, 19, pp. 109-127

Sullivan, O. (1996) 'Time Co-Ordination, the Domestic Division of Labour and Affective Relations: Time Use and the Enjoyment of Activities within Couples' in *Sociology*, 1996, 30, 1, pp.79-100

Sullivan, O. (2000) 'The Division of Domestic Labour: Twenty Years of Change?' in *Sociology*, 2000, 34, 3, pp. 437-456

Sümer, S., Smithson, J., das Dores Guerreiro, M. and Granlund, L. (2008) 'Becoming Working Mothers: Reconciling work and family at three particular workplaces in Norway, the UK, and Portugal' in *Community Work and Family*, 2008, 11, 4, pp. 365-384

Sutherland, J. A. (2010) 'Mothering, Guilt and Shame' in *Sociology Compass*, 2010, 4, 5, pp. 310-321

Taylor-Gooby, P. (2012) 'Root and Branch Restructuring to Achieve Major Cuts: The Social Policy Programme of the 2010 UK Coalition Government' in *Social Policy and Administration*, 2012, 46, 1, pp. 61-82

Taylor-Gooby, P. and Stoker, G. (2010) 'The Coalition Programme: A New Vision for Britain or Politics as Usual?' in *The Political Quarterly*, 2010, 82, 1, pp. 4-15

Thébaud, S. (2010) 'Masculinity, Bargaining and Breadwinning: Understanding Men's Housework in the Cultural Context of Paid Work' in *Gender & Society*, 2010, 24, 3, pp. 330-354

Thompson, E. P. (1967) 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' in *Past and Present*, 1967, 38, pp. 56-97

Tilly, L. and Scott, J. W. (1978) *Women, Work and Family* London: Routledge

Timescapes Data Archive available at [www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk) [accessed 04/05/12]

Trade Union Congress (2008) *Hard Work, Hidden Lives: The Full Report of the Commission on Vulnerable Employment* Available at [http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/files/CoVE\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/files/CoVE_full_report.pdf)  
[http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/files/CoVE\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/files/CoVE_full_report.pdf) [accessed 20/01/12]

Trade Union Congress (2011) *Basic rights @ work* [online] Available at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/tuc-19836-f0.cfm> [accessed 28/08/2012]

Trickey, H. and Walker, R. (2000) 'Steps to Compulsion Within British Labour Market Policies' in I. Lodemal and H. Trickey (2000) *'An Offer You Can't Refuse' Workfare in International Perspective* Bristol: Policy Press

Tronto, J. C. (1989) 'Women and Caring: What Can Feminists Learn About Morality From Caring?' in V. Held (ed.) (1995) *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* Boulder: Westview Press

Tronto, J. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care* New York: Routledge

Ungerson, C. (1983) *Why do women care?* In J. Finch and D. Groves (eds.) (1983) *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring* London: Routledge

Urry, J. (2002) 'Time, complexity and the global' in *Social conceptions of time : structure and process in work and everyday life. Explorations in sociology Vol. 6* Palgrave, Basingstoke

VanEvery, J. (1999) 'Nuclear families to postmodern diversity? The sociological construction of 'families'' in G. Jagger and C. Wright (eds.) (1999) *Changing family values* London: Routledge

Van Hooff, J. (2011) 'Rationalising inequality: Heterosexual couples' explanations and justifications for the continuing division of domestic labour along traditionally gendered lines' in *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2011, 20, 1, pp. 19 – 30

Vincent, C. and Ball, S. J. (2007) ‘‘Making Up’ the Middle-Class Child: Families, Activities and Class Dispositions’ in *Sociology*, 2007, 41, 6, pp. 1061-1077

Waddell, G. and Burton, K. (2006) *Is Work Good for Your Health and Wellbeing? A Review of the Literature* London: TSO

Waldfoegel, J. (1998) ‘Understanding the ‘‘Family Gap’’ in Pay for Women’ in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 1998, 12, 1, pp. 137-156

Warren, T. (2003) ‘Class and Gender Based Working Time? Time Poverty and the Division of Domestic Labour’ in *Sociology*, 2003; 37; pp. 733-754

Warren, T. (2004) ‘Working Part-time: Achieving a Successful ‘Work-Life’ Balance?’ *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2004, 55, 1, pp. 99-122.

Warren, T. (2007) ‘Conceptualizing breadwinning work’ in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2007, 21, pp. 317-336

Warren, T., Pascall, G. and Fox, E. (2010) ‘Time and unpaid work: the relevance of innovative time policies to low waged women’s lives in the UK’ in *Feminist Economics*, 2010, 16, 3, pp. 193-219

Weaver, K. (2000) *Ending Welfare as We Know It* Washington DC: Brookings Institution

Weber, M. (1905) (1930 ed.) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* London: Allen and Unwin

Welfare Reform Act (2009) c. 24. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/24/contents> [accessed 26/08/12]

Welfare Reform Bill (2011) available at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/welfarereform.html> [accessed 13/09/12]

Wells, (2010) 'A Nudge One Way, A Nudge the Other: libertarian paternalism as political strategy' in *People, Place and Policy Online*, 2010, 4, 3, pp. 111-118

West, R. (2002) 'The Right to Care' in E. F. Kittay and E. K. Feder (eds.) (2002) *The Subject of Care. Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* New York: Rowman and Littlefield

Whelehan, I. (1995) *Modern Feminist Thought From the Second Wave to 'Post Feminism'* Edinburgh: University Press

White, S. (1999) 'Rights and Responsibilities: A Social Democratic Perspective' in A. Gamble and T. Wright (eds.) (1999) *The New Social Democracy* Oxford: Blackwell

Wiggan, J. (2010) 'Managing time: the integration of caring and paid work by low income families and the role of the UK's tax credit system' *Policy Studies*, 2010, 31, 6, pp 631-645,

Wiggan, J. (2011) 'Something old and blue, or red, bold and new? Welfare reform and the Coalition government' in C. Holden, M. Kilkey, G. Ramia *Social Policy Review*, 23. *Analysis and debate in social policy 2011* Bristol: Policy Press

Wiles, P. (2004) 'Policy and Sociology' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2004, 55, 1, pp. 31-34

Wiles, R. (2012, in press) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* London: Bloomsbury academic

Williams, F. (1999) 'Good-enough principles for welfare' in *Journal of Social Policy*, 28, 4, pp. 667-687

Williams, F. (2001) 'In and beyond New Labour: towards a new political ethics of care' in *Critical Social Policy*, 2001, 21, 4

Williams, F. (2004a) 'What Matters is who Works: Why Every Child Matters to New Labour. Commentary on the DfES Green Paper Every Child Matters' in *Critical Social Policy*, 2004, 24, pp. 406-427

Williams, F. (2004b) *Rethinking Families* London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Williams, S. (2008) 'What is Fatherhood? Searching for the Reflexive Father' in *Sociology*, 2008, 42, pp. 487-502

Windebank, J. (2001) 'Dual-earner couples in Britain and France: gender divisions of domestic labour and parenting work in different welfare states', *Work, Employment and Society*, 2001, 15, 2, pp. 269-290

Wiseman, M. (2003) 'Welfare in the United States' in R. Walker and M. Wiseman (eds.) (2003) *The Welfare We Want? The British Challenge for American Reform* Bristol: The Policy Press

Women's Budget Group (2010) *The Impact on Women of the Coalition Spending Review 2010* London: Women's Budget Group

Women's Budget Group (2011) *Welfare Reform Bill 2011 - Universal Credit payment issues: Briefing from Women's Budget Group (WBG) – September 2011* London: women's Budget Group

The Working Time Regulations (1998) No. 1833 Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/1998/1833/contents/made> [accessed 24/09/12]

Yerkes, M., Standing, K., Wattis, L. And Wain, S. (2010) 'The disconnection between policy practices and women's lived experiences: combining work and life in the UK and the Netherlands' in *Community Work and Family*, 2010, 13, 4, pp. 411-427

Yin, R. K. (2009) *Case Study Research. Design and Methods* London: Sage

Young, I. M. (2002) 'Autonomy, Welfare Reform and Meaningful Work' in E. F. Kittay and E. K. Feder (eds.) (2002) *The Subject of Care. Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* New York: Rowman and Littlefield

Zelitzer, V. A. (1985) *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* New York: Basic Books

---





