



# **Family and work, security and change: a longitudinal qualitative study of lone mothers and their children in Britain**

**Jane Millar**  
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# Overview

1. The project - aims, design and methods
2. Two case studies and themes
3. Talking to policy

# Research aims



Started in about 2001, an in-depth study of lone mothers and their children:

1. to examine the impact of paid work, and for some job loss, on family life and living standards over time
2. to explore whether and how families negotiate the everyday challenges of sustaining low-income employment over time.

The research team: Jane Millar & Tess Ridge

# Key elements in the design

## 1. Mothers **and** children

- Lone mothers focus of policy
- Children – tended to be overlooked ..

## 2. Longitudinal qualitative

- Lives over time
  - A moving picture that changes ....
- Policy context
  - from *work is good for you* **to** *work is your obligation*
  - from expansion **to** austerity

# The sample & interviews

## Lone-mother families who:

- Left income support between Oct 2002 and Oct 2003; *and*
- started jobs of 16 hours or more per week with tax credits; *and*
- had at least one child aged between 8 and 14

## Three rounds of interviews:

- 50 women and 61 children in early 2004
- 44 women and 53 children in mid to late 2005
- 34 women and 37 children in winter 2007

## And in 2016

- 15 women and 17 young people in late 2016

# Focus of interviews & analysis

Constant areas: nature & conditions of work, income and benefits, quality of life, well-being, health, role of state support, family and social relationships

Round 1: The transition to work

Rounds 2 & 3: Staying in work

Round 4: Relationships and work over time

Different funders at each stage

Analysis: mothers, children, family, themes, over time, case studies

## Charlotte 2002 to 2007

“what have I done, I've made the biggest mistake of my life coming off Income Support and I just panicked”

“I don't want to go back to where I was”

“I didn't have no confidence before I started working at all, because I just didn't think in a million years I'd be doing what I'm doing now, because I didn't think I could do it”

# Themes

1. Tenacity
2. A process over time
3. The 'family-work' project
4. The policy environment
5. Self-confidence



## Charlotte in 2016

“I have tried everything so I can carry on working, because I don’t want to be dependent on anybody. I want to work as long as I can, but it’s hard”

“my world had just come to an end you know all that, all the hard work, everything that I have done, I had just moved into this house, a three storey town house with stairs and I thought God what am I going to do, who is going to pay my bills because there is only me that pays my bills and I thought what am I going to do”

# Shane, 2004 to 2007

In 2004, age 12 - “Yeah, like, yeah coming home, using the key, locking up, drying up the dishes and all that, making my own food using the grill and the oven ... I like cleaning up, especially in my room... Yep, I like cleaning up ‘cos it just looks nice for people to come in”

“Yes, more money coming in now, its better now because of everything, everything’s just changed completely, and not just a bit, just completely because of the money”

In 2005 - “She has to keep working, so I go to my Aunties ... I don’t see her, well most of the holidays I don’t actually see my mum, because she’s got work”

In 2007 - “It has been stressful, but I guess it was worth it in the end.....you’ve just got to work to get what you want anyway”

# Themes

1. Strategies – accepting responsibilities, moderating needs, tolerating situations
2. Push away from poverty
3. Independence
4. Relationships with other family members
5. Ambivalence – the trade-offs

# Shane, 2016, age 25

“I guess responsibilities is probably the main thing about the whole single-parent bubble. I personally believe I had to do a lot more at home than any of my friends used to. .... And I think I lost ... I believe that I've lost a lot of my childhood time because of all these responsibilities – doing things at home”

“I guess growing up I have realised that, wow, it must have been hard for my mum, and she still, you know, achieved a lot, done a lot. But it's hard for me as well to progress because I don't have the ... I don't want to say it's all financial ... I suppose if we all had a lot of money then lives would be a lot easier. But, yes, I mean, the responsibilities as well: it's a burden. It is a lot of pressure. Even now I still feel pressure to do things, to make sure my mum's okay, to make sure that she's not going without anything – just as she used to do the same for me, really”

# Policy areas

## Ongoing engagement with policy – DWP, Select Committees, NGOs

- The cost, as well as benefits, of work – for mothers & children
- The limits to in-work progression and advancement
- Mothers often lack resources to help children to independence
- Security slow to achieve and often fragile
- ‘Just managing’ families

# More information

The family work project: earning and caring in low-income household

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/ipr/policy-briefs/working-lone-mother-families-and-their-children.html>

Change, choice and constraint in family and work

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/casp/projects/change-choice-constraint-family-work/>

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