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## Activating lone parents: An evidence-based policy appraisal of the recent welfare-to-work reform in Britain

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# Activating lone parents: An evidence-based policy appraisal of the 2008 welfare-to-work reform in Britain

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**Non-technical summary:**

The welfare-to-work reform implemented between 2008 and 2010 requires lone parents with older children to be available for work. From October 2010 lone parents whose youngest child is seven or older will have to be available for work. In practice this means that they will no longer be eligible for Income Support but will be transferred to Jobseeker's Allowance. The focus is on using the age of the youngest child as the sole criterion for 'ability to work'. This article examines the likely effect of this reform and the proposed extension by the new coalition government with regards to the employment rate of lone parents.

The analysis is based on cross-sectional 2005 data from the Families and Children Study and uses the analysis of the effect of multiple disadvantages on the likelihood of moving into work as applied by Berthoud (2003).

It is argued that the reform will not lead to the desired increase in the employment rate of lone parents as the target group is too small and the levels of multiple disadvantages within the group too high. Indeed, 'ability to work' cannot be equated with the age of the youngest child but needs to take into account the characteristics of lone parents as well.

# **Activating lone parents: an evidence-based policy appraisal of the recent welfare-to-work reform in Britain**

Tina Haux<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

The recent welfare-to-work reform requires lone parents with older children to be available for work. This article examines the likely effect of this reform and the proposed extension with regards to the employment rate of lone parents. It is argued that it will not lead to the desired increase in the employment rate of lone parents as the target group is too small and the levels of multiple disadvantages within the group too high. Indeed, ‘ability to work’ cannot be equated with the age of the youngest child but needs to take into account the characteristics of lone parents as well.

## **Keywords:**

Lone parents, welfare-to-work, activation, child poverty

## **JEL Code:**

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*Sixty years on...*

As a result of an international trend towards the activation of lone parents (Carcillo and Grubb 2006, OECD 2007 and Finn and Gloster 2010), the question of whether lone parents are treated as mothers or workers has increasingly shifted to when they are treated as workers (Lewis 2006) or, perhaps more accurately, who is treated as workers. This shift to treat (some) lone parents as workers has also taken place in Britain where the recent welfare-to-work reforms require lone parents with older children to be available for work. This is the first time that the eligibility of lone parents to social assistance set out in the National Assistance Act in 1948 is restricted. Moreover, using age of child as proxy for 'ability to work' and therefore social assistance eligibility is relatively new to the British social policy system. Yet, it is not clear whether age of child can be equated with ability to work. This last point is particularly relevant as the welfare reform is introduced in the current recession as many lone parents are at the margins of the labour market.

The welfare-to-work reforms activating lone parents have been introduced by the New Labour government through changes in the regulations of the 1948 National Assistance Act and the 2009 Welfare Reform Act and amount to the following:

Lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child is

- seven years or older will be transferred to Jobseeker's Allowance
- between three and six years will have to participate in work-related-activities,
- between one and two years old will have to attend regular work-focussed interviews,
- under one will be able to claim Income Support unconditionally.

(White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* (Cm7290 2007) and Welfare Reform Act (DWP 2009)).

The aims of the reform are to increase the employment rate of lone parents and thereby to reduce child poverty (Welfare Reform Act 2009 and White Paper (Cm7290 2007)). The reforms arise from the broader belief of the New Labour government that work is the best route out of poverty and social exclusion (Lister 2002 among others). They come after 'unprecedented' investment (Millar 2005) in policies helping lone parents move into work and making work pay such as the reform of tax credits, the

National Childcare Strategy and the New Deal for Lone Parents. Despite this investment, the two key New Labour targets, namely that of halving child poverty and raising the employment rate of lone parents to 70 per cent by 2010, have been missed. This is likely to have been an important factor in bringing about the contentious decision to activate a group of lone parents for the first time in sixty years. The New Labour government justified the introduction of compulsion by arguing that lone parents with older children should work because:

- Working will have beneficial effects for lone parents and their families,
- The infrastructure, in terms of helping lone parents into work, making work, pay and the availability of suitable childcare is already in place or will be in the course of 2010,
- Most other countries have greater conditionality already,
- The employment rate of lone mothers in other countries is much higher as is the employment rate of mothers in couples in Britain and
- Lone parents with older children are ‘able to work’ as they are not required to look after their children full-time.

(White Paper (Cm7290 2007).

Being transferred from Income Support to Jobseeker’s Allowance will not change the financial situation of lone parents with older children. However, they will be required to meet a range of additional conditions such as signing on at the jobcentre every fortnight, be actively looking and available for work. In addition, lone parents will be included in the flexible new deal, which is being rolled out in 2009/10. The flexible new deal escalates conditionality in accordance with the length of JSA receipt up to a four week work placement (White Paper (Cm7290 2007).

The new coalition government will not only keep the reform in place but also extent it further. The emergency budget in June of this year contained the announcement that that the age of the youngest child at which lone parents have to be available for work will be lowered from seven to five years (HC61 2010 - budget).

#### *Activating lone parents based on the age of the youngest child*

The introduction of compulsion to be available for work for lone parents with older children has had a mixed reception and a number of the previous government’s justifications such as the policy infrastructure have been challenged (HC42-1

(2008/09). Moreover, some commentators have fundamentally questioned the principle of activating lone parents particularly in the context of the government rhetoric around good parenting and parental choice, the existence and functioning of said infrastructure in terms of childcare provision and flexible working legislation, the flexibility of the JSA regime to accommodate this new client group and whether, particularly in the current economic climate, activation should not be replaced by focus on retention (for an overview of the different positions, see HC42-1 (2008/09)). At the same time, activating lone parents in general and in particular those with older children has been endorsed by a number of commentators for some years (Commission for Social Justice 1994, Deacon 1999, Stanley and Lohde 2004 and Freud 2007) though usually with the caveat of infrastructure such as childcare being in place.

Indeed, the arguments for activating lone parents with older children seem compelling: Lone parents with older children already have a much higher employment rate than those with younger children (see table 1 below) and older children need less physical care than younger children. Furthermore, age of child is used as a work activation criterion in most other countries (Carcillo and Grubb 2006<sup>i</sup>) usually either the age at which children start nursery or primary school (Millar 2001).

However, it is not clear whether taking the age of the youngest child as the selection criterion for lone parents to be available for work will be successful in meeting the stated aims of the reform, given the composition of this group of lone parents (see Haux 2007). The age of (youngest) child has been highlighted as one of several factors but by no means the key driver, influencing the non-employment of lone parents (Bradshaw et al 1996, Holterman et al 1999 and Millar and Ridge 2001). Furthermore, Lister (2006) makes the broader point that welfare reform is increasingly focussing on children at the expense of the welfare of parents. Gregg et al (2006) have pointed out, that the relatively high employment rate of lone parents with older children (see table 1 below) may be an indication of the majority of lone parents in that group being able to work but may also mean that those lone parents with older children who are left on Income Support are perhaps not able to move into work easily. Alternatives that have already been suggested are to lower the age of child to three and to explore options dividing lone parents into groups according to

their work readiness (Gregg 2008, for an attempt see Bryson and Kasparova 2003) with the view to tailor both support and conditionality accordingly.

*Aims, objectives and methodology of this article*

Increasing the employment rate of lone parents has been regarded as a key lever for meeting the child poverty target. The aim of this article is to examine how effective the design of the recent reform and the proposed extension, namely, to select lone parents on the basis of the age of child, are likely to be in increasing the employment rate. The target groups of the welfare reform is examined here in terms of:

- The contribution that moving these groups successfully into employment would make to the overall employment target,
- Whether lone parents in these groups are ready for work and
- A comparison with lone parents with pre-school children.

The analysis is set-up as a policy appraisal of age of child as the criterion for selecting lone parents to be available for work. This is motivated by the significance of the welfare-to-work reform, the emphasis New Labour has placed on evidence-based-policy to establish ‘what works’ (see Nutley and Smith 2000, Solesbury 2001 and Sanderson 2002) and the availability of a substantial body of research on lone parents (Holterman et al 1999 and Millar and Ridge 2001). Policy appraisal stands here for ex-ante evaluation and it is deliberately set up as an intrinsic evaluation (Powell 2002) by adopting the policy aims of the government as well as the methodology of the Green Book published by the Treasury to inform policy appraisals across government. However, it is not an appraisal of the whole reform as this is likely to be affected by overall economic climate and institutional settings (HC42-I (2008/09) and subject to an ex-post evaluation already (Finn and Gloster 2010). This does not mean, though, that an important aspect of the policy design, such as the criterion for activation, cannot be examined by itself on the basis of existing knowledge.

In the Green Book, a policy appraisal consists of four steps: justifying action, setting objectives, appraising options and making recommendations (HMTreasury 2003). The first two steps, namely that there is a need for policy reform and that the objectives are to increase the employment rate of lone parents as one key lever for reducing the



child poverty rate, have been adopted for this analysis as the aim is to carry out an intrinsic policy appraisal. The focus is therefore on the third and fourth step: appraising options and making recommendations.

Appraising the options is done in two parts. Firstly, the potential effect of a successful activation of this group on the employment target is examined on the basis of a number of hypothetical scenarios. Secondly, the central argument used to justify the activation, namely that lone parents with older children are ‘able to work’ is examined in more detail on the basis of the characteristics of lone parents in the respective target groups. Recommendations will then be made in the discussion.

The analysis is based on a secondary analysis of 2005 data from the Families and Children Study (FACS), an annual cross-sectional and panel survey of all families with children in Great Britain<sup>ii</sup>. FACS is designed to monitor and evaluate a range of policies affecting families and the lead commissioning department is the Department for Work and Pensions. The sample size for lone parents is around 2000 households and the latest available data is wave 7, i.e. from 2005. The official employment rate for lone parents (57% in 2005) is based on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the LFS has been used frequently for analysis of lone parents and employment due its large sample size (e.g. Gregg et al 2006). However, FACS contains more questions specific to the circumstances of families and therefore gives greater scope for analysis than the LFS in this case. The overall employment rate of lone parents in FACS is one per cent higher than that of the LFS (58 and 57 per cent respectively). Therefore, the figures shown below are likely to be slight overestimates.

### *Some definitions*

In this paper, ‘being in employment’ as working one hour or more per week. This is in line with the last government’s definition of employment for the purpose of the employment target. The focus in this paper is on two groups of lone parents: the final target group of the current welfare-to-work reform:

1. lone parents whose youngest child is between seven years and 15 years old, referred to as lone parents with older children, and
2. the proposed extension of activation of lone parents with children aged between five and six, referred to as lone parents with younger children.

The analysis also includes lone parents whose youngest child is between three and four years old for comparison purposes. This group is referred to as lone parents with pre-school children.

*Employment rates of lone parents by age of child*

The relatively high employment rate of lone parents with older children compared to that of lone parents with younger children can be seen as both an endorsement of current government policy as well as a problem for its likely success. According to FACS, the employment rate, defined as working one or more hours per week, of all lone parents was 58 per cent in 2005 (see table 1 below, see also Hoxhallari et al 2007 and Lyon et al 2007). However, this figure is a cross-section of all lone parent families and the employment rate of lone parents differs according to the age of their youngest child. The employment rate of lone parents with children aged between seven and 15 was 68 per cent in 2005, i.e. already very close to the overall employment target for lone parents (table 1). This compares to an employment rate of 53 per cent of lone parents whose youngest child was between five and six years old, 54 per cent for those whose youngest child is between three and four years and 79 per cent for lone parents whose youngest child was between 16 and 18 and still in full-time education (see table 1)<sup>iii</sup>. In other words, the employment rate of lone parents increases with the age of their youngest child, to the point where it is already very close to the employment target (see also Gregg et al 2006).

**Table 1: Employment rate of lone parents by age of youngest child**

Age of youngest child (column %)	0-2	3-4	5-6	7-15	16-18	All
<b>In work</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>58</b>
Receiving IS	58	43	42	27	12	36
Other [1]	9	*	*	5	9	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Weighted base	365	217	177	820	141	1720

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents who are not married at the same time, not retired, not working and claiming IS at the same time and have children under 18, weighted using ggrossw supplied with dataset, own analysis.

[1] The 'other' group consists of lone parents who are neither working one or more hours per week nor claiming Income Support but have other means of financial support such as maintenance payments.

#### *Different scenarios for meeting the employment target*

As part of the policy appraisal, the potential impact of a policy is examined. Therefore, in the following section results on the effect of three scenarios on the employment rate of all lone parents are examined.

- 1) **Best case scenario:** what would be the effect on the employment rate of all lone parents if 100 per cent of lone parents in the target group moved into work
- 2) **Employment target scenario:** what proportion of lone parents in the target group would need to move into work to meet the overall employment target?
- 3) **Child poverty scenario:** to meet the child poverty target solely through an increase of lone parent employment would require an employment rate of this group of 86 per cent (Cm6951 (2006)). Hence, the child poverty target scenario examines what proportion of lone parents in the target group would need to move into work in order for the overall employment rate of lone parents to rise to 86 per cent?

The scenarios described above are dependent on the overall size of the target group, i.e. what proportion of all lone parents constitutes the current target group, i.e. lone parents with older children on Income Support. Therefore, table 2 shows the size of the target group as a proportion of the overall number of lone parents. According to

FACS, 13 per cent of all lone parents have older children and are receiving IS (see table 2). In other words, the target group of the reform is a relatively small sub-group of all lone parents. By comparison, if the target group was to be extended to include those whose youngest child is between five and six and who are on Income Support, it would rise to 17 per cent of all lone parents (see table 2).

**Table 2: Employment rate of lone parents by age of youngest child as a percentage of all lone parents**

Age of youngest child (cell %)	0-2	3-4	5-6	7-15	16-18	All
In work	7	7	5	32	7	58
<b>On IS</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>36</b>
Other	2	*	*	2	1	6
Total	21	13	10	48	8	100
Weighted base	365	217	177	820	141	1720

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents who are not married at the same time, not retired, not working and claiming IS at the same time and have children under 18, weighted using ggrossw supplied with dataset, own analysis.

Table 3 presents the different outcome scenarios discussed above for the current reform and its potential extension. It starts with the overall employment rate of all lone parents which currently stands at 58 per cent. Lone parents in the target group of the current welfare to work reform, i.e. lone parents with older children who are on Income Support, make up 13 per cent of all lone parents. Therefore, in the **best case scenario**, i.e. if part or all of the lone parents in the target group were to move into employment, the overall employment rate of lone parents of 58 per cent would increase by 13 percentage points and be brought up to 71 per cent (see table 3). In this scenario the overall employment rate would just about exceed the employment target of 70 per cent. It would be sufficient for 92 per cent of the target group to move into work to meet the **employment target**. However, the **child poverty target** could not be met this way as the target group is too small (see table 3).

If the target group was extended to include lone parents with younger children (i.e. all lone parents whose youngest child was between five and 15), the overall employment

rate would increase to 75 per cent if all lone parents in the target group moved into employment (best case scenario) and it would be sufficient for 69 per cent of lone parents in the target group to move into employment to reach the employment target (see table 3). However, even with the expansion of the target group, it is still too small to meet the child poverty target (see table 3 below). Finally, if the target group was extended to include all lone parents whose youngest child is three years or older, it would only require the activation of half of lone parents with children three and over currently on IS to meet the employment target and even meeting the child poverty target would be feasible if the vast majority of lone parents moved into work (table 3 below).

**Table 3: Employment rates and increases by age of youngest child**

<i>Actual and potential employment rates</i>	<i>7-15 years</i>	<i>5-15 years</i>	<i>3-15 years</i>
<b>Current employment rate</b>	58 %	58%	58%
Increase in employment rate in best case scenario (see table 2)	+13 %	+17%	+23%
<b>Best case scenario</b>	71%	75%	81%
To reach <b>employment target</b>	92%	69%	52%
To reach <b>child poverty target</b>	Not feasible	Not feasible	96%

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents who are not married at the same time, not retired, not working and claiming IS at the same time and have children under 18, weighted using ggrossw supplied with dataset, own analysis.

To summarise, the above analysis clearly demonstrates the link between the size of the target group and the level of activation required to meet particular targets. The current target group is relatively small and it would therefore require the almost complete activation of this group to reach the employment target. The proposed extension to include those lone parents whose youngest child is between five and six years is not going to change this as it is a relatively small group. However, it would be sufficient for just over half of lone parents to move into employment if the target group was extended to include lone parents with pre-school children. Either way, this raises the questions whether lone parents in these groups are able to move into work.

*Are lone parents on IS ready for work?*

The risk of lone parents to stay in non-employment is assessed here on the basis of their characteristics as research on the characteristics of lone parents not in work presents ‘a very complete and generally consistent picture’ (Millar and Ridge 2001: 147). This review of previous research identified seven key characteristics linked to not being in employment:

1. Having a child under five,
2. Having three or more children,
3. Having a health problem,
4. Not having any qualifications,
5. Not having any recent work experience,
6. Being a social tenant and
7. Not looking to move into work.

Not all of the characteristics linked to non-employment outlined above have been used. Age of child is already part of the policy specification and therefore not included again and while living in rented accommodation applies to a large majority of lone parents in the target group (73 per cent of lone parents with older children on IS) and would therefore not identify those at a particular disadvantage. Instead an additional factor has been added which has emerged from the employability literature, namely, the state of local labour markets (McQuaid and Lindsay 2002 and Devins and Hogarth 2005). Due to data limitations, this has been implemented as lone parents being at a disadvantage if they are living in London. The employment rate of lone parents in London is substantially lower than elsewhere lone parents in London are more likely to be on IS and on IS for longer periods than their counterparts elsewhere (see McKay 2004 and O’Connor and Boreham 2002).

Hence, the five factors included in the list of multiple disadvantages are:

- **FAMILY COMPOSITION:** Having three or more children,
- **EMPLOYABILITY:** Not having any qualifications and not having been in work for the past two years and/or never having worked,

- **HEALTH:** Either the lone parent or at least one child to have an impairment that is expected to last for at least a year and limits either the amount or kind of work the parent can engage in,
- **WORK ORIENTATION:** Not looking or expecting to move into work in the next two years and
- **LOCAL LABOUR MARKET:** Living in the government region with the lowest lone parent employment rate, i.e. London.

The indicators of disadvantage have been set deliberately high. Impairment of either the adult or the child is defined as lasting for more than a year and affecting the ability to work and this applies to 43 per cent of lone parents with older children on IS (see table 4). Similarly, 33 per cent of lone parents in this group have not worked in the past two years and do not have any qualifications (see table 4).

**Table 4: Characteristics of lone parents**

<i>Column percentages</i>		<b>With older children (7-15)</b>			<b>With younger children (5-6)</b>			<b>With pre-school children (3-4)</b>			<b>All</b>
		<i>In work</i>	<i>On IS</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>In work</i>	<i>On IS</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>In work</i>	<i>On IS</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>3 + children</b>	Yes	8	16	11	15	21	18	11	27	19	8
	No	92	84	90	85	79	83	89	73	81	92
<b>London</b>	Yes	10	19	12	13	23	18	12	25	17	20
	No	90	81	88	87	77	82	88	75	83	80
<b>Ill-health</b>	Yes	13	43	22	13	23	19	*	27	15	14
	No	87	57	78	87	77	81	95	73	85	86
<b>Work experience</b>	No	n/a	33	10	n/a	21	13	n/a	27	12	11
	Yes	n/a	67	90	n/a	79	87	n/a	73	89	89
<b>Work orientation</b>	No	n/a	34	11	n/a	32	15	n/a	19	9	13
	Yes	n/a	66	89	n/a	68	85	n/a	81	81	87
<b>Weighted base</b>		555	225	820	93	75	177	117	94	217	1720

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents who are not married at the same time, not retired, not working and claiming IS at the same time and have children under 18, weighted using ggrossw supplied with dataset, own analysis.

Notes: Lone parents in the 'other' group are not included in the above table nor are lone parents whose youngest child is below one year old.



Looking at the summative level of disadvantage across the target group of the welfare reform then, table five shows marked differences according to the employment status of lone parents. For example, while 73 per cent of lone parents with older children in employment did not have any of the disadvantages identified above, this compares to only 23 per cent of those on Income Support. Conversely, 25 per cent of lone parents on IS with older children have two and 19 per cent three or more disadvantages. This compares to four per cent of those in employment. Somewhat surprisingly, there does not seem to be much difference between the number of disadvantages of lone parents with older and those with younger child on IS. Similar proportions of lone parents on IS whose youngest child is between five and six years do not have any disadvantage compared to those whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years (25 and 28 per cent respectively). Though the difference is more pronounced when comparing the proportions with three or more disadvantages (12 and 19 per cent respectively). Still, the figures in table five suggest that lowering the age of the youngest child to five and over would not bring in a different group of lone parents in terms of their likelihood of being able to find employment.

The reason for choosing relatively strict criteria is that they are going to be added together in an adaptation of work by Berthoud (2003). Based on longitudinal analysis of the effect of having multiple disadvantages on the risk of being in non-employment, Berthoud (2003) argues firstly, that the risk of not being in employment for lone parents increases sharply with the number of disadvantages from around four per cent for those not having any disadvantages to over 90 per cent for those with six disadvantages and secondly, that while the strength of the effect differs between disadvantages, the overall effect can be calculated by simply adding the effect of the individual disadvantages. Berthoud (2003) included disabled people, older workers and lone parents in his analysis and therefore, the disadvantages chosen are those that apply to all three groups, namely, age, family status, ill health, low skills, low employment rate and lack of recent work experience. I have adapted the disadvantages to fit lone parents only as discussed above but would argue that the cumulative effect of multiple disadvantages on the risk of not being in employment identified by Berthoud (2003) still holds.

**Table 5: Number of disadvantages: lone parents by work status and age of youngest child**

column %	With older children			With younger children			With very young children			<i>All</i>	
<b>No.</b>	<b>of</b>	<i>In work</i>	<i>On IS</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>In work</i>	<i>On IS</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>In work</i>	<i>On IS</i>	<i>All</i>	
<b>disadvantages</b>											
None	73	23	57	67	28	49	75	28	53	55	
One	24	33	27	25	32	28	21	37	29	29	
Two	3	25	10	*	24	15	*	23	12	11	
Three or more	*	19	6	*	12	8	*	13	6	7	
All	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Weighted Base	555	225	820	93	75	177	117	94	217	1721	

\* fewer than 10 respondents

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents who are not married at the same time, not retired, not working and claiming IS at the same time and have children under 18, weighted using ggrossw supplied with dataset, own analysis.

Note: Looking at combinations of disadvantages, the only two correlations that are strongly significant (at the 0.01 level) are those between health and work orientation and employability and local labour market.

## *Discussion*

The 2008 welfare reform focuses on activating lone parents based on the age of their youngest child. Activating lone parents is a key plank in the strategy to meet the child poverty target via an increased lone parent employment rate. The argument in support of the activation is that lone parents with older children are able to work not least because the infrastructure in terms of childcare, in-work benefits and flexible working is in place. However, when looking at the group of lone parents with older children more closely, two key aspects emerge: firstly, the group of lone parents with older children on IS is too small to make a substantial contribution to the employment target. In fact, it would require an almost complete activation of this group to meet the 70 per cent employment target. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the level of multiple disadvantage among this group suggests that a substantial proportion of lone parents have a high risk of not moving into employment.

The plan to expand the activation to include lone parents with younger children has been announced by the coalition government. This would increase the size of the target group and therefore make it easier to reach the employment target even if only half of the group could be successfully moved into the labour market. However, the composition of this group is similar to this of lone parents with older children, i.e. over a third of lone parents with younger children have at least two disadvantages. Thus, given that the reform has been introduced during a recession it seems reasonable to expect only a modest increase in the employment rate of lone parents while at the same time expecting an increase in the proportion of long-term unemployed.

The level of multiple disadvantages among lone parents with older children exposes the assumption that the age of the youngest child can be equated with ability to work in the case of lone parents as one-dimensional. It therefore supports Lister's argument that the focus on children under New Labour has led overlooking the needs of lone parents (2006). Furthermore, it also raises questions as to whether the infrastructure to support lone parents to move into and stay in work really is in place to support those lone parents who have multiple disadvantages. Moreover, it is not clear whether measures are in place to address the disadvantages faced by lone parents, e.g. the need

for recent work experience (particularly, in the low-skilled end of the labour market) or childcare for children with impairments. Finally, given that there are substantial proportions of lone parents with older children who are unlikely to move into work in the near future, the question as to what is on offer for lone parents who can't work is newly pertinent.

The coalition government seems intent on pushing welfare reform further in the same direction. However, as age of child does not seem to be linked to ability to work as shown above, it can be hoped that the government will be taking forward the recommendation by Gregg (2008) to devise tools to profile lone parents according to their distance to the labour market as a way of better identifying lone parents who are able to get and keep a job.

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<sup>i</sup> The typology developed by Carcillo and Grubb (2006) has been adopted in a number of publications, such as the Freud report and the OECD Families and Bosses series.

<sup>ii</sup> This research is based on data from the Families and Children Study 2002 to 2005 (SN4427). The data have been collected by the National Centre for Social Research. The study is sponsored by the following government departments: Department for Work and Pensions (lead department), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Transport. The data have been supplied by the Data Archive and are Crown copyright.

<sup>iii</sup> This group of lone parents is no longer eligible for Income Support but are still defined as lone parents as their children are defined as dependent for the purposes of child benefit. Therefore, those lone parents who are receiving child benefit are counted towards the lone parent employment target but are outside the remit of the reform as they are no longer treated as lone parents for the purposes of Jobseeker's Allowance.

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