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Centre for the Analysis
of Social Policy



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BATH

Desperately seeking security: UK family policy, lone mothers & paid work

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Sustaining Families in Challenging Times
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Work is good for you

Work is good for you: people who work are better-off financially, better-off in terms of their health and well-being, their self-esteem, and future prospects for themselves and their families. Work promotes choice and independence for people, supports our society and increases community cohesion.

(DWP, 2007, p 23)

Our research

The everyday experience of sustaining low paid work over time

Lone mothers – key target group for policy

50 women and 61 children

Started work 2002/2003

3 interviews: early 2004, mid 2005, late 2007

** Jane Millar & Tess Ridge, funded by ESPSC and DWP*

Lone parents, employment and poverty

	1997/8	2002/3
LP employed	45%	53%
LP - Income Support	1,013,000	852,000
LP – FC or TC	351,000	990,000
LP poverty rates	47%	39%
Child poverty rates, LPF	49%	40%
LP employed full time	11%	11%
LP employed part time	28%	22%
LP not employed	67%	61%

4/5 years on

Most stayed in work, but ...

Most valued work, but ...

Better-off, but ...

Stability, better-off, security

13 stable, better off and secure

12 relatively stable but not secure

9 struggling

Strategies to increase income

- Wages
- Tax credits
- Other benefits
- Child Support
- Partners
- Family support

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Work should mean living as others do

There is this great sense of satisfaction when you're working to say that I did all this myself and to want to be like any other family so you do spend and you go on the family holidays and you have the car and you do all those things, because you do just want your children to have that same... not luxuries, but the same opportunities as any other child in any other family.

I'm not allowed to earn more

What I get in one hand I get took off in the other, so at end of day it don't really make any difference at all because what if they put my wages up, which I had the opportunity to do, and then family tax credit will take it off because I'm only allowed to earn so much anyway so at the moment, while my son is at the age he is. It doesn't really make any difference to me whether I get a pay rise or not. We do get pay rises every year but it doesn't make any difference to me really, I mean I'm in that bracket where it doesn't make much difference, I'm only allowed to bring so much into house anyway.

Losing security

Tax credits ... extremely important because I've been able to, you know, keep a good roof over the girls' head and it's been a security to me, well it's security I don't have now ... And now, when I'm in the situation where I no longer get that help, it is very, very hard ... it doesn't actually get easier as you get older and the girls move away because that security just totally leaves you.

All parents struggle?

*I just plod along anywhere. I just go at my own pace
... Financially I struggle every month, so I just get used to
doing that. But I suppose all parents do, no matter whether
you are a single parent or whether there is two of you*

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Harder times coming

- Emergency budget: benefits & tax credits
- Spending review: services & jobs
- Work as welfare: sticks not carrots
- Child poverty: causes & cures
- Security

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