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**THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION
OF
YOUNG SINGLE PARENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED
NEIGHBOURHOODS**

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YOUNG SINGLE PARENTS: - THEIR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SITUATION

INTRODUCTION

This work draws together findings from a number of recent studies into issues of social exclusion and urban deprivation by the Centre for Research in European Urban Environments at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. In particular it focuses on two studies looking at the situation surrounding young single parenthood within disadvantaged neighbourhoods¹. Those studies highlighted several issues relating to employment and training for young single people with children. It was not possible to explore those issues fully in the final reports. It is, therefore, the aim of this work to build on the findings of those studies to highlight the relationship between employment and training, and young single parenting in the context of urban social disadvantage.

The paper is in 3 parts. Part one both explains the background to the previous work on which this paper is based, and sets the context for the exploration of young single parent's experiences of training and employment. Part two uses the voices of young people interviewed for previous studies to highlight young single parents aspirations, difficulties and experiences in relation to training and employment. Part three offers a broader discussion of some of the issues raised.

This section of the paper explains the background to the studies on which this work is based, and gives an outline of the employment and training situation of the young people involved in those studies. It also sets the context for the paper in terms of more general information about youth unemployment and lone parent unemployment, and the policy and political response to these in recent years.

Two main sources inform this paper, *Young Single Mother: barriers to independent living* and *Young Single Father: their participation in fatherhood*. The studies which led to these reports were both funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and carried out by the department of Town and Country Planning at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Hereafter, the reports will be referred to as 'the Newcastle mothers study' and 'the Newcastle fathers study'.

In addition to these, information has also been drawn from another study carried out by The Department of Town and Country Planning, *Changing the way we do things here: the Cruddas Park Experience*. This study, funded by the Baring Foundation looked at the experience of a community development trust on an estate in Newcastle upon Tyne. It is relevant to this paper as many young single parents are housed on the estate, and much of the work of the development trust was aimed at training and employment.

1.1 The Newcastle mothers and father studies

The Newcastle mothers study was undertaken in 1993/4 and aimed to explore the difficulties young single women with children experienced in establishing and maintaining their first home with little or no support from a partner. The study was qualitative in nature and involved drawing from young single mothers their own aspirations, experiences and difficulties. Forty in-depth interviews were held with single young mothers. The definition of a single young mother was a woman aged between 16 and 24 years, with a child, who was not married to or cohabiting with the father of her child or any other man. For the purposes of the study she should also either be living independently of her family, or be in the process of establishing an independent home. In addition to these individual interviews, there were a further 15 group discussions with single, separated and divorced mothers. All the women lived in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Newcastle upon Tyne.

That study raised several issues which challenged assumptions about the role of the fathers of children born to, and raised by young single mothers. It highlighted the fact that some young single fathers may want greater involvement in the lives of their children than is understood, or than is readily available to them.

Beginning in 1995, the Newcastle fathers study aimed to explore the difficulties faced by a young single father who, whilst not continuing a sexual or romantic relationship with the mother of his child, does endeavour to maintain contact and have an input into the child's upbringing. The Newcastle father study was again qualitative and again relied heavily on in-depth interviews with young single non-residential fathers from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Newcastle. The definition of a young single non residential father was a man between the ages of 16 and 24 who was not married to and did not cohabit with the mother of his child, but who did express a desire to maintain contact with his child and be involved in its support. This distinguishes such a man from those men who have longer term,

stable cohabiting relationships with the mother, who could be considered more similar to married fathers. It also distinguishes him from those men who father a child out of marriage and have no more to do with either the child or its mother.

Central to both studies was the notion that the disadvantaged neighbourhoods and backgrounds from which many young single parents come, and in which many continue to be housed as independent adults, has a direct effect on their ability to participate fully and effectively in society as parents. Some such neighbourhoods are in local authority wards with particularly high unemployment. For example, in the West City ward in Newcastle upon Tyne unemployment is 24.7 percent with male unemployment at over 33 per cent (Tyne and Wear Research 1998).

Whilst employment was not itself central to either study, it has become clear that there are a number of employment related issues which are specific to this groups of young people, who are doubly disadvantaged by their youth and their lone parent status. Table 1 shows the employment and training status and history of the 80 young parents involved in the two studies.

Here it is interesting to note that of the 80 young parents interviewed exactly twice as many mothers as fathers had previously been employed. This reflects the fact that young women are more likely to find work, particularly in the de industrialised North East, than young men. This is relevant for this paper as will be seen later in the discussion on young parents' desire to work and the suitability of types of work available, particularly for young men.

Table 1 The work and training situation of mothers and father interviewed for the Newcastle studies

	employed at interview	training at at interview	I/S or FC² at interview	previously employed	informal work	no income interview
Mothers	3	0	37	22	5	0
Fathers	4	5	34	11	18	2

1.2 Context

Young single parents are disadvantaged by both their youth and by their status as lone parents. Therefore, any discussion about their employment situation needs to begin with an understanding of the changes which these groups have experienced in recent years.

Youth and Employment

In a study of school-leavers from two Nottinghamshire schools in 1976 it was found that 32% obtained the first job they applied for and 86% had jobs within a month of leaving school . One commentator suggests that this was:

'one of the last British inquiries to be completed before school-leaver's prospects changed radically(West and Newton 1995)

The nature of that change has two dimensions. Firstly, the growth of unemployment among young people and the fact that, during the 1980s and 1990s, it has been young workers who have been most vulnerable to unemployment. Secondly, the diminishing role of full-time employment as the first destination of those coming to the end of compulsory schooling with, in particular, full-time education or placement on a training scheme becoming more important. The vulnerability of the young to unemployment is demonstrated in table 2 on the following page

While unemployment as for all age groups has fluctuated with the condition of the economy, the level of unemployment among young, and especially very young, workers has remained substantially higher than the workforce as a whole and, in particular, substantially higher than for workers in the middle years of their working lives. Indeed, the data for the most recent years shows some intensification of this trend. While in the 1980s and early 1990s the ratio of the highest (16-19 year old) to the lowest (35-49 year old) was about 2.5:1, the data for 1996 and 1997 shows a ration of over 3:1.

**Table 2
Unemployed as % of economically active (ILO definition), by age, Great Britain**

	16-19	20-24	25-34	35-49	50-retirement
1984	22.0	17.6	12.2	8.1	8.6
1986	19.8	16.3	12.2	7.8	8.1
1988	13.5	11.6	9.4	6.1	8.1
1990	11.5	9.1	7.1	4.7	6.3
1992	16.3	15.0	10.3	7.1	8.4
1994	18.7	14.8	9.9	7.0	9.0
1996	18.1	12.8	8.6	6.0	6.8
1997	16.3	11.8	7.0	5.3	5.9

Source: Labour Market Trends July 1997

Table 3 (on the following page) indicates the second aspect of change in the employment situation of young people, the replacement of full-time work as the first step of those coming to the end of compulsory schooling:

In the mid-1980s less than a third of 16-17 year old entered full-time work but this had declined even further by the early 1990s. While more young people of this age are unemployed or on training schemes than are in work, these two categories also declined in comparison with the continued growth in the proportion of those staying on in education (Courtney and Mekelholt 1996).

Table 3 The percentage of school leavers aged 16-17 going into full time or part time employment, a training scheme or unemployment

Activity at age 16-17,	Full-time education (%)	Full-time employment (%)	Training scheme (%)	Unemployment (%)
1985	37	29	17	15
1986	38	22	28	10
1987	43	23	26	8
1989	50	25	22	4
1991	58	16	16	7
1992	66	10	14	7
1994	72	8	12	6

Source: Courtney and Mekelholt 1996

An analysis of data from the Youth Cohort Studies of the Department of Employment as shown in table 4 shows that, even by the age of 20, the majority of young people were not established in the labour market (Hales and Stratford 1996). By the age of twenty, only 21 per cent had spent the years since leaving school mainly in work. The majority, 35 per cent had spent the years between sixteen and twenty in either full time higher education (29%) or full time non higher education (26%). The remaining 24 per cent had spent the four years to the age of 20 in non-full time education, unemployed or a fragmented pattern of education, employment and unemployment.

Table 4 Main routes to employment taken from 16 to 20

	%
Mainly work	21
Non-HE full-time education to work	26

Higher education	29
HE early leavers	1
Mainly non-HE full-time education	7
Non-HE full-time education to out-of-work/other activities	6
Returners to non-HE full-time education	3
Fragmented pattern of work and out of work/other activities	4
Mainly out-of-work/other activities	3

Source: Hales and Stratford (1996)

1.3 Lone Parenthood and Employment

Lone mothers are less likely than married mothers to be in employment, and single mothers less likely than other lone mothers, and there has been a marked increase in the degree of divergence over time, as indicated in table 5 on the following page.

In the late 1970s single mothers were the most likely to be in full-time employment and married mothers the least, but by the mid-1990s this position had reversed. The decrease in full-time employment among lone mothers has to some extent been compensated by a rise in part-time employment, especially for single mothers, but their levels of part-time employment remain substantially below those of married mothers with dependent children.

Table 5. Lone Mothers and married women with dependent children: percentage working, Great Britain

	% working				
	1977-79	1981-83	1985-87	1989-91	1993-95
Single mothers					
full-time	25	18	14	11	13
part-time	11	12	13	16	17
All lone mothers					
full-time	22	19	18	18	16
part-time	23	23	24	24	24
Married mothers with dependent children					
full-time	15	14	17	21	23
part-time	37	35	37	40	42

Source ONS: Living in Britain 1995: General Household Survey London: HMSO, 1997

Single mothers are also less likely than other lone mothers to be seeking work; they are the least likely to be economically active, are more likely to define their status as 'looking after the home' and are more likely to have never had employment, as shown in table 6 on the following page (McKay and Marsh 1994)

Less information is available on lone fathers than on lone and single mothers. Fathers as a whole are more likely to be in work and less likely to be unemployed than men who are not fathers. The British Household Panel Study of 1992 showed 79.6% of fathers of working age to be in work compared to 68.5% of non-fathers, while the unemployment rate among fathers was 9.2% compared to 11.5% among non-fathers. As might be expected, though, lone fathers caring for their children were substantially less likely to be economically active than other fathers with one in four neither working nor seeking work (Burghes et al 1997). In contrast to fathers as a whole, young fathers are more likely to be unemployed than men of the same age who are not fathers.

Table 6 Economic Activity of Lone Mothers, 1993

	Single never married (%)	Separated from co-habitee (%)	Separated from marriage (%)	Divorced (%)	Widowed (%)
Paid job	24	28	40	48	22
Unemployed (Seeking work)	4	9	7	6	9

Economically-28 active		37	47	54	31
Never had a job	19	15	14	10	28

Source: McKay and Marsh (1994)

The British Household Panel Study of 1992 showed that almost half of men aged 20-24 who were fathers were unemployed, three times the rate of their contemporaries who were not fathers.

1.4 The Recent Policy Context

In the first Budget of the Labour Government on 3rd July 1997 a new package of measures was announced around the theme of 'welfare to work', labelled the 'New Deal' and to be funded largely by a Windfall Tax on the profits of privatised utilities. Young people and lone parents are specifically targeted by this initiative, indeed almost all of the media attention and political debate surrounding the welfare to work package has focused on these groups, though the proposals also contain major element of job subsidies for the adult long-term unemployed.

For the young unemployed the New Deal offers four options to those aged 18 to 25 who have been unemployed for six months or more:

- Employment in a job in either the public or the private sector, with the employer receiving a job subsidy of £60 per week for the first six months. A 'gateway' programme will be linked to this initiative to prepare young people for the workplace environment and teach social skills³.
- Self employment. With effect from August 1998 there will be a scheme allowing the young person to retain Job Seekers allowance and other benefits, whilst trading as self employed or attending relevant training courses for six months. Any profits made during this time will be held by a mentoring company and if trading continues will be returned to the young persons business as start up capital⁴.

- Work in a voluntary-sector agency, while continuing to receive benefit plus a fixed additional sum of up to £400
- A job with an environmental task force
- Full-time study on an approved course while continuing to receive benefit for up to a year.

A £750 allowance for education and training will be available for participants. For those who, at the end of the programmes are not in employment or education, further advice, skills training and work experience placements are promised to allow them *to continue without feeling that they have dropped off the end of the programme (Blunket 1997)*.

It seems clear that the success of this programme will be heavily dependent on the response of the private sector in providing jobs. The Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed this in his Budget speech

I urge every business to play its part in this national crusade to equip this country for the future by taking on young unemployed men and women (Chancellor of the Exchequer 1997a).

Concerns have been expressed that the other options will be seen as second best. For example, the director of the National Council for Voluntary Organisation (The Times, 3rd July 1997) says

It is vital that the voluntary sector and the environmental task force options are not seen as the "sink options" but as the source of "proper" jobs. We need to be regarded not as a second class option but in the same way as the big employers. The sector...needs to be seen as an employer in its own right, providing sustainable jobs (National Council for Voluntary Organisations 1997).

It is intended that this programme for young people will be piloted in 15 areas (including Newcastle) from the beginning of 1998, and implemented nationally from April 1998.

Lone parents, too, are to be encouraged into employment by the New Deal, which includes a package of measures costing £200 million relating to employment and child care. Lone parents with a child aged under 13 and with their youngest child in the second term of full-time school will be invited into job centres for advice on employment, training and child care. After an initial interview mothers will be given a caseworker and draw up an action plan. Benefit changes increasing the allowance for child care costs before benefits are withdrawn from £60 to £100 and increasing maximum age for child care allowance (from 11 to 12) are intended to decrease the benefit-withdrawal disincentive to work, and lone parents who take part are to be what is described as 'fast tracked' for payment of Family Credit and for Child Support Agency action on child maintenance. The scheme is linked to a National Child Care Strategy. An element of this linking the two programmes discussed here is a proposal for the voluntary sector to train up to 50,000 of the young people on the New Deal programme in child care.

The welfare to work programme of Labour's New Deal has a significant element of compulsion; of "carrot and stick". This was made clear by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement:

'With these new opportunities for young people come new responsibilities. There will be no fifth option - to stay at home on full benefit. So when they sign on for benefit, they will be signing up for work. Benefits will be cut if young people refuse to take up the opportunities (Chancellor of the Exchequer 1997b).

Indeed, the Financial Times headlined: 'Sanctions on the unemployed tighter than under Tories', explaining that 'The sanctions to be used in the Government's "welfare to work" plan against young long-term jobless who refuse to co-operate represent a tightening of the rules introduced in September by the Conservatives in their Job Seekers Allowance scheme' (Taylor 1997). Specifically, young people refusing all the four options will have their case considered by an adjudicator with an initial benefit stop of two weeks and subsequent four-week stops on further refusals. The scheme extends to those classified as 'vulnerable', including pregnant women, people with disabilities and single mothers who, if they refuse a New Deal placement, will receive only 60% of their benefits under "hardship arrangement".

Doubts have been expressed about this tough approach. The Director-General of the Save the Children Fund (UK) has commented:

We welcome the Government's commitment, reinforced in the Budget, to help young people in improving their employment prospects.

He sounded a note of caution, however, on the intention to withhold benefits from those who do not "fit in", adding:

This could have serious consequences for a significant minority of marginalised young people who cannot settle into schemes through no fault of their own and for a variety of reasons - for example homelessness, emotional problems, family responsibilities or learning difficulties. This desire for compulsion and sanctions must be questioned (Save the Children Fund 1997).

For lone mothers the scheme has been described by the Secretary of State for Social Security as *empowerment not punishment (The Times 1997)*. Nevertheless, it has been accompanied by changes which are likely to further disadvantage non-working lone mothers. In particular, the Labour Government will go ahead with the ending of One-Parent Benefit as initially proposed by the previous Conservative government.

The overwhelming emphasis of the policies appear to be on paid work. Harriet Harman has said: *Work is the best form of welfare for lone mothers (Harman 1997)*. and Tony Blair described the New Deal as

an approach that puts work at the heart of the welfare state and extends opportunities to those that have, until now been denied the chance to provide a better life for themselves and their families (Blair 1997).

This emphasis has been questioned by some of those concerned with policies for parents and children. The Child Poverty Action Group, for example, say:

'Labours proposals for lone parents represent a partial solution since over half of lone parents on Income Support have a youngest child of pre-school age...the case for adequate out of work benefit rates remain as strong as ever. It is important to acknowledge that 'getting lone parents into work' may not always be the best or only objective for this group of families' (CPAG 1997).

This section of the paper highlights the aspirations and difficulties of young single parents with regard to employment and training. It uses the voices of young single mothers and fathers to illustrate their desires and frustrations at each stage of the route from unemployment to employment. It begins to show changing perceptions and attitudes to the role of employment.

2.1 The hunt for a job

Desire to work

Research shows that the majority of lone parents do want to work, and see it as their only hope of improving their financial situation (Speak et al 1995; Burhges and Brown 1995). Indeed, in this respect they are no different to many other people living on welfare benefits (Kempson 1996; Morris and Ritchie 1994). Other studies have shown the additional benefit to the general welfare of lone mothers from being in employment (Bryson et al 1997). Young single mothers in the Newcastle mothers study were no exception the majority expressing a desire to work either full or part time.

Yeh I'd love a job me, just get out like and meet people and that, it's not even the money like...well that'd be good

Well, I can't see me ever getting sorted out on the Nash (welfare benefits). You got to work really I think to get anywhere

However the young single mothers suffered the same work/home conflicts which many working or would be working mothers feel at some time, and were reluctant, like many other mothers, to miss out on their children's early years.

...suppose I'd take it...(a job) well I would like but it'd break my heart leaving her (daughter)

not let anyone look after her, no way not yet, not now....nah not even (my mother)

Young men interviewed for the Newcastle Fathers Study also expressed a strong desire to find and keep 'a good job', this was especially true for those who considered cohabiting with their partners.

Well I just thought 'got to stick it now, just got to knuckle down and get on with it, we're going to need to money'. I did too, while it lasted then I got laid off...we split up

Fatherhood might be considered as an incentive to work, and clearly for some it was, if a good enough job, with prospects could be found. However, others saw some benefit in their unemployment, both to themselves, their children and the mothers of their children.

K (child's mother) gets depression, you know...not depression really but just right low. She's on something From the Docs... I think she finds it too hard, at least I can take our L (daughter), give her a break. She's a place at school...not school, nursery in September. I'll do it then (look for a job).

Others, however, were unwilling to consider poorly paid, uninteresting work, which would not only leave them little better off financially but also rob them of their time. This was particularly the case for the young men with greater contact and care of their children.

I'll not do just owt, what's the point...If I could get a right job a good job that'd be different.

Clearly the type of work available and the level of pay made a difference to a young man's willingness and determination to get a job. The changes to the labour market in recent years have meant that much of the work available is low paid, part time and of a sort that would traditionally have been considered as 'women's work'.

(I would like) to work outside, building or that sort of thing...sitting in a factory with a load of wifies (women) that's not for me man.

It was difficult to draw conclusions as to whether it was the nature of the work or the level of pay which put some young men off. As one young man said:

Do owt me if they pay me enough but I'm not working my bollocks off for that type of money, no way

However, another young man about to go to Africa as a volunteer on a school building project commented

(I) don't get paid much, well nothing really just your keep like and they give you a bit spending money but at least its something worthwhile. I've never had nowt so I'll not miss it (money)

Never the less, many young women and men with children would like to work, even for little financial gain, what then are the barriers to them finding and keeping a job?

Training

Unable to get a job without formal educational qualifications, many young people attend employment training schemes in their search for a first job. However, confidence in such schemes is low, both amongst young people themselves and others, as these mothers and fathers reported.

Crazy it is cause its just the same your bus fares and snap (food) and that but you don't get enough (money) you're worse off, I was worse off, a lot.

Some of the young parents had valued the experience but were disappointed in the outcome and felt ultimately that training had been a waste of their time.

(I worked) for 2 years for the DSS like on a scheme. It were alright but for what you get like £55 a week and I were doing all what the others were doing, full time like. Then, they just said you've finished now and that were it. Two years man and there weren't no job for me and I didn't have and qualifications or nowt...a waste it was

It's quite good at first 'cause you get ...fed up at home...and when you've got nothing to do and at least you get a bit extra money like... I got put on the (shop) floor (at local DIY Store) and they did try to teach us and that, stuff about the things they sell...and we did these projects and writing and that too. My Mam said it were cheap labour but I liked that 'cause my dad were a plumber. Aye it were OK really I'd have liked it there but there's only just so many jobs like and at the end of it they said I could maybe go to another store Blaydon way... (approximately 10 miles). I couldn't go all that way with the cost and that. They said they'd get in touch if they had a job closer but they never

For others, in the absence of employment training had become a way of life itself, taking the place of employment (Hollands 1990; Deakin 1996; Finn 1987). One youth worker interviewed for the Newcastle fathers study told how a young man who she had supported for several years had become a 'training junkie'.

He'll do anything, been on every course going. He came in here and said I'd like to do your type of job isn't there anything I can do? So we tried to give him a bit of training and work here, I was paying him out of petty cash but they stopped me. He's doing really good too but I don't know what it will lead to. I've tried to tell him not to get his hopes up.

It is not only the trainees who are disillusioned. Those involved in stimulating employment on a Newcastle estate found that many residents, including young people recently out of school, needed very basic training, as one man involved in the study of the Cruddas Park Initiative explained.

They thought they could develop training...yes employment training and flag up employment opportunities but they didn't realise how much needed to be done...really we are talking about pre ET training, basic literacy and numeracy in a lot of cases (Wood et al 1995).

The search for a job

Many young people were keen to point out that they had tried very hard to find a job. Several had become completely disillusioned and disheartened, not only with the lack of jobs but also with the poor responses from employers, some of whom had not even sent a courtesy reply.

I must have, (sent) hundreds of letters, well a lot, dozens, yeh, dozens and you don't even get a reply most times...not even a thank you nor nowt, it's disgusting

The employment services set up to assist people to find a job are not held in good regard by many young people, as the following quote from one young man shows

Nah man they (the Job Centre staff) don't do nothing for you, just treat you like shit ...like you don't care. They send you for jobs if there's one you go for ...that's what it boils down to there's no jobs in there. They try to spread them cards out to make it look more...

Many people find work through word of mouth, rather than from a Job Centre or news paper.

My mate's dad works for Vickers, he got him a job in the stores when someone left. Said he'd try get something for me too like

Our Shelly does cleaning on a morning 7 till 9, she can get me in if I want, she got my friend a job like but cleaning, well I don't know...

The young parents interviewed for the Newcastle mothers and fathers studies lived predominantly in disadvantaged areas of urban social housing. In such areas unemployment is high. Some of the young people came from families which had suffered long term unemployment over several generations.

Mine (father) were laid off from the yards (ship yards) when I were a little lad like...more times than I can remember, out more than in I don't know

Even where employment opportunities do exist, they may not be so readily available to people from the disadvantaged neighbourhoods in which many young single parents are housed. There is evidence of employers and employment agencies discriminating by post code. As one woman interviewed for a study of the Cruddas Park Community Development Trust explained

Employers see a stigma about Cruddas Park. I usually write Park Road as my address and leave off Cruddas Park - I know I should try to be proud of the area but I don't want to be judged by where I live (Gilroy and Speak)⁵.

The type of work available or being sought

Some of the young parents seemed almost to have accepted, without question, the fact that there was no stable, long term employment for them. Asked what type of work they would like, both mothers and fathers could generally see a distinction between the jobs available to them and the type of work which they would like and which they see as providing long term prospects, as one young man explained:

There's work aye, here and there I can find a bit work like in the town but it's not what you'd call a good job is it? It's not for the long term...not really worth it.

A mother also demonstrated similar sentiments:

We could only do cleaning...and that don't pay enough, not by the time you pay for baby-sitters and that, wouldn't be worth it.

This distinction, held primarily by men, rather than women, between a good job for the long term and the bits of short term or part time work many took to provide extra money was very clear. It could be seen to suggest that young men no longer accept work as being worthwhile in its own right. Many of the young mothers felt that any work was worth while, as long as it did not leave them financially worse off, and as long as they could manage the logistics of it whilst caring for a child. They did not see cleaning as below them or menial, indeed many sought cleaning jobs for company and to meet people. However, as the quote above shows, it was the low level of pay which was the deterrent.

Self employment

The lack of suitable jobs makes some young people consider self employment. This was the case for several of the young men interviewed for the Newcastle fathers study, but not the mothers. However, the type of self employment was low key and informal. The young men had tried such activities as car valeting, industrial and commercial cleaning and window cleaning. The young men who did this generally claimed benefits as well. Speaking about the idea of coming off benefits and being officially self employed, one young man had this to say.

to do it right like...better aye, but I'd never make enough, not right away like. With your tax and all and what if you had a bad week with no business, no money?

One young man in a young offenders institution at the time of interview spoke of his dreams of working for himself

All I can think about now...my uncle's going to help me 'cause he's got a business and I can't wait. I'm going to get one of them cleaners, industrial type not just a cleaner. I'll go to people's houses and offices and do carpets and sofas and that. You've got to do it for your sen I think, there isn't no jobs for you these days

2.2 Taking a job

Once a job or suitable training course has been found, young people and young single parents particularly encounter a range of obstacles, some of these are obvious and well documented, other are less so.

Child care

The most obvious and the most often mentioned barrier to lone mothers returning to work is the availability of affordable child care. However, this issue is more complex than many may realise, it will be discussed in detail in section three.

Ya can't afford to work I mean not if you have to pay baby-sitters and you can't be asking people to have the bairns all times

Many mothers believe that they will be able to start working once their child starts school. However, finding a job to fit in with school hours is difficult and there is little in the way of out of school care available. Mothers discussed the possibility of asking neighbours, friends and family for support.

I couldn't leave mine, not where we live. They're OK, sensible like but the kids around and the grown ups too... I just wouldn't trust anyone. If we lived somewhere else, a better part like, then I might leave them with a neighbour but not where we live, too much crime... drugs and that.

Fathers' role in child care

Whilst a need for child care did not prevent the fathers from taking a job, their role in providing child care to free the mothers to work, train or have time off was a significant issue. Many of the young single fathers interviewed for the fathers study who were not

employed, showed a willingness to be involved in the daily care of their children. Of the 40 men interviewed, 29 said they could see no reason why child care should be the sole responsibility of the mothers. They did not see anything inherently female about caring. Several of the fathers did regularly provide child care without which, the mothers lives may have been more difficult.

She (child's mother) gives us the bottles made up and the nappies and we're right for the day and I take him round Pasty's (a friend) and we play with him.

I told her get them (nappies) that you just hoy in the bin, and I'll be right. Nah man...it's got to be done just get on with it

One young man had taken the notion of child care a stage further, seeing in it the potential for a satisfying job.

I remember at school, well you'd never say 'I want to work with kids'. I never really thought about it but I love kids me, always have. and now I've got a son I think well I can do this, it would be good to do this...look after kids, in a nursery like. I've been thinking about taking a course.

The transition From benefits

A number of commentators have discussed the experience of the poverty trap (Kempson 1996; Oppenheim 1993)) and it is not the intention to repeat those arguments. Here we will look, however, at the problems caused by the transition from low but regular welfare benefits to a wage. Because this clearly prevented several young parent's from taking a job, even temporarily, their thoughts about the transition are being presented here, rather than in the following section on experiences of work.

...but if you do (get a job) you have to tell them (Benefits Agency) right away and they stop your money don't they... then you have to wait till pay day and that might be at the end of the month. Well man, how can you manage, I mean what do you live on.

Oh what a right bloody mess it were. They stopped my benefit, 'cause like I knew they would do but I thought OK. I can manage for a couple of weeks and my Dad said he'd help me out. Then they (employer) messed up my wages the first few weeks, and they took tax off and they didn't ought to have.. then they did something else wrong can't remember now, anyhow, what a blood mess it were for months. I didn't never get my money right really 'cause I still owe my Dad and that. ...(I'm) back on the benefits now and at least you know where you are. I reckon you need to have a load of money already before you get a job or else it makes it worse for you.

Coming off wages at the end of temporary employment and back onto benefits also caused problems. For some, delays in sorting out new housing benefit claims caused specific difficulties

(I could) manage fine with my money, well it were tight at first but I knew it would be and so I were right tight with myself. But they stopped my housing benefit and it took ages, I mean weeks for them to get it sorted again and my landlord were giving me a right hard time about it.

You don't think about things when you get chance of a bit work like... I just thought brill! a job, but I tell you it were more trouble than it were worth man sorting out the benefits afterwards but I had to stop when the bairn broke up for summer (from school). Shame 'cause I'd made friends and that and its better to be out and doing stuff.

2.3 Being in work

Experiences of work

Those young parents who had held jobs had a range of different experiences of employment, some good and some bad. Some had enjoyed the experience but were disappointed at their small financial gain, or in some cases loss. One young man told the following story:

The best (job) were down the F (local frozen food processing plant) but they pissed us about so I told them to stuff it. First week right, and I got my money like and they'd taken out for boots and like overalls, you know. Well they never said owt about that when I went (for an interview). So after a couple of weeks I said it weren't right... not just me, everyone said it weren't right so I told them to stuff their job. Well it weren't right good money to start with and by the time I'd got my bus fares and a bit scran (food) and with what they'd taken out for boots and that...wasn't worth it.

Others had poor experiences all together.

*I tell you, my first job, what a ***** ***** man. The boss, foreman he weren't even top boss like and what a... It were at D*** (local builders merchants) do this, do that and nowt were ever right from the first day I were, he expected me to know what stuff were well I don't know what a***** wall tie is, well I do now like*

Some young mothers too had poor experiences

'cause I were young I suppose they just treated me bad...I should have stuck up for myself but I just give up me

Others had enjoyed the work but found the logistics of juggling motherhood and employment too hard

weren't till J (son) were at school I started on the machines (fashion cut, make and trim business) and they didn't really allow for me not having no one to take care of the bairn if...like if owt went wrong like just well like it's your problem and you can't expect them to make allowances I suppose... so I had to give up.

There was some evidence to suggest that some young men had lost touch with a culture of work, and what being an employee meant. This was indicated by the comments on the experience of working for a 'boss'. Discussing being fired from a job, one young man said

I can't be doing with being telt (told) what to do me. I know it's me own fault but I just can't be doing with being bossed around ... stupid little things like... five minutes late.

This was not an unusual story. It may be that because some of the men were older, in their late teens or early twenties by the time of their first jobs, they did not feel inclined to be treated as young lads. However, with no experience of working life or a work environment, they perhaps behaved inappropriately.

Maintenance and The Child Support Agency

Twenty nine of the 40 fathers interviewed for the Newcastle Fathers Study reported paying maintenance of some form or other to the mother of their child. However, only 11 had had any dealings with the Child Support Agency (CSA), two of these were having deductions of less than £5.00 per week taken out of their Income Support. Many felt that they had escaped the interest of the CSA specifically because they were out of work and therefore not able to pay. For the fathers, maintenance payments only really became an issue, therefore, if they were employed. One young man told the following story about a friend of his

...used to give her (his child's mother) £15 a week about, if he could, not every week like but mostly. (a conversation ensued between several men as to the correct amount of maintenance to pay)... Then they (CSA) nobbled him said he had to give her a tenner...I think it was. They stopped it off her social (Income Support). So now she's ten quid worse off...he still give her £15 but she's on his case all the time saying she needs more.

There were several comments about the fact that whilst the men did not begrudge paying maintenance if they got a job, they did object to the fact that it would not benefit their child. However, there was no evidence to suggest that any of the men actively avoided employment to avoid paying maintenance.

I'll not give her no money...I'd rather buy things for the kid, shoes and that and toys...every week, she never goes without. I'll not give her money regular like 'cause I know they'll (Benefits Agency) take it off her social (Income Support)

The mothers involved in the Newcastle Mothers Study were generally quite philosophical about the issue of maintenance. Whilst they felt that it was right that a man should pay maintenance, they were realistic about the chances of benefiting from it. They saw both the unemployment of the young men as an issue, and the fact that any maintenance they received would be deducted from their Income Support.

Nah man, I mean, they'd never get owt out of him, even if he had owt. He's mostly out of work, but for bits of jobs. And they'd just knock it off my social anyway

Oh aye it's a good thing I suppose, well why shouldn't they have to pay out for them. It's not just the mothers responsibility. And it makes you feel bad knowing that you have to live on social all the time. I've told them (CSA) where he lives and that but I can't see them getting owt out of him, 'cause he's never worked, well not properly. Anyway, he can't pay out for all of them can he.

None of the mothers made the connection between maintenance and their own future employment. Whilst they realised that if they were employed, they would be able to keep the maintenance, the chances of them getting a job which paid them enough to make the switch from benefits worthwhile, even with regular maintenance was slight.

PART THREE - DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This section will discuss some of the main issues raised by parents in the previous section. It will try to highlight areas where young single parents are affected differently or are at a greater disadvantage than their non parent peers. It will also highlight areas where their behaviour and perceptions may be different.

3.1 Desire to work

Whilst both the mothers and the fathers in the two studies expressed a desire to work, there are important differences in the way they perceived work, the role it fulfilled in their lives and their confidence in getting a job.

It is interesting first to note that although both the mothers and the fathers were from very similar backgrounds and were the same ages, exactly twice as many mothers as fathers had been employed in the past. At the point of interview, of the 40 mothers with full time responsibility for their children, three were working, only one less than the four working (out of forty) fathers who did not have to care for their children full time.

One of the main differences between the mothers and the fathers with regards to work was their perceptions of the role it played in their lives. Many of the mothers said they would be willing to take any job, as long as they could manage the logistics of it whilst caring for a child, and would not be financially worse off. They saw work as a way to meet people, get out of the house and get on the ladder to a better future as their child grew up and started or progressed through school. Even the most menial jobs seemed to offer some form of life improvement and self esteem. The majority of men, however, felt that unless a job was going to make them better off financially and was long term, there was little point in working. This is not to say that they did not want to work but their reasons for working were different.

This might seem to contradict the assumption that fatherhood would make getting a job more important. The only suggestions of this came when a young man was considering cohabiting with the mother of his child and settling down to build a home and life together. This may be seen as acceptance of the more traditional male provider role. However, if getting a part time poorly paid job does not benefit either the young man or his child greatly, then his identity and life may gain more from time spent with his child.

Here the issue of maintenance is relevant as a disincentive to employment for young mothers and young fathers. There was no evidence to show that any of the fathers in the Newcastle study had actively avoided work in order to avoid paying maintenance. However, given that the young men saw financial gain as the main reason for working, the increased maintenance they would pay in work naturally raises the amount they would want to earn. It may serve to make jobs which would otherwise be acceptable, unacceptable.

In an attempt to get lone mothers off benefits, policy was changed to allow them to disregard some of their maintenance in the calculation of in-work benefits. Young mothers generally do not benefit from this policy because their chances of receiving regular maintenance are so low. Here the key issue is regularity of payment rather than amount. With jobs for young

people being not only poorly paid in many cases but also insecure, most mothers felt unsafe relying on a mixture of their own earnings, their maintenance (itself reliant on insecure earnings) and in-work benefits. In this respect, maintenance may logically have a negative effect on desire to work.

3.2 Type of work

The recent restructuring of the labour market in Britain and many other countries has created more unstable and insecure employment conditions for many people. There is more part time work and more temporary contract working. This increase in part time work may benefit some, especially mothers who cannot commit to full time work but such work tends to be in low paid service sector jobs.

The Labour Force Survey for spring 1992 and 1997 shows male economic activity for the Tyne and Wear district reducing slightly from 67.7 per cent in 1992 to 65.5 per cent in 1997. At the same time, however, female economic activity increased very slightly by 0.2 percent to 49.2 per cent. This is a continuing trend which can be seen across a longer period of time by looking at different sources. It may be that young men consider the type of work available to be less suitable. They are the type of jobs which the fathers had little interest in, not seeing them as 'real jobs'. Alternatively, young men may be considered less suitable for such jobs by employers.

Some studies suggest marked changes in gender roles brought about by changing employment situations (Wilkinson 1994) The evidence from this study suggests that the gender role changes are, to an extent, an unhappy compromise. Whilst many of the men in the fathers study were happy to put their time to good use, looking after their children, few actively chose unemployment over stable employment. They had, however, made careful calculations as to the potential benefits of the type of employment and level of wages available to them. The benefits from employment, in terms of esteem, finances and relationships were often poor.

For those young men and women in work, wages have been conditioned both by the abolition of wages councils and the changing nature of employment. The result is that for many young unskilled or semi-skilled workers, a family wage is more difficult to achieve (Employment Policy Institute 1997; Byrne 1986). In 1995 males aged 18 to 20 earned 47.7%, and males 21 to 24 earned 70% of the averages earnings for males of all ages.

This may have an impact on the stability of young cohabiting relationships, as research shows that new forms of employment are not providing young men in particular either strong work identities or enough money to set up home separate from their own families (Hollands 1995). Clearly some of the young parents in the Newcastle studies had been deterred from cohabiting for financial reasons and both men and women felt that employed or unemployed, at their age they were financially better off living apart.

3.3 Employability

There was some evidence to show that the delay many men experienced in engaging with the labour market was causing them problems once they did. Those men who had worked or were working related more negative experiences, such as being 'bossed around' or 'told what to do'. Conversely the majority of young women had enjoyed their experiences of work.

There is, perhaps, a suggestion that the later a young person enters the work environment, with all the demands of team work, compromise and a degree of subservience, the more difficult it is for them to adjust. In the case of the young men it appeared in several cases that they perceived their age, gender and status as fathers to warrant them greater respect from an employer than was the case given their experience. Not enough was known about the father's or mother's family employment backgrounds to make any associations between their parents' perceptions and experiences of work and the young person's perceptions.

3.4 Education and training

A lack of educational qualifications often disadvantages young parents in their search for a job. Single, never married parents are less likely to have educational qualifications than other lone parents. This may be due to their young age, as younger parents are also less likely to have such qualifications than those who began their parenting at a later age. The General Household Survey (1990-92) shows that almost four out of 10 single lone mothers had no educational qualifications at all. Only one in 10 had higher qualifications to 'A' level of degree level.

For fathers the picture is similar, in that the younger a man is at the time of the birth of his first child, the less likely he is to have educational qualifications. However, young fathers are more likely to go on to acquire educational qualifications than young mothers are. One study showed that around 19% of the fathers who had their first child by the age of 25 went on to get a degree. The same was true for only 10% of the women who became mothers under 25 years (Burghes et al 1997).

None of the young father interviewed for the Newcastle study had any educational qualifications. Many reported having a poor attendance record and dropping out of school early. The mothers reported slightly better school attendance. Some also benefited from special schooling for pregnant school girls.

The issue of training and qualifications is important as one study of lone parents and work shows that even basic qualifications greatly improve the hourly rate of pay which can be achieved (Bryson et al 1997). Those with even the lowest level of school qualifications (CSE and GCSE grades D-F) averaged 20 per cent more in hourly earnings than those with no qualification. For young mothers using Family Credit as a step to joining the labour market, the hourly rate of pay is crucial in deciding the viability of working if child care is to be paid for.

There is an important issue here for the development of special education services for pregnant school girls. This may need to be extended to cover school aged or just post school aged fathers, as indeed it is in the United States, where a multi-disciplinary approach to engaging young single fathers in education and work has been developing for over a decade (The Collaborator).

3.5 Training for employment

In Britain one response to the number of young people leaving school without employment or qualifications has been changes in benefits provision to encourage or ensure take up of employment training. Since 1987 Income Support or unemployment benefit has no longer

been available generally for young people under 18 years of age. In its place youth training schemes now offer training and work experience. However, as we have seen these schemes are not popular. One study of the take up of training places highlighted the concerns of trainees, showing that (NACRO 1993).

- 90% were concerned that the training allowance was too small
- 57% feared they would not gain employment
- 42% were concerned about cut backs in training resources
- 35% were dissatisfied with the quality of training

This dissatisfaction with training schemes has been well documented in other studies and may account for why an estimated 10% of young people in the Tyne and Wear area are not in employment, education or registered on any training course (Finn 1987; Hollands 1990). Young fathers felt that few of the training schemes were aimed at the type of work they hoped for.

CONCLUSIONS

Two sets of conclusions can be drawn from revisiting the previous studies of young single parents. The first set of conclusions relates to their position in the labour market. The second set of conclusions relates more to the changes in the perceptions young people have of work and its role in their lives and identities. Both these will be discussed here.

First, however it is important to return to the context of this work and the original studies to emphasise the disadvantaged backgrounds and neighbourhoods from which many of the parents came, in order to clarify one point. Undoubtedly, some of the responses from young single parents have challenged ideas both about gender roles and the way young parents see their employment prospects. The assumption that parenthood makes a need for employment more urgent may be false. However, whilst the responses given by the young men in particular, especially in relation to their unwillingness to accept 'just any job' may portray them as being unconcerned about their unemployment, and happy to remain on benefits, this is far from the truth. The young men in particular did want to work. However, what they wanted was self esteem and financial reward from a job. Both are increasingly hard to find in the changing labour market, particularly the local labour market of the Tyne and Wear area.

Position in the labour market

Young, single parents are clearly at a greater disadvantage in terms of employment than either young people without children or older lone parents. Their young age and for many, their lack of qualifications sets them behind others in the search for a job and keeps them on lower wages once a job can be found.

Policy response to unemployment for young people and lone parents has been largely punitive, in order to make living on benefits more difficult. For example, in 1987 Income

Support was withdrawn for young people under 18, and in April 1998 One Parent Benefit will be withdrawn. Alternatively, there have been a number of attempts to make taking low paid jobs more attractive, such as maintenance disregard for in-work benefits for mothers. However, these approaches do not acknowledge the differences between lone parents in general and this group of young single parents in particular.

Any approach to reducing unemployment for young single parents should begin by accepting that many are already at a disadvantage prior to becoming parents, due to a low level of educational attainment, limited work experience and the disadvantaged neighbourhoods in which many are raised. It should continue by understanding that, whilst they are affected by all the issues which affect any working parents, and especially lone working parents, these issues are often more complex in the case of young single parents. Furthermore, the strategies which other lone parents develop to assist their return to work, and the resources they can draw on, such as family networks and friends, are often simply not available to younger parents. This may be so for a number of reasons. Younger single mothers may well have younger parents themselves, who may still be working or have other younger children of their own to care for, and little time to offer for care of their grandchildren. There is also often one set of grandparents less to offer support, as single, never married young mothers are less likely to have developed a relationship of support with their children's paternal grandparents (Speak et al 1995). Divorced or separated older mothers may well have a more established relationship with the father or paternal grandparents of their children, to whom they can turn for support. Older lone mothers and fathers may be more established in the community with a knowledge of different support agencies and a greater circle of friends and known neighbours to turn to for child care. This is often not the case for younger single mothers who may have been housed away from their family and friends and not yet have settled into a community where they have re-established such support. Younger parents will generally have younger children and therefore a greater need for full day care if they are to work. A range of circumstances such as lack of family support, the type and location of housing they may have, their limited educational attainment and their lack of work experience puts them at the bottom of the labour market ladder.

It is important that policy response takes account of the differing problems and needs of younger parents and seeks ways of tackling their unemployment from its root cause. This means beginning by looking at basic education and support, rather than at training and employment. Policy is beginning to address this for all young unemployed people through the 'gateway' element of the New Deal strategy on unemployment for young people, which offers a comprehensive package of training in employment and social skills and introduction to the work environment.

However, it is important also to recognise how the needs and abilities of young single fathers may differ from young single men without children, and to recognise that they may have a role to play in the care of their child and in enabling the mother of their child to work. Lessons can be learned From the United States about the way in which support and encouragement for young parenthood, especially fatherhood can be used to stimulate the take up of education, training and employment. The 'gateway' element of New Deal is beginning to address the interrelated issues of training for employment, social skills and experience of working environments. However, it still does not recognise the different needs of parents. In this respect it may be more productive to adopt the approach taken in some American states, where young single parents are targeted separately with a range of programmes aimed specifically at them. In some cases young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with the

potential to become young unemployed parents are identified and helped early on in their schooling, rather than later in schooling or as they leave school and become unemployed.

Changing roles or unhappy compromise?

It is important also to look at changing gender roles and the changing patterns of family development. Two conflicting ideas have arisen from the fathers study in relation to the changing roles of young men. On the one hand, many of the men expressed a real desire to get a good, well paid and permanent job. On the other hand, they expressed a desire, willingness and ability to take care of their children in very practical ways. It is difficult to know whether young men's attitudes to work, family and parenthood are changing, or whether, robbed of their traditional identities as provider, by unemployment or under employment and poor pay, they are searching for a new way to participate in society and trying to construct new identities.

Where ever the truth of this dilemma lies, the fathers study in particular shows that we should recognise and encourage the willingness and ability to be involved which many even very young fathers display. In the light of increased divorce and separation, we are beginning to accept that two people can cooperate to raise children after their cohabitation or marriage ends, and we are beginning to produce policies to support this. Should we not then also consider that because two people choose not to marry or cohabit in order to raise a child, it does not mean that they can not work together as a married or separated couple might to support the child, both emotionally and financially. Perhaps it is time to reconsider the accepted sequence of events leading to child raising. The traditionally accepted sequences of employment, marriage and establishing of new household prior to child raising is being challenged by many younger people across all social groups for a range of economic and cultural reasons. However, the policy responses put in place to support lone parents from nuclear families which have separated, may not be suitable for young lone parent families which never formed in the traditional nuclear way. For example, the policy of disregarding maintenance for lone mothers in the calculation of in work benefits is of little use or incentive to younger single mothers wishing to work, as they receive the lowest level of maintenance of all lone mothers, in part because young fathers are most likely of all fathers to be unemployed.

Most importantly, for this group of young single parents, the emphasis perhaps needs to be not on their parenthood but on their young age and the difficult logistics of their daily lives as young, often unsupported single people. It is only by recognising the way in which young single parents differ from young single people, and from other lone parents, and acknowledging their greater need for support, that we can begin to develop effective policies to improve their employment situation.

¹Speak S et al (1995) *Young Single Mothers: Barriers to independent living*. Family Policy Studies Centre, London

Speak S et al (1997) *Young Single Fathers: Participation in fatherhood*. Family Policy Studies Centre, London

² FC refers to Family Credit and IS refers to Income Support

³ This option was originally based only on a job in the private sector but extended to include public sector employees in late 1997.

⁴ At the time of writing (March 1998) this option had not been finalised. Policy documents are expected by Autumn 1998

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