

# Chapter 3:

## Income poverty, material deprivation and lone parenthood

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Lone parents are less likely to be in employment and their annual changes in work intensity is statistically significantly higher compared to their coupled counterparts. Additionally, their income poverty and high levels of material deprivation indicate precarious, low-pay employment. They experience exceedingly high levels of material deprivation compared to all other family formations and have increasing levels of material deprivation the longer they remain a lone-parent. When all these factors are taken into account, it is not the state of lone-parenthood that is negatively associated with child wellbeing, nor transitions in family formations, but the low levels of income and high levels of material deprivation they experience. In order to improve child wellbeing, policy needs to begin by securing the financial circumstances of lone-parents.

## **Introduction**

Children who do not grow up with both of their biological parents are often considered to be disadvantaged in terms of social and academic achievements (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Kiernan & Mensah, 2010; Sigle-Rushton, Hobcraft, & Kiernan, 2005) and are widely expected to display greater levels of behavioral difficulties, as discussed by Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado in the introductory chapter of this book (Amato, 2005; Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). However, research into the children of lone<sup>i</sup> parents often omit the heterogeneity of lone-parent families. As parents (or mothers) transition into and out of relationships across time, they spend different lengths of time in partnered and non-partnered circumstances. This results in different typologies of lone-parenthood, for example, stable lone-parenthood versus a recently separated parent (Zagel & Hübgen, in this book). This assumption of the homogeneity of lone-parenthood neglects the idea that parental partnership heterogeneity has theoretical consequences for the causal argument of the effects of lone-parenthood on children's development and wellbeing. Making 'lone-parent' families a unidimensional comparison category, as most studies do, implies

that homogenous effects of one-parent families are expected. In addition to the lumping together of 'lone-parent' families into one category, which is a conceptual problem, another reason for this lack of attention to heterogeneity is the quality of the data available to some researchers. For the exploration of the impacts and experiences of lone-parenthood, cross-sectional data are often used, which is a rather blunt instrument with which to study such a dynamic phenomenon as relationships. Furthermore, the existing research in the area is often from the US, where the societal, political and policy contexts differ greatly from those in Europe. This chapter seeks to challenge research findings that posit lone-parenthood per se, rather than the inadequate resources available to lone mothers, as a disadvantageous factor for children and, also, to challenge the assumption of the homogeneity of lone-parenthood by using longitudinal, annually-collected birth cohort data to derive a measure of family transitions over time.

Lone parents are more likely to experience multiple disadvantages, such as income poverty and material deprivation, due to their inadequate resources and inadequate employment (Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado, introductory chapter in this book). Often these disadvantages are written about as factors associated with children's low levels of wellbeing, with lone-parenthood being included as another such factor: that is, lone-parenthood is viewed as a disadvantage that children experience in addition to income poverty and material deprivation, rather than as a family state that increases the likelihood of lone parents and children together experiencing the disadvantage of income poverty and material deprivation. Yet, there is qualitative research that shows that low income and the poor quality of lone mothers' employment result in poorer wellbeing for both mothers and children (Ridge, 2007; Ridge & Millar, 2011). This chapter will use quantitative methods to complement the qualitative evidence, and to test its generalizability, by exploring lone-parents' employment, work intensity, family transitions, income poverty and

material deprivation to disentangle the association between lone-parenthood and lower levels of child wellbeing. In so doing, it aims to challenge the research that promotes lone-parenthood as yet another child-level disadvantage rather than a group of parents facing the same (or greater) disadvantages as their children.

## **Literature Review**

Being a lone parent and, specifically being a lone mother, is one of the most stigmatized positions in UK and Scottish society today. The previous Coalition and the current Conservative UK government administrations placed 'family breakdown' as the root cause of child poverty to great stigmatizing effect (Hancock & Mooney, 2013; Mooney, 2011; Slater, 2014). In today's political discourse lone parents are seen as a political and social problem and as deficient parents (Dermott & Pomati, 2016).

There are many, often wrong, assumptions made about lone mothers in Scotland. Contrary to the myth of the young, lone, unmarried mother, the average age of lone motherhood in Scotland is 36 years old and they have usually previously been married (McKendrick, 2016). Furthermore, in Scotland "only 3% of lone mothers are teenagers and only 15% have never lived with the father of their child" (McKendrick, 2016, p. 104). Lone-parenthood is not usually a permanent status for families in Scotland but is often another stage in family life that lasts on average around 5-and-a-half years (McKendrick, 2016, p. 104). As such, it is estimated that around one third to one half of all children in Scotland will spend time in a lone-parent family formation (McKendrick, 2016, p. 104).

Children in lone-parent households are at greater risk of experiencing income poverty and material deprivation than children in two-parent households. In Scotland, 41% of children in lone-parent households are living in poverty compared to 24% of children in two-parent households

(McKendrick, 2016, p. 99). However, when the lone parent works full-time the poverty risk for children falls to 20% which is far lower than the 76% experienced by children in a couple household where neither parent works (McKendrick, 2016). Poverty is not an inevitable outcome for lone-parent families and lone-parenthood per se does not cause poverty but that "the way in which the labour market, taxation and welfare system operate in Scotland mean that lone parents are more likely to experience poverty" (McKendrick, 2016, p. 99).

The longitudinal qualitative research on the impact of lone mothers' work experiences on their children shows that prior to mothers gaining employment, children experienced severe deprivation, stigma and exclusion from school and leisure activities (Ridge, 2009). When their mothers first entered work, they experienced a welcome increase in income and material goods and increased participation in the life of the school and friends (Ridge, 2009). However, it took the whole family to manage the long non-standard hours that mothers had to work, with children taking responsibility for household chores and caring for siblings in the absence of affordable, suitable childcare (Millar & Ridge, 2009, 2013). Furthermore, children reported being worried about how tired and stressed their mothers had become and were offering emotional support to their mothers (Ridge, 2009).

When mothers' employment was unstable, insecure, low-paid and of low-quality they rotated between periods of employment of this type and unemployment. For children, this led to "*the loss of opportunity and dwindling hopes of the improvement that work seemed to promise*" as well as a return to severely impoverished circumstances at each transition (Ridge, 2009, p. 507). The evidence shows that stable work with standard hours has a positive effect on both mothers and children (Harkness & Skipp, 2013), but "*unstable employment transitions can threaten wellbeing and result in renewed poverty and disadvantage*" (Ridge, 2009, p. 504).

The economic disadvantage associated with inadequate employment and resources is typically measured cross-nationally using income poverty at 60% median income, often in conjunction with an index of material deprivation. Material deprivation describes the conditions or activities experienced due to an inadequate income or resources (Gordon, 2006; Mack & Lansley, 1985; Pantazis, Gordon, & Levitas, 2006; Townsend, 1979). The index of material deprivation has been incorporated into official poverty measures, including the ones used in the UK, Europe and the OECD. However, the use of material deprivation to measure economic disadvantage is not a controversy-free zone. Treanor (2014) discusses two critiques: (1) there are people who cannot afford items considered essential while affording those that are considered inessential (choice); and (2) that living in material deprivation is not necessarily caused by poverty as people may choose not to have the goods or participate in the events that indicate material deprivation even though they can afford to should they wish. Treanor (2014) counters that these elements of choice mean that only when material deprivation is imposed by insufficient command of resources, rather than self-imposed deprivation, can it be conceived as a dimension of poverty (inter alia Pantazis et al., 2006). This chapter uses the standard measure of material deprivation used cross-nationally in conjunction with income poverty to explore the economic disadvantage of lone parents and their children. While there is cross-national research on income and material deprivation, there is none that focuses on the experience of lone parents and their children per se, and certainly none that looks at lone-parenthood through a lens of heterogeneity. Thus, this chapter uses novel ideas and analyses to challenge the existing evidence and the current pejorative public and political attitude towards lone parents in Scotland and the UK.

The strength of this chapter lies in the quality and frequency of the collection of its data: it is a birth cohort study with an almost annual data collection that allows a nuanced exploration of

change. It also permits the exploration, to a granular extent, of the diversity, heterogeneity and dynamics of the formation and reformation of lone and couple parenthood. Thus, this chapter explores the impacts of income, material deprivation and work intensity, separately and combined, for different typologies of poverty and for family transitions, on their children's wellbeing. In so doing, it aims to explore aspects of the triple bind of lone-parents; the effects of inadequate resources and inadequate employment and how they impact on child wellbeing.

## **Data**

The dataset used is the almost annually collected Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study<sup>ii</sup>, a longitudinal birth cohort study with a nationally representative sample of 5,217 children born in 2004-5 in Scotland. Wave 1 was collected in 2005, wave 2 in 2006, wave 3 in 2007, wave 4 in 2008, wave 5 in 2009, wave 6 in 2010, but wave 7 was collected after a year's gap in 2012. For this reason, panel models were not the chosen methodology but clustered OLS regression models (clustered on child ID number over time). This chapter uses the last four waves of data (2008-12) when all the variables have been collected at each time point, with the exception of material deprivation which has a gap at wave 5. This gap has been left as it is. The full set of variables used are described below.

### **Dependent variable**

**Child wellbeing** is measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores taken annually from wave four in 2008, when the children are 3 or 4 years old to wave 7 in 2012 when the children are 7/8 years old. SDQ scores have been reversed and standardized so that they have a mean of zero and standard deviation of one. Any scores below the mean (negative scores)

correspond to lower levels of child wellbeing and any scores above the mean (positive scores) correspond to higher levels of child wellbeing. This recoding was undertaken to facilitate the intuitive comprehension of the graphs and so that the coefficients in the regression analyses would correspond to poorer levels of child wellbeing when negative.

### Independent variables

**Longitudinal poverty:** The poverty variable, measured as 60% of median household income equivalized for household size, has been coded into four typologies: no poverty, transient poverty (one year of poverty), recurrent poverty (two years of consecutive poverty) and persistent poverty (three years consecutive poverty out of any four) as set out by Fouarge & Layte (2005).

**Material deprivation:** is defined as the proportion of people living in households who cannot afford at least 3 of the following 9 items: two pairs of all-weather shoes for all adult members of the family, one week annual holiday away from home, enough money for house decoration, household contents insurance, regular savings of £10 a month or more for rainy days or retirement, a night out once a month, celebrations at special occasions, buy toys and sports gear for children, and replace worn out furniture (Guio, Gordon, & Marlier, 2012). These are combined to create an index of multiple deprivation, a similar index that is used cross-nationally by other bodies and studies such as the OECD, European Union and EU-SILC data. In this chapter, it has been left as a continuous index and standardized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, with higher levels of material deprivation corresponding to positive values above the mean and lower levels of material deprivation corresponding to negative values below the mean.

**Family transitions:** denote different family formations across time to capture the heterogeneity of adult relationships. It has the following typologies: stable couple family, stable



lone-parent family, couple recently separated, lone parent re-partnered, and repeated separations and re-partnerings.

**Maternal employment:** is a categorical variable with three categories: working full-time, working part-time and not in paid work. This is an individual-level variable of the mother.

**Work intensity:** is a household measure, which for couple families uses the employment status of both partners. It is a variable that ranges between 0 and 1. For a couple family, the range is: 1 = both partners in full-time work; 0.75 = one full-time and one part-time partner; 0.5 = one full-time or two part-time partners; and 0.25 = one part-time partner, one partner not in paid work. For a lone parent the range is: 1 = lone parent working full-time; 0.5 = lone parent working part-time; and 0 = lone parent not working. This means that a full-time working lone parent has the same weighting as a full-time working couple. As work intensity uses some of the same data as maternal employment these will not be used in the same models.

**Change in Work Intensity:** This variable is derived by taking the change in work intensity from the previous to the current year. When this is positive there has been an increase in work intensity for a family, when this is negative there has been a decrease in work intensity. As this is directly derived from the work intensity variable they will not be used in the same models.

### Control variables

The control variables are mother's age at first birth child, child's gender and mother's level of education which are factors known to confound the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on children's outcomes (Schoon, Jones, Cheng, & Maughan, 2012; M. Treanor, 2016a, 2016b).

## **Descriptive statistics**

Table 3.1 gives summary information on all the variables used in the analysis. The data are given for the final wave of data collection in 2012; although the clustered OLS regression analysis in Table 3.5 uses data from waves 4-7 as almost all variables, including child wellbeing, were collected annually in these waves. The exception is material deprivation which was collected in waves 4, 6 and 7 but not in wave 5.

Table 3.1 Summary statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Err./Std. Dvn.	Min	Max	SDQ (Mean)	Material Deprivation (Mean)	Work Intensity (Mean)	Change in Work Intensity (Mean)
Material Deprivation (z score)	0	1	-0,67	4,77				
SDQ (z score)	0	1	-4,71	1,87				
Work Intensity	0,58	0,008	0	1				
Change in Work Intensity	0,02	0,004	-0,75	1				
Family transitions:								
Couple (ref cat.)	0,69	0,013	0	1	0,06	-0,16	0,65	0,01
Lone parent	0,09	0,008	0	1	-0,54 ***	1,34 ***	0,30 ***	0,06
Separated couple	0,08	0,006	0	1	-0,29 ***	0,57 ***	0,41 ***	-0,03 **
Repartnerings	0,07	0,008	0	1	-0,40 ***	0,64 ***	0,48 ***	0,05
Seprations/re-partnerings	0,07	0,006	0	1	-0,48 ***	0,78 ***	0,43 ***	0,05
Poverty transitions:								
Never poor (ref cat.)	0,46	0,015	0	1	0,17	-0,37	0,72	0,01
Transient poverty	0,14	0,008	0	1	0,02 **	-0,09 ***	0,63 ***	-0,01 *
Recurrent poverty	0,14	0,008	0	1	-0,33 ***	0,36 ***	0,51 ***	0,00
Persistent poverty	0,26	0,013	0	1	-0,49 ***	1,12 ***	0,31 ***	0,06 ***
Child sex:								
Male	0,51	0,009	0	1	-0,28 ***	0,19	0,57	0,03 ***
Female (ref cat.)	0,49	0,009	0	1	0,09	0,11	0,57	0,01
Age of mother at birth of first child:								
Under20	0,07	0,008	0	1	-0,52 ***	1,07 ***	0,38 ***	0,03
Twenties	0,41	0,012	0	1	-0,22 ***	0,32 ***	0,53 ***	0,03 *
Thirties (ref cat.)	0,49	0,013	0	1	0,08	-0,13	0,63	0,01
Over40	0,03	0,003	0	1	0,03	0,14	0,57	0,01
Maternal education:								
Degree (ref cat.)	0,30	0,013	0	1	0,17	-0,30	0,69	0,02
Vocation	0,41	0,009	0	1	-0,14 ***	0,20 ***	0,58 ***	0,02
Higher	0,06	0,005	0	1	0,02	0,14 ***	0,58 ***	0,00
Standard	0,14	0,009	0	1	-0,30 ***	0,50 ***	0,46 ***	0,02
NoQual	0,08	0,008	0	1	-0,51 ***	0,92 ***	0,30 ***	0,03
Maternal employment:								
Full time (ref cat.)	0,60	0,011	0	1	0,03	-0,08	0,74	0,05
Part time	0,11	0,007	0	1	0,02	-0,09	0,42 ***	-0,02 ***
No paid work	0,29	0,011	0	1	-0,40 ***	0,74 ***	0,27 ***	-0,03 ***

Source: Growing up in Scotland

All at wave 7 (2012) except where longitudinal

svy weights applied

binary variable significance by t-tests

multiple response category variables' significance by simple linear regression compared to the reference category with no controls (coefficients not shown)

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

In Table 3.1, the means in the first column denote the means for the continuous variables and proportions for the dummy variables. The variables ‘family transitions’, ‘poverty transitions’, ‘work intensity’ and ‘change in work intensity’ are longitudinal variables created across all seven waves of data but only reported for those who are present in the data at wave seven (2012). The four columns to the right of the table give the means of child wellbeing (SDQ), material deprivation, work intensity and change in work intensity for all the independent and control variables in the data. The significance levels attached to these are from bivariate analyses - *t*-tests and simple linear regressions with no control variables. It should be noted that these are means and not coefficients and so they should not be interpreted across the different variables.

There is much to note in the descriptive statistics but for the purposes of this chapter four points are of particular importance; (1) with no controls the child wellbeing (SDQ) of children for all family formations is significantly lower compared to stable couple families; (2) those living in persistent poverty have very deep levels of material deprivation; (3) material deprivation is also particularly high for those not in paid work; and (4) the work intensity rate is lowest for stable lone parents although it is lower for all family transitions compared to a couple family.

Table 3.2 Employment and family transitions (Cross tabulation)

Employment status	Stable couple		Stable lone-parent		Lone parent re-partnered		Couple separated		Separations/re-partnerings		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Work full-time	1,291	18.7	48	9.9	57	15.0	155	22.1	105	24.2	1,656	18.6
Work part-time	3,976	57.7	204	42.2	163	42.9	374	53.2	171	39.4	4,888	55.0
Not in paid work	1,628	23.6	231	47.8	160	42.1	174	24.8	158	36.4	2,351	26.4
Total	6,895	100	483	100	380	100	703	100	434	100	8,895	100

Source: Growing up in Scotland

The descriptive statistics in Table 3.1 suggest that the first facet of the triple bind, inadequate resources, do indeed disproportionately affect lone-parent families, although this will be explored further in the multivariate analysis. In order to explore the second facet of the triple bind, the idea of inadequate employment, Table 3.2 shows that stable lone parents are half as likely to work full-time as their partnered contemporaries. The biggest difference lies in the proportion of stable and re-partnered lone parents who are not in paid work compared to those in a couple. This employment variable gives a useful snapshot but does not give an indication of the type, quality or stability of employment that lone parents are able to access. To examine this further, two variables - work intensity rate,

and change in work intensity rate - were created to measure the change in the work patterns of couple and lone-parent families over time.

Table 3.3 Change in work intensity (t-test)

Year	Work intensity (mean)			Change in work intensity (mean)		
	Couple	Lone		Couple	Lone	
2008	0.655	0.324	***	0.005	0.031	**
2009	0.644	0.317	***	-0.009	-0.035	***
2010	0.650	0.345	***	0.010	-0.007	**
2012	0.655	0.389	***	0.017	-0.001	**

Source: Growing up in Scotland waves 4-7

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Table 3.3 shows the results of *t*-tests for each year of the data used (2008-12) using the work intensity and change in work intensity variables. These variables cover all families in the data including all lone-parents, not just those in work, which is what makes the work intensity rate of lone parents seem quite low (remembering the higher proportion of lone parents not in paid work at all). Looking at the final column and the change in work intensity rate, what it shows is that lone-parents' work intensity changes more year after year than that of couple-parents. This relationship was tested again only for those in employment and the relationship holds firm. The differences are statistically significant each year. Only after the financial crisis of 2008-2009 did all families experience a reduction in work intensity. As coupled families recovered, lone parents continued to experience greater reduction and flux in their work intensity.

This shows that the nature of employment for lone parents is less stable and more precarious than for couples. While this doesn't tell us directly about the quality of employment available to lone-parents, when looked at in relation to lone-parents' rates of poverty (Table 3.4) and the extent of their material deprivation (Figure 3.1), it can give an indirect indication that lone parents are experiencing more precarious, unstable employment that is insufficient in monetary

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terms and so of a lower quality than their coupled counterparts. Thus, work intensity is used here as a proxy for work (in)adequacy, to empirically test the second facet of the triple bind.

Table 3.4 Income poverty and family transitions (Cross tabulation)

Poverty Transitions	Stable couple		Stable lone-parent		Lone parent re-partnered		Couple separated		Separations/re-partnerings		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No poverty	4,523	65.6	49	10.1	50	13.2	204	29.0	96	22.1	4,922	55.3
Transient poverty	1,068	15.5	22	4.6	40	10.5	179	25.5	53	12.2	1,362	15.3
Recurrent poverty	697	10.1	72	14.9	96	25.3	156	22.2	127	29.3	1,148	12.9
Persistent poverty	607	8.8	340	70.4	194	51.1	164	23.3	158	36.4	1,463	16.5
Total	6,895	100	483	100	380	100	703	100	434	100	8,895	100

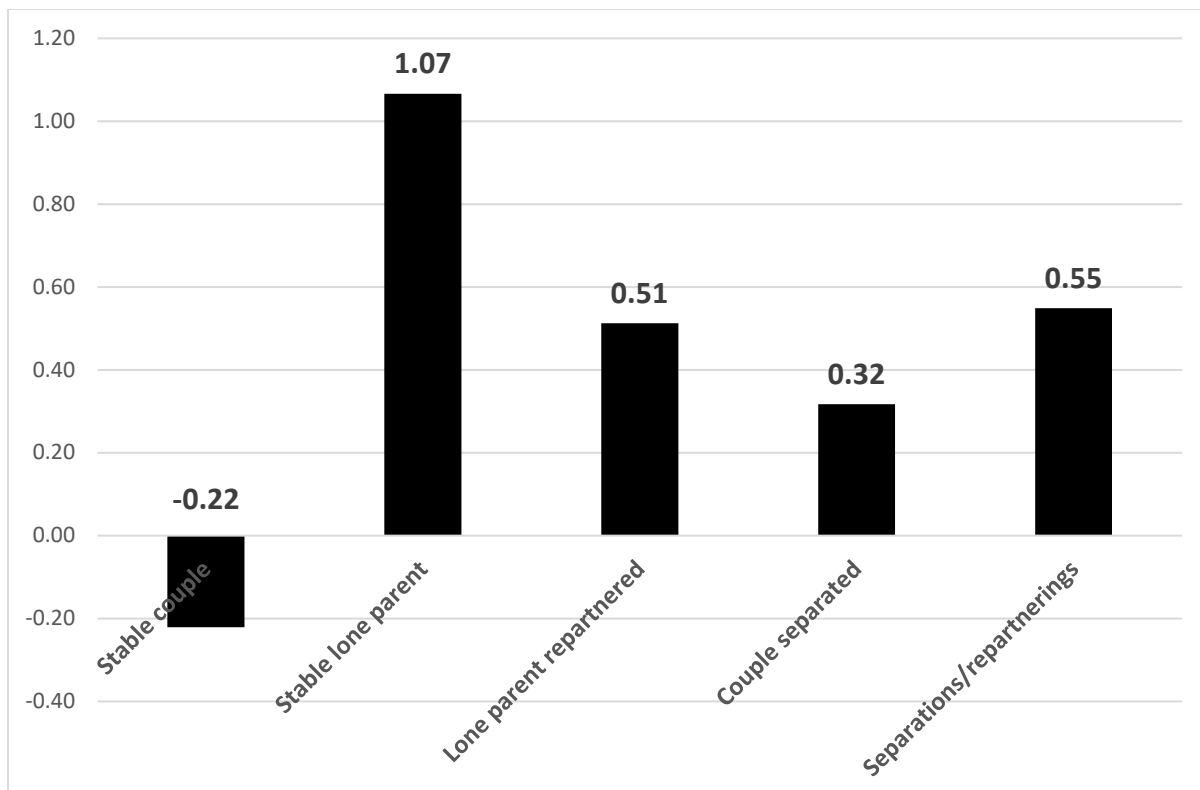
Source: Growing up in Scotland waves 4-7

As can be seen from Table 3.4 stable lone parents experience the most persistent poverty at over 70% prevalence compared to just 8.8% for stable couple families. Only 10% of stable lone-parent families experience no poverty compared to 66% of coupled families. The next most disadvantaged form of family in terms of lone-parenthood is a lone parent who has re-partnered, suggesting perhaps that insufficient time has lapsed to enable the lone parent to recover from previous disadvantages, or that resources and financial burdens are not shared equally with a new partner, or that the new partner is equally disadvantaged. This is not tested empirically in this analysis.



Figure 3.1 shows the depth of material deprivation for family transitions and a similar relationship emerges. Being a stable lone parent results in a level of material deprivation that is almost 6 times deeper than those who have never been a lone parent and almost twice as deep than those lone parents who have re-partnered.

Figure 3.1 Material deprivation by family transitions



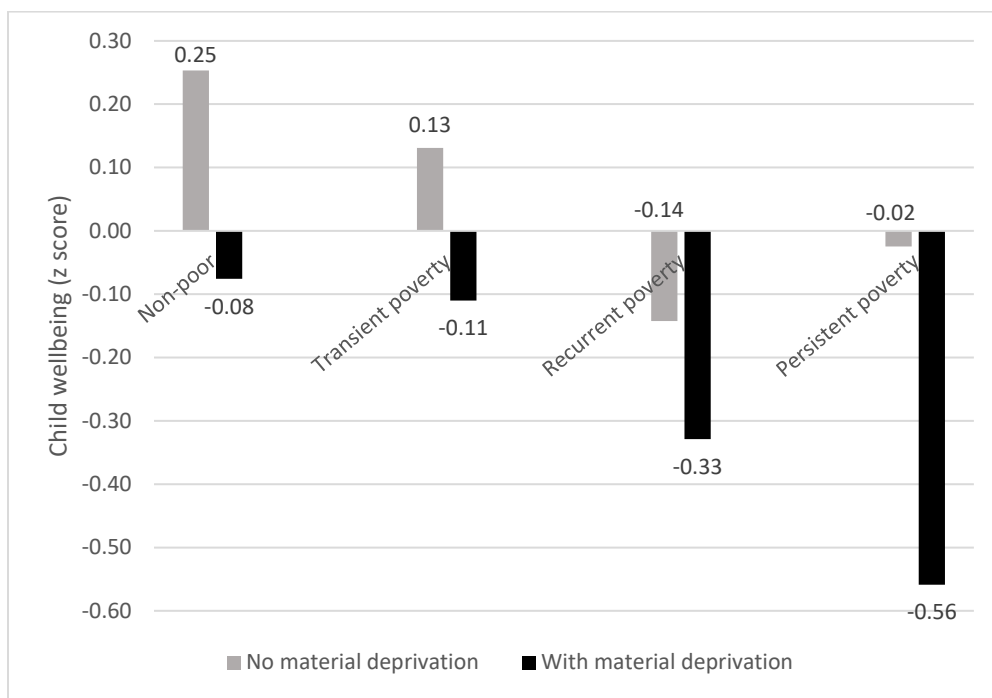
Source: Growing up in Scotland

So far, the descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses show that stable lone parents are statistically significantly more likely to have precarious employment when they have employment, a higher incidence and more persistent experiences of poverty, and far deeper levels of material deprivation. This is in contrast to all other family transitions, including recently separated lone-parents, indicating that the length of time spent as a lone parent has an increasingly detrimental effect on employment (as measured by work intensity) and on resources (as measured by income

poverty and material deprivation), supporting two facets of the central thesis in this book that lone parents experience a debilitating bind as regards the adequacy of resources and employment.

To explore the effect income poverty and material deprivation have on child wellbeing, Figure 3.2 shows the levels of child wellbeing for the four poverty typologies with and without material deprivation.

Figure 3.2 Child wellbeing by poverty and material deprivation



Source: Growing up in Scotland

The level of child wellbeing for those experiencing recurrent and persistent poverty without material deprivation is below the mean for all children, as one might expect. What is striking, however, is the depth the level of child wellbeing falls to when material deprivation is experienced in addition to recurrent or persistent poverty. The strongest difference is where a child lives in persistent poverty and material deprivation when they can expect to have wellbeing that is up to 28 times lower than those with no material deprivation. This shows that prolonged poverty is

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associated with increasingly deep levels of material deprivation, which together lead to extremely poor levels of child wellbeing. It suggests that there is no floor to the effects of income poverty and material deprivation combined on child wellbeing and that the longer lone parents experience the effects of the triple bind, the greater the detrimental effects on child wellbeing. Whether this relationship holds in the multivariate analysis is tested in the models in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Child wellbeing, family transitions, poverty transitions and material deprivation (Clustered OLS)

	model 1	model 2	model 3	model 4	model 5
Family transitions (ref: stable couple family):					
Stable lone-parent family	-0.560*** (0.081)	-0.368*** (0.081)	-0.263** (0.081)	-0.143 (0.086)	-0.0697 (0.084)
Couple who separated	-0.283*** (0.060)	-0.236*** (0.059)	-0.188** (0.059)	-0.141* (0.059)	-0.0992 (0.058)
Lone parent who re-partnered	-0.439*** (0.080)	-0.232** (0.081)	-0.206* (0.080)	-0.0957 (0.082)	-0.0739 (0.082)
Separations and re-partnerings	-0.413*** (0.078)	-0.289*** (0.078)	-0.253*** (0.076)	-0.166* (0.076)	-0.115 (0.075)
Mothers' qualification (ref: degree):					
Vocational		-0.175*** (0.033)	-0.158*** (0.033)	-0.119*** (0.033)	-0.108** (0.033)
Higher Grade/A level		-0.0477 (0.059)	-0.0335 (0.059)	-0.0125 (0.058)	-0.0106 (0.058)
Standard Grade/GCSE		-0.278*** (0.053)	-0.233*** (0.054)	-0.173** (0.055)	-0.170** (0.054)
No Qualifications		-0.528*** (0.090)	-0.437*** (0.090)	-0.323*** (0.091)	-0.288** (0.090)
Child sex (ref: female)		-0.254*** (0.029)	-0.255*** (0.029)	-0.260*** (0.029)	-0.263*** (0.029)
Mothers' age at first birth (ref: 30-39):					
Under 20		-0.318** (0.102)	-0.267** (0.103)	-0.205* (0.104)	-0.166 (0.101)
20-29		-0.160*** (0.034)	-0.144*** (0.034)	-0.120*** (0.034)	-0.105** (0.033)
Over 40		0.0865 (0.071)	0.0942 (0.071)	0.0946 (0.071)	0.103 (0.070)
Work intensity			0.359*** (0.057)	0.183** (0.061)	0.0750 (0.061)
Poverty transitions (ref: no poverty):					
Transient poverty				-0.0292 (0.040)	-0.0181 (0.040)
Recurrent poverty				-0.223*** (0.051)	-0.167** (0.051)
Persistent poverty				-0.347*** (0.062)	-0.217*** (0.063)
Material deprivation					-0.162*** (0.018)
Constant	0.119*** (0.017)	0.412*** (0.027)	0.153** (0.050)	0.296*** (0.052)	0.303*** (0.051)
r2	0.032	0.076	0.084	0.094	0.111
N	8895	8895	8895	8895	8895
df_r	3251	3251	3251	3251	3251

Standard errors in parentheses

Source: GUS sweeps 4 to 7

OLS clustered by ID number over time

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 3.5 gives a series of models with the baseline model at model one, the control variables added at model two, work intensity added at model three, income poverty added at model four and material deprivation added at model five. The analysis is a clustered OLS regression model using data from all four waves of data (2008-12). In the null model, all family transitions are negatively associated with child wellbeing compared to a stable couple family, with stable lone-parenthood showing the largest effect size. With control variables added at model two, education, the sex of the child and the youthfulness of the mother are statistically significantly associated with lower child wellbeing. These relationships hold in model three when work intensity rate is added. Higher levels of work intensity are statistically significantly associated with higher levels of child wellbeing. When poverty transitions are added at model four, recurrent and persistent poverty are highly significantly associated with lower child wellbeing and the earlier associations with family transitions and child wellbeing are attenuated. Now the only transitions associated with lower child wellbeing are a separated couple and the experience of repeated separations and re-partnerings. Work intensity continues to be significant, however, indicating income poverty and work experience are having a separate additive effect. In the final model (model five) material deprivation has been added. Here, the relationships for poverty, education and gender continue to hold but the ones for all types of family transitions and for the work intensity rate are no longer statistically significant.

This strongly indicates that it is not the state of lone-parenthood, nor separations, nor meeting a new partner that is deleterious to child wellbeing, but the impoverished and materially deprived conditions that lone parents find themselves living in. In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, two thirds of children living in poverty have a parent who is working; which suggests that work is only sometimes the best route out of poverty. The key aspect of employment as a route out

of poverty is in its quality and stability. This analysis shows that lone parents have lower work intensity rates, and greater changes in work intensity rates year-on-year indicating higher levels of instability in their employment. Coupled with the fact that they also experience higher levels of poverty and material deprivation, even when working in precarious employments, it is clear that for lone-parents, work as a route out of poverty is simply not ... working. That it is higher levels of poverty and material deprivation that is associated with lower levels of child wellbeing rather than the state of lone-parenthood itself is a matter of urgency for policy.

## **Discussion**

The main points from the analysis are that: the wellbeing of children in lone-parent families is more determined by income and material deprivation than by lone-parenthood or changing family formations; that the longer the experience of lone-parenthood the lower the levels of employment and work intensity; that stable lone parents have a higher incidence and persistence of poverty; that lone parents have a higher incidence and deeper levels of material deprivation; and that lone parents have greater precariousness in their employment as shown by the annual changes in work intensity.

The triple bind of lone parents posits that lone parents have a tripartite set of circumstances that disadvantage them; inadequate resources, inadequate employment and inadequate policies. The findings in this chapter empirically test the first two of these and provide support to this theory. They show how inadequate resources and inadequate employment, rather than the status of lone-parenthood and family transitions, are associated with poorer levels of child wellbeing. The analysis in this chapter exonerates lone-parents, in Scotland at least, from the blame and shame associated with the lower wellbeing of their children, and points the finger of blame instead to the triple bind. In considering that third aspect of the triple bind, inadequate policies for lone-parents,

it is important to consider not only what can be implemented to improve the circumstances of lone parents and release them from the triple bind, but also to consider the policies that may be causing actual harm and which should be repealed.

The analysis in this chapter leads to two clear policy recommendations for the position of lone parents in Scotland: (1) there is an urgent need to combat poverty and material deprivation for lone parents and their children; and (2) there is the need to support lone parents into stable employment that enables them to earn a decent wage. These are elucidated below.

The first policy recommendation is to increase the income of lone parents not in paid work and to support the circumstances and enhance the incomes of those who are working. In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, there has already been one such policy change. Under the new Labour government (1997 - 2010) Child Tax Credits were introduced to do just that. The Child Tax Credit policy was successful in that it lifted 900,000 children in the UK out of poverty. It provided those on modest incomes with money for each child, covered up to 70% of childcare costs for working families (not just lone-parents) and gave extra money for those families with disabled children. This policy was rightly criticized for being overly complicated and unwieldy, but wrongly criticized for its efficacy. It was a successful policy, although it did not enable the new Labor government to end all child poverty in a generation as was the stated intention (Hills, Sefton, & Stewart, 2009), and research shows that parents spent this new, additional income on their children (Dickens, 2011).

Unfortunately, the child tax credit policy is being incrementally dismantled in Scotland by the two subsequent UK administrations. Its dilution will lead to even higher rates of poverty and material deprivation (Brewer, Browne, & Joyce, 2011) and even lower levels of child wellbeing

in the coming years. A recommendation of this chapter is that steps should be taken to improve the income and material deprivation of lone-parent families.

The second policy recommendation is that lone parents should be supported into work when the time is right. The work ought to be stable, not precarious with constantly changing hours, and have a decent income, not one that doesn't allow for adequate provision for families. The UK government believes that work is valuable in and of itself but the relentlessly poorer circumstances of lone parents and children show that this is not necessarily the case. The take home message of this chapter is that poor employment, income poverty and material deprivation are detrimental to the wellbeing of children, especially those of lone-parents.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter concludes by reiterating the findings that undermine much current thinking in relation to lone parents in Scotland and the rest of the UK. Although lone parents are less likely to be in employment (remembering the young age of children in this study) their annual changes in work intensity is statistically significantly different to their coupled counterparts. Additionally, their low income and higher levels of material deprivation indicate precarious, low-pay employment. They experience exceedingly high levels of material deprivation compared to all other family formations and have increasing levels of material deprivation the longer they remain a lone-parent. When all these factors are taken into account, it is not the state of lone-parenthood that is negatively associated with child wellbeing, nor transitions in family formations, but the low levels of income and high levels of material deprivation they experience. In order to improve child wellbeing, policy needs to begin by securing the financial circumstances of lone-parents. This is not an easy ask given the stigmatized status of lone parents in Scottish and UK society. Policies aimed directly at children will always have an easier transition and garner more support than those



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aimed at lone-parents, but a bold step is required. If the UK government is disinclined to take that step then the Scottish government, with its increasing powers devolved from Westminster, ought to take up the mantle.

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<sup>i</sup> Lone parent is preferred to 'single' parent as single implies never married and is therefore only one category of lone-parent. The status of 'single', i.e. never married, lone parent is highly stigmatized in Scotland and the UK and so avoided in this chapter.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://growingupinScotland.org.uk/>