

Lone Parent Families and Poverty



Illustration by Brian Fitzgerald



HOW MANY?

In 2002, according to the Central Statistics Office, there were 153,863 lone parents in Ireland. This is probably an underestimation. (Many young single mothers live with their own parents and are unlikely to be counted.) Generally, widowed, divorced and separated parents are older and have older children while single mothers tend to be younger and have younger children. There are 46,632 lone parents aged between 25 and 39 who are dependent on One Parent Family Payment.

Between 1996 and 2002 the number of one parent families increased by 25%. There was a rise of almost 50% in the number of lone parents with children under 15 who live in poverty between 1994 and 2004.

- Almost half of lone parents have only a primary education.
- For some lone parents entering employment, attempting to retain the security of their social welfare income, can result in them becoming trapped in part-time low paid employment.

WHO?

The family in Irish society is changing. We can no longer assume that a family is made up of two parents and their children. Among the changes in Irish family structures is a rise in the

number of one-parent families. Most lone parents are raising their children on their own because their marriages have broken down, they are single mothers or widowed. And most heads of these families are women – they face a particularly high risk of consistent poverty.

EMPLOYMENT

60% of those receiving the One Parent Family Payment are employed. Of those who do work, most women work part-time, while male lone parents usually work full-time. In order to work around their children's needs, job choices are often limited and career advancement is poor. Lone parents often experience difficulty in accessing education or training because of a lack of good quality affordable childcare and after school care.

HOUSING

Approximately 43% of people on local authority housing lists are lone parents. In 2002, 20,882 lone parents were on the housing list. This is in part because they may not have access to affordable quality childcare, which prevents them from accessing employment and the income stream that derives from that.

GETTING OUT OF POVERTY

Ideally, lone parents should be able to bring up their families independently, with security and care. A primary focus must be to meet the needs of the children and to support parents to overcome obstacles to employment if they wish.

BARRIERS TO GETTING OUT OF POVERTY

For most lone parents, creating an independent existence is difficult. Many barriers to getting out of poverty exist. These include:

- Lack of family-friendly work arrangements
- The need for integration between income tax and social welfare systems to make it financially feasible to hold down a job

Further information from:

www.combatpoverty.ie

Measuring Poverty factsheet

Poverty Briefing: Poverty in Ireland - the Facts

JargonBuster for definitions of terms used in discussing poverty

Useful publications:

NESF(2001) *Lone Parents: Forum Report no.20*
Dublin

OPEN(2004) *Living on The Book* Dublin

OPEN Loftus, C.,(2e)(2005) *One Size Fits All?*
Dublin

Government of Ireland (2006) *Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Lone Parents*
Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs

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