

by NDLP tended to be:

- Younger
- Interested in starting a job in the next six months to a year
- Those with academic and/or technical qualifications.

Lack of interest in NDLP services was especially prevalent among older lone parents, those who felt that work was not an option in the next three years, and lone parents who lack qualifications.

NDLP Participants and Non-Participants

Because some of the postal survey respondents participated in NDLP after returning their questionnaire, a preliminary analysis is available comparing participants to non-participants. There was little variation in programme participation based on age and ethnicity, although participants tended to:

- Have fewer children
- Have had briefer spells on Income Support
- Hold some qualifications
- Anticipate working in the near future.

The next stage of the survey will match these participants identified in the postal survey with closely-matched non-participants. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted among each group from October 2001. A comparison of outcomes among participants and non-participants in the New Deal for Lone Parents will be used to judge the programme's effects.

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New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: A Quantitative Survey of Lone Parents on Income Support

The National Centre for Social Research was commissioned by the Employment Service to carry out a quantitative study as part of the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). NDLP is one element of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. It is a national voluntary programme aimed at helping lone parents claiming Income Support to improve their living standards by taking up or increasing hours of paid work, and to increase their job readiness and employment opportunities.

This report presents findings from the foundation stage of the evaluation. It draws on data collected from a postal questionnaire sent to 70,000 lone parents between October 2000 and April 2001. The survey gathered data about lone parents' demographic characteristics, qualifications, work experience, motivation and barriers to work. Findings bear out many aspects of existing research on lone parents.

Key findings are as follows:

- Most lone parents claiming Income Support are women and white. Nearly half reported having only one child; and half stated they have a child under the age of five. The majority rented their accommodation, while significant proportions did not have a telephone, a driving licence or qualifications. Over half had been claiming benefit for two or more years.
- Only one in ten lone parents were working at the time of the survey while seven in ten were not working at the time though they had in the past. The remaining two in ten had never worked; they were likely to lack qualifications, live in social housing, be women, younger, and have longer spells on Income Support.
- About 33 per cent of lone parents not working at the time of the survey wanted to start work within a year, but 40 per cent did not expect to start paid work within three years. Commitment to work was especially high among lone parents who were currently working, those who intended to work in the near future and black lone parents. Nearly half of the sample expressed an interest in starting a course within the next three years.
- The common barriers to work were childcare, lack of opportunities for work, perceptions about employers and pay and low levels of skill or confidence. Compared to those not working, many lone parents working at the time of the survey cited a similar number of barriers, indicating that some lone parents manage to work in spite of these difficulties. Nearly two-thirds of lone parents were unwilling to work at the minimum wage.
- A quarter of eligible lone parents expressed interest in one or more of the specific services offered by NDLP. Those expressing greater interest in the services offered by NDLP tended to be younger, held better qualifications, and were interested in starting a job in the next six months to a year.
- There was little variation in NDLP participation based on age and ethnicity, but participants had briefer spells on Income Support, tended to have fewer children, held some qualifications and anticipated working in the near future.



Executive Summary

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is one element of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. NDLP is a national voluntary programme aimed at encouraging and sustaining work among lone parents on Income Support. The key feature of the programme is a network of Personal Advisers who offer employment-related guidance through a series of interviews and contacts with participants.

The National Centre for Social Research was commissioned to conduct a quantitative assessment of NDLP. This report draws on postal survey data collected from over 42,000 lone parents. It provides insight into the characteristics and programme needs of eligible lone parents, as well as forming the basis for more extensive face-to-face interviews with NDLP participants and a matched sample of non-participants.

Research Design

In the first stage of the project a postal survey was sent to almost 70,000 lone parents on Income Support who were eligible to participate in NDLP. Over 42,000 questionnaires were returned, indicating a response rate of 64.4 per cent. The postal questionnaire was designed to identify key characteristics of the eligible population not available from administrative data.

When selecting the sample for the postal questionnaire, administrative records were checked to establish that individuals selected had not participated in NDLP. Later monitoring identified a subset of lone parents who had participated after returning the questionnaire. The report includes a preliminary comparison of these NDLP participants with non-participants. The next stage of the project will match the participants identified in the postal survey with a control sample of non-participants in order to measure the impact of NDLP.

Characteristics of the Eligible Population

Confirming what is already known from administrative data, most eligible lone parents who returned the postal questionnaire were women, in the middle age ranges, and white. Nearly half had only one child in their care. A similar proportion had a child under the age of five. In addition,

- The majority rent their accommodation, usually from the local authority or housing association
- A significant proportion do not have a telephone at home, and this is particularly true among social renters
- A majority lack a full driving license
- Half report no academic or technical qualifications
- Over half have been on Income Support for two or more years.

These factors suggest that the capacity to find work is low for many lone parents.

Employment Experience

Only one in ten lone parents on Income Support were working at the time of the survey. They tended to be women, those with qualifications, and homeowners or those with a mortgage. This group had relatively brief spells on Income Support.

The majority of lone parents on benefit – nearly three in four – were not working at the time of the survey but had some prior experience of work. A third wished to start work within a year, but 40 per cent did not anticipate working in the next three years.

Another 18 per cent of the eligible population reported no work experience at all. A lack of qualifications and accommodation in social

housing proved to be strongly associated with never having worked. In addition, those who had never worked tended to be:

- Women
- Lone parents in the younger age bands
- Those who were younger at the time of their first child's birth
- Those who had longer spells on Income Support.

Barriers to Work

An array of barriers to work were cited by lone parents on Income Support. Health-related factors were least commonly cited, though they tend to be more persistent as barriers to work. Barriers more widely cited include those pertaining to childcare, the perceived availability of work, perceptions about employers and pay, and low levels of skill or confidence. It is barriers such as these that NDLP is designed to address.

Many lone parents who were presently working faced a number of barriers, suggesting that lone parents do not necessarily move into work when they cease to face barriers but when they can sustain work in spite of barriers. However, the barriers they cited differed in important ways from lone parents who had never worked. Those presently working were less likely to cite:

- a lack of confidence or skills
- worry about leaving their child with someone else
- worry that employers would not hire them due to their childcare responsibilities
- a health condition or disability.

Wage expectations may act as an additional barrier to work. Nearly two-thirds of the lone parents queried indicated they would not be

willing to work at the minimum wage, although the percentage was lower among those lone parents currently working.

Commitment to Work

A set of nine attitudinal statements gauged attitudes toward work. They included such notions as "A person must have a job to feel a full member of society" and "If I didn't like a job, I'd pack it in..." Based on a summary analysis of responses to these statements, overall 'commitment to work' was assessed.

Commitment to work was especially high among:

- Lone parents who were currently working
- Those who intend to work in the near future
- Black lone parents.

Those who face multiple barriers and demonstrate low levels of commitment to work are less likely to be selected in the next stage of research, since they are unlikely to be programme participants or closely matched to them on key characteristics. As such, the postal survey data can continue to be exploited for insight into the circumstances of all eligible lone parents.

Interest in Study, Training and NDLP Services

A small minority of eligible lone parents were engaged in study or training at the time of the postal survey. An additional group – nearly half of the sample – expressed interest in starting a course within the next three years. Those hoping to start a paid job in the near future were especially interested.

A quarter of eligible lone parents expressed interest in one or more of the specific services offered by NDLP. There was little variation in interest among the services tested. Only 'help in trying out a job' was less popular. Those professing greater interest in the services offered