

“A
wise
head on
young
shoulders”

the experiences of young lone parents in Northern Ireland

Prepared by

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



contents

FOREWORD	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
SECTION 1 Background	
Introduction	13
CHAPTER 1 Methodology	17
SECTION 2 Demographic and Social Characteristics	
CHAPTER 2 Demographics	25
SECTION 3 Practical Support	
CHAPTER 3 Income and Living Standards	35
CHAPTER 4 Employment and Employment Intentions	52
CHAPTER 5 Caring for Children	65
CHAPTER 6 Housing	72
SECTION 4 Emotional Support	
CHAPTER 7 Health and Welfare	85
SECTION 5 Schooling	
CHAPTER 8 Schooling	101
SECTION 6 Conclusions and Recommendations	
CHAPTER 9 Summary of Main Findings and Conclusions	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY	125
LIST OF TABLES	133
LIST OF FIGURES	137
APPENDICES	141

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

Foreword

2

This report represents a significant step forward in terms of recognising the needs of young lone parents. As a group they have been much discussed and debated and often been misunderstood but rarely given the opportunity to have their say on the broad range of issues which affect not just their lives but also that of their children.

We in Gingerbread recognised that our range of mainstream services were to some extent “passing young lone parents by” and with funding provided by BBC Children In Need we were determined to make an opportunity to find out more about their lives and what services and support they needed. This report is the culmination of that process. It has given us much to contemplate and analyse in terms of young lone parents support needs and how we can better meet them and we hope it does likewise for you.

We have entitled the report “A Wise Head On Young Shoulders” because we feel that the picture which shines through is that of young lone parents taking on the responsibility of parenthood with pride and determination, sometimes in the most difficult of circumstances. However, we also know that to change the lives of young lone parents and their children we need to address the circumstances which have served to keep them on the margins of our society. We need to increase the income levels of young lone parents, provide the opportunities they need for education and training, address their emotional and physical health needs and ensure that the information and support they need in terms of parenting is made available. Gingerbread cannot do this alone. It is on that basis that I commend this report to you and hope that by working together we can make a real difference to the lives of young lone parents and those of their children.

Marie Cavanagh
Director
Gingerbread N.I.

Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible without the support and co-operation of a great number of individuals and organisations. In particular the researcher would like to thank all the young lone mothers who took the time and trouble to participate, and who spoke so freely and openly about their lives.

Also to be thanked for their assistance are the many representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors, the Health Visitors, Social Workers and community and voluntary group workers who helped to recruit young lone mothers to take part in the research and in many cases distributed, collected and returned questionnaires. (See Appendix 2)

I am also very grateful to Kate Small and Vera Kelso who arranged for Gingerbread to pilot the questionnaire amongst young lone mothers outside of the research catchment area.

I would like to thank the Research Advisory Group for the time, commitment and expertise that they all contributed to the project. (See Appendix 1)

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Special thanks go to fieldworker Sinead Quinn who helped with the distribution of the questionnaires, Margaret Kelly for her support, encouragement and advice throughout, and to Children in Need for funding the project. It is my hope that the results of the research will increase our understanding of the issues that young lone mothers face, and identify the provision which would help them to secure a better future.

Jena Muston
December 1997

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Executive Summary

This study of young lone mothers in two areas, one urban and one rural, was carried out by Gingerbread N.I. and funded through Children in Need. It was completed with the participation of 163 lone mothers under the age of 25, 139 in Belfast and 24 in Newry and Mourne. The research used both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

4

Demographics

- Northern Ireland has seen an increase in the number of births to teenage mothers, occurring outside of marriage.
 - The number of single, never-married mothers as a proportion of the total lone mother population, has increased in Northern Ireland.
 - 5,788 households in Northern Ireland are headed by a lone parent under the age of 25. Only 7.3% of these have a male head.
 - There are 1700 households in Belfast and 182 households in Newry and Mourne headed by a young lone parent.
 - The research sample was made up entirely of females, a third of which were teenagers, and almost half under twenty.
 - 94.3% of lone mothers in Belfast and 95.9% of lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were single never-married mothers.
 - The majority of young lone mothers had been a lone parent for two years or less and had only one child.
 - 95% of respondent's children in Belfast, and 94% of respondent's children in Newry and Mourne were aged five years of age or younger.
- 96.4% of young lone mothers in Belfast had a child under the age of five. In Newry and Mourne 100% of mothers had a child under the age of five.
 - Lone mother families in Newry and Mourne tended to be bigger than lone mother families in Belfast. The average family size of lone mother families in Newry and Mourne was 1.8 children, and in Belfast it was 1.4 children.

Income and Living Standards

- 90% of young lone mothers in both research areas were living on £100 a week or less.
- The majority of the sample's income came from benefit receipt, few young lone mothers gained income through employment.
- The predominant source of income was Income Support - 95.8% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 95.8% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were in receipt of Income Support.
- Child maintenance had little impact on the incomes of young lone mothers since only 21 mothers in Belfast and 1 mother in Newry and Mourne was in receipt of it, and the majority of those that were, were also in receipt of Income Support.

executive summary

- Young lone mothers reported much difficulty living off their weekly incomes. Income Support did not in some cases meet the normal weekly living costs, and did not allow for one-off expenses such as buying items for a new home or providing for a new baby.
- The payment of Income Support at a lower rate to mothers under 18 put a further burden on young lone mothers of that age.
- 61.6% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 41.7% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were in debt. The main source of debt was catalogues.
- The highest percentage of young lone mothers said that an extra £20-£29 a week would make living off their weekly incomes a lot easier, and would often mean the difference between coping and not coping both financially and emotionally.
- Almost half of young lone mothers in Belfast and two thirds of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne required further benefit information and advice.
- The overwhelming majority of young lone mothers in both research areas indicated that it was their desire to work in the future, although a large number of mothers revealed that the parenting and upbringing of their very young children was of foremost importance, until their children were older.
- Over 90% of young lone mothers in both research areas indicated that they needed support to help them to enter the labour market. Support ranged from changing employer attitudes to helping respondents with interview skills.
- Top of the agenda for employment support was child care. Over 60% of young lone mothers indicated that help with child care was needed to help them into employment.

5

Caring For Children

Employment and Employment Intentions

- 69.6% of respondents in Belfast and 70.8% of respondents in Newry and Mourne had previously been in paid employment, although only 14% in Belfast and 4.2% in Newry and Mourne were currently employed.
- The majority of young lone mothers not in paid work were looking after their children full-time. 16.6% of the total population were in education, and a further 5.9% were on employment training schemes, such as Job Skills and the Community Work Programme.
- There was an overwhelming reliance on the extended family for child care support. The extended family were the main sources of child care support in 73.2% of cases in Belfast and 62.5% of cases in Newry and Mourne.
- 64% of all young lone mothers had used solely the extended family as a source of child care support.
- 59.3% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 58.3% of mothers in Newry and Mourne indicated that they would like more child care support. The main reason for wanting more child care support was because respondents felt that they needed a break from parenting.
- The cost of child care other than that of the extended family prevented 70.9% of young lone mothers in Belfast, and 57.1% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne, from getting more child care support.

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6

- Both Health Visitors and parents were the main providers of advice on caring for children, to young lone mothers in the study. The main type of advice sought was regarding the health of the children of young lone mothers.
- 81.3% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 87.1% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne desired further information on the caring and upbringing of their children. The largest numbers wanted information on stress management.
- Lone mothers aged 16-19 were more likely to live with their parents than lone mothers aged 20-24. It was important for younger lone mothers to stay at home because of the support that was offered.
- 73.4% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 58.3% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were happy with their current accommodation. The main factor that determined happiness, was living with or near the family, illustrating again the importance of continued support for young lone mothers.

Housing

- Over three quarters of young lone mothers in both research areas lived with their parents before becoming pregnant.
- 64.7% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 66.7% of mothers in Newry and Mourne had moved house since becoming pregnant. The majority of young lone mothers had moved house because they desired their own home for bringing their children up in.
- 18% of young lone mothers in Belfast, and 20.8% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne, had moved more than once since becoming pregnant. This gives rise to concern about the security of housing amongst young lone mothers, since most of them had been a lone mother for two years or less.
- The majority of young lone mothers were living in Housing Executive accommodation at the time of the study, although 36% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 25% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were living at home with their parents.
- Unhappiness with current accommodation was determined by there not being enough space in the house or flat, and the house or flat not being in a nice area.
- Young lone mothers contact with housing support agencies was overwhelmingly limited to the Housing Executive. Few young lone mothers had ever heard of alternative support agencies.
- 57.1% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 62.5% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne experienced difficulties in moving house.
- 20.8% of young lone mothers experiencing difficulties in moving house in Belfast had to wait 1 year or more to be housed in permanent Housing Executive accommodation. The situation in Newry and Mourne was worse where 50% of young lone mothers experiencing difficulties in moving house had to wait 1 year or more to be housed in permanent Housing Executive accommodation.

executive summary

Health and Wellbeing

- The majority of young lone mothers in both urban and rural area reported that their physical and mental health was 'very good' or 'good'. However it was a matter of some concern that one third of young lone mothers in both research areas reported that their physical and mental health was 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor', especially considering the young age of the population.
- Experiencing poor mental health was significantly related to having debts. Debts occurred most frequently amongst young lone mothers living alone.
- Sleeping problems and high levels of fatigue and depression were experienced amongst a sizeable number of young lone mothers. Young lone mothers experiencing these problems were significantly more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health.
- 28.1% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 29.2% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne reported that they were 'always' or 'often' lonely. Loneliness was significantly related to going out less than once a month.
- Money worries were rated as the biggest stressor in the lives of young lone mothers. Young lone mothers were also particularly worried by their children, being a good enough parent to their children, and coping alone in the upbringing of their children.
- The highest percentage of young lone mothers in both areas confided most often in their friends about any problems that they had, illustrating therefore the importance of peer support to young lone mothers.
- The attitudes of parents, relatives and friends remained largely unchanged to young lone mothers since they had become lone parents. However where parental attitudes were 'worse' than before the mothers became lone parents, this had a negative effect on the physical health of respondents.
- The attitudes of health and social welfare professionals were rated as particularly positive, although young lone mothers in Belfast pointed to Doctors sometimes being ignorant of the circumstances of young lone mothers and the difficulties of parenting alone.
- Attitudes of Housing Officers and Social Security Officers were rated poorly. 52.1% of respondents in Belfast, and 30% of respondents in Newry and Mourne, who had been in contact with a Housing Officer viewed their attitudes as 'negative', 53.4% of respondents in Belfast, and 18.2% of respondents in Newry and Mourne, who had been in contact with a Social Security Officer viewed their attitudes as 'negative'.
- Young lone mothers reported high levels of support provided by both the extended family, and particularly by parents.
- High levels of support were also provided by health and social welfare professionals. Doctors in Belfast however, were significantly more likely than Doctors in Newry and Mourne to be rated by respondents as giving 'no support'.
- Health Visitors were considered to be the 'most helpful' health and social welfare professionals. This was because they gave young lone mothers advice and acted as emotional confidantes to them.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

- Few young lone mothers were members of a lone mothers support group. 40% of Belfast mothers and 54.8% of Newry and Mourne mothers indicated that they would be interested in joining one.
- 65% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 100% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne who had received Home Tuition reported that they found it useful, mainly because it helped respondents make progress in their studies.

8

Schooling

- 24.5% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 20.8% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne had become pregnant whilst at school.
- The majority of school-aged mothers in Belfast reported that staff attitudes on hearing of their pregnancy were ‘worse’ or ‘much worse than usual’. In Newry and Mourne however, the majority of respondents reported that staff attitudes were ‘much better than usual.’
- The majority of school-aged mothers in urban and rural area reported that pupil attitudes on hearing of their pregnancy were ‘the same as usual’ or ‘better than usual’.
- Hours of Home Tuition provided before and after the birth of the baby were disconcertingly low. 56.3% of mothers in Belfast and 50% of mothers in Newry and Mourne received no Home Tuition before the birth of their baby, and 75% of mothers in both areas received no Home Tuition after the birth of the baby.
- The researcher acknowledges that the majority of the school-aged mothers sample were not recruited to take part in the study through applications made for Home Tuition. At the same time however, some young lone mothers are clearly slipping through the net as far as completing their compulsory education is concerned.
- For those who find Home Tuition not useful, the main reason was because it was too limited in length.

Whilst no respondents in Newry and Mourne felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams because of their pregnancy, 62.5% of respondents in Belfast felt that they had.
- A higher percentage of respondents who had received no Home Tuition felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams, than those who had received some Home Tuition.
- 51.6% of mothers in Belfast reported that their school had given them no support, compared to 25% of mothers in Newry and Mourne. School-aged mothers who reported that their schools had given them no support were significantly more likely to suggest that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams, illustrating therefore the crucial role that individual school’s play in determining the future of young lone mothers.
- Whilst all the young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne, if given a choice of options for completing their education, would have preferred to complete it at school, the majority of young lone mothers in Belfast opted for a form of provision other than that of the school.

executive summary

RECOMMENDATIONS

Income

At The Level Of Central Government:

- 1 Central Government should undertake a comprehensive reassessment of the income needed to live adequately. Particular attention should be paid within this assessment to Income Support and the standard of living that it affords. The level of Income Support should then be determined according to the amount of income needed to live adequately. Income Support cannot be ignored if the immediate economic circumstances of young lone mothers and their children are to be ameliorated.
- 2 Central Government should withdraw plans to abolish One Parent Benefit and the Lone Parent Premium for lone parents
- 3 Central Government should increase the Income Support allowance for children under 11 years of age, in view of recent research findings indicating the proportional cost of a child under 11 has been underestimated.
- 4 Central Government should determine Income Support levels by the parental status of young lone mothers not by their age, and should abolish age-related differentials.
- 5 Central Government should make changes to the benefit system which will actually help lone mothers in part-time work to be better off, given that those young lone mothers in the study who were working part time and claimed Family Credit, saw only limited increases in their income. This is because Family Credit gives with one hand and claims back with another, through its inclusion in income calculation for Housing Benefit.

At Regional Level:

- 6 Gingerbread in conjunction with the Health and Social Service Trusts should pilot a universal outreach project which would include benefit information, in view of the fact that so many young lone mothers required further information on benefits. The scheme should aim to disseminate benefit information to young lone mothers in their homes at an early stage of their parenthood.
- 7 Local Credit Unions should develop their services to meet the specific credit needs of young lone mothers, taking account of the particular problems that young lone mothers currently have in accessing affordable forms of credit.
- 8 Gingerbread should produce an information leaflet on the comparative costs of different forms of credit.

9

Employment and Training

At The Level Of Central Government:

- 9 Central Government should review it's New Deal initiative, in view of the fact that neither the programme for 18-24 year olds, nor the programme for lone parents specifically acknowledges young lone mothers or their needs. In their present form each programme could potentially disadvantage young lone mothers. The New Deal should be reviewed to ensure that optimum advantage is afforded to young lone mothers.
- 10 Central Government should increase the financial support given to the provision of targeted pre-vocational and vocational training schemes for young lone mothers. Given that large numbers of young lone mothers wish to participate in training, but few currently do so, it is essential that there is an increase in the provision of targeted pre-vocational and vocational

“A wise head on young shoulders”

training, which addresses the particular needs of young lone mothers for assistance with child care and travel. Gingerbread recommends the ESF Scheme as a model of good practice. (See Appendix 6)

mothers use the extended family as their main source of child care support. The same flexibility should be incorporated in the Child Care Allowance within existing training schemes.

10

At Regional Level:

11 The Training and Employment Agency should organise a conference which brings together employers throughout Northern Ireland to discuss family-friendly policies in the workplace. Models of good practice should be publicised, with the aim of encouraging employers to review their current practices. The NCOPF (1997) publication *Lone Parents Into The Workplace*, should be disseminated to all employers.

At Regional Level:

15 Inter-Departmental Groups on Early Years, regional Early Years Committees, and Trust Early Years Committees should devise and monitor the implementation of a policy for meeting the child care needs of young lone mothers. In view of the fact that the children of young lone mothers are more likely to meet the criteria for ‘children in need’ under the Children N.I Order, the policy should pay specific attention to:

Child Care

At The Level Of Central Government:

12 Central Government, in recognition of the often limited range and availability of child care, should direct public funding to the widest possible variety of child care options for young lone mothers. The direction of public funding should support the different choices that young lone mothers make between education, training and work.

13 Central Government should recognise in the provision of publicly funded child care services that the overwhelming majority of young lone mothers have children under four, and therefore out of schools services may not be an appropriate or sufficient resource for young lone mothers.

14 Central Government should consider the abolition of the child care disregard in Family Credit and its replacement by a Child Care Allowance for low income families. Any such Child Care Allowance should recognise that the majority of young lone

- the need to prioritise access to day care services amongst young lone mothers,
- the need to prioritise provision of, and access to, respite child care to reduce stress, depression and loneliness amongst young lone mothers.

16 Voluntary agencies and the appropriate Health and Social Service Trusts should develop partnerships which meet the need for positive parenting training amongst young lone parent households.

Housing

At Regional Level:

17 The Department of the Environment, the Executive and Associations should give greater recognition to ‘emotional needs’ and ‘emotional stress’ within the proposed Common Housing Selection Scheme. Providers should acknowledge that the support needs of young lone mothers often mean that they need to be housed near to their extended family for support.

executive summary

18 The Housing Executive should provide awareness-raising training to all staff which highlights the needs of young lone mothers.

19 The Housing Executive should monitor and evaluate the impact that the introduction of a common register of applicants has on the access of young lone mothers to Housing Association accommodation.

20 Housing Support agencies should promote their services to young lone mothers to ensure that they are aware of the full range of options and the implications of their choices.

21 Further research is required to determine whether or not the private rented sector in its current form can provide an alternative source of secure, good quality, affordable accommodation for young lone mothers.

22 Further research is required to assess the impact that the implementation of Government policy on 'local reference rates' for the purpose of calculating Housing Benefit in the private rented sector, is having on young lone mothers' opportunities to both access and maintain tenancies of private rented properties.

Health and Wellbeing

At Regional Level:

23 Statutory agencies and voluntary organisations should review their existing family support services to assess their effectiveness in meeting the specific needs of young lone mothers.

24 Gingerbread in conjunction with the Health and Social Service Trusts should pilot a universal outreach project to support young lone mothers. Any work undertaken should compliment the existing

work of Health and Social Services professionals, particularly Health Visitors.

25 Gingerbread should co-ordinate the production and dissemination of a good-practice guide for working with young lone mothers.

Schooling

At Departmental Level:

26 The Department of Education for Northern Ireland should legislate to convey a duty on individual schools to refer a pupil who becomes pregnant to an ELB Educational Welfare Officer.

At Education and Library Board Level:

27 ELBs should monitor and evaluate the action taken by the key players in response to any policy/strategy framework arising from the SCF research to ensure that the needs of women who become pregnant whilst at school are met.

28 ELBs in conjunction with the Regional Training Unit should outline and undertake a comprehensive training programme which meets the needs of staff and Home Tutors in relation to pregnant school-girls and school-girl mothers. Particular attention should be paid in the programme, to training which addresses the need to avoid negative attitudes towards school-age mothers.

29 ELBs should establish partnerships with Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts and voluntary organisations, to ensure that the requirements of individual pupils for educational provision other than that provided at school, are met. Flexible programmes which could run as alternatives to the school and Home Tuition systems should be devised and provided.

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12

30 ELBs should appoint an Education and Welfare Officer for each pregnant pupil, who has responsibility for:

- informing the pupil, on becoming pregnant, of the options and support available for the completion of her education,
- co-ordinating the package of educational support for each individual pupil,
- co-ordinating communication between support providers.

31 ELBs should co-ordinate the administration of information sessions for Principals and Governors of individual schools. Information sessions should aim to inform Principals and Governors about the whole issue of school-aged pregnancy, the findings of this and the SCF report, and the action that needs to be taken.

At The Level Of Individual Schools:

32 Individual schools should draw up their own Code of Practice which outlines the role and responsibility of the school when a pupil gets pregnant.

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background

CHAPTER 1 Methodology

"It has been great to know someone is interested in how I feel and why, and willing to listen to my views, even if it makes no great changes in my life. Thanks"

(TWENTY ONE YEAR OLD LONE MOTHER, BELFAST)

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



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Section one: Introduction

14

“It has been great to know someone is interested in how I feel and why, and willing to listen to my views, even if it makes no great changes in my life. Thanks.”

(TWENTY ONE YEAR OLD LONE MOTHER, BELFAST)

Since the early 1980s the subject of young unmarried mothers has filled the political agenda, rarely has so much attention been paid to one small group. The climate surrounding the debate has been negative and has been brought forward for a number of reasons. Primarily young lone mothers have come under intense scrutiny from successive Conservative governments whose key economic objective has been to control public expenditure. The 1980's saw social security spending on lone parents increase three fold in real terms, and young lone mothers who are predominantly dependent on Income Support were singled out as a group draining state resources. It was argued that they were no longer taking responsibility for themselves, but instead were relying on the state to meet all their needs, creating a 'culture of dependency' and generating an 'underclass'.

Secondly, the debate has been brought forward in terms of a moral panic about the erosion of traditional family values. The argument here is that increasing numbers of young unmarried mothers bode ill for society because such a family form is lacking in important qualities compared with the two parent family. It is assumed that young mothers make unsatisfactory mothers, and thus that the children born to them are 'at risk.'. Particular concern has also been registered in terms of the potential danger to the child in the absence of a stable father figure.

“Children are in danger of seeing life without

fathers not as the exception but as the rule.

This is a new kind of threat to our whole way of life, the long term implications of which we can barely grasp.”

(MARGRET THATCHER QUOTED BY FPSC, 1990:5)

Finally, young motherhood provides evidence of early sexual activity. This often invokes moral outrage because the young mother threatens safe images of childhood and innocence, and as such, contravenes social norms. This has raised a series of moral issues to do with contraceptive advice and sex education, and is one of the reasons why the reduction of teenage pregnancy has been given prominence in both the Health of the Nation (DOH, 1992) and the Northern Ireland Regional Strategy 1992-1997.

Much of the research into young lone parents has been divided along these lines. One pool of research has concentrated on teenage motherhood and examined predictors and correlates of teenage pregnancy, or health and social risks to mother and child because of early motherhood. (Simms and Smith, 1986; Garlick et al, 1993; Ingham, 1997; Hudson and Ineichen, 1991; Kiernan, 1995; Phoenix, 1991; and Smith, 1993. For a discussion of the Northern Ireland context see: Scally, 1992; Finlay et al, 1995; Black, 1993; Thomson, 1990).

A second pool of research, funded by the Department of Social Security, has been driven by the public policy concerns outlined above. These large scale research projects have examined the lives of lone parents in detail, particularly the relationship between their benefits, earnings, labour market activity and living standards

background

(Bradshaw and Millar, 1991; McKay and Marsh, 1994; Ford, Marsh and McKay, 1995).

What is noticeable however is that neither of these pools of research have focused on young lone parents specifically, simply teenage mothers, married or single, or lone parents, of various ages. There is at present a dearth of research on young lone parents, particularly within the Northern Ireland context, despite the fact that they have been at the centre of so much controversy.

The impetus for this research therefore came from that beginning: How many young lone parents were there in Northern Ireland? Where were they distributed and concentrated? What was their current situation? Furthermore, Gingerbread as the major voluntary organisation working with lone parents in Northern Ireland, was aware that many young lone parents had found it difficult to avail of the general support offered by the organisation, for a variety of reasons. More information was needed if Gingerbread was to develop its services to young lone parents: What educational, health and social care needs did they have? What were their service and support requirements?

To this end Gingerbread approached Children in Need and gained funding to undertake a one year research project focused on a needs assessment of young lone parents. Within the context of this research young lone parents were defined as:

“A mother or father living without a spouse (not cohabiting) with his or her never married dependent child or children aged either sixteen or from sixteen to (under) nineteen and undertaking full-time education.”

(FINER COMMISSION REPORT, 1974)
AGED UNDER 25 YEARS

It was agreed that the study should meet a number of distinct aims and objectives. These were as follows:

1 Overall Aim

To improve the lives of young lone parents by ensuring the provision of services which meet their needs.

2 Specific Aims

- 2.1 To increase the level of knowledge about young lone parents.
- 2.2 To improve our understanding of the services currently available to young lone parents.
- 2.3 To increase our understanding of what young lone parents need and want from services.
- 2.4 To improve the services offered to young lone parents by both Gingerbread and other voluntary organisations and statutory agencies.

3 Objectives

- 3.1 To review the literature already available on young lone parents.
- 3.2 To create a map of the distribution and concentration of lone parents in Northern Ireland.
- 3.3 To provide an opportunity for young lone parents to tell us about their current situation and experience of services.
- 3.4 To provide an opportunity for young lone parents to tell us their needs and future service requirements.
- 3.5 To analyse and evaluate the information gathered and write a report.

15

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- 3.6 To disseminate the report to a wide range of agencies.
- 3.7 To use the information gathered to plan and monitor Gingerbread’s services for young lone parents.
- 3.8 To monitor the impact of the research on the overall provision of services for young lone parents.

In addition, the remit of the research project was expanded to incorporate a second dimension. It was decided that the project should also look at, and compare experiences of young lone parents living in an urban area, with those living in a more rural area. Gingerbread’s focus around the time of the application for funding had been to illicit more information on the needs of lone parents living in rural areas in order to plan service delivery towards that group. It was therefore felt that incorporating the views of rural lone parents in this project was essential.

Preliminary investigations revealed that there were some differences between the numbers of young lone parents living in each Health and Social Services Board area. Table. 1. below illustrates these differences.

Table. 1.
Number and Percentage of Total Young Lone Parent Households in each Health and Social Service Board Area

HSSB	Number	Percentage
NHSSB	1,426	24.6%
EHSSB	2,802	48.4
SHSSB	682	11.8
WHSSB	878	15.2
Total	5,788	100

As Table.1. shows the EHSSB has the highest number of young lone parent households and the SHSSB the lowest number. It was decided therefore to base the research in areas within each of these Boards. The obvious choice for an urban area within the Eastern Board was Belfast. In the SHSSB area some interest had been shown in the project within the Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust. Therefore it was decided that it would be advantageous to use this area for the rural comparison.

The structure of the report is as follows. Section One outlines the research methodology, looking at sampling procedures, response rates and tools of data collection. Section Two reviews firstly some of the demographic data available on young lone parents in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and then presents a demographic profile of the research sample. In Sections Three, Four and Five the main findings of the research from the analysis of the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews are presented. Section Three examines the practical support that young lone mothers have experienced or feel that they need; whilst Section Four looks at the emotional support. Section Five looks at the schooling experiences of young lone mothers who became pregnant whilst at school. Finally Section Six provides a summary of the main findings and conclusions and a set of recommendations. These recommendations aim to aid the targeting and commissioning of services by Gingerbread and beyond, to meet the needs of the young lone parent population more effectively.

* Source: Adapted from Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

Chapter one: The Design of The Survey

1 Methodology

It was envisaged from the outset that in order to meet all of the research objectives the project would need to combine both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a two stage design.

The first stage was perceived as constituting the main body of the research. Given the timescale for the project, the wish by Gingerbread to contact a large sample and the level of resourcing of the project, a questionnaire was considered the most appropriate tool for the collection of largely quantitative data.

With the aim of yielding more qualitative data, the second stage of the research incorporated a focus group discussion meeting (Belfast) and semi-structured interviews (Newry and Mourne.) 5.8% of the original sample from Belfast and 12.5 per cent of the original sample from Newry and Mourne areas participated in these discussions.

1.2 Stage One - The Questionnaire

The ideal research design for collecting quantitative information on young lone parents would have been to conduct structured face-to-face interviews. This would have allowed for greater consistency and would have ironed out the difficulties that young people often face when asked to complete a questionnaire on their own. However such a design would have required a large commitment of resources in terms of time and money.

There was no doubt therefore that a self-completion questionnaire would have to be used. Much effort was put into designing the questionnaire. A compromise had to be reached between covering all the areas that the research intended to look at and making sure that the questionnaire was not so lengthy as to deter potential respondents from completion.

In addition the questionnaire had to be amenable to self-completion, so the tone and wording of questions were pitched at an appropriate level. A particular feature of questionnaire preparation was in designing the cover sheet. This aimed to assure respondents of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. It also attempted to inform them of what the research wished to achieve.

Pilot work for the questionnaire took several forms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three young lone parents who were in direct contact with Gingerbread. General issues to be covered in the questionnaire were discussed. These interviews were important in clarifying and weighting issues the researcher was aware of, and also in identifying issues that the researcher was unaware of or had paid scant attention to.

The next step was to incorporate alterations to the design and wording of the questionnaire by the project's Advisory Group. The Advisory Group was made up of representatives from both the statutory and voluntary sectors, and a young lone mother. Their role was to use their knowledge and expertise in the area to assist and guide the project (See Appendix 1 for a list of members of the Advisory Group). This questionnaire was then piloted amongst two groups of young lone parents outside of the research catchment areas. One pilot was set up in Downpatrick, and a second pilot was arranged in Dungannon. The pilots resulted in changes in both content and design to the questionnaire. Finally, fine tuning of the questionnaire was carried out during a meeting of the Advisory Group.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

18

Sampling

At an early stage of the research design it was acknowledged that locating a random sample of young lone parents would be difficult. There was no absolute comprehensive register of young lone parents that could be used as a sampling frame through which to draw a representative sample. The principle method used by recent British studies of lone parents, involving the recruitment of those claiming One Parent Benefit, or Income Support, was dismissed as being too time-consuming, although it may have provided an adequate sampling frame. Access to these records would involve lengthy inter-agency discussion, and even if guaranteed, the process of singling out those aged under 25 years from registers would be a protracted task. This method was also considered inappropriate given the suspicion that it would be likely to raise amongst potential participants.

In addition to the absence of an accessible, complete and up-to-date sampling frame, it was acknowledged that recruiting a substantial number of young lone parents to take part in the research would be a major problem. The Advisory Group had set the rigorous target of receiving one hundred usable questionnaires from the Belfast area, and thirty from the Newry and Mourne area, in order to substantiate the research. This would mean accessing 6 per cent of the total young lone parent population in the Belfast area, and twenty eight per cent of the total young lone parent population in the Newry and Mourne area (according to 1991 Census data, Census Office For Northern Ireland). Young lone parents are a hard group to access. There are no specific organisation/s which work with them as an autonomous group of people, or on a large scale. Therefore there was no large resource pool from which to draw a potential sample. However, there are a variety of agencies that have sporadic contact with individual young lone parents for a variety of reasons.

It was decided therefore that the sample would have to be recruited using a snowball sampling technique whereby the researcher would contact a variety of agencies that have short term, small-scale and sporadic contact with individual young lone parents. Much energy would have to be expended on this stage of the research if the sample targets were to be achieved.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

A. Recruiting directly and indirectly through community, voluntary and women's organisations

The main element of the recruitment strategy was to recruit through community, voluntary and women's organisations that worked with, or were in contact with young lone parents. Initial contact with these organisations was facilitated in different ways.

a) Belfast

The researcher contacted organisations that appeared in one of three directories, and asked for their help in contacting possible research participants.

The three directories were:

- Bryson House Directory 1996,
- 1992 Directory of Women's Voluntary Organisations in Northern Ireland,
- Women's Resource and Development Agency's Directory of Women's Groups 1997.

With the invaluable help of the research Advisory Group the researcher was able to attend the North and West Belfast Early Years Committee and meet in person,

chapter 1 background

representatives from community, voluntary and women's groups in that area. (Unfortunately South and East Belfast had no such Committee at that time).

b) Newry and Mourne

In this area the researcher contacted organisations appearing in one of three directories, and asked for their help in contacting possible research participants. The three directories were:

- Bryson House Directory 1996,
- 1992 Directory of Women's Voluntary Organisations in Northern Ireland,
- Newry and Mourne Confederation of Community Groups Directory of Voluntary Organisations 1993.

From this initial contact, arrangements were made to distribute the questionnaire directly to respondents where, there were young lone parent groups already established, and indirectly through the organisation's staff, where they had only individual, sporadic contact with young parents. In the first case, convenient dates and times were arranged. (See Appendix 2 for a list of community, voluntary and women's groups who assisted with the research).

Since the majority of community, voluntary and women's organisations only had contact with young lone parents on an individual, sporadic basis it was decided that the sample would have to be further supplemented. Moreover, accessing a sample purely through community, voluntary and women's groups might have resulted in only accessing those lone parents motivated enough to visit such organisations. Thus, the sample was supplemented through two additional recruitment methods.

B. Recruiting indirectly through Health Visitors and Social Workers

Since every child born in Northern Ireland is registered by the Health Authority and seen by a Health Visitor, the 'health route' was seen as a potential source for recruiting a significant number of respondents. Again, the Advisory Group offered invaluable help in the Belfast area since individual members of the group were gate-keepers to the 'health route'.

a) Belfast

The researcher was able to make contact with individual Nursing Managers after primary negotiations by Advisory Group members. Each Nursing Manager assured the researcher of the commitment of their team of Health Visitors to the research and their help in the distribution of questionnaires. Only in one area of Belfast was any further inter-agency discussion required. In this area the researcher was asked to outline the research personally to Health Visitors to ensure their co-operation in contacting potential participants.

b) Newry and Mourne

In Newry and Mourne, progression was slightly more difficult since there was no Health Service staff representative on the Advisory Group. However, preliminary contact with both the Child Care Manager and Director of Nursing and Community Health illustrated their willingness to co-operate with the research.

In the case of both the community, voluntary and women's groups and the Health Visitors and Social Workers, copies of the questionnaires were sent to our contacts to be distributed in June and July 1997. (See Appendix 2 for a list of health and social welfare professionals who were contacts). Guidelines for the administration and collection of questionnaires accompanied every posting and a pre-paid envelope accompanied every questionnaire administered.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

The guidelines had the dual aim of attempting to ensure standardisation amongst those distributing questionnaires and of achieving the highest possible response rate. (See Appendix 3).

C. Recruiting indirectly through Education and Library Boards

From the outset the researcher was conscious about making sure that younger lone parents (those aged under 18 years of age) would be represented in the sample. It was felt that this age group might not have been recruited amongst community, voluntary and women’s organisations. However, since all young women who become pregnant while still of compulsory age must be offered Home Tuition, it would be a positive step to get in contact with the Education and Library Boards in the two research areas.

Preliminary meetings were arranged with the Chief Education and Welfare Officers at the two Boards. A summary of the project together with a draft procedure for drawing the sample and two covering letters which would accompany the questionnaires were taken to the meeting for discussion. (See Appendix 4). Both Boards agreed to co-operate with the research, and provide the clerical support needed. (See Appendix 2 for Chief Education and Welfare Officers who helped with the research).

Lists of those who had received Home Tuition in the past five years were produced and with clerical assistance a numbered questionnaire was assigned to each name on the list and mailed out. Participants were asked to return completed questionnaires direct to Gingerbread in the pre-paid envelopes provided. After three/four weeks the researcher informed the Boards of those questionnaires that had not been returned and reminders were sent out to the appropriate people.

Although the procedure was long-winded, it had the merit of preserving confidentiality as the researcher at no point had access to Board records

and Board staff were unaware of who was in the final sample.

Response

Table.2. below shows the total number of questionnaires distributed, broken down into means of distribution, and the total number of responses and overall response rates achieved from each of the two research areas.

Table.2. Response by Method of Distribution and by Research Area

Research Area	Method of Distribution	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate
Belfast	Community	189	69	37%
	Health	140	56	40%
	ELB	87	14	16%
Totals		416	139	34%
Newry	Community	72	8	11%
	Health	40	14	35%
	ELB	11	2	18%
Totals		123	24	21%
Overall Total		539	163	30%

Evaluation of Response

An overall response rate of 30 per cent is fairly good for a questionnaire which was in the main, distributed through the post. Clearly however, several points must be made with reference to the Table.

The response rate for the Newry and Mourne area is not good, and is a good deal lower than the response rate for Belfast. Several factors may have contributed to the lower response rate. They can be summarised as follows:

- The timing of the distribution of questionnaires. The research year began at the start of the calendar year. Because of the timing of the research it was clear from

chapter 1 background

the start that the distribution of questionnaires would not realistically commence before mid June 1997. This did not give many community, voluntary and women's organisations a great deal of time to distribute questionnaires since many of them are only partly-functional, and some even close during the months of July and August. In addition to this many of the training courses that operate for young lone parents finish at the end of May/early June 1997.

- Over - optimism by those working in community, voluntary and women's organisations about the numbers of young lone parents that they would be able to get to participate in the research. There was an intuitive perception by workers that young lone parents formed a significant part of their working contacts. However, the numbers were often much smaller than were originally predicted, as several of those that they had thought were young lone parents were either outside of the age specification, or were presently cohabiting.
- The change in situation of young lone parents contacted through the Education and Library Boards. It is difficult to assess the significance of this factor. However, a questionnaire was returned by one young mother with the following statement written on the top:

"Please note that since my home tuition four years ago I am now married."

- The sensitivity of the topic and of the women's situation. It is difficult to know how far this contributed to the low response rate. However, some community, voluntary and women's organisations who had agreed on principle to distribute questionnaires,

commented later that they found it difficult to approach some young lone parents about the research for fear of offending or causing distress.

- Reluctance to take part in the research by young lone parents themselves. Once again it is difficult to assess the significance of this factor. It is possible however, that the emphasis of the study on lone parent status and problems encountered by lone parents, provided a negative image for some people and dissuaded them from taking part.
- The questionnaire. Questionnaires are never perfect and this one had its limitations. It was somewhat lengthy in order that all the issues that the research intended to look at were covered. This may have been a deterrent to some possible respondents. It is also likely that some may have found the wording or format of the questions off putting and therefore did not complete the questionnaire.

It is clear that some of these factors may be equally applied to the Belfast area and thus may have had some effect on the response rate there.

Evaluation of the Sample

There are several points to be made in evaluating the sample. The level of response in both areas lead to some concern that the samples may be biased, and therefore would not provide a secure basis for extrapolation to the population of young lone parents in both areas, as a whole.

In order to assess bias it is necessary to compare the characteristics of the achieved sample with the characteristics of the population as a whole. However, with no comprehensive sampling frame, this was an impossible task. It was possible however, to make some assessment of the representativeness of the sample. Primarily, there was an under-representation of young lone fathers

“A wise head on young shoulders”

22

in the study. According to data from the 1991 Northern Ireland Census, they form 7.3% of the young lone parent population in Northern Ireland as a whole, but formed 0% of the young lone parent population in this study (NISRA, 1991: Table 21: Housing and Household Composition Report). This was not intentional, but may have arisen from the fact that much of the sample was recruited through the 'health' route.

Secondly, it was evident that there was some regional bias in the achieved sample in the Belfast. Table.3. below illustrates the distribution of the achieved Belfast sample by Belfast Health Trust areas, splitting the city into North and West and South and East, and compares this with the actual population of young lone parents in each of the Trust areas.

Table.3.
Final Sample by Belfast Health Trust Area

Health Board Areas within Belfast	% of Sample Population	% of Actual Population*
North & West Belfast HSS Trust	50.30%	68.70%
South & East Belfast HSS Trust	47.50%	31.30%
Non-Response	2.20%	
Totals	100%	100%

* Source: Adapted from Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

It is clear that there was an under-representation of young lone parents from the North and West of the City. Unfortunately, the dearth of statistical information relating to young lone parents makes it impossible to measure representativeness in terms of age, marital status, income and employment status.

We cannot therefore ascertain whether we can extrapolate these findings to that of the populations of young lone parents as a whole in each area. It was evident from the start, that the study would

not provide a rigorously accurate analysis of the lone parent population, given the size of the study and the snowball sampling method that had to be used. None-the-less the fairly large number of respondents is an important achievement. Our 139 respondents in the Belfast area, and 24 in the Newry and Mourne area, account for 8.2% and 13.2% of all young lone parent households (where lone parents are the head of household) in each area respectively. One could argue therefore that the broad direction of the findings are likely to be indicative of issues that need to be addressed.

1.3. Stage Two - Sampling

Following preliminary analysis of the survey data, respondents in both the Belfast and Newry and Mourne areas who had said that they would like to take part in a second stage of the research, were invited to attend focus group discussions during September 1997. There were to be two such discussion groups, one in each of the research areas, and the aim was to get around ten per cent of the original samples in both areas to attend.

Just over fifty per cent of the original sample in Belfast who had completed the questionnaire and one third of respondents in Newry and Mourne said that they would like to take part in the second stage of the research. All of these respondents were invited to take part, with the offer that any travelling or child care expenses would be paid for by Gingerbread. Owing to the great numbers who had shown an interest however, only the first to return their reply slips were actually invited to attend the focus groups. The respondents who took part in this stage of the study were therefore virtually a self-selecting sample.

Recruitment for the focus groups was not as easy as it had been originally perceived. Respondents in both research areas were unable to attend for a whole variety of reasons. These ranged from being unable to organise suitable child care arrangements to having a job interview and starting College. In Newry and Mourne however

there were particular problems with arranging transport to get to and from the focus group. The researcher did not foresee that some young lone parents in this area would have had to travel over twenty five miles to get to a focus group session in Newry.

In Newry and Mourne therefore, it was decided that individual interviews with respondents would have to be conducted. These would be conducted in respondents own homes and therefore would overcome problems of travel and child care.

Focus Groups and Semi-Structured Interviews

The focus group sessions and semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit more information, and to focus specifically on what young lone parents perceived their service and support needs to be. It was felt that this second stage of the research was vital in gaining information which may not have been sufficiently retrieved in the questionnaire. The questionnaire elicited largely factual information, the focus groups and semi-structured interviews however were designed to yield attitudinal data on how people perceived their situation and their options, and what they needed and wanted from services to improve their situation and options.

In total some 5.8 per cent of respondents in Belfast, and 12.5 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne took part in the second stage of the research.

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

24

2

demographic and social characteristics

CHAPTER 2 Young Lone Mothers

“There is at present a dearth of research on young lone parents, particularly within the Northern Ireland context, despite the fact that they have been at the centre of so much controversy.”

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



Chapter Two: Demographics

This section describes the social and demographic circumstances of the 163 young lone mothers in the sample. Primarily their age and marital status is considered. Then the focus turns to the age that they had their first child, their family size, and the ages of their children. Finally the length of time that they have been a lone parent is discussed. Firstly however, the section reviews some of the demographic data available on young lone parents, looking initially at demographic developments in relation to young lone parents and secondly focusing in more detail on young lone parents in Northern Ireland.

2.1. Demographics data on Young Lone Parents

There are a series of problems with presenting demographic data on lone parents. Haskey (1994:5) points to the fact that it is ‘impossible to derive a completely accurate estimate of the number of one parent families from any of the available data sources’ suggesting that different sources can yield different estimates, and that there is uncertainty about the accuracy of each source. Moreover, there is a remarkable dearth of statistics relating to young lone parents, particularly in the Northern Ireland context. Where there is data available it has concentrated overwhelmingly, in line with the public debate, on the dynamics of teenage motherhood. Consequently much of the data presented in this section centres around this issue.

Recent Demographic Trends

In contrast with popular belief teenage mothers represent only a small proportion of all lone mothers. According to Haskey, under 4 per cent of lone mothers in Great Britain are teenagers (Haskey, 1994:10). Figures also illustrate a fall in the total number of teenage births in Great Britain in the past twenty-five years, from 86,746 in 1966 to 47,900 in 1992. Similarly, in 1966 there were 47.9 births per 1000 women aged 15-19 years, but in 1992 this figure had dropped to 31.8 (Selman and Glendinning, 1994/5:40).

In Northern Ireland young lone mothers also represent a smaller proportion of the total population of lone mothers than is generally perceived. Figures from the 1991 Census suggest that only 10.8 per cent of all households headed by a lone mother are headed by a lone mother of 24 years of age or less (NISRA, Table 21 Housing and Household Composition, 1991) Statistics from Northern Ireland illustrate that between 1980 and 1990 the number of births to teenage mothers has remained consistent at 2000 births per year (Scully, 1992: Fig.1). When examined however, against a changing demography in which the last ten years has seen the 15-19 year old population fall by one tenth, the fertility rate of 15-19 year olds has in fact increased over this ten year period. Scully suggests an approximate increase of 13.3 per cent (Scully, 1992: Para.2:07).

Perhaps the most distinctive demographic trend in relation to young lone mothers however, is the increase in the proportion of births occurring outside of marriage, a trend which is mirrored equally in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In Northern Ireland in 1980 only 27 per cent of teenage mothers were unmarried. In 1989 however only 27 per cent of teenage mothers were married (Farrell, 1992:2). In Great Britain the proportion of teenage births occurring outside of marriage has increased from 26 per cent of all births to teenage mothers in 1971 to 84 per cent in 1992 (Selman and Glendinning, 1994/5:40).

chapter 2 demographics and social characteristics

This has been linked closely to a decline in the number of so-called 'shot-gun' weddings. Today, it may be that lone parenthood is the preferred option to young mothers.

This concept is indeed reflected in statistics which illustrate that the number of single never-married mothers, as a proportion of all lone parents, has increased steadily. Data from the 1994/5 Continuous Household Survey suggests that single mothers (as opposed to separated, divorced or widowed) make up 30 per cent of the total population of lone mothers in Northern Ireland (CHS quoted by Spence, 1996b:14). Moreover, in relation to age, 1990 saw 21 per cent of all births to unmarried mothers, with 84 per cent of the total being to mothers under 20 years of age (EHSSB Director of Public Health, 1990 quoted in Spence, 1996a: 30).

Evidence from Great Britain suggests similar trends. In 1971 single, never-married mothers made up 15.8 per cent of the total lone parent population. In 1989 however this figure had risen to 31.3 per cent (Burghes, 1993:7). Significantly, Burghes suggests that as a group, single, never-married mothers have a median age of 24 years, and data from the General Household Survey (GHS hereafter) 1990-1992 illustrates that 46 per cent of single, never-married mothers are 24 years of age and under (GHS quoted in Burghes and Brown, 1995:21). Haskey (1991) in his analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) put this figure at the higher percentage of 51 per cent (Haskey, 1991 quoted by Middleton, 1995:154).

2.2. Young Lone Parents in Northern Ireland

The 1991 Northern Ireland Census of Population and Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS hereafter) 1994/5 are two sources which provide data on lone parents in N. Ireland.

Recent figures from the CHS suggest that 25 per cent of all families in Northern Ireland are headed by a lone parent (CHS, 1995 quoted in Social Welfare Inspectorate, 1996:10). This figure has increased from the 1990/1 figure of 19 per cent of all families.

The 1991 Northern Ireland Census indicates that there are 66,601 lone parent households in Northern Ireland. Of those households some 5,788 were headed by lone parents under the age of twenty five. Table.4. below outlines the breakdown of young lone parent households.

Table.4.
Young Lone Parent Households in Northern Ireland

Type of Family	Age of Head	
	Under 25	25 and Over
Lone Parent, with Child(ren) No other(s)	5,087	53,186
Lone Parent, with Child(ren) No other(s)	701	7,627
Sub-Total	5,788	60,813
Total No. of Lone Parent Households	66,601	

* Source: Adapted from the Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

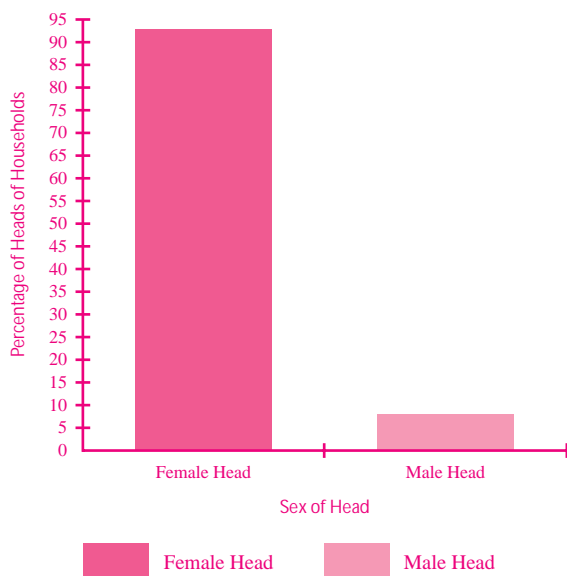
It is evident from the table that the data available on young lone parents in Northern Ireland suggests that they form 8.69 per cent of all lone parent households. It is clear however that the figure of 5,788 young lone parent households may not be accurate. It is highly likely that it under-represents the true number of young lone

“A wise head on young shoulders”

parents since some of them may be living with their parents and thus be hidden in the category of ‘married couple, with or without others’ or the category of ‘two families with or without others’.

Bearing these shortcomings in mind, figures from the 1991 Census indicate that the overwhelming majority of young lone parent households in Northern Ireland are headed by a female. Figure.1 below illustrates that 92.7 per cent of all young lone parent households have a female head.

Figure. 1.
Young Lone Parent Households,
By Sex of Head



* Source: Adapted from the Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

One of the objectives of the research was to create a map of the distribution of young lone parents in Northern Ireland. Table.5. aims to do this by showing the number of young lone parent households in each district council area in Northern Ireland.

Table.5.
Young Lone Parent Households,
By District Council Area

District Council Area	No. of Lone Parent Households With Head Under 25 Years
Antrim	184
Ards	168
Armagh	86
Ballymena	205
Ballymoney	72
Bandbridge	76
Belfast	1,700
Carrickfergus	155
Castlereagh	133
Coleraine	241
Cookstown	68
Craigavon	257
Derry	449
Down	166
Dungannon	81
Fermanagh	119
Larne	131
Limavady	82
Lisburn	479
Magherafelt	42
Moyle	50
Newry and Mourne	182
Newtownabbey	278
North Down	156
Omagh	116
Strabane	112
Total	5,788

* Source: Adapted from the Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

Table.6. below aims to provide an insight into the concentration of young lone parent households in Northern Ireland by illustrating what proportion of the total under 25 head of household population, in each district council area, is made up of young lone parent families. It shows that between 14.4 and 35.22 per cent of the total households headed by someone aged under 25, are headed by young lone parents.

chapter 2 demographics and social characteristics

Table. 6.
Young Lone Parent Heads of Household
As A Percentage of Total Under 25 Heads
of Household, By District Council

District Council	Percentage
Antrim	25.6
Ards	22.6
Armagh	19.2
Ballymena	28.7
Ballymoney	32.5
Bandbridge	25.3
Belfast	30.4
Carrickfergus	27.3
Castlereagh	20.3
Coleraine	31.2
Cookstown	21.7
Craigavon	26
Derry	34.4
Down	24.6
Dungannon	20.3
Fermanagh	28
Larne	35.2
Limavady	21.1
Lisburn	33.4
Magherafelt	14.4
Moyle	35.2
Newry and Mourne	22.8
Newtownabbey	27.1
North Down	19.1
Omagh	23.4
Strabane	30

* Source: Adapted from the Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

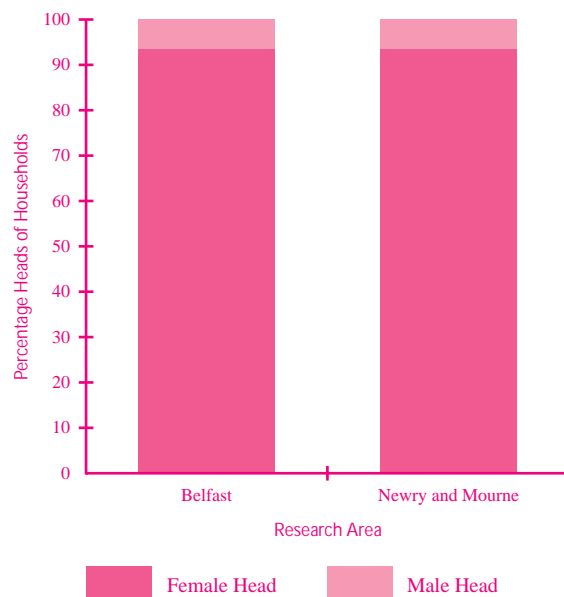
It can be seen that in 42.3 per cent of district council areas, young lone parent heads of household constitute between one quarter and one third of the total under twenty five head of household population.

Looking specifically at the two research areas the figures are as follows. There are 1700 households in the Belfast headed by a young lone parent, and 182 in Newry and Mourne. Young lone parent households in Belfast make up 10.6 per cent of all lone parent households, and in Newry and

Mourne they make up 6.7 per cent. In Belfast young lone parent households also form 30.4 per cent of all households headed by someone aged under 25 years of age, and in Newry and Mourne this figure stands at 22.8 per cent. In both areas the overwhelming majority of young lone parent households have a female head. The Chart below illustrates young lone parent households in each area, by sex of head.

29

Figure. 2.
Young Lone Parent Households,
By Research Area and By Sex



* Source: Adapted from the Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

Having examined some of the demographic developments in relation to the young lone parent population and having illustrated the break down of young lone parent households in Northern Ireland and in particular in the Belfast and Newry and Mourne area, let us now look at the demographic characteristics of the sample.

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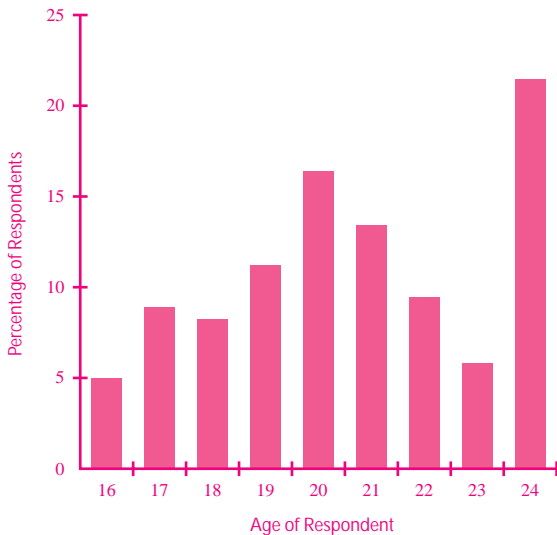
2.3. SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Gender and Age of Respondents

Of the 163 respondents who took part in the survey, 139 came from Belfast and 24 from Newry and Mourne. All 163 respondents were female.

In Belfast respondents ages ranged from 16 to 24 years. Figure.3 below illustrates the breakdown of the Belfast sample population by age.

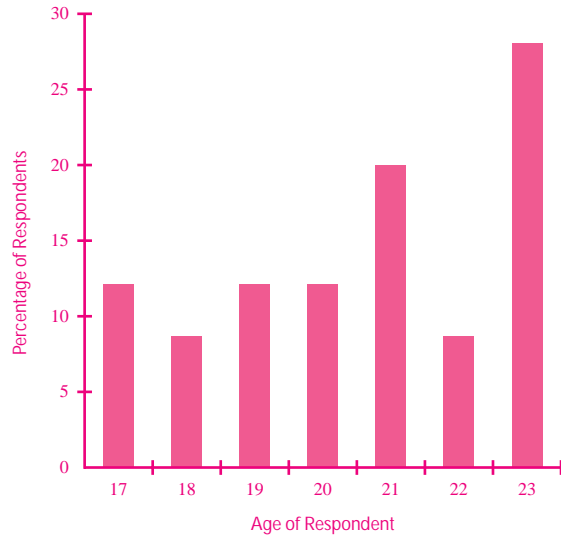
Figure.3.
Age of Respondents - Belfast



The mean age of respondents in Belfast was 20.64 years. A third of the sample were teenagers with almost half the sample aged twenty years or less.

In Newry and Mourne respondents ages ranged from 17 to 24 years, with a mean age of 21.12 years. Figure.4. shows the breakdown of the Newry and Mourne sample population by age of respondent.

Figure.4.
Age of Respondents - Newry and Mourne

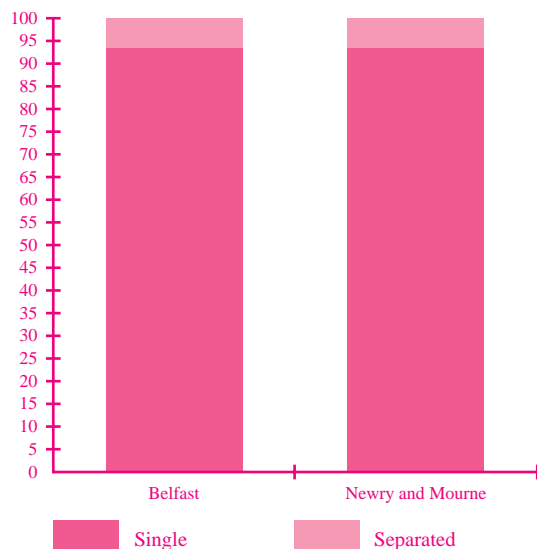


Similarly to Belfast, approximately one third of respondents in Newry and Mourne were teenagers at the time of the research and just under one half were aged twenty years of age or less. Figure.4. illustrates that in Newry and Mourne there were no respondents aged 16 or 21 years in the sample population.

Marital Status

Figure.5. shows the marital status of respondents in Belfast and in Newry and Mourne.

Figure. 5.
Marital Status of Respondents, By Research Area



chapter 2 demographics and social characteristics

As illustrated, the marital status of respondents in both research populations was overwhelmingly single. The present survey however did not establish how many of the single respondents had separated from a cohabiting relationship, which may have been interesting. Only 8 respondents in Belfast, and 1 respondent in Newry and Mourne were separated, and there were no respondents in either area who were divorced or widowed.

Figures for Northern Ireland as a whole, suggest that in 1994/5 only 30 per cent of all lone mothers were single, with nearly 61 per cent separated or divorced, and nearly 9 per cent widowed (CHS quoted by Spence, 1996b:14). These figures tend to illustrate that younger lone mothers are perhaps more likely to be single, than older groups of lone mothers.

Age When Respondent Had First Child
Table.7. below shows the age of respondents when they had their first child. In both research areas the age when most respondents had their first child was seventeen. The majority of respondents in both Belfast and Newry and Mourne had their first child before they were twenty years old (76.2% and 71% respectively). The mean age amongst respondents for having their first child was 18.06 years in Belfast and 18.58 years in Newry and Mourne.

Table.7.
Age When Respondents Had Their First Child, By Research Area

Age of Respondent At Birth of First Child	% of Respondent Belfast	% of Respondents Newry and Mourne
14	1.4 (2)	
15	8.6 (12)	4.2 (1)
16	13.7 (19)	4.2 (1)
17	22.3 (31)	29.2 (7)
18	12.9 (18)	16.7 (4)
19	17.3 (24)	16.7 (4)
20	12.2 (17)	8.3 (2)
21	4.3 (6)	12.5 (3)
22	5 (7)	4.2 (1)
23	0.7 (1)	4.2 (1)
24	1.4 (2)	

Surprisingly, some 23.7 % of respondents in Belfast had their first child before they were seventeen years of age.

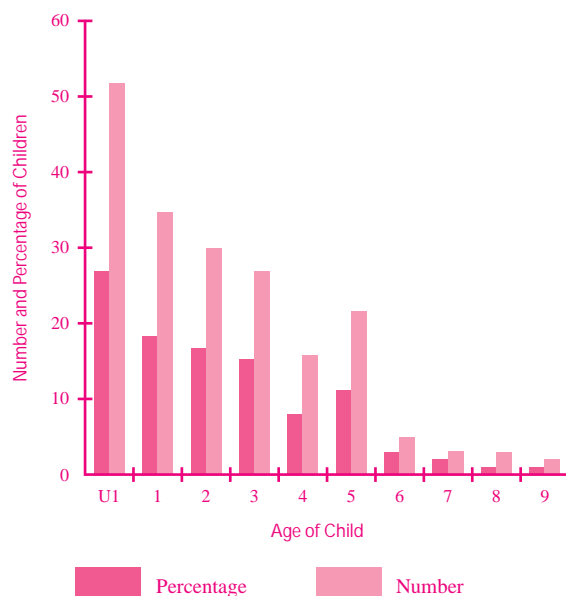
Family Size

The majority of young lone mothers in both Belfast and Newry and Mourne had only one child - 72.7% and 62.5% respectively. 91.4% of the research population in Belfast had one or two children compared to 75% of respondents in the Newry and Mourne area. The 139 respondents surveyed in Belfast had, between them, 190 children giving an average family size of 1.4 children. Families tended to be bigger in the rural area with the 24 respondents surveyed having 44 children between them, giving an average family size of 1.8 children. Both of these figures are smaller than the CHS figures for average family size of lone parent families. The 1994/5 survey showed that lone mothers in Northern Ireland had on average 1.9 dependent children (DHSS, 1996). In Great Britain the figure is lower still at 1.7 children per lone parent (Haskey, 1994).

Ages of Children

The distribution of the ages of the respondent's children in both research areas were strikingly similar. Figure.6. gives the age profile of respondent's children in Belfast.

Figure.6.
Ages of Respondents' Children - Belfast



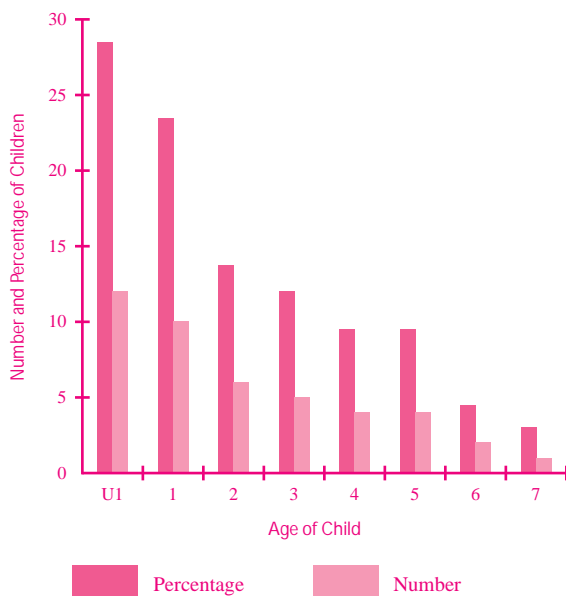
“A wise head on young shoulders”

Nearly 95 per cent of respondent's children were aged five years old or younger. 74.7% of respondent's children in Belfast were under primary school age. The biggest percentage of children were under 1 year old (26.8%).

Thirty six per cent of respondents in Belfast had a child under 1, with 89 per cent of respondents having a child under primary school age. In addition, only five respondents did not have a child who was aged five or under.

In Newry and Mourne similarly, 94 per cent of respondent's children were aged five years or less, and 75.8% of children were under primary school age. Again, the biggest percentage of children were under the age of 1 (27.8%). Figure.7. below gives the age profile of respondent's children in Newry and Mourne.

Figure. 7.
Age of Respondents' Children-
Newry and Mourne



In comparison to Belfast a higher percentage of respondents had children under 1 year of age-50%. Furthermore 100% of respondents had children under primary school age. Therefore, although families in Newry and Mourne were bigger, they were also more likely to contain a child under the age of 1.

Length of Time Spent As A Lone Parent
In both Belfast and Newry and Mourne the largest number of respondents had been a lone parent for 1-2 years. Indeed, the majority of lone parents in both areas had been a lone parent for 1-2 years or less, with only 28.1% of respondents in Belfast and 16.7% of respondents in Newry and Mourne having been a lone parent longer than 2 years.

2.4. SUMMARY

- Northern Ireland has seen an increase in the number of births to teenage mothers, occurring outside of marriage.
- The number of single never-married mothers as a proportion of the total lone mother population has increased in Northern Ireland.
- 5,788 households in Northern Ireland are headed by a lone parent under the age of 25. Only 7.3% of these have a male head.
- There are 1700 households in Belfast and 182 households in Newry and Mourne headed by a young lone parent.
- The research sample was made up entirely of females, a third of which were teenagers, and almost half were under twenty.
- 94.3% of lone mothers in Belfast and 95.9% of lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were single, never-married mothers.
- The majority of young lone mothers had been a lone parent for two years or less and had only one child.
- 95% of respondent's children in Belfast, and 94% of respondent's children in Newry and Mourne were aged five years or younger.

chapter 2 demographics and social characteristics

- 96.4% of young lone mothers in Belfast had a child under the age of five. In Newry and Mourne 100% of mothers had a child under the age of five.
- Lone mother families in Newry and Mourne tended to be bigger than lone mother families in Belfast. The average family size of lone mother families in Newry and Mourne was 1.8 children, and in Belfast it was 1.4 children.

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

34

3

practical support

CHAPTER 3 Income and Living Standards

CHAPTER 4 Employment and Employment Intentions

CHAPTER 5 Caring for Children

CHAPTER 6 Housing

"I receive £64 per week.
I often can't afford coal for
heating or nappies for my
daughter at nights."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



Chapter Three: Income & Living Standards

36

Poverty studies have consistently found lone parents over-represented amongst low income households, and this remains true despite the variety of ways used to define poverty. It is evident however that young lone parents are often the ‘poorest’ of all lone parents, and suffer specific and individual financial problems. This chapter of the report analyses the income of young lone mothers. It looks firstly at previous research on income levels and sources of income in lone parent families. It then goes on to outline the policy context, highlighting the main developments in social security policy, the Social Fund and Child Maintenance. The focus then turns to the sample populations and looks at levels and sources of income in more detail, examining the benefit system, the Social Fund, employment, and maintenance. Young lone mothers’ views about their financial situation are looked at next and then the chapter turns to an examination of young lone mothers and debt. The chapter finishes by looking at some of the support services that young lone mothers requested in relation to income.

3.1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

It has long been illustrated that the gross weekly disposable incomes of lone parent households are lower than those of couples with two children. In 1994-95 the gross weekly disposable income of lone parent families in Great Britain was £193.76 compared to £538.53 of couples with two children (FES, 1994). The gross income of lone parent families was therefore only 36 per cent of the income of two parent families with two children.

There is some suggestion too that the average gross weekly disposable incomes of lone parent families, relative to those of couples with two children, have fallen over recent years. In 1980 the average gross weekly disposable incomes of lone parent families were equivalent to about 46 per cent of that of couples with two children. By 1984 this had fallen to 44 per cent, and by 1990, 38 per cent (FES, 1992 quoted in NCOPF, 1996: 5).

Evidence suggests that young lone mothers may suffer even lower levels of income than couples with two children and lone parents generally. Data from the GHS (1993) in Great Britain illustrated that whilst 59 per cent of married couples were on gross incomes above £350 per week, 67 per cent

of lone parents had gross incomes below £150.00 per week. Sixty per cent of single, lone mothers however, had gross incomes of less than £100.00 per week (NCOPF, 1996:5).

More specific age-related data suggests all but a very few young, single, lone mothers have net weekly incomes of less than a £100.00. In 1992, 95.8 per cent of a sample of 53 survey mothers aged up to 20 years, and 87.4 per cent of a sample of 229 survey mothers aged 20-24 years had a weekly income of less than a £100.00 (GHS quoted by Burghes and Brown, 1995:24).

Part of the explanation for a lower total income amongst lone parent families is that benefits, whilst forming a small addition to earnings for married couples, are often the major or sole source of income for lone parents. According to the 1989 Family Expenditure Survey, the average gross weekly incomes of lone parent families were made up of 49 per cent from earnings, 35 per cent from benefits and 29 per cent from other sources. By contrast the average gross weekly incomes of couples with two children were made up of 81 per cent from earnings, five per cent from benefits and one per cent from other sources (CSO, 1990 quoted in Bradshaw and Millar, 1991:18).

chapter 3 practical support

Indeed, Bradshaw and Millar's survey of a large representative sample of lone parents in Great Britain found that they were largely reliant on the benefit system as a source of income. 72 per cent of the survey sample claimed Income Support and only 40 per cent had any income from earnings. In addition, for the sample as a whole, Income Support was the predominant source of net income, contributing on average 45 per cent, with earnings contributing 22 per cent, Child Benefit 14 per cent and maintenance 7 per cent (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991).

Income Support is therefore a very important source of income for lone parents. However, it has long been stated by researchers and lone parents alike that the Income Support premium level is too low:

“Whatever the long term aims of policy, Income Support cannot be ignored if the immediate economic circumstances of lone parents are to be ameliorated . . . It follows that any increase in Income Support payments . . . would make most lone parents better off.”

(BURGHES, 1993:31)

Studies of lone parents on Income Support and other benefits have all found that lone parents on these benefits suffer financial hardship and debt (Bradshaw and Morgan, 1987; Millar, 1989; Speak et al, 1995; Middleton et al, 1997). Speak's study of young single mothers for example, found that mothers on Income Support expressed real difficulties in making ends meet. Moreover, these mothers suggested that they would only need £10 a week extra to make living on Income Support easier (Speak et al, 1995:48).

3.2. POLICY CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIAL SECURITY

There have been several significant social policy responses to the low incomes of lone parent households. Primarily, a first wave of reform introduced some of the more positive changes in social security in relation to lone parents. The growing number of lone parents throughout the 1980s was exceeded by the growth in those reliant on Income Support, and this contributed to a rise in the number of families with children, amongst families with the poorest fifth of incomes. The policy response was to recognise the additional needs of lone parents on Income Support and introduce a Lone Parent premium in the 1985 review of social security.

The increased reliance of lone parents on Income Support actually reflected a fall in the number of those in employment. During 1979-1981 for example, 49 per cent of lone mothers were in employment. Between 1988-1990 however, this figure had dropped to 41 per cent (GHS and OPCS quoted by Burghes, 1993: 10). In response to these developments several measures have been introduced to facilitate lone mothers' opportunity to work. Family Credit replaced Family Income Supplement paying more generous benefits to those with low paid occupations, and the definition of full-time employment for qualification for Family Credit has been progressively reduced to 16 hours. Furthermore in April 1992 a maintenance disregard of £15 for those on Family Credit was introduced, and in October 1994 an earnings disregard for child care costs was introduced.

The Social Fund

The 1986 Social Security Act signalled the end of exceptional needs payments and the introduction of the Social Fund. The Social Fund introduced the substitution of loans for exceptional needs payments, and ever since its introduction it has attracted widespread criticism.

(See Johnson, 1990:48-54).

“A wise head on young shoulders”

38

Low income levels have inevitably forced many lone parents to apply for Social Fund loans or grants. Criticism of the system has been launched at the fact that payments of loans and grants are discretionary, so applications do not always succeed. Payments are evidently subject to both an individual officer's interpretation of need, and the amount of money remaining in the budget at a particular time. Refusal rates are high, and by December 1991, the overall refusal rate for loans nationally had risen to 47 per cent (Craig, 1993).

The Social Fund has also been criticised for putting added strain on the already inadequate incomes of many lone parents. As Speak et al infer:

“If people need financial assistance it is because they are poor, and, if they are poor, they cannot afford to repay loans without becoming poorer.”

(SPEAK ET AL, 1995:63)

Accessing a loan therefore can often lead to long-term debt, and problems can be doubly generated because loan repayments are directly taken from Income Support at source. This reduces the weekly income of lone parents again and often forces lone parents to turn to family, friends, money lenders and other forms of credit to make up the shortfall.

Child Maintenance

Falling numbers of lone parents in receipt of maintenance was just one of the factors contributing to one of the biggest reforms in social policy for 40 years - the reform of the child maintenance system. Desire to save public expenditure and reduce the 'dependency culture', along with moral arguments that stressed that 'no father should be able to escape from his responsibilities' were other reasons (Thatcher quoted in Bennett, 1997:2). (See also Keery, 1996; McShane, 1994; Millar, 1994). Prior to the Child Support Act (1991), maintenance

was either decided on informally between partners or through the jurisdiction of the courts. Family law legislation recognised that fathers had a legal liability to maintain their dependent children which was extended to the mother, if the father was or had been married to her. The level of maintenance payments took account of the financial needs of the child, the income of the parents, prior living standards etc. However several problems were identified with the then existing procedures.

- decisions were discretionary and hence inconsistent and inequitable,
- levels of maintenance were often low,
- there was no automatic review of awards,
- many awards were not paid regularly (DSS, 1990: Para 1.5).

These concerns lead to the Child Support Act 1991 and the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order which was implemented in April 1993. The Order introduced a series of changes to the system of child maintenance. Primarily, in an attempt to ensure fairness and consistency maintenance is now assessed under a formula with set rules and amounts, instead of being left to the discretion of the court. Maintenance is assessed, collected and enforced by the Child Support Agency, established within the Department of Health and Social Services.

Additionally, all carer parents who are in receipt of means-tested benefits must use the agency unless 'good cause' for not doing so can be shown. This has been defined as situations where the recovery of maintenance payments would either place the carer parent or their child at risk of 'undue harm and distress.' If the carer parent refuses to co-operate with the Agency and 'good cause' has not been shown they will undergo a benefit deduction. The amount is currently £19.16 per week. Changes introduced in October

chapter 3 practical support

1996 mean that the benefit penalty can now be imposed for three years.

Finally, in an effort to encourage lone parents to take up paid employment, regulations to Family Credit were also changed (See above). There is no financial gain however for those who stay on Income Support. Any maintenance recovered is effectively deducted pound for pound from their benefit.

The Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order has come under much criticism. Perhaps the most vehement attack has been aimed at the 'reduced benefit direction', which can be enforced if lone parents refuse to name the absent father without 'good cause'. An examination of the operation of the 'good cause' clause has revealed a great deal of variation in the way it has been interpreted, owing to officer's discretion (Clark et al, 1996). It has been argued that Income Support is a subsistence level benefit and therefore should not be reduced in any way. Since statistics suggest that the 'reduced benefit direction' was imposed in 27,478 cases in 1995/6 investigated in the relation to the requirement to co-operate in the U.K, the effect may well be catastrophic (CSA, 1996).

Criticism has been aimed at the Act for not addressing poverty amongst lone parent families. Lone mothers in receipt of Income Support gain nothing from any child maintenance collected by the Agency. Since the majority of young lone mothers are currently in the receipt of Income Support, this may well be viewed as absurd. In fact Clark et al's (1996) in-depth study of the Act's effect on 53 lone mothers, found that none of the mothers were any better off financially. Lone mothers who received enough maintenance to lift them just above the Income support level were no better off because they lost help with housing costs and free school meals.

Having examined developments in social security, the Social Fund and Child Maintenance, the next

section of the report goes on to analyse the incomes of the young lone parents in the survey.

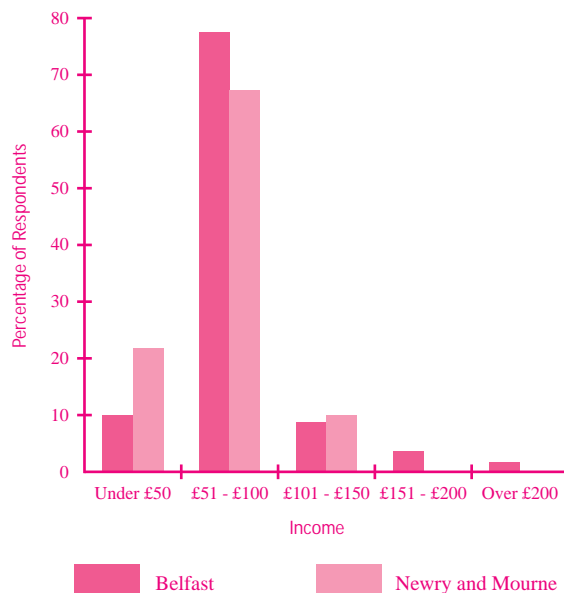
3.3. THE STUDY RESULTS

Income Levels

Respondent's in Gingerbread's survey were asked to give their weekly income levels. Figure.8. below outlines the weekly income levels of respondents in Belfast and in Newry and Mourne.

39

Figure.8.
Weekly Income Levels of Respondents



Most of the respondents were living on a very low income. 87.8% of the sample in Belfast and 90.9% of the sample in Newry and Mourne were living on £100 a week or less. These figures are very similar to those produced by a recent study of young lone mothers in Northern Ireland carried out by Save The Children, which indicated that 87 per cent of a sample of 91, lived on a net weekly income of £100 or less (SCF, 1996:27).

When compared to the incomes of lone parent families in general, young lone mothers in this study fair badly again. Spence's (1996) study of lone parents in the Northern HSS Board area

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40

found that 60 per cent of respondents were living on an income of less than £100 (Spence, 1996b: 18). The lower income in this study is likely to be related to the age of respondents, and as indicated through previous studies, the fact that the majority of them are single, never-married lone mothers.

The findings that 90 per cent of respondents in both research areas were living on £100 a week or less gives cause for concern when one considers that the average gross weekly household income for all households in Northern Ireland in 1994/5 was £326.32, illustrating therefore that young lone mothers are amongst the poorest families (NI FES, 1994/5: 15).

Further concern can also be registered when one considers that 25.4 per cent of young lone parents living on £100 a week or less had two or more children, and 8.5 per cent had three or more children. Bradshaw et al's (1997) study revealed that the average parent spends £47.20 per week on a child. This figure increases to £51.29 when child care costs are taken into account. The study illustrates therefore that for respondents with two or more children, an income of £100 or less a week is extremely difficult to live on adequately (Bradshaw et al, 1997:17). Children of young lone mothers are clearly experiencing the effects of low income levels alongside their mothers.

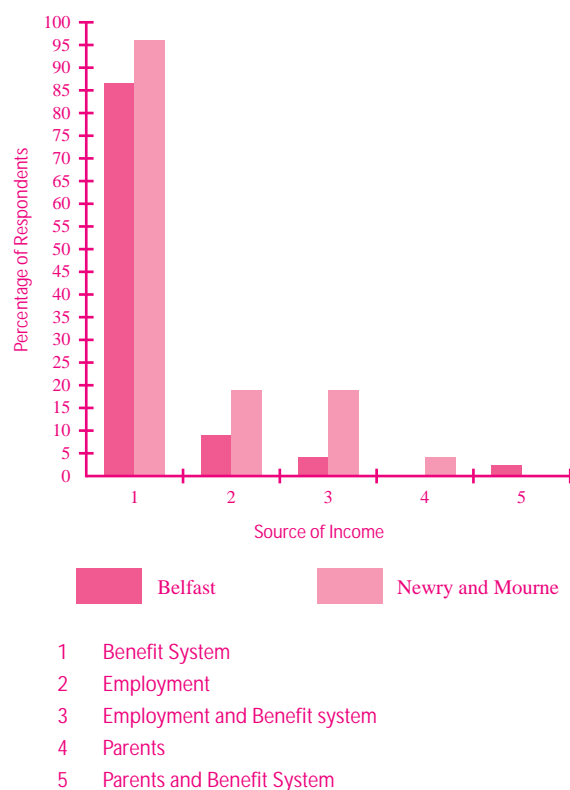
Sources Of Income

A. Income From Benefit Receipt

Evidence suggests that the predominant source of net income for young lone mothers, like the total lone parent population, comes from Income Support. 95.7 per cent of those aged 19 and under, and 89 per cent of those aged 20-24 years were in receipt of Income Support between 1990-1992 (GHS quoted by Burghes and Brown, 1995:24).

In accordance with these studies, the majority of the sample population's income came overwhelmingly from benefit receipt. When asked to reveal where most of their income came from, the majority of respondents in both areas said that their main income source was the benefit system. Figure.9. below outlines the main source of income, by research area.

Figure.9.
Main Source of Income, By Research Area



Respondents were asked to outline the benefits that they received. Table.8. below identifies benefits that respondents were in receipt of, by research area.

chapter 3 practical support

Table.8.
Benefit Receipt, By Research Area

Benefit	% of Respondents in Receipt of Benefit, Belfast	% of Respondents in Receipt of Benefit, Newry and Mourne
Income Support	82.7	95.8
Family Credit	10.1	4.2
Housing Benefit	26.6	41.7
Child Benefit	84.2	87.5
One Parent Benefit	71.2	58.3
Disability Living Allowance	4.3	4.2
Incapacity Benefit	0.7	0
Social Fund Grant or Loan	10.1	4.2

Income Support

The highest levels of uptake for any benefit were for Income Support. The levels of uptake were very similar to those for the populations of 16-24 year olds in the GHS 1990-1992. In addition, the figures resemble those of single lone mothers (1991) which illustrated that nine out of ten claimed Income Support (GHS 1991 quoted by Burghes, 1993:9).

Child Benefit and One Parent Benefit

Child Benefit had one of the highest levels of uptake by respondents of any benefit. However, 9.8 per cent of respondents said that they were claiming One Parent Benefit but did not say that they were claiming Child Benefit, so it is likely that the figures for uptake of Child Benefit may be higher.

Figures for One Parent Benefit appear somewhat low. This may be because after the April 1997 changes, One Parent Benefit was distributed as part of the Child Benefit rate. Some respondents may not have been aware of this and therefore would not have noted that they were receiving One Parent Benefit.

Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit

As an indicator of the health of young lone parents, some 4.3% of respondents in Belfast and 4.2% of respondents in Newry and Mourne were

in receipt of D.L.A. One person in Belfast was in receipt of Incapacity Benefit.

Social Fund Grants and Loans

Fourteen people in Belfast, and one person in Newry and Mourne were in receipt of a Social Fund Grant or Loan.

41

B. Income From Employment

Income from employment affected only a small minority of the sample. Only 8.6 per cent of the sample in Belfast indicated that most of their weekly income came from employment; no-one in Newry and Mourne said that this was the case. In addition, 4.3 per cent of the sample in Belfast indicated that most of their weekly income came from a combination of income through work, and income through benefits.

10.1 % of respondents in Belfast and 4.2% of respondents in Newry and Mourne did in fact claim Family Credit. Of those claiming Family Credit and in paid employment, 16.7 per cent were in full time work, and 83.3 were working part-time. This indicates that 63 per cent of those in Belfast in paid employment, and the one person in paid employment in Newry and Mourne, were on low earnings.

A more detailed analysis of the figures suggests that workers who described themselves as being in full-time employment, were less likely to claim Family Credit. Only 28.6 per cent of full-time workers in Belfast, claimed Family Credit, compared with 83.3 per cent of respondents describing themselves as part-time workers.

Respondents in paid employment were more likely than those not in paid employment to have higher income levels, although this was not significant. Table.9. below illustrates the income levels for respondents of different employment statuses.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

Table.9.
Income Level, By Employment Status

Income Per Week	% of Respondents Working Full-Time in Income Bracket	% of Respondents Working Part-Time in Income Bracket	% of Respondents Not Paid Work in Income Bracket
Less than £50	0	0	12.8
£51 - £100	37.5	83.3	78.7
£101 - £150	12.5	16.7	7.8
£151 - £200	37.5	0	0.7
Over £200	12.5	0	0
Total	100%	100%	100%

It is evident from Table.9. that part-time work did not make a big difference to the income levels of respondents. It is likely that this is due to the fact that the Family Credit system gives on the one hand, but takes on the other by its inclusion in calculations for Housing Benefit. Full-time work however, was making a substantive difference to the income levels of respondents.

C. Income From Maintenance

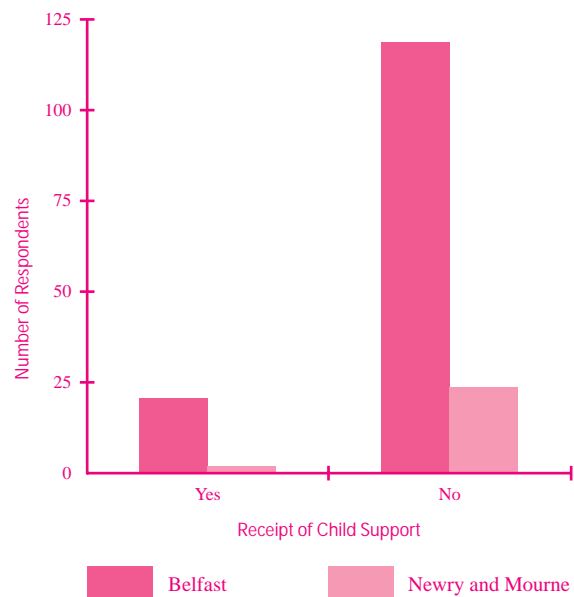
The numbers of lone mothers in receipt of maintenance decreased between 1979 and 1989. Whilst 1979 saw half of all lone parents on supplementary benefit in receipt of maintenance, by 1989 this had declined to 23 per cent of those on Income Support (DSS, 1990:5).

Figures for 1989 indicate that single lone mothers were less likely to receive maintenance payments than those who had been married. Fourteen per cent of single, never - married mothers were in receipt of maintenance compared to 40 per cent of divorced mothers and 32 per cent of separated mothers (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991: Table 7.1). This is significant considering the majority of single never - married mothers are under the age of 25.

Age - related figures from the GHS 1990-1992 indicate that only 10.4 per cent of single lone mothers under 20, and 17.3 per cent of single lone mothers aged 20-24 years receive maintenance (Burghes and Brown, 1995: Table 13).

It was a matter of grave concern to see that only 15.1% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 4.2% of young lone mothers (1 person) in Newry and Mourne received any maintenance. Figure.10 shows those in receipt of maintenance by research area.

Figure.10.
Respondents in Receipt of Maintenance



Maintenance receipt was not affected by age or by marital status. Approximately the same percentage of respondents aged 16-19 years and 20-24 years received maintenance (15.1% and 13% respectively). Approximately the same percentage of single lone mothers and separated lone mothers were in receipt of maintenance also (13.8% and 11.1% respectively).

Of those receiving maintenance however, 77.3 per cent would not have seen any increase in their income levels, since they were also in receipt of Income Support. One young mother from the Belfast focus group session was well aware of this fact. Her comments illustrate how the introduction of the Child Support Agency has actually worsened her situation. By focusing strictly on formal maintenance arrangements the Child Support (N.I) Order has underestimated the extent to which the father of her child was actually making contributions towards her child.

chapter 3 practical support

"You see what happens is that they take money off the child's father and he's getting less money. You see the father of my child was paying me money and then they intervened and took money off him, but we are both worse off, because I don't see any of it."

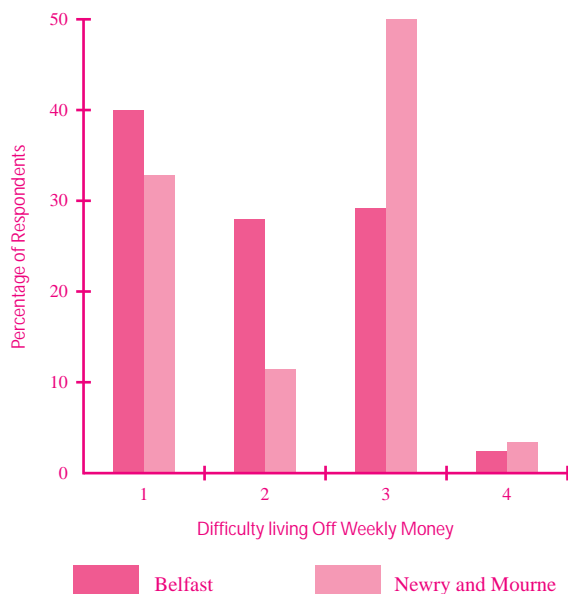
(MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

It is clear therefore that maintenance made little contribution to the income levels of the majority of young lone parents in the study.

Young Lone Mothers Views About Their Financial Situation

Respondents were asked to describe their financial situation. It was not surprising, given the low income levels to see 96.4 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 95.8 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne describe themselves as 'always', 'often' or 'sometimes' having difficulty living off their weekly income. Figure.11. below illustrates respondent's perception of their financial situation, by research area.

Figure.11.
Respondents' Perception of Financial Situation



Respondents in Belfast were significantly more likely to describe themselves as 'always' or 'often' having difficulty living off their weekly money, than respondents in Newry and Mourne.

Although respondents gave no indication as to why this is so, one possible explanation is perhaps that respondents in Belfast were more aware of the difference between their level of income and the income levels of others living in the city.

43

Table.10.

Respondents' Perceptions of Financial Situation, By Research Area

Research Area	% of Respondents "always" or "often" experiencing money difficulties	% of Respondents "sometimes" or "never" experiencing money difficulties	Total
Belfast	66.9	33.1	100
Newry and Mourne	45.8	54.2	100

* Significant at 0.05 level (For a description of the statistical test used, a definition of statistical significance, and a description of significance levels, see Appendix.5).

More detailed analysis revealed that other factors also played a part in respondents' perceptions of their financial situations. Predictably, respondents living on smaller weekly incomes were significantly more likely to describe themselves as 'always' or 'often' having difficulties living on their weekly incomes. 92.2% of respondents who described themselves as 'always' or 'often' experiencing difficulties had an income of £100 or less a week.

- 1 Always Has Difficulty Living Off Weekly Money
- 2 Often Has Difficulty Living Off Weekly Money
- 3 Sometimes Has Difficulty Living Off Weekly Money
- 4 Never Has Difficulty Living Off Weekly Money

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Only 7.8 per cent of respondents who described themselves as ‘always’ or ‘often’ experiencing difficulties had an income of £101 a week or more. Furthermore respondents in receipt of Income Support were significantly more likely to indicate that they ‘always’ or ‘often’ had difficulties living on their weekly incomes than respondents who did not claim Income Support - those on Family Credit or Disability Living Allowance. Whilst 68.1 per cent of respondents in receipt of Income Support described themselves as ‘always’ or ‘often’ having difficulties living off their weekly incomes, only 40 per cent of respondents not claiming Income Support, suggested the same. See Table.11. below.

Table.11.
Receipt of Income Support, By Respondents’ Perceptions of Difficulties Living Off Weekly Income

Receipt of Income Support	% of Respondents “always” or “often” experiencing difficulties Living Off Weekly Income	% of Respondents “sometimes or “never” experiencing difficulties Living Off Weekly Income	Total
Yes	68.1	31.9	100
No	40	60	100

* Significant at 0.01 level

An open-ended question asked respondents to explain the type of difficulties that they experienced living off their weekly income. 38.8 % of respondents in Belfast and one third of respondents in Newry and Mourne put forward responses. The range of difficulties, and explicit nature of responses indicate that some young lone mothers do suffer extreme difficulties living off their weekly income.

Table.12.
Type of Difficulties Experienced Living Off Weekly Money

Type of Difficulty	% Respondents Belfast	% Respondents Newry and Mourne
Buying clothing for children	27.8	
Cannot afford School Uniforms	3.7	
Cannot afford nappies	16.7	
Cannot afford groceries	18.5	12.5
Cannot afford household items	7.4	
Cannot afford bus fares		12.5
Just have to do without	14.8	
Once bills paid no money	31.5	16.7
Cannot afford holidays	3.7	
Cannot afford Christmas/Birthdays	3.7	12.5

* Respondents could put forward more than one response.

These findings indicate the true hardship of many young lone mothers living on low incomes from week to week. Clearly, the children of young lone mothers are experiencing the effects of impoverished incomes alongside their mothers. It is distressing to see that so many cannot afford even the basics needed for children such as nappies and groceries.

Some of the responses below indicate the true desperation of young lone mothers living off impoverished weekly incomes:

“After I have bought food, coal, paid electric, there is no money left to buy kids clothes, and I have to get in debt for household items.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN, BELFAST)

“I receive £64 per week I often can't afford coal for heating or nappies for my daughter at nights.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

chapter 3 practical support

"I think it is hard living on what benefit I got. You don't get enough to live on or run a house or feed yourself and a child."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"The money I receive covers the bills and just, I don't have any money left over to buy even a pint of milk during the week."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"The money I get doesn't even feed and cloth both of my children, when I also have to buy coal and electric cards."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF TWO, BELFAST)

"Where I live I need money for bus fares to go anywhere with two children."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF TWO, NEWRY)

It is interesting to note that some of the particular items mentioned, reflect the findings of Middleton et al's (1997) survey on spending on children and childhood poverty. Spending by parents on clothes formed 17 per cent of all spending on babies, with nappies 15 per cent. Middleton points out however that spending on nappies for babies represents 27% of the national average Income Support allowance for babies, therefore severely reducing the weekly income of those living on Income Support (Middleton et al, 1997:21).

In addition Middleton found that poor children were much more likely to go without each item from a list of 21 essential items needed for bringing up children in Britain today. Poor children were particularly likely to go without food and

clothing. Children in one-parent families where the mother was not working were found to be seven and a half times more likely to be 'poor', than those in a two parent family where neither was working (Middleton et al, 1997:56).

Problems living from day to day on weekly incomes were further exacerbated in some cases by a respondent's age. Younger lone parents under 18 years of age receive a lower level of benefit than those aged 18 or over. Those in receipt of Income Support who are living with parents, receive only £62.25 per week; those living independently, who must be doing so for 'good reason,' receive £71.55. For those aged 18 years or over however, Income Support is ten pounds higher at £81.80 (1997/8 Rates).

For young lone mothers under the age of sixteen however the situation gets progressively worse. The only benefit that they are entitled to is Child Benefit for their child, which from April 1997 was £17.10. This small weekly income puts particular strain on younger lone mothers, who were particularly aware of having impoverished incomes.

"Because I was under 18 when I had my wee girl, I got no money at all-Nothing. I mean my mummy was supposed, expected to keep both me and her (the baby) with the money that she maybe got. My mummy got £20 a week and she was expected to keep me and my daughter for £20 a week. I mean we've a large family, we've six kids . . . And £20 a week will get you nothing, I mean nappies cost £6 or £7. And I mean with me still being at school. So I took on a part-time job to help with the costs."

(BELFAST MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

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46

Further analysis of preliminary data indicated that young lone mothers under the age of 20 were significantly more likely to have a lower income than young lone mothers aged 20-24. The relationship between having an income below £50 a week and being aged 16-19 is extremely strong. Table.13. below illustrates income per week, by age.

Table.13.
Income Per Week, By Age

Income Per Week	% of Respondents Aged 16-19 In Income Bracket	% of Respondents Aged 20-21 In Income Bracket
£50 per week or less	26.4	3.7
£51 per week or more	73.6	96.3
Total	100	100

* Significant at 0.001 level.

Other mothers pointed to the problem of social fund loans and the diminishing effect that repaying them was having on their weekly incomes.

“I have loans taken from my Income Support, which leaves me not a lot I pay for coal and electricity and general house needs and babies nappies food and clothes. But I’m always struggling because there is not enough money coming in.”

(BELFAST LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

The dilemma here was that young lone mothers often had to apply for loans in order to purchase items for a house, which they would not have had otherwise.

“When I got my house I had nothing. I can honestly turn in and say all I had was a bed. I went to the DHSS for money and they gave me a loan

of £400 to start me off. They took £13 a week off me, off my Income Support. It was hard like.”

(BELFAST LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

Apart from difficulties experienced living from day to day on weekly incomes, respondents also highlighted specific points in time when they suffered financial difficulties. Christmas and Birthdays put a particular strain on young lone mothers finances, as the quote below illustrates.

“It is very difficult to live off with three children. My family do not live near me. I get anxious about Birthdays and Christmas. I want my children to have a good life.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF THREE, NEWRY)

“Yes Christmas is a real struggle, because mine can talk back to me now and she’s going through the books, and telling me what she wants. And you’re thinking ‘Oh God, please don’t’, and she wants everything in that book. And you know yourself that when you’re a parent you want the best for your kids. Give her the best that I never got. She’s looking and you’re thinking ‘Oh my God’ and you see all the £100 signs. I mean I’ve actually started now . . . getting her stuff in for Christmas. That’s how bad it is. Last year I sat with 50p in my purse on Christmas day.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE, BELFAST)

chapter 3 practical support

Young Lone Mothers and Debt

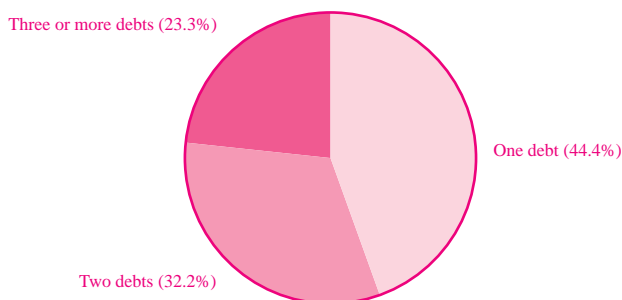
Living in debt is a common feature of lone parent life. A study of lone parents in Derry found that 68 per cent had substantial debts and 81 per cent regularly borrowed from relatives and friends (CPAG N.I., 1994). Last year's study by Gingerbread in collaboration with the Northern Health and Social Services Board produced similar findings: 61.2 per cent of the sample said that they had debts (Spence, 1996b:19).

Young lone parents in this study in both the urban and rural areas had debts. A higher percentage of respondents in Belfast had debts as compared to Newry and Mourne, although this was not significant. 61.6% of respondents in Belfast and 41.7% of respondents in Newry and Mourne had debts. There was no significant relationship between debt and income, or age, or employment status, illustrating therefore that young lone mothers in various situations and of various ages experienced problems of debt.

Number of Debts

The number of debts amongst respondents was worryingly high. Of those who had debts (95 respondents), five respondents declined to give a description. Of those who did the majority, 55.5% had two or more debts. Figure.12. outlines the number of debts that the sample as a whole had.

Figure.12.
Number of Debts -
Total Sample Population



There were no significant differences in the number of debts between each research area.

Sources of Debt

For respondents in both research areas the main source of debt, in accordance with the findings of other research, was catalogue payments (Spence, 1996b: 20; CPAG, 1994). 74.1% of respondents in Belfast, and 55.6% of respondents in Newry and Mourne owed more than one catalogue payment. Young lone mothers in the study turned to catalogues for providing essential items for a new home and items needed for a new baby or growing child.

It is clear that catalogue credit is the most easily accessible form of credit available to young lone mothers, since few meet the criteria for accessing other forms of credit, such as credit cards, bank loans, and retail cards. However interest on catalogue credit is often higher than that of other forms of credit. It is disconcerting therefore to see that young lone mothers on already impoverished incomes may be paying more interest on catalogue credit, than wealthier people who can access alternative forms of credit with smaller rates of interest.

The range of sources of debt mentioned was illuminating. Table.14. below illustrates sources of debt, by research area.

Table.14.
Source of Debt, By Research Area

Source of Debt	% of Respondents Belfast	% of Respondents Newry and Mourne
Rent	7.4	0
Mortgage	1.2	0
Heating/Lighting Bill	18.5	44.4
Coal Man	1.2	11.1
Hire Purchase Payment	33.3	11.1
Car Loan Payment	3.7	0
Catalogue Payment	74.1	55.6
Credit Union	7.4	0
Loan Company	7.4	0
Bank Loan	1.2	0
Social Fund Loan	8.6	11.1
Family/Friends	2.4	0
Retail Card	0	11.1
Student Loan	1.2	0

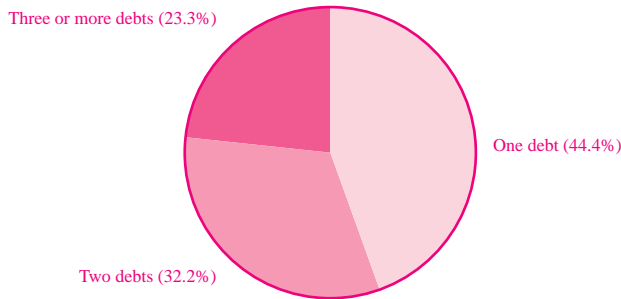
* Respondents could tick more than one response.

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Amount of Debt

The amount of debt that respondents were in, in both research areas was worryingly high. Most respondents owed between £100 - £300, but almost a quarter of respondents in both areas owed £501 or more (24.6% in Belfast, and 22.2% in Newry and Mourne). This is illustrated in Figure.13. below.

Figure.13.
Debt Amount, By Research Area



The amount of debt that young lone mothers are experiencing is a matter of grave concern when considered alongside their impoverished weekly income levels. What is ironic however, is that the level of weekly income was clearly a crucial factor in pushing young lone mothers into debt in the first place. Figure.14, 15, 16, and 17 below illustrate the amount of debt respondents are in, by weekly income levels.

Figure.14.
Debt Amount of Respondents with Weekly Income of Less than £50

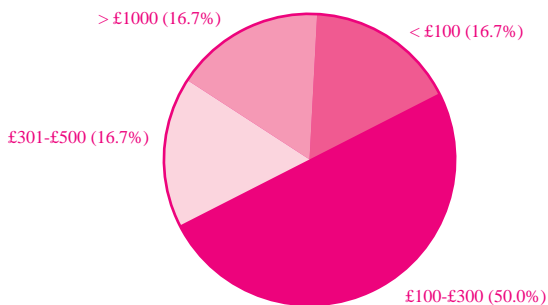


Figure.15.
Debt Amount of Respondents With Weekly Income £51 - £100

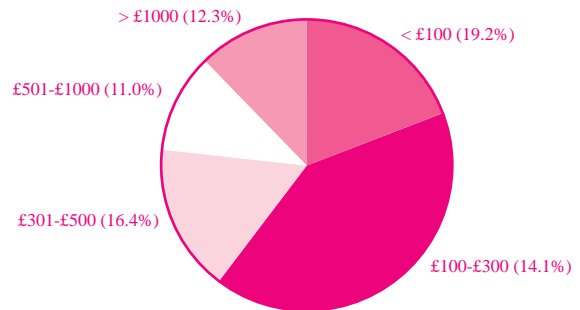


Figure.16.
Debt Amount of Respondents With Weekly Income £101 - £150

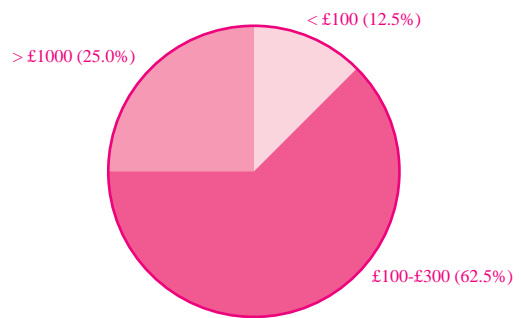
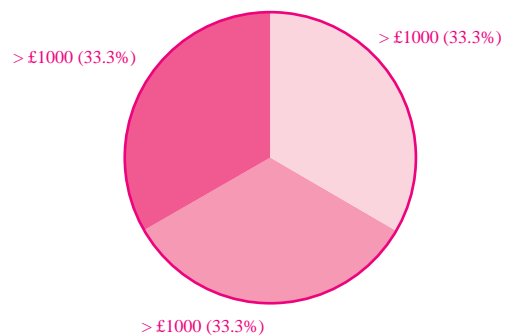


Figure.17.
Debt Amount of Respondents With Weekly Income £151 - £200



chapter 3 practical support

3.4. YOUNG LONE MOTHERS: FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The financial support services required by young lone mothers centred on two issues - Information on benefits, and financial aid.

Information on Benefits

In an attempt to analyse how young lone mothers found out about their benefit entitlement when changing status to become a lone parent, respondents were asked who they had contacted for information.

Table. 15.
Sources of Contact For Information on Benefits, By Research Area

Source of Contact	% of Respondents Belfast	% of Respondents Newry and Mourne
Parent/s	35.9	27.3
Relative/s other than	8.6	4.5
Friend/s	22.3	13.6
DHSS Benefits Office	42.4	63.6
Gingerbread	0.7	4.5
Advice Centre	23.7	4.5
Other	7.8	4.3

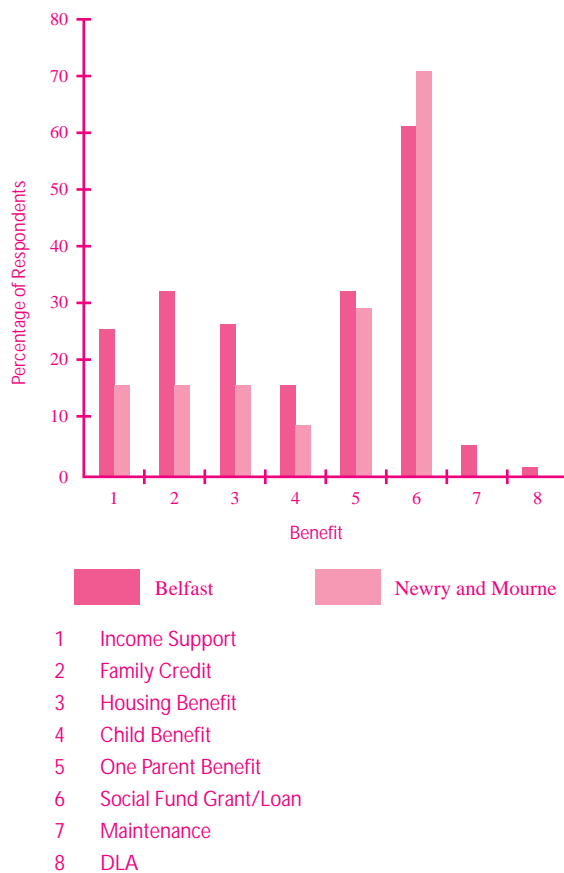
* Respondents could tick more than one response.

The table illustrates that a large number of respondents found out about their benefit entitlement informally, through parent/s, relative/s other than parents, and friend/s. A third of respondent/s in both research areas found out about benefits solely through informal sources (36% respondents in Belfast, 31.8% respondents in Newry and Mourne).

It is likely that this factor contributed to the large number of respondents requiring more information on specific benefits. 48.2% of respondents in Belfast and 63.6% of respondents in Newry and Mourne required more information on specific benefits. Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of six main benefits affecting lone parents, which they would like further information on. There were no

significant differences between the research areas in the number of respondents requiring further information on benefits. Figures.18. below highlight the benefits that respondents wanted information on, by research area.

Figure. 18.
Benefits For Which Further Information is Required, By Research Area



* Respondents could tick more than one response.

The largest number of respondents in both areas required information on Social Fund Grants/Loans, reflecting in part the desperate financial situations of respondents.

Of the 48.2 per cent of respondents in Belfast who required further benefit information, 56.7 per cent requested information on one benefit, 19.4 per cent information on two, and 23.9 per cent information on three or more benefits. In Newry and Mourne the majority of respondents

49

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50

required information on one benefit (78.6%), with 7.1 per cent of respondents wanting information on two, three or more benefits. Therefore, between one fifth and one quarter of respondents in both areas required information on three or more benefits, illustrating a real need for benefit knowledge in some cases.

Financial Aid

Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of incomes ranging from less than £10 to more than £49, how much money they would need each week to make living off their money easier. Two respondents in Belfast did not answer the question, and a further five mothers in Belfast and one mother in Newry and Mourne did not answer because they had previously reported that they ‘never’ had any difficulties living off their weekly money. However of those who did respond, the largest number of respondents in both urban and rural area indicated that an extra £20-£29 per week would make the difference. 47% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 39.2 per cent of mothers in Newry and Mourne indicated that they would manage easier, with an extra £20 - £29 a week or less.

This amount of money may mean the difference for young lone mothers between coping and not coping, both financially and emotionally. It is clear therefore that young lone mothers who apply for Child Benefit and Income Support after April 1998, and therefore receive both the lower rate of Child Benefit and Family Premium on Income Support, will find it extremely hard to cope on the weekly incomes that benefit receipt alone provides. It is critical that these changes do not go ahead, since they are likely to have an adverse impact on the physical and emotional well-being of many young lone mothers.

3.5. SUMMARY

- 90% of young lone mothers in both research areas were living on £100 a week or less.
- The majority of the sample's income came from benefit receipt, few young lone mothers gained income through employment.
- The predominant source of income was Income Support - 95.8% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 95.8% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were in receipt of Income Support.
- Child maintenance had little impact on the incomes of young lone mothers since only 21 mothers in Belfast and 1 mother in Newry and Mourne were in receipt of it, and the majority of those that were, were also in receipt of Income Support.
- Young lone mothers reported much difficulty living on their weekly incomes. Income Support did not in some cases meet the normal weekly living costs, and did not allow for one-off expenses such as buying items for a new home or providing for a new baby.
- The payment of Income Support at a lower rate to mothers under 18 put a further burden on young lone mothers of that age.
- 61.6% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 41.7% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were in debt. The main source of debt was catalogues.

chapter 3 practical support

- The highest percentage of young lone mothers said that an extra £20 - £29 a week would make living off their weekly incomes a lot easier, and would often mean the difference between coping and not coping both financially and emotionally.
- Almost half of young lone mothers in Belfast and two thirds of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne required further benefit information and advice.

Chapter Four: Employment

52

Obtaining employment is one of the most effective ways of decreasing material hardship (Bryson et al, 1997). Employment studies however, have consistently illustrated that the U.K has one of the lowest employment rates for lone mothers, and in a comparison of nineteen countries had the lowest proportion of lone mothers in full time employment (Bradshaw et al, 1997). This chapter of the report looks at the employment of young lone mothers.

Primarily, it outlines changing trends in Conservative Government policy on the employment of lone mothers, with a brief look at the new Labour Government’s ‘welfare to work’ proposals. It then summarises previous research on employment amongst the lone parent population and identifies the barriers to work that lone mothers face. The focus then turns to employment and employment intentions of young lone mothers in this study. The chapter finishes by looking at some of the support services that respondents requested in relation to employment.

4.1. POLICY CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENTS IN GOVERNMENT THINKING ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF LONE PARENTS

Conservative Government Policy

There has always been an ambiguity over the way in which the personal obligations and duties of lone mothers should be defined. As Lewis (1988) states, ‘Are they mothers or workers?’ The early Conservative Government response to this was to remain neutral in terms of encouraging or discouraging employment amongst lone mothers. Choice was to remain with lone mothers about whether or not to take up paid employment. In evidence to the National Audit Office, the DSS defined this philosophy like so:

‘Social Security benefits are structured so that, while not requiring lone parents with children up to the age of 16 to be available for work, they nevertheless do not unduly discourage lone parents from working if they wish to do so’.

(NAO, 1990:Para1.5).

Concern over the growing numbers of lone parents during the 1980’s claiming Income Support and the consequent spiralling fiscal costs, lead the Conservative Government of the 1990s to change its philosophy from one of neutrality, to one of positive encouragement. Initiatives designed to encourage lone parents to return to the workforce were implemented (See Family Credit, Chapter.3. above).

Family Credit was regarded by the Conservatives as the ‘cornerstone’ of their work incentives strategy (Conservative Party, 1997). In reality however lone parents wishing to return to the workforce had little incentive to work. Financial incentives were limited, owing to the low pay generally experienced by lone parents, and choice was restricted through lack of adequate and affordable child care facilities.

New Labour’s Welfare To Work Policy

The Labour Government’s ‘welfare to work’ policy has singled out lone parents as a target group and has pledged to ‘tear down the barriers’ which prevent lone mothers from working (Harman quoted by IPPR, 1997). The policy therefore aims to overcome some of the disincentive problems that were previously ignored.

chapter 4 practical support

An initial funding of £200 million will be spent solely on a scheme to help lone parents to work over the next five years. The scheme will encompass five main elements which include job search, training and after-school care. The scheme will not be implemented in Northern Ireland until April 1998, and is only in its primary stages of testing in England. It therefore remains to be seen whether this scheme will be successful in helping lone parents into work.

4.2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Lone Mothers: Involvement in Employment Data from the GHS (1993) illustrates that lone mothers generally are less likely to be in employment than married mothers. 63.6% of married mothers compared to 40 per cent of lone mothers were in employment in 1993 (GHS Table 2.28 quoted by NCOPE, 1996:6).

Evidence suggests however that still fewer young lone mothers are likely to be in employment. Figures for 1993 indicate that only 29 per cent of single lone mothers with dependent children were in paid employment compared to 52 per cent of widowed lone mothers, 46 per cent of divorced mothers, and 45 per cent of separated mothers (Ibid). This is staggering considering the majority of single lone mothers are aged under 25.

Data from the 1991 Northern Ireland Census which looks specifically at the employment status of lone mothers under the age of 25, indicates that only 12.4 per cent of young lone mothers in Northern Ireland are in paid employment. Table.16. below illustrates the economic activity of young lone mothers in Northern Ireland.

Table.16.

Economic Activity of Young Lone Mothers in Northern Ireland

Economic Activity	No. of Young Lone Mothers	% of Young Lone Mothers
In Employment	667	12.4
On a Government Scheme	39	0.7
Unemployed	602	11.2
Student	42	0.8
Economically Inactive	4,016	74.8
Total	5,366	100

* Source: Adapted from the Northern Ireland Census 1991 Housing and Household Composition Report by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Department of Finance and Personnel

Data also suggests that single, lone mothers in paid employment are more likely to be in part-time work than other lone mothers. Between 1990-1992, 35.6 per cent of single mothers were in part-time work, compared to 27.1 per cent of other lone mothers and 28.5 per cent of married mothers (Ibid). As a group their average net weekly earnings are less too (around 15% lower), a reflection in part of their greater propensity to work part time.

Although few single, lone mothers are involved in paid work, statistics from 1990-1992 suggest that a higher proportion of single, lone mothers, as compared to all other mothers, were looking for work (Ibid). Studies have consistently shown that the majority of young lone mothers also wish to gain employment, or, amongst the youngest of young lone mothers, resume training or education. However, it must be pointed out that for several of those either wishing to gain employment or to resume training or education, motherhood is seen as their priority until the child is in full-time education, indicating therefore the importance that parenting has to mothers who are parenting alone (Burghes and Brown, 1995; Speak et al, 1995; Clark, 1989).

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54

Barriers to Employment

Research has consistently illustrated that a lone mother's choice about whether or not to enter the workforce is severely restricted. In reality there has been little 'choice' for lone mothers because employment support is too weak. Let us first look however at demographic and social characteristics which limit the employment choices of lone mothers.

A - Demographic and Social Characteristics

1. Ages of Children

Research has illustrated that most mothers, lone or otherwise with children under five are less likely to work, since the younger children are the less likely their mothers are to work (Burghes, 1993: 9). Only 11 per cent of lone parents with a child under five, worked 24 hours a week or more in 1993 compared to half of those with teenage children (Ford et al, 1994).

It is likely that this factor has greater prominence in young lone mothers' decisions to work. According to GHS 1990-1992 figures 100 per cent of single lone mothers under 20 and 92.1 of those aged 20-24, had a youngest dependent child under 5 (GHS quoted by Burghes and Brown, 1995:24).

2. Qualifications and Experience

Recent research by Bryson et al (1997) which followed a representative sample of lone mothers from 1991-1995 pointed to low levels of qualifications and work experience as one of two main reasons why lone mothers in Britain remain out of work (Bryson et al, 1997 quoted in JRF, 1997:2). Low qualifications depressed earnings capacity and therefore made it almost impossible for lone mothers to meet the costs of child care while working.

Young lone parents may face particular difficulties associated with limited work experience.

Significantly, the youth of young lone mothers may mean that few have had any substantial work experience before becoming pregnant. At a time when jobs are scarce and more and more people either have on-the-job experience or hold higher qualifications, limited experience makes it harder to enter the labour market. Bradshaw and Millar's (1991) survey found that whilst two-thirds of single, lone mothers had expressed an interest in employment training, only 2 per cent had ever taken part (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991:61).

B - Employment Support

3. Child Care

Compared to most industrialised countries, the UK has exceptionally few public child care facilities. A recent survey by the Daycare Trust has shown that there is only one public child care place for every nine children under eight years old (Daycare Trust quote in CABx, 1997).

Furthermore, the public education system only provides places for just over than half of children aged 3-5 years (Bradshaw et al, 1997 quoted in JRF, 1997:3). The result is that many parents have to rely on private child care provision if they want to enter the workforce.

According to Bradshaw et al in his study of employment patterns of lone mothers in nineteen countries, mothers in the U.K pay more for full-time formal care than in any of the other countries studied. This high cost of private child care provision acts as a significant barrier to lone mothers who simply cannot afford to pay for it. In fact Bradshaw found that the very high level of child care costs in the U.K was the key factor in explaining why lone mothers in the U.K were less likely to take up employment than lone mothers in any other country (Ibid).

The cost of child care was acknowledged to some extent, by the earnings disregard of £60 on Family Credit, for child care costs for lone mothers in employment. However, in 1995/6 for a lone mother claiming Family Credit alone this offered a maximum income increase of £28 per week. Whilst this sum provides some help, it hardly covers the cost of full-time child care for even one child (Speak et al, 1995:46). Spence, for example found that the cost of child care in Northern Ireland to 37 per cent of her sample, was more than £60 per week (Spence, 1996b:42). Furthermore, child care is likely to be relatively more expensive to young lone mothers since they earn less per week than all other mothers. Findings from Bradshaw and Millar's survey reflect the unsuitability of the present child care situation. Fifty-five per cent of lone parents said that, were suitable child-care to become available, they would start work sooner than planned (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991:43).

Inevitably the majority of working mothers, both lone and otherwise, do not pay for child care at all but rely on informal care from partners, family and friends (OPCS, 1994). Speak's study of young lone mothers illustrated however, that young lone mothers may have problems over and above other lone parents in relation to the use of informal child care. Of the thirty-seven sample mothers in the study who were not working, only two reported having a family member who could look after their child if they worked. It is evident that this was owing to the fact that few had contact with the child's father, and thus no contact with paternal grandparents. Furthermore, Speak highlights that given the young age of the mothers it was likely that their parents were still young too, and would probably be working and therefore have no time to babysit, or be looking after younger siblings at home. This was therefore a significant obstacle to employment of lone mothers in the study.

4. Benefits-To-Work Transition

The benefit-to-work transition often complicates a lone mothers' decision to enter the workforce. Joshi (1987) argued that the system was too complicated making rational decisions difficult. For those lone mothers moving from Income Support to Family Credit and any other in-work benefits, there is concern that they will put their immediate income at risk on trust of being paid earnings and benefits. Earnings are paid in arrears and there is often a time-lag in obtaining any in-work benefits. In 1990 this time-lag stood at three weeks, (House of Commons, 1991: Col: 577) and as Corden and Craig illustrate, this can cause some financial difficulties:

“Families got into major financial difficulty while they waited for Family Credit and Housing Benefit, with long lasting consequences”.

(CORDON AND CRAIG, 1991:78).

Additional Costs While Working

Currently even full-time employment is often an insecure alternative to claiming benefits. Lone mothers often experience problems with securing an adequate income to overcome the likely losses in free school meals, Housing benefit and any help with mortgage interest repayments, due to the fact that limited qualifications and experience place them in low paid jobs (Bryson et al, 1997).

There are also new obligations with tax and National Insurance to be met, and there are the additional costs of working, such as travel and childcare. Indeed, Bradshaw et al (1997) when comparing the ratio of net income on social assistance to net income in employment, found that for a lone mother with one school-aged child, net disposable income on social assistance after child care and housing costs was 178% of net disposable income when earning half average earnings. Lone mothers therefore were 'much' worse off when working

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56

than when relying solely on benefits, because of the reduced help with housing costs and additional costs in child care when in employment (Bradshaw et al, 1997 quoted in JRF, 1997:3). Having outlined the barriers that lone parents face when making a decision about employment, let us now turn to the employment and employment intentions of young lone parents in this survey.

4.3. THE STUDY RESULTS

The majority of this section contains details relating to those young lone parents who were not in paid employment, and their employment intentions. (For a discussion on lone parents in paid employment, and the advantages and shortcomings of paid work, see Bradshaw et al, 1991; Ford et al, 1994).

Previous Employment of Young Lone Mothers

The majority of respondent's in both research areas had previously been in paid employment, and the majority had worked full-time. 69.6% of respondents in Belfast and 70.8 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne had been employed previously. This figures show a commitment to work amongst the majority of young lone mothers, and appear to fly in the face of stereotypical ideas which suggest that young lone mothers have always relied and will continue to rely, on the state to support them.

Current Employment Status of Respondents

Only a small number of young lone mothers were in paid employment at the time of the study. Twenty respondents in Belfast (14%) and one respondent in Newry and Mourne (4.2%) were in paid employment. Figures.19. and .20. below outline the current employment status of respondents in the study.

Figure.19.
Employment Status of Respondents,
Belfast

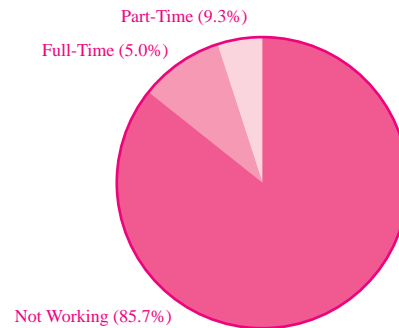
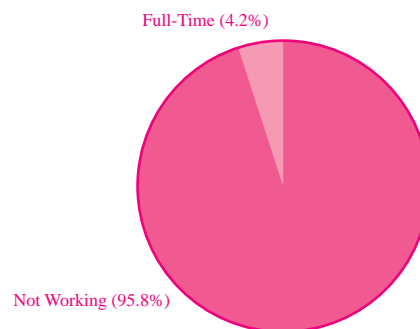


Figure.20.
Employment Status of Respondents-
Newry and Mourne



These findings are remarkably similar to the data from the 1991 Census relating to the numbers of young lone mothers in employment. The total survey sample (Belfast and Newry and Mourne) indicates that some 12.8 per cent of young lone mothers were in employment, compared to a figure of 12.4 per cent provided by Census data (NISRA:Census, 1991).

These findings indicate a lower level of employment amongst young lone mothers in this study than amongst lone parents generally. Spence (1996) reported that 23 per cent of her sample of 197 lone parents in Northern Ireland were in paid employment. This is very similar to the 1991 Census figure which found 24 per cent of all lone parents to be in employment. (1991 Census quoted in Higgins et al, 1997)

chapter 4 practical support

The findings reflect those of other research studies on lone parents and employment in that they illustrate that the majority of lone parents who do work, work part-time (Bradshaw et al, 1991: 32; McKay et al, 1994:9).

More detailed analysis of the data illustrates a slightly higher percentage of those under 20 years of age in employment, and a lower percentage of those aged 20-24 in employment when compared to GHS data. Specific age related figures from the GHS suggest that of all single, lone mothers, 15 per cent of those under 20, and 20.1 per cent of those aged 20-24, are in paid employment. This compares to 36.6 per cent of those aged 25 and over (GHS 1990-1992 quoted by Burghes and Brown, 1995:24). Table.17. below illustrates the employment status of the total sample of young lone mothers, by age.

Table. 17
Employment Status, By Age of Respondent

Employment Status	% Respondents	% Respondents	Total
In Paid Work (Full and Part-Time)	16.7	83.3	100
Not in Paid Work	11	89	100

Those respondents with a child under one were significantly less likely to be in paid employment than respondents who did not have a child under one. See Table.18. below.

Table. 18.
Employment Status of Respondents with Child Under 1

Employment Status	Respondent Has Child Under 1	Respondent Does Not Have Child Under 1
In Paid Work (Full and Part-Time)	3.20%	18.80%
Not in Paid Work	96.80	81.20%
Total	100	100

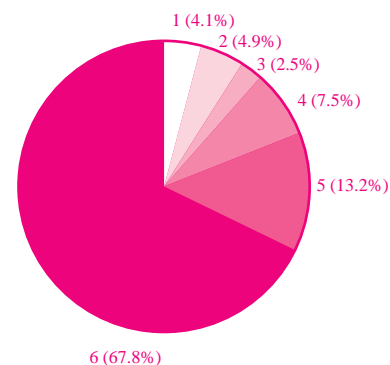
* Significant at 0.01 level

3.2.5. Status of Young Lone Mothers Not in Paid Work

Respondents who were not in paid work were asked to indicate from a range of responses what their non-employment status was. One respondent from Belfast declined to answer, but of those who did the majority of respondents described themselves as 'looking after children full-time'. This is not surprising given that approximately 75 per cent of respondent's children were under primary school age.

These findings are very similar to those of Spence (1996b:17) who found that 73 per cent of her sample indicated that they were not seeking employment, but occupied in the role of full-time mother, looking after the home and family. Figures.21. and .22. below illustrate the status of respondents who were not in paid work, in the two research areas.

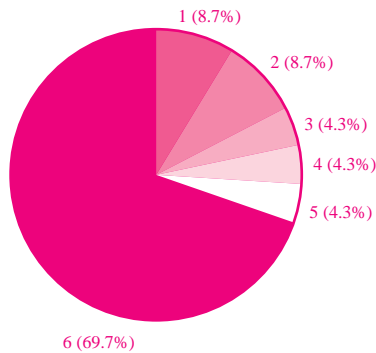
Figure. 21.
Status of Respondents Not in Paid Work-Belfast



- 1 At school
- 2 In Further Education
- 3 In Higher Education
- 4 On An Employment Training Scheme
- 5 Looking For Work
- 6 Looking After Children Full Time

“A wise head on young shoulders”

Figure.22.
Status of Respondents Not In Paid Work -
Newry and Mourne



- 1 At School
- 2 In Further Education
- 3 In Higher Education
- 4 On A Professional Training Course
- 5 On An Employment Training Scheme
- 6 Looking After Children Full Time

It is interesting to note that of those not in paid employment 7.5 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 8.6 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne are involved in employment training initiatives, such as Job Skills, YTP etc.

Information gained from the focus group session in Belfast also stressed that many of the young lone mothers, although not in paid employment were involved in work in a voluntary capacity. 50% of those in the focus group session said that they were or would soon be involved in work of a voluntary nature. The particular attraction that voluntary work had to young lone mothers in the focus group, was that it offered flexible working hours, and this meant that they were able to arrange work around school hours.

“I start voluntary work after Christmas. (Child’s name) will be coming out of school at a quarter to two, and then I’ll be going to work in the after schools project. (Child’s name) will be with me, it’s handy although I don’t get the normal

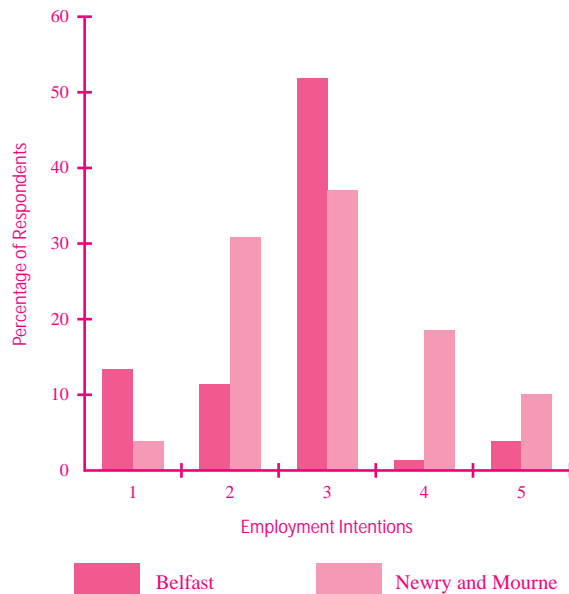
money at the end of the week. But it’s just something to fill the time.”

(BELFAST LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

Employment Intentions

Those respondents not in paid work were asked about their employment intentions. The majority of respondents in both the urban (79.1%) and rural study area (72.7%) responded that they wanted a job either ‘now’, or ‘as soon as they had finished their education and training’, or ‘when their children were older’. Only 5 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 9.1 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne did not want a job. See Figure.23. below.

Figure.23.
Employment Intentions, By Research Area



- 1 Respondent wants a job now
- 2 Respondent wants a job as soon as she has finished her education/training
- 3 Respondent wants a job when her child is older
- 4 Respondent does not know whether she wants a job
- 5 Respondent does not want a job

chapter 4 practical support

These figures are similar to those of Bradshaw and Millar's study of a representative sample of lone parents. Of those not in employment in their sample 27 per cent wanted a job now or soon (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991). Similarly 25.9% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 36.4 per cent of lone mothers in Newry and Mourne in this study, wanted a job now or soon.

There were no significant differences between research areas and employment intentions. Furthermore having a child under one, or a child under four was not significantly related to wanting a job when children were older.

Reasons For Not Wanting A Job In The Immediate Future

Those respondents not wanting to work in the immediate future, i.e. those not wanting to work 'now' or 'as soon as' they had finished their education/training, were asked to identify why they did not want to work as soon as possible.

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of six options, their MAIN reason for not wanting to work in the immediate future. This question was the most poorly answered of all the questions, with ten people in Belfast and one person in Newry and Mourne declining to answer it. This is perhaps because they perceived that the question was not applicable to them because they did want to work, albeit it in the future. Furthermore although the question asked for the MAIN reason why respondents did not want to work in the immediate future, several respondents (27% in Belfast and 21% in Newry and Mourne) gave two or three answers showing that for some respondents it was owing to a combination of reasons.

Despite this, 88 per cent of those respondents in Belfast and 93.3 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne, who should have answered the question did so. Table.19. below illustrates their response to the question: 'What is your main reason for not wanting to work now?'

Table.19.

Young Lone Mothers' Reasons For Not Wanting To Work In The Immediate Future

Employment Status	Respondent Has Child Under 1	Respondent Does Not Have Child Under 1
In Paid Work (Full and Part-Time)	3.20%	18.80%
Not in Paid Work	96.80	81.20%
Total	100	100

59

Amongst these populations the main reason for wanting to delay employment in both areas centred around the children of young lone mothers. In Belfast the highest percentage of respondents gave the response that their 'children were too young' and in Newry and Mourne the highest percentage of respondents gave the response that they 'preferred to care' for their children. These findings reflect those of Weale et al (1984). 59 per cent of the non-working mothers in his sample said that they were not working because their children were too young, or that they preferred to be at home caring for their children (Weale et al, 1984).

These findings illustrate that amongst young lone mothers the main factors affecting employment decisions were their perception of the needs of, and their responsibilities towards their children. This view was developed more during the qualitative stage of the research:

" I left work when I had (child's name) and could have had the opportunity to go back. But I didn't want to leave her because she was so young. so I stayed out of work. I don't want to be one of these ones working from 9-5 and not seeing my child."

(BELFAST, LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

“A wise head on young shoulders”

The decision about taking on paid work was truly a dilemma to the young lone mother parenting alone who was forced to choose between making a living or missing out on the development of her child:

60

“See before (child’s name) was born I was at work and then after she was born I went back to work, and I went full-time. But you see now, it’s just now that I’m realising what I missed out on. I was going to work at 8 o’clock in the morning, and I wasn’t coming back until four and I was really knackered so I was. But I was on my own and I never knew any different. But you see my sister and her wee child, she has all day with him and they do loads and loads of stuff that I never got to do.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

4.4. YOUNG LONE MOTHERS: EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Training and Education

Those young lone mothers who did not want to work in the immediate future (now or as soon as they had finished their education and training) were asked if there was anything else that they were interested in participating in. Two respondents in Belfast and one respondent from Newry and Mourne did not answer the question, but of those who did, the majority of mothers in each research area showed an interest in training or education. Figures.24. and .25. below illustrate the proportion of respondents from each research area interested in participating in training and education.

Figure.24.
Demand For Training and Education
Services-Belfast

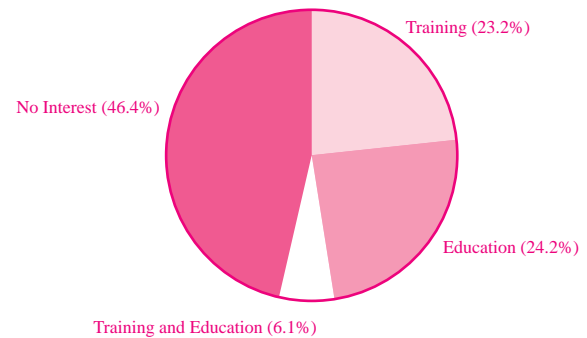
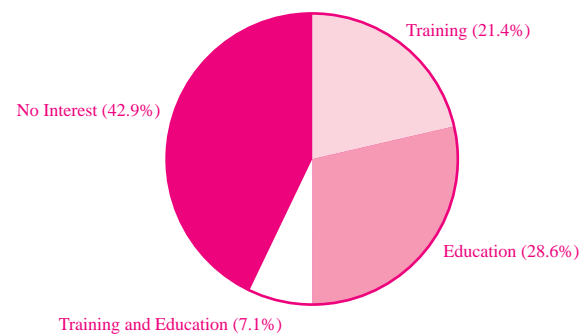


Figure.25.
Demand For Training and Education
Services-Newry



The qualitative stage of the research suggested that there was another dimension to further education and training. Young lone mothers perceived that further training and education were necessary in order for them to both, increase their earnings potential and give them a choice over what type of job that they wanted to do.

“I’d like to have more NVQs under my belt so that it pays me to go to work and so I can get a choice of what I want to do.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF THREE
CHILDREN, NEWRY)

chapter 4 practical support

"I do want to work eventually but I'll be a student for another couple of years. I wouldn't want to work in Wellworths."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, NEWRY)

Bryson et al's recent study on lone mothers illustrated the significance of these comments. The effect of education and training was one of the most powerful influences on employment in their research. A lone mother who, on the basis of her qualifications and other employment-related characteristics, could expect to earn ten per cent above the average, was 11 per cent more likely to be employed. Furthermore, qualifications contributed to a growth in earnings over time (Bryson et al quoted in JRF, 1997:3).

Support Required To Get Young Lone Mothers into Employment

Over 90 per cent of respondents in both the urban and rural area requested some form of support in helping them to get a job. Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of six items what type of support would be useful in helping them to find a job in the long term. The types of support that they required are illustrated in Table.20. Respondents could choose more than one response, and over one third of respondents in both the urban and rural area indicated that they required three or more types of support, illustrating a heavy demand for services (45.5% respondents in Belfast, and 36.8% of respondents in Newry and Mourne).

Table.20.

Support Required To Help Young Lone Mother into Employment, By Research Area

Support Needed	Belfast % of Respondents Requiring Support	Newry and Mourne % of Respondents Requiring Support
Help deciding what type of work respondent wants to do	44.1	19
Help with finding out where jobs are	47.5	42.9
Help with filling in application forms	27.1	23.8
Help with writing CV	29.7	14.3
Help with interview skills	39.8	33.3
Help with child care	61	62
Other help	0.8	4.8

* Respondents could tick more than one response

Child Care

It is interesting to note that the highest percentage of respondents mentioned that help with child care would be needed to help them get a job. There were further dimensions however, to the matter of child care support which were highlighted in the qualitative stage of the research. Primarily respondents indicated that if they were to enter the labour market their only option would be to use private child care, the costs of which were often too expensive to a lone parent.

"I think creches are so expensive. There's a girl I know who was told £25 a day to leave her baby in the nursery. She can't afford that. And even a Registered Child Minder will quote you £10 for one day. That's just mad."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

61

“A wise head on young shoulders”

62

“There’s a wee playgroup where I live and if I was thinking of going back to work it’s something like £2.75 a morning. That’s £11 a week, which is dear to me.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Issues also centred around the security of child care facilities. Young lone mothers were uncertain about leaving their children with ‘strangers’, child minders and creches in which their children were unknown. More confidence was felt with leaving their children, if not with their family, in the familiarity of community set-ups where both mother and child were known to staff, and staff known to mother and child. This is clearly of importance in targeting child care services to young lone mothers.

“She has used the wee centre and she goes to the after schools club and they all know her really well.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

There was a common consensus amongst the focus group participants that the reason for wanting to use familiar settings was that being a lone parent made them more protective over their child, because ‘they are all that you have’.

Respondents in Newry and Mourne pointed to the particular problem of having a limited choice in terms of child care support. The decision about whether or not to enter the labour market was further complicated by the fact that some of the more rural areas offered limited, if any, child care support. As one respondent in Newry and Mourne put it:

“We’re limited to one or two childminders around here. And they are quite expensive.”

(NEWRY AND MOURNE MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN)

Job-Hunting

The focus group also helped to describe the dimensions of the support needed with regard to finding out where jobs are and its role in helping young lone parents into employment.

Respondents pointed to a need for a job club in which young lone mothers could find out where jobs are, fill in application forms and prepare Curriculum Vitae’s all under the same roof.

“A job club, specifically I think for lone parents because everyone’s in the same boat.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Interview Skills

Respondents who took part in the qualitative stages of the research also stressed the importance of gaining interview skills if they were to enter the labour market.

Respondent 1:

“You’re out of the way for going for interviews. I mean I came out of employment when she was three, and I’ve had all that time . . . I’ve had wee jobs in the clippy, Chinese and this and that thing, but I have had all my time with my three year old, so I’m used to doing things like plastering her hands in paint and shoving it all over the paper I’m used to do things like that. If I go into a room and there’s six people interviewing me they don’t even have to speak, and I’m going to be crying with nerves’.

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

chapter 4 practical support

Respondent 2:

"That's me. All my time's been devoted to her. I mean interview skills, I'm lost. I'd go into a room and probably faint."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Employment Support:

Additional Considerations

Additional elements of employment support which were not covered in the questionnaire came out of the qualitative stage of the research. They were flexible working hours and employer attitudes.

Flexible Working Hours

Respondents in both Belfast and Newry and Mourne pointed to the importance of flexible working hours to young lone mothers.

Considering around ninety five per cent of young lone mothers in both areas had children of five years of age or younger, this is not surprising. Young lone mothers clearly wanted to be able to enter into employment that allowed them also to fulfil their obligations to their very young children.

"Now it's actually finding work in between the hours that they are at school. So you can see them first thing in the morning and when they're coming out of school."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"if it was the hours that (child's name) was at school, say 9-2, if I could get a job in between those hours, five days a week then it would be no problem for me, but it's actually over those hours when somebody is actually going to have to take her for me."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Again voluntary work (apart from the fact that it was unpaid) was singled out as the ideal prototype of employment, because it afforded flexible hours which could be fitted in around school hours, and afforded time off when children were sick.

According to NCOPF (1993), flexitime is by far the most common family-friendly practice enjoyed by lone parent employees, because it enables lone parents to manage their child care arrangements more effectively and to deal with family crises without having to make special leave arrangements (NCOPF, 1993: 47-48).

Evidence suggests too, that lone parents who wish to combine their family and work obligations through part-time work are more heavily concentrated in sectors where flexi-time is operated. The Labour Force Survey (1990) found flexi-time was more commonly operated in the white collar sector, and the importance of the facility was reflected by the fact that 76 per cent of lone mothers choosing to work full time choose non-manual occupations, while for those choosing to meet family obligations through part-time work, manual occupations were more common (52 per cent).

Employer Attitudes

Employer attitudes were viewed as a significant barrier to gaining employment amongst young lone mothers. It was felt that the limited understanding by employers' of the commitments of parenting alone, both prevented lone mothers entering the labour market, and threatened their dismissal once successfully employed. One young mother from Belfast who had previously been employed but left her full-time job after her child was born, explained:

"It's just getting back in. No matter how many times you tell them 'I went out to spend time with my daughter' and try and be truthful to them. See once you go on to that

“A wise head on young shoulders”

line of conversation you may as well kiss the job goodbye’

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Another suggested:

“I would like an employer who understands . . . There’s the problem of the emergency if it does arise, are they going to like, first time you have to go out of work, or phone in and say that you can’t come in, are they going to say ‘Oh I knew this would happen’ and automatically say “Oh she’s a single parent and this happened”.

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Bradshaw et al’s (1996) report on the employment of lone parents across 20 countries found that the United Kingdom has a poor package of leave for employed lone parents, particularly with regards to ‘leave to care for sick children’. A poor package of leave was found to correlate with low rates of employment amongst lone mothers in the United Kingdom (Bradshaw et al, 1997: 30-32).

Moreover in countries such as Sweden, Belgium and France where ‘leave to care for sick children’ was provided, employment rates for lone mothers were comparatively higher.

It is clear therefore that initiatives which help to improve attitudes of employers towards lone parents, and improvements in policies designed to reconcile paid employment with child-rearing responsibilities, are needed if young lone mothers are to have real opportunities to enter the workforce.

4.5. SUMMARY

- 69.6% of respondents in Belfast and 70.8% of respondents in Newry and Mourne had previously been in paid employment, although only 14% in Belfast and 4.2% in Newry and Mourne were currently employed.
- The majority of young lone mothers not in paid work were looking after their children full-time. 16.6% of the total population were in education, and a further 5.9% were on employment training schemes, such as Job Skills and the Community Work Programme.
- The overwhelming majority of young lone mothers in both research areas indicated that it was their desire to work in the future, although a large number of mothers revealed that the parenting and upbringing of their very young children was of foremost importance, until their children were older.
- Over 90% of young lone mothers in both research areas indicated that they needed support to help them to enter the labour market. Support ranged from changing employer attitudes to helping respondents with interview skills.
- Top of the agenda for employment support was child care. Over 60% of young lone mothers indicated that help with child care was needed to help young lone mothers into employment.

Chapter Five: Caring for Children

Lone mothers' decisions about whether to enter the labour market are clearly affected by the suitability of child care provision. This chapter examines in more detail the nature of child care provision used by young lone mothers. It looks firstly at the current level and sources of child care provision in Northern Ireland. It turns briefly then to previous research into lone parents and child care. The focus then turns to the sample populations and investigates two main areas - A: Child Care, and B: Caring for Children. The first section looks at the sources and costs of child care that young lone mothers in the survey used.

The section then focuses on the child care support services requested by young lone mothers in the study. The focus then turns to caring for children and examines the support services that young lone mothers felt were needed in order to help them with the care and upbringing of their children.

65

5.1. LEVEL AND SOURCES OF CHILD CARE PROVISION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

When compared to other countries, Northern Ireland like the rest of the U.K, has a low level of child care provision. Whilst there has been significant growth in recent years commentators are generally critical of current levels of provision (DHSS and DENI, 1994:3).

Looking specifically at day care provision for the under fives, Higgins et al comment that there are only some 35,537 day care places available for an under five population of 128,210 children in Northern Ireland (Higgins et al, 1997:149). In effect this means that around seventy per cent of the under five population are not being catered for by registered day care facilities (Registered Day Nurseries, Pre-School Play Groups (Board and Registered) and registered Private Home facilities).

It is not surprising therefore to find that the results of a survey looking at the child care services used by parents of pre-school and school-aged children (up to age 7), found that the most commonly used form of child care was the grandparent. The results of the survey also showed a strong reliance on extended family to care for children (PPRU, 1994).

5.2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH: LONE PARENTS AND CHILD CARE SERVICES

Recent research on lone parents has indicated that in a similar vein to parents generally there is a strong reliance on the extended family for provision of child care. Spence (1996) found that friends and relatives were the most used forms of child care. 38 per cent of respondents had used friends and relatives, and 37 per cent had used babysitters (which included friends and relatives.) This compared to 35 per cent using pre-school playgroups, a quarter using nursery schools and 20 per cent mother and toddler groups. Only 15 per cent of respondents had used childminders, and very few, creches (Spence, 1996:41).

THE STUDY RESULTS

5.3. A. CHILD CARE

Sources of Child Care

Respondents indicated that they had used a variety of people/agencies for child care since becoming a lone parent. Four respondents however, did not provide a response but for those who did, Table.21. below illustrates their sources of child care provision.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

Table.21.
Child Care Use, By Research Area

Child Care Source	Belfast % Using Child Care Source	Newry and Mourne % Using Child Care Source
Parent/s	82	58.3
Relative/s other than	44.6	33.3
Friend/s	38.8	37.5
Childminder	1.4	0
Local creche	15.1	12.5
Privately-run nursery	4.3	4.2
Nursery School	10.1	4.2
Pre-School playgroup	10.1	4.2
Child's father	0.7	0
Foster Care Community Support Worker	0	4.2
Mother Baby Unit	0	4.2
Women's Group	0.7	0
Respondent Never Used Childcare	2.2	8.3

* Respondents could tick more than one response.

It is clear that there is a very strong reliance on extended family for child care provision. In both Belfast and Newry and Mourne the majority of respondents reported that their parents had helped them the most with their child care, but there is also a large percentage of respondents using both relative/s other than parents and friend/s. In fact 64 per cent of those respondents who indicated their sources of child care support, suggested that they used solely the extended family (Parent/s, relative/s other than parent/s, and friend/s). This is a phenomenal figure, and indicates that there are clear issues to do with accessing child care other than that of the extended family.

Few respondents used pre-school playgroups and nursery schools but it is likely that this is a reflection in part of the few respondents with children aged four and five.

A higher percentage of respondents in both urban and rural areas in this survey used local creches, compared to the lone parents in Spence's (1996) survey. It is likely however that working young

lone mothers in this survey viewed the local creche as a more suitable alternative to childminders. Indeed the qualitative stage of the research revealed the importance of community child care set-ups to young lone mothers.

The Main Provider of Child Care For Young Lone Mothers

Young lone mothers in the survey were asked in a separate question who had helped them the most with their child care. Again, the findings illustrated the overwhelming reliance on the extended family for child care support, and the importance of grandparents as the main providers of child care. The extended family were the main sources of child care support in 73.2 per cent of cases in Belfast and 62.5 per cent of cases in Newry and Mourne. Grandparents were the main providers of child care in 63 per cent of cases in Belfast and 50 per cent of cases in Newry and Mourne. One young lone mother from Belfast explained why:

“You can trust them plus you don't have to pay them anything like.”

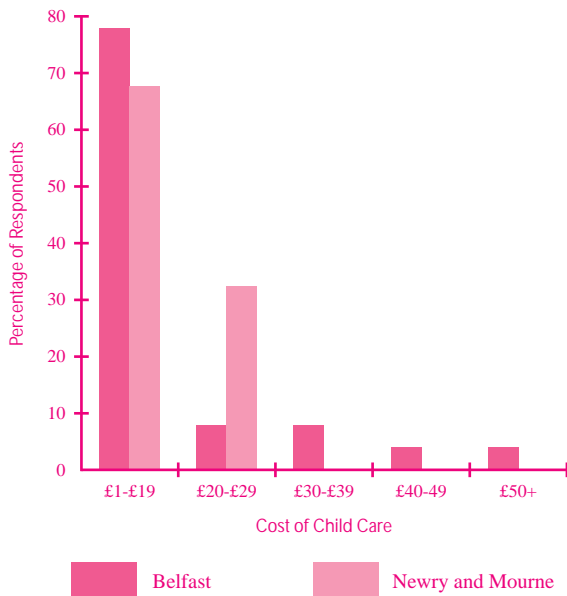
(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

The Cost of Child Care Provision

Only a minority of respondents in both research areas paid for their child care, a reflection no doubt, of the overwhelming dependency on the extended family as providers of child care. Twenty eight respondents in Belfast and three respondents in Newry and Mourne paid for their child care. Figure.26. below outlines the cost of child care to respondents, by research area.

chapter 5 practical support

Figure.26.
Cost of Child Care, By Research Area



The majority of respondents were paying in the region of £1-£19 per week for their child care. This contrasts sharply with the findings of Spence (1996) who found that 37 per cent of her respondents who were paying regularly for child care, were paying more than £60 a week (Spence, 1996: 42).

5.4. YOUNG LONE MOTHERS: CHILD CARE SUPPORT

Parenting Alone and The Need For More Child Care Support

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt that they needed more child care support. The majority of respondents in both research areas reported that they would like more child care support than they have currently (59.3% of respondents in Belfast, and 58.3% of respondents in Newry and Mourne). Wanting more child care support had no significant relationship to the age of the respondent, whether or not they had a child under one or four years of age, nor whether they were in paid employment.

Respondents were asked to give their main reason for wanting more child care support. Five respondents in Belfast declined to give a response. Respondents were asked to give only one reason, however some 14 per cent of respondents in both urban and rural area gave more than one reason, suggesting therefore that more child care support was needed for a combination of reasons.

In both Belfast and Newry and Mourne wanting a 'break from parenting' was cited in the highest percentage of responses as the reason why more child care support was needed. It was cited in 38% of cases in Belfast, and 50% of cases in Newry and Mourne. Wanting to 'go to work' was cited in a further 26.6% of cases in Belfast, and a desire to 'get some training' in 27.9% of cases. Wanting to 'go to work' was cited in 28.6% of cases in Newry and Mourne, and the desire to 'get some training' in 14.3% of cases.

It is not surprising that wanting to 'get a break from parenting' was the main reason why respondents wanted more child care support. One could argue that it is a understandable reason for anyone who is parenting alone for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to need a break. As one respondent from Belfast suggested:

"I would just like a little time for myself."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

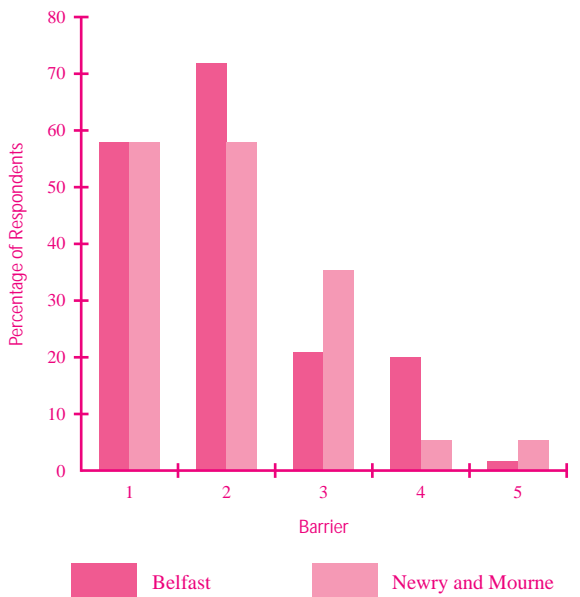
Indeed young lone mothers in the study highlighted that parenting alone meant having a continuous responsibility, and one which couldn't be shared with a partner. It is therefore understandable that some form of respite is needed for young lone mothers who parent alone, as it can often mean the difference between coping and not coping.

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Barriers To More Child Care Support

Respondents who suggested that they needed more child care support were asked to indicate what prevented them from getting it. The highest percentage of respondents in Belfast gave not being able to afford child care other than that provided through informal sources (by parents, relatives and friends) as the reason. In Newry and Mourne however an equal number of respondents gave not being able to afford formal child care (57.1%) and not wanting to ‘rely more heavily’ on parents, relatives and friends as their reason. Figure.27. outlines responses, by research area.

Figure.27. Barriers Preventing Respondents From Getting More Child Care Support, By Research Area



- 1 Does not want to rely more heavily on extended family
- 2 Cannot afford child care other than that of extended family
- 3 Does not like child care other than that of extended family
- 4 Does not know about child care other than that of extended family
- 5 Others

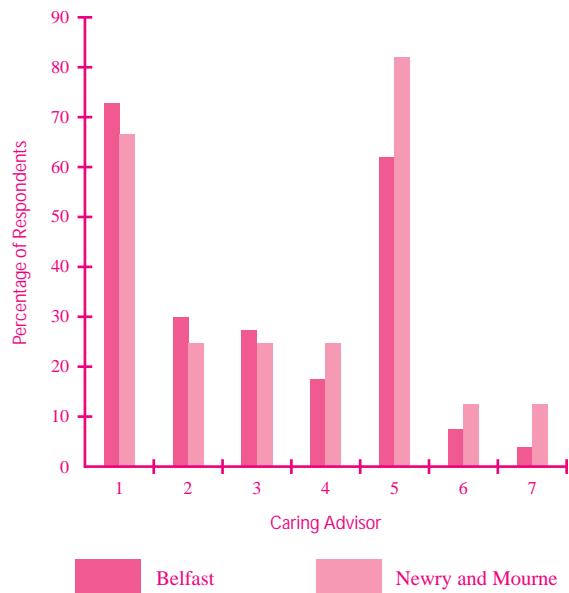
* Respondents could tick more than one response
 There are obviously issues here to do with young lone mothers not liking or trusting people other than their extended family to look after their children, which need to be tackled. In Belfast there are also issues to do with there being limited knowledge about child care provision other than the extended family, which need to be overcome.

5.5. B. CARING FOR CHILDREN

Caring Advisers

A second part of the section in the questionnaire which looked at child care and parenting alone looked at the type of advice respondents had sought on caring for and the upbringing of their children. Respondents were asked firstly to indicate who had provided them with advice on caring for and the upbringing of their children, since they had become a lone parent. Responses in both research areas illustrated that respondents had been given advice by a variety of people. Figure. 28. below illustrates who the caring advisers were in both urban and rural area.

Figure.28. Caring Advisers, By Research Area



- 1 Parents
- 2 Relative/s other than parents
- 3 Friend/s
- 4 Midwife
- 5 Health Visitor
- 6 Social Worker
- 7 Other (Doctor, HomeStart, Family Centre)

* Respondents could tick more than one response.

chapter 5 practical support

Parents and Health Visitors were the main providers of caring and upbringing advice to young lone parents in both research areas. There were some differences between Belfast and Newry and Mourne in that in Belfast the main caring adviser was the respondents parent/s (74.1%), whereas in Newry and Mourne it was the Health Visitor. (83.3%)

Type of Advice Sought

An open-ended question asked young lone mothers in the sample to indicate the type of advice that they sought on caring for and the upbringing of their children. Over half of the respondents in both areas of research acknowledged the type of advice that they had been given (55.4% in Belfast and 58.3% in Newry and Mourne respectively). This ranged from weaning, to children's behavioural problems. However, the type of advice that most respondents in both areas needed was on their children's health. Around sixty per cent of respondents in both areas had sought advice on this issue. See Table. 22. below.

Table. 22.
Type of Advice Sought, By Research Area

Type of Advice Sought	Belfast % Respondents	Newry and Mourne % Respondents
Child's Health	59.7	57.1
Feeding	37.7	57.1
General Advice on Caring-No Description	11.7	14.3
Bathing	2.6	7.1
Teething	5.2	7.1
Child Development	6.5	7.1
Toilet Training	2.6	14.3
Behavioural Problems	14.3	0
Effects of Separation	2.6	0
School/s and Nurseries	3.9	7.1
Motherhood	6.5	14.3

* Respondents could put forward more than one response.

Some of the responses below indicate the details of the type of advice that young lone mothers sought.

"The Health Visitor visits me a lot at home and gives me advice about coping."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

69

"Breastfeeding, my injections were needed and generally worries about my baby."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

"My son will go to nursery soon. My Health Visitor is helping me to find a place."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

"In the beginning about feeding then it was crying. I wasn't sure about injections and when to start spoon-feeding him."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

"Needed advice, ref: supporting my children during separation - Father very difficult."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

"When children are sick-colic and constipation and behavioural problems."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF TWO CHILDREN,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

“A wise head on young shoulders”

5.6. YOUNG LONE MOTHERS: SUPPORT FOR CARING FOR CHILDREN

Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of six options what information, if any, they required on caring for their children and parenting alone. 81.3% of respondents in Belfast and 87% of respondents in Newry and Mourne indicated that they desired information of one sort or another, illustrating therefore a large demand for services. Table.23. below illustrates the specific information required by those who requested information.

Table.23. Type of Information Required, By Research Area

Information Required	Belfast % Respondents Desiring Information	Newry and Mourne % Respondents Desiring Information
Child Care	43.4	25
Child Development	38.1	50
Parenting	30.9	30
Being a Mother	21.2	30
Confidence-Building	36.3	40
Assertiveness	30.9	45
Stress Management	42.5	50
Other	0.9	10

* Respondents could tick more than one response.

Perhaps the most illuminating of these results is the large number of respondents in both areas wanting information on stress management, which is a likely consequence of parenting alone, and the limited opportunities that young lone mothers have to get some respite. As one respondent from Newry and Mourne indicated:

“There were times when I just wanted to get out. I was holding my head in my hands and screaming. Sometimes I just wanted to have a break, not to go for a drink or anything, just to get away from it all.”

(NEWRY AND MOURNE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

More detailed analysis of the information required on caring for a child and parenting alone revealed that there were some significant differences in those requiring various types of information, by age of the respondent and by the number of children that they had.

Respondents aged 20-24 were significantly more likely than respondents aged 16-19 years of age to require information on parenting, being a mother and assertiveness. One possible explanation for this is that since young lone mothers in the sample aged 20-24 were significantly more likely to have older children, it is likely that they are more likely to start asking questions about the parenting of their children (both being a mother and being assertive in disciplining children). Evidence from the focus group confirmed this. There was a consensus amongst participants that a lot of support was given to them when their child was a baby, by Health Visitors etc. However it was when their children were older, during the ‘terrible two’ stage, where there was an information shortage, when they most needed information on caring for their children and parenting alone.

Furthermore respondents with more children were significantly more likely to require information on both parenting and stress management than respondents with less children. See Tables.24. and .25. below:

Table.24. Information Required On Stress Management, By Number of Children

	% of Respondents Desiring Information		
	With One Child	With Two Children	With Three or More Children
Information On Stress Management Required	26.1	55.2	66.7

* Significant at 0.00 level

chapter 5 practical support

Table.25. Information Required on Parenting By Number of Children

% of Respondents Requiring Information		
	With One Child	With Two or More
Information On Parenting Required	20	38.3

*Significant at 0.05 level

5.6. SUMMARY

- There was an overwhelming reliance on the extended family for child care support. The extended family were the main sources of child care support in 73.2% of cases in Belfast and 62.5% of cases in Newry and Mourne.
- 64% of all young lone mothers had used solely the extended family as a source of child care support.
- 59.3% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 58.3% of mothers in Newry and Mourne indicated that they would like more child care support. The main reason for wanting more child care support was because respondents felt that they needed a break from parenting.
- The cost of child care other than that of the extended family prevented 70.9% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 57.1% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne from getting more child care support.
- Both Health Visitors and parents were the main providers of advice on caring for children, to young lone mothers in the study. The main type of advice sought was regarding the health of the children of young lone mothers.

- 81.3% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 87.1% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne desired further information on caring for and the upbringing of their children. The largest numbers wanted information on stress management.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

Chapter Six: Young Lone Mothers: Housing

Much of the controversy surrounding young lone mothers has focused on their access to social housing. Several Conservative Ministers have conveyed the idea that the social housing system is over generous to lone mothers, and thus young women have seen motherhood as a passport to guaranteed housing.

“I’ve got a little list (of) young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list.”
(Peter Lilley, quoted by Brindle, 1993:2).

This section of the report examines issues surrounding young lone parenthood and housing. Statistics relating to lone parents and housing status are examined first.

The section goes on to review previous research on lone parents and housing, and considers the housing options available for young lone mothers. The focus then turns to consider in brief, recent housing policy developments and the effects that they may have on lone parents housing options. Finally, the section examines the housing experiences of young lone mothers in the study sample.

6.1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The Housing Status of Lone Parents

Research has shown that lone parents and their children are more likely than other families to live in social rented housing (Local Authority in England and Wales, and Housing Executive property in Northern Ireland). Data from the 1992-1993 GHS in England and Wales illustrated that 57 per cent of lone parent families rented Local Authority property, compared to 17 per cent of ‘other families’ (GHS quoted in NCOPF, 1996:7). Trends also illustrate that lone parents are less likely to be owner-occupiers than other families.

Significantly, data relating to the housing tenure of young lone parents suggests that despite the popular belief that young lone mothers are being given priority in access to social housing, few teenage mothers head council homes. Figures from the Department of the Environment show just 0.3 per cent (13,000) of heads of council homes to be women under 20 (DOE, 1991). Furthermore, a study of thirty Local Authority Directors of Housing in England, revealed that 90 per cent of Authorities commented that it was

rare for unmarried teenage mothers to present themselves for rehousing and thus the correlation between having a child and seeking a local authority home was, at best, tenuous (Institute of Housing, 1993:1).

Northern Ireland statistics indicate similar trends. Data from the Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS hereafter) illustrate that only 3.3 per cent of all Housing Executive tenants in 1995-1996 were lone parents under the age of 25 (CTOS, 1995-6).

Never-the-less the main provider of housing to young lone parents in Northern Ireland between the years 1993-1994 to 1995-1996 was the Housing Executive. Data from the Continuous Household Survey (CHS hereafter) in Table.26 below, illustrates the housing status of young lone parents for the combined years of 1993/4, 1994/5, and 1995/6.

chapter 6 practical support

Table.26.
Housing Status of Young Lone Parents
Aged 16-24

Housing Status	% of Young Lone Parents
Owner-Occupier	1
Renting from NIHE	57
Renting from a H.A.	3
Renting privately	5
Living with parent/s	30
Living with other family members/friends	3
Other (Squatting and rent-free)	1
Base 100% =	155

* Source CHS, NISRA: 1993/4, 1994/5 and 1995/6

Young lone parents in 1995-6 represented 19.46 per cent of all lone parent tenants of Housing Executive property, and 54.4 per cent of the total number of tenants under the age of 25 (CTOS, 1995-6).

The Table also illustrates however, that a large number of young lone parents in Northern Ireland live with their own parents. Dawson in her study of pregnant school girls (1995) pointed to the fact that:

“It may be surmised that for a significant group of young mothers in Northern Ireland, there will be a lot of family support, in terms of continuing to live at home.”

(DAWSON, 1995:10)

The figures illustrate that a greater proportion of young lone parents in Northern Ireland continue to live at home than in England and Wales. Estimates have put the figure for England and Wales at around 12 per cent (Family Policy Studies Centre, 1990).

Young Lone Parents and Housing Options
It would seem that the higher proportion of young lone mothers living with their own parents in Northern Ireland, compared to England and Wales, may be attributed to a culture which places more emphasis on the centrality of the ‘family’. Undoubtedly however, difficulties in accessing housing also play a major part. Northern Ireland, like England and Wales, has seen public expenditure cuts from the housing budget, which has led to a decrease in the availability of public sector housing as new-build programmes have been halted. The increasing number of re-possession, and a substantial increase in public-sector tenants who are purchasing their homes, has resulted in a decreasing housing stock. Ultimately young lone parents may have limited choice as to whether or not to leave their parental home.

The Parental Home

Schofield’s qualitative research illustrated that living in the parental home may not always be ideal. Mothers in her study indicated that negotiating a new identity as a mother, in the same environment that they were a dependent child often caused extremes of tension (Schofield, 1994:97). Rickford’s (1991) research with a London social worker illustrated that one in five young women with whom the social worker had come into contact, were actually forced to leave home because ‘life was made unbearable for them’ (Rickford, 1991:6).

Social Housing

Some young lone mothers inevitably have no choice of living in the parental home, those who have previously left home for example, or are thrown out on recognition of their pregnancy. Evidence suggests that these young mothers still regard the major provider of alternative secure housing as being the Local Authority/ Housing Executive (Speak et al, 1995:15). However for these young lone mothers there are a variety of problems related to accessing social housing.

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74

For those who are deemed ‘homeless’ and can be classed as having ‘priority need’ and are less than choosy about their accommodation, tenancies are often offered with little delay. It would seem that for the majority of young lone mothers however, there are lengthy waits to be faced on the Local Authority/Housing Executive waiting list. Evidently, the length of this wait depends on the desirability of the area requested. It is clear however, that since available social housing is frequently concentrated in difficult-to-let areas, young mothers may often have to wait lengthy periods. Speak et al’s study of young single mothers found for example, that half of the eight sample mothers who had not been classed as ‘homeless’, had to wait 18 months or more to get their council house property (Ibid:16).

Despite the controversy surrounding the ‘homeless’ route to Local Authority/Housing Executive tenancy, research has revealed that generally mothers do not get pregnant in order to ‘engineer’ ‘homelessness’, and jump the housing queue. Clark (1989) in her study of young single parents and their housing and support needs found:

“Neither in the groups or amongst the individuals was their anyone who had thought of pregnancy or motherhood as a passport to guaranteed housing. Often when the question was raised it was greeted with derision or disbelief. It seemed laughable and tragic to them that anyone would use a baby to get a flat or house”.

(CLARK, 1989:11)

Speak et al’s study of young single mothers revealed in fact that those deemed ‘homeless’ were generally under great stress, caused by extended periods in the over-crowded family home which had led to a breakdown in support (Speak et al, 1995:16). This stress was further perpetuated by the fact that often the young lone mothers in her

sample faced a period of time in temporary accommodation while waiting to be permanently housed in social housing, particularly if they lived in areas where there was a shortage of social property or a low turnover in tenancies. It has been illustrated that temporary accommodation can be very isolating for lone mothers (Housing Rights Service/Gingerbread, 1997). Arguably, this may have the effect of pushing young mothers to compromise their standards and accept ‘unsuitable’ permanent property, when an offer is eventually made.

Evidence from Speak et al’s study of young single mothers suggested that many mothers did compromise their standards and preference to be housed near their own families, in order to be housed quickly. Mothers in the study were generally dissatisfied with their housing regardless of whether or not a tenancy had been achieved through the waiting list or homeless route. The dissatisfaction however, stemmed more from social problems of the area that the house was in, than in the condition of the actual property. There was a general concern that areas were not good ones in which to raise a child (Speak et al, 1995:19). Research from Northern Ireland has also illustrated the extent of lone parents dissatisfaction with housing conditions. 14 per cent of all housing queries logged over a three month period in 1995 at the advice services of Gingerbread and Housing Rights Service related to problems with housing conditions (Housing Rights Service/Gingerbread N.I, 1997).

Private Rented Housing

Despite these problems it is not surprising that the Housing Executive/ Local Authority is seen as the major provider of alternative housing to young lone parents. Much of the private rented sector is not available to young lone parents for a variety of reasons, and the property which is available is often of a poor standard.

Tenancies in the private rented sector in Northern Ireland largely fall into two broad categories. First there is the 'controlled tenancy' which affords tenants a range of rights, including limitation on the amount of rent which can legally be charged and the security of tenure. Secondly there is the 'uncontrolled tenancy' which is not subject to legislative control and is essentially a private contract. Landlords of such properties can charge free market rents, and arrangements regarding repairs and security of tenure are largely defined by the terms of the tenancy agreement.

Although property in the 'controlled' sector is likely to be of a better standard and the rent cheaper to that of the uncontrolled sector, it is not easily accessible to young lone parents as evidence suggests that landlords are unwilling to let property to prospective tenants who are likely to claim housing benefit.

Features of the 'uncontrolled' sector such as deposits and advance rents are off-putting to the young lone parent solely dependent on state benefits, but where prospective tenants are able to secure deposit costs, this form of tenure becomes a readily available option. Tenants of this sector however, often experience problems with claims for assistance with rent payments through the Housing Benefit scheme, which may force them into debt, or threaten them with subsequent eviction.

Changes introduced to the Housing Benefit scheme in April 1996 mean that Housing Benefit calculations for private sector rents must now take into account a 'local reference rate' which is the mid-point in the range of rents in a particular area/locality. Claims for Housing Benefit on rents above this reference level are not paid in full. The amount payable is generally the 'local reference rate' plus half the difference between it and the actual contractual rent charged. If landlords are unwilling to reduce rents, tenants may well be forced to fund the shortfall from their own resources, or face eviction if arrears accrue.

Research has also shown that tenants of the 'uncontrolled' sector may also face eviction if they are to challenge the poor housing conditions associated with properties in the 'uncontrolled' private sector. Given the limited nature of the security of tenure, any action by tenants to force the landlord to meet repair obligations is likely to threaten continued occupation and may result in his/her issuing a Notice to Quit. A total of 33 per cent of respondents in the Housing Rights Service/Gingerbread N.I.'s research, sought advice on enforcing landlord's obligations to repair in the private 'uncontrolled' sector (Ibid).

6.2. DEVELOPMENTS IN HOUSING POLICY

It is clear that young lone parents face several problems accessing housing whether it be social or private rented. Thus it may be of some concern that some of the measures outlined in the first major review of Northern Ireland housing policy for twenty five years, appear to restrict the housing options of young lone parents still further.

The importance of having a decent home is recognised by the DOE itself:

“Lack of a decent home . . . can prevent people developing and learning, thereby adversely affecting their educational performance and long term job prospects.”

(DOE, 1996:19)

Among the measures outlined in the review however are plans to increase promotion of owner-occupation, reduce further the rights of homeless people to public sector housing, and sustain the private rented sector as a 'viable, and alternative source of accommodation' (Ibid).

It is clear that owner-occupation is not a realistic option for socially and economically deprived households. Furthermore, the private rented sector in its current form is not a viable source of alternative accommodation for those in housing

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need. Concern that people being accepted as 'homeless' were enjoying preferential treatment, has led to the proposal that those being accepted as 'homeless' will be owed a duty and afforded temporary accommodation, but their allocation of a secure tenancy in social housing will be dependent upon their level of priority within the Housing Selection Scheme (DOE, 1996:71). Those accepted as homeless therefore may suffer the detrimental effects that a substantial wait in temporary accommodation could have.

Finally concern can also be levied with the new Code of Guidance which accompanies the Housing Act 1996 (England and Wales) and might consequently be reflected in the Housing (NI) Order, which appears to discriminate against lone parents. Although the Housing Act itself does not penalise lone parents, the Code of Guidance does not appear to be equally value neutral:

“The Secretaries of State would encourage local Authorities to exercise their discretion to ensure that first priority should be the provision of housing for married couples with children.”

(PARA 5.21)

While not legally binding, councils are expected to 'have regard' to the provisions of the Code. In effect this may mean even longer waits for lone parents seeking social housing.

Having examined the housing status of lone parents, the housing options available to young lone parents and the detrimental effects that recent housing policy review, if legislated, will have on lone parents, let us now turn to the study sample.

6.3. THE STUDY RESULTS

Housing Tenure Before Pregnancy

Table.27. below illustrates the housing tenure of respondents in both research areas before becoming pregnant.

Table. 27.

Housing Tenure of Respondents Before Pregnancy

Housing Tenure	Belfast %	Newry and Mourne %
Living with parent/s	72.7	70.8
Living with relative/s	3.6	0
Living with friend/s	7.9	4.2
Living alone in H.E accommodation	4.3	16.7
Living alone in H.A accommodation	1.4	0
Living alone in private rented accommodation	1.4	0
Living alone in own home	1.4	0
Other	7.7	8.4
Total	100	100

As the table illustrates over three-quarters of respondents in both research areas lived with their parents before becoming pregnant.

Movers

On becoming pregnant almost equal percentages of respondents in both urban and rural area moved house. 64.7 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 66.7 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne had moved house since becoming pregnant.

Some respondent's had moved house more than once since becoming pregnant. Figures.29. and .30. below illustrate the number of moves made by respondents, in each research area. Although a higher percentage of respondents in Newry and Mourne had moved more times, there were no significant differences between the two research areas and number of moves made.

Figure.29.
Number of Moves Made By Respondents - Belfast

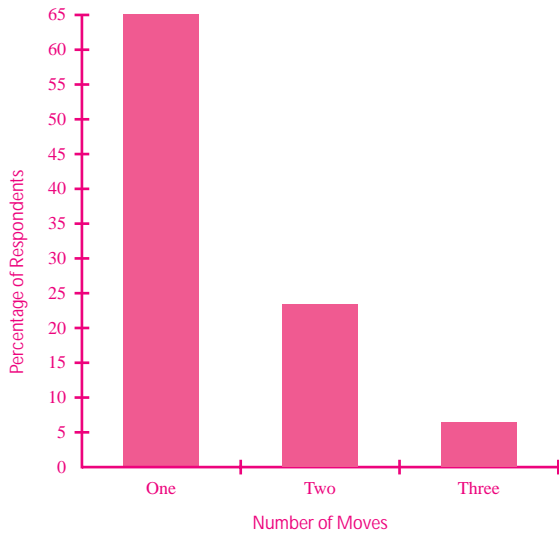
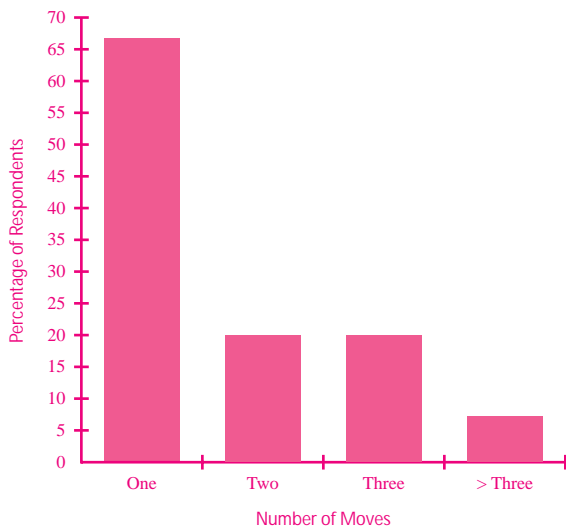


Figure.30.
Number of Moves Made By Respondents - Newry and Mourne



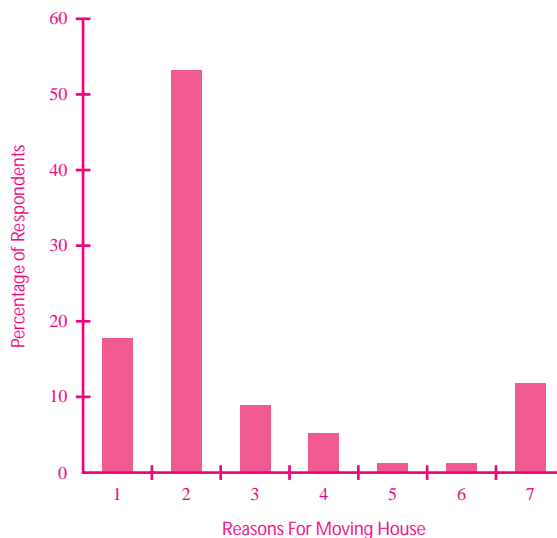
These figures illustrate that several respondents had made a large number of moves in rather a short space of time. Given that the majority of respondents were single, never-married mothers and had been a lone parent for less than two years this gives rise to concern about the security of housing amongst young lone parents.

Reasons For Moving

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of nine options and give their reasons for moving house the first time. Six respondents in Belfast did not provide a response. However of those who did, the reasons provided were similar in both research areas. The majority of respondents desired their 'own home' for bringing up their new child - 53.6 per cent of the population in Belfast, and 56 per cent of the population in Newry and Mourne. A further 17.9 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 18.8 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne gave 'being made or threatened with homelessness' as the reason why they moved house. Figures.31. and .32. below show reasons for moving house the first time in each research area.

77

Figure.31.
Reasons For Moving House-Belfast

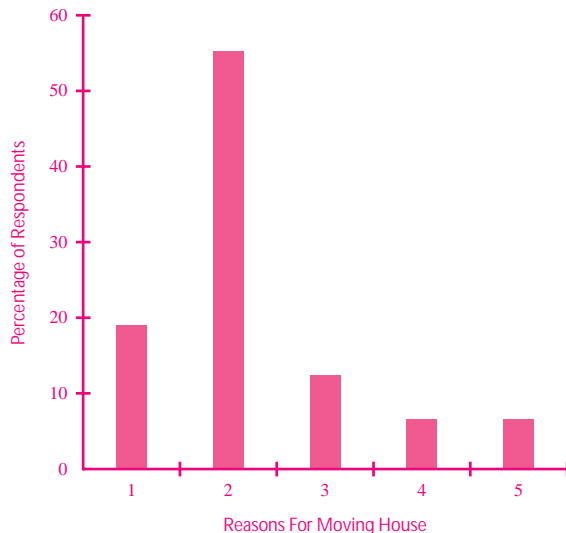


- 1 Made/threatened with homelessness
- 2 Wanted own home
- 3 Wanted bigger home
- 4 Wanted to be near family
- 5 Wanted to be near friends
- 6 Wanted to be in a nice area
- 7 Other

“A wise head on young shoulders”

78

Figure. 32.
Reasons For Moving House-Newry and Mourne



- 1 Made/threatened with homelessness
- 2 Wanted own home
- 3 Wanted bigger home
- 4 Wanted to be near family
- 5 Other

More detailed analysis revealed that those respondents who moved because they wanted their ‘own home’ were significantly more likely to have lived with their parent/s before becoming pregnant, than live in another form of housing tenure. 85.2% of those who moved for this reason had lived with their parent/s before becoming pregnant. This compares to 14.8 per cent of those living in another form of housing tenure.

The qualitative part of the study revealed that wanting their ‘own home’ in which to bring up their child was a necessity for some young lone mothers.

“It’s the independence, you know you do what you want, you’ve nobody peering over your shoulder saying you shouldn’t be doing that, this is the way to do it, this is the way we did it years ago you’re there, you’re in control.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

The quote highlights the need to escape tension in the family home, and the need for independence.

Furthermore, those respondents who moved house for reason of being ‘made or threatened with homelessness’ were significantly more likely to have lived in a housing tenure other than living with their parent/s before becoming pregnant. 55.6% of those moving for reason that they had been imade or threatened with homelessness lived in a housing tenure other than living with parents, compared to 44.4 per cent of those living with parents.

Current Accommodation Status Respondents were asked to indicate their current accommodation status. Table.28. shows the accommodation status of respondents in both research areas, at the time of the questionnaire.

Table.28.
Accommodation Status of Respondents, By Research Area

Accommodation Status	Belfast %	Newry and Mourne %
Living with parent/s	36	25 (6)
Living with relative/s	2.2	0
Living with friend/s	1.4	4.2 (1)
Living alone in H.E accommodation	41.7	58.3
Living alone in H.A accommodation	1.4	0
Living alone in private rented accommodation	11.5	8.3 (2)
Living alone in own home	1.4	0
Living in a mobile home	0	4.2 (1)
Living in PACT	2.2	0
Living in a Hostel	1.4	0
Living with ex husband	0.7	0
Total	100	100

* Initiative of Barnardos, which houses ‘parents and children together’ in supported accommodation.

The table shows that the highest percentage of respondents in both research areas lived in Housing Executive accommodation, followed by

chapter 6 practical support

living with their parents. In Belfast however, comparable numbers of respondents lived either with their parents or extended family or in Housing Executive accommodation. These figures are also similar to the figures for the CHS 1993-4 and 1995-6. Only two young lone parents were owner-occupiers.

There was a very strong relationship between being aged 16-19 and currently living at home with parents. Younger respondents were significantly more likely than older respondents to currently be living with their parents. 51.9% of 16-19 year olds were living with their parents compared to 26.6 per cent of 20-24 year olds. A participant in the focus group highlighted why it was important for younger respondents to live at home with their parents:

"I was only 16 you see when I got pregnant, so it was best for me just to stay at home, I couldn't cope on my own . . . I couldn't do nothing, cook or anything, and they looked after her everyday while I was at school."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

It is clear that living at home with parents was essential for the young lone mother in this case, because of the family support that was offered, and because it allowed for the mother to return to school.

Levels of Satisfaction With Current Accommodation

Respondents were asked whether they were 'happy' with their current accommodation. The majority of respondents in both areas were, although happiness was not as explicit in Newry and Mourne as in Belfast - 58.3 per cent compared to 73.4 per cent respectively. These findings contrast to those of Bradshaw et al

(1991) who found only 17 per cent of respondents to be 'dissatisfied' with their current accommodation (Bradshaw et al, 1991:93).

Reasons For Happiness With Current Accommodation

Respondents were asked to rate three reasons why they were or were not happy with their current accommodation, to give an indication of priorities in making decisions about housing. 'Living with or near family' was the main reason why respondents were happy with their current living arrangements, in both research areas. Table.29. below lists the reasons why respondents were happy with their current accommodation, in rank order (See Appendix 6 for further information).

Table.29.
Priorities in Making Decisions About Housing-Reasons For Being Happy With Current Accommodation

Reason Why Happy	Belfast Priority Ranking	Newry and Mourne Priority Ranking
Lives with/near family	1	1
Lives with/near friends	2	2
Lives in a nice house/flat	3	5
Lives in a nice area	4	3
Lives near the shops	5	4
Lives near the doctors	7	6
Lives near the school	6	7

Respondents taking part in the focus group and semi-structured interviews highlighted that living with or near family and friends was so important because of the support that was offered.

"I think you definitely need your parents. I only have my mum and sister nobody else. But I think if I didn't have them ones, God knows what state I'd be in."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

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Parents were close by in case of any emergency and this offered young lone mothers great assurance.

“I think it's the case that you want to be near someone that you know. I mean when my daughter's sick you panic. I always run to my mum in the middle of the night 'She's took a temperature', so you can picture being on your own in an area where you didn't know a sinner and your child takes sick in the night, who are you going to talk to.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Living with or near family also helped to combat feelings of loneliness. As one young lone mother from Belfast explained:

“It's so great so it is. They give the baby a hand and all, help out, give you a break. I didn't like living on my own it was so lonely.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Table.29. shows that there were some differences in the third and fourth placed reasons for being happy with current accommodation, between Belfast and Newry and Mourne. In the urban area having a ‘nice house/flat’ scored third and living in ‘a nice area’ fourth. However in Newry and Mourne greater importance was placed on living in ‘a nice area’ and then living ‘near the shops.’ Speak (1995) found that living in close proximity to the shops was important for mothers living in a rural area.

Reasons For Unhappiness With Current Accommodation

The main reason for respondents being unhappy with their current living arrangements differed between urban and rural area. Table.30. below

lists the reasons why respondents were unhappy with their current accommodation, in rank order (See Appendix 7 for further information).

Table.30.
Priorities in Making Decisions About Housing-Reasons For Being Unhappy With Current Accommodation

Reason Why Unhappy	Belfast Priority Ranking	Newry and Mourne Priority Ranking
Not enough space in the house/flat	1	2
House/flat is in bad condition	2	5
House/flat is not in a nice area	2	1
House/flat is not near family	4	3
House/flat is not near the doctors	5	5
House/flat is not near the school	6	5
House/flat is not near friends	7	8
Cannot afford rent for house/flat	8	9
House/flat is not near shops	9	3

These rankings are in part reflective of what makes respondents happy with their current living arrangements, illustrating that being in ‘a nice area’ and being ‘near the shops’ are more important to respondents in the rural area. However, ‘not having enough space’ in the house/flat becomes an issue when young lone mothers are unhappy with their living arrangements. These findings are similar to those of those of Bradshaw et al who, when examining reasons for dissatisfaction with current housing, found the most common reason was that the dwelling was too small (Bradshaw et al, 1991:93).

6.4. YOUNG LONE MOTHERS: HOUSING SUPPORT

Contact with Housing Support Agencies

In an attempt to analyse housing service provision for young lone mothers, respondents who had moved house since becoming pregnant were asked who, if anyone from a list of nine agencies, they had contacted for help with finding a new home. Contact with housing support agencies was overwhelmingly limited in both areas to the Housing Executive. 81% of respondents in the

chapter 6 practical support

Belfast area who had moved house since becoming pregnant had contacted the Housing Executive, with 100% of respondents in Newry and Mourne doing the same. Use of other agencies giving housing support was exceptionally limited. Figure.33. illustrates who respondents contacted for help with finding a new home.

Figure.33.
Housing Support Agencies Used,
By Research Area



H.E. Housing Executive
H.A. Housing Association
CAB Citizens Advice Bureau
Simon Simon Community
HRS Housing Rights Service
P.L. Private Landlord

Several points must be made with reference to the chart. There are some differences between the main contacts for housing support in the urban and rural area. It is clear that in the rural area there are fewer contacts used by young lone parents. The main contacts in the rural area (apart from the Housing Executive) appear to be the Simon Community and private landlords (P.L).

It is inevitable that the majority of respondents would go to the Housing Executive for help with housing, since they are evidently viewed as the

main provider of housing alternative to that of the parental home. However limited contact with other agencies does give cause for concern. Evidence from the qualitative stage of the study indicated that few respondents knew about agencies who could provide housing support other than the Housing Executive, indicating therefore a need for information and knowledge about alternative housing support agencies.

Respondents also pointed to the factors that impacted on their use of agencies apart from the Housing Executive. The problems with acquiring housing through private landlords were specifically singled out.

R1: "Everyday I was contacting private rented houses, but they're asking a deposit of £300 so where are you meant to get that money? Like the 'BRU' won't give you it."

(LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

R2: "They'll take on professionals or students but it's every time, if you look down the paper it's no DHSS, no DHSS."

(LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Satisfaction With The Service of Housing Support Agencies

Respondents were asked if they got the help they needed from the housing support agency that they had contacted for help with finding a new home. The majority of respondents - 79.5% of respondents in Belfast and 75 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne, said 'yes' they had got the help that they needed, indicating a high level of satisfaction with service.

Never-the-less one fifth (16) of respondents in Belfast and one quarter (4) of respondents in Newry and Mourne who had moved house since

“A wise head on young shoulders”

82

becoming pregnant felt that they did not get the help that they needed. All complaints were levied with the Housing Executive as opposed to other housing support agencies. Complaints centred around several different issues: These were: access to housing; condition of housing; suitability of housing; temporary accommodation; and communication.

Access To Housing

69% of respondent's complaints in Belfast, and 75 per cent of respondent's complaints in Newry and Mourne related to access to housing. The majority of complaints within this category referred to not being given priority status and being put on a waiting list. However, 36 per cent of complaints in Belfast however in this category referred to the discrimination against respondents because of their youth.

“Because of my age, 16, at the time, they said I was too young for a house with one child, so I had to lease a house from a landlord.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

“I felt that they had no time for me because I was too young.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Condition of Housing

12.6% of respondent's complaints in Belfast related to the condition of housing offered to them by the Housing Executive. Although the results of Housing Condition Surveys by the Housing Executive point to an overall reduction in unfit levels, down from 11% in 1987 to 8.8% in 1991 (DOE, 1995:24), participants in the qualitative stage of the research highlighted the problem of being offered accommodation that was in poor condition.

“I'm down here every day. I'm actually on the homeless list at the moment so I am. They've actually been out to see me, they offered me different places but they're very . . . I tell you I wouldn't let a dog live in them, put it that way.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Suitability of Housing

The complaints of only one respondent in Belfast and one in Newry and Mourne referred to the suitability of housing. There was some suggestion here though that respondents were already living in Housing Executive accommodation, and wanted to move to bigger homes. In response they were told that the accommodation they were in, was adequate for their needs.

Temporary Accommodation and Communication

One respondent in Belfast pointed to her dissatisfaction with service stemming from the fact that she had to live in temporary accommodation before being offered permanent housing by the Housing Executive. A final respondent pointed to lack of communication by the Housing Executive as being the problem.

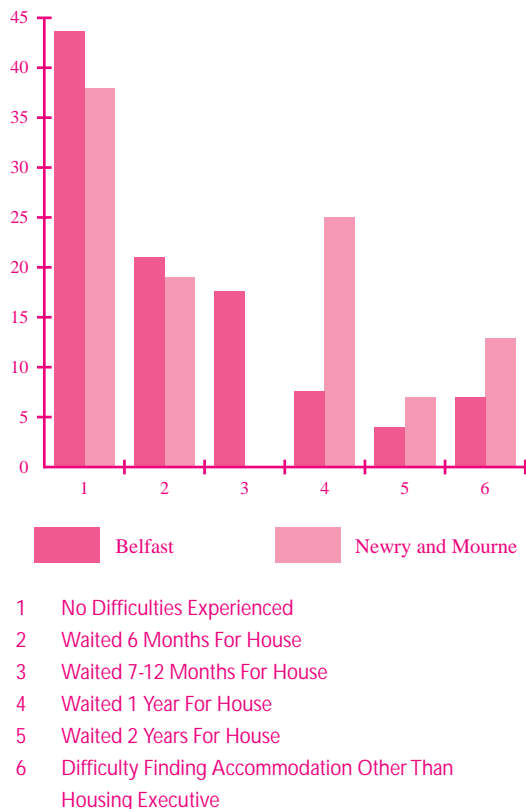
Difficulties Experienced in Moving House

A second measure of satisfaction with services asked respondents to indicate what difficulties if any, they experienced in moving house. Six respondents in Belfast did not answer the question. Of those who did 57.1 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 62.5 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne, indicated that they had experienced difficulties in moving house. The majority of difficulties referred to the length of wait that young lone mothers had before being housed in Housing Executive accommodation. A further 6 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 12.5 per cent of

chapter 6 practical support

respondents in Newry and Mourne suggested that their difficulty was in finding accommodation other than that provided by the Housing Executive. Figure.34. below illustrates the difficulties that respondents experienced in moving house.

Figure.34.
Difficulties Experienced in Moving House, By Research Area



Respondents in Newry and Mourne were significantly more likely to wait for one year or more for Housing Executive accommodation than respondents in Belfast. It is likely that this is because of the current shortage of Housing Executive accommodation available to tenants in rural areas (DOE, 1995:66). Rural new build schemes are making up an increasing proportion of the Housing Executive's new build programme. The effects that this measure has on decreasing the waiting times for Housing Executive property, need to be monitored.

Future Contact with Housing Support Agencies
Respondents from both research areas suggested that if they were to move house in the future the agency that they would most contact would be the Housing Executive. Again the responses illustrated that there would be limited contact with other housing agencies.

6.5. SUMMARY

- Over three quarters of young lone mothers in both research areas lived with their parents before becoming pregnant.
- 64.7% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 66.7% of mothers in Newry and Mourne had moved house since becoming pregnant. The majority of young lone mothers had moved house because they desired their own home for bringing their children up in.
- 18% of young lone mothers in Belfast, and 20.8% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne had moved more than once since becoming pregnant. This gives rise to concern about the security of housing amongst young lone mothers, since most of them had been a lone mother for two years or less.
- The majority of young lone mothers were living in Housing Executive accommodation at the time of the study, although 36% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 25% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were living at home with their parents.
- Lone mothers aged 16-19 were more likely to live with their parents than lone mothers aged 20-24. It was important for younger lone mothers to stay at home because of the support that was offered.

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

84

- 73.4% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 58.3% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne were happy with their current accommodation. The main factor that determined happiness, was living with or near the family, illustrating again the importance of continued support for young lone mothers.
- Unhappiness with current accommodation was determined by lack of space in the house or flat, and the area that the house or flat was in.
- Young lone mothers contact with housing support agencies was overwhelmingly limited to the Housing Executive. Few young lone mothers had ever heard of alternative support agencies.
- 57.1% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 62.5% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne experienced difficulties in moving house.
- 20.8% of young lone mothers in Belfast experiencing difficulties in moving house, had to wait 1 year or more to be housed in permanent Housing Executive accommodation. The situation in Newry and Mourne was worse. 50% of young lone mothers experiencing difficulties in moving house had to wait 1 year or more to be housed in permanent Housing Executive accommodation.

4

young lone mothers: emotional support

CHAPTER 7 Health and Welfare

“Generally they are extremely mature and adaptable. They take their responsibilities seriously and manage well considering many do it with very little support and in almost impossible conditions.”

(SOCIAL WORKER QUOTED BY RICKFORD, 1991:16)

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



Chapter Seven: Health and Wellbeing

“Generally they are extremely mature and adaptable. They take their responsibilities seriously and manage well considering many do it with very little support and in almost impossible conditions.” (Social worker quoted by Rickford, 1991:16).

86

This section of the report examines the health and welfare needs of young lone parents. It looks firstly at previous literature investigating the health status of lone parents, and factors which affect their health and well-being. The section then turns to the study samples and examines their physical and mental health, and their emotional well-being.

7.1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The Physical Health Status of Lone Parents
There has been a dearth of research investigating the health status of lone parents. Studies which have investigated the health status of lone parents indicate however, that lone parents experience poorer health than parents in couples. Popay and Jones' study which used a subset of data on lone parents from the 1980,1981,1982 General Household Surveys, found for example that on three main measures of health and illness lone parents reported poorer health than parents in couples. The three measures were:

- long standing illness, whether limiting or not;
- recent illness, which had restricted activities in the previous two weeks;
- perceptions of health in general over the previous year.

(Popay and Jones in Hardey and Crow, 1991: 66-87).

Spence (1996) study of lone parents in Northern Ireland revealed that lone parents in Northern Ireland reported a very poor health status. 42% of a sample population of 197 described their health

as being 'fair' or 'poor'. The study also found high levels of depression, anxiety and tiredness amongst lone parents (Spence, 1996b:24-25).

Factors Affecting The Health of Lone Parents

Research has illustrated correlations between low levels of paid employment, receipt of Income Support, social housing and poor health. Popay and Jones report that all women council tenants had poorer health than home owners, and paid employment was positively associated with better health (Ibid: 75 and 81). Additionally Bradshaw and Millar in their research for the Department of Social Security found that those currently receiving Income Support were most likely to describe their health as poor or very poor (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991:80).

This would indicate that young lone parents may have an even 'poorer' health status than other lone parent sub-groups. As has been illustrated earlier in this report, young lone mothers are less likely to be in paid employment than other lone parent groups. The majority are in receipt of Income Support, and many live in social housing. All three of these factors are individually related to a poorer health status, thus when compounded it may be assumed that there is a greater likelihood of poor health.

Recent research has also highlighted the difficulties that lone parents who are dependent on Income Support have in meeting the nutritional needs of themselves and their dependent children. The CPAG survey of 200 households on the East and West banks of Derry found that half the sample found it hard to meet

chapter 7 emotional support

basic food costs. Fresh meat and vegetables were classed as 'luxuries' and in an attempt to manage, parents protected their children above themselves. Some 64 per cent of adults regularly missed meals to feed their dependent children properly, and were described by the authors as 'literally starving themselves to feed their children' (CPAG, 1994:23).

Evidently levels of nutrition are worse still amongst young lone parents and their children. Dowler and Calvert's study of diet and nutrition amongst lone parent families in London summarises:

“Parental age often differentiated nutritional outcomes: older mothers consistently had better diets, as did their children, than those who were younger. This may well be because of poverty: lone mothers under 25 tender to be poorer than older mothers.”

(DOWLER AND CALVERT, 1995:37)

Evidence regarding the psychological health and well-being of young lone parents suggests that the stigma surrounding lone parenthood is a factor which promotes social isolation and that this in turn may cause stress. Social isolation was cited as a stressor of 60 per cent of the sample of lone parents in research carried out by Gingerbread (Spence, 1996b:26). There is still much stigma attached to lone parenthood despite an increase in the numbers of lone parents. In an attitude study which asked participants in Northern Ireland to rate different groups for extra spending on social benefits, lone parents came bottom of the list (Wilford in Stringer and Robinson, 1992). In a society which readily sets age limits as a convenient way of indicating the readiness of an individual to take on adult roles, young lone mothers are doubly stigmatised for contravening convention.

Young mothers in Clark's study of housing and support needs highlighted a perceived stigma associated with their youth. Sample mothers felt that older people regarded them as 'incapable of competent mothering' (Clark, 1989:30). Mothers in the CPAG study in Northern Ireland indicated that it was this very stigma that dissuaded them from going out socially. On the rare occasions that they did go out they felt 'under surveillance' by neighbours, and felt that they had to contend with assumptions about their sexual availability. Resulting feelings of isolation were illustrated most poignantly in the words of one young mother:

“I am utterly aware of being alone in the crowd . . . ”

Her parents opposed her going to pubs and discos because 'single parents who do that have bad names' (CPAG, 1994:19).

Currently, there is little in the way of adequate support for young lone parents to help them alleviate these feelings of isolation. This is an increasing concern amongst those working with young women, many of whom have become aware of the increasing number with no family support at all (Speak et al, 1995:53). The problem is a two-tier one. Young lone parents for a variety of reasons are not accessing the present services; and what present services there are appear wholly unsuited to and inadequate for them (Ibid).

To take the first issue, much support at present exists on a 'here it is, come and get it basis.' However, there are a range of factors which inhibit young mums accessing support. They include physical distance, lack of money, practical child-care problems, lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Simply the cost and inconvenience of travelling may put a young mother who is considering attending a baby-weighing clinic, off. Yet it is here that there is a point of contact with other mothers and advisers. Furthermore it is here that vital work is done around basic parenting and baby care.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

To take the second issue, it seems that support for young lone parents is largely inadequate because of its disjointed nature. Support is largely spread across a variety of different agencies. There is no single person or agency which offers a young lone mother all the support and practical assistance she often needs, in the initial days of motherhood. Youth, social and health workers for example, are all limited in their ability to offer the intensive, on-going assistance that young mothers often need, especially if they have limited family assistance. Although they may be commended for their efforts to provide support, it must be recognised that to a great extent, they are doing so as a small part of their overall duties, usually without specific training. Evidence suggests in fact that there is little contact between social workers and young lone mothers. A study conducted by Simms (1986) found that only 15 per cent of teenage mothers had experienced any contact with a social worker (Simms, 1986). Moreover some women voiced a desire to see a social worker but didn't know how to go about it. Evidence suggests that those voluntary and community organisations which aim to support mothers and lone parents also tend not to appeal to younger women, who feel 'out of place' amongst women even a few years older, in their twenties. Any future move to support young lone parents therefore, must identify and address the specific support needs of this group.

Having demonstrated the factors which affect the health status of young lone parents let us now turn to the study samples.

7.2. THE STUDY RESULTS

The findings from the health and welfare study samples are divided into four main sections: physical and mental health; social isolation and loneliness; stresses and attitudes.

The Physical and Mental Health of Young Lone Mothers

Respondents in the survey were asked to indicate how they viewed their physical and mental health.

The majority of respondents in both Belfast and Newry and Mourne rated their physical and mental health as either 'very good' or 'good'. Figures.35. and .36. below outline how respondents viewed their physical and mental health, by research area.

Figure.35. Physical Health of Respondents, By Research Area

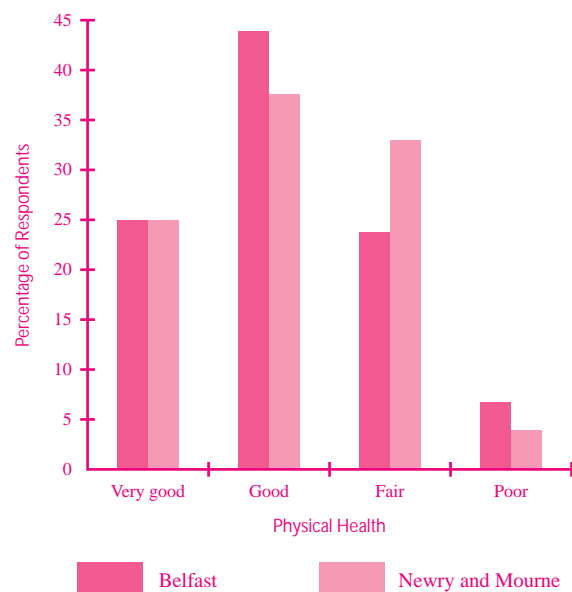
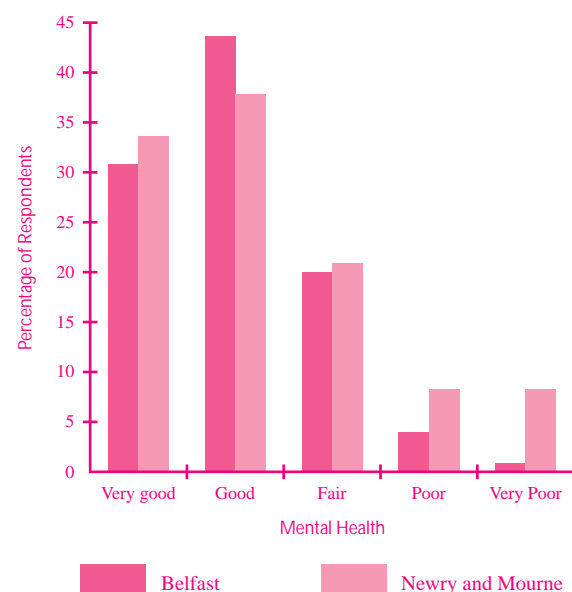


Figure.36. Mental Health of Respondents, By Research Area



chapter 7 emotional support

The percentage of respondents from Belfast and Newry and Mourne who rated their physical health as 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' is smaller than that of the study of lone parents carried out by Spence (1996). However, the fact that around one third of respondents in both research areas are describing their physical and mental health as such does lead to some cause for concern, particularly given the young age of respondents in the study.

More detailed analysis revealed that the factors which impacted on both the physical and mental health of young lone mothers were having an income of £50 or less a week, not being in employment, living alone, receiving no parental support and having debts. Each of these factors increased the likelihood young lone mothers describing themselves as having 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' physical and mental health.

There was a significant relationship between having debts and experiencing 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' mental health. 81% of young lone mothers with debts described their mental health as such, compared to just 19 per cent of respondents without debts. See Table.31. below.

Table.31.
Impact of Having Debts on Mental Health of Young Lone Mothers

Debt Status	% of Respondents Within Mental Health "Very Good" or "Good"	% of Respondents Within Mental Health "Fair" or "Poor" or "Very Poor"
Respondents Has Debts	50.8	81
Respondents Does Not Have Debts	49.2	19
Total	100	100

* Significant at 0.001 level

Clearly being in debt has an influence on the mental health of young lone mothers. Young lone mothers went into debt early in motherhood because of the difficulties they experienced in making ends meet whilst living on Income

Support, and because going into debt was the only way that they could get the essentials needed to set up a new home and provide for a new baby.

Interestingly, there was a significant relationship between having debts and living alone. 71.3% of young lone mothers living alone had debts compared to only 44 per cent of mothers living with others. Young lone mothers who, for a variety of reasons have to live alone, are clearly suffering from the consequences of their actions. Limited state assistance in helping young lone mothers who strike out independently to gain the essentials needed to furnish a new home, means that young lone mothers are going into debt. This in turn, is having a detrimental effect on the mental health of mothers.

Further Indicators of The Health Status of Young Lone Mothers

Respondents were asked a further set of questions relating to their sleeping patterns, levels of tiredness and energy and depression levels, with an aim to establishing further details about the health of young lone mothers. The results were as follows:

- 33.1% of respondents in Belfast and 29.2% of respondents in Newry and Mourne had sleeping problems.
- 54% of respondents in Belfast and 45.8% of respondents in Newry and Mourne, described themselves as feeling tired (most) or a 'good bit' of the time.
- 25% of respondents in Belfast and 16.7% of respondents in Newry and Mourne reported that they had enough energy to do most things only 'a little' or 'none' of the time.
- 23.7% of respondents in Belfast and 20.8% of respondents felt depressed 'most' or a 'good bit' of the time.

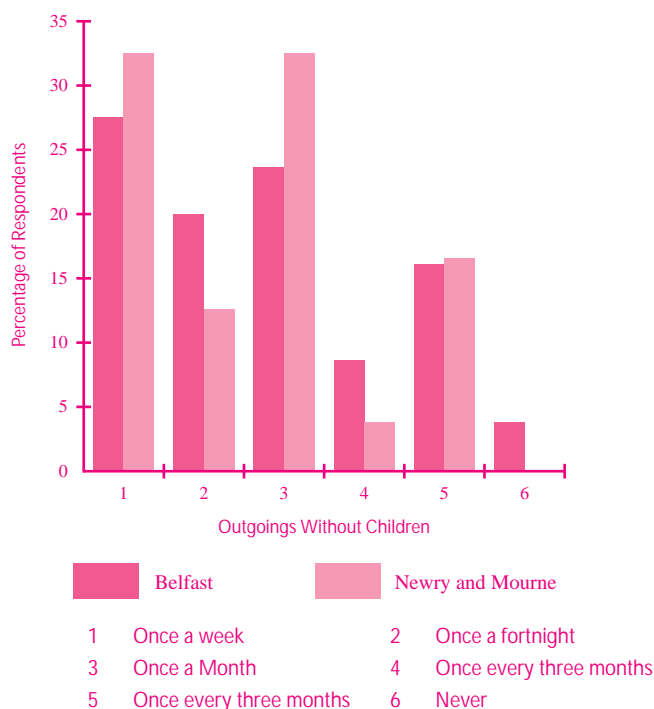
“A wise head on young shoulders”

More detailed analysis revealed that there were extremely strong relationships between suffering from 'fair' or 'poor' physical and mental health and experiencing sleeping problems, reporting high levels of tiredness and reporting high levels of depression. These findings therefore seem to indicate that poor physical and mental health and inter-related sleeping problems and high levels of tiredness and depression, are concentrated amongst approximately one third of respondents. It is evident therefore that whilst the majority of young lone mothers seemed to be coping well, a smaller but substantial core of around one third of young lone mothers, were coping less well, and were suffering mental and physical health problems which impacted on their sleep and consequently their levels of tiredness and depression levels.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

Respondents were asked how often they went out for an evening without their children with them. Figure.37. below illustrates how often respondents went out on their own, by research area.

Figure.37. Social Outings Without Children, By Research Area



The majority of respondents in both research areas reported that they went out for an evening without their children once a month or less - 52.4 per cent Belfast, and 54.2 per cent Newry and Mourne. These findings are similar to that of Spence's study of lone parents in Northern Ireland which found that 60 per cent of respondents went out without their children once a month or less (Spence, 1996b)

The frequency of going out alone without children was affected by the age of respondent's children. Respondent's with children under one years old were significantly less likely to go out alone once a month or more See Table.32. below.

Table.32. Frequency of Going out Alone, By Age of Respondent's Child(ren)

Age of Respondents' Child(ren)	% of Respondents Going Out Once a Month or More	% of Respondents Going Out Less than Once a Month	Total
Respondent has child under one year of age	64.4	35.6	100
Respondent does not have a child under one year	81.6	18.4	100

* Significant at 0.05 level

Respondents were asked about feelings of loneliness. 28.1% of respondents in Belfast and 29.2 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne reported feeling lonely 'always' or 'often.' It is quite striking to see that nearly one third of young lone mothers experience high levels of loneliness. One young lone mother explained why loneliness was such a problem:

chapter 7 emotional support

"You do get lonely. I got depressed over that before and had to go to the Doctors and see someone about it. Now I just snap out of it. It's not having anyone there to talk to. You'd like someone there sometimes to talk to, instead of talking baby talk."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, NEWRY AND MOURNE)

High levels of loneliness were significantly related to high levels of depression, indicating therefore the impact that isolation can have on the health of young lone mothers. Furthermore respondents reporting high levels of loneliness were significantly less likely to go out once a month or more frequently. Only 21.2% of respondents who described themselves as 'always' or 'often' feeling lonely went out once a month or more frequently, compared to 81.6 per cent of those who described themselves as 'sometimes' or 'never' feeling lonely.

The qualitative stage of the research illustrated the importance of getting out to socialise and get a break from parenting.

Researcher:

"Young lone mothers in the survey suggested that they wanted more child care support to get a break from parenting. At what times do you need a break from parenting?"

Respondent:

"That's why we set up our young mother's group. It's just having somewhere else to go and actually getting you out of your house. Giving your problems to someone

else, and talking about things other than babies."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Stressors

In an attempt to measure the type of things that impacted on young lone mother's health and well-being, young mothers were asked to indicate from a list of ten stressors the three problems that worried them the most. Five respondents in Belfast and one respondent in Newry and Mourne did not answer the question. Table.33. below illustrates the order of ranking of the ten stressors for each research area, based on mean scores (See Appendix 7 for more detailed information).

Table.33.

Stressors Impacting on Health of Young Lone Mothers in Rank Order, By Research Area

Stressor	Belfast Ranking	Newry and Mourne Ranking
Money Worries	1	3
Being a Good Enough	2	1
Respondent's Children	3	2
Coping Alone	4	4
Inability To Gain	5	10
Loneliness	6	5
Housing Problems	7	7
Conflict With Parent/s	8	7
Conflict With Parent/s	8	7
Conflict With Ex-Partner	9	9
Respondent's Health	10	5

The top four stresses amongst respondents in both Belfast and Newry and Mourne were the same, although their order of priority was different. Findings earlier in the report indicated that money caused a lot of stress amongst respondents, although those in Newry and Mourne indicated that they had less difficulties living on their weekly income.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

92

These findings clearly illustrate the centrality of children to young lone mothers' perspectives. They appear to contradict media stereotypes of young lone mothers as women who are selfish and think only of their own ends. Children were clearly put first amongst young lone mothers in this study. Responses earlier in the study pointed out that children are so important to young lone mothers because they feel that their child is all that they have, and they too are all that their children have. The high numbers of respondents concerned by coping alone and being a good enough parent illustrates just how important young lone mothers view the upbringing of their children, especially because they are parenting alone. As one young lone mother from Newry and Mourne pointed out:

“As a lone parent all the pressure is on you being single. If there were two people you could divide the time, you would have more time. You worry that he's (the child) is not going to get everything, like if you had two people, not going to get enough love.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, NEWRY AND MOURNE)

Confidantes

Respondents were asked to indicate who they confided in the most about any problems/stresses that they had. A quarter of respondents in both research areas suggested that they confided in their 'parent/s.' The highest percentage of respondents in both urban and rural area however, confided in their 'friend/s' about any problems that they had - 30.7 per cent of young mothers in Belfast and 45.8 per cent of young mothers in Newry and Mourne. This indicates the importance of peer support to young lone mothers.

Of some concern however, were the relatively high numbers of respondents suggesting that

they could confide in 'nobody' about any problems that they had. 18.2% of respondents in Belfast and 12.5 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne indicated this. These respondents did not indicate however, that they were more depressed than other respondents or that they had lower levels of family support.

Attitudes

Another stressor affecting the health and well-being of lone parents as the Derry study showed (CPAGNI, 1994), is the stigma which surrounds young lone parenthood. Young lone mothers are often doubly condemned for being both a young mother and a lone parent.

Attitudes of Parent/s, Relative/s, and Friend/s

Young lone mothers were therefore asked to indicate whether other people's attitudes to them had changed since they had become a young lone parent. The highest percentage of respondents in both research areas reported that the attitudes of 'parent/s', 'relatives' and 'friends' were 'unchanged' since they had become a lone parent. Table.34. below illustrates the attitudes of parent, relatives and friends to respondents since becoming a lone parent.

Table.34.
Attitudes Of Immediate Family Towards Young Lone Mothers, Since Becoming A Lone Mother

Person	Attitudes Since Becoming A Lone	% of Respondents Belfast	% of Respondents Newry and Mourne
Parent/s	Better than before	42.4	34.8
	Unchanged	47.7	47.8
	Worse than before	9.8	17.4
Relative	Better than before	30.6	14.3
	Unchanged	61.2	71.4
	Worse than before	8.3	14.3
Friend/s	Better than before	24	17.4
	Unchanged	67.4	78.3
	Worse than before	8.5	4.3

chapter 7 emotional support

Parental attitudes which were worse since becoming a lone mother, were significantly related to young lone mothers experiencing poor physical health. Whilst only 29 per cent of young lone mothers whose parent's attitudes were better than before, experienced 'fair' or 'poor' or 'very poor' physical health, 52.9 per cent of those whose parents attitudes were worse than before they were a lone mother, experienced poor health.

Attitudes of Service Providers-

Health and Social Welfare Professionals Respondents were also asked to rate the attitudes of service providers whom they had come into contact. Attitudes of Health and Social Welfare professionals, Midwives, Health Visitors, Doctors, Social Workers and Community Psychiatric Nurses were viewed as 'positive' or 'unchanged' by the majority of respondents in both research areas. Moreover high percentages of respondents described health and social welfare professionals attitudes as 'positive.'

- 65.3% of respondents in Belfast and 82.6% of respondents in Newry and Mourne described midwives attitudes as 'positive.'
- 64.5% of respondents in Belfast and 83.3% of respondents in Newry and Mourne described doctors attitudes as 'positive.'
- 65.1% of respondents in Belfast and 79.2% of respondents in Newry and Mourne described Health Visitors attitudes as 'positive.'
- 44.7% of respondents in Belfast and 61.5% of respondents in Newry and Mourne described Social Workers attitudes as 'positive.'
- 50% of respondents in Belfast and 61.5% of respondents in Newry and Mourne described Community Psychiatric Nurses attitudes as 'positive.'

There were no significant differences between the description of attitudes of health and social welfare professionals between the two research areas.

These attitudes compare favourably to those perceived by lone parents in Spence's (1996) study of lone parents. Only 29.9 per cent of respondents in the study felt that health and social care professionals attitudes to lone parents were 'favourable'

Further dimensions of the attitudes of health and social welfare service providers emerged during the qualitative side of the research. The attitudes of doctors in the smaller rural areas within Newry and Mourne were viewed as particularly positive. It emerged that this was to do with the familiarity that they had with the young lone mothers, who had often been resident with the same doctor from young childhood:

"My GP is brilliant really brilliant. But I've known him since I was small. If he (the child) is sick, I just phone up or they come down. They are so nice and they listen to you. They ask how you're getting on, how everything's going. They're informal and treat you more like a friend."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD,
NEWRY AND MOURNE)

There was strong feeling amongst participants at the Belfast focus group session however, that Doctors, and in particular those on call, were often ignorant of the circumstances of young lone mothers, and the difficulties of parenting alone.

"They make you feel sort of inferior. Like when (child's name) was wee she had a wee thing wrong with her kidneys and I had her

“A wise head on young shoulders”

94

to the doctor's all the time, and I had him out and they were really pig ignorant. They'd cut you up and make you feel like nothing. Like 'I've been out so many times and I'm sick of telling you there's nothing wrong with her. There is nothing else I can do. It's because it's your first baby and you are on your own and you're over-protective. You're wasting our time . . .’”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

“They knew I was just seventeen when I had my wee child, and that's all I ever got. 'Oh it's your first child and you are still very young and you don't know nothing about babies'. . . That's the type of attitude, you are too young, you're over-protective, you shouldn't have a child anyway.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Attitudes of Service Providers - Housing and Social Security Officers
Perceived attitudes of Housing Officers and Social Security Officers were viewed very poorly by respondents in both research areas. 52.1% of respondents in Belfast who had been in contact with Housing Officers viewed their attitudes as 'negative'. This figure was lower for Newry and Mourne, but still stood at 30 per cent. Social Security Officer's attitudes were perceived as 'negative' by 53.4 per cent of respondents in Belfast who had been in contact with them, and 18.2 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne.

Further dimensions of the 'negative' attitudes of Housing Officers and Social Security Officers

emerged during the qualitative stage of the research. Respondents clearly felt that Housing Officers were ignorant of the circumstances of young lone parents who were desperate to move out of the family home and 'get their own place'.

“When they came out to see me. I have three brothers living in the house, and me, and mum and dad, and it was a four bedroomed house, and when they came out to see me like . . . it was like 'Miss (name) there's a list' and I don't understand why you want to move out' and he said I'm not being cheeky or anything but I think you'll be inheriting this house' which means like when your mummy and daddy die. And that was his attitude.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Young mothers also reported that they felt that they had to 'plague' and 'torture' Housing Officers everyday to make sure that they were 'bothered with' and even then they felt that offers of homes made to them were unacceptable.

“I'm still living at home and quite happy living there. I have to put in for a house and the Housing Executive's attitude is because you're getting it for nothing you have to take what you get, and because you are not working getting Housing Benefit. I've got a bungalow, and I've got a house in the village which is boarded up, and my mummy says tell them that if you were buying a house you would not take the first one that

chapter 7 emotional support

you see and his exact words were but she's not buying it, she's getting it for nothing."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Respondents in Newry and Mourne were significantly more likely to describe Social Security Officers attitudes as 'negative' than respondents in Newry and Mourne.

7.3. YOUNG LONE MOTHERS: HEALTH AND WELFARE SUPPORT

Support Provided By Family

Young lone mothers were asked to indicate the level of support that parent/s, relative/s and friend/s had given them since becoming a lone parent. The majority of respondents in both areas indicated that parents, relatives and friends had given them 'a lot of support.'

Support given by parent/s was the highest with 83 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 63.6 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne indicating that their parents had given them 'a lot of support' Respondents in Belfast however, were significantly more likely to suggest that their parents had given them 'a lot of support', compared with respondents in Newry and Mourne.

When asked who had given the respondent the 'most' support since becoming a lone parent, 67.4 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 50 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne, indicated that it was their parent/s.

67.6% of respondents in Belfast and 75 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne indicated the type of support that had been given to them. Table.35. below shows the type of support given to young lone parents.

Table.35.

Type of Support Given To Young Lone Mothers By Main Provider of Support

Type of Support	% Respondents Belfast	% Respondents Newry and Mourne
General Support With Children	47.4	22.2
General Support of Parent	42.3	55.6
Emotional Support	25.8	33.3
Financial Support	34	16.7
Child Care Support	44.3	27.8
Meals	4.1	0
Housing Support	10.3	11.1

95

The comments below illustrate the true nature of support offered to young lone mothers:

"Always there for me. Has helped me out with baby-sitting. Helped me move house. Supportive and understanding."

(RELATING TO FRIENDS OF BELFAST YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD)

"Advice, emotional and financial assistance, support and encouragement. Helping out when things are rough, shoulder to cry on."

(RELATING TO PARENT/S OF YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"My mother and sister have helped me a lot since having my daughter. They helped me cope when she was a baby."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"Helped get a house, moved us in, sorted out benefits, and is always there when I have a problem."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

“A wise head on young shoulders”

“My mother has given me a house to stay with food on the table and bed for my child and myself to sleep and I love my child very much.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

“If I’m ever stuck for money I would ask my parents or my brothers and they wouldn’t think twice about giving it to me.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, NEWRY AND MOURNE)

Support Provided By Health and Social Welfare Professionals

When asked to record the levels of support given by health and social welfare professionals, reported support was quite high. Table.36. below outlines the levels of support provided by a variety of health and social welfare professionals to young lone parents.

Table.36. Levels of Support Given By Health and Social Welfare Professionals To Young Lone Parents, By Research Area

Research Area	Level of Support	Health and Social Welfare Professional			
		GP	HV	SW	CPN
Belfast	A lot of support	34.4	56.9	42.1	63.6
	A little support	51.6	36.6	36.8	27.3
	No support	13.9	6.5	21.1	9.1
Total		100	100	100	100
		N=122	N=123	N=38	N=11
Newry and Mourne	A lot of support	60.9	73.9	57.1	0
	A little support	30.4	21.7	21.4	0
	No support	8.7	4.3	21.4	0
Total		100	100	100	100
		N=122	N=123	N=38	N=11

GP General Practitioner HV Health Visitor
 SW Social Worker CPN Community Psychiatric Nurse

The level of support provided by doctors in Belfast is lower than perhaps would be expected. More detailed analysis of the data indicated that respondents in Newry and Mourne were significantly more likely to rate doctors as having given them ‘a lot of support,’ than respondents in Belfast. This perhaps relates to the comments of participants of the focus group session in Belfast, which related to the negative attitudes of doctors, who didn’t understand the particular issues around parenting alone.

When asked which health or social welfare professional had been the most ‘helpful’ to respondents, Health Visitors in both areas were most often indicated. Figure.38. below illustrates which health and social welfare professional was the most helpful to respondents, by research area.

Figure.38. Most Helpful Health and Welfare Professional, By Research Area



It must be acknowledged however, that few people had been in contact with Social Workers and Community Psychiatric Nurses so the figures may be slightly misleading.

The sample populations were asked to explain why a particular health and welfare professional had been the most helpful to them, in an attempt to illustrate what is important in service delivery. The highest percentage of respondents in Belfast reported that the reason why a particular health and welfare professional was the most helpful was because they 'gave or referred respondent to advice' (34.4%). Almost equally important was that they had 'let the respondent talk and had listened to the respondent' (33.6%). In Newry and Mourne this was the reason why a particular health and welfare professional was the most helpful to respondents (47.8%). Clearly it is important to young lone mothers that their voices are heard and this is why health and welfare professionals are thought to be particularly helpful. Furthermore, health and welfare professionals are evidently seen as sources of advice to young lone mothers.

Membership of, and Need for Young Lone Parents Support Group

Only 8.6 per cent of the Belfast sample population reported being a member of a lone parents support group and in Newry and Mourne no one reported membership. The importance of having a lone mothers support group was acknowledged by one member:

"I'm in a young women's group. I've been in it for years now. When my wee un was little I took her around there and put her in the crecke, and went and had tea and that, and sorted out all your problems, cry on someone else's shoulder like someone who's in the same situation."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Respondents who were not a member of a support group were asked how interested they would be in joining one. Levels of interest were relatively high - the highest percentage of respondents in both urban and rural area said they would be 'interested' in joining a support group. 40% of respondents in Belfast and 54.8 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne reported that they would be 'interested' or 'very interested' in joining a support group, indicating therefore a specific need for this type of peer support amongst certain young lone mothers.

General Support

At the end of the questionnaire, an open-ended question asked respondents if there was anything else that they felt could be done to help lone parents. 35.3% of respondents in Belfast and 25 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne added their own comments. Responses related to a variety of issues such as child care, training for lone parents, benefit entitlement knowledge, advice organisations, education opportunities, holiday support, lone parent support groups, work and accommodation for lone parents. The highest percentage of responses referred to child care, demonstrating how important the issue of child care is to lone parents. The comments below are a few of those illustrating the type of support young lone parents need.

"I'm either expected to go back to work while my child is too young for me to leave him. OR that when I want to go back to work I won't be able to get child care."

"No local play facilities for my child and nothing local for myself. No safe play areas. (Child's name) is mainly confined to house."

“A wise head on young shoulders”

98

“Better and more child care facilities and better education opportunities. have been lucky and have found a good job. I feel this is what has made my experience better. I know that many other lone parents aren't as lucky.”

“Free child care or financial assistance from Government. More help and support for lone parents finishing education or returning to work.”

“More child care facilities and better benefits to encourage me to work.”

“I feel there should be more parenting groups and places to go for people who are in my situation meeting people who are in a similar situation. wouldn't have felt so isolated and lonely.”

7.5. SUMMARY

- The majority of young lone mothers in both urban and rural areas reported that their physical and mental health were ‘very good’ or ‘good’. However, it was a matter of some concern that one third of young lone mothers in both research areas reported that their physical and mental health was ‘fair’, ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’, especially considering the young age of the population.
- Experiencing poor mental health was significantly related to having debts. Debts occurred most frequently amongst young lone mothers living alone.
- Sleeping problems and high levels of fatigue and depression were experienced amongst a sizeable number of young lone mothers. Young lone mothers experiencing these problems were significantly more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health.
- 28.1% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 29.2% of young lone mothers reported that they were ‘always’ or ‘often’ lonely. Loneliness was significantly related to going out less than once a month.
- Money worries were rated as the biggest stressor in the lives of young lone mothers. Young lone mothers were also particularly worried by their children, being a good enough parent to their children, and coping alone in the upbringing of their children.
- The highest percentage of young lone mothers in both areas confided in their friends the most about any problems that they had, illustrating therefore the importance of peer support to young lone mothers.
- The attitudes of parents, relatives and friends remained largely unchanged, to young lone mothers since they had become lone parents. However, where parental attitudes were ‘worse’ than before the mothers became lone parents, this had a negative effect on the physical health of respondents.
- The attitudes of health and social welfare professionals were rated as particularly positive, although young lone mothers in Belfast pointed to Doctors sometimes being ignorant of the circumstances of young lone mothers and the difficulties of parenting alone.

chapter 7 emotional support

- Attitudes of Housing Officers and Social Security Officers were rated poorly. 52.1% of respondents in Belfast, and 30% of respondents in Newry and Mourne who had been in contact with a Housing Officer viewed their attitudes as 'negative'. 53.4% of respondents in Belfast, and 18.2% of respondents in Newry and Mourne who had been in contact with a Social Security Officer viewed their attitudes as 'negative'.
- Young lone mothers reported high levels of support provided by both the extended family, and particularly by parents.
- High levels of support were also provided by health and social welfare professionals. Doctors in Belfast however were significantly more likely than Doctors in Newry and Mourne, to be rated by respondents as giving 'no support'.
- Health Visitors were considered to be the 'most helpful' health and social welfare professional. This was because they gave young lone mothers advice and acted as emotional confidantes to them.
- Few young lone mothers were members of a lone mothers support group. 40% of Belfast mothers and 54.8% of Newry and Mourne mothers indicated that they would be interested in joining one.

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

100

5

young lone mothers: schooling

CHAPTER 8 Schooling

"She was only out one day to me and that was for about one hour. I got one day of tuition and then she never came again."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD BELFAST)

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



Chapter Eight: Schooling

This, the final section of the report examines the experiences of young lone mothers who became pregnant whilst at school. It was deemed necessary from the outset of the project that any study of young lone mothers could not exclude the experiences of those that became pregnant whilst at school, even though they would represent a small minority of lone parents under the age of 25. This section of the report therefore looks firstly at the policy context in relation to educating young mothers. The next section then looks at the numbers of women who experience pregnancy whilst in compulsory full-time education.

It then examines previous research which looks at young lone mothers experiences of schooling, concentrating mainly on the findings of a study carried out by Save The Children in 1996 on school-age mothers. The focus then turns to the study populations and their experiences of being a school-age mother.

8.1. THE POLICY CONTEXT: EDUCATION AND YOUNG MOTHERS

Each Education and Library Board in Northern Ireland is legally required to provide free education to pupils attending schools in Northern Ireland from the compulsory ages of four to sixteen (DENI, 1994 quoted in SCF, 1996:20). Each Board must also provide a Home Tuition service at least for those aged less than 16, who are for whatever reason, unable to attend school. Young women in the province who become pregnant whilst of compulsory school-age should in theory at least, be able to continue with their education despite their pregnancy.

8.2. NUMBER OF SCHOOL AGE MOTHERS

Mothers aged 16 and under represent a very small proportion of all young mothers. Figures relating to teenage births, suggest that 60-70 per cent of all births occurring to women aged 15-19, occur to women aged 18-19 (Selman and Glendinning, 1994/5:39). It is however, almost impossible to be accurate about the figures on school-girl motherhood because of the different status between a 16 year old who is still of statutory school-age, and a 16 year old who has left school. Never-the-less statistics suggest that the number of mothers aged 16 and under is relatively small in Northern Ireland. The number of

mothers aged 15 and under has hardly fluctuated between 1982 and 1992. In 1982 there were 25 and in 1992, 34. For those aged 16 years of age, in 1982 there were 104 births and in 1992, 144 (Dawson, 1995:3).

8.3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The most comprehensive survey of school-age mothers in Northern Ireland carried out by the SCF, suggested that when looking at the way the school system had treated young mothers, there was 'cause for celebration. but not for complacency' (SCF, 1996:57).

Schools were congratulated on two accounts. Primarily the research illustrated that on notification of pregnancy, schools' treatment of young women was generally 'the same' as before. Forty-five per cent of the 91 young women in the study sample reported that their school had treated them the same or better (Ibid:32).

Praise was also given to Home Tuition system, and in particular to the Home Tutors themselves. 50 per cent of the sample of 91 mothers described their Home Tutors as a 'friend', and 81 per cent of Home Tutors were described by respondents as having encouraged them to return to school after the birth of the baby. Sixty-three per cent of the sample did in fact return to school (Ibid:39).

chapter 8 schooling

Schools in Northern Ireland were criticised however on three main notes. One in five of the young women in the sample had distinctly negative feelings to report about how the staff treated them on recognition of their pregnancy. One young woman suggested that:

"When I told the Head Nun at school she sent me a letter and told me not to come back even though I was not showing. She treated me like a leper"

(PUPIL QUOTED IN IBID:34)

Dawson's (1995) study of educational provision for pregnant school-girls found too that schools were often not keen to have young mothers in their classes (Dawson, 1995:9).

On a second note, criticism was mounted at the fact that over half of the sample felt that more could have been done to 'support' them at school. Respondents spoke about this both in terms of being treated with 'more respect' by staff, and in terms of the shortage of courses relevant to their situation.

Other criticisms were made of the Home Tuition service. One-fifth of the sample of school-girl mothers received no home tuition at all. Dawson's (1995) research on school-girl mothers has commented that the level of Home Tuition in Northern Ireland compares favourably to that of England, Scotland and Wales. In 1995 four ELBs provided eight hours of tuition per week, with the fifth resourcing five hours, compared to England, Wales and Scotland where the most common number of hours available per week was five (Dawson, 1995:4). Levels of Home Tuition in the SCF's study however, were variable. Of those who had stayed in school the majority (51%) experienced 3-6 hours of Home Tuition before the birth of the baby, and none after the birth (SCF, 1996:40).

Further problems were attributed to the content of Home Tuition. As many as three-quarters of the sample said that the actual content and structure of Home Tuition that they received was not relevant to them. In some cases pupils desired to continue with a more academic programme, doing the same work as other class members and getting more specialist subject support. To others a programme of support related to their new circumstances would have been welcomed more (Ibid:58).

Dawson (1995) has pointed to the fact that the provision of education other than that provided by Home Tutors and schools, is necessary in some cases. At the present time however, Northern Ireland has only two 'special centres' which provide education. These are somewhat unsatisfactory since young mothers are taught alongside children with emotional and behavioural disorders (Dawson, 1995:9).

Two crucial measures of whether the education system had met the needs of school girl mothers indicated that majority of young mothers in the survey felt the education system had failed them because of their pregnancy. One-third of young women in the SCF's study had in fact left school completely, either before or after the birth, and in an answer to a direct question to measure the extent to which the education of school-age mothers suffered as a result of their pregnancy, 55 per cent of the sample mothers indicated that they felt that they had 'missed out' on opportunities at school to take their exams due to their pregnancy (SCF, 1996: 39, 43 and 42).

Perhaps one of the main reasons why young mothers may miss out on opportunities to take exams, is the lack of child care provision for young mothers. At the present time young mothers have to rely on the extended family to provide informal child-care, and if there is no-one at home who can do this, the girl normally cannot return to school. This may mean that not all young

“A wise head on young shoulders”

mothers have the choice of returning to school. Dawson's 1995 survey of the educational provision for pregnant school-girls in Northern Ireland, indicates that child-care was not mentioned as an issue by ELBs, and no creche facilities were provided in any schools, including the special centres. This lack of provision may work against the equal opportunity of school-girl mothers to a full secondary education, and therefore must be addressed.

Having considered some of the bonuses and shortcomings of the present educational provision for school-girl mothers, the next section looks at the experiences of schooling amongst young lone mothers in this study.

8.4. THE STUDY RESULTS

The section of the questionnaire which looked at the experiences of lone mothers who became pregnant whilst at school concentrated on three specific areas-attitudes and treatment, Home tuition, and support.

The School Sample

Only a minority of respondents in both Belfast and Newry and Mourne had become pregnant whilst at school, 24.5 per cent (34) of respondents in Belfast and 20.8 per cent (5) of respondents in Newry and Mourne. Two respondents in Belfast and one respondent in Newry and Mourne did not however complete the section on schooling. They have therefore been left out of the analyses. This section concentrates on 32 respondents from Belfast and four respondents in Newry and Mourne.

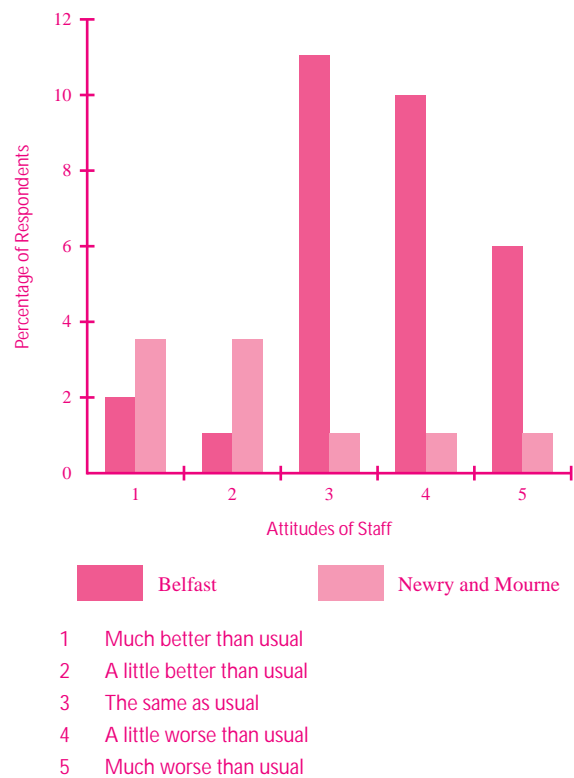
Attitudes of Staff

Of the 32 young lone mothers who had become pregnant whilst at school in Belfast the majority, 53.3 per cent, reported that staff attitudes were 'a little worse' or 'much worse' than usual, on finding out about the respondent's pregnancy. Although the highest single number of respondents reported that staff attitudes were 'the same as usual,' some concern must be registered at the

fact that respondents felt they were being treated worse simply because of their pregnancy.

Of the four respondents in Newry and Mourne who had become pregnant whilst at school, three out of four reported staff attitudes as being 'much better than usual'. Figure.39. below illustrates staff attitudes to pupils on finding out about pregnancy, by research area.

Figure.39. Staff Attitudes, By Research Area



It is clear that one cannot make assumptions about consistency of treatment of pregnant school girl mothers by staff across different Boards and at different schools.

These attitudes were reflected in the differential treatment of those who had become pregnant whilst at school in Belfast and Newry and Mourne. Respondents were asked if there was anything else that they would like to add about the way they were treated at school. 14 respondents in Belfast offered further comments, and 2

respondents in Newry and Mourne. Of those who offered further comments on treatment of them by their school in Belfast, 64.3 per cent suggested that they had been treated in a negative manner by the school, 14.3 per cent offered mixed comments about their treatment at school, and 21.4 per cent said that they had been treated in a positive manner. Those in Newry and Mourne however, only offered positive comments.

Positive comments in Belfast centred around people's attitudes. One respondent pointed to the fact that not being treated any differently to other pupils helped her. Another respondent suggested that she was treated in a positive manner because she was attending Technical College at the time, and people's attitudes were 'that little bit more open.' A further respondent indicated that 'young teachers 20-35' were particularly 'nice.'

The two respondents with mixed comments suggested that the treatment that they had experienced at the hands of some teachers was more favourable than that of others.

"My headmaster was judgmental and made the experience a little worse for me. But most of staff were O.k."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Negative comments in Belfast centred around four main issues. Being treated in a disrespectful manner (4 respondents); not being given enough support with school work (3); being forced to leave school (one respondent); and not having privacy respected (one respondent.) Some pupils clearly felt that they were ostracised and humiliated as a result of their pregnancy.

"My teachers did not want to know and made it quite clear that they didn't want anyone that was having a baby bringing it back to school."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"Headmistress really rude and only worried about school's reputation."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"The staff at school made me feel like I was carrying a disease not a baby."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"The staff seemed to think that I wasn't able to do the work because I was pregnant."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF TWINS, BELFAST)

Attitudes of Pupils

Attitudes of pupils towards young lone mothers who had become pregnant whilst at school in Belfast were rated more positively than the attitudes of staff. 32.3% of respondents reported that pupil attitudes were 'better' or 'much better' than usual, with the majority (51.6%) reporting that they were the same as usual.

In Newry and Mourne there was the same picture with three out of four respondents reporting attitudes which were the 'same as usual' or 'better than usual', and only one respondent reporting attitudes were 'worse' than usual.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

Home Tuition Provided Before and After Birth

Hours of Home Tuition provided before and after the birth of the baby were disconcertingly low. Over half of respondents from Belfast and 50 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne received no Home Tuition before the birth of their child. The proportions of respondents receiving Home Tuition after the birth of the baby decreased still further, with three quarters of respondents in both areas receiving no Home Tuition at all. Tables.37. and .38. below illustrates the hours per week of Home Tuition that respondents received, by research area.

Table.37.
Hours of Home Tuition Per Week Before Birth of Baby, By Research Area

Hours of Home Tuition Per Week	None	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	More than 8 hours
Belfast % of Respondents	56.3 (18)	15.6 (5)	9.4 (3)	3.1 (1)	15.6 (5)	0
Newry and Mourne % of Respondents	50 (2)	0	25 (1)	0	25 (1)	0

Table.38.
Hours of Home Tuition Per Week, After Birth of Baby, By Research Area

Hours of Home Tuition Per Week	None	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	More than 8 hours
Belfast % of Respondents	75 (24)	9.4 (3)	6.3 (2)	6.3 (2)	3.1 (1)	0
Newry and Mourne % of Respondents	75 (3)	0	0	0	0	25 (1)

Levels of Home Tuition are much lower than those received by the sample population in the SCF study. 38 per cent (12) respondents in Belfast 50 per cent (2) respondents in Newry and Mourne, did not receive any Home Tuition at all. Compared to one-fifth of the sample in the SCF study. There are several points which must be made however with reference to Tables.37. and .38.

It must be pointed out that 50 per cent of the school sample mothers in Belfast and 75 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne were not recruited to take part in the study through the ELB's records of applications for Home Tuition. Therefore some of the respondents receiving no Home Tuition at all, may not have received it because they did not apply for it. This does not detract from the fact however, that some young lone mothers may be slipping through the net as far as completing their compulsory education is concerned, because they are not being given the opportunity to complete their schooling through Home Tuition or otherwise.

An in-depth look at those respondents who had not received any Home Tuition in Belfast, revealed that 6 out of the 12 respondents had not been offered it, although later comments indicated that if they had been they would have accepted it.

“They didn't offer it to me and told me I had to get back to school six weeks after I had my twins.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF TWINS, BELFAST)

One of these six young mothers was in fact told that she had to leave school, and no offer of Home Tuition was made.

“When I became pregnant I was told to leave school, although I got work sent home and still finished my exams.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Therefore it appears that offers of Home Tuition made by schools to pupils, are dependent on what school the young mother attended.

One respondent was promised Home Tuition but it appears that she did not receive it.

"When I got time off I was never sent my work from school, every time me and my mother rang for my tutor they never wanted to know and never came to my house, they told me I should never have got pregnant in the first place."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

A further respondent dropped out of school on becoming pregnant, although it is unclear whether or not she was offered Home Tuition. For four final respondents it is not clear why they did not receive Home Tuition, although all four were 16 years of age on becoming pregnant and therefore may have only had their exams left to complete. All four did not drop out of school.

Those respondents not receiving Home Tuition in Newry and Mourne, were over compulsory school-age when they had their children, and therefore may not have been offered Home Tuition. However one could argue that since these young women have shown a commitment to their education by continuing into post 16 education, Boards may have a duty to offer them Home Tuition so that they can continue with their education despite their pregnancy.

The Usefulness of Home Tuition

Of those who did receive Home Tuition in Belfast and Newry and Mourne, the majority of them, 65 per cent in Belfast and 100 per cent in Newry and Mourne, reported that they had found it 'useful.' Reasons offered as to why it was 'useful' centred around the respondents making progress in their studies, illustrating therefore the importance of continuing education despite pregnancy, to the majority of respondents receiving Home Tuition. Table.39. below outlines why respondents in both research areas found Home Tuition useful.

Table.39.

Reasons Why Home Tuition Was Useful To Respondent, By Research Area

Reason Why Home Tuition Described As Useful	Belfast % Respondents	Newry and Mourne % Respondents
Helped with revision/ preparation for exams	25 (3)	0
Kept respondent up-to date with education whilst off school	33.3 (4)	50 (1)
Respondent learnt more with one-to-one tuition	25 (3)	50 (1)
Home Tutor not judgmental of pregnancy	16.6 (2)	0
Total	100 N=12	100 N=2

107

For those in Belfast who did not find Home Tuition useful, the main reason given was that it was too limited in length (50% of respondents), giving concern about the number of hours provided by the Board. As one respondents implied:

"She was only out one day to me and that was for about one hour. I got one day of tuition and then she never came again."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

A further two respondents pointed to the fact that Home Tuition was not suitable for them, indicating a need for varying forms of educational provision. A final respondent reported that the content of her Home Tuition was not suited to her needs.

Respondents Missing Out On Opportunities To Take Exams

Respondents were asked as a direct measure of whether current educational provision is failing young women who become pregnant whilst at school, whether they thought that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams because of their pregnancy.

“A wise head on young shoulders”

There were some differences between the two research areas. All four respondents from Newry and Mourne who had become pregnant whilst at school felt that they had not missed out on opportunities to take exams. There was a different picture in Belfast however, with nearly two thirds of respondents reporting that they felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams. It is likely that the negative attitudes of staff towards young lone mothers in Belfast may have had some consequence on their opportunities to take exams.

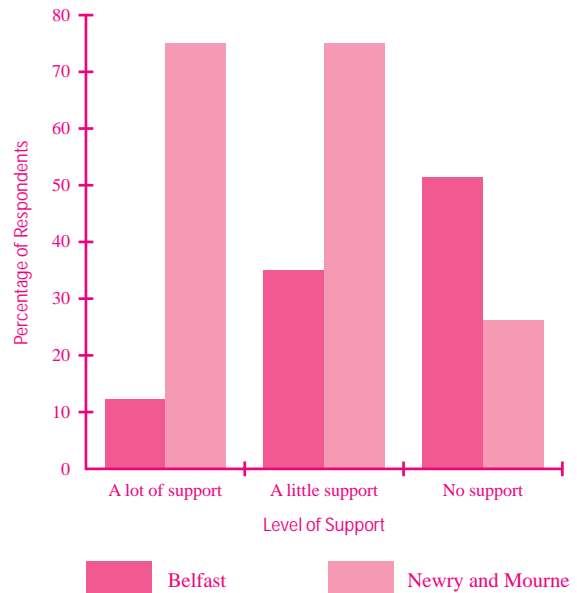
A higher percentage of those who had received no Home Tuition at all, reported that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams, than those respondents who had received some Home Tuition, although this was not significant. 70 per cent of those who received no Home Tuition before the birth of their baby felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams, compared to just 37.5 per cent of those who had received Home Tuition before the birth of their baby. It is clear that Home Tuition plays an important role in the opportunities for young lone mothers to take their exams. Examinations play a crucial role in the long term employment prospects of young lone mothers. Therefore all pregnant school-girl mothers must be offered Home Tuition, in order that they can take their exams and improve their future prospects.

8.5. YOUNG LONE SCHOOL-AGED MOTHERS: EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

Levels of Perceived Support Given By School To Young Lone Mother

Perceived levels of support offered by the school varied distinctly between Belfast and Newry and Mourne respondents. In Belfast only 12.9 per cent of the population suggested that their schools had given them ‘a lot of support’ compared to 75 per cent (3) of respondents in Newry and Mourne. Moreover, in Belfast the majority of respondents (51.6%) suggested that their school had given them ‘no support’. Figure.40. illustrates the levels of perceived support given to young lone mothers by their school.

Figure.40. Levels of Perceived Support Given By School To Young Lone Mother, By Research Area



Lack of support from the school was significantly related to respondents perception of whether or not they missed out on opportunities to take exams. Respondents who reported that their schools had given them ‘a little’ or ‘no support’ were significantly more likely to indicate that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams because of their pregnancy, than respondents reporting that their school had given them ‘a lot of support.’ See Table.40. below.

Table.40. Perceived Level of Support Given By School, By Missing out on Opportunities To Take Exams

Level of Support	% of Respondents Missing out on Opportunities To Take Exams	% of Respondents Not Missing out on Opportunities To Take Exams	Total
A lot of Support	33.3	66.7	100
A little or no support	76.5	23.5	100

* Significant at 0.01 level

It is evident again that individual schools play a crucial role in respondents opportunities to take exams. Schools therefore are playing a major part in determining the future of women who become pregnant whilst at school.

Support Required As A School-Aged Mother Respondents were asked what, if anything, they would do to help someone in their situation, if they were Principal of their school. 68.8 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 50 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne offered suggestions. The type of responses recorded ranged from letting respondents sit their exams to providing child care in school. Table.41. below gives the range of responses, by research area.

Table.41. Support Required By Pupils

Type of Support	Total Number of Respondents
General Support	8
Talk to them personally	3
Do not judge them	3
Provide Child care in school	3
Provide sex education	1
Provide more Homework	4
Arrange for Home Tuition	3
Let them sit their exams	2
Let them continue at school	1

* Respondents could put forward more than one response

The table above illustrates a real commitment amongst respondents to continue with their education. The comments indicate that it would be easier for respondents to do so, if School Principals were more supportive of their desire to make progress in their studies despite their pregnancy, and without being made 'uncomfortable' at school.

"Give them Home Tuition and help with other people's attitudes."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"I would allow them to take their exams, and provide them with work books for revision."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"Let them stay at school until they were ready to leave and give a lot more support with work towards exams."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"Talk to them, have more time for them, listen to what they have to say, and advise them."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"I did not get Home Tuition. So I would make sure that the person got their tuition while they were off school."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"Be less judgmental and offer better support. It can happen to anyone."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

"Let them take their exams whether they were showing or not and have a child care scheme so they can come back to school."

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

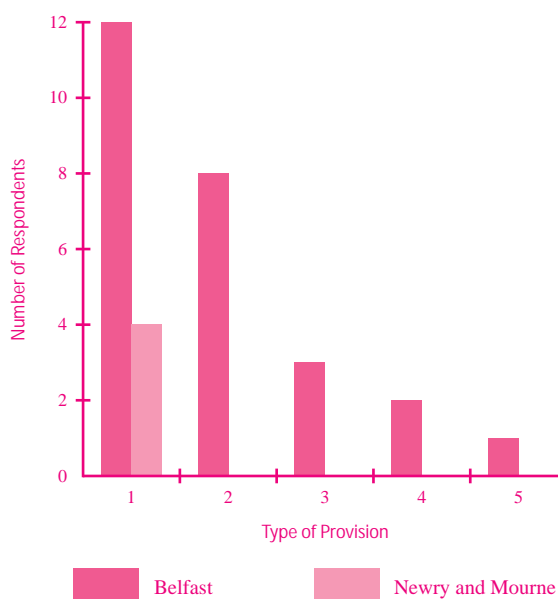
“A wise head on young shoulders”

“I would give them all the help they could ever have I would make sure they got their work and their tutor they need to get to pass their exams. I would make sure the teachers did not treat them if it was no use teaching them, a waste of time.”

(YOUNG LONE MOTHER OF ONE CHILD, BELFAST)

Type of Educational Provision Requested
In an attempt to determine whether or not there was a need for different forms of educational provision for young women who become pregnant whilst at school, the young lone mothers in the survey were asked where they would have preferred to finish their education after having their children, if they could of had the choice. Disappointingly six respondents in Belfast declined from answering the question. Figure.41. below illustrates the results for the 26 respondents in Belfast who did, and the 4 respondents in Newry and Mourne.

Figure.41.
Preferred Choice Of Educational Provision For Completion of Education, By Research Area



It is clear that while the total population of mothers in Newry and Mourne would have chosen to stay on at school, there is a requirement amongst mothers in Belfast for additional forms of provision, other than that of the school. 54 per cent of those mothers in Belfast who answered the question, would have preferred provision other than that of the school.

8.6. SUMMARY

- 24.5% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 20.8% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne had become pregnant whilst at school.
- The majority of school-aged mothers in Belfast reported that staff attitudes on hearing of their pregnancy were ‘worse’ or ‘much worse than usual’. In Newry and Mourne however, the majority of respondents reported that staff attitudes were ‘much better than usual’.
- The majority of school-aged mothers in urban and rural areas reported that pupil attitudes on hearing of their pregnancy were ‘the same as usual’ or ‘better than usual.’
- Hours of Home Tuition provided before and after the birth of the baby were disconcertingly low. 56.3% of mothers in Belfast and 50% of mothers in Newry and Mourne received no Home Tuition before the birth of their baby, and 75% of mothers in both areas received no Home Tuition after the birth of the baby.

- 1 At school
- 2 At a school for young mothers
- 3 With a Home Tutor
- 4 With a Home Tutor or at a school for young mothers
- 5 At school or a school for young mothers

chapter 8 schooling

- The researcher acknowledges that the majority of the school-aged mothers sample were not recruited to take part in the study through applications made for Home Tuition. At the same time however, some young lone mothers are clearly slipping through the net as far as completing their compulsory education is concerned.
- 65% of young lone mothers in Belfast and 100% of young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne who had received Home Tuition reported that they found it useful, mainly because it helped respondents make progress in their studies.
- For those who found Home Tuition not useful, the main reason was because it was too limited in length.
- Whilst no respondents in Newry and Mourne felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams because of their pregnancy, 62.5% of respondents in Belfast felt that they had.
- A higher percentage of respondents who had received no Home Tuition at all, felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams, than those who had received some Home Tuition.
- 51.6% of mothers in Belfast reported that their school had given them no support, compared to 25% of mothers in Newry and Mourne. School-aged mothers who reported that their schools had given them no support were significantly more likely to suggest that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams, illustrating therefore the crucial role that individual school's play in determining the future of young lone mothers.
- Whilst all the young lone mothers in Newry and Mourne, if given a choice of options for completing their education, would have preferred to complete it at school. The majority of young lone mothers in Belfast opted for a form of provision other than that of the school.



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112

6

conclusion and recommendations

CHAPTER 9 Summary of Main Findings and Conclusions

“Young lone mothers in the study showed themselves to be proud young women, who generally managed well, despite their impoverished circumstances.”

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



Chapter Nine: Summary of Main Findings and Conclusions

114

This section summarises the main findings and draws conclusions arising from the research study of young lone mothers. It focuses on the implications of the findings for policy direction and the delivery of services to young lone mothers in both urban and rural areas. The section ends with a list of recommendations which outline the responsibilities of and action to be taken by, Gingerbread and others.

9.1. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PROJECT AND CONCLUSIONS

Social and Demographic Characteristics

All of the 163 respondents who took part in the survey were female, and were aged between 16 and 24 years. A third of the populations in both research areas were teenagers and almost half were aged 20 years or less. The overwhelming majority of young lone mothers were single, never-married mothers and had had their first child before they were twenty years of age. The majority of women had been a lone parent for only two years or less, and had only one child. Lone mother families in the rural area tended to be bigger than families in the urban area and were more likely to contain a child under the age of one. The highest percentage of young lone mothers' children in both research areas were under the age of one.

The Income and Living Standards of Young Lone Mothers

The research illustrated that approximately 90 per cent of young lone mothers in both research areas were living on £100 a week or less. Less than a third of the average gross weekly household income for all households in Northern Ireland in 1994/5. The majority of the sample's income came from benefit receipt, with few young lone mothers gaining income through employment. The predominant source of income was Income Support, which 82.7 per cent of young lone mothers in Belfast and 95.8 per cent of young

lone mothers in Newry and Mourne claimed. Child Support had little impact on the incomes of young lone mothers since few were in receipt of maintenance and the majority of those who were, were also in receipt of Income Support.

Young lone mothers reported having difficulties living on their limited weekly incomes, although the struggle was less apparent amongst young lone mothers living in the rural area. Worry about money was the chief stress amongst young lone mothers in the survey. Income Support in some cases, did not even meet the normal weekly living costs, and definitely did not allow for one-off expenses such as buying items for a new home or providing for a new baby or growing child. The payment of Income Support at a lower rate to mothers under eighteen, put a further burden on young lone mothers living either with, or apart from, their families. The true level of poverty experienced by young lone mothers was reflected in the comments they made about survival from week-to-week. These findings are particularly poignant in light of the fact that recent research has revealed that children under the age of 11 are currently severely disadvantaged in Income Support benefit calculations, when compared with older children (Middleton et al, 1997). Current Income Support allowances suggest that children under 11 years of age cost only 61 per cent of the cost of a 16 year old. Middleton et al found however, that average spending on the under 11's is actually 86 per cent of what is spent on children aged 16.

chapter 9 conclusions and recommendations

Lack of furniture for a new home and equipment for the new baby in the early weeks of motherhood, resulted in some young lone mothers applying for social fund loans, the repayment of which put considerable strain on an already insufficient income. Young lone mothers however, were more likely to opt for other forms of credit, such as catalogue shopping.

The difficulty of living on weekly incomes and of providing for a new baby or growing child and setting up an independent home, culminated in many young lone mothers going into debt. The majority of mothers in both areas were in debt, with 55.5 per cent of all young lone mothers having two or more sources of debt. The main source of debt was catalogue payments. One quarter of young lone mothers owed £501 or more.

Income And Living Standards: Financial Support for Young Lone Mothers

The findings reiterated the inadequate level of Income Support for lone parent families. Not only does it fail to provide an adequate standard of living on a weekly basis, it entrenches young lone mothers and their children into debt at an early stage of parenthood. There is a clear need to increase present income levels. The highest percentage of young lone mothers in the study suggested that an extra £20-£29 a week would make living off their weekly income easier, even though the questionnaire allowed them to choose up to £49 a week or more. It is clear that Government plans to withdraw One Parent Benefit and the Lone Parent Premium on Income Support will have truly adverse effects on young lone mothers and their children.

The findings also demonstrated a gap in the present provision of services related to benefit information and advice. Although most mothers gained their knowledge of the system from the SSA benefits office, a high percentage of respondents learnt about their benefit entitlement

solely informally - through parents, relatives and friends. Almost half of the respondents in Belfast and almost two thirds of respondents in Newry and Mourne required further information on benefits affecting young lone parents, illustrating a real need for further knowledge of the benefit system.

The Employment and Employment Intentions of Young Lone Mothers

Although the majority of young lone mothers had previously been in employment, only twenty young lone mothers in Belfast and one young lone mother in Newry and Mourne were currently employed. This level of employment is lower than that of lone parents generally, but is likely to be affected by the fact that young lone mothers are more likely to have younger children than lone parents in general.

The majority of respondents who were not in paid work described themselves as 'looking after children full-time'. Around 8 per cent were involved in employment training initiatives however, and some were involved in voluntary work.

The overwhelming majority of young lone mothers - 79.1 per cent in Belfast and 72.7 per cent in Newry and Mourne, indicated that it was their desire to enter the workforce even though they were concerned by the difficulties of combining paid work and parenting alone.

It is clear however, that for a large number of young lone mothers who were not in paid work at the time of the study, the parenting and upbringing of their very young children would be of foremost importance to them until their children were older. It must be acknowledged therefore, that it is only then that work will take precedence.

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116

Employment Support For Young Lone Mothers

The findings indicated an immense need amongst young lone mothers for employment support measures of numerous and different kinds. It was clear from the research that current strategies to get young lone mothers into employment and current employment support, are not meeting the needs of young lone mothers.

There was an obvious desire for training and/or further education amongst some mothers. The majority of young lone mothers who were not interested in working in the immediate future indicated that they had a real desire to participate in training and/or further education so that they could both increase their earnings potential and have a choice over what type of job they gained when they decided to enter the labour market.

The findings illustrated a strong need amongst young lone mothers for practical employment support services. Over 90 per cent of young lone mothers in both the urban and rural areas who were not in paid employment, indicated that they would need some form of support to help them into employment, whether it be now or in the long-term. Over a third of young lone mothers suggested that they needed three or more types of support to help them secure employment.

Young lone mothers demanded services which would help them find out where jobs were, which would teach them interview skills, and aid with their job applications. Some of these provisions will be provided by the new personal advisers for lone parents under Labour's Welfare to Work policy. Further research will be needed to assess the role and importance of these personal advisers. In addition it remains to be seen whether young lone mothers will be included in this initiative, or the alternative 'New Deal' for young people aged 18-24.

The need for service provision however, did not stop there. Young lone mothers perceived that if they were to enter the labour market, employer attitudes would have to be more understanding of some of the issues surrounding parenting alone. Furthermore, the study reiterated the importance of flexible working hours to the young lone mother who was parenting alone. The findings showed a clear need therefore, to educate employers on lone parenthood and the needs of young lone mothers as employees.

The findings reiterated those of previous studies with child care at the top of the agenda for employment support services. 60% of young lone mothers indicated that assistance with child care would be needed to help them into employment. They also stated however, that any child care made available would have to be both affordable and suitable in terms of accessibility and familiarity of setting. It has been stressed time and time again that the dearth of good quality, affordable child care acts as a significant barrier to the employment of lone parents. The Government's current child care proposals under the welfare to work initiative may not however, be appropriate for young lone mothers who wish to enter the workforce. Since the majority of young lone mothers have children under the age of four, the proposals for out of school services are not likely to meet the needs of young lone mothers.

Young Lone Mothers: Caring For Children A. Child Care

Young lone mothers had used a variety of people and agencies for child care since becoming a lone parent, although there was an overwhelming reliance on extended family for child care support. The extended family was the main source of child care support in 73.2 per cent of cases in Belfast and 62.5 per cent of cases in Newry and Mourne. Grandparents were the main providers of child care in both research areas.

chapter 9 conclusions and recommendations

Child Care Support For Young Lone Mothers

The study highlighted the inadequacy of current child care provision for young lone mothers. The majority of mothers in both research areas reported that they would like more child care support than they had at the time of the study. Young lone mothers clearly indicated that they would need more child care support if they were to enter the labour market or commence training. Their main reason for wanting more child care support however, was that a break from parenting was needed - a consequence of parenting alone around the clock. It is clear therefore, that the limited nature of child care support may be impacting on the health of young lone parents who do not get a break from parenting.

Young lone mothers pointed to the fact that the cost of child care, other than that provided by the extended family, was the main factor preventing them from getting more child care support. The (1995) Children N.I. Order's provision of day care places for children 'in need' (Article 19(2)) provides a new opportunity for the child care needs of one parent families to be met. Young lone mothers need to be made aware of how provisions under the Children N.I Order can benefit them.

B. Caring For Children and Parenting Alone

Although young lone mothers had been in contact with a variety of people for advice on the caring and upbringing of their children, the main providers of advice were the young mothers' parents and Health Visitors. The main type of advice sought was on the health of their children. Health Visitors are therefore playing an important role in providing information and assurance to young lone mothers about the care and upbringing of their children.

Caring For Children and Parenting Alone: Support For Young Lone Mothers

Young lone mothers reported an overwhelming need for further information on caring for their children and parenting alone. Between 80 and 90 per cent of respondents in both research areas reported that they desired information on aspects such as parenting, assertiveness and confidence building etc. The largest number of requests was for information on stress management. This appears to confirm the debilitating effects that lack of respite from parenting has on young lone mothers.

Housing and Young Lone Mothers

The majority of young lone mothers lived with their parents before becoming pregnant. Since becoming pregnant however, 64.7 per cent of young lone mothers in Belfast and 66.7 per cent of mothers in Newry and Mourne had moved house. The findings confirmed the importance to young lone mothers of setting up an independent home. They had moved house because they required the independence of having their own home to bring their children up in.

Between one quarter and two fifths of respondents in both research areas had moved more than once since becoming pregnant. This gives rise to concern about the security of housing amongst young lone mothers and the impact that lack of a secure home has on both mother and child, since the majority of young mothers had only been parenting for two years or less.

The majority, 41.7 per cent of mothers in Belfast and 58.3 per cent of mothers in Newry and Mourne, were currently living in Housing Executive accommodation. A large percentage were also living with their parents, although they tended to be younger respondents. The majority of young lone mothers were happy with their current accommodation. This satisfaction resulted from living with or near family and friends because of the support that they offered.

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118

Dissatisfaction with current accommodation was more prominent in the rural area and often arose from the fact that the accommodation was not ‘in a nice area’. Unhappiness with accommodation in Belfast stemmed from the accommodation being too small. This was also an important factor in the rural area.

Young Lone Mothers and Housing Support Young lone mothers’ contact with housing support agencies was overwhelmingly limited in both areas to the Housing Executive. Use of other agencies giving housing support was exceptionally limited, particularly in the rural area. It is clear that the limited awareness of alternatives such as Housing Associations, Simon Community etc effectively limited young lone mothers to Housing Executive property. This problem may be overcome to some extent, by the creation of the Common Waiting List for all applications for Social Housing. However, since not all Housing Associations will take part in this scheme, there remains an urgent need to inform young lone mothers about alternative housing support agencies.

Young lone mothers perceived the main provider of housing, alternative to that of the parental home, to be the Housing Executive, particularly because of the limited availability of private sector property. However, 52.1 per cent of respondents in Belfast and 30 per cent of respondents in Newry and Mourne indicated that the Housing Officers they had come into contact with, displayed ‘negative’ attitudes towards young lone mothers. Some also felt that they were discriminated against because of their youth and their status as a lone mother, and that this interfered with the offers of property that were made to them. If the Housing Executive continues to be the main provider of alternative housing to young lone mothers, this clearly has implications for improving future service delivery.

Young lone mothers also faced difficulties associated with long waits for Housing Executive property, which were more lengthy in the rural area. Such a long wait can put great strain on families supporting their daughters and grandchildren. It can also affect the security of housing for young lone mothers and their children who often move from one form of temporary accommodation to another whilst awaiting an offer of permanent Housing Executive property.

The Health and Wellbeing of Young Lone Mothers

Although the majority of young lone mothers reported that both their physical and mental health was ‘good’, the fact that around one third of young lone mothers in both rural and urban area had both poor physical and mental health does lead to some cause for concern, especially considering the young age of the population. High levels of sleeping problems, fatigue and depression were experienced amongst a sizeable number of young lone mothers in both areas. The study showed a relationship between these problems and poor levels of overall physical and mental health.

Around one third of young lone mothers also reported feelings of loneliness. Higher levels of loneliness were reported by those young lone mothers who went out socially less often. Again, this emphasises the importance that getting a break from parenting has for young lone mothers, and the debilitating effects that lack of respite has on the health of young lone mothers.

Top of the list of factors that impacted on young lone mothers’ health and well-being were some of the particular stressors associated with parenting alone. Young lone mothers were particularly concerned about their children, being a good enough parent to their children and coping alone with the upbringing of their children.

chapter 9 conclusions and recommendations

Young Lone Mothers: Health and Wellbeing Support

Young lone mothers, in the main, reported high levels of support provided by the extended family, and in particular by parent/s. Friends played a particular role as confidantes indicating the importance of peer support to young lone mothers. Although few young lone mothers were members of a lone parent support group, 40% of mothers in Belfast and 54.8 per cent of young mothers in Newry and Mourne, indicated that they would be interested in joining one. The findings therefore, show a strong need for developing support groups, particularly in the rural area. Support groups have an important role to play in supporting lone mothers in both practical and emotional ways. It is clear however, that general lone parent groups do not attract young lone mothers.

Health and social welfare professionals generally offered young lone mothers high levels of support, and must be commended for their largely positive role. However, the findings do suggest that doctors in Belfast are more likely to have a problematic relationship with young lone mothers. In order to work more successfully with young lone mothers, doctors in Belfast should be made more aware of the fact that contacts need to be handled as sensitively as possible to avoid the communication of negative attitudes.

Health Visitors were considered by young lone mothers to be the most helpful health and welfare professional. The findings indicated that this was because they gave mothers advice and acted as emotional confidantes to young lone mothers. Since, as this study has shown, the majority of young lone mothers have a child under five, it is likely that Health Visitors will be in routine contact with a very high proportion of them. Therefore, it is clear that they are in a good position to develop work with this client group.

Young Lone Mothers and Schooling

One quarter of young lone mothers in Belfast and one fifth of mothers in Newry and Mourne had become pregnant whilst at school. Staff attitudes to pupils who became pregnant whilst at school in Newry and Mourne were on the whole, considered to be 'better than usual'. The situation was different in Belfast however, where the majority of young lone mothers reported that staff attitudes towards them on hearing of their pregnancy, were 'worse than usual'.

Home Tuition rates were very low. 56.3% of young mothers in Belfast and 50 per cent of mothers in Newry and Mourne received no Home Tuition at all. Although this may have been because several young lone mothers did not apply for Home Tuition, the fact remains that some young lone mothers were slipping through the net. They were not being given the opportunity to complete their education through Home Tuition or otherwise because they were either asked to leave school on becoming pregnant or no offer of Home Tuition was made. It is clear therefore that the opportunities for pregnant schoolgirls and young lone mothers to complete their compulsory education is dependent on the school that they attend. Further research is needed to establish individual school's policies on opportunities for pregnant school pupils.

The majority of young lone mothers receiving Home Tuition reported that it had been useful to them. In cases where it was not useful, the underlying factors tended to be that it was too limited, giving cause for concern as to the number of hours provided by the Board, or that Home Tuition was not a suitable form of provision to young lone mothers, indicating a need for different forms of educational provision for some.

Although no one in the Newry and Mourne area who had become pregnant whilst at school, felt that they had missed out on opportunities to take exams because of their pregnancy, some three

“A wise head on young shoulders”

quarters of young lone mothers in Belfast felt that this had been the case. This single statistic indicates that work needs to be done to ensure that young women are not denied the opportunity to complete their schooling because of their pregnancy.

120

Young Lone Mothers and Educational Support

Perceived levels of school support differed between the two research areas. Although high levels of support were provided by schools in Newry and Mourne to young lone mothers, support in Belfast was generally low. 51.6% of mothers in Belfast suggested that their school had given them no support. Moreover those mothers who indicated that they had received low levels of support from their school were significantly more likely to indicate that they also missed out on opportunities to take exams. Clearly therefore, the support that different schools offer, plays an important part in determining the educational outcomes of young lone mothers.

Young lone mothers demonstrated the importance they placed on their education. When asked what they would do to help someone in their situation if they were principal of the school, young lone mothers indicated that they would be more supportive of mothers' desires to make progress in their studies by providing them with more homework, arranging Home Tuition and letting them sit their exams.

However, the findings illustrated that in order to continue with their education when pregnant, some young lone mothers needed an alternative to school. Over half the mothers in Belfast indicated that they would have preferred to complete their schooling after having their child, either with a Home Tutor, or at a school for young mothers. Further research is needed to establish the feasibility of additional forms of provision.

Young lone parents now represent some 30.4 per cent of all heads of households under the age of 25 in Belfast and 22.8 per cent in Newry and Mourne. Little research has been conducted on young lone mothers despite the fact that they have been at the centre of so much controversy. This research has for the first time, addressed young lone mothers and asked them what can be done to meet their forgotten needs. Young lone mothers in the study showed themselves to be proud young women, who generally managed well, despite their impoverished circumstances. They were women who took their responsibilities seriously, particularly in relation to the care and upbringing of their children. They were also women who had not given up hope of establishing an independent home, gaining employment and establishing some measure of self-sufficiency and independence from social security, despite the fact that they were parenting alone.

These images strongly refute the idea that young lone mothers are a group of people who have shelved all responsibility for their lives and needs. What is needed now is for the numerous and specific needs of this sub-group of lone parents to be met by Gingerbread and others. It is only then that young lone mothers will achieve their hopes.

Most young lone parents indicated that they and their children would benefit greatly from the enhanced and focused provision of practical and emotional support services. The recommendations below, therefore outline the responsibilities of and action to be taken by, the main players, in relation to aspects of service delivery for young lone mothers. It is hoped that the research and its recommendations will lead to a more integrated and co-ordinated approach to providing services and support for young lone mothers.

chapter 9 conclusions and recommendations

9.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Income

At The Level Of Central Government:

- 1 Central Government should undertake a comprehensive reassessment of the income needed to live adequately. Particular attention should be paid within this assessment to Income Support and the standard of living that it affords. The level of Income Support should then be determined according to the amount of income needed to live adequately. Income Support cannot be ignored if the immediate economic circumstances of young lone mothers and their children are to be ameliorated.
- 2 Central Government should reverse the decision to abolish One Parent Benefit and Lone Parent Premium for lone parents.
- 3 Central Government should increase the Income Support allowance for children under 11 years of age, in view of recent research findings indicating the proportional cost of a child under 11 has been underestimated.
- 4 Central Government should determine Income Support levels by the parental status of young lone mothers not by their age, and should abolish age-related differentials.

At Regional Level:

- 5 Gingerbread in conjunction with the Health and Social Service Trusts should pilot a universal outreach project which would include benefit information. The scheme should aim to disseminate benefit information to young lone mothers in their homes at an early stage of their parenthood.

- 6 Local Credit Unions should develop their services to meet the specific credit needs of young lone mothers, taking account of the particular problems that young lone mothers currently have in accessing affordable forms of credit.

- 7 Gingerbread should produce an information leaflet on the comparative costs of different forms of credit.

Employment and Training

At The Level Of Central Government:

- 8 Central Government should review it's New Deal initiative, in view of the fact that neither the programme for 18-24 year olds, nor the programme for lone parents specifically acknowledges young lone mothers or their needs. In their present form each programme could potentially disadvantage young lone mothers. The New Deal should be reviewed to ensure that optimum advantage is afforded to young lone mothers.
- 9 Central Government should increase the financial support given to the provision of targeted pre-vocational and vocational training schemes for young lone mothers. Given that large numbers of young lone mothers wish to participate in training, but few currently do so, it is essential that there is an increase in the provision of targeted pre-vocational and vocational training, which addresses the particular needs of young lone mothers for assistance with child care and travel. Gingerbread recommends the ESF Scheme as a model of good practice (See Appendix 8).

“A wise head on young shoulders”

122

At Regional Level:

10 The Training and Employment Agency should organise a conference which brings together employers throughout Northern Ireland to discuss family-friendly policies in the workplace. Models of good practice should be publicised, with the aim of encouraging employers to review their current practices. The NCOPF (1997) publication Lone Parents Into The Workplace: Good Practice, Sound Policy should be disseminated to all employers.

Caring For Children

At The Level Of Central Government:

11 Central Government, in recognition of the often limited range and availability of child care, should direct public funding to the widest possible variety of child care options for young lone mothers. The direction of public funding should support the different choices that young lone mothers make when entering education, training and work.

12 Central Government should recognise in the provision of publicly funded child care services, that the overwhelming majority of young lone mothers have children under four, and that out of schools services may not be appropriate for young lone mothers.

13 Central Government should consider the abolition of the child care disregard in Family Credit and its replacement with a Child Care Allowance. Any such initiative should recognise that the majority of young lone mothers use their extended families as their main source of child care support. The same flexibility should be incorporated in the child care allowances within existing training schemes.

At Regional Level:

14 Inter-Departmental Groups on Early Years, regional Early Years Committees, and Trust Early Years Committees should devise and monitor the implementation of a policy for meeting the child care needs of young lone mothers. In view of the fact that the children of young lone mothers are more likely to meet the criteria for ‘children in need’ under the Children N.I Order; the policy should pay specific attention to:

- the need to prioritise access to day care services amongst young lone mothers,
- the need to prioritise provision of and access to respite child care to reduce stress, depression and loneliness amongst young lone mothers.

15 Voluntary agencies and the appropriate Health and Social Service Trusts should develop partnerships which meet the need for positive parenting training amongst young lone parent households.

Housing

At Regional Level:

16 The Department of the Environment, the Executive and Associations should give greater recognition to ‘emotional needs’ and ‘emotional stress’ within the proposed Common Housing Selection Scheme.

17 Providers should acknowledge that the support needs of young lone mothers often mean that they need to be housed near to their extended family.

18 The Housing Executive should provide awareness-raising training to all staff which highlights the needs of young lone mothers.

chapter 9 conclusions and recommendations

19 The Housing Executive should evaluate the impact of the introduction of a common register of applicants on the access of young lone mothers to Housing Association accommodation. The Housing Executive should monitor whether or not the new scheme does, in fact, broaden their choice of accommodation and improve their chances of being housed within a reasonable time.

20 Housing Support agencies should promote their services to young lone mothers to ensure that they are aware of the full range of options available to them and the implications of their choices.

21 Further research is required to determine whether or not the private rented sector in its current form, can provide an alternative source of secure, good quality, affordable accommodation for young lone mothers.

22 Further research is required to assess the impact of the new system for calculating private Housing Benefit on young lone mothers' ability to find and retain private rented accommodation.

Health and Wellbeing

At Regional Level:

23 Statutory agencies and voluntary organisations should review their existing family support services to assess their effectiveness in meeting the specific needs of young lone mothers.

24 Gingerbread in conjunction with the Health and Social Service Trusts should pilot a universal outreach project to support young lone mothers. Any work undertaken should complement the existing work of Health and Social Services professionals, particularly Health Visitors.

25 Gingerbread should co-ordinate the production and dissemination of a good-practice guide for working with young lone mothers.

Schooling

At Departmental Level:

26 The Department of Education for Northern Ireland should convey a duty on individual schools to refer a pupil who becomes pregnant to an ELB Educational Welfare Officer.

At Education and Library Board Level:

27 ELBs should monitor and evaluate the action taken by the key players in response to any policy/strategy framework arising from the SCF research, to ensure that the needs of young women who become pregnant whilst at school are met.

28 ELBs in conjunction with the Regional Training Unit should outline and undertake a comprehensive training programme which meets the needs of staff and Home Tutors in relation to pregnant pupils and young mothers. Particular attention should be paid in the programme to training which addresses the need to avoid negative attitudes towards them.

29 ELBs should establish partnerships with Health and Social Service Boards and Trusts and voluntary organisations to ensure that the requirements of individual pupils for educational provision, other than that provided at school, are met. Flexible programmes which could run as alternatives to the school and Home Tuition systems should be devised and provided.

123

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124

30 ELBs should assign an Education and Welfare Officer to each pregnant pupil, who has responsibility for:

- Informing the pupil during her pregnancy of the options and support available to her for the completion of her education;
- co-ordinating a package of educational support for each individual pupil,
- co-ordinating communication between education support providers.

31 ELBs should co-ordinate information sessions for School Principals and Governors, which should aim to inform them about school-aged pregnancy, the findings of this research and the SCF report, and the action that needs to be taken by them.

At The Level Of Individual Schools:

32 In accordance with any Departmental policy and guidelines, individual schools should draw up their own codes of practice which outline the role and responsibility of the school when a pupil becomes pregnant or wishes to return to school after the birth of a child.

bibliography

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



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126

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127

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128

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130

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“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

132

list of tables

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

List of Tables

134

Table	No. Description of Table	Page No.
Table 1	Number and Percentage of Total Young Lone Parent Households in Each Health and Social Service Board Area	16
Table 2	Response by Method of Distribution and by Research Area	20
Table 3	Final Sample by Belfast Health Trust Area	22
Table 4	Young Lone Parent Households in Northern Ireland	27
Table 5	Young Lone Parent Households by District Council Area	28
Table 6	Lone Parent Heads of Household as a Percentage of Total Under 25 Heads of Household, by District Council Area	29
Table 7	Age When Respondents Had Their First Child, by Research Area	31
Table 8	Benefit Receipt, by Research Area	41
Table 9	Income Level, by Employment Status	42
Table 10	Respondents' Perceptions of Financial Situation, by Research Area	43
Table 11	Receipt of Income Support, by Respondents' Perceptions of Difficulty Living off Weekly Income	44
Table 12	Type of Difficulties Experienced Living Off Weekly Income	44
Table 13	Income Per Week, by Age	46
Table 14	Source of Debt, by Research Area	47
Table 15	Sources of Contact For Information on Benefits, by Research Area	49
Table 16	Economic Activity of Young Lone Mothers in Northern Ireland	53
Table 17	Employment Status, by Age of Respondent	57
Table 18	Employment Status of Respondents with Children Under One	57

list of tables

Table	No. Description of Table	Page No.
Table 19	Young Lone Mothers' Reasons For Not Wanting To Work in The Immediate Future	59
Table 20	Support Required to Help Young Lone Mother Into Employment, by Research Area	61
Table 21	Child Care Use, by Research Area	66
Table 22	Type of Advice Sought, by Research Area	69
Table 23	Type of Information Required, by Research Area	70
Table 24	Information Required on Stress Management, by Number of Children	70
Table 25	Information Required on Parenting, by Number of Children	71
Table 26	Housing Status of Young Lone Parents Aged 16-24	73
Table 27	Housing Tenure of Respondents Before Pregnancy	76
Table 28	Accommodation Status of Respondents, By Research Area	78
Table 29	Priorities In Making Decisions About Housing- Reasons For Being Happy With Current Accommodation	79
Table 30	Priorities In Making Decisions About Housing- Reasons For Being UnHappy With Current Accommodation	80
Table 31	Impact of Having Debts on Mental Health of Young Lone Mothers	89
Table 32	Frequency of Going Out Alone, by Age of Respondent's Child(ren)	90
Table 33	Stresses Impacting on Health of Young Lone Mothers in Rank Order, by Research Area	91
Table 34	Attitudes of Immediate Family Towards Young Lone Mothers, Since Becoming A Lone Mother	92
Table 35	Type of Support Given To Young Lone Mother, By Main Provider Of Support	95
Table 36	Levels of Support Given by Health and Social Welfare Professionals To Young Lone Mothers, By Research Area	96

135

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

136

Table	No. Description of Table	Page No.
Table 37	Hours of Home Tuition Per Week Before Birth of Baby, by Research Area	106
Table 38	Hours of Home Tuition Per Week After Birth of Baby, by Research Area	106
Table 39	Reason Why Home Tuition Was Useful to Respondent, By Research Area	107
Table 40	Perceived Level of Support Given by School, by Missing Out on Opportunities to Take Exams	108
Table 41	Support Required, By Research Area	109

list of figures

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

List of Figures

138

Figure No.	Description of Figure	Page No.
Figure 1	Young Lone Parent Households, by Sex of Head	28
Figure 2	Young Lone Parent Households, by Research Area and by Sex	29
Figure 3	Age of Respondents - Belfast	30
Figure 4	Age of Respondents - Newry and Mourne	30
Figure 5	Marital Status of Respondents, by Research Area	30
Figure 6	Ages of Respondents' Children - Belfast	31
Figure 7	Ages of Respondents' Children - Newry and Mourne	32
Figure 8	Weekly Income Levels of Respondents	39
Figure 9	Main Source of Income, by Research Area	40
Figure 10	Respondents in Receipt of Maintenance	42
Figure 11	Respondent's Perception of Financial Situation	43
Figure 12	Number of Debts - Total Sample Population	47
Figure 13	Debt Amount, by Research Area	48
Figure 14	Debt Amount of Respondents with Weekly Income of Less Than £50	48
Figure 15	Debt Amount of Respondents with Weekly Income £51-£100	48
Figure 16	Debt Amount of Respondents with Weekly Income £101-£150	48
Figure 17	Debt Amount of Respondents with Weekly Income £151-£200	48
Figure 18	Benefits For Which Further Information is Required, by Research Area	49

list of figures

Figure No.	Description of Figure	Page No.
Figure 19	Employment Status of Respondents - Belfast	56
Figure 20	Employment Status of Respondents - Newry and Mourne	56
Figure 21	Status of Respondents Not In Paid Work - Belfast	57
Figure 22	Status of Respondents Not in Paid Work - Newry and Mourne	58
Figure 23	Employment Intentions, by Research Area	58
Figure 24.	Demand For Training and Education Services - Belfast	60
Figure 25	Demand For Training and Education Services - Newry and Mourne	60
Figure 26	Cost of Child Care, by Research Area	67
Figure 27	Barriers Preventing Respondents From Getting More Child Care Support, by Research Area	68
Figure 28	Caring Advisers, By Research Area	68
Figure 29	Number of Moves Made By Respondents - Belfast	77
Figure 30	Number of Moves Made By Respondents - Newry and Mourne	77
Figure 31	Reasons For Moving House - Belfast	77
Figure 32	Reasons For Moving House - Newry and Mourne	78
Figure 33	Housing Support Agencies Used, by Research Area	81
Figure 34	Difficulties Experienced in Moving House, by Research Area	83
Figure 35	Physical Health of Respondents, by Research Area	88
Figure 36	Mental Health of Respondents, by Research Area	88
Figure 37	Social Outings Without Children, by Research Area	90
Figure 38	Most Helpful Health and Welfare Professional, by Research Area	96

139

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

140

Figure No.	Description of Figure	Page No.
Figure 39	Staff Attitudes, By Research Area	104
Figure 40	Levels of Perceived Support Given By School To Young Lone Mother, by Research Area	108
Figure 41	Preferred Choice of Educational Provision For Completion of Education, by Research Area	110

appendices

for lone parents
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland



“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

List of Appendices

142

Appendix No.	Appendix Description
Appendix 1	List Advisory Group Members
Appendix 2	List of Community, Voluntary and Women's Groups Participating in the Research
Appendix 3	Guidelines For The Administration and Collection of Questionnaires
Appendix 4	Draft Procedure For Drawing The Sample- ELBs
Appendix 5	Description of Statistical Tests and Terms
Appendix 6	Table of Mean Scores of Respondents Priorities in Making Decisions About Housing
Appendix 7	Table of Mean Scores of Stresses Impacting on Health of Young Lone Mothers
Appendix 8	Gingerbread's ESF Scheme For Lone Parents: A Model of Good Practice

Appendix 1

Members Of Advisory Group

Margaret Kelly	Deputy Director, Gingerbread N.I.
Jena Muston	Research Worker, Gingerbread N.I.
Lyndsay Cowan	Young Mother
Maria Maguire	Early Years Manager, North and West Belfast HSS Trust
Marion McAroe	Child Health Services Manager, South and East Belfast HSS Trust
Una Devlin	Health Visitor, South and East Belfast HSS Trust
Maurice Leeson	Assistant Director, Barnardos
Paula Rodgers	Social Policy Officer, Save the Children
Marina Monteith	Child Care Research Centre, QUB

143

Appendix 2

Community, Voluntary and Women’s Organisations Participating in the Research

144

Organisations From The Belfast Area

Queen’s University Creche
Mums on the Move (Youth Action Moving on Programme)
New Lodge Community Family Centre
Newtownards Road Women’s Group
Suffolk Community Centre
Upper Springfield Development Trust
Newhill Community Work Programme
Falls Women’s Centre
Barnardo’s PACT Project
Short Strand Women’s Group
Barnardo’s Tullycarnet Family Project
Gingerbread N.I.
Friendship House
Thorndale Family Centre
Ashton Centre
Duncairn Mother and Toddler Group
Ardmonagh Women’s Group
Suffolk Community Services Group
Upper Andersonstown Women’s Network
Windsor Women’s Centre
Roden Street Women’s Group
NIPPA

Organisations From The Newry and Mourne Area

Homestart, Newry
Barnardo’s Newry Family Resource Centre
Magnet Young Adult Centre, Newry
Cullyhanna Community Centre
Crossmaglen Women’s Group

Health and Social Welfare Professional Contacts Who Organised The Distribution and Collection of Questionnaires

Contacts in the Belfast Area

145

Angela McLarnon - Nurse Advisor, North and West Belfast HSS Trust

Margaret Kelly - Nursing Manager, South and East Belfast HSS Trust

Maurine Morgan - Nursing Manager, South and East Belfast HSS Trust

Contacts in the Newry and Mourne Area

Joan O'Hagan - Director of Nursing and Community Health, Newry and
Mourne HSS Trust

ELB Educational Welfare Officers Helping with Research

Belfast ELB

Elizabeth Martin, CEWO

Southern ELB

Harold Bennett, CEWO

Anne Mackell, EWO Newry and Mourne

Appendix 3

Guidelines For Administration and Collection of Questionnaires

146

- (1) How To Introduce The Research to Young Lone Parents And Secure Their Involvement

Principle of 'informed consent'. I would like you to explain as fully as possible what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, and why it is being undertaken.

You will need to engage their interest in the research. It would be helpful if you could stress to them that the research aims to improve their lives by ensuring the provision of services to meet their needs, and therefore that it would be beneficial for them to take part.

Ethical issues. It would be helpful to explain that all the answers are anonymous and confidential. I do not know who they are or where they live.

- (2) Guiding Respondents Through The Questionnaire

The questionnaires are for self-completion. Therefore it will not be necessary for you to ask the questions as it is not an interview.

I would advise that you 'guide' the young lone parents through the questionnaire. Allow them to complete the questionnaire on their own, and only intervene where they need help to understand a question.

The questionnaire is designed to be straightforward and easy to complete. The language used is simple, and in the main it will just be a matter of ticking boxes. However, if someone does not understand you can explain what the question means, as long as you do not incline someone towards a particular response.

- (3) Collecting And Returning The Questionnaire

In order to ensure the highest possible response rate it will be necessary for you to collect the questionnaires from the young lone parents during the same session that you administered them, and place them in the pre-paid envelope, and return them to Gingerbread.

Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Appendix 4

Draft Procedure For Drawing Sample

- 1 The Belfast ELB will establish the sampling frame: they will produce a list of names drawn from the records of those who have received Home Tuition from the Belfast ELB in past five years.
- 2 The Belfast ELB will inform Gingerbread of the number of questionnaires needed.
- 3 Gingerbread will post out the questionnaires with identification numbers already attached to the Belfast ELB during the first week in June 1997.
- 4 The Belfast ELB will mail the questionnaires to the sample, with covering letters enclosed.
- 5 Participants will send completed questionnaires back to Gingerbread.
- 6 Gingerbread will inform the Belfast ELB of the Identification numbers of the questionnaires which have not been returned.
- 7 The Belfast ELB will send out reminders to those who have not completed and returned the questionnaires by the last week in June 1997.

147

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Suggested Letter For Distribution By Belfast ELB To Young Lone Mothers

148

Dear

Your name has been brought forward in connection with the Home Tuition that you received from this Board.

We are helping Gingerbread N.I, a charity which supports lone parents and their children, with a research project which looks at the needs of young lone parents.

The research project hopes to find out more about the lives of young lone parents so that services and support can be more effectively targeted to help you.

We have enclosed a letter and a questionnaire from Gingerbread. It would be helpful if you are aged under 25 and a lone parent if you could fill in the questionnaire and return it in its pre-paid envelope.

This is being sent out from our offices so Gingerbread do not know your name or address. This means that everything is anonymous and completely confidential.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely

Chief EWO

Letter From Gingerbread N. I. To Accompany Questionnaires

Dear

149

My name is Jena Muston. I work for Gingerbread N.I, a charity which supports lone parents and their children, and I am carrying out some research for them. I am interested in looking at the needs of lone parents who are aged under 25.

We are carrying out this survey to find out about the lives of young lone parents. This is your opportunity to have 'a say' and tell us what services and support you would like.

If you are aged under 25 and a lone parent, you can help me by filling in the enclosed questionnaire. It is just a matter of ticking some boxes. All the information that you give is completely confidential and will be used only in this research. Nobody will know who you are or where you live. Please fill in the questionnaire and send it back to Gingerbread in the pre-paid envelope.

Thank you for your help.

Jena Muston

Appendix 5

Statistical Tests and Terms

150

Statistical Test

The Chi-Square test has been used throughout the report to test for a relationship between any two variables - a bivariate association. The Chi-Square test is used to ascertain whether or not there really is a relationship between two variables or whether it has arisen by chance.

What we need to know is the probability that there is a relationship between the two variables in the population from which the sample was derived. In order to establish this probability the chi-square test is used in conjunction with a contingency table.

The Chi-Square test is a test of statistical significance, meaning that it allows the researcher to ascertain the probability that the observed relationship between two variables may have arisen by chance, and therefore that there is no relationship between the two variables, they are independent.

The starting point for the administration of the chi-square test, is a null hypothesis. This means that the researcher implies that there is no relationship between the two variables to be examined.

In seeking to determine whether a relationship does in fact exist between two variables, the procedure entails needing to reject the null hypothesis and thus confirm that there is a relationship between two variables.

The Chi-Square statistic is calculated to determine whether we should reject the null hypothesis. The Chi-Square entails a comparison of actual frequencies in each cell in a contingency table, with those that are expected to occur on the basis of chance alone- expected frequencies.

The next step is for the researcher to decide what significance level to employ. If we say for example, that the computed chi-square value is significant at the 0.05 level of statistical significance, we are saying that we would expect that a maximum of five in every hundred possible samples that could be drawn from a population, would appear to yield a relationship between two variables when in fact there is no relationship. In other words there is only a one in twenty chance that we are rejecting the null hypothesis when we should be confirming it.

At this level of statistical significance it is very unlikely that a relationship between two variables has occurred by chance. We can therefore accept that there is a relationship between two variables and reject the null hypothesis.

Level of Statistical Significance

Throughout the report the minimum level of statistical significance that has been employed is the 0.05 level. Where the chi-square value has been significant at the 0.01 level of statistical significance and the 0.001 level of statistical significance this has been noted in the text.

Appendix 6

Mean Scores For Respondents Reasons For Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction With Current Accommodation

Respondents were asked to rate, from a list of six reasons, the top three reasons why they were satisfied with their current accommodation in order of preference. Mean scores were then calculated for each of the six reasons, to give an indication of respondent's priorities in making decisions about housing. The list of reasons for being satisfied with their current accommodation, in order of rank preference, are given in chapter.6. of the report.

151

Mean scores were calculated by giving scores to each reason as follows:

- where a respondent had ranked a reason as '1', a score of 3 was given,
- where a respondent had ranked a reason as '2', a score of 2 was given,
- where a respondent had ranked a reason as '3', a score of 1 was given,
- where a respondent had not ranked a reason a score of 0 was given.

The scores were then added up and divided by the number of respondents in the sample population.

The mean scores for reasons for being satisfied with their current accommodation are shown in Table.1. below.

Table. 1.

Priorities in Making Decisions About Housing - Reasons For Being Satisfied
With Current Accommodation

Reason Why Happy	Belfast Mean Score	Newry and Mourne Mean Score
Lives with/near family	1.04	1.5
Lives with/near friends	0.91	1.14
Lives in a nice house/flat	0.86	0.57
Lives in a nice area	0.82	0.86
Lives near the shops	0.67	0.71
Lives near the doctors	0.58	0.36
Lives near the school	0.61	0.14

“A wise head on *young shoulders*”

The same statistical procedure was followed to calculate the mean scores for respondents reasons for being dissatisfied with their current accommodation. Again respondents were asked to rate from a list of nine options their top three reasons for being dissatisfied with their current accommodation. The results are shown in Table.2. below.

152

Table.2.

Priorities in Making Decisions About Housing - Reasons For Being Unhappy With Current Accommodation

Reason Why Unhappy	Belfast Mean Score	Newry and Mourne Mean Score
Not enough space in the house/flat	0.68	0.5
House/flat is in bad condition	0.54	0.3
House/flat is not in a nice area	0.54	1
House/flat is not near family	0.38	0.4
House/flat is not near the doctors	0.3	0.3
House/flat is not near the school	0.22	0.3
House/flat is not near friends	0.16	0.2
Cannot afford rent for house/flat	0.11	0
House/flat is not near shops	*	0.4

* Mean score not calculated.

Appendix 7

Mean Scores For Stresses Impacting on Health and Wellbeing of Respondents

Respondents were asked to rate, from a list of ten stresses, the top three problems that worried them the most, in order of priority. Mean scores were then calculated for each of the ten problems, to give an indication of the type of things that impacted on young lone mothers' health and well-being. The list of problems in order of stressor ranking, are given in chapter. 7. of the report.

153

Mean scores were calculated by giving scores to each reason as follows:

- where a respondent had ranked a reason as '1', a score of 3 was given,
- where a respondent had ranked a reason as '2', a score of 2 was given,
- where a respondent had ranked a reason as '3', a score of 1 was given,
- where a respondent had not ranked a reason a score of 0 was given.

The scores were then added up and divided by the number of respondents in the sample population.

The mean scores for problems that impacted on the health and wellbeing of respondents are shown in Table.1. below.

Table.1

Mean Scores For Stresses Impacting on Health and Wellbeing of Young Lone Mothers

Stressor	Belfast		Newry and Mourne	
	Mean Scores	Ranking	Mean Scores	Ranking
Money Worries	1.22	1	0.74	3
Being a Good Enough	1.07	2	1.26	1
Respondent's Children	0.76	3	0.91	2
Coping Alone	0.75	4	0.65	4
Inability To Gain	0.48	5	0.13	10
Loneliness	0.4	6	0.52	5
Housing Problems	0.33	7	0.48	7
Conflict With Parent/s	0.32	8	0.48	7
Conflict With Ex-Partner	0.3	9	0.22	9
Respondent's Health	0.27	10	0.52	5

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Appendix 8

Gingerbread’s E.S.F. Scheme For Lone Parents: A Model of Good Practice

154

1 Background To ESF Scheme

- 1.1 Many lone parents find it difficult to participate in education and training for a variety of reasons. Practical arrangements such as who will look after the children, create particular difficulties.
- 1.2 Most lone parents are not able to pay the costs associated with training, such as child care and travel.
- 1.3 Many employment training initiatives are not flexible enough to meet the varying training needs of lone parents.
- 1.4 Many employment training initiatives are not flexible enough to allow lone parents to meet their parenting responsibilities.

For these reasons Gingerbread’s ESF Employment Linked Training Scheme was set up.

2. Main Aims of ESF Scheme

- 2.1 To enable lone parents in Northern Ireland to participate in a targeted training programme of their choice.
- 2.2 To offer flexible training packages to meet the specific and individual needs of lone parents.
- 2.3 To meet the extra costs associated with participating in training.
- 2.4 To provide lone parents with the widest possible choice of child care options, whilst participating in training.
- 2.5 To allow lone parents to build on their existing skills and progress from there within a supported environment.

3. Outline Of ESF Scheme

- 3.1 The scheme provides training opportunities for lone parents all over Northern Ireland to participate on a forty week programme which allows them to take part in an accredited course run by a local training provider.

The forty week programme includes three main elements:

- (a) course attendance;
- (b) study at home;
- (c) a work placement relevant to chosen area of study.

- 3.2 In the interests of flexibility lone parents, with the help of Gingerbread staff select a locally offered accredited course of their own choice, which meets their specific and individual needs.
- 3.3 In the ethos of self-help lone parents arrange their work placement themselves with Gingerbread ESF staff available to advise as necessary.
- 3.4 For those lone parent wishing to return to work, it is vital that they become familiar with the demands of the labour market. To meet these demands all lone parents on the scheme are therefore given training in interview skills and the completion of job application forms.
- 3.5 In order to meet the specific needs of lone parents, the scheme provides assistance with the costs of course fees, travel, child care, meals, books and equipment.
- 3.6 A weekly Child Care Allowance is available. In order to provide greater flexibility, lone parents can use this to pay for their choice of child care options.

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156

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