

Welfare Poverty to Work Poverty

The effectiveness of Welfare to Work in assisting single mothers into sustainable employment

Purpose of the literature review

The literature review Global Sisters conducted into the effectiveness of Welfare to Work (WTW) in assisting single mothers into sustainable employment included:

- analysis of government contracted employment services such as Parents Next, Newstart and the transition from Parenting Payment Single to Newstart mutual obligations
- gendered analysis of policies and policy recommendations that would assist single mothers into sustainable employment which are also in line with the objectives of Global Sisters

The paper defined sustainable employment as secure and adequately paid work that is flexible, provides opportunities for career progression, and accessible so that single mothers can manage the logistics of work and caring.



Overview

The review focuses on the impact of the 2006 changes to Parenting Payment Single policy whereby access by sole parents Parenting Payment Single was drastically cut from when the youngest child turns 16 to the day they turn eight. This then pushed sole mothers onto the lower paying Newstart Allowance.

This also included a tightened, and continually tightening, list of mutual obligations determined by a third party Job Network Agency, whereby interpretations of policy were ambiguous discretionary, and non-compliance by the welfare recipients to meet sometimes unreasonable or irrelevant compliance activities have become more punitive.

Summary of key findings

- Single mothers engaged in WTW are typically placed in low-paid and precarious jobs that afford little immediate or long-term financial security however there is also a lack of recognition in policy of the personal and structural barriers to sustainable employment experienced by single mothers. This includes the need for paid work that will offer immediate and long-term financial security and the flexibility to meet their children's needs.
- One in five Australian families are headed by single parents and the clear majority (83 per cent) of these are women
- 56 per cent of single mothers with dependent children are in paid work. However, they are likely to be employed in low skilled, low paid and unstable jobs.
- Employment of single parents generally increases with the age of the youngest child, from 40 per cent when the youngest child is eight years old to 76 per cent when the youngest is aged 15-24.
- 32 per cent of single parent households now live in poverty – up by six per cent since 2011.
- A massive 59 per cent of single parents with dependent children who rely on government assistance as their main source of income live in poverty – up by 24 per cent since 2013.
- 39 per cent of children from single parent families live in poverty, compared with 13 per cent of children in coupled families.

Policy recommendations in line with Global Sisters mission

- Invest more in single mothers' education, training and entrepreneurial activities Recognise the impact of caregiving on single mothers' employment outcomes and support single mothers into employment that is compatible with their caregiving responsibilities.
- Recognise the interaction of various policies, including welfare, labour market and family policies, in the lives of single mothers and address gendered structural barriers to sustainable employment.
- Ensure Centrelink and employment services staff receive adequate training in dealing with single mother issues and barriers and vulnerable clients.
- Support single mothers' financial security, employment and wellbeing at key junctures in their lives:
- Provide greater flexibility and consideration of the circumstances of single mothers through relaxing participation requirements and lessening punitive elements of Welfare To Work.

