



Briefing: Family Separation & Poverty

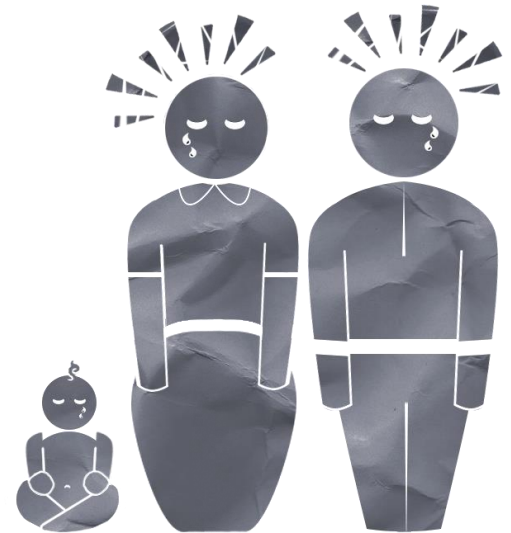
This briefing looks at what works in reducing poverty in the area of family separation and is aimed at policy-makers and practitioners. It is based on wider research by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) on Personal Relationships and Poverty for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

THE EVIDENCE ON FAMILY SEPARATION AND POVERTY:

The stress of being in poverty puts pressure on relationships and increases their risk of breakdown. Relationship breakdown can also give rise to, or increase, poverty for both parents.

For non-resident parents (typically fathers) the poverty risk is greater for those in low-paid or no employment. But, overall, economic recovery can be faster than for resident parents (typically mothers) who have a greater risk of extreme and longer lasting poverty due to childcare responsibilities that takes them out of work.

In the UK, state provision of child-care remains limited and private provision is of variable quality, expensive and typically available at fixed times that are not suitable for mothers' working hours. Children whose parents separate are affected by this socio-economic disadvantage and for a minority, where poverty is compounded by maternal ill-health or parental conflict, there can be long-term negative outcomes which can impact on their education, future employment and likelihood of low income in adulthood. Rates of cohabitation are increasing while those of marriage are decreasing. But, cohabitation itself is no more susceptible to breakdown than marriage, however cohabiting couples tend to be on lower incomes than those who marry. It is because of poverty – not cohabitation per se – that causes higher numbers of cohabiting couples to separate.



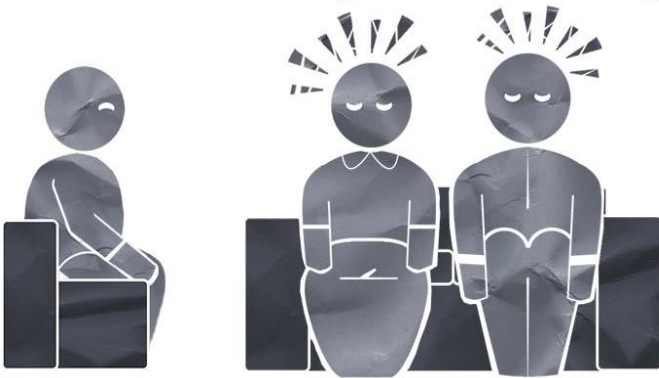
SUMMARY:

Policies and family relationships which help reconcile the tension between employment and caring responsibilities can reduce the chances of individual and family poverty.

- The stress of living in poverty brings added risk of relationship breakdown, which in turn can increase or lead to family poverty, especially for resident mothers with caring responsibility.
- Relationship support services are an effective way to tackle poverty by reducing couple conflict and promoting more stable child maintenance arrangements, but they need to reach families on low-incomes more effectively.
- Stable child maintenance arrangements are critical in lifting resident mothers and their children out of poverty after separation.
- Anti-poverty policies for separated families need to be holistic, address the multiple needs of all family members, and promote more involvement of non-resident fathers.
- Affordable and good quality childcare needs to be more readily available in the UK, to allow resident mothers to work which would reduce poverty caused by family separation.



Couple Counselling



AFFORDABLE & GOOD-QUALITY CHILDCARE

Affordable and good quality childcare is needed to ensure lone mothers can take up or increase their employment.

Current UK welfare policy where lone mothers must be available for employment will only work if affordable childcare is available. Mothers have a high risk of poverty after separation and divorce, due to them leaving the labour market because of child-care.



WHAT WORKS IN REDUCING POVERTY:

Current UK policies emphasise the importance of strong and stable relationships which give children a good start in life. But to reduce poverty more needs to be done by:

- Relationship support and couple counselling to help all types of couple relationships – whether married, cohabiting or separated – improves financial and emotional outcomes. This includes emotional wellbeing, relationship quality, couple conflict, and increasing the likelihood of stable child maintenance payments. But they need to reach families in poverty and in stress more effectively. Promoting marriage is not an anti-poverty strategy.
- When relationships do end, holistic practical and emotional support, especially when targeted at low-income families and all family members, can help alleviate adverse outcomes. This includes financial hardship, couple conflict, mental ill-health and housing problems, as well as the negative consequences suffered by some children. Services need to improve how they reach and support non-resident fathers.
- Ensuring stable child maintenance arrangements are in place is essential to lift resident mothers and children out of poverty. Formal arrangements through the Child Support Agency are more likely to endure than informal ones, but the new charges for this service may prevent its use by low-income families that need it most.

As well as reducing poverty, investment in the above policies can lead to substantial public savings if relationship breakdown is avoided or better managed when couples do separate, with problems resolved early-on rather than when they become entrenched.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This briefing is based on research by Laura Stock, Judy Corlyon, Cristina Castellanos Serrano and Matt Gieve, Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. The full report and other briefings in the series are available on the Tavistock Institute website, along with an animation visualising what works in reducing poverty:

<http://www.tavinstitute.org/projects/personal-relationship-poverty-evidence-policy-review>



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