

**GIVING A VOICE TO LONE MOTHERS: INVESTIGATING THE
IMPACT OF NEOLIBERAL POLICIES ON ACCESSING AND
PARTICIPATING IN FURTHER EDUCATION**

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Abstract

This research is an inquiry into the experiences of lone mothers who are trying to access and/or participate in further education in the presence of neoliberal policies. Its aims are to highlight the impact of neoliberal policies like labour activation has, on lone mothers in education. It also seeks to highlight the existing barriers which lone mothers face, with gender being a key theme running throughout the research.

The findings suggest that the participants in this research were worse off financially because of the implications of labour activation policies, that education for the sole purpose of labour activation, in most participants, has not been successful and did not lead to secure well-paid employment. Instead, it has been stated by participants in this research, that it may lead to the production of low-skilled workers, to feed the demands of an unsecure labour market to work in minimum wage employment, therefore reproducing inequality and keeping lone mothers trapped in a cycle of poverty. The findings also suggest that if the right type of education is attainable, that the participants felt it is very valuable, because they felt that it would have a positive influence on their child/children's development and it increased their chances of being successful in life. This research also suggests that a good education, one not just for labour activation, gave lone mothers confidence and a positive outlook on their lives.

This research seeks to inform those in powerful policy making positions to consider the experiences of the lone mothers voices in this thesis and the impact which neoliberal policies had on them in real terms, to make improvements to failing policies which already exist. It also seeks for care of children and their well-being to be taken into consideration when rolling out labour activation policies, and the long term affects

that they may have on the next generation given the mounting social problems that exist of today.

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Abbreviations

SP-Single Parent(s)

LP-Lone Parent(s)

SW- Social Welfare

OFP- One parent family payment

BTEA- Back to Education Allowance

FIS- Family Income Supplement

RS-Rent Supplement

SUSI- Student Universal Support Ireland

JST- Job Seekers Transitional Payment

INTRO- Service from the Department of Social Protection for income and employment needs.

JA- Jobseekers Allowance

FET- Further Education and Training

BTEA- Back to Education Allowance

RAS- Rental Accommodation Scheme

HAP- Housing Assistance Payment

CCS- Community Childcare Subvention

ECCE- Early Childhood Care and Education

ESP- Early Start Programme

CETS- Childcare Education and Training Support

ASCC- Afterschool Childcare

CEC- Childcare Programme

LA- Labour Activation

WTW- Welfare to Work

SPARK- Single Parents Acting for the Rights of Kids

TULSA – Child and Family Agency, Ireland

Chapter 1- Introduction

This research came about from my personal experiences of being a single mother while participating in further education. At the same time as pursuing my education, I was setting up a business to become self-employed while I studied, as no employment that was on offer, would allow me to study full time and take care of my son, so there was no other option for me as I saw it. I was being activated by the state because my son turned seven that year, and so, I was expected to work outside the home. I was lucky in the sense that I had an undergraduate degree prior, which enabled me to set up my own fitness business and run fitness classes, which I could do in the evenings after I attended college classes, but the workload of running a business, keeping a house, rearing a child alone and trying to keep up with academic work was a stressful task which almost broke me, to the point where I wanted to quit every week.

I do not hide the fact that my experience is intertwined in this research deeply, and that my experience and struggle has formed my ontological position. The introductory chapter takes the reader through my motivations for the research, gives a taste of my personal experience through my own education while single parenting, and the structure of this research.

Research Question

The purpose of this research was to hear the voices of lone mothers who were either already participating in further education or trying to access it. I wanted to hear their experiences of parenting alone while participating in education in relation to the current neoliberal agenda that has been adopted by the Irish government. I wanted to try and assess the impact of neoliberal policies on single mothers in further education, and

hear their voices in terms of the sacrifices that they made, to conform to labour activations demands and essentially, better their chances of escaping hardship and poverty. The research question therefore was, what are the experiences of female lone parents, in relation to the barriers they face to accessing and participating in education?

Based on the findings of this research and the literature reviewed, this thesis will make the following arguments;

- That significant numbers of barriers still exist for lone mothers when trying to access and/or participate in education, despite numerous policies implemented trying to lessen them.
- That psychological barriers need more research specifically for lone mothers, in terms of how they impact on lone mothers mental health and well-being, and that of their children.
- That there is no enforcement or consequences for the absent parent to be financially responsible, and that court orders for maintenance payments are often reneged on without consequence, yet social welfare payments to the lone mother/parent, are reduced based on means assessment on maintenance payments with immediate effect, which exacerbates lone mothers and their children's financial difficulties instead of easing them.
- That the impact on lone mothers in education and trying to juggle being a parent, run a household, complete academic work, and employment (in some cases), can have serious negative health implications, and forcing lone mothers out of the house to work, or out of the house into education when they are not ready, or would rather stay home to care for their child/children, may not be in the best interest of the dependent child/children or them.

- That care is still not valued in the home or outside the home.
- That institutions are still gender blind.
- That neoliberal policies are negatively impacting on lone mother trying to access and participate in further education and in addition, making them more vulnerable to income poverty.

Background leading to this research

It's important to set the context whereby the idea and motivation behind this research is named and expressed. It comes from my own experience as a single mother who started out on a journey to get more from life, as I refused to accept the dead end, minimum wage job I was in. This research came about from the stress and anxiety I experienced as a single parent for years.

The first step was a meeting with an adult guidance service, which was free. Following many meetings and failed attempts at securing a way forward on a course of study, that would both be plausible financially and worthwhile, in terms of the opportunity, for well-paid secure employment, I could only do one course of study which met all the criteria for my personal circumstance, and to satisfy the rules and regulation of social welfare. I also had to make sure I was eligible to get a grant to pay for my studies which had more conditionalities (meaning the conditions or criteria that needed to be met in order to get social welfare assistance) attached. One course out of the hundreds offered across the country, was somewhat suitable. It is worth mentioning that the same course was offered in my locality, but because it was classed as part time study, social welfare wouldn't allow it, and I wouldn't have received my grant from SUSI

(Student Universal Support Ireland). I had to do the same course but in Maynooth University in Kildare, which meant a commute of four hours each trip every week.

This commute cost me sixty euros a week in petrol which I received no help financially for from social welfare. Let's not forget, I was an unemployed and a lone parent at the time. Childcare was not sufficient in my locality to suit the hours that I returned home from university, so I begged neighbours to collect my son and mind him until I returned late in the night. I also had to stay overnight due to the hours of my course, so a friend I met on the same course, let me stay for free in her home every week. Again, this caused major problems with early morning childcare and I had to get my father to mind my son, get him to school before he himself started his own job. It was hell.

Emotionally, I was wrecked with guilt that I wasn't there. I was worried all the time about my son and who's picking him up and whether they forgot him, thinking, are they late to collect him? I had the school ring me a few times saying no one showed up to collect him. I was in Kildare. I developed chronic anxiety and got very ill that year. I couldn't sleep, my mind was racing when I tried to. I was emotionally exhausted and physically, my body was shutting down. My hair was falling out. But I continued, because I hoped that it would be worth it.

When I was at home with my son, I was there physically but not mentally. I had mountains of college work to do and was always behind. I had work placement on top of all this, which brought more stress and more problems in terms of childcare. My financial situation got so bad I was skipping meals to put petrol in my car to get to Maynooth. I decided I had to do something.

I created my own business out of pure desperation to earn some money while studying because I couldn't get a job that allowed me to take the time off I needed to study. This

brought more problems in terms of stress and physical exhaustion and childcare. I am lucky that my father helped me to take my son while I worked at night. This work meant my son was not getting to bed until 10pm on a school night which I felt guiltier about. I persisted non-the less, and achieved my higher diploma in Adult and Further Education.

Has my educational experience been worth it? Yes and no. Yes, in terms of personal development and opening more doors for me in terms of job opportunities but after I finished the course, I was applying for teaching positions (the secure ones) in Adult Education centres and I still, to this day have not even received an interview for any work of this type. I am still self-employed. I did pick up a freelance teaching job at weekends but it's far from the well-paid security I had hoped for at the beginning of my journey. So, I think I was naive at the beginning of this process, thinking education equalled a good job, that would take me out of the unsecure life I was trapped in, but I remain hopeful.

The barrier's, stress, exhaustion, guilt, and the negative impact I felt while persisting through my education is an experience I will never forget. It changed me fundamentally. It made me grow by breaking me down. It made me question everything I thought I knew about my life and how I saw the world. I lost friends and gained friends through the process. I know that I was one of the lucky ones who, out of pure stubbornness and determination succeeded, and here I am writing my master's research, but I also know, that many single mothers are not as lucky or strong-willed as me to fight each barrier thrown in their faces.

Thesis content

The literature review (chapter 2) takes the reader through the current statistics on lone parents in the Irish context, discussions on neoliberalism in relation to managerialist discourse, neoliberalism the welfare state and poverty, labour activation and education, and gender in relation to lone mothers. Chapter three describes and justifies the methods used, my ontological position, ethical considerations, and a reflexive piece. Chapter four gives voice to the participants as a stand-alone findings chapter. Chapter five deals with the analysis of the emerging themes from the findings, states limitations and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter looks at the literature pertaining to how lone mothers are impacted by neoliberal ideologies and policies, managerialism, labour activation, gender and class. The discussions are focused on the above mentioned, in relation to lone mothers accessing and participating in education and/or training.

Current statistics on lone parents in the Irish Context

The relevance of knowing statistics on lone parents in Ireland today is vital to establish, the current situation in which lone mothers are living. The facts about poverty and lone parents are essential, to grasp a fuller picture of the circumstance which most lone parents find themselves in.

The Millar report found that lone parents have lower levels of education, are from a lower manual social class and tend to have higher unemployment rates (Millar and Crosse, 2014). The pathways into lone-parenthood make lone parents a 'heterogeneous group' by age, children's ages, social status, education, and employment status (Millar and Crosse, 2015).

Single parents in Irish society are classed as disadvantaged with only 2.4 per cent reported as professional workers and 27.3 per cent skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers (CSO, 2012). Education levels for lone parents show 2.54 per cent

have no formal education or training, 17.1 per cent have primary level, 21.24 per cent have secondary level and 9.6 per cent have a third level degree. Only 3.85 per cent have a postgraduate qualification (CSO, 2012a). This shows that 40.8 per cent of Irish lone parents have not completed second level schooling. This reflects the economic status of lone parents today.

Single parents are living in consistent poverty. According to the central statistics office (CSO, 2015) figures, 23 per cent of lone parents are living in constant poverty and a further 37.7 per cent are 'at-risk-of-poverty'. The deprivation rate was in excess of 63 per cent in 2013. No doubt these levels have risen since then.

Neoliberalism in General

There is this thing called neoliberalism which has, and is being discussed, using various definitions of the word, and in relation to many things, across a broad spectrum of social and political forums. It is being discussed here firstly, to understand what neoliberalism means pertaining to this research, and secondly, how neoliberalism and its many masks, are impacting on lone mothers in Ireland in relation to education, social policy, employment, and poverty. Its relevancy to this research is seen through access to education, completion of education and subsequently employment opportunities.

Neoliberalism is being discussed, in relation to lone mothers and the impact it is having on them. Neoliberalism is viewed in this research through a lens or mechanism, that the Irish government is using, to implement policies such as labour activation. Neoliberalism has many descriptions, this is another which I believe embodies the language applicable to this research;

It is an ideology which legitimates individual competition and questions collective structures; it is a political project of institutional transformation, against any attempt to institute “collectivism” and against the types of capitalism which had resulted from the various social-democratic compromises, in particular in the post-war period, such as redistributive social protection, workers’ collective rights or legal protection of employment and economic status

(Amable, 2010 p.7)

Harvey (2005, p.2) says that, ‘neoliberalism is a broad term used in various ways to describes various things’. He explains it as a ‘theory of economic political practices’ that say’s that human’s well-being can best be advanced by liberating them to be entrepreneurial within an institutional framework. Strong private property rights, free markets and free trade characterize this framework. The state takes a back seat in neoliberalism but ensures to preserve an institutional framework to allow these practices to take place. The state’s role is to set up and protect the conditions to ensure the free market can function properly. Importantly, in neoliberalism, if a market doesn’t exist (in areas such as education, land, water, health care, social security) then they must be created (Harvey, 2005) by state action if necessary. Beyond this, state interventions are minimal.

Amable (2010) states that neoliberalism as an ideology is based on the idea that the ideal world order should be free and fair competition between individuals. He goes on to suggest that this will always be challenged by individuals or groups who want to seek more than their fair share, and that this is where public intervention steps in, to restore conditions of fair competition (p.5). Amable (2010) recognizes that this competition is good in terms of economic efficiency, by allowing the best individuals to rise to the top and be rewarded according to their merits, and allow them to better themselves.

Castree et al. (2013) refers to it as a,

Macroeconomic doctrine, a true-ism of which the key elements are variously described but always include the value of private enterprise and suspicion of state interference.

Neoliberalism wants the state to be run like a business in terms of efficiency and to reduce always expenditure through whatever means necessary. Neoliberalism can be indexed to a sort of 'rationality' in the Foucauldian sense, linked less to class and more to specific mechanisms of governments, and recognizable modes or methods of creating subjects (Castree et al. (2013)).

For this research, neoliberalism is viewed in terms of governmental mechanisms to produce the 'active' and 'responsible' citizen. As Castree et al. (2013) explains, neoliberalism in contrast, puts governmental mechanisms developed in the private sphere to work within the state itself, so that even core functions of the state are either subcontracted out to private providers, or run (as the saying has it) 'like a business'. This can be seen in the Irish context where private companies are being contracted to do the work that was done by the state, an example of this is TULSA. The question of what should be public and what private becomes blurred, as the state itself increasingly organizes itself around 'profit centres', 'enterprise models', and so on. It is here we see managerialism creeping in. Rather than shifting the line between state and market, neoliberalism in this account is involved in the deployment of new, market-based techniques of government within the terrain of the state itself. At the same time, new constructions of 'active' and 'responsible' citizens and communities are deployed to produce governmental results that do not depend on direct state intervention. The 'responsibilized' citizen comes to operate as a miniature firm, responding to incentives, rationally assessing risks, and prudently choosing from among different courses of action. (Castree et al, 2013)

Discussions on Neoliberalism

Ferguson, in Castree et al. (2013) acknowledges that there is vast literature which exist condemning neoliberalism as 'bad' for the 'poor and working people'. He states that he does not disagree with this, but wonders why he should bother to read more analysis only to reach the same conclusions. He agrees that the powerless are getting the short end of the stick, but that this is not new or surprising news. Ferguson raises the point that the 'left' don't like to be governed, or don't like the way in which it is being done, but importantly highlight's that the 'left' has yet to produce a plan to govern in a different way, which adequately addresses the challenges of our time. I do not believe that Ferguson is suggesting that there is no alternative to neoliberalism, but rather is pointing out that, if it was that easy to come up with an alternative way of governing, then why isn't it being used today to address the social issues of today? I think he raises a relevant point here, but I also believe that there are alternatives to neoliberal ways, but they are hidden somewhat by those in power, whom neoliberalism serves well.

Harvey (2005) points out that dominant groups around the world have used neoliberalism and its arguments to carry out what is in fact a 'class project'. He explains that neoliberalism is a name for a set of public policies that have made the holders of capital richer, while leading to increasing inequality, insecurity, loss of public services, deterioration of quality of life for the poor and working classes. Lone mothers fall into this category. As stated in the statistics section, most lone mothers and their children are living in poverty or at living in deprivation. The link between lone parenthood and poverty will be discussed later in this research.

So why is neoliberalism and its ideologies still being used to govern today, if it only does what Harvey (2005) claims as described above, you may ask? Castree et al. (2013) pointed out that the idea's echoing from Thatcherism, being that, providing people with welfare would de-motivate them to work and be self-sustaining, that it would create a 'nanny state' that would try to run everyone's life in the name of the needs of society. The state would then be responsible and would have to make judgments on who are the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor and surveillance recipients of social assistance. This surveillance would come at a hefty price to the people who work and pay their contributions of course, and these points were used in trying to justify and promote the neoliberal methods. Basically, scare tactics and making people turn on each other in favour of themselves, the individual, were used in the public arena to get people believing that neoliberalism was a good thing. Not only that, but that it was the only way of maintaining a stable social system. After all, if everyone didn't work then the country would go broke eventually. These are the types of idea's that were sold to the people and they fell for it, hook line and sinker.

Some say neoliberalism is good because humans are competitive by nature and it teaches people to be competitive thereby making them independent and self-reliant (Amable, 2010). But is this fair in terms of lone parents? Are they free to be as competitive as someone who doesn't have children and raising them alone? It is also noted that struggle and competition is at the centre of neo-liberal thought which makes humans compete for scarce resources. Essentially then, it could be described as survival of the fittest and as Amable (2010) suggests, any intervening to reduce inequalities would promote survival of the 'unfit' and bring down society by favouring its 'worst members' who are unproductive.

However, the inequalities that neoliberalism exacerbates cannot be denied. Amable (2010) states that neoliberalism as an ideology is based on the idea that, in the ideal world order, there should be free and fair competition between individuals. He goes on to suggest that this will always be challenged by individuals or groups who want to seek more than their fair share and that this is where public intervention steps in, to restore conditions of fair competition (p.5). Amable (2010) recognizes that this competition is good in terms of economic efficiency, by allowing the best individuals to rise to the top and be rewarded according to their merits and allows them to better themselves. Fairness, as highlighted by Amable (2010) is an issue, due to inequalities among individuals. These inequalities could exist for an individual at birth, through no fault or doing of their own. Therefore, the question raised is, to what extent inequalities should be compensated through public intervention to make competition 'fair'? Competition in this regard should be viewed as something which is not limited to businesses, getting access to education as well as employment competition is vital if 'fairness' is really to be considered. The link between neoliberalism, lone parents, and education here, is the fact that a single mother is not in fair competition for educational access or employment because of barrier's like childcare, poverty, and social welfare policy. This view is reflected in all participants in this research.

More social neoliberals described by Amable (2010) as the 'modern left' are concerned with 'equality of opportunity' whereas the neoliberal right, who do not favour any intervention, therefore leave's room for substantial political opposition between the two sides. Equality of opportunity is vital if lone parents are to access education, to have the chance to become competitive and to pull themselves and their children out of poverty. The social norm in a neo-liberal society promotes aggressively, self -reliance. It's all about the individual. Public intervention is not prohibited, but must be justified

and is only justified, if the result is the promotion of the individual in terms of helping them to help themselves (Amable, 2010).

Neoliberals argue that the system which existed before, Keynesian, led to stagnant growth, spiralling inflation and a balance of payments crisis (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2004) and have argued that measures to 'artificially' reduce poverty or compress income distributions have been as complicit as other government interventions. In OECD countries, it has been argued by neoliberals that high welfare benefits meant that work no longer paid for the poor which is reflected in this research by participants who are in low-waged employment. While that may all be true, if the vast majority of a population have no income to spend other than surviving then it could be argued that this too may have a negative impact on the economy.

According to my understanding of Amable (2010), traditional neo-liberal critique of the welfare state is based on individual responsibility. It is recognized that there is a role for social insurance for people who cannot be self-sufficient but that the problem lies in the redistribution. He views that neo-liberal social protection should not be redistributive, rather be individualized and that aid should be granted in exchange for something. That exchange being work. This neo-liberal view is that, handouts (state welfare) will give the recipient poor self-esteem, keep them dependant and prevent them from escaping poverty (Amable, 2010). The findings of this research suggest that neoliberal policies have been responsible, at least in part, with keeping lone parents dependant on social welfare, the very thing that it is against.

It is clear that this research has a stance on neoliberalism which is, it's ideologies and policies are detrimental to lone parents in accessing and participating in education, but not only that, on a broader view, it's at least partially responsible for keeping lone

mothers dependant on social welfare and living in income insecurity and deprivation (Millar and Crosse, 20016).

Neoliberal Reform

Saad-Filho and Johnston (2004) speak of a reformed neoliberal approach. One which recognises the inadequacies of the old approach. The new reform argues that with greater education and training, lighter regulation and asset distribution, poor people will participate more in the markets. Critique of this new approach argues that it doesn't consider the complexity of problems within policy and distribution, and that lumping people who have very individualistic problems and circumstances into averages, hides great diversity in the current data (Ravallion, 2001). In relation to education, Bennell (2002) points out that access may be necessary but not sufficient to reduce poverty without the presence of employment or self-employment opportunities.

It is concluded by Saad-Filho and Johnston (2004) that neoliberal reform is unlikely to improve poverty and inequality because within the reform, there is continued belief in liberalisation which is preventing the implementation of policies that would most benefit the poor.

The efforts made to address inequalities are conflicting. The world bank set out concerns about the role of equality, security, and empowerment in its 2000 report, yet it continues to focus on liberalisation. It seems, that for the world bank, inequality is not a result of liberalisation, instead inequality is stemming from non-economic factors, and argues that inequality is detrimental to growth, promotes inappropriate government policy and restricts the ability of the poor to invest in education or production (World Bank Report, 2000). I do not believe that a focus on liberalisation

lends itself well to the promotion of equality, security and empowerment, therefore, I think that the World Bank's efforts to address these concerns are conflicting and will not be successful.

Managerialism and the Neo-Liberal Overlap

Neoliberalism is concerned with the economic and the political. Managerialism is concerned with corporations and management. It's an ideology which is knowledge, and knowledge serves power (Klikauer, 2015). According to Klikauer (2015) the clearest point that differentiates the two is democracy. Managerialism does not seek to influence politics and is more concerned with getting its ideology, being managerial-reactionary, from companies into the wider societal institutions, like education for example.

The point where neoliberalism and managerialism intersect is seen when you examine the aspects of managerialism being consistent with that of aspects of neoliberalism and its ideology of advocating free markets. Neoliberalism fails to mention that this advocacy inevitably leads to an economic monopolization of a few corporations. Managerialism seeks to also establish this. The link between this research, managerialism and neoliberalism lies here. It is evident currently that many public services are being privatised in Ireland, and the relentless application of managerial techniques to public administration, all of which can be seen in the management of our social welfare system for example. The main features of managerialism are evident through outsourcing (e.g. Tura's Nua), reduction of employees to a bare minimum (placing huge stressors on the remaining staff), lowering income (min wage

jobs everywhere and precarious contracts of employment) and the severe downgrading of working conditions (Thompson and Smith, 2010).

Managerialist Discourse and lone parents

The public sector has changed and is looking for ways to save money and cut the social welfare bill, by adopting private sector's values to regulate public bodies. Managerialism is essentially how neo-liberal ideas are applied in terms of policy. Managerialism is being discussed because these values which the state have adopted have proved to impact on the most vulnerable in society at present. Lone mothers are considered as a vulnerable population and therefore managerialism impacts on them in various ways, some direct and some indirect. In relation to education, cuts in welfare to lone mothers as pointed out earlier, directly affects the income of a lone-parent household, and this reduction of income may lead too lone-parents not being able to afford to get an education, due to many of the reasons outlined later in this chapter. Olssen and Peters (2005) stated that new managerialism has 'redefined what counts as knowledge, who may bear it and who is empowered to act'.

Clarke and Newman, (2006) express that managerialism is embedded in a complex series of social, political, and economic organisational changes which are tied to neoliberalism. Economic, educational, and social problems therefore, are viewed as management issues which more efficient managerial regimes can fix. Kathleen Lynch (2013) describes 'new managerialism' as the organisational arm of neoliberalism, the 'mode of governance' designed to make the goals of the neoliberal project happen. The method used to perform this is termed as 'institutionalizing market principals to govern organisations'. This means that the public sector has adopted the values of the

private sector in that, it seeks efficiency and productivity above all to regulate public bodies. According to Lynch (2013) key features of managerialism include:

... a change of nomenclature from that of citizens, rights, welfare and solidarity to that of customers, service users and competition; a focus on outputs which is achieved through a measured monitoring of employee performance, and the encouragement of self-monitoring through the widespread use of performance indicators, league tables, target-setting and benchmarking.

(Lynch, 2013)

Neoliberalism, the Welfare State, and Poverty

Neo-liberalism is being discussed here in relation to the welfare state and poverty because both the welfare state (in terms of social welfare payments) and poverty (in terms of lone parents living in or at risk of poverty) impacts the lives of lone parents through various social policies. These policies have a direct and indirect effect on increasing barriers making it extremely difficult for lone parents to access education. Through aggressive social welfare reforms, due to a neo-liberal backdrop, lone parents have suffered increased income poverty with the statistics showing that single parent headed families are less well off now than they ever were before (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

In terms of poverty and distribution, neoliberals use the convenience of the concept 'trickle down' where it is thought that whatever benefits the top and the wealthy, will eventually benefit the bottom and the poor. Its theory being that, economic growth increases will benefit all Cornia (2014). In the same research, Cornia (2014) pointed to the detrimental impact of neoliberalism and its policies on the purchasing power of the poor because of cuts to subsidies and rises in the cost of services in the areas of health and education. This point is relevant to lone parents as it has been shown that

lone parent families are living either in poverty or are at risk of poverty, in which case lone parents are 'the poor' as described here and therefore, their purchasing power is dramatically reduced, especially when combined with the rising cost of living. This is bound to affect lone parents in their decision making in terms of accessing education and paying for fees, travel costs and additional childcare they may require if they wanted to participate in further education.

Employment in the public sector was cut and wages decreased, while private sector employment rarely expanded to offset this. Private sector employment was and is still predominantly low-waged, and unprotected because of legislation to protect wages being squashed or eliminated, and labour conditions deteriorated Cornia (2017). This situation is reflected in Ireland in relation to public sector jobs being lost and in general, public sector unrest, for example Bus Eireann (A state owned bus service that serves the Republic of Ireland, except for Dublin City) and the recent disputes (2017) with management and workers in relation to wages, contractual conditions, and an attempt by the public services to privatise certain routes to maximise profit and reduce inefficiency. These changes show that neoliberal policies which are being implemented across the board in Ireland and will affect the poor and most vulnerable in society including lone mothers. Millar and Crosse (2016) highlighted that it is lone parents who often get caught in low-waged, precarious employment in the private sector.

It was noted that this vulnerability went beyond income poverty into broader concepts of disempowerment and insecurity (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2004). In the UK, the concept of 'social exclusion' began to emerge, the United States named it, the emergence of the economic 'underclass' which brought focus onto poverty and

highlighted how the focus was being shifted to individual inadequacies (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2004 and Atkinson, 1998).

Neoliberalism in all its glory, meant the rich got richer and the poor got poorer, and during the 1980s and 1990s this was evident as there was a clear increase in income inequality Cornia (2017) and as documented in this research in the section on statistics, where 23 per cent of lone parents are living in poverty compared to only 8.2 per cent of the general population. A massive 63.2 per cent of lone parents are living in deprivation compared to 30.5 per cent of the general population (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

Labour Activation, Education, and Lone Parent's

Application of Labour Activation

The application of labour activation (LA) informs how it impacts on lone parents and education. This literature helps the reader to better understand the barriers which still exist to education, and highlights the cracks in the system, which lone mothers fall into.

Labour activation was introduced to tackle poverty levels for lone parents and as a solution to increased public expenditure on social protection (Millar and Crosse, 2016). In the UK, Gloster et al. (2010) highlighted that policymakers sought to increase the number of lone parents in employment with the aim of reducing child poverty. These activation policies were introduced in various ways depending on the country in which you resided, but all aimed to pursue the same goals. Millar and Evans (2003) in a comparative study of welfare-to-work policies for lone parents noted that, activation measures involved financial incentives to work, expansion of childcare provisions,

employment supports and the targeting of policy to lone parents based on their youngest child age.

Haux (2008,2010b) put forward six different types of activation approaches in relation to selection criteria for lone parents and employment. General activation, where all lone parents in receipt of welfare are activated, the age of the youngest child, transition, employability (where lone parents are profiled according to their readiness for work), caseworkers (where independent assessments arising from employability checklists alone) and voluntary (where lone parents regarded as poor mothers) are not required to participate in active labour activation market policies but may do so voluntarily).

The mechanisms that the Irish state have used is based on the age of the youngest child. Once the youngest child turns seven currently, the lone parent is activated to start engaging with the state either to pursue education and training or seek paid employment. When the youngest child turns seven, the lone parent social welfare payment changes from OFP (one-parent family payment) to JST (job seekers transitional payment) which means that the lone parent must engage with the state in activation as stated above. If a lone parent is in employment, FIS (family income supplement) can be claimed if the lone parent is contracted and works 19 hours per week (Millar and Crosse, 2016)

The current rollout plan nationally for labour activation is called 'Pathways to Work' and is in conjunction with services provided by INTREO. Lone parents are entitled to social protection supports which include OFP, JST, JA (jobseekers allowance) and other supports through measures such as JobPath for employment (Millar and Crosse, 2016). Lone parents can avail of educational and training supports such as FET

courses (Further education and training), BTEA (back to education allowance), and SUSI (Student universal support Ireland). Housing supports such as RS (rent supplement), RAS scheme (rental accommodation scheme), HAP scheme (housing assistant payment). Childcare supports include CCS (community childcare subvention programme), ECCE (early childhood care and education), ESP (early start programme) and CETS (childcare education and training support), ASCC (afterschool childcare and CEC (childcare programme) (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

Labour Activation and Education

In terms of education, Forste and Jacobsen (2013) highlight that low levels of education and training among lone parents is a significant problem, and that education and training participation, is a prerequisite prior to moving into paid employment. Education and training has consistently been identified as a significant factor in reducing welfare dependency (Forste and Jacobsen, 2013) and Western et al., (2008) show that educational inequality among lone parents is linked to income inequality.

Importantly, Forste and Jacobsen (2013) reported that an undergraduate degree level at least, is required for lone parents to attain an increased employment income. Certificates and diplomas reported no difference in income. This highlights the importance of the type of education in terms of the level needed to make embarking in education worthwhile. Mothers have reported many difficulties in remaining in education (Osborne et al., 2004) but Hinton-Smith (2008) and Coccia, (1997), suggests that the benefits of education include increased earnings and improved self-esteem.

Education and training for the sole purpose of labour activation has yet to be evaluated effectively for lone parents who have been activated in Ireland. The OECD (2006d) reported on the results of a five-country study into welfare to work initiatives. It stated that;

Policies concerned with workforce development and skills upgrading initiatives, while sitting within the adult learning agenda, addresses a narrower, more modest objective. That objective is to improve skills, competencies and qualifications of low-qualified incumbent workers, and thereby respond to the “skills shortages” and “skill gaps” experienced in local labour markets and within organisations (p.39).

Impact of Activation on lone parents in Education

There is limited research currently available on how activation impacts lone parents who return to education or training, specifically in Ireland. Especially education that is in a third level institution or post-graduate study because as Millar and Crosse (2016) highlighted, the percentage of lone parents who have achieved a degree or higher is miniscule. Most research speaks about activation and its impact to lone parents on employment. However, Zabel (2013) in a study conducted in Germany with lone mothers found that lone mothers benefited from participating in vocational training programmes but that workfare does not seem to benefit lone mothers with young children. It highlighted that the main reason lone mothers of young children are not employed is because of a lack of adequate childcare provision. This is echoed currently in Ireland and indeed other countries. The study raised the question of whether lone mothers, who are strongly targeted by activation or workfare programmes, despite facing numerous barriers to employment, can profit or benefit from their participation.

Labour Activation, Employment, and Poverty

Labour Activation (LA) in terms of employment and poverty is being discussed because of the important links which exist between LA, lone mothers employment, and poverty. Lone mothers have been targeted for LA which affects their employment status, but the type of employment they attain is relevant to contributing to a lone mother's income, in either a positive or negative way, meaning that the type of employment, whether its minimum waged or not, whether it has job security or not, directly affects the income of the lone mother, her future choices, decisions and whether she may experience poverty or not.

The late 20th century saw a crisis of the so-called welfare state because of a mixture of issues such as globalisation to technological change; change in family make up; increasing divorce rates and a greater number of lone parents; an aging population; new migration patterns and increased immigration and changes in political ideology (MacGregor, 2014). Neoliberal social policy, individualisation and freedom of choice and social protection laws are viewed as indirect barriers to trade. According to neoliberals the welfare state hampers economic growth, encourages unemployment and creates poverty traps (Johnston, 2004), yet poverty is rising and the gap between rich and poor expanding, as mentioned earlier.

The new neoliberal policy paradigm is moving away from full employment, labour activation policies are taking over and targeting the unemployed (including lone mothers) through aggressive measures which result in their state benefits being reduced or cut if they do not comply with compulsory measures being introduced regarding education, training, or redeployment.

The literature seems to be saying on one hand labour activation is good because it aims to help the vulnerable out of poverty and give them skills necessary to eventually become employed, but labour activation seems to be making the lives of the vulnerable worse. Exacerbating poverty among the already poor. As Grant, et al. (2011) explains, the primary aim of market labour activation for lone parents is to reduce poverty experienced by these families. This assumes that employment would lead to an increased income for single parents. Grant et al. (2011) suggests that the evidence for this is mixed, and labour activations effectiveness to reduce poverty in lone parent families is questionable.

Jaehrling et al. (2014) highlights that poverty rates in some cases have increased in lone parent families, despite a rise in employment rates among this population. Moreover, young single mothers and single mothers of young children, are the least employed group of parents and are more likely to be in low-skilled, low-paid employment (Ruggeri and Bird, 2014). More single mothers are working, yet their earnings are low and they remain concentrated in low-paid employment (Meyer and Sullivan, 2008; Jones De Weever et al., 2003). This income poverty remains a barrier to single mothers participating in education because even if they are approved for a grant to cover fee's, travel costs and childcare costs are not factored into the fee's only grants and social welfare have scrapped the maintenance grant which used to factor in some of these costs, under policy reform to save money.

Millar and Crosse (2016) talk about the poverty cycle that many lone parents are trapped in, and the feeling from lone parents in Ireland is that the system is designed for two-parent families. For other lone parents, the cyclical effect of the barriers faced by lone parents are yet to be addressed or even adequately acknowledged. All of this is despite lone parent's best efforts to improve their own situation and work with the

system, but the system does not consider individuality of circumstance's (noted in recommendations of Millar and Crosse, 2016) and therefore the analogy of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole comes to mind.

Views on activation in the interviews extended beyond concern over loss of income and poverty and pertained to what was a distinct lack of awareness of the reality of the lives of lone parents in Ireland in the present day. Some said the welfare system was designed to support two-parent families and that absorbing lone parents as jobseekers is a continuation of that practice, which highlights a lack of recognition of the distinctive challenges faced by lone parents. While the transitional arrangement was meant to address some of the issues faced, for some it's 'neither one thing nor the other'. For others, the cyclical effect of the barriers faced by lone parents is an issue that needs to be acknowledged. Despite efforts to improve their own situations, many lone parents are caught in a cycle from which they cannot manoeuvre and as a consequence feel trapped.

(Millar and Crosse, 2016, p.68)

Watts (2006) argues that all welfare to work is doing is targeting low-skilled vulnerable people (like single mothers) to 'churn low-skilled labour in and out of the labour market' which he adds, is characterised by low-pay, low-skilled and precarious employment, which is a sector that is now even less regulated or protected than it ever was before. If education and training is recruiting the most vulnerable, low-skilled people in society to propel them into what is most likely low-paid, low-skilled precarious employment, then I would question, what is the point of education and training, if the outcome is still dependency on social welfare because of the type of precarious low-paid employment after they have engaged in the education and training like they were forced to do by the state?

Guenther et al., (2008) lays out the challenges faced by lone parents including transport, childcare, ill health, substance abuse, low self-esteem and the difficulty in juggling caring for their children while dealing with the demands of academic work and attendance in educational institutions. Even though these barriers or deterrents have

been widely mentioned in the research, they still exist for lone mothers, and have proven to still be significant factors in determining whether a lone mother can access and/or participate in education.

Critique of Labour Activation and its application

Is labour activation helping or hindering lone parents?

A critique of labour activation is relevant to the reader because it provides a discussion on how labour activation and its application negatively impacts on lone parents.

Raffass (2016) surveyed the existing assessments, to determine what outcomes have derived from activation. The results were that activation has not resulted in reducing unemployment or combating long term unemployment, reducing (in work) poverty, or empowering jobseekers to consume more. Raffass (2016) argues that activation has been working as a mechanism of entrapment and has failed to achieve its direct labour market and social objectives. Not only that, but it has negatively impacted on the social, and has been regressive and repressive.

Watson et al (2011) reported that single parents attached to the labour market were more likely to work in low-paid, low-skilled employment which reflects the reasons why the participants in this the research, are determined to get a third level education. Similarly, to the findings of this study, Richardson (2012) found that high childcare costs were a significant barrier to progression, in terms of employment.

There has been numerous discrepancies and problems highlighted by lone parents themselves, advocate groups for lone parents and the participants in this research, on the provisions made by the state to support lone parents in transitioning into either

employment or education and training. Millar and Crosse (2014) explains the points highlighted. These include, FIS (family income supplement) as not being suitable for those in precarious employment (which most lone parents are in) because of changing hours weekly and zero hour contracts. Advocacy support groups for lone parents (One-Parent Family Network) have raised concerns that lone parents will be financially worse off in the transition from OFP to JST to JA and FIS.

Millar and Crosse (2016) has shown that most lone parents depend on some form of housing rental assistance from social welfare, and Threshold's Report (2014) outlined several problems with rent supplement scheme, including shortage of affordable rental properties, rent supplement limits out of line with the market, and the use of social welfare to top up rent to avoid homelessness.

Concerns were raised on the well-being of children in terms of care, something which has been reflected in the concerns of participants in this research as well as concerns on the demands placed on lone parents by work and/or education. The lack of knowledge and awareness by social welfare personnel and caseworkers, of the barriers to employment and similarly the barriers to education and training for lone parents, were experienced by lone parents in Millar and Crosse (2016) report and similarly has been expressed by participants in this research.

The same report highlights recent increases in consistent poverty and income loss to lone parent's due to state cuts and reforms, as well as means tested payments for rental assistance meaning that, any increase in income no matter how minimal, is deducted from rental assistance and other social welfare payments such as BTEA (back to education allowance) which is all evidence that activation measures have not delivered in its aim to reduce poverty among lone parents and their children. Poverty

rates among lone parents and their children have increased from 17 per cent to 23 per cent. This has led to greater numbers of lone parent families registering as homeless and living in temporary accommodation, such as one of the participant's situation in this research (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

Cambell et al. (2016) in a comprehensive review of qualitative research on lone parents, health, well-being, and welfare to work raised several points which participants have spoken about in this research. Welfare to work (WTW) policies conflicted with child care responsibilities and that available employment for lone parents was low-paid and precarious. Adverse health impacts such as increased stress, fatigue and depression were commonly reported, like that of the participants in this research. Employment and appropriate training was linked to increased self-worth for some but that WTW reduced control over the nature of employment and care of children. Lone mothers in this research have reflected the same points as this review.

Labour Activation drives inequality for lone mothers in terms of access to education because of income poverty, barriers faced by lone mothers which may prevent participation in education, gender inequalities, class and the type of education received.

Income Poverty

While initial reports of activation showed increased employment levels of lone parents, recent data on poverty demonstrates that the way activation programmes have been implemented has not led to a decrease in poverty among the lone parent populations in the EU and OECD (Millar and Crosse, 2016 pp. 66)

Furthermore, lone parents are unsure as to whether they are financially better off in low-paid precarious employment, as opposed to being in receipt of social welfare. In terms of well-being of the lone parent in relation to poverty, lone parents reported no improvement in well-being, in fact, they reported additional stress while trying to juggle work and family life (Millar and Crosse, 2016 pp. 66).

Policy often has unintended consequences, but if the premise of activation policy is to reduce poverty levels by increasing the number of lone parents in paid employment, then a policy which results in lone parents in paid employment being financially worse off has evidently created an unintended consequence and needs revision. This neither encourages welfare recipients to enter into employment, nor will it result in an increase in the income of the household; rather, it has the perverse effect of encouraging welfare dependency and reducing household income.

(Millar and Crosse, 2016, p. 67)

Gender

Fine et al., (2009) suggested that in theory, women have the same chance of promotion as men do. However, it has been argued that young educated women are competing with their male counterparts for positions of power, however, Halford and Leonard (2001) state that under new managerialism, a sort of superwoman is required, a female willing to sacrifice all, (including children) to achieve company goals and to be able to compete for powerful positions.

In relation to activation and being a mother, Kowalewska (2017) argues that there are two types of activation, one is focused on developing jobseeker's employability and the other on quick (re)- entry to the labour market, and that these two approaches tells us what activation means for the unemployed male worker but overlooks the family and what activation means for the female parent with child responsibilities. It is also revealed that the two approaches to activation do not support maternal activation and

hence the activation literature remains gender blind (Kowalewska, 2017). I would pose the question, if activation is gender blind then what outcome can a lone mother raising a child or children expect under activation? Surely lone mothers cannot be as competitive as their single male counterparts with no child responsibilities in the labour market, which is what managerialism demands?

This is from the Millar Report which shows inequality and gender inequality in terms of the impact being forced to work would have on a single parent headed household.

As such, the current activation policy does not treat all families equally; welfare recipients in a two-parent household have work requirements placed on one of the parents, whereas in one-parent families the welfare recipient now has work requirements placed on them. This suggests an upholding of the traditional male-breadwinner approach to social protection for parents who cohabit or are married, and a different one to those parenting alone. This family form is a vulnerable and stigmatised one, and such an approach runs the risk of exacerbating the difficulties experienced by lone-parent families.

(Millar and Crosse, 2016, p.69)

How Managerialism Impacts on care of children and lone mothers

Discussing managerialism in relation to the impact it is having on lone mothers, pertains to gender and care because it is the female who predominantly cares for the child/children in lone parent's families (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

Lynch (2013) comments on one of the major concerns of managerialism, being that, it occurs at the expense of moral and social values related to care, autonomy, tolerance, respect, trust, and equality. Once the system has taken hold, public services such as education become a commodity to simply be delivered by the 'market' to 'customers' who can afford to buy them. Managerialist values, according to Lynch (2013) 'manifest' themselves in education through the promotion of measurement, surveillance, control, and regulation. Care has no place in education anymore because care is difficult to

monitor and doesn't give immediate results in relation to the impact it may or may not have in education. This type of education is being rolled out under enormous pressures from various organizations both public and private, getting bums on seats, satisfying the needs of the market and simply meeting the learning outcomes of courses.

Lynch et al. (2012) states that there is an 'anti-care rhetoric' within organizations which have a zero tolerance for letting your private life interfere with your working life. In relation to lone parents, this is simply not realistic because of primary care responsibilities and therefore creates severe challenges for lone parent's to be employed in this type of environment (Currie et al. 2002). Women predominantly do care work meaning women, particularly mothers and especially lone mothers face many difficulties combining paid work and their personal life responsibilities in relation to caring for their children (Lynch et al. 2012).

There seems to be a state view, that care work within the home is not work because it's not paid work or that someone who at home caring for children, the elderly or disabled is not 'contributing to society'. Griffen, Cohen and Pulkingham (2009) in a feminist critique of activation discourse, is based on the premise that paid work is the only way to contribute to society and that welfare to work programme construct employment to try and solve poverty but offers nothing more than low-income jobs which lack social benefits, security, and possibilities for advancement (Herbst and Benjamin 2015) which exacerbate gender and ethnic discrimination (Morgen and Maskovsky 2003).

Gender, Care, and Responsibility

As a proportion of all families with dependent children, lone-parent families rose from 8 per cent in 1981 to 16 per cent in 2002, and 88 per cent, are headed by women (Millar and Crosse, 2016). Therefore, more women than men are the primary carer of their children in lone parent families in Ireland today. This statistic follows the stereotype that women are the traditional carers in society not only for children but also the sick, disabled and the elderly populations. Women outnumber men in the teaching profession both in primary, secondary, and further education (HEA, 2016) because teaching is typically associated with the care of children which is associated with women (Lynch, 2014).

Neo-liberal ideology assumes that care work is a family responsibility, not a state responsibility, and that care of the family falls on the woman Bezanson and Luxton (2006). So, in terms of neo-liberal ideology and the lone mother, it is reasonable then to suggest that the care of the children is the responsibility of women, in the eyes of the state, with no mention of the role or responsibility of the absent father. This responsibility means that women, especially lone parent mothers, are usually reliant on some form of social welfare payment, which propels them automatically into the system of labour activation. Activation of course, does not only mean activated into paid employment, but education and training also. It is in dealing with the social welfare system that inequalities are felt by lone mothers who are trying to better themselves via education or training in relation to the conditions placed on payments of certain allowances, and access to grants as discussed elsewhere in this research. If lone mothers refuse to co-operate or take part in activation policies, the risk being punished or sanctioned by the state and may mean a reduction in the welfare they receive (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

The family care for, and socialize the next generation. It can be therefore assumed that the lone parent family is doing the same, raising children to become functioning adults. Adults who become the next labour force (Luxton, 2017), it seems then, that families including lone parent families are responsible for social reproduction which is an essential part of the capitalist economy Bezanson and Luxton (2006) yet, the conditions of employment within this neo-liberal era, are not favourable for a caring family environment in which to raise children to become stable, functioning members of society. Instead, labour activation is forcing single mothers back into the workforce and away from their children as young as seven years old, leaving them being shuffled from person to person or facility to facility, so the lone mother can engage in activation via education or training or employment. This is a concern highlighted in the finding of this research. Direct discrimination is occurring in this domain because labour activation policies are therefore targeting lone mothers, putting an obligation on them to work outside the home, whereas in a family headed by a married couple, there is an obligation only on one parent to work outside the home (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

Gender and Childcare as barriers to Education for Lone Mothers

It has been widely documented in the literature that childcare remains one of the biggest barriers for parents to be employed or in full time education. These barriers not only still exist but are pronounced when you consider the one-parent family.

As mentioned, it is women who usually care for children and the impact of labour activation therefore is gendered (Millar and Crosse, 2016). Lone parents feel that the 'care' aspect of raising children is being ignored and that 'choice of care' within labour activation, in lone parent families is not an option (Millar and Crosse 2016). This point

was reflected in the voices of the participants in this research when they expressed concerns of 'strangers in care facilities earning minimum wage, rearing their children because they have to work or study'. As Millar and Crosse (2016) notes, the capacity of a lone parent to work and care cannot be equated to that of a two-parent family which can be applied to the lone parent being in education also. There is a lack of acknowledgment by the state and society about the value of caring for children historically, and labour activation has worsened this lack of acknowledgment (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

In relation to childcare, Ireland has adopted a free market approach resulting in high childcare costs which interfere with parents who want to take up employment or education (Millar and Crosse, 2016). This directly affects decision-making and participation in education or gaining employment (Hodgins et al. 2007). Moreover, choices for suitable employment for women with children, let alone a single mother, are completely dependent on childcare facilities, are limited, and childcare acts as a significant disincentive to them remaining in the labour force, especially when there are two or more children (Immervol and Barber, 2006). For example, full-time day-care for two preschool children is 40 per cent of the family income for an Irish single parent on an average income, in comparison with the OECD average of 13 per cent (Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis, 2014). A reliance on non-formal, free sources of childcare is common, and I would argue a necessity in Ireland, especially for lone parent families (Millar et al. 2007).

Gender and its Impact on lone mothers

Neoliberalism with the focus on individualism decontextualizes the student or learner and doesn't take into consideration factors such as gender, class, or race and how these may affect learning opportunities (Jackson, 2003). Inequalities linked to gender and social class are now rendered 'private' problems rather than 'public' concerns in relation to the impact gender and class have on being able to compete (Gouthro, 2009). This is important when we consider lone mothers and their competitiveness with regard to accessing education, having the finances to participate in education and being competitive in relation to employment opportunities. Many lone mothers, as stated earlier, have less education and more time at home caring for children and therefore an implication of this are gaps in curriculum vitae, this is just one way in which their competitiveness is weakened. Moreover, Olssen (2006) drawing upon Foucault to argue that competition is not natural, but state engineered.

Care and mother work are in the 'private' realm and therefore, this work is not valued (Gouthro, 2009) yet, lone mothers are tied to this type of work because that's where women have been conditioned to think they belong, at home rearing children. It is tied to a women's identity and is very difficult to disengage from it (Gouthro, 2009).

Women are expected to prioritize their identities as a mother, yet the pressures of labour activation challenges this identity because, it has an expectation of forming an almost split identity, one being a mother and caregiver, the other being the ruthless worker ready to give all and drop everything for the company which they may be employed by. Crittenden (2001) points out that mothers are held accountable for their children's behaviour, appearance and success in school and in life. That is a substantial amount for one parent to be accountable for, let alone having the responsibility of education and/or work at the same time.

Gouthro (2009), goes on to say that neoliberalism's worldview is that the marketplace should shape societal views and patriarchy reinforces it by undermining and devaluing unpaid labour and the 'feminine identities associated with it'. More importantly, lone mothers are being forced by the state to change their gendered identities to become a worker in an increasingly unstable environment, which lone mothers have voiced their concerns about in this research, stating that it is stability they need, want, and crave. I would argue that going back to education also changes the gendered identity of a lone mother and when you combine that with the expectation of labour activation on top, then it's plain to see that too much is being forced onto lone mothers.

Gender difference in adult learning experiences therefore, are not acknowledged and perpetuates the myth that patriarchy is no longer a concern in adult education (Gouthro, 2009). The 'public' 'private' dichotomy is keeping women's concerns and experiences hidden because the 'private' is not subjected to research investigation or policy development (2009, pp. 162).

Gender Identities and How They Impact on learning

The impact gender identities have on learning situations are ignored by neoliberal discourse (Gouthro, 2009, pp. 165). In an analysis of women in vocational learning, Fenwick (2004) showed that the invisibility of gender identity fuels inequalities and Gouthro's research on mature women reveals that the individualistic and competitive nature of neoliberalism does not account adequately for gender, in educational trajectories because many women do not put their own interests or needs first. Often, they make decisions for the benefit of their families, and their children. This echoes the voices of the participants in this research. They choose courses to minimise family

disruption, one that fits in with childcare arrangements and usually, if they had a choice, choose part-time study over full-time (2009, pp.165). However, the fact is that the current social welfare systems and policies as explained earlier don't complement part-time, flexible study options which would greatly help lone mothers.

Stalker (2001) found that when women participate in higher education their home life must remain unshaken by their absence, therefore participation in education requires not just motivation but incredible amounts of preplanning, organization, time and energy (2001, pp. 300) not to mention the intricate act of dealing with the social welfare system in seeking financial assistance to be able to return to education, a point which many participants in this research highlighted, as very difficult and stressful.

Gouthro (2009) states that not recognizing work in the home reinforces gendered values that play down the amount of responsibilities that women learners and especially lone mothers in education, must attend to which affects their academic abilities (p. 168).

Gender and Education

The new purpose of education in line with neoliberalism is to develop the 'neo-liberal citizen' who is educated to be self-sufficient, rational and a competitive worker who is almost detached from themselves (Lynch, 2014). This is not conducive with being a parent, let alone being a lone female parent. Higher education has been turned into a marketable commodity that can be traded internationally (Marginson, 2006), but who is able to afford this education? Are the lone mothers who are dependent on social welfare assistance able to afford it? What type of education are they being offered through state programmes under the implications of neoliberalism?

Gender, education, and employment are closely related. As education is increasingly geared toward getting a job, the type of education being offered to lone mothers, who are predominantly dependant on some type of welfare payment, is narrowed by market demands and what is deemed suitable for lone mothers. Under managerialism, there is an expectation that you must be competitive, tough, individualistic, and wedded to the organization or company you work for (Lynch, 2014). Worker's today are almost expected to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The lifestyle of this new type of worker under managerialism for this reason, is not compatible with lone mothers who have primary caring responsibilities in the home (Lynch et al. 2012). To succeed in employment under new managerialism it therefore seems as though women must be more like men, and not be bound to primary care responsibilities as these are 'assumed to be outside of men's responsibilities' (Hanlon and Lynch, 2017).

In education, it has long been known that subjects like science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM subjects) are dominated by males and under new managerialism, these types of subjects are considered 'valuable knowledge' whereas predominantly female subjects like humanities and social sciences are funded poorly, are mainly voluntary (when working in education) and are positioned as dependants (Lynch, 2014). This echoes' what is currently happening in relation to lone mothers being drafted by social welfare under coercive measures outlined earlier, onto further education courses that are getting them 'job ready' and placing them strategically in the market where there are gaps to be filled. Courses such as caring for the elderly, childcare, and beauty therapy to name a few, seem to be top of the list and are highly gendered. Furthermore, the research suggests as mentioned, that these roles within the job market currently are low-paid, precarious employment. An example of this comes from statements made from a participant of this research in relation to her

experiences of having a third level university qualification in education, yet because she couldn't gain employment straight away in the sector, social welfare was pressurising her to do a course in childcare so she could satisfy the conditions of securing her welfare payment without being sanctioned. She wasn't offered a course in engineering for example. I would raise the question, is this 'valuable knowledge to the example used above, for this particular woman? She would have spent four years studying childcare if she wanted to work in childcare surely, and not a different discipline.

So, in summary, when looking at how new managerialism affects lone mothers, the literature suggests that, in terms of education, it affects the type, access, and participation as explained in the analysis chapter of this research, in terms of labour activation and getting a job. It affects a single mothers ability to remain competitive compared with males and females without child responsibility, and it also places unrealistic expectations on parents, not to mention lone mothers in relation to being expected to be 'superwoman' juggling childcare, work and possibly education all at once.

Class

Class has several implications on lone mothers in terms of access to education because of barrier's, the type of education that is realistically in reach, and on offer for this population. Poverty affects choice's and decisions in terms of employment and education. The type of education one receives, has an impact on future employment prospects and therefore income potential. It has been shown that most lone mothers

come from working class backgrounds and have limited education (Millar and Crosse, 2016).

Bezanson and Luxton (2006), states that the work that mothers do for their children is the foundation of social reproduction and that motherhood is central to subordination. The impact of motherhood on women's lives depends on the intersectionality of gender, class, and race (p. 231). In a study conducted on the impact of neo-liberal welfare-state restructuring, it found that for those with low incomes, state protections were decreased or were restructured which negatively impacted on women to manage and maintain a standard of living (Bezanson and Luxton, 2006, p. 174) which propels them into a lower socio-economic class even if they didn't start out there.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA 2016) showed that a greater percentage of mature students who came from a lower socio-economic background, studied in Institutions of Technology whereas mature students from a higher socio-economic background, studied at a University. Another report from the HEA in 2016 showed that 85 per cent of mature students returning to education studied part-time in comparison to 10 per cent who studied full-time. This certainly corresponds with the lone mothers in this research who, for the most part would choose to study part-time because of care commitments to their children. The implications of this are, social welfare does not approve grants or financial assistance to those mature single parents returning to education if the course is classified as a part-time course. For this reason, many lone mothers from working class, who would depend heavily on receiving a grant, are limited to the course choice and institution

In terms of access to higher education, Reay (1997) noted that the higher education sector has expanded, that there has been a significant reduction in gender inequality

but no reduction in social class inequality. Class inequalities arise from lack of information within lower social classes regarding education and options and the introduction of fee's and loans, while at the same time maintenance grants being abolished. This directly affects lone parents as the literature suggests (Millar and Crosse, 2016) that they come from a lower social class where educational attainment is low and poverty is a reality they live with.

In relation to the choice of institution or type of education, Giddens (1995) points out that choice is a medium of both power and stratification. Lone parents are making different kinds of choices based on their circumstances and constraints. It is here where the barrier's become evident because these decisions are based on constraints which lone mothers have to deal with such as geographical constraints, material constraints, and course choice constraints because of activation. Social welfare conditionalities on welfare payments and having to work long hours while studying or choose not work, and be faced with poverty and psychological constraints like the social stigma, surrounding parenting alone and the feeling that one might not be 'good enough to be attending university' (Reay, 1997) or feeling like they don't belong. All of which were voiced by the participants in this research as barriers to education. Bourdieu writes on how objective limits can transform into practical anticipation of objective limits which can lead to one excluding oneself from places which one is excluded (Bourdieu, 1984.p.471). My take on what Bourdieu is saying here is that a person who believes they do not belong in a certain situation (like further education) due to insecurities or lack of confidence, may make real physical barriers (even if they could be overcome) for themselves to essentially, convince themselves not to undertake education.

Conclusion

The literature started off by looking at the current statistics in relation to lone parents in Ireland today. The focus of the literature was neoliberalism, labour activation, gender, and class, in relation to lone mothers and education as well as, the impact which they have, in terms of barriers to accessing and participating in education. Neoliberalism as a backdrop, was critically discussed in the review which led to further discussions and sub-sections, which were included to give the reader a clear understanding of what the research is about and to highlight the current debates.

The gaps in the literature were clear. There is limited specified research on lone mothers in relation to the impact neoliberal policies are having on their day to day lives specific to Ireland. There seems to be a huge trench between the lived realities of lone mothers, and the neatly presented statistics coming from the state. In terms of policies and policymakers, the literature reflects that, policies originally designed to help lone mothers out of poverty, are the very policies that keeps them in poverty, and dependant on the system, a system which is massively flawed and has turned into more of a business due to new managerialism, than a social welfare system designed to help the people in most need. Policymakers are out of touch with the realities and struggles of life, which a lone mother faces on a daily basis. More research like this, is needed which specifically looks at the impacts of neoliberal policies have on lone mothers and how best to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discusses both the methodology underpinning this research and details of methods employed in gathering data. The first section focus is on the approach, the rational, ontological positioning, and epistemological. This is reinforced by the literature supporting the research design, which includes a discussion on the feminist paradigm in qualitative research. The second section and sub sections, details the methods used in collecting data combined with the rational for using these methods. This chapter finishes with ethical considerations and a reflexive piece.

Approach to research

Qualitative research was suited to this work because I believe that I was looking at issue's that I felt were important in relation to social justice and equality of single parents. It begins with assumptions (which are discussed in detail below), and I had a lot of them. I wanted to make sense of what other's in a similar situation experienced. I wanted to dig deep and interpret the participant's responses in the hope of making a change and laying the foundations for further future research. I wanted to transform the world and I think this quote of what qualitative research is, sums up my intentions as to why I chose it:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world...This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interrupt, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(Denzin &Lincon, 2005, p. 3) in Creswell (2007)

Examining the main aims of qualitative research which, according to Creswell (2007) are, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to people who are in the study, data which establishes themes, the voices of participants, the reflexivity of I and a complex description and interpretation of the problem which extends the literature or signals a call for action.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) explains that grounded research is research which moves beyond description and generates a theory or theme of a process. This research did not start from a readymade framework or theme and the key idea behind grounded research is that theory development does not come 'off a shelf' but is rather 'generated' or 'grounded' in data from the participants of the research who have experiences of the process.

Therefore, this research is grounded qualitative research and I believe like Creswell (2007), that qualitative research represents 'a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research'.

Rational for research

My experience of single parenting while trying to gain a university qualification could only be described as 3 years of complete exhaustion and change. It challenged me financially, when I chose to put petrol in the car to get to class, over eating three times per day. It challenged me emotionally with voices in my head from my past telling me I was not good enough to achieve at this level. My entire inner belief system was crushed and rebuilt in those three years. It cost me friends, and sometimes I felt extremely isolated and no one understood. I was so stressed from trying to be everything, a mother, a cleaner, a business owner, a daughter, and a full-time student,

I was losing clumps of hair and got ill. All this while desperately maintaining my smile and proving to society and the married, stay at home mothers at the school gate, that I was the same as them, that I could be as good as them. I desperately tried not to slip up and fall into the category of 'the single parent who can't cope, sure god love her'. The truth is, I was rudely awakened.

Through this process, I uncovered truths in me which I hadn't seen before and I started to see and experience real inequality and unjustness in society for the first time. I wasn't fully aware before this. I was ignorant to it. Through this experience, I see something today that is fundamentally wrong that pertains to gender and class discrimination. I believe that this inequality and unjustness is becoming more visible today, but is by no means near to resolution. This is the tip of the iceberg. These fundamental problems of inequality, unjustness and a feeling of powerlessness are associated with lots of other fundamental issues experienced by single female parents in society. Issue's like the impact neoliberalism is having on policies and therefore directly affecting single parents in relation to them being able to access and participate successfully in education.

I chose to do this research because I had experienced single parenting while being in full time education as an adult while also running a business. I did it because the entire process from applying for my course, to being accepted, to financially supporting myself and my child through this, was unbelievably difficult. I came up against so many barrier's, those mentioned in the findings and other's that pertain to my personal circumstances. I did it because I wanted the voice of single parents to be heard about their personal experiences of trying to get an education while lone parenting in Ireland today. I did it because I feel that all lone parents are branded as sponges on the social welfare system and a drain on society, tarred with the same brush regardless of

individualistic efforts to overcome enormous barriers, to get themselves an education to gain gainful employment. Employment which will not land them back on minimum wage with zero hour contracts. I did it because every woman is five seconds from single parenthood, and this can affect anyone, not just the poor working-class girls, who know no better. I want society to see that. I want a more empathetic society.

I wanted to do this to tell the powers that be, and most in society, that we are not to be labelled a burden to the taxpayer, and lazy, that we are mostly motivated individuals with an individual set of circumstances, sometimes beyond our control, who strive for a better life for our children and who, for the most part, want to work and not rely on welfare.

I wanted to show to the reader's that there still exists an enormous lack of value and recognition of the single parent's role and in caring for children in the home. This is shown via unjust and discriminatory policies of labour activation being rushed through our government currently. That the failure of our government to step up and make the absent parent responsible through proper measures which would secure maintenance for single parents. I wanted to lay down the barriers that single parents face when trying to return or enter education.

What do I want from this research?

I want this research to inform policy makers and the public. I want to help elevate the crippling stigma which still exists, I want policy makers to hear the voices of single parents and understand fully the barrier's which they face when trying to enter and complete education. I want this research to inform the powers that be, that education for labour activation is pointless unless a proper system which includes individual

plans and supports for single parents are put into place. I want these changes to happen so we can, instead of isolating and stigmatising single parents, help them, to achieve what they need to be an active member of society. I believe that if this happened, everyone in society would benefit.

Ontological Positioning, Paradigm, and Epistemology

I thought I'd begin with this quote, it speaks to this research. I am fully aware I am biased and what my biases are however, those biases have led me to this point and to writing this work which has changed me entirely.

My subjectivity is the bias for the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researcher, from the selection of the topic clear through to the emphasis I make in my writing. See as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than exorcise.

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.104) in (Maxwell, 2005)

This research is set in a context of, being a female single parent in 2016 while being in education. It examines the impact of labour activation within a backdrop of neoliberalism in relation to lone mothers accessing and participating in education as experienced by female single parents. I am looking at this from a primarily feminist lens because I believe that it has the same goals and aims of feminist research. It discusses social justice in terms of policy issues surrounding access to education and the barrier's which arise from this. Gender domination prevails in this patriarchal society in which we live and this is evident in barrier's experienced, in relation to women being undervalued in the work they do in society, whether that work is inside or outside the home.

Though the lens is predominantly that of feminist research, social constructivism also plays a role in this research. It must be recognized that the participant's subjective meanings are not simply created from nowhere, they are shaped and formed through interactions and experiences with other's and through cultural and historical norms that operate in their individual lives. I set out with a broad base of questions to generate themes or patterns to make meaning of the answers participants gave. These open-ended questions allowed participants to make their own meaning through discussion with the inquirer. As stated earlier, I reiterate again that I recognize that my background shapes their interpretation to a certain extent, and that my interpretation of the answers the participants gave shapes this research (Creswell, 2007).

The research aims are transformative by the nature, and so falls into feminist paradigm. As Creswell (2007) discusses, the goal of this type of research is to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationship and to conduct research that is transformative. This was the aim in conducting the interviewing process. It was a process where the author wanted to be a collaborator and friend as opposed to an interviewer showing power relations. Even though I am aware that there is a power dynamic regardless, I tried to minimise it by revealing some of my own story and thereby gaining the trust of the participants. The research also aims to be transformative in relation to the rationale behind it but also it may have transformed some participant's perspectives or have helped them overcome some barriers because of the conversations had in the process of interviewing.

Lather (1991) commented on the most important perspective of the feminist framework which is the fact that feminist researchers see gender as the main principal or factor that organizes and shapes the conditions of their lives. This is something that I believe today, and can be seen when the pay gap between men and women in the

same roles are examined, when we look at the statistics on the number of women in position of power and the lack of recognition and value placed on the parenting role which is predominantly carried out in today's society by women.

Feminist discourse is related around the centrality of gender in shaping our consciousness. The questions that we ask ourselves to make sense of the world in relation to our lives, depends on how we interrupt knowledge, and how we do this depends on the beliefs that is held. I believe that gender is the central theme to how one knows and interrupts knowledge, how one sees the world through a lens that is shaped by what gender we are born to.

Lather (1991) states that the aims of feminist research is to 'correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position'. This speaks to this research because it is clear to see that female single parents are in an unequal social position to that of a female parent who is married or co-habiting. This is obvious when policies are put under the microscope and it is realized that single parents are directly discriminated against and part of the reasoning being, that they are female.

I wanted to talk to real women about their experiences of being a single parent while being in education and/or working. I wanted to hear the way in which these women struggled with their social devaluation and powerlessness within society. Similarly, Stewart (1994) in Creswell (2007) suggests that 'we need to look for what has been left out in social science writing, and to study women's lives'. Stewart also says that as a feminist researcher, you need to question how you understand your own gender in terms of for one women gender may be a greater barrier to achievement than another woman, and that gender is a social contract that is different for each individual.

I agree with this because, I believe it depends how gender was viewed in the home where you were raised and the role of your mother, but also the role of the father in relation to the mother of the household. I am saying that if gender is seen to be a barrier to achievement in life and that this belief is coming from childhood then gender will affect that person differently over another individual who was perhaps raised in a more gender-neutral household.

However, I don't believe that a woman has full agency because I believe that the way society is constructed currently, it doesn't account for problems which would hold a woman or female single parent back in terms of getting a job, job progression or achieving one's true potential in education for example. How does one have agency, and the ability to make choices to resist oppression, if women are tied and restrained because they have had a child? While science is advancing, women are still the sex that gives birth and this single thing I believe, takes some of that agency and free choice away from women in Ireland. In this country, currently, you can't have an abortion legally which takes away any choice. Whereas Stewart (1994) views women as having agency and the ability to make choices to resist oppression. I think it depends on the law and policies of the land in which you live.

Epistemology

I wanted to find out how other female single parents are experiencing this. I wanted their interpretation of the experiences they had in terms of being a single parent while trying to access or complete education. I wanted to know if they felt the same way and experienced the same barrier's as each other regardless of their social standing. What I mean by this is, I wanted to see if the commonalities of problems/barriers faced of single parenthood while in education were the same or similar across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Methods

I am aware that I am a feminist researcher with insider knowledge' and that I must be conscious of my own background and what I bring to the table. Olsen (2005) rightly states that, as a researcher you must 'uncover hidden or unrecognized elements' in relation to the 'validity of researcher's accounts, reporting of women's voices without exploiting or distorting them, ethical issues of care, establishing positive relationships with participants and recognizing power and ownership of materials. I have taken this on board in conducting this research and I have taken measures to ensure the upmost respect, support and validity of the participants and their voices.

Interviews/Participants

The method of recruitment initially was a Facebook post on SPARK and National One Parent Family Network, both activist groups supporting lone parents in Ireland. The same post was used on both pages (see appendices). From the responses on the post I contacted those participants who met the criteria for this research. The criteria were that they must be a female full-time lone parent with experience of, or being in, or trying to gain education, while and/or working. Contact emails were exchanged and I sent all relevant documents and information regarding the nature of the study. Once informed consent was obtained interviews were arranged in venues at a mutually agreed at a time, that suited both the participant and I. The locations of the venues have not been disclosed for confidentiality reasons.

It was my aim to create a warm open environment for the interviews to build rapport with the participants. To encourage openness, I disclosed some personal experiences while being conscious not to over disclose. Originally, I was not opposed to having

male single parents involved but only one male single parent met the criteria but then he could not be reached after initial Facebook contact. I therefore decided to only interview female single parents to get the female perspective.

Qualitative data was collected via one to one semi structured interviews (see appendix for questions used) (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were used to narrow slightly on the conversations and to tease out answers relevant to this research, because of time restraints on the interviews. The nature of the interview topic was personal, and so I kept the questions semi-structured and relevant to the topic I was interested in, because otherwise the interviews could have gone off on tangents that I wasn't equipped as a researcher to deal with safely at the time. Issues such as emotional upset perhaps because of the nature of the conversation. I went through the consent in person which they agreed to and gave them a hard copy of a list of supports put together encase they felt they needed further assistance after the interviews.

In addition to the original participants (the women I met in person) I needed to gain more precise data in relation to my research question. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to meet all the original participants in person for a second time, so I decided to post a specific question on the SPARK Facebook page to generate more participants with specific answers and opinions that lended to the research question. I did it this way so I had access to a big population of female single parents in a limited timeframe. I obtained consent to use each participants answers and sent them the same information and consent as I had sent the original participants.

The sampling used therefore was purposive sampling and snowballing. The commonalities linking all participants together was the fact that they claimed to be all

full time lone parents that have had experiences either in accessing or completing education or both. The differences in each participant was their social background or class, age, and number of children, and whether they were employed or not.

Use of Facebook

I decided to use Facebook to collect additional data from a cohort of single parents. This data was collected prior to initial data from the interviews. The rationale was, although data collected from the interviews was indeed in depth and provided a wealth of information on various aspects and problems faced by female lone parents in society, not enough detailed responses were collected in relation to the research question pertaining to the barriers faced by female lone parents in accessing or completing education.

The use of social media in qualitative research is relatively a new concept, but one that has been gaining support in recent years (Baltar and Brunet, 2012). Lone parents are a vulnerable hard to reach group, and Baltar and Brunet (2012) found that Facebook had positive outcomes in areas of connecting with hard to reach groups. Interestingly, they also produced findings based on the willingness of people to disclose personal information to someone who has disclosed very personal information to them as I had done in this study.

I had been active on the SPARK Facebook page which might have influenced the responses received. The SPARK Facebook page has over 2,000 members as is dedicated to act on behalf of people claiming to be lone parents and was used to gather additional data via responses to specific thematic questions.

Data, Coding, and Analysis

Once the initial data was collected and examined, I began to prepare for organizing it. I used open coding to reduce the data collected into themes. Using the constant comparative approach, I looked for data to saturate the category I had placed it in. I continued to look for new information within the data until it didn't provide any further insight into the category or theme. I put names on those categories and further subdivided them when I needed too.

While coding in this way, I realized that although the data collected from the interviews was very informative, some of it could not be used because it was outside the scope of this research. I felt I needed to collect additional data to pertain to my research question in a more precise way. I decided to put up another post on the SPARK Facebook page, that asked a specific question in relation to the data I had already received. The question was direct, and its aim was to get more usable data on a specific theme which arose from the original interviews. This is termed axial coding where the data is reviewed or new data collected, to provide insight into specific theme or category which emerged, and relates to the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The additional post can be seen in the appendices. Consent was given by each respondent whose response was used in this research and each respondent was asked to provide an email for an informed consent to be sent to them along with the support list.

Data Analysis consists of preparing and organizing the data (in this research, it was transcripts and Facebook posts), reducing the data in themes through coding, and representing the data in a discussion (Creswell, 2007).

The data was analysed through my interpretation of the actual replies the participants gave, during the interviews and in response to the Facebook posts. I kept the discussions around the participants actual experiences and own words, to best interpret the data relevant to the themes.

Ethical Considerations

Per the American Anthropological Association (2012) the considerations for conducting qualitative research are first, do no harm, second, be open and honest regarding the nature of your work, third, obtain informed consent and necessary permissions, weigh competing ethical obligations due collaborators and affected parties, make your results accessible, protect and preserve your records and maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships.

As Hammersley and Traianou (2012) argues, that there is always some 'potential for harm', it is the responsibility the researcher to make 'reasonable assessments' of how likely and at what severity, harm could be present. Before research began, possible harms to the well-being of this vulnerable group were considered. The type of harm which could be felt by a participant in this research was mainly psychological and I took appropriate steps to ensure measures were taken to limit this possibility. I compiled a list of organizations and information including twenty-four-hour helpline number for support and counselling services to each participant.

Every step of the data collection was done openly and honestly and there was absolute transparency about the intent and subject matter of the research. The informed consent clearly stated issues of confidentiality and anonymity and laid out what was expected of each participant. Permission was therefore granted when each participant signed

the informed consent. I took certain steps to ensure that the vulnerability of the population was taken into consideration by providing a list of contact details to each participant with helpline numbers, doctor's contacts, including mine and my supervisor's contact details, should any participant feel that they needed to talk to a professional about anything upsetting that may have come up for them in the interviews. Included in the list were contact details of councillor's, if something was triggered for the participant's in relation to the stigma they faced or trauma from past relationship breakdowns.

The results of this research will be disseminated to each participant via email which they each provided and if it were to be published, each participant would be contacted beforehand to get permission from them at that point. They have been made aware that in the event of publication of this research, anonymity would not be guaranteed even though every step would be taken to protect the participant's identity. The process that I used have been designed in a way to ensure the physical and psychological safety of each participant to the best of my ability and to ensure this research was done in a conscious and ethical manner.

Storing data

Like Creswell (2007) I agree that the storage of data resulting from qualitative research should be given attention. This research has collected person's data via recordings made on two devices, my mobile phone, and a Dictaphone, I used as a back up to the phone.

The phone is password protected and the password is only known by myself which prevents access to sensitive recordings. The Dictaphone was kept safe within my

home out of reach by anyone. Once I had transferred the data to my personal laptop, the data was secured via password to get into my profile on the laptop so therefore could not be accessed easily.

Of course, there is always a risk of your laptop being hacked into, but I have backed up the data and I have adequate antivirus and security measures on the laptop to prevent easy hacking.

I have also created a personal key to mask the names of the participant's data which I have used in the research to protect anonymity.

Anonymity

An informed consent form along with a list of organizations with phone numbers such as Samaritans and emergency numbers for care were also provided. This was to ensure the welfare of all participants encase anyone need to speak to a councillor or doctor after the interviews, due to the content of the personal experiences of that single mothers.

As explained above, the participant's welfare was a priority throughout this research. Consent was obtained from all participants. The consent form stated outlined the intensions of the research, and participants were informed of their safety and issues pertaining to confidentiality. They were informed that they did not have to disclose anything that they were not confident in doing. They were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time up to an agreed point in time.

It was recognised that the participants in this research are vulnerable and the power dynamics which existed between the inquirer (me) and the participant. I managed this by disclosing some of my personal story to the participants which seemed to make

them feel more at ease when sharing their stories. I did this for two reasons, to build trust, and break down barriers and to limited the participants feeling the power dynamics in the interview situation. I also created a safe place on mutual ground which the participants picked themselves as a venue which I felt encouraged trust and limited power relations. The settings were casual and I dressed casually.

Reflexivity

Those text messages and comments saying, 'you are nearly there now, you can do this', really don't help when your head is spinning with so many things you must do that day. Of course, they mean well but, well they don't get it. They don't fully understand what it is like to get up at the crack of dawn, get your child out to school single handily, have no time to eat because you are already late and you should have been on the road a half hour ago, but you still go in late anyway. They don't know the financial struggle of putting fifty-euro extra petrol in the car every week to get you to class. The fact that you come home, after a tiresome drive and a brain exhausting day, where your core beliefs and values have all been turned on their head and you can't reverse it, to a child you haven't seen and is hungry for dinner. The guilt of always rushing, saying 'come on, we are late' as the child wolfs down his readymade dinner. It not his fault. He didn't choose this life, I made that choice and the guilt was immense. The watching of the clock through homework and getting easily frustrated with an incorrect attempt at his spellings packed the car for work and realized I hadn't eaten since 12pm that afternoon and now face three hours of exhausting exercise, where I had to paste a smile from ear to ear and listen to everyone else unwind from their

stressful day. That is my bread and butter, I have no choice. Rolling in the door of my freezing home (but at least I have one) at 11pm with a sleeping child, who must be lifted from the car up the stairs to bed. Lying in bed with my head spinning, trying to keep my eyes open to read another journal article. I must do it all again tomorrow.

When I began this research, I was naive. At the beginning, I thought it would be relatively straight forward but I was very wrong. I didn't realize that I was so sheltered in terms of not seeing or knowing of the vast inequalities that exist in our society today. This research has transformed my being. It has made me question everything. When I started to experience first-hand the inequality, unjustness, and discrimination, that exists for lone parents, I could no longer do nothing. I now understood the sense of powerlessness which I felt as a female single parent. What stood out to me is that it didn't matter how you became a single parent, the powerlessness was there regardless, however it did matter in terms of different stigmas felt which was outside the scope of this research. This research made me angry at society, at the world. I was sucked into it with no shield. I wanted to quit many times but felt that I no longer had the luxury of selfishness, that this was somehow now a duty of mine to bring this out into the open. The learning I have gone through because of this entire process has made me want to act. This research is therefore my act in trying to bring the knowledge and experiences contained in it, into the public domain and make these injustices known. I had to do this in the name of equality and fairness for female single parents.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Introduction

This chapter aims to let the voices of lone parents be heard in a raw state. It presents the barriers that female single parents face when trying to engage in education or complete education, to better their lives and the lives of their children. We live in a society that doesn't seem to have any empathy for anyone, and it is the aim of this research, for the reader to understand how complex returning to education or training is in reality for single female parents. This chapter will present the data collected and the emerging themes stemming from this.

General Experience of Education

These single parents speak of their experiences of education while working and being a single mother all at the same time. All participants felt it was too much to juggle:

... I was having to be resourceful and juggle everything which was probably the most difficult thing throughout my whole journey. (Ann1)

too much to organize regarding childcare:

The most difficult thing was finding someone to look after her, because my parents did work. (Ann1)

and too much of a financial burden:

First time I went back I couldn't afford full time childcare. (Ann2)

They have all experienced high levels of consistent stress trying to manage everything:

It was very demanding and I felt very stressed out during the year. (Ann3)

and some women felt that their academic work suffered because they simply could not focus on their studies:

... I think your blocked from reaching your full potential academically, you know you must accept 40 % less than what your capable of. So, your lowering your expectations of yourself. you're not maximised at all. (Ann1)

Barrier's to education

Everyone in this research agreed, that the barriers to education and training would deter, if not prevent, most single parents from engaging in education and/or training. Most of these barriers are interlinked with each other and so, getting over one barrier may mean you then face a different barrier. This research has highlighted some of the barriers that single parent face.

Housing Barrier

Affordable housing has been highlighted as one of the top barriers to education and training for lone parents:

I could only go back to education because I got my council house because the rent was low and I could afford the childcare then (Ann4)

The same participant is working and explains that if she was in receipt of rent allowance and renting privately that she couldn't have gone back to education. So, the council house meant she could get over this barrier:

I could have not gone back to education without coming off rent allowance. (Ann3)

Childcare

This research shows that childcare is still a huge problem that remains as a barrier to lone parents engaging in education:

First time I went back I couldn't afford full time Childcare which I needed. (Ann2)
Even though the government through childcare schemes have made some progress, they are wholly inadequate and do not meet the realistic needs of a single parent, especially a working single parent:

Also, two of my kids are teenagers so crèches aren't suitable, even if affordable. (Ann 5)

I've children finishing school at 3 different times daily. (Ann6)

The hours that the childcare facilities operate in, are not always suitable for lone parents who work, or are undertaking education or training. This parent explains how her childcare facility is of no use to her, because it doesn't open early enough and closes before she returns home:

I have to leave my house at 6am and sometimes not home till 9pm. (Ann 5)

This participant explains what she has had to do to stay in education, regarding the above-mentioned point of inadequate operational hours of childcare facilities:

At one point, I had three different people minding my son during the same day and that went on for a whole week because of college commitments and work commitments. It's an absolute nightmare. (Ann7)

In relation to social welfare and childcare, this participant explains that she wasn't entitled to childcare schemes or subsidies because she worked:

... but then said actually no, that's only if you don't work. I mean what's the point in having childcare for people who don't work? They don't work, they are at home with their kids. (Ann8)

In terms of expectations of educational coursework and placements, single parents face an additional childcare barrier in relation to childcare needed to suit the hours and the calendar of work placement facilities which in some courses is essential:

So, I had to do work placements, I didn't know what hours I was going to have to work, because we were told that we must work whatever hours are the organisations hours, so if the organisation works over the weekend I was going to have to figure out child care. (Ann7)

This participant speaks of the additional cost of this extra childcare needed to complete work placements or trips required by the educational facility:

It's one thing a few hours after school, but if the goes into the evening or later than that, then that means more money and you're looking at least ten euro or more per hour. I must pay that on top of everything else. (Ann4)

This participant highlights that even when children are of school going age that you can't depend on that as some type of childcare security, because schools take training days randomly, close early sometimes, take Christmas, Easter, Summer, Mid-Terms, and public holidays. She explains that you as a single parent, still must work or attend college during these times and most childcare facilities take similar holidays, public holidays, and training days also:

When a lone parent works, the kids are constantly on holidays like midterm break in October, Christmas, Easter break, teacher training days, summer, a week for St. Valentines, St. Patricks day you know what I mean? Honest to jasus! All those days you must try and find somebody to mind your child. During the summer, there is no afterschool around this area there is no summer projects. So, as a lone parent who's working, what are your options to get your child minded? Summer camps cost a fortune and still don't fit in with the working

day schedule and still require drop offs and pickups. Like it's a disaster. The stress of trying to get her minded was intense. (Ann8)

Financial

The participants have highlighted several financial barriers to education, in terms of just not being able to afford childcare, travel costs, registration fees and costs for materials needed for their chosen coursework:

I can't afford childcare fees as you do not qualify for CETS once at third level. (Ann9)

This woman points out the fact that out of hour's childcare is too expensive for a single parent to pay for, essentially rendering her employment useless:

So, last summer I put my daughter into a summer camp for a half day 8-2.30 it cost 95euro for one week out of 250 which is what I earn per week. (Ann8)

This lone parent can't afford to put petrol in the car to get to her college course and the bus takes her four hours which doesn't fit in with the schedule of when she must be in classes:

I can't afford to put petrol in my car every week to get to college and public transport won't get me there on time. (Ann 3)

This participant points out that the type of course may be a barrier because you will not get any funding for part time or online courses:

There is no financial support if you're doing part time courses and you're doing from level seven up. you've got to pay for it yourself. (Ann10)

Social Welfare and access to grants criteria

Social welfare and its restrictions on access to grants is a substantial barrier to education for single parents. This woman explains how the restrictions she faced with social welfare prevented her from going to university:

I'm on carers allowance, my adult son has several disabilities, so with carers I'm only allowed 15 hours a week to either work OR study. (Ann11)

This participant was denied access to a SUSI grant because she couldn't afford to live independently with her son so she moved home and then was classed as a dependant on her parents:

My barrier was not being able to get the SUSI grant because I had to move back home when I couldn't afford the rent anymore. I was 34 and classed as dependent on my parents! So, no degree for me! (Ann21)

This working female single parent explains how the social welfare conditionalities prevented her from going back to education citing that she was not on the correct type of social welfare payment:

I work and am receiving FIS, because I am receiving FIS I am not entitled to BTEA which would allow me to go to university. (Ann8)

This participant raises the point that 70 per cent of lone parents are in receipt of rent allowance, but that the payment is taken away when you go back to university. That you can't be in receipt of both rent allowance and BTEA at the same time. This means that you must choose between being able to pay rent or get an education:

... Like 70 per cent of lone parents are on rent allowance and you can't go into full time education at level seven to ten while on rent allowance so that's a huge barrier for lone parents. (Ann 12)

Rent allowance is one of the biggest problems. If on rent allowance, you have no choice at all but to switch to BTEA, then you are not entitled to maintenance grant. (Ann17)

This woman expresses the complexity of problems and how they all interact with each other as barriers to furthering her education. She explains that she has a degree already, but that her degree has been rendered useless because of new regulations that were brought in, in her professional field. She explains that, to find stable employment making use of her existing qualifications is no longer an option, and now is faced with changing professions completely:

The grant won't cover an online course even though I would be progressing from a level 8 to level 9 SIMPLY because it is online. The other one I could do instead which is full time, SUSI won't cover because it is a level 8 and therefore I won't be progressing as I have a level 8 already. My bank won't approve a student loan to pay the fees if it is an online course, but if I take the full-time face to face course, if I get a place on it, they might approve a fee-paying loan but then I cannot work to repay the loan to pay the fees. (Ann 13)

Emotional Barriers

The fact that a lone parent is parenting alone, means that all decisions regarding her and her child's future is down to her. That is a burden. This participant explains that making certain decisions can be precarious and could affect their stability or finances and so, these decisions can themselves, be a barrier to education, for fear of making the wrong decision or it not working out and then having to deal with the consequences of that:

In terms of emotional barriers, being single and a parent means that any decision can be precarious and could affect stability or finances so it's a huge decision. (Ann14)

Although it may not have been known before they undertook courses or degrees, the feelings of guilt are evident in these participants and reiterated how important it is in relation to being a barrier to education especially furthering their education after having one experience of it:

... single parents also have the guilt of dedicating a huge amount of time to college (I'm lucky to get home for 6.30 most days) then, add research or studying or continuous assessment, on top of cooking/shopping/cleaning to somehow actually spending time with my children!

This single parent feels guilty all the time and feel's that her son had to make huge sacrifices unbeknown to himself. She fears emotional repercussions in him in the future:

I think my son has had to sacrifice a lot unbeknownst to him. I feel guilty all the time. (Ann16)

Time is a barrier that is faced by lone parents thinking of doing education or already involved in education. As this participant explains:

I travel 4 hours a day to get to class, by time I get in home in the evenings, bath, and feed baby, I want to sleep. No time for assignments and work. (Ann9)

This participant explains a scenario regarding educational facilities making no allowances for single parent's absenteeism due to sick children and another said she had to quit her course due to her not being allowed time off to give birth to her baby:

Also, we need 100 per cent attendance at uni. If we miss due to sick kids etc. we can attend another day for a fee of €200, one of my fellow student's daughters, fell badly and hurt herself needing emergency care. The single parent student had no choice but to leave and drive from Galway to her home town in Cork. She then got charged the €200 to attend what she had missed. (Ann18)

Confidence and fear of failure/success was a real barrier for this woman who speaks of having to geographically move her and her daughter in order to do a course, but is then scared that she may fail it or pass it and then not find employment that pays well enough to keep them there with no supportive family or friends closely:

Confidence has stopped me! What if I don't succeed? Putting myself and my daughter through the hardship, that is study as a lone parent and having to move half way up the country to do the course what if I fail... then what do I do? Worse still... if I succeed and do well, what happens when the job I am in then, newly qualified for, still doesn't pay me enough to survive...(Ann19)

This participant felt that loneliness and isolation, along with confidence is a barrier to education in terms of when you have begun the course. She explains that college commitments isolate you from friends because you have no spare time as a lone parent to go anywhere with them, eventually they stop asking you. She felt isolated by her peers because she had home commitments and they didn't understand and financially you can't afford to mix or do anything leisurely within your community because you have no money for anything like that:

There's no break or let up. No opportunity for late night library sessions or weekend study groups... It's lonely, incredibly lonely and isolating. Unless you're lucky, most of the people around you aren't studying so are living in the evenings. As a part-time, full-time student (see above) you're trying to use every waking moment to your advantage so there's no time for phone calls to connect with people. There's no money for an evening class or time to visit friends. No money for sitters to go out and take a break for a few hours. There's no-one to talk to. No-one to even mull over your papers with. (Ann20)

Gender and responsibility as a barrier to education

I asked did anyone feel that gender, just being a female, was a barrier to them fulfilling their education to the level that they felt they could attain:

Yes, gender is a barrier because a lot of mature students on the course that I am on put off going back to education because they felt that it was their sole responsibility as a woman to stay in the home and raise the children, even though they were married, their husbands didn't support them or see the point in them getting their degree. Personally, in relation to women taking on the childcare role, it's a male expectation that female's take on. (Ann18)

Responsibility of childcare usually falls to the woman and one participant felt that men do not share the responsibility of childcare of their children equally. This has obvious implications on the female single parent's ability to not only access education but to remain in education:

I also asked, is guilt linked to gender? This participant felt that it was.

I think it most defiantly is. (Ann 18)

In relation to responsibility in the financial sense, the women in this research stated in some way that the male is not held responsible or accountable financially and that the single mother must bear this financial burden. This burden placed on most female single parents is a direct gendered barrier to education:

He reneged on his maintenance payments and I was punished and chased by social welfare...If you don't get maintenance, you are sanctioned by social welfare and you lose money...I couldn't afford to go to college. (Ann4)

Is Education the only way out of poverty?

I asked the participants did they think that education was the only way out of the poverty trap. Mixed views on this were evident:

“I think it's a load of crap. I don't agree with that statement no, because I have my degree I've only newly got it, but I'm still living in poverty. (Ann7)

Whereas this participant agreed that education was the only way out of poverty because it leaves you with more options and it 'opens doors' to working in different countries:

I agree that education is the only way out of poverty... I want to do social work and the starting salary is 43,000... So, I would certainly hope that I could walk into a job like that after my degree. (Ann8)

In relation to social welfare, this woman states that education hasn't made her independent of social welfare nor has it led to employment, she thinks there is an element of luck to finding a job that will take you out of poverty:

I'm still social welfare. It hasn't magically got me a job yet... I think it may be a route out of poverty but you must be.... I think there's an element of luck to it. You must pick the right degree at the right time and having the right opportunities open to you. (Ann7)

This participant believes that education isn't a choice now for lone parents, it's necessary. She states that because of the cost of living that there is simply no alternative:

You have no choice now, with the cost of childcare, rent and life any job will not do. You really have no choice. There is no other alternative. (Ann12)

This woman explains how she doesn't believe that education is the way out of poverty because she is still earning minimum wage and that most jobs nowadays are minimum wage jobs and if not, out of her reach geographically:

No, I don't agree that education is the way out of poverty because I have my education and I am still on minimum wage. Most jobs nowadays are all min wage jobs especially in the community area. Or they are looking for 5 years' experience or the good jobs are all in Dublin. (Ann12)

Education for Labour Activation

The conversations steered from this to questioning education for labour activation. Most participants felt strongly that education for the sole purpose of labour activation was not going to work in the long term. These are some of the participant's views on this:

Education for labour activation is not going to work or lead to gainful employment for the people now who really need it because of those policies that are in place. Neoliberalism self-perpetuates poverty it does not eradicate it. It drives up profits for the capitalists, and it drives down labour costs for them and drives down wages for the worker. It's a complete oxymoron. (Ann3)

This participant states that education for labour activation will do nothing except produce low skilled, low paid workers and that this type of education is targeting single parents and the most vulnerable in society:

...I know you're going to say education is a pathway out of poverty but not all education is, we are talking here about education for labour activation, this will produce low-skilled, low paid workers. These low skilled low paid workers predominantly, the poorest in Society and most likely single parents, will never be able to pay for childcare and pay for a mortgage for their children, it's just not possible(Ann3)

This single parent refers to education for labour activation being responsible for creating a new 'slave' like class and that single parents will be relying on minimum wage, zero hour contracts to feed their families:

Education for labour activation is just creating a new lower, almost slave like class. They will be relying on zero-hour contract minimum wage jobs or whatever they can get to put food on the table. (Ann3)

This woman feels that the goal posts just keep getting shifted further away:

Degrees now are like a currency, it's just a stepping stone it's all about postgraduate study. How many lone parents have the opportunity or the means to not only be given the opportunity to study a level 8 but then a level 9 or a level 10? There are too many barriers most people would never get there. (Ann3)

This participant makes the point that a lot of education and training for labour activation, is done by coercing people into doing courses they do not want to do:

No, it won't work long term. If a person is unemployed and made to go do a course, they only do it because they don't want their dole money to be cut but you will have no interest in it. It's about giving a person a choice. Coercing people is an absolute waste. They don't stick it out. It's horrible for them, it's demoralizing. (Ann4)

The majority believe that education for labour activation will not get single parents out of poverty nor will it succeed in getting people sustainable employment but this participant believes it is the best way forward, but feels more help is needed in terms of policies and a reform of the social welfare system:

...it's probably the most sustainable way out of poverty but I think that there are other policies that can help move people out of poverty and one of those is reforming the social welfare system and reforming employment at a community level. (Ann22)

This participant explains how she could get benefits if she did a healthcare course but that she will not get any financial help toward her master's in her area of choice, that may lead to sustainable employment for her:

... they are activating you for low-paid crap jobs. They will activate me and I get funding for doing a course and I get to keep my social welfare benefits for me to be a Healthcare worker because there is an ageing population ...in their eyes I am fit for doing that, but not fit to activate me to complete my masters, where I would be on a solid salary and I be a good tax payer, and I would be doing something within my skills and achieving the best of my potential and providing security for my son, they will give me nothing....(Ann16)

This participant thinks it may well be a step in the right direction but that maybe throwing people into academic courses after years of unemployment is perhaps not the most efficient thing to do:

... a mandatory personal development kind of course would be useful to help people figure out the path, or work on the skills that they may be missing like, are they able to use a computer? Basic level things.... but to be honest they have removed the funding to be able to get to university level so they don't want you to do that, they don't want you to go that high.... (Ann16)

This woman recalls working in community education and her students telling her that they were fearful and anxious about getting summoned to the social welfare office because they knew they would be forced onto some sort of a course or else risk being sanctioned:

... Fear of being called to do a course you don't want to do. Its fear of your money being cut because your struggling enough as it is. Fear of being sanctioned. (Ann4)

This participant talks of one of her students who completed her postgraduate education to be offered a childcare course which was a completely different field for her:

I have a student who just finished a postgraduate course and when she went down to the social to come off the payment she was offered a course in

childcare so... I think an individual approach needs to be taken instead of recruiting people onto courses that the government needs workers in that area like childcare or healthcare etc... (Ann23)

Positive Aspects of Education

When asked, what are the positives that they felt education offered them, a discussion about what type of education came about. Some believe education changes you in a positive way no matter what level of education it is, and other's felt that only true education, and not education for education's sake would change you:

No, I think that sometimes education is ok for education sake. You might still want a parent at home, but if you have a level of education you have much more awareness of information and resources that are needed for your child to be able to progress. (Ann23)

All participants agreed that an educated single parent is very important to the development of their children, in fact some said it was the most important aspect, even if you didn't get work from the education, that your child/children would have a better chance at succeeding in life if the single parent knew how to navigate through the education and social welfare system:

This participant said that education gave her a new outlook, a new perspective on life and it gave her a new-found confidence:

It was very thought provoking and emotional. I loved it. It gave me a wider perspective on life, I completely changed. I was a different person if you met me 5 years ago, it gave me so much confidence, I am outspoken now, I campaign. (Ann12)

Although this comment was in a positive light, it did highlight how becoming educated can completely change a person's inner beliefs and can lead to isolation from friends and family because of it:

Critical thinking, sometimes I get too critical. Sometimes I found like I was getting into conspiracy theories and stuff and I couldn't stop. (Ann4)

Something that stood out from all participants was their determination that their children would be getting a full education to the highest level and this is reflected in this statement from a single mother, from working class background:

I am determined that my daughter is going to go to college, and if I must beg borrow and steel to get her there I will. I set my hopes on her for changing our future. (Ann8)

This participant brought up the fact that she felt her attitude had changed in a more positive way and that because of her education she was better able to face life's challenges and that in turn, her son would not face poverty because of her education:

You develop a more positive attitude. The more education you have the more your able to face difficulties in life. Not only getting jobs. My son, I don't think will suffer poverty because I'm educated and so will he be. (Ann12)

More participants talk of the confidence, self-belief and different perspectives education gave them:

...it's given me a different perspective on the world, on our society, of people, particularly people in my situation as single parents, but also everybody living on a low income. (Ann7)

Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings of this research in relation to the barrier's that single female parents face when trying to access or complete education or training. The findings highlight the barriers to education for female single parents which are, housing, childcare, financial, social welfare and access to grants, emotional barriers, and gender and responsibility. It displays single parent's voices and opinions regarding education and its relationship with poverty and education for the purpose of labour activation. It takes us through the positive aspects that single parents felt when returning to education. The limits of this research prevented me from going into stigma in great detail, state discrimination on a policy level against the single parent, lack of responsibility from the absent parent, respectability, internalized dialogue of female single parents and the underrepresentation of single parents in positions of power. Emotional responses felt by most lone parents in education and in general are anger and frustration, exclusion, and isolation and that there is a lack of recognition and value for the work of single parents. The lack of value for the caring profession and indeed care in the home, carried out by lone parents is nothing less than shocking.

Chapter 5 – Analysis

Introduction

The aim of this research was to find out from the mouths of lone mothers, the impact neoliberal ideologies and labour activation policies have had on their lives when trying to access or participate in further education. This research argues that neoliberalism, managerialism and labour activation impacts negatively on lone mothers. It demonstrates that the above-mentioned means, the lone mother has increased barriers to education, increased income poverty, increased gender inequality and the reproduction of the lower socioeconomic class is evidently seen. There is also an increased probability that lone mothers will end up in low-paid precarious employment. It also argues that the impact of neoliberal policies on the care and well-being of the children in lone parent families, is negative and that little is being done to address these issues.

I wish to make clear what neoliberalism and managerialism are, and the differences between them to highlight how they link to this research. Neoliberalism is about economics and politics, managerialism is about corporations and management and they function both inside managerial capitalism (Klikauer, 2015) but the two overlap each other. Managerialism is used in the neoliberal sphere, because the department of social protection(DSP), is now being run like a business. This reflects the economic and political overlapping with the primary concern of managerialism, and the link therefore, between how neoliberalism and managerialism are impacting on social welfare recipients in this country and subsequently, lone mothers.

This research also highlights that care is still very gendered, goes unrecognized, and still grossly underpaid. Regarding education, this research puts forward the argument that, education is vital to the lone parent in terms of increased opportunities, confidence, and hope, but that the type and quality of the education they receive is essential therefore, education that is being offered for the sole purpose of labour activation under neoliberal policies, is not beneficial to lone parent's long term and can trap them in a cycle of poverty even when employed.

Neoliberalism, Managerialism, and Labour Activation

This research is steeped in the ideology and policies stemming from neoliberalism. As discussed in the literature reviewed, it seems that the Irish Government may be following suit, using this approach, as a mechanism to address social problems that are currently evident. This is apparent by many policies and cut backs to social welfare payments, as outlined by Millar and Crosse (2016) A dependency on social welfare payments by those who are most vulnerable, unemployment, and poverty are just some aspects that neoliberals claim it will address. Neoliberalism through managerialism, aims to address social welfare dependency through policies such as labour activation, cuts to social welfare payments, and increased conditions places on people wanting to claim social welfare benefits.

However the participants in the research, who are lone mothers and are classed as a vulnerable group, state that neoliberal policies, like labour activation, have made there situations worse in relation to, diminishing resources, increased childcare costs, reduced income due to social welfare cuts and reform, reduced employment opportunities that are suitable to a lone mother, in terms of pay, contracts and hours, increased household costs including rent and bills, due to increased housing demand

and the privatisation of once public services (like electricity), where companies are unbridled and can charge as they wish for services.

Also, labour activation has brought an enormous amount of stress on lone mothers who are now being forced out of the house to work or to engage in education. This stress has deteriorated the health of all participants in this research in one way or another. Lone mothers in this research have also stated that they are now financially worse off because of these neoliberal policies, which have forced some into low-paid precarious employment. Once employment (any employment) is found, social welfare pulls the rug from underneath regardless of pay, contracts, or hours of employment, and so many participants has stated that they are financially worse off because they are working. This is contradictory to the reasons neoliberal policies were implemented in the first place because the aim of the policies was to get people back to work and become self-sufficient, however it is becoming more obvious that even when working, people are still dependant on social welfare payments to bump up their weekly income because of poor employment opportunities.

The literature suggests that single parents are living in consistent poverty and according to the central statistics office (2015) 23 per cent are living in consistent poverty with a further 37.7 per cent being 'at-risk-of-poverty' with the deprivation rate in 2013 in excess of 63 per cent (Millar and Crosse, 2016). These statistics do not suggest that neoliberal policies have addressed poverty of single parents, in fact they suggest that the problem of single parents living in poverty, is getting worse.

Cornia (2017) states in the literature that neoliberalism's theory is that economic growth increases will benefit all, yet the findings of this research prove that this is not the case. The rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer. This research echoes with

Cornia (2017) on the point made about purchasing power. It was stated in the literature that, the impact of neoliberal policies, reduces the purchasing power of the poor. Lone parents are 'the poor' and so this research argues that economic growth does not reach the poor and therefore there is no 'trickle-down effect' for them.

Amable (2010) as recalled from the literature reviewed, states that neoliberalism is based on the idea that the 'ideal world order should be free, and fair competition between individuals'. This research argues, how can a single mother living either in poverty or in deprivation compete freely and fairly with someone who is not? This research suggests that they can't, therefore these policies do not promote or consider equity, and ultimately fail those who are most disadvantaged, as reflected by the lone mothers in this research.

Many neoliberal policies are implemented through social welfare provision in Ireland. Example of these are OFP payment being stopped once the youngest child turns seven, the introduction of sanctions for noncompliance, and the requirement on jobseekers to prove they are actively seeking work, to get their social welfare payment every week. The overall goal of labour activation is, according to Millar and Crosse (2016):

Based on the premise that being in paid employment is the responsibility of all citizens and that paid employment is the most effective way of dealing with poverty and that looking for work is a requirement of receiving social welfare.

In short, labour activation policies aim to reduce poverty by forcing people that for whatever reason are unemployed, into any employment because LA believes that this is the best way to reduce poverty.

The participants in this research have explained as outlined in the findings chapter, that because of restrictions, cuts and conditionalities to social welfare payments and

grants, they are less well off financially, but not only that, they have also expressed in relation to access to further education, that the policies have made it more difficult to access grants like SUSI, due to the conditions social welfare have placed on them. These cuts and changes in social welfare provision are due to labour activation policies being currently implemented.

The above highlights that many social welfare payments have discrepancies in terms of how they conflict with the overall goal of labour activation. For example, as one participant in this research said, it was because of restrictions she faced with social welfare payments she was on, that it prevented her from going to university. This was directly because of the rules which applied to the payment she was receiving, which made her choose between employment for no more than fifteen hours a week, or to study full time without the possibility of being allowed to work. All this while having a dependant disabled child in her care, alone. Another participant was denied a grant because she couldn't afford to live independently anymore with her child, so she had to move back in with her parents and was then assessed for the SUSI grant based on her being a dependant of her father and was refused the grant based on her father's income. A working single mother (Ann8) was prevented from returning to education because she was not on the correct type of social welfare payment, because she was working as opposed to being unemployed.

It's clear to see from the findings of this research that there are serious problems in the system when it comes to the most vulnerable in society being refused, denied, and backed into a corner, and forced to make decisions between getting an education for a hopeful future, or being able to work to put food on the table and a roof overhead, foregoing the opportunities education may bring of a more stable future. Therefore, this research presents findings that indicate that, the system which is implementing

labour activation policies is actually working against the goal of labour activation, that it is so desperately forcing onto the most vulnerable in society.

I would like to reiterate a quote from the findings which captures the complexities of the problems which lone mothers face when trying to access or participate in education, while dealing with neoliberal policies;

The grant won't cover an online course even though I would be progressing from a level 8 to level 9 SIMPLY because it is online. The other one I could do instead which is full time, SUSI won't cover because it is a level 8 and therefore I won't be progressing as I have a level 8 already. My bank won't approve a student loan to pay the fees if it is an online course, but if I take the full-time face to face course, if I get a place on it, they might approve a fee-paying loan but then I cannot work to repay the loan to pay the fees (Ann13)

As Castree (2013) explains in chapter one, neoliberalism puts governmental mechanisms developed in the private sphere to work within the state itself, so that even core functions of the state, like social welfare provisions are either subcontracted out to private providers, or run (as the saying has it) 'like a business'. This is evident in Ireland and it can be seen through the cuts to social welfare payments, particularly in the last few budgets.

In contrast to the findings of this research, Castree (2013) explains where and why the neoliberal ideology came about. Idea's echoing from Thatcherism, being that, providing people with welfare would de-motivate them to work and be self-sustaining, whereas this research argues that these single mothers do want to work, but because the work on offer is low-paid and precarious, they are left little choice because the pay for working doesn't always make working worthwhile today. The point highlighted here is that most single mothers want to work but are restricted by the very policies and mechanisms within social welfare, aimed at getting them back into work, and prevent them from working, and in some cases, returning to education.

The findings of this research would argue that instead of neoliberal policies doing what they are meant to do, get people back to work and not be reliant on the state, the opposite is happening. Instead, its creating what Castree (2013) highlights as the 'nanny state' because people are afraid to leave the safety net of social welfare as working conditions are so bad in terms of low-pay, zero hour contracts and no job stability in most professions.

Amable (2010) as highlighted in chapter one, states that a traditional neo-liberal critique of the welfare state is based on individual responsibility. This research would argue that, how is anyone meant to be responsible, if all their power to make decisions is taken away from them and put into the hands of the state. Lone mothers, because most depend on some form of social welfare, are powerless when it comes to making decisions, because everything revolves around their social welfare provision and their financial circumstances. So, they cannot be responsible.

Saad-Filho and Johnston (2004) speak of a reformed neoliberal approach in the literature reviewed. The new reform argues that with greater education and training, lighter regulation and asset distribution, poor people will participate more in the markets whereas, Ravallion, (2001) argues that it doesn't consider the complexity of problems within policy and distribution, and that lumping people who have very individualistic problems and circumstances into averages, hides great diversity in the current data. Ravallion, (2001) reflects the findings of this research, where it is argued that, there are complex problems within our social welfare system in relation to conditionalities and distribution, and that each lone mothers circumstances are different. I agree with Ravallion (2001) in that, the circumstances of lone parents are very individual and therefore a one size fits all approach will not work and may even

lead to a decreased stability for lone parents and their children with regard to income, and a possibility of increased poverty.

Olssen and Peters (2005) stated that new managerialism has 'redefined what counts as knowledge, who may bear it and who is empowered to act'. In this respect, this research has shown how managerialism, being essentially, how neo-liberal ideas are applied in terms of policy, is intertwined within this research as discussed here in relation to social welfare cuts, conditionalities, and distribution.

It will be recalled from the chapter one where Meyer and Sullivan, (2008) and Jones De Weever et al. (2003) highlighted that more single mothers are working, yet their earnings are low and they remain concentrated in low-paid employment. Income poverty remains a barrier to single mothers participating in education because even if they are approved for a grant to cover fee's, travel costs and childcare costs are not factored into the fee's, only grants are, and social welfare have scrapped the maintenance grant which used to help alleviate some of these costs, under neoliberal policy reform to save money. Therefore, as reflected in this research, and by Millar and Crosse, (2016) lone parents feel like they are trapped in a cycle of poverty, that the social welfare system of this state, is designed to work against them despite their best efforts to improve their own situation, and that the neoliberalism and its policies does not recognise individual circumstances or equity.

Labour activation was introduced to tackle poverty levels for lone parents and as a solution to increased public expenditure on social protection (Millar and Crosse, 2016). Labour activation policies as explained earlier, are being applied by managerialism. Haux (2008,2010b) put forward six different types of activation approaches in relation to selection criteria for lone parents and employment. The mechanisms that the Irish

state have used is based on the age of the youngest child as explained in the literature reviewed. The Irish state therefore, use several different incentives to activate lone parents via income supports, housing supports and educational supports, as explained in chapter one. However, this research argues that these supports are inadequate, complex and contradict what they initially set out to achieve. It is through this process that the barriers to education for lone mothers become apparent. The next section will analyse the barriers which lone mothers face while trying to access and/or participate in education. These barriers reflect the main themes which emanated from the findings of this research.

The link between neoliberalism and the barriers which are discussed, can be associated to changes in social welfare and how the Department of Social Protection is now being run. The DSP is now being run like a business under managerialist ideology, where measurement of performance, efficiency and the state limiting their expenditure, is of utmost importance. It is being run like a business, which does not care for human well-being. The neoliberal changes occurring are linked to the barriers via the policies which have brought changes, making it more difficult for people in need to access social welfare payments. Restrictions and increased conditionalities have been placed on almost all social welfare payments combined with the expectation that it is the responsibility of every citizen to work, regardless of their circumstances. Therefore, people must prove they are actively seeking employment or they will not meet the criteria and will not receive social welfare payments. Similarly, if a person is not compliant in participating with various labour activation schemes brought in, such as the community employment (CE scheme), or doesn't participate in a course that social welfare put them on, their social welfare payments may be sanctioned or taken from them entirely. For these reasons, the link between, how neoliberalism,

managerialism and labour activation, can increase the barriers for a lone mother in accessing and participating in education.

However, it is also recognized that some barriers mentioned may also be caused by a wider cultural set of values. The findings of this research suggest that, most of the participants wanted to change their circumstance and attain an education. The barriers experienced by them, were predominantly caused by neoliberal policies which affected their own circumstances, namely through the provision of social welfare and income poverty, related to lack of access to adequate income support and childcare services.

Barriers to Education as a Lone Mother

Lack of affordable social housing

The lack of affordable social housing that is secure, acts as a barrier to education for a lone parent because it affects the decision-making process. Having a home is a basic human need, which promotes stability. Stability is something which the participants in this research have mentioned a lot. They felt they didn't have stability in their lives in other aspects, like employment, but that having a council house provided the stability that one participant states, was the make or break factor when she was deciding whether to return to education or not, 'I could only go back to education because I got my council house because the rent was low and I could afford the childcare then (Ann4)'.

This participant highlights that having the security of a home, often depends on what type of social welfare benefit you are receiving, and she points out that if she was in receipt of rent allowance, she could not have gone back to education because you

don't get BTEA (back to education allowance) if you are receiving rent allowance. This means you would have no weekly income to live on if you were not working. It also means that you wouldn't be entitled to any SUSI grants when returning to education. This shows that social welfare and neoliberal policies have a profound knock on effect on the lives of single mothers in a variety of aspects, including decision making processes in relation to returning to education.

The literature suggests that stability and security is very important for lone parents (Millar and Crosse, 2016) and this research reflects this in terms of the importance of a lone parent having access to social housing where stability can be ensured, so that their basic needs are met. The CSO (2015) as stated in the literature, found that 23 per cent of lone parents are living in consistent poverty and a further 37 per cent are at-risk-of poverty. These figures coincide with participant's self-assessment of their financial situations and ties in with lone parent's dependency on social welfare, and social housing. Therefore, any policy which affects social welfare payments or housing assistance payments, will directly negatively impact on lone parent's stability and security, which indirectly impacts on their ability to feasibly access or participant in further education.

Childcare Provision and associated Cost

This research, like Guenther et al. (2008) suggests that for the participants, adequate childcare provision and cost remains a significant factor when trying to access and participate in education, training and/or employment. Like the literature suggests (Millar and Crosse 2016), some improvements have been made to childcare in terms

of reducing costs in the form of subsidies, but this research suggests that the changes are not significant enough to erase childcare provision and cost as a barrier to education.

First time I went back I couldn't afford full time Childcare which I needed. (Ann2)

All participants in this research stated that childcare provision was not good enough to meet their needs and expectations placed on them as lone mothers, by the state, to return to either education, employment, or both through labour activation policies. The hours of operation in childcare facilities were highlighted as a problem because they didn't align with educational courses start times and finish times, and this meant that the lone mothers had to rely on family, friends and neighbours to pick up the slack in terms of filling in the extra hours needed for childcare. It was also stated that a lot of grandparents are still employed, and therefore that family support network is not always there to rely on for childcare today. The participants also made the point that, the constant juggling and insecurity of trying to find suitable childcare, caused additional stress on top of the stress they were already under, and that keeping track of different people doing picks ups and drop offs at various locations, consumed their minds, which took away from their focus on their studies. As Ann 5 says, 'two of my kids are teenagers so creches aren't suitable' and Ann 6 states 'I've children finishing school at three different times daily'.

Like Millar and Crosse (2016) recommend, the child's welfare and the lone parents state of mind needs to be addressed in terms of the possible impact shuffling around children from one place to the next is having on them and their parent. Similarly, this research reflects the concerns highlighted in Millar and Crosse (2016) but has not be addressed by the state to conduct a full impact assessment.

In relation to the care and well-being of the child/children, this research, like that of Millar and Crosse (2016) has relayed concerns of the well-being of children in lone parent families who have been activated, and the demands that the lone parent faces by the conditions of work and/or education.

Financial Barriers

This research has highlighted several financial barriers which lone mothers still face when trying to access or participate in education. Childcare costs, travel costs, registration fees, college fees and costs for materials needed for certain courses, are those that have been highlighted. These findings are concurrent with recent research and in the review of literature in this research, on poverty and lone parents, which demonstrated that, the way in which activation policies have been implemented has not led to a decrease in poverty among the lone parent population (Millar and Crosse 2016).

Making decisions about putting petrol in the car to get to college or putting food on the table and paying electricity bills, is significant according to the findings of this research. Therefore, income poverty of lone parents remains a significant barrier to education, training, and low-paid employment, according to the findings of this research.

Social Welfare and conditionalities

Social welfare under neoliberal ideology, has adopted labour activation policies to reduce the welfare bill, increase tax returns and get the long term unemployed working again, as shown in the literature of the research. Lone parents have been targeted by this policy, and it has had several implications on lone mothers in terms of accessing

and successfully participating in education through mechanisms which social welfare are using, to coerce lone mothers back into either education and/or training. The methods labour activation policies are using are a combination of cutting or reducing social welfare payments, and placing strict qualification criteria regarding the conditions which need to be met, to be eligible to receive a benefit from social welfare. The state is also using measure's like sanctions, which actively punish people by reducing their money received by welfare, who do not conform to the strict rules in relation to job searching, declaring any changes and for choosing not to participate in any education and training if the state deems you fit for labour activation.

Policy changes brought in by Joan Burton (Minister for social protection 2011-2016) saw lone mothers hit hard by labour activation policy by coercing them to return to either education, training, or employment when their youngest child turned seven years old. These policies were implemented without impact assessment or support structures in place which the literature shows (Millar and Crosse, 2016), has had a negative impact on lone mothers, in terms of income reduction and increased barriers in relation to being eligible for social welfare payments like BTEA and grants (SUSI).

This research reflects similarly to the literature reviewed in Millar and Crosse (2016) in relation to social welfare policies and how they are being implemented, in terms of the impact lone parents are experiencing by these measures. The conditionalities of receiving one social welfare payment has an impact on whether the lone parent is entitled to receive another payment as explained in the findings. It has been stated both in the literature, and similarly in this research, that there are gaps in the social welfare system. These oversights on behalf of the state, are negatively impacting on lone mothers in terms of them seeking employment, education or/training, and even weighing up whether it will benefit them to be employed or not, financially.

More in-depth research is needed specifically on this issue because this research was limited in terms of the number of participants and the literature reviewed in this research was not specific to lone mothers in Ireland and didn't focus on the impact of these conditionalities and cracks in the social welfare system which is allowing lone parents to fall in. Certainly, this research is suggesting that the social welfare system is broken and needs to be brought in line with the lived realities of lone mothers, to address the ongoing income poverty and associated problems.

Psychological barriers

There is limited specific literature examining the psychological barriers faced by lone mothers in trying to access and participate in adult education today in Ireland. The participants in this research felt that psychological barriers such as stress, guilt, fear insecurity and stigma, negatively affected them in one way or another when trying to either access education and participate in it.

In this research, lone mothers stated that decision making was harder because there is no one else to rely on, or talk too when important decisions need to be made that may affect the rest of their lives. Going back to adult education has several barriers as explained, but the stress faced by lone mothers is immense. Having to juggle a household with all its duties, dependent child/children alone, and possible employment as well as college work and study has been highlighted as a significant cause of ongoing stress.

The significance of psychological barriers is not adequately addressed in the literature contained in this research because it simple doesn't exist. There is ample research on the psyche of children of lone parent families in relation to primary and secondary

education, and there is research on lone parents and psychological issues they experience regarding their mental health, but there is a gap in the literature that focuses on lone mothers and the psychological barriers they face in relation to returning to adult or further education. The main psychological barriers experienced by lone mother in this research are laid out in the findings.

The stigma, (being another topic highlighted by this research), surrounding being a lone mother in education has not been documented in the literature adequately nor has its impact as a barrier to education. This research suggests that stigma felt by lone mothers when accessing or participating in education is significant, and can act as a barrier in terms of reduced confidence of the lone mother. Undertaking a change from being a parent, to making the decision to return to education is no easy task, and for lone mothers who have been isolated and excluded from certain aspects of society for many years, it is very difficult. Lone mothers in this research have spoken about an underlying whisper in their ear telling them they are not good enough, and some have stated that this has been a barrier for them, in considering returning to education. On the issue of stigma, I wish to offer two quotes to show the way single mothers are viewed today by society and the emotional damage it may do to lone mothers. These quotes are directly from participants in this research:

People have called me a slut, and told me 'You should have kept your legs closed'...they have said to me that I'm a cunt and nothing but a cunt. (Ann 1)

So, my experience I've being a lone parent or an unmarried mother in 1996 was still very much one of sexual stigma whereby you very much sexually deviated from the norm, whereas today the big thing that sticks out to me is the social welfare stigma, almost the Vikki Pollard caricature of the lone parent whose sponging off the state and has the baby for the council house. (Ann 3)

Unfortunately, the boundaries of this research did not allow more time to be dedicated to this topic in particular.

Gender

As the literature suggests 88 per cent of lone parent families are headed by women (Millar and Crosse, 2016). This research looked at gender as an emanating theme, and its role in relation to accessing and participating in further education, care, and employment. It concluded that gender may limit, or at least make it more difficult, for a woman to access and participate in education because being a woman is typically associated with the rearing of children and therefore, the responsibility of care is placed on the woman. This has consequences in terms of a woman being available for education or employment, and heavily depends on access to adequate childcare and services. Neoliberalism can be linked into this, via the fact that women are now obliged to work outside the home and in relation to this research, they are already doing the work of two people inside the home, but neoliberal policies do not recognize this work and therefore, this research would argue that neoliberal policies adds to gender inequalities and increases the barriers to education.

Impact of Managerialism on Gender in relation to Education

The new purpose of education in line with neoliberalism is to develop the 'neo-liberal citizen' who is educated to be self-sufficient, rational and a competitive worker who is almost detached from themselves (Lynch, 2014). This is not conducive with being a parent, let alone being a lone female parent, and this research reflects this viewpoint.

The Impact of Managerialism on Gender in relation to Care and Responsibility

More women than men are the primary carers for children (Millar and Crosse, 2016) and the literature suggests (Bezanson and Luxton, 2006) that, neoliberal ideology assumes that care work is a family responsibility and not state responsibility. This point, in relation to this research means that it is a woman's responsibility to care for her children, in a lone parent family scenario, as opposed to a man's, according to neoliberal ideology. This point echoed in the responses of the participants where they strongly felt that their gender was partially the reason they were held responsible for the care of their children.

In comparison to the literature reviewed, this research is similarly aligned with the fact that society and the neoliberal ideology views, that women are responsible for caring for their children more than men, and that this has impacted on lone mothers accessing and participating in education because they are responsible for sourcing and paying for adequate childcare, which has already been outlined as a significant barrier to education and employment.

In relation to managerialism and gender, it can be recalled from the literature review when Lynch (2009) comments on one of the major concerns of managerialism, being that, it occurs at the expense of moral and social values related to care, autonomy, tolerance, respect, trust, and equality. In addition to this, Lynch et al. (2012) states that there is an 'anti-care rhetoric' within organizations, meaning that whether you're in employment as a lone mother or education, your care responsibilities are not taken into consideration. This pertains to gender because as stated earlier, it has been

deemed by this state and society, that it is the responsibility of a woman and not a man, to care for children. The findings of this research tell the reader that this is indeed the case today.

This research highlights that the barriers a lone mother faces, for example, increased income poverty, decreased access to education and competitiveness, is because she is a woman, and gender inequality remains blind in these neoliberal times. In addition to this Ireland has adopted a market approach to childcare, which has seen costs rise and therefore it is female lone parents who must come up with the money to pay for childcare to be able to work or study. Therefore, this research argues that women are financially burdened more than men are, when it comes to labour activation policies. Neoliberalism would have us believe that the individual is to blame for failing and not the fact that all responsibility of rearing a child alone is on the woman, whereas the absent parent is free to do as he pleases because he doesn't have the burden of responsibility on him, therefore not being restrained (by childcare worries) and comes across less barriers to overcome in accessing or participating in education if he so wishes.

The literature reviewed has highlighted that care work remains undervalued, like that of Gouthro (2009) who said that 'neoliberalism's worldview is that the market place should shape societal views and patriarchy reinforces it by undermining and devaluing unpaid labour and the feminine identities associated with it'. This meaning that a mother and her work in rearing children is not valued. This is evident by lone mothers being forced to put their children into childcare for other strange people to raise them, as opposed to recognizing the value a mother has within the home, rearing her own children, and the value of that to society in the future.

Impact of Managerialism on Gender in Relation to Employment

It may be recalled from the literature review, that in theory, women have the same chance of promotion in terms of employment that men do (Fine et al. 2009), however as recalled from the literature in chapter 2, Halford and Leonard (2001) stated that under new managerialism, a woman is required to be 'super', someone who will sacrifice all (including having children), and work like a dog to achieve company goals, to be able to compete for that promotion or powerful position. The findings of this research express the participant's feelings on this matter, and proclaim that too much is expected of a woman today, in terms of them already being a lone parent, being expected by the state to work outside of the home, being expected to study without adequate support measures in place, and remain competitive and ready to work like a dog. It will be recalled that participants stated that:

There's no break or let up..... It's lonely, incredibly lonely and isolating... As a part-time, full-time student (see above) you're trying to use every waking moment to your advantage so there's no time for phone calls to connect with people. There's no money for an evening class or time to visit friends. No money for sitters to go out and take a break for a few hours. There's no-one to talk to.' (Ann 20)

They are activating you for low-paid crap jobs... in their eyes I am fit for doing that... but not fit to activate me to complete my masters, where I would be on a solid salary and I be a good tax payer, and I would be doing something within my skills and achieving the best of my potential and providing security for my son, they will give me nothing....(Ann 16).

The participant's also highlight that all these expectations are not on the fathers of their children nor are they on married mothers.

Importantly, the current activation policy does not treat all families equally. As touched on in the above paragraph, there are obligations on the lone mother to work but not on married or co-habiting mothers and as Millar and Crosse (2016) states in the

literature reviewed. This suggests an upholding of the traditional male-breadwinner approach to social protection which this research argues, is displaying gender inequality.

This research, in agreement with the literature reviewed (Gouthro, 2009), suggests that inequalities linked to gender and social class are rendered private problems and the impact that gender has, on the ability of a woman or lone mother to be competitive is not considered to be an issue that the state must address, because the state has adopted neoliberal ideologies. This research would argue that competitiveness is a huge factor in competing for educational opportunities and employment opportunities and that women, especially women who are parenting alone, are at a significant disadvantage because of this.

Many lone mothers, as stated in the literature reviewed (Millar and Crosse 2016), have less education and more time at home caring for children and therefore an implication of this, are gaps in curriculum vitae. This is just one way in which their competitiveness is weakened. Inequalities linked to gender and social class are now rendered 'private' problems rather than 'public' concerns in relation to the impact gender has on being able to compete (Gouthro, 2009). Many of the participants in this research have expressed difficulties in getting care for their children to participate in either work and/or education and I believe that this reduces their competitiveness in today's job market.

Crittenden (2001) points out that mothers are held accountable for their children's behaviour, appearance and success in school and in life. This is something that the findings chapter in this research reflects when participants speak of the pressure's and stress they are under because they too feel accountable for this. Not only this, but the

single mothers in this research like that discussed in the literature reviewed feel as if they need to split their identity, to be a mother, a student, and a worker. I believe that these expectations are not on men, not only that but these expectations wouldn't be on men, even if they were the single parent as opposed to the female.

Class

Class and Education

Gender and class intersect with each other in this research. The intersection points in terms of where gender has impacted on class are, for this research, around income poverty, lack of viable opportunities for education, lack of state responsibility for not recognising the roles expected of a woman regarding labour activation, is detrimental and reproduces class inequalities, for women who are lone mothers. The fact that the state is allowing men for the most part, to not act responsibly in terms of looking after their children at least financially, and the state does not enforce laws. There is no serious repercussions for male fathers if they don't contribute financially for their child/children.

Class has several implications on lone mothers in terms of access and participation to education because of barrier's, and the type of education that is realistically in reach and on offer for this population. Poverty affects choice's and decisions in terms of employment and education. The type of education one receives, has an impact on future employment prospects and therefore income potential.

As Millar and Crosse (2016) argued in the literature review, class inequalities arise from lack of information within lower social classes regarding education and options and the introduction of fee's and loans, while at the same time maintenance grants

being abolished. This directly affects lone parents as they come from a lower social class where educational attainment is low and poverty is a reality they live with. It could also be viewed as discriminatory against those who come from a lower socio-economic background because of their dependency on receiving financial income support in accessing education.

As discussed in chapter one, a report from the HEA in 2016 showed that 85 per cent of mature students returning to education studied part-time in comparison to 10 per cent who studied full-time. The implications of this are, social welfare does not approve grants or financial assistance to those mature single parents returning to education, if the course is classified as a part-time course. For this reason, many lone mothers from working class, who would depend heavily on receiving a grant, are limited to the course choice and institution

This research suggests that there remain mixed views when it comes to education being a lone parent's way out of poverty. Some of the reasons for this are because some lone mothers, after attaining their qualifications, remain impoverished, some are still dependant on social welfare, some remain unemployed and some were employed but still earning min wage and in precarious positions.

In contrast, some participants felt they had no choice, that they had to participate in education because of state pressures in relation to activation, and the fact that a degree nowadays is a necessity to have any chance at being competitive because they are considered the new currency.

This research argues that the class you come from is relevant when it comes to the type of education a lone mother can realistically access. The lone mother is subjected to income inequality because, as the literature suggests (Millar and Crosse 2016) most

lone parents are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, although this research suggested that this is not always the case. This research found that simply becoming a lone parent in Ireland can propel you into a lower socio-economic class which then has knock on implications on your educational access.

As recalled from the literature Giddens (1995) in relation to the choice of Institution and education attainable, points out that choice is a medium of both power and stratification. This research disagrees with Giddens's because, it is here where the barrier's become evident, decisions for lone mothers are based on constraints which lone mothers have to deal with such as geographical constraints, material constraints, course choice constraints because of activation and social welfare conditionalities on welfare payments, having to work long hours while studying, or not work and be faced with poverty, and psychological constraints like the social stigma surrounding parenting alone and the feeling that one might not be 'good enough to be attending university' (Reay, 1997) or feeling like they don't belong. So, this research would argue therefore, that lone mothers do not have a choice of which educational institution they attend nor do they have power to exercise their preference.

This research argues that lone mothers therefore, are less likely to get the type of education needed to get a job that is secure and pays well. The implications of this is that lone mothers are more likely to remain in a lower socioeconomic class and the institutions enable this class reproduction. The participants in this research felt that this was true and one mentioned that she has shifted to working class from middle class because she is a lone mother living in these neoliberal times.

Reproduction of social class

This research argues that lone mothers are subjected to social reproduction of class because of their personal circumstance. As discussed in the literature reviewed, Bezanson and Luxton (2006) states that the work that mothers do for their children is the foundation of social reproduction and that motherhood is central to subordination. This research suggests that this work goes unrecognized and unpaid still today and that the impact of motherhood on women's lives depends on the intersectionality of gender, class (Bezanson and Luxton, 2006). As the findings suggested, even if a woman was considered to be middle class, single parenthood propels her into a lower socioeconomic class because of the constraints, conditions responsibility that comes with being a lone mother.

The family care for, and socialize the next generation. It can be therefore assumed that the lone parent family is doing the same, raising children up to become functioning adults. These adults, who will become the next labour force (Luxton, 2017), it seems then, that families, including lone parent families, are responsible for social reproduction which is an essential part of the capitalist economy Bezanson and Luxton (2006). This research would argue that neoliberal policies reproduce social class, and lone parent families are on the increase, this would indicate that greater numbers of lone parent families will be of a lower-socioeconomic class. This means that society will be increasingly dependent on social assistance just to get by. The opposite of what neoliberalism is trying to achieve. This view is long term, but this research would argue that the implications of increasing numbers of families that are lone parent families, will therefore mean increased dependence on social assistance which means an increased social welfare bill. This is because of managerialism and the impact it has on lone parents in relation to class.

Class and Childcare

In relation to childcare, Ireland has adopted a free market approach resulting in high childcare costs which interfere with parents who want to take up employment or education (Millar and Crosse, 2016). As documented in the finding chapter, it could be argued that is this keeping lone mothers in the lower class because of income poverty.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Personal Learning

It funny because when I started out on this journey I believed that I was equal to those students who sat next to me in lectures. It almost took me four years to complete my educational journey which should have been done in two. You could say I was one of the lucky single mothers, because I had received a good education before I became a single mother, but when I was propelled into lone-parenthood, reality soon hit home.

Ironically, I almost became the statistics I write about in this research on more than one occasion, because I wanted to quit. There were times when I felt absolutely defeated no matter how hard I tried to juggle everything or how many obstacles I overcame. There was always another one.

I began to struggle financially. I was stressed all the time, felt guilty about being an absent parent to my son who wanted and needed my attention. I felt that I had to become three different people, a mother, a worker, and a full-time student.

In classes, I felt I was different. I couldn't relax like them or enjoy the experience of education. The inequalities I felt were in relation to income poverty, and having to make difficult choices, for example, I had to choose a course that was two hours away from where I lived, because of neoliberal policies and social welfare restraints that wouldn't allow me to do the same course in an institution five mins away from where I lived, as it did not meet the criteria that social welfare said it had to, in terms of being classed as a full-time course. I didn't realize this was due to neoliberal policies at the time.

I have learned that just being born a woman in today's neoliberal times still has many implications in relation to gender inequality. I now feel after completing this research, a deep sense of injustice in relation to how unfair the system and society treats lone mothers. However, I credit the completion of this research to that feeling. I have anger now at the system because I am now aware of how unjust it is if you are a lone mother.

However, despite all of this, the experiences that education at a level 9 has given me is priceless. Regardless of my employment prospects after I finish, I am indeed richer in knowledge and cultural capital than I was before, and more aware of how the world works. This is valuable, along with the confidence it gave me to trust myself and my decision-making abilities. I realized I finally had something to offer and what I have to say is important and relevant.

The Implications of this Research

Implications of the neoliberal approach

As stated, the neoliberal approach which the Irish Government has adopted, aims to address problems that are currently evident. Some of these problems include, a rising social welfare bill, dependency on social welfare assistance, increased poverty rates, increased homelessness, and unemployment. With these aims of neoliberal policies named above in mind, this research draws several implications of this approach. The first being, diminishing resources available due to social welfare cuts, leading to increased poverty rates of those who are most vulnerable in society, in this case, lone mothers.

In relation to an increase in the cost of living, sustaining a household and rising childcare costs, puts massive financial strain on lone parent families and worsens their financial position.

In relation to social welfare and employment, increased income poverty for lone parent's, due to social welfare cuts and lack of sustainable well-paid employment, deepens their inability to have financial stability. This combined with reduced employment opportunities due to the neoliberal nature of the labour market, and its lack of flexibility when it comes to flexible, part-time employment options which would suit lone parent and promote a healthy work life balance, further deepens the hole which they are stuck in. Furthermore, a decrease in job security with zero hour contracts and working hours that are not compatible with the demands of a lone parent.

Lack of opportunity for lone mothers to access the type of education they need to better their chances of getting a well-paid sustainable job. Labour activation policies are rail- roading lone parents into low level education and training programmes which this research suggests are not conducive for long term sustainable employment opportunities for the lone mother.

It can therefore be concluded that from this research, which pertains to lone mothers, that the neoliberal approach, in terms of the policies it implements, are not achieving the aims which it set out to achieve, and has a negative impact on lone mothers.

Policy Implications of the Managerialist approach in relation to care

In relation to labour activation and lone mothers, the state demands that lone mothers are required to work outside of the home when their child turns seven years old, whereas this requirement is not on a mother who is married and stay's home to look

after her children while her husband or partner goes out to work. This highlights discrimination and is nonsensical because in a married household, there are two parents there to provide childcare and share the financial burden of raising children, whereas in a single parent household there is only one adult, who is now expected to leave the house to work, thereby leaving her child/children to be cared for in institutions or childcare facilities in which case, costs more money. Often, this additional childcare cost cripples the working single parent to a point where they must rely on the state to subsidise the cost of care, or make the decision to quit their job and stay home to look after their children because being employed doesn't pay them, when taking into consideration the cost and availability of suitable childcare.

The research also points out that the impact of care and well-being for the children of lone parent families, is not taken into consideration under the managerialist approach which has been adopted by the Irish state. This issue of care and long-term welfare of the children in lone parent family's needs to be assessed in a proper and thorough manner. The constant juggling of childcare from one facility to the next, or from one person to the next, does not benefit the child in terms of providing a stable nurturing environment for them to be raised in. Instead, it promotes instability and anxiety in both the children and their parent, and this view has been stated in this research. However, it is suggested that more research be done on this topic.

On the issue of parental responsibility, all of which are female in this research, the state does not enforce that the absent parent be held at least financially responsible. This point has been mentioned several times, that even though the absent parent is taken to court and court ordered to pay maintenance for their child/children, this court order is often reneged on and is not enforced by the state. This is leading to a situation where lone mothers are being awarded maintenance through the court system, and

social welfare then takes that maintenance as means, the lone parents social welfare is then reduced because of these means, but the absent parent often reneges on the payment. The situation resulting from this means that, lone mothers are punished by the state through a reduction in their social welfare payments because they followed the rules and sought maintenance through the courts, from the absent parent. The implications of this are that, the single mother and child being financially worse off while already living in poverty or at risk of poverty.

Employment opportunities even after educational attainment are limited for lone mothers' due to the rigid and aggressive nature of private sector employment in this neoliberal environment. In relation to labour activation, lone mothers are being activated into low level courses and training, coming out with qualifications in a caring role (childcare, care of the elderly, healthcare assistant) which are all low-waged, precarious employment thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty and inequality. Essentially, I would ask what is the point in forcing a lone mother out of the home to work in childcare caring for other people's children when she then must pay a stranger or childcare facility to look after her own child/children when she wanted to stay at home and raise her own child anyway?

Labour activation policies I would argue based on the findings of this research are keeping lone mothers in a cycle of poverty and dependency on social welfare. The mechanisms by which the policies are doing this, are by restrictions and conditionalities placed on social welfare payments and the abundance of private sector low-waged precarious employment, where most lone mothers are forced to work in, due to the flexibility or part-time work.

Implications of the Neoliberal Approach on Gender

The neoliberal ideology assumes that care work is the responsibility of the family and this research suggests that the woman is held responsible as opposed to a man, for providing care to children according to society today. Gender therefore is linked with being responsible meaning women are responsible for the family and care work. The implications of this are that lone mothers have greater difficulty in accessing and participating in education because they are responsible for sourcing and paying for childcare. Under the neoliberal approach, the care work of a woman in the home remains unpaid, undervalued, and unrecognized.

Managerialism impacts on women because her caring responsibilities are not taken into consideration in relation to education or employment and therefore she is expected to be in competition with those who do not have caring responsibilities. The neoliberal approach as well as the managerial ideology ever present, is therefore blind to gender inequalities and indeed perpetuates it.

The rising cost of childcare means that a woman who is a lone parent must absorb these costs, whereas the absent parent typically does not. This can lead to further income reduction for the lone mother where she continues to be financially burdened.

The impact of managerialism on a woman today is that she must choose to either have a career or be a mother because this research suggests that the conditions which must be met to do both are unsustainable. Finally, the current activation policies have impacted lone mothers by way of discrimination and suggests an up-holding of the traditional male bread-winner approach, which displays gender inequality.

Implications of the Neoliberal Approach on Class

The neoliberal approach has impacted lone mothers by way of, access to education in terms of the type and quality, and participation, in terms of lone mothers being at a disadvantage, due to their lower socio-economic class. Being from a lower socio-economic class means one is subjected to more income poverty which impacts on a lone mother when making decisions and when trying to access and participate in education. Lower economic status also means there is less access to appropriate and vital information and guidance, which has been shown to influence prospects for the lone mother and her children.

Lone mothers from a lower socio-economic class are more dependent on student grants and social welfare assistance, which have all been impacted by managerialism, meaning they were cut, and therefore more difficult to access. This impacts negatively on a lone mother by decreasing her income and this has knock on effects mentioned previously.

Lone mothers from a lower class are also impacted negatively because most have no choice but to work while trying to attain educational qualifications, meaning there are implications on the time they can spend on their academic work. This effects on the ability of lone mothers to achieve higher results academically and therefore their competitiveness in applying for jobs or furthering their education to the next level.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to inform policy makers of the findings of this research, relevant to the research topic, the impact of neoliberal policies on lone mothers, in relation to accessing and participating in education, while highlighting the barriers which they faced. It is the aim of this research that the interpretation offered, reflects the views expressed by participants, and that their voices get heard in terms of future decisions regarding policy changes, which directly affect lone parents.

1. A long and short-term impact assessment on how labour activation policies are effecting lone parents in terms of their income, their employment opportunities after being activated and their mental health, is needed. Is activation working or not for real people who are lone parents and not just statistically speaking? This must be specific to the current lone parent population of Ireland and their voices should be heard.
2. An impact assessment is needed to assess how labour activation of lone parents may affect children's mental health, their preference and well-being, as the only parent at home being forced out of the house and caring role to work, leaving the child/children to be raised by a facility or stranger.
3. Following on from recommendation 2, this research suggests that the state look at the activation policies in terms of discrimination in relation to obligations on the lone parent to work yet no obligation on both parents to work in a family headed by two adults. Also, how these policies are affecting women who are lone parents in terms of their gender and future employability prospects, lack of recognition of the work they do in the home and the reasons why this work is not recognised or paid?

4. The type of employment opportunities available for lone parent who have low levels of educational attainment (up to level 6 is considered low), needs to be examined in relation to how employment which is low-paid and precarious, affects lone parents long term.
5. A general overhaul is drastically needed in relation to (a) how social welfare departments communicate with each other and (b) how certain payments contradict each other and make the recipient less well off in terms of income.
6. The maintenance system in Ireland is broken. This urgently needs to be addressed as the absent parent is not enforced to pay maintenance for their child/children even when court ordered, yet social welfare payments to the other parent, who is raising the child is cut quickly even when the payments are reneged on by the absent parent. Also, social welfare holds the possibility of receiving a payment such as OFP at ransom until maintenance from the absent parent has been pursued. This creates a situation where the lone parent's income is either non-existent or significantly reduced because of the backlog in social welfare in issuing payments or reinstating them.
7. Barriers that remain for lone parents need to be addressed, in relation to access to grants and funding for educational purposes, inadequate expensive childcare, and financial restrictions in terms of the conditionalities which social welfare places on welfare payments.
8. It needs to be recognized that lone parents are not a homogenous group. Each set of circumstances are different; therefore, this research recommends that lone parents are assessed on a case by case basis and that discretion is used when decisions are being made regarding social welfare assistance.

9. Educational institutions need to recognize that lone parents have responsibilities outside of their education and that these responsibilities sometimes mean absenteeism, reduced income, increased stress, and increased time constraints, all of which may impact a lone parent's academic abilities. More concessions and flexibility is needed from educational institutions. Start and finish times of courses should consider individuals with children and not have them clash with school drops for children.

Limitations

This research is small scale when compared to the number of lone mothers in education in Ireland. It aimed at taking a section of the lone parent population that I was interested in, and examining the impact of neoliberal policies on their lives in relation to education, their financial state, gender, and class. For this reason, I chose to limit the participants to lone mothers because I wanted to hear their experiences of gender and how they thought it may, or may not have impacted on their lives while trying to attain education as a lone parent. Parts of the answers which didn't pertain to the research questions were excluded from this research because of time restrictions. Concerns about generalizing findings on any piece of qualitative research is valid, however the literature review firmly backs up the findings of this research. My own bias is present but has been named in the methodology and the findings are pure and reflect the direct voices of the participants, but it is noted that my interpretation of the participant's answers may, or may not contain my own biases however unintentional. This research has recognized the gaps in the literature and makes recommendations for further research accordingly.

Further Research

This research highlights gaps in the literature pertaining to this research topic. More specific research on a larger scale, is needed to properly assess the real impact felt by lone parents in Ireland today. Research is needed to compare the experiences of male lone parents versus female lone parents, in relation to education, income, gender, and class, specific to Ireland. Future research should aim to portray lone parent's actual voices in terms of their experienced realities and not in terms of government statistics on how labour activation is bringing down unemployment among

this population because the type and quality of employment remains unquestioned by this government. Research that displays lone parent's voices in relation to their concerns, frustrations, and injustices experienced need to be addressed. The impact of neoliberal policies, namely labour activation, on the children's well-being, in lone parent family's needs to be addressed specifically pertaining to Ireland. Finally, the impact of the type of educational courses offered and their levels, under the neoliberal agenda, needs to be assessed in terms of how beneficial different types of education at different levels are, for the long-term needs of a lone parent. The aims and objectives of what the neoliberal agenda is trying to achieve needs to be compared to what is actually happening, in relation to whether employment that is offered and attainable for lone parents, is sustainable long term, and question whether it makes lone parents completely independent and no longer dependant on social welfare assistance.

Dissemination

As agreed with the participants of this research, I will contact them beforehand if this research is published. I have discussed with them that if they wish for an electronic copy of the research, that I am happy to provide it to them. The participants are aware that in the event of publication, their anonymity can't be guaranteed and they were still happy to proceed.

I will seek to publish key parts of this research so that this information is accessible to policymakers. I will also endeavour to make the research available to any advocate group, which acts on behalf of lone parents. As mentioned earlier, any dissemination of findings will only be done with the agreement of the participants in this research.

Conclusion

This research has examined the impact of the neoliberal approach on lone mothers in relation to education, gender, and class. This research found that neoliberalism, managerialism and labour activation impacts negatively on lone mothers in terms of, increased barriers to education, increased income poverty, increased gender inequality and the reproduction of the lower socioeconomic class, and the increased probability that lone mothers will end up in low-paid precarious employment. The research also highlights that care is still very gendered and goes unrecognized and grossly underpaid. It is the view of this research, that the neoliberal agenda in relation to labour activation, is perpetuating poverty of lone parent families, not considering their diversity of circumstance or needs, and is reducing choices about the type of education and training they wish to receive, which they believe (not the state) would benefit them and their children's future.

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Appendices

1. Consent Form
2. Ethical Support Details
3. Interview Questions
4. Facebook Post and link

Consent Form

The purpose of this research is to hear the voice of single parents in Ireland in 2016, with regard to their personal experiences of being a single parent, while undertaking education and/or working at the same time.

The working title is: The Impact of Neoliberal Policies on Single Parents in Education and/or Work in Ireland 2016: Giving a Voice Back to the People.

Iagree to participate in Christina Sinnott's research study, as part of her M.Ed. in Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University.

The purpose of this study has been explained to me fully.

I am participating voluntarily.

I am aware that the conversations between Christina and I will be recorded for the purpose of this research. I give my permission to be recorded.

I understand that I will be required to commit to meeting in person with Christina, at an agreed venue by both parties. In some cases, I may be required to meet a second time with Christina.

I understand that the meetings do not constitute any kind of counselling. I will be provided with contact details of a person/councillor/doctor/organization that I may contact should I experience any kind of distress/stress as a result of this study.

I understand that I will have access to view the transcripts of my recording and I can edit my recording up to a certain date, which I will be fully aware of.

I understand that data will be as secure as possible at all times.

I understand that the data may be viewed by members of staff from Maynooth University and/or external examiner's. If Christina's research is published, the data will be viewed by the public.

I understand that my data will remain anonymous unless I wish otherwise. In that case, any implications or consequences for waiving my anonymity will be discussed in full.

I understand that I can withdraw my permission to use the data prior to the completion of the thesis, in which case the material will be deleted.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Signed.....Date

Participant Support Details

Researcher – Christina Sinnott

0863043214

sinnott85@hotmail.com

Supervisor – Dr. Michael J. Murray

michael.j.murray@nuim.ie

Support Information

Councillor- Contact your local GP for referral to a councillor or psychotherapist in your area.

See www.hse.ie to find contact numbers of local services in your area.

Website- www.yourmentalhealth.ie www.smaritans.ie www.pieta.ie

Phone Numbers

Samaritans Free Call 116 123 (24h 7 Days a week)

Pieta – Free call 1800 247 247

Emergency Numbers – 999 (Landline) 112 (Mobile Phone)

Doctor – www.hse.ie This will enable you to find local GP phone numbers and local general hospital numbers.

Contact your local GP or Accident and Emergency Department if you need immediate help.

Interview Questions

Q1. Tell me your story about how you found yourself parenting alone, and what is your experience of lone parenting?

Q2. Can you tell me your experience if any, of stigma surrounding single parenting?

Q4. Tell me your story of your educational journey as a single parent?

Q3. The accepted “story” today is that, the only way out of poverty is education, what are your thoughts on this statement?

Q5. Do you think it is easy to get a job, that pays well enough, to return to full time employment, considering social welfare cuts and policies, while single parenting in Ireland today and why?

Q6. In your opinion, will education, for the sole purpose of employment or “labour activation”, address the inequalities in society and why?

Q7. “Labour activation” is pushing parents out to work. What are your thoughts on both parents being out of the home and working, when children are still as young as 7years old?

Q8. Do you think that raising children and working in the home is valued today or given as much importance as working outside the home for a wage and why?

Q9. Do you think that government policies value or encourage single parents work in the home?

Q10. Do you think that the parent who takes on the responsibility for their child/children and raises them alone, gets treated equally/fairly by society and/or government policies, in relation to the absent parent of the child/children?

Q11. What are the things I haven't asked you about, that you would like to talk about?

Facebook Post

Christina Sinnott Posted :

As single parent's, what are the main barriers to education and training you have faced? It can be anything you experienced that was difficult to overcome including emotional barriers? Would love to hear some views on this?

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SolidarityforallOPF/> 21/12/16