

Poverty amongst Immigrant Women in England: A Study of Black African Single Mothers

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Abstract: *In Recent Years, Welfare To Work Programmes Has Been Central To British Policymaking As A Way Of Tackling Poverty. This Is Evident In The Recent Changes Aimed At Reducing Welfare Dependency And Poverty Through Enforcing Work Participation On Lone Mothers. For Many Decades Work Participation Has Been Very Low On Lone Mothers Due To Challenges Associated With Motherhood. As Such, Income Support Benefit Have Served As Their Income Protection. The Study Seek To Explore How Has The Recent Changes In The Income Support Policy Affected Black African Lone Mothers Who Are Newly Immigrants In The UK. Studies Have Demonstrated That Black African Women In General usually Experience Challenges In Securing Stable Jobs. However, Despite This Evidence The Intersectionality Is Missing In The UK Policy Initiatives. Through Semi-Structured Interviews With 17 Black African Lone Mothers, We Explored their Experiences Of Transitioning From Welfare To Work Using Intersectionality Theory As A Lens To Unpack Their Multiple Identities. Due To Intersections Of Race, Class, Gender And Immigration Status, Black African Lone Mothers Have Limited Access To Employment Opportunities. Subsequently, The Situation Forces Them into Low Paying Jobs. This Paper Concludes That The Changes On Income Support Benefit has Had Unintended Negative Implications By Exacerbating The Problem Of Poverty Experienced By These Women.*

Key Words: *Poverty, Policy, Lone Mothers, Employment, Intersectionality, Welfare Benefits*

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I. Introduction

In Recent Years, The British Government Has Implemented Welfare To Work Policies In Order To Increase Workforce Participation Amongst Welfare Recipients Including, Lone Mothers (Department For Work And Pensions, 2012). The Recent Policy Initiatives Aimed At Increasing Lone Mothers' Employment Participation Include, The Introduction Of Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) To Actively Seek Work And Claim Jobseeker's Allowance Rather Than Income Support If Their Youngest Child Is Over The Age Of Five. The welfare Benefit Reform Is Based On The Assumption That Welfare Benefit Is A Risk Factor For Poverty Therefore, If Claimants Move To Employment, Their Income Status Could Improve. Contrary, The Evidence Shows That Single Parent Families In The UK Are Twice As Likely As Couple Families To Experience Poverty (Department For Work And Pensions, 2012). The High Poverty Rates In This Group Is Partly Associated With Their Lower Employment Rates Which Accounts For More Than 37% As Compared With 5% Of Couple Households With Children (Dziak Et Al, 2010). Lone Parent Families Are Also More Likely To Experience In-Work Poverty As Compared With Couple-Families (Department For Work And Pensions, 2012). The Risk Of Poverty Experience Is At Its Highest Amongst Black African Lone Mothers (Datta Et Al., 2007, Lindley Et Al., 2004; Gedalof, 2007 And Dwyer Et Al., 2006).

Regardless Of The Studies That Suggest Challenges For Black African Lone Mothers In Finding Stable Jobs, Considerations Of Intersectionality Is Missing In The UK Policy Initiatives Aimed At Increasing Work Participation (Baxter & Alexander, 2008; Kaestner & Tarlov, 2006). Previous Research Into The Impact Of The Changes In Welfare System Focuses On The Mainstream Population And Generalises Women (Moosa, 2009). This Current Research Then Seek To Explore How The Recent Changes In The Income Support Policy Has Affected Black African Lone Mothers Who Are Newly Immigrants In The UK.

The Research Has Two Objectives

- (1) To Explore The Experiences Of Black African Single Mothers About Their Transition From Income Support Welfare Benefit Into Employment
- (2) To Explore How These Changes Have Affected them Social And Economically.

Overview Of The Problem

Historically, Lone Mothers With School-Aged Children Were Understood As Unemployable Due To Their Caring Obligation, However, In Recent Years This Has Shifted To Recognizing Them As Potential Employees (Gregg & Smith, 2009; Hawkins, 2010; Johnson & Threlfall, 2011; Barker & Lamb, 2009). The

Changes That Forces Women To Work Outside Home Undermines Their Traditional Role As Caregivers. Although Caregiving In Itself Is Not Oppressive But It Becomes Oppressive With The Expectation That Women, Regardless Of Their Caregivers' Roles Must Also Be Forced To Work Particularly In A Welfare State (Kemp, 1994). The Provision Of Welfare Benefits To Unemployed Lone Mothers Has Provided A Safety Net For The Recipients (Rank & Hirschl, 2003; Rank & Hirschl, 2003). The Income Support Benefit Was Based On The Belief That Mothers Who Are Raising Children Without Male Support Need Freedom From The Obligation Of Paid Work So That They Can Concentrate On Their Key Role As Care Givers, Up Until Their Last Child Reaches The Age Of Sixteen (Cook, 2012).

The Recent Welfare Changes In Year 2012, Entails That Single Mothers Are No Longer Entitled To The Benefits Once The Youngest Child Turns 5 Years, And Instead Mothers Are Required To Find Employment And Financially Support The Family (Department Of Work And Pensions, 2011). The Justification For These Changes Is That Moving From Welfare To Work Will Enable Lone Mothers To Earn Income From Employment, Which Has A Potential To Improve Their Economic Circumstances And Uplift Them From Poverty (Department Of Work And Pensions, 2011). This Initiation Downplays The Obvious Disadvantage That Poorer Mothers, For Example, Difficulties In Combining Work With Their Own Caring Responsibilities (Cook, 2012 & Conaghan, 2005). The Jobs That Low-Income Women Are Forced To Take Have Little Opportunity For Negotiation And Are Unlikely To Be Flexible And Conducive (Barker & Lambie, 2009). The Welfare To Work Initiative Has Been Problematised By Those Who Argue That Many Of The Rights Connected With Maternal Employment Only Make Sense In The Context Of Middleclass Working Patterns; Hence Exclude Poorer Women (Dziak Et Al, 2010; Cribb Et Al., 2012; Lower-Basch & Greenberg, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality Theory, As Provided For By Crenshaw (1991) Helps To Identify The Ways In Which Gendered Welfare Policies Affected Black African Women In The UK. Intersectionality Framework Is Relevant For This Research Because It Is An Explicit Black Feminist Critique Of The Manner In Which, A Focus On The Experiences Of The Privileged Groups Leads To Themarginalisation Of Those With Multiple Identities. Intersectionality Recognises That Certain Aspects Of People's Identities, For Example, Immigration Status And Ethnicity In Addition To Other Dimensions, Such As Gender, Race And Class Can Expose One To Discrimination From Multiple Actors. From This Perspective The Experiences Of Single Mothers In This Study Will Be Easily Understood In Relation To The Disadvantages And Discrimination That They Experience From Multiple Players Including Labour Force And State Agencies (Crenshaw, 2000). Therefore, It Will Allow This Research To Examine How The Intersections Of The Participants' multiple Identities, Such As Their Race, Migration And Minority Status As Well As Low Economic Status Intersect In Their Experiences Of Transitioning From Welfare To Work (Fagan Et Al. 2006).

Literature Review

Previous Research On Lone Mothers' Transition From Welfare To Work Concluded That Employment Has A Potential Of Exacerbating Their Poverty Rather Than Reducing It (See Baker & Tippin, 2004; Solomon, 2006; Roy Et Al., 2004 & Lee, 2009). The Empirical Study Of Cook (2012) Found That Lone Mothers Are Usually employed In Low Paying Jobs For Example, Care, Cleaning And Factory Work And This Has Implication On Their Poverty Rates. The High Cost Of Childcare As Well As The Cost Of Travelling Long Distance Trips To Work Contributes Also Contributes To Their Financial Difficulties (Anderson Et Al., 2004; Weinberg, 2000; Millar, 2008). Poverty Has Been Put Forward As A Risk Factor For Poor Health Especially Mental Illness Includes Depression (Alfred, 2007; Barker And Lambie, 2009; Perry-Jenkins Et Al., 2000; Bitler And Hoynes, 2008; Ciabattari, 2007). In Addition To Financial Hardship; Lack Of Social Support, The Burden Of Combining Employment And Caring For Children Have Been Proposed To Explain The Higher Prevalence Of Mental Health Problems Amongst Lone Mothers (Butterworth, 2004). Targosz Et Al. (2003) In Their Longitudinal Study Demonstrated That Poverty, For Example, Lack Of Food, Lack Of Heating And Problems In Paying Debts Has A Significant Impact On The Depressive Symptoms. Similarly, Reading & Reynolds (2001) In Their Qualitative Study Of Examining The Relationship Between Debt, Social Disadvantage And Maternal Depression: Lack Of Social Support Was Associated With Higher Depression Scores Among Women.

The Study Of Viitanen (2005) Suggest That Lone Mothers' Participation In The Workforce Is Low Because Of The Limitations That They Experience. Firstly, The High Cost Of Childcare In The UK Limits Mothers From Taking Employment. Secondly, The Unavailability Of Jobs With Family-Supportive Structures Including Flexible Hours. Working Irregular Hours Tend To Impact Negatively On their Family Lives By Limiting Their Chances Of Spending Time With Children (Kissane & Krebs, 2007; Hildebrandt & Kelber, 2005). Lone Mothers Who Work Tend To Rely On Informal Childcare Including, Friends and Neighbors Rather Than Proper Childcare High Cost Of Childcare (Baxter & Alexander, 2008 And Zabkiewicz, 2009). Research

Shows That Utilising Informal Childcare Is Detrimental For A Child Developmentwhile Appropriate Formal Quality Childcareis Associated With Enhanced Social And Emotional Competence (Zabkiewicz, 2010).

In Most Cases,Black African Immigrant Women Face Under-Employment And Overrepresentation In The Poorest Paying Jobs (Heath And Cheung, 2007; Kogan, 2007; Van Tubergen, 2006; Reitz, 1998). They Lack Access To Good Job Opportunities; The Only Jobs That They Are Recognised For Are The Low Paying Ones, For Example, Catering, Care Factories And Cleaning (Nandi And Platt, 2010; Moosa & Woodroffe, 2009).Obtaining Meaningful Jobs With Decent Wages Is A Serious Challenge Even For Those Women With University Degrees (Naples, 2003; Goode And Maskovsky, 2001). Low Paying Jobs Makes It Difficult For Lone Mothers To Achieve Economic Security (Nandi And Platt, 2010; Moosa And Woodroffe, 2009).These Inequalities Feeds Directly To Poverty Differences Between Immigrant Black Mothers And The General Population (Moosa & Woodroffe, 2009). Nevertheless, The Disadvantagein The Labour Market That Immigrant Lone Mothers Usually Face Is Less Pronounced In The UK Welfare Policies (Kogan, 2006). Policy Is Usually Based On The Experiences Of The Privileged Women.

II. Methodology

In Order To Explore Experiences Of Single Mothers As They Negotiate Their New Employment Status, A Purposive Sample Of Employed 17 Black African Single Mothers With School-Aged Children Was Recruited. In Order To Explore The Tensions Between Combining Motherhood And Paid Work We Recruited Single Mothers Who Are Newly Immigrants In The UK And Who Raises Children On Their Own. Ethical Approval From Leeds Metropolitan University Was Obtained Before Recruitment Commenced.Participants Were Recruited Primarily Through Community Advertisements And Personal Networks. Snowball Was Used In Order To Allocate And Reach The Participants.

Participants In The Sample Were All Black Women, Originally From Different Parts Of Africa Such Assomalia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, And Nigeria And Have Arrived In The UK Within The Past Five Years. Most Of Them Had A Refugee Status And Were Settled In The UK As Their Home Country. On The Overall, Participants Were Relatively Disadvantaged In Terms Of Employability; They Were In Low Skilled Occupations, Such As Cleaning, Caring, And Factory Workers. This Is Although Some Of Them Had Achieved University Degrees But The Majority Have Left School With High School Certificate.

A Semi Structured Interview Schedule Was Utilised In Order To Explore Participants' Experiences Of Their Transition From Welfare To Work. Interviews Took Place In Community Halls And Play Rooms In Schools. Each Interview Lasted Around One Hour .Thematic Data Analysis Approach Was Utilised. During The Research The Researcher Kept A Reflexive Journal In Order To Acknowledge Her Emotions And Values Since They Can Contaminate The Research. This Helped To Ensure That Research Findings Comes From Participant's Voices And Not A Biased Narrative (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

III. Results And Discussion

This Section Will Utilise The Data To Elucidate Women's Experiences Of Transition From Income Support Benefit To Employment, From Their Worldviews. The Perspective Of Women In This Study May Be Understood Through Adoptingan African Feminist Perspective Where Traditional Gender Role Norms Continue To Exist Within The Family. In The African Context Motherhood Is Seen As One Of The Most Valued Roles; And Serves To Be The Basis Of Wholeness And Sense Of Being A Woman (Glenn Et Al., 2016). Virtually All Of The Women Interviewed Mentioned That As Women Their Main Role Is To Stay At Home And Raise Children But With Their Current Situation That Forces Them To Work Deprives Them From Being Good Mothers. Most Of Them Are Divorced And They Asserted That They Use To Be Stay At Home Mothers Who Receive Financial Support From Husbands.

Janet States, *"Working And Making Sure There Is Money In The House Is A Man's Job In The Family I Feel Like I Have To Be A Man And Still Be A Woman Right Now In This Work Stuation"*

Transition From Welfare To Work Has Been A Negative Experience For The Participants In This Study.For Them Life As Immigrants And Single Mothers Presents Some Challenges In Participating The Workforce. Lone Mothers Require A Particularly High Level Of Flexibility Due To Their Caring Responsibilities Of Dealing With Day-To-Day Logistics Of Parenthoodin The Absence Of Partner Support. Participants Mentioned That There Are Few Jobs Offering Flexibility To Accommodate Family Responsibilities Or Hours That Might Fit Around School Hours. The Good Jobs With Flexibility Are Usually Offered To Locals And Them As Immigrants Have To Accept The Most Unattractive Jobs With No Incentives. Most Participants' Asserted That When They Apply For Jobs And Get Shortlisted They Fail Job Interviews Because English Is Not Their First Language And Locals Do Not Favor The African Accent.They Always Have To Worry About Communication And Their African Accent Because Most British People Do Not Always Find It Easy To Understand Them. This Seems To Be A Problem Even At Work; Participants Face Discrimination Or Ridiculed

Because Of Their African Accent. This Has A Negative Impact On Their Confidence Around Local People, They Feel Isolated Or Outsiders.

Negative Changes On Family Life

Based On Their Reflections, It Is Argued That The Family Life Of Women In This Study Has Been Negatively Affected By Exiting Income Support Benefit. The Participants Reported Negative Changes In Their Family Lives Due To Their New Employment Status As Opposed To Being Stay At Home Mothers. These Changes Include Inability To Spend Quality Time With Children At Home, As Well As Difficulties To Engage In Family Activities Due To Exhaustion. These Problems Have Been Expressed, Particularly By Those Who Work Long Hours And Shifts, With Those Working Fixed Short Hours Reported Lesser Degrees Of Poor Family Life.

Anna States, " My Family Life Is Bad Now That I Have To Work And Make Sure There Is Food On The Table, It Is Hard, Even If I Work Seven Hours A Day I Find Myself Being Away From Kids For More Than Ten Hours A Day Because I Have To Travel A Long Distance To My Work Area".

Marry, "I Think It Was Better Before, My Family Life Was Good Because If I Don't Go To Work And I Look After My Child You Know, I Have Plenty Of Time With Them And Then I Focus More On Doing My Duties As A Mother.

Most Participants Utilise Informal Childcare Including, Friends And Neighbors Because They Work Odd Hours Due To The Type Of Jobs That They Do. It Is Concerning That Most Participants Have Chronic Stress As A Result Of Feeling Like Bad Mothers Because Of Working Long Hours And Shift Work While Neglecting The Emotional Needs Of Their Children Including, Spending Time Talking And Helping Them With Homework, As Zelda Commented,

"It Makes Me Stressed Cause It Is Kind Of Bad, I Have To Be At Work By Six To Start My Shift Early In The Morning Or Sometimes At Night I Start At Ten And Have To Leave My Children At My Friend's House. That Is Painful For Me All The Time, I Am Heart Broken When I Think Of My Children And Not Having Time For Them".

Marry Commented, "They Have Homework Every Day And I Don't Even Like To Help Them With The Home Works Because I Have No Time But I Have To Help Them Anyway, Its Hurry Hurry Everything. My Time With The Kids Is Very Short I'm Telling You".

Most Participants Reported That If They Had Their Children's Grandparents And Other Extended Family Members To Help With Child Care, They Would Be Comfortable Working Knowing That Their Children Are Happy In A Family Centered Environment Rather Than Living Them With Strangers Or Nurseries. Therefore, Lack Of Support Networks To Assist With Childcare Makes It Difficult For Them To Adjust And Enjoy Going To Work Outside Home.

As Irene Responded, " Its Hard To Be A Mother And Work, Very Hard, Tough One Is Leaving My Son Alone At Home And Then Ask A Friend To Come And Take Her To School Later Because I'm Rushing To Get To Work".

Similarly, Martha Explained "Its Not Fair To Leave My 10 Year Old Alone To Prepare Herself For School And Then You Ask Different People To Help You Take The Child To School, Asking People For Favors All The Time Is Very Stressful".

The Availability Of Support Networks Is Critical In Encouraging Lone Mothers To Work. One Participant Who Share The House With Extended Family Members Expressed A Great Satisfaction With Combining Motherhood With Employment. Emma Commented That,

"I Like Working And Being A Mother At The Same Time Because It Takes Me Out Of The House And See People At Work, But I Wish I Was Working A Part Time Job So That I Can Spend Most Of The Time At Home. When I Am Not At Home My Mother Looks After My Child And It Helps Me Get Fresh Air Out There".

Poor Economic Status

Financial Security Is Difficult To Obtain For Lone Parents In The Context Of An Income That Is Low, Complex And Insecure. All The Participants Were Employed In Low Paying Jobs Earning A Minimum Wage. Their Job Sector Include, Catering, Care, Cleaning And Factory Work. This Is Although Some Of These Women Are Educated With A University Degree But According To These Women Securing A Job In Other Sectors Hasbeen Proven To Be Impossible For Immigrants. One Of The Participants Have Made A Reference With Friends And Other People That She Knows In Her Community Who Have Been Looking Have Spent A Long Time Looking For Professional Work That They Qualify To Do But With No Luck Such That They End Up Taking Low Paying Jobs. These Jobs Are Available For Immigrant Workers Because They Have Shift Work And Bad Working Conditions. The Participants Report That They Earn More Money From Employment As Compared To Income Support, But This Has Not Improved Their Economic Status Because The Expenses Has Gone Up Tremendously And The Income Doesn't Afford Them To Pay All Their Expenses. They Assert

That It Was Better To Be On Income Support Benefits Because They Were More Secured Knowing That All The Bills Will Be Covered. The Income Support Benefits Also Mean That They Were Entitled To Many Other Benefits Which Were Taken Because They Now Work, For Example Their Children Use To Receive Free Lunches At School And That Helped Them To Save Money.

Janet Stated, *“I’m Better On Income Support, There Is No Money From Working, It’s A Lie If Someone Can Tell You That It Is Paying To Work Is Worse Now, I Can’t Afford Things Im More Broke And Miserable.”*. Marry *“I Am Working But I Can’t Even Save Money Or Have Good Life Like Maybe Go Out Every Weekend Or Take The Children To Movies. You Buy Groceries And Only The Cheap Staff You Have To Know Your Cheap Brands And Stick To Them”*.

Most Of The Participants Work Far From Their Communities Since There Is Limited Employment Opportunities In Their Communities. As Such, They Spend A Lot Of Money On Transport Costs While End Up Being Left With Almost Nothing To Spend On Their Daily Needs.

IV. Conclusion

Welfare Reform Policies Narrowly Focuses On Increasing Single Mothers’ Participation In Work Force Whilst Reinforces The Already Existing Gendered And Classed Occupational Segregation By Pushing These Lone Mothers Into The Lowest Waged Work. The Evidence Presented In This Study Suggest That Employment Approach Adopted In The British Policy Will Never Successfully Tackle Issues Of Poverty Surrounding Black Lone Mothers Because They Lack Employment Opportunities And The Only Jobs Available For Them Are The Lowest Paying Ones. The Income Support Policy Changes Operates Within Embedded Structural Racism And Arguably Contributes To Predicaments Of Lone Mothers. The Focus On Paid Work In The Welfare Policy Undermines Structural Inequalities That Affect Poorer Black People Particularly Those Who Are Immigrants. The Current Research Concludes That Income Support Policy Changes Has Had Critical Negative Implications Family Life And Arguably Contributes To Problems That Normally Affects Children From Working Class Families Including, Poor Performance At School And Child Neglect. Recognising Intersectionality Has Led Us To More Complex And Nuanced Analysis Than The Discourses Surrounding The Income Support Policy Changes. A Critical Approach Is Needed To Develop Services And Interventions, Necessary To Provide A Real Social Safety Net For Women Whose Lives Are Affected By Multiple Hierarchies.

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