

Two-thirds of single parents in lower-skilled jobs because of unavailable childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Single parents are being forced to take on junior roles that offer more flexible hours and are closer to home, a new report has found.

The charity Gingerbread carried out a literature review of existing evidence into single parents' work aspirations and employability, a survey of 1,000 single parents, and held focus groups and interviews with single parents and employers.

Of the survey respondents, 59 per cent were employed, 75 per cent aimed to be in work within the next three years, and most of the remainder of single parents were either long-term disabled or caring for a child with disabilities.

While the majority of single parents wanted to work in order to provide for their family, be a good role model for their child, as well as feel challenged and stimulated by their job, researchers found that this ambition is often stifled by a lack of flexible jobs and unaffordable and unavailable childcare.

The report, 'The only way is up? The employment aspirations of single parents', reveals that more two-thirds of single parents have taken lower-skilled occupations that are typically low paid.

Around 27 per cent of single parents took elementary jobs which require little or no formal training, such as cleaning or kitchen and catering work, 20 per cent entered sales and customer posts and 22 per cent took roles in personal service occupations including care assistants or childminders.

The reasons single parents gave for taking lower-level jobs was because it fitted in with their new sole caring role, they felt a high-level position would involve longer hours, more responsibility and be stressful.

Some single parents said they worked fewer hours, commonly 16 hours a week, in order to maximise the amount they received in tax credits.

The study also highlights the way in which employers, particularly large public sector organisations and companies, provide opportunities for flexible working.

Case studies within the report include Marks and Spencer's Marks and Start Programme for single parents, disabled people and those at risk of homelessness; the Metropolitan Police, whose employees can access emergency childcare; and Chelsea and Westminster NHS Trust, which offers childcare support to their staff.

Fiona Weir, chief executive of Gingerbread, said, 'The real picture of single parents today is a million miles away from the 'scrounging' stereotype. Single parents want to work, provide for their family and be a role model to their children, but they are being held back by a system that isn't fit for purpose.

'Affordable, modern childcare options and more flexible jobs could transform the lives of millions of working families across the UK, not just single parents, and offer real benefits for employers and our economy. Even small changes can make a big difference, so that single parents can pursue the jobs that would make the most of their skills and provide a better life for their families.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe ^[2]

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