

**SOCIAL THREAT OR SOCIAL PROBLEM? – CHANGES AND  
CONTINUITIES TO THE U.K. GOVERNMENT’S LONE PARENT  
EMPLOYMENT POLICY DISCOURSE BETWEEN 1997 AND 2016**

By

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## Author's declaration

I, the undersigned Oisín Nolan hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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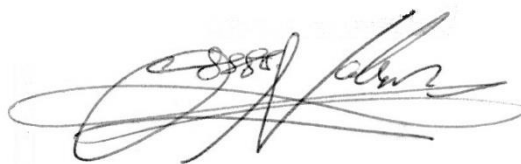
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## Abstract

Between 1997 and 2016, the labour market participation of lone parents in the UK rose to be an increasingly controversial issue in British social policymaking. During this time, successive welfare reforms have each sought to increase lone parent employment rates. Yet, hidden behind these reforms was a confrontation between two competing ideologies: that of market liberalism and social conservatism. On the one hand, from a market-liberal perspective, the state had a moral duty to liberate lone parents from their dependence on the welfare state through the poverty-alleviating force of employment. On the other hand, from a socially conservative perspective, the state had a responsibility to promote nuclear family structures, consisting of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker, against the corrupting forces of the modern economy that were subverting nuclear family structures. Accordingly, the disputed figure of the unemployed lone parent within political discourse represents a suitable avenue to investigate the confrontation of these two ideals within the UK's welfare policymaking. Accordingly, this research presents an analysis of all statements made by British Government Ministers on the issue of lone parents, with a particular focus on their employment status, between 1997 and 2016. This research found that market-liberal discourses have become an entrenched paradigm in ministerial statements on the issue over the two decades of research. As such, the conclusions produced in this research provides evidence contrary to the assumption that the political discourse around the issue of lone parent employment in the UK has shifted back towards social conservatism after the Financial Crisis.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of lone-parent households in the United Kingdom (UK) has been one of the most radical changes to family formations in the country over the past half-century. Between 1997 and 2016, competing policy discourses on the topic of lone parent labour market participation have embodied the contradictions between the two dominant yet competing socio-political ideologies of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the market-liberal perspective, unemployed lone parents had become a growing burdening the public finances due to their dependence on state aid. From a socially conservative perspective, the figure of the unemployed lone parent represented the rise of an underclass, whose deviance away from the nuclear family structure was framed as the source of the reproduction of an anti-social and workshy generation. Accordingly, the rise of unemployed lone parents in the UK during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century created a policy challenge for both of these competing ideologies on what a good society looks like.

By measuring and analysing how political discourse responds to debates on legislation, this thesis will establish whether different UK Governments engaged in a sustained political narrative on the issue of lone parent employment. To do so, this research deployed a content analysis methodology to measure the similarities and differences in the political discourse on the topic of lone parent (un)employment in ministerial statements in Parliament between 1997 and 2016. In doing so, the extent to which a market-liberal perspective or socially conservative perspective on the role of lone parents in the labour market dominated political discourse on the topic was identified.

Overall, this research found that the market-liberal framing of lone parent unemployment has dominated British ministerial discourse between 1997 to 2016. Specifically, the rise of the



Third Way Politics followed by the Financial Crisis entrenched the role of lone parents as breadwinners instead of homemakers within political discourse. Yet, the variation in the use of discourse on the topic by Ministers nevertheless identified more subtle transitions in the use of language that hold implications for future policymaking. What differentiated the different governments in office were that the New Labour Governments promoted a discourse of enablement and opportunity, while the Coalition and Conservative Government promoted a discourse of employment obligation and fairness with married couples. Therefore, the post-2010 discourse on the topic presented incentivizing the stability of married nuclear families, with their traditional gendered family roles, as a key means to alleviate poverty for policymakers when faced with the rise of unemployed lone parent households. Nevertheless, almost all ministerial statements between 1997 to 2016 on the issue framed labour market participation as the most effective means to breaking cycles of deprivation, social exclusion, and family breakdown. In essence, the results found by this research capture a broader normative transition that began at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the UK. Despite the ideological differences of the New Labour, Coalition, and subsequent Conservative Governments, this research found that the market-liberal discourse on lone parent labour market activation persisted during the period of research. By justifying the retrenchment of the welfare state in its role in providing incomes to lone parents, the market-liberal discourse has supported the implementation of a policy agenda that has increased the market dependency of lone parents in the UK; a process of re-commodification.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **2.1 Historical Context**

#### **2.1.1 Origins of Lone Parenthood in the UK**

Debates surrounding the welfare deservingness of lone parents in the UK goes back to the New Poor Laws of the 1830s, and have become a persistent source of disagreement in British social policymaking ever since (Cody, 2000) (Thane, 1978, pp.20). Historically, lone parenthood was usually the result of the death of a parent or childbirth out of wedlock. These two independent pathways to lone parenthood created two parallel responses by society. Widowers received compassion from society, and importantly, generosity from the state, while unmarried mothers with illegitimate children were stigmatized (Letablier and Wall, 2017, pp. 29). As famously discussed by Thomas Malthus during debates around the New Poor Laws, the notion that state-led poverty relief encouraged the poor to have children that they could not afford has a centuries-old legacy in the UK (Huzel, 1969, pp.23).

Beginning with their role in manufacturing, female labour force participation (FLPR) became increasingly common in the UK during the Industrial Revolution. Later, the sexual revolution of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century brought about many social changes to family structures in the UK (Cook, 2006, pp.6). The Divorce Reform Act of 1969 legalised divorce into its modern form, giving greater autonomy to women in terms of determining the sorts of family structures they wished to inhabit (Binner and Dnes, 2001, pp.3). Simultaneously, the Abortion Act of 1967 brought about the end of shotgun weddings, a longstanding practice in which unintended pregnancies from premarital sex resulted in forced marriages. For instance, a substantial increase in the number of joint registrations of extra-marital births mirrored a large decline in

bridal pregnancies from the 1970s onwards (Lewis, 1998, pp.5). In summary, the liberalisation of divorce and abortion laws, increases in FLFP rates, combined with changing social attitudes towards extramarital childbearing, all contributed to the rise in the number of lone-parent households in the UK after the Second World War.

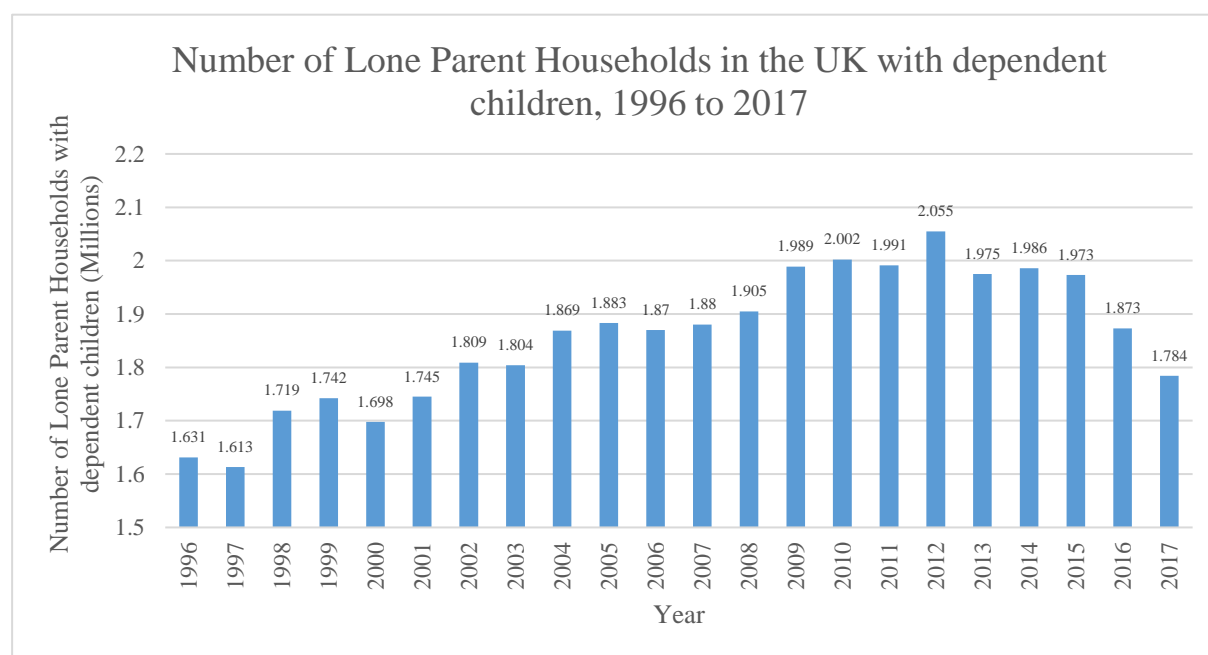
### **2.1.2 Moral Panic or Moral Hazard? Lone Parenthood in the UK in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

During the New Right turn of the 1980s, the research of Laurence Mead (1986) and Charles Murray (1984) became increasingly prominent within social policymaking in the UK (Prideaux, 2009, pp.8). Echoing Malthus, they argued that the generosity of welfare transfers had created a moral hazard in society that was encouraging family breakdown and lone parenthood (Edwards and Duncan, 1997, pp.3). Under the Thatcher Government, the narrative that single mothers were reproducing an undesirable social underclass was revived, leading to the figure of the unemployed unmarried mothers being blamed for many of society's ills (Pascall, 1997, pp.6). From this perspective, the welfare state was transforming the role of men in the family structure as optional, which in turn produced a lack of socialization and discipline amongst children from single-mother households. In summary, single mothers in the 1980s became framed as both a cause of and symptom of a crisis in traditional family structures and morality that was acting as a dual threat to both public finances and social stability.

In response, a paradigm shift occurred in social policymaking towards lone mothers. First, the state began reducing incentives for welfare dependency by lone parents and increasing incentives for their labour market participation. Within political discourse, the respectable hardworking nuclear family was contrasted against the deviant and workshy single mother who

was presented in political discourse as undeserving of welfare transfers (Cain, 2016, pp.3). Since the 1980s, the New Right belief that lone parent employment would act as an effective solution to social ills became entrenched within mainstream social policy discourse in the UK. In doing so, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century social paradigm of the housekeeping single mother began to be slowly replaced by the working-parent model that has become the norm in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Millar, 2018, pp.2). By seeking to reduce the role of the state in providing welfare transfers, the dual objectives of the New Right approach were to increase the role of the labour markets in providing incomes to lone parents, while also addressing the alleged moral hazard created by the welfare state for having extramarital children.

### 2.1.3 (Mis)perceptions of Lone Parenthood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



(Office for National Statistics, 2021)

*Figure 1 - Number of Lone Parent Households in the UK, 1996 to 2017*

Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by 2017 there were 1.9 million lone parent households with dependent children in the UK, meaning that almost 1 in 4 families with dependent children were lone parent households (ONS, 2021). Although most of the literature on the topic uses the genderless terminology of “lone parent”, 90% of lone parents in the UK are female (ONS, 2021). This demographic behaviour reflects the longstanding tendency for children to remain with mothers following a marriage separation. Therefore, it is important to recognize here that that the discourse analysed by this research should be understood as gendered, as lone parent discourse primarily targets female-led households. Moving forward, we will now clarify certain misperceptions concerning lone-parent households in the UK.

The political discourse surrounding lone parent employment in the UK frequently reflects the inaccurate perceptions towards this stigmatized group. For example, the stereotype of the welfare-dependent unemployed teenage single mother with multiple children has continued to hold important connotations within the British public imagination (Salter, 2017, pp.65). Yet, this stereotype is erroneous. Firstly, at present, teenage single mothers make up less than 2% of lone parent households in the UK (ONS, 2021) (Klett-Davies, 2016, pp.19). Second, lone parents have fewer children than married couples on average, with 55% only having one child (ONS, 2021). Third, in terms of their age, the average lone parent in the UK is 39 (ONS, 2021). Fourth, the typical lone parent will only remain single for an average of five years, meaning that the demographic group of lone parent households reflects a process of inflows and outflows, and is not a permanent state of existence (Klett-Davies, 2016, pp.17).

## **2.2 Lone Parent Activation Policies in the UK, 1997 - 2016**

Since 1997, the problem of worklessness amongst lone parent households has become a priority issue amongst both Labour and Conservative policymakers (Klett-Davies, 2016, pp.60). The barriers faced by lone parents to enter paid work are numerous, and the decisions behind individual labour market decisions are complex. Primarily, the availability and accessibility of affordable childcare, the availability of flexible labour market opportunities, the effective marginal tax rate, all factor into the decision making of lone parents in terms of their labour market participation choices. By the time of the 1997 election, the UK had one of the lowest lone parent labour market participation rates in OECD (2021) countries. As FLFP rates were much higher for married mothers at the time, the UK was an outlier in the late 1990s in terms of lone parent employment in comparison to equivalent European countries. In the following section, we will introduce the past 25 years of welfare reforms that sought to increase lone parent employment rates through labour market activation policies.

### **2.2.1 Lone Parent Labour Market Activation – A Policy Timeline, 1997 – 2016**

Before moving forward, it is important to first define what labour market activation policies are. In liberal welfare states, welfare policies are often designed to incentivize labour market participation with the view of controlling spending on unemployment transfers and related programmes. Regarding workless lone parents, welfare states present the most obvious means by which policymakers can modify incentives concerning their employment outcomes. The eligibility criteria, generosity of payments, and duration of payments can all be reformed to attempt to increase incentives for labour market participation. In other words, lone parent

labour market activation can be incentivized by modifying how much government programmes “de-commodify” household incomes from labour market participation.

In the 1990s, the lack of affordable childcare and the low value of tax credits in the UK placed lone parents’ households at a disadvantage in terms of the net value of employment opportunities. The 1997 Labour election manifesto promoted a policy narrative of reducing structural barriers to lone parent employment, namely, childcare accessibility and affordability (Labour Party, 1997). Simply put, the 1997 – 2007 era of lone parent employment policies were focused on voluntary activation, while the austerity-driven policymaking of the Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments after the 2008 Financial Crisis represented a departure towards more compulsory forms of labour market activation policies (Millar, 2018). We will now introduce in detail how the following policy interventions in the UK sought to increase lone parent employment rates since the late 1990s.

### **Blair Premiership (Labour), 1997 – 2007**

#### **New Deal for Lone Parents (1998)**

Under the first Blair government, the landmark New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) represented a paradigm shift in this policy area (Wiggan, 2012, pp.4). Unlike future welfare reforms, the NDLP reduced the barriers to lone parent employment without reducing the value of welfare entitlements by providing advice on childcare opportunities, training opportunities, and assistance with job searching efforts instead. The NDLP created pathways for lone parents to immediately access flexible support through Jobcentre advisors whose role it was to support their move into paid employment without having to resort to coercive measures (Millar, 2000, pp.5).

## **Working Families Tax Credit (1999)**

The new means-tested Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) was introduced in 1999 to low-income, often, lone parent households, to increase the value of their income should they chose to enter full-time employment (Millar, 2000, pp.11). Simply put, this increased the financial incentives for labour market participation by topping up wages for lone parents who chose to work 30 hours or more. This was complemented by the introduction of the Childcare Tax Credit within the WFTC, which reimbursed low income working families with up to 70% of official childcare costs (Millar, 2000, pp.11).

## **Brown Premiership (Labour), 2007 - 2009**

### **Lone Parent Obligations (2008)**

In light of the global financial crisis, the eligibility conditions for welfare transfers for lone parents were made stricter. Lone parents with school-age children were now required to undertake Lone Parent Obligations assessments (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011, pp.11 - 12). Beyond simple guidance and advisory services, unemployed lone parents in receipt of welfare transfers with children over 11 were now required to undertake regular work-focused interviews. Should a parent be assessed as “better off” in paid work, they could now have their eligibility to Income Support withdrawn (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011, pp.85). This represented a critical juncture in British welfare and employment policy towards lone parents. Many lone parents were transitioned onto the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) that required them to meet weekly job searching obligations to continue receiving welfare transfers, with the threat of their entitlements withdrawn should they reject any job offer. In summary, the right to receive



welfare transfers for unemployed lone parents with school-age children were now based on employment activation criteria.

### **Cameron Premiership (Coalition), 2010 – 2016<sup>1</sup>**

Beginning in 2012, the Coalition Government introduced a once-in-a-generation welfare reform. Behind these welfare reforms was a fiscal agenda of austerity that sought to reduce the cost of welfare transfers, especially on workless lone parent households (Slater, 2012, pp. 10 – 14). First, these pieces of legislation had the aim of stimulating labour market performance by reducing perceived incentives for lone parents to remain unemployed (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). Second, they reformed entitlement criteria for working-age households with children. These policies had been specifically designed to have an uneven financial impact on different types of households, with lone parents experiencing the greatest financial loss out of all demographic groups (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016, p.11). These reforms to the value of transfers and conditionality requirements were part of a calculated effort by Ministers at the time to reduce perceived incentives for family breakdown and long-term unemployment amongst parents (Slater, 2012, pp. 14). As the welfare reforms implemented after 2016 are outside the scope of this research, the ongoing Universal Credit scheme will not be discussed directly in this section. To further develop how the 2012 and 2016 Welfare Acts differentially affected single mothers, we will now examine the policy design of four key measures that were introduced as part of these reforms.

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<sup>1</sup> Pages 9 – 13 contain edited extracts from Oisín Nolan’s 2020 term paper for the Welfare States and Gender under Democratic and Undemocratic Rule course at the Gender Studies Department of Central European University.

## **The Benefit Cap (2013)**

The introduction of the Benefit Cap limited the total value that households could receive in the form of welfare payments, regardless of the value of previous entitlements. With the Benefit Cap's initial impact assessments stating that 59% of households affected would be lone parents with two or more children, it is evident that this policy was designed to primarily target unemployed single mothers with larger families (Beatty and Fothergill, 2016, p.89). By increasing the incentives for lone-parent employment, policymakers claimed that the Benefit Cap would make them more financially responsible. However, the Benefit Cap has also been interpreted as a response to the inaccurate assumption that women were purposefully having large families to increase the value of their welfare entitlements (Patrick, 2014, pp. 2). It was equally acknowledged by judges in the High Court that the Benefit Cap was indirectly discriminatory against lone parents (Palmer, 2016, pp. 3).

## **Increased Conditionality for Lone Parents (2012)**

In 2012, the eligibility criteria for Income Support recipients were reformed, meaning that only lone parents with children under the age of 5 could receive it. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of lone parent households were again transitioned onto JSA. JSA requires recipients to attend labour market activation meetings, mandatory training, and to spend up to 35 hours per week searching for employment. If parents failed to meet these criteria, recipients who are deemed to be uncooperative are disciplined by sanction mechanisms that reduce or completely cut their welfare transfers (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). At its peak in 2015, 1 in 7 single parents had their incomes sanctioned (Rabindrakumar, 2017, pp. 5). Notably, lone parents had far higher levels of successful appeals against sanctions when compared to other

demographic groups, reflecting the unequal enforcement of conditionality criteria (Rabindrakumar, 2017, pp. 14).

### **2.2.2 Outcomes of Lone Parent Activation Policies, 1997 – 2016**

#### **New Labour Interventions (1997 – 2006)**

As a result of these policies between 1997 and 2006, the lone parent employment rate increased from 45 to 55%, especially in full-time roles (Gregg and Finch, 2016, pp. 19-20). In terms of social outcomes, there was equally a notable reduction in the number of job exits during parental separations (Gregg, Harkness and Smith, 2009, pp.3). Previously, mothers who were transitioning into lone parenthood often left their jobs due to their child-caring responsibilities. Now, government policies effectively cushioned the adverse effect of separations on lone parent employment outcomes by reducing the rates of employment exits during marriage separations for women (ibid, pp.26).

#### **Policy developments during the Great Recession (2008 – 2010)**

In light of the growing deficit and unemployment rates in the UK during the Great Recession, a new cross-party consensus on welfare rights for lone parents was reached. Welfare rights began to be transformed into conditional entitlements that coerced recipients into desired behavioural outcomes (Gregg and Finch, 2016, pp. 20). Yet, the reality of these reforms was that lone parents often exchanged dependence on out-of-work benefits with low-paid work that subsidized via in-work benefits such as the working tax credit with its childcare subsidy component (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011, pp.9). Therefore, their reliance on government top-ups to their income via tax credits meant that, despite increasing the labour market participation rates of lone parents at the time, lone parents, continued to be partially dependent on state aid

for their incomes. This represents a process of re-commodification towards lone parents, as they become increasingly dependent on labour market participation to receive state-subsidized incomes.

### **Coalition reforms (2010 – 2015)**

The 2012 Welfare Reform Act, and the 2016 Welfare Reform and Work Act represented a notable departure in welfare policymaking towards unemployed single mothers. Marriage was now included within poverty indicators as part of a social agenda that sought to promote family stability (Stewart and Roberts, 2018, pp.5). Moreover, the proportion of children living with both their natural parents was included as an indicator of “progress” (Stewart and Roberts, 2018, pp.4). With these welfare reforms all having unequal effects on the incomes of single mothers, these reforms reflected a conservative social agenda that sought to address the alleged moral hazard behind increasing levels of lone parenthood (Figure 1).

### **Conclusion on Activation Policies, 1997 - 2016**

As stated by Wacquant (2009, pp.290), the transition away from the Keynesian welfare state towards a Monetarist welfare state has had important effects on welfare norms. From this view, changes to lone parent welfare policy reflected a prioritization of responsibilities over rights, and sanctions over support. Nevertheless, the UK government’s lone parent activation policies have been successful in achieving their aim of reducing worklessness and unemployment amongst lone parents. Between 1996 and 2016, the percentage of workless lone parent households decreased by 40% (ONS, 2021) (Gregg and Finch, 2016, pp.14 - 19). In summary, the 20<sup>th</sup> century model of decommodification from the labour market via the welfare

state reliance was replaced with a welfare-to-work model for many lone-parent households in the UK who had been previously excluded from activation criteria.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Having introduced the social issue of lone parent unemployment over the past decades in the UK, and the policy responses to it between 1997 and 2016, we will now turn to presenting the theoretical framework of this research.

#### **3.1 Why Discourse?**

There is a growing need to understand how and why lone parenthood continues to be framed as a problematic burden on the British state, and how such narratives have been legitimated, mediated, and reproduced. Discourse labels and rationalizes the social world around us, and assigns meaning and causes to specific social outcomes (Konstantinova et al., 2019, pp.3). As different discourses ascend while others become marginalized, it is of interest to research to identify how these narratives change over time. Political discourse in particular shape how citizens view each other, and parliamentary debates legitimate specific narratives that have important consequences to those affected by welfare policies (van Dijk, 2002, pp.34). The entrenchment of specific political discourses surrounding the issue of lone parenthood delimits how this social issue is problematized within policy debates, and therefore addressed by legislation (Cain, 2016, pp. 4 - 5). Each UK Government has its own unique narrative regarding how to address poverty, reflecting different logics of governance and political ideologies in terms of the role of the state in intervening in private lives (Jensen and Tyler, 2015, pp.16). In this sense, changes in the discursive emphasis on the labour market

participation of lone mothers by Ministers capture how state intervention and social norms towards different family structures changed between 1997 and 2016 in the UK.

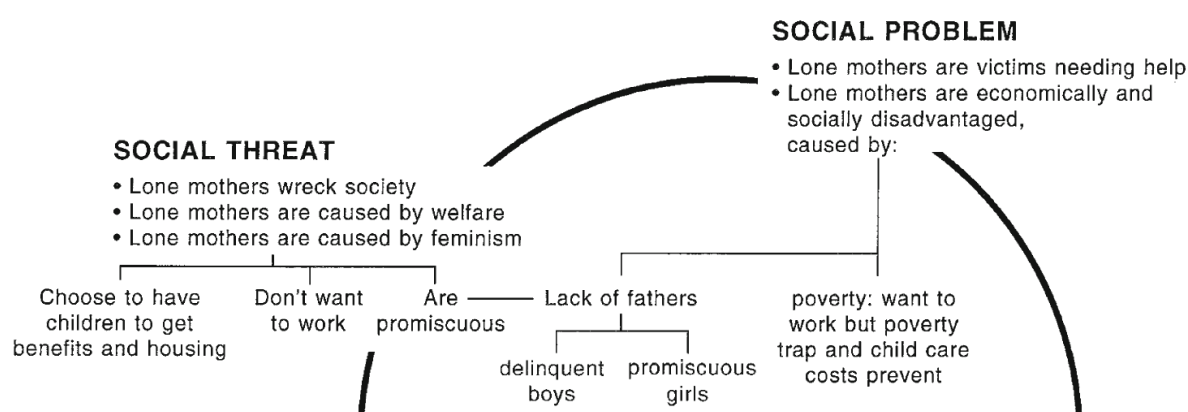
## **3.2 Welfare Discourses**

Discourses are ‘practices which form the objects of which they speak’, and the political discourses on lone parenthood provide the background in which single mothers build their lives (Carabine, 2001, pp.3). Welfare debates have a disciplinary effect on the sorts of family structures a state wishes to normalize or promote (Carabine, 2001, pp.18). For example, welfare policy discourses communicate implicit assumptions on what constitutes normal and acceptable family structures and employment behaviours. In this sense, welfare discourse acts as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed to give meaning to physical and social relations” (Hajer, 1997, pp.14). Therefore, what is viewed as “common sense”, or tacit knowledge, within public opinion, has important effects in terms of the behaviour of policymakers and voters alike (Duncan and Edwards, 1999, pp.26). Accordingly, this research will identify how the policy question of lone parent employment, has been formulated, presented, and reinvented within parliamentary discourse in the years of study.

### **3.2.1 Discursive Categories of Lone Parents.**

A question raised by Dermott and Pomati (2015, pp.4) that remains unanswered is the degree to which lone parents are especially being targeted in political statements regarding welfare reform and unemployment outcomes. Specifically, were unemployed lone parents being focused on, or were they being coupled with other social groups who are equally reliant

on state aid (Dermott and Pomati, 2015, pp.4)? In response, researchers in this field have developed several key typologies in how the issue has been previously presented by political actors in the UK. In this research, we will take advantage of two previously identified discursive categories that are found in debates on lone parenthood in the UK; one based on a socially conservative ideology, the other from the market-liberal ideology. It should be noted that the following categories are not entirely mutually exclusive, but rather they overlap and mutate depending on the context and time period in which they are deployed.



(Duncan and Edwards, 1999, pp.27).

*Figure 2 – Discourses on Lone Motherhood*

### 3.2.2 Social Threat Discourse

Returning to the work of Charles Murray (1984) and Lawrence Mead (1986), the socially conservative Social Threat discourse of the late 1980s and early 1990s presented single mothers as an alienated product of social breakdown that were contributing to the growth of an underclass. In this view, the employment status of lone parents will not remedy the social ills caused by the lack of a father figure in such households. This neo-conservative approach to

welfare discourse stresses the importance of nuclear family structures while criticizing the moral hazard that is purportedly produced by the generosity of the welfare state. Accordingly, re-commodification through the reduction in the value of welfare transfers to lone parents is presented in this discourse as a suitable response to family breakdown, as it increases the dependence of mothers on their partners in families. In summary, this view highlights social expectations on traditional gender roles and gender relations and opposes deviance away from idealised social norms of nuclear family structures (Duncan and Edwards, 1999, pp.29). Behind this view is the antiquated assumption that the lack of a male authoritative parental role model in families is the basis for the social ills that are attributed to lone parenthood.

### **3.2.3 Social Problem Discourse**

The market-liberal Social Problem Discourse presents the issue of lone parenthood in a way that legitimizes more intrusive interventions by the state in their lives. However, the focus of this discourse is on addressing the social and economic disadvantage faced by lone mothers. In this view, unemployed lone mothers wish to be employed but are constrained by structural conditions; a poverty trap. Accordingly, this discourse promotes increased state intervention in the lives of lone parents to enable them to enter paid work and training. Yet, this discourse does not rely on the assumption that lone parenthood inevitably leads to poverty (Duncan and Edwards, 1999, pp.32). Rather, behind this view is the market-liberal assumption that the poverty rates amongst lone parent households are the basis for the social ills attributed to lone parenthood. As such, the Social Problem Discourse presented lone parent unemployment as a more pressing form of social deviance than lone parenthood itself. Therefore, the labour market participation of lone parents would remedy the social ills caused by poverty thanks to increased



incomes. A hypothesis found in previous research that the results of this paper will challenge is that the Social Problem Discourse was dominant during the New Labour era, but later thwarted by the resurgence of the New Right in British policymaking after 2010 (Salter, 2017, pp.89). Having presented the theoretical framework of this research, we will now turn to explain how these two discourses were measured, and how this research identified whether such a transition took place in the ministerial discourse on the topic within parliamentary debates between 1997 and 2016.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research design - Operationalizing and Measuring Changes to Welfare Discourse**

Decision-making in Parliament is a discursive-political process, which influences the public perceptions on how particular issues are contested and presented (Van Dijk, 1997, pp.9). The question raised by Dermott and Pomati (2015, pp.4) was that it remains unclear the degree to which lone parents are especially being targeted in political statements regarding welfare reform and employment outcomes. Specifically, are unemployed lone parents being focused on in ministerial statements, or are they coupled with a broader demographic group who are equally reliant on state aid? By measuring how the topic of lone parenthood is tied to other policy questions, we intend to respond to Dermott and Pomati's question on the extent to which the figure of lone parents associated with issues of unemployment and labour market activation in statements. In doing so, we will equally seek to measure the extent to which the Social Threat and Social Problem Discourses were deployed during the research timeframe using a range of different categories in our content analysis.

### **4.2 Role of Ministerial Statements in Parliament**

Within the British Parliament, ministerial statements are an important means through which Ministers raise important matters to the attention of the members of the House of Commons. An hour of each day of sitting is allocated for these statements, and they primarily are issued based on the pressing government policies of the day. Accordingly, the statements of a Minister are of interest to researchers as, unlike Members of Parliament or Members of the

House of Lords, Government Ministers are bound by the government policy positions and narratives of the day. Therefore, ministerial statements are a useful data source to analyse how the narrative around a policy issue changes over time.

Due to the complexity of employment and social security policies, statements made by Ministers interpret and frame policy debates by focusing on specific sub-issues that are associated with them. The ways in which Ministers design such statements on policy questions are the result of a coordinated strategy of communication that is based on the political agendas of their respective parties (Elias, Szöcsik and Zuber, 2015, p.3). Accordingly, measuring how such political actors associate lone parents with other economic and social issues over time allows researchers to identify and challenge the strategies and assumptions adopted in their decision making. Given the importance of welfare reforms over this period, close attention in this research will be paid to the timing of legislative changes, parliamentary debates, and election results when analysing the dataset.

### **4.3 Method - Content Analysis**

This thesis will apply a qualitative content analysis methodology to a self-produced dataset of all statements in the British Parliament in which Government Ministers referred to the issue of lone parenthood between 1997 and 2016. To do so, a coding manual was developed by piloting a design on an exploratory data sample of all 27 debates entitled “lone parents” (Appendixes 1 and 2). Having completed this iterative development of the coding manual using this grounded method approach, the coding frame was subsequently applied to analyse the dataset (Franzosi, 2004, pp.4). Due to the large sample of 425 statements, the results generated by the content analysis were measured quantitatively to establish how the discourses surrounding

lone parenthood, and their labour market participation, changed over time. The following section will present the methodology used in this research in detail.

## 4.4 Data collection

All statements made by Ministers on the issue of lone parenthood and single mothers in parliamentary debates were recorded from May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997, to the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2016. This 19-year timeframe was selected for the following reasons. First, the start date is the day where the first Blair Ministry entered government. Blair was elected on a centrist mandate to reform the welfare state, and his first government between 1997 and 2001 represented a shift in lone parent employment policy in the UK towards market-liberal principles. The data collection timeframe ended on the day of David Cameron's resignation in the wake of the 2016 European Union membership referendum. Although a 20-year data collection timeframe would have been more elegant, the significant cabinet reshuffle and policy agenda revision that took place during the early months of the May administration meant that extending the period beyond 19 years would have decreased the validity of this research's results. Overall, this timeframe was identified as the most suitable to produce an accurate comparison of ministerial statements between the 1997 – 2001 and 2010 – 2015 waves of welfare reform.

To collect the data, statements were recorded from transcripts of British Parliamentary debates using the Hansard Database. Hansard records all oral and written statements that are made in the British Parliament. Using its online search engine, the key search terms of “lone parent”, “lone mother”, “single mother”, and “single parent” were used to locate every debate in which the issue was raised by Members, Ministers, or the Speaker of the House. Next, each debate was reviewed in full to identify which statements were made only by Government

Ministers. 146 web pages of Hansard results were thoroughly reviewed to identify each instance where a Minister referred to the issue of lone parents. Unless their statement was interrupted, multiple statements in a debate by a minister were recorded as separate entries. Each time a statement was identified, it was recorded in our database alongside the name of the Minister, the name of the debate, the full statement, the date of the debate, the government, which was in office, as well as a weblink to the entry on the Hansard webpage.

#### **4.4.1 Development of the Coding Manual**

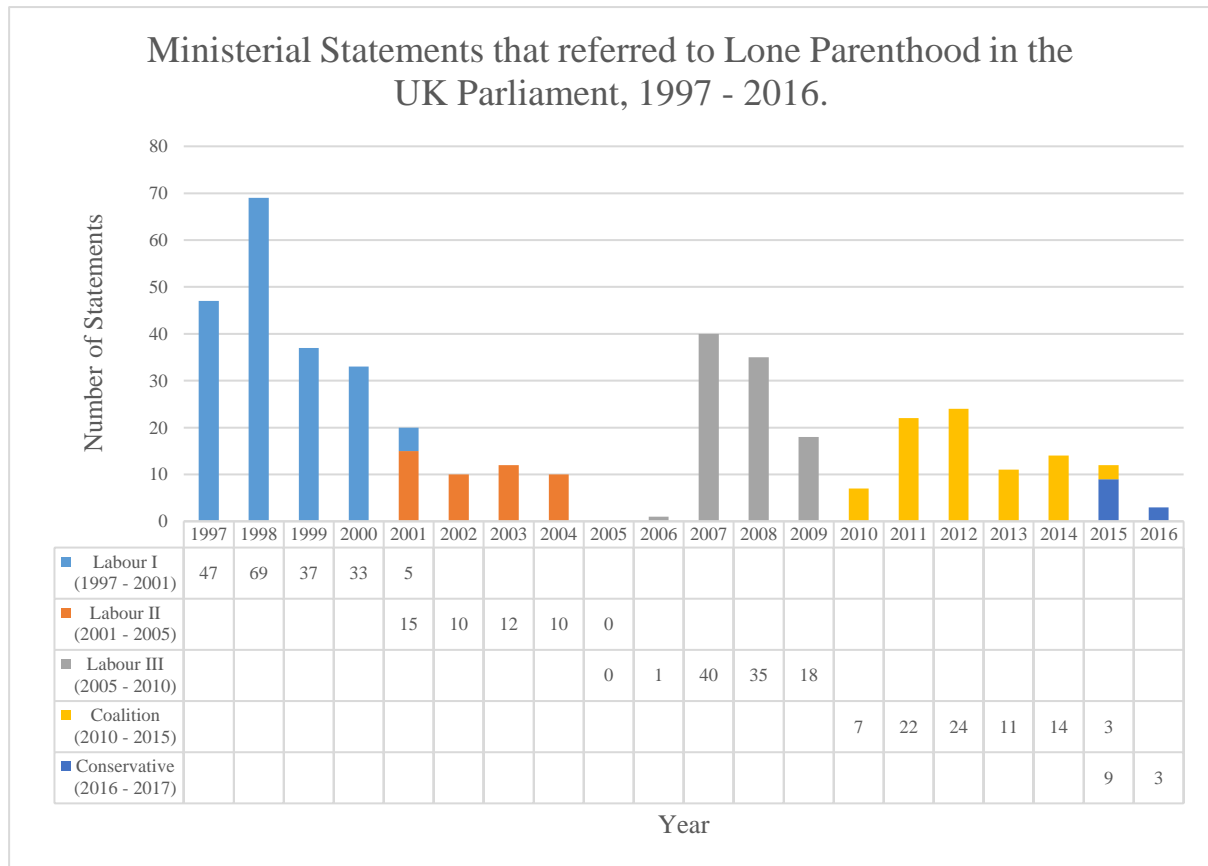
Having attentively collected each statement where Ministers raised the topic of lone parents in Parliament between 1997 and 2016, the coding manual for the content analysis was built through an exploratory sample. First, an exploratory analysis was conducted on the 27 debates with “lone parents” in the title (Appendix 2). This exercise was used to inductively determine which individual categories would be used in the coding manual (Hsieh and Shannon, p.3). As the overarching goal of this research is to identify patterns in how the policy issue of lone parents was presented by Ministers in Parliament, with a specific focus on employment and activation policies, the subcategories found in Appendix 1 were designed to be able to measure variations in discourse use as discussed in the theoretical framework section of this paper. Regarding the validity of the results, the categories were designed in such a way that each category could be transparently identified and classified from the manifest content of statements alone.

#### **4.4.2 Coding Procedure**

Having developed the final version of the coding manual, it was applied to each text statement recorded in the dataset (Appendix 1). To increase the reliability of the lone-scholar coding exercise, all statements were given an identifier code and then randomly ordered before beginning the coding exercise of the data analysis. Only the string text and the unique identifier were available to the coder when applying the coding manual to each statement. For the sake of ease of use, the coding procedure and subsequent calculations were undertaken in Microsoft Excel. Having completed this coding exercise, the individual data pieces of ministerial statements were re-matched to the relevant secondary information using the unique identifier. Having established how the data collection and analysis was conducted, we will now turn to presenting the results of the content analysis.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1 Distribution Of Statements



*Figure 3 - Ministerial Statements that Referred to Lone Parenthood in the UK Parliament, 1997 - 2016.*

Between the election of Tony Blair in 1997 and the resignation of David Cameron in 2016, our research identified 425 statements in which Government Ministers directly raised or referred to the issue of lone parents or single mothers in the British Parliament. These statements were collected from 219 separate parliamentary debates in the House of Commons over this 19-year period (Appendix 2). Out of these statements, 191 were made during the 1<sup>st</sup> Blair Ministry, 47 during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Blair Ministry, 94 during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Blair/Brown Ministry, 81 during

the Cameron-Clegg Coalition Ministry and only 12 during the shortened Second Cameron Ministry. In terms of initial findings from this overview of the dataset, several key results of interest stand out.

The first finding from the dataset was that the policy issue of lone motherhood did not remain high on the political agenda in British Parliamentary debates throughout the period of research. Instead, between 1997 and 2016, the topic of lone motherhood has surged and declined as an issue of importance during specific legislative sessions, particularly in periods where debates concerning welfare reform and employment policy occurred. As can be seen in Appendix 2, 72 out of the 219 debates where one or more ministerial statements were recorded was directly on the topic of welfare and employment policy. With 45% of all ministerial statements collected in this research coming from one four-year period, this result confirms that the first Blair premiership represented the period in which the issue of lone motherhood, and lone-parent employment, was the most contested within Parliament.

The second result of interest from Figure 3 was that the issue of lone parents was seldomly raised between the 2001 General Election and the onset of the 2007-2008 Financial Crisis. Beginning in 2002, a decline in the number of times the issue was raised in Parliament was identified. This result was unforeseen, as only one ministerial statement on lone mothers was recorded in 2006, and zero statements were identified in 2005. In response, we returned to our research methodology to examine whether any errors had taken place during the data collection phase. As verified in Appendix 3, all databases show that the phrases “lone parent” or “single mother” were never referred to by any Minister, MP, or Speaker in their parliamentary statements, even anecdotally, during this period. This finding indicates that, in periods where few pieces of welfare and employment legislation were debated, virtually no



statements on the issue of lone parents were made by Ministers. As will be developed later in the results section, this result is an indication that ministerial statements on lone parents were primarily tied to welfare legislation and employment outcomes. Altogether, despite the demographic patterns of lone motherhood being relatively stable, the importance of this issue within political debates appears to be volatile, depending on the political agenda and economic circumstances of the period.

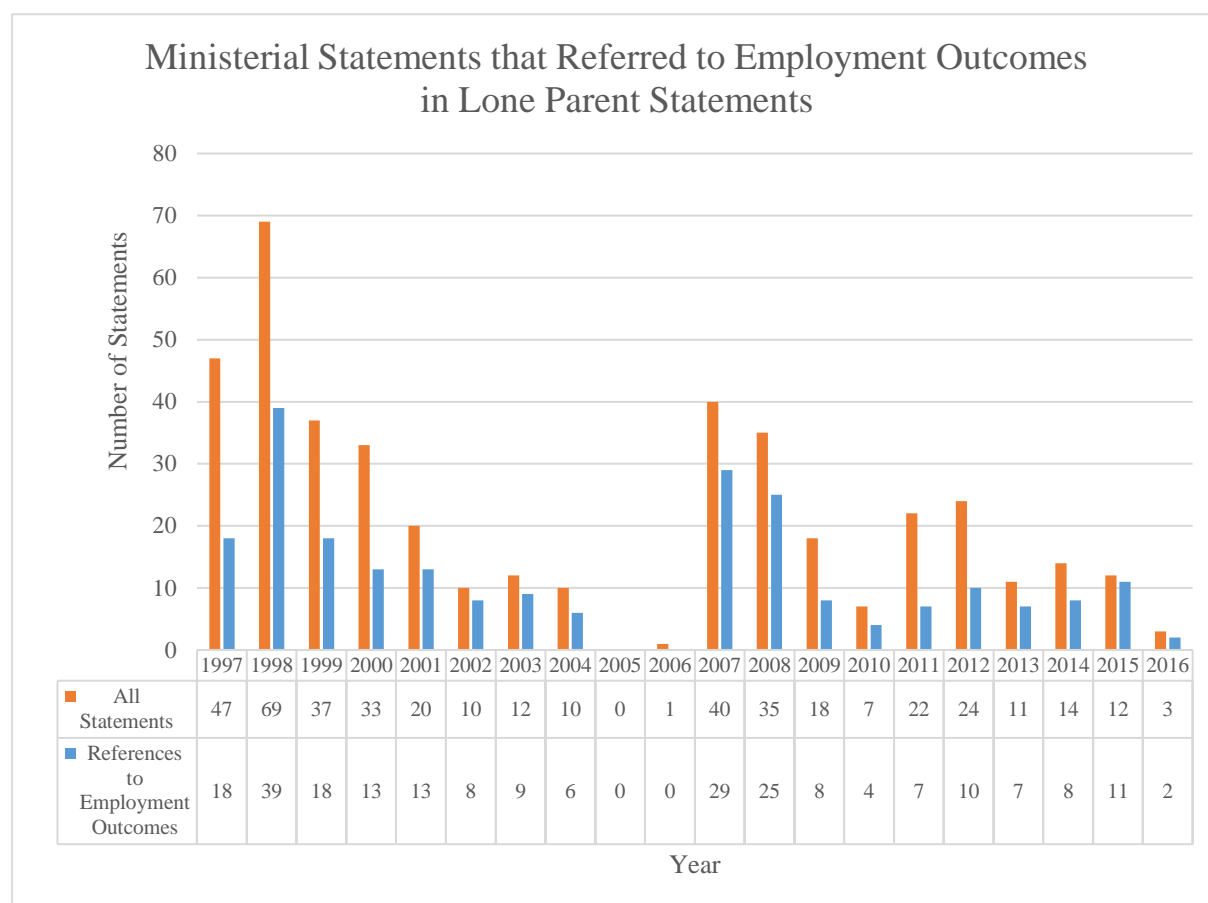
The issue of lone parenthood returned to the fore in ministerial statements in parliamentary debates during the onset of the Global Financial Crisis. The simultaneous increase in welfare spending on unemployment benefits alongside the rapid increase in the UK's sovereign deficit during this crisis had an important effect on social policy narratives at the time. Between 2008 and 2012, the figure of the unemployed lone parent was placed firmly back onto the parliamentary agenda. Yet, another noteworthy result from the sample distribution was the smaller volume of statements made by Ministers on the topic after 2010 when compared to the first Blair Ministry, despite the fact that many of the welfare reforms made during this period were targeted at lone parents. The post-2010 represented a second period in which the relationship between lone parents and labour market activation policies were routinely contested in Parliament. Despite the large impact these reforms had on lone parent incomes, and the many MPs raising their concerns on the issue, Ministers themselves appeared to rarely address the issue directly in their statements. Specifically, only 19% of the ministerial statements collected were made between the 2010 and 2015 elections despite this period representing the second critical juncture in lone parent policymaking in the UK. However, it should be noted that the low number of statements by Ministers that referred to the issue in Parliament does not indicate that the issue was not being debated in Parliament. Rather, it only indicates that Ministers themselves chose to infrequently mention the issue in name

during their ministerial statements. It was identified during the data collection phase that members of Parliament from all political parties raised the issue regularly after 2010, but that unlike during the 1997 – 2001 parliamentary sessions, Ministers did not consistently refer to the issue in their responses.

Altogether, each key period of welfare reform debate in the British Parliament in 1997, 2007, and 2015 correlated to a proportional increase in references by Ministers on the issue of lone parenthood. During periods in which major pieces of legislation and debates relating to welfare and employment policy did not take place, the policy question of lone parenthood was seldomly debated in Parliament. Moving forward, we will now seek to determine the extent to which statements by Ministers on the topic of lone parents were specifically tied to themes of labour market activation.

## 5.2 Employment and Activation References

### 5.2.1 References to Employment Outcomes



*Figure 4 - Ministerial Statements that Referred to Employment Outcomes in Lone Parent Statements*

This category was measured using references to lone parenthood that referred directly to employment outcomes. Overall, 55% of recorded statements by Ministers on the issue of lone parenthood made direct reference to either employment or unemployment outcomes. This was identified by recording the use of key terms such as “employment”, “in work” and “employed”, “unemployed” and “out of work”, and “workless households” in statements where either single mothers or lone parents were referred to. In statements where both unemployment

and employment were mentioned, the statement was only recorded as one data entry in this category.

Figure 4 provides robust confirmation that the issue of lone parenthood in Parliament has been continuously linked to statements on employment outcomes between 1997 and 2016. Notably, in years where there were fewer statements by Ministers on the topic of lone parenthood were made, the percentage of statements relating to employment outcomes mostly made up a greater share of ministerial statements. Therefore, even when the social issue of lone parents is not directly on the parliamentary agenda, its association with employment and activation debates in ministerial discourse persisted. Moreover, in years where major welfare reforms were being debated, the number of statements relating directly to employment also increased (see 1998, 2008 and 2015). Put otherwise, British ministerial discourse on lone parenthood is rarely separated from the figure of the unemployed single mother, despite the economic, demographic, and labour market performance trends moving in the opposite direction during this period. This result provides an answer to Dermott and Pomati's (2015, pp.4) as it demonstrates that lone parents are especially being targeted in ministerial statements regarding welfare reform and unemployment outcomes. Nevertheless, this result does little to help us identify what changes took place in lone parent employment discourse during the period of research. Accordingly, the following sections of this analysis will expand on what changes occurred to lone parent employment discourse between 1997 and 2016.

### 5.2.2 Lone Parents - Employed or Unemployed?

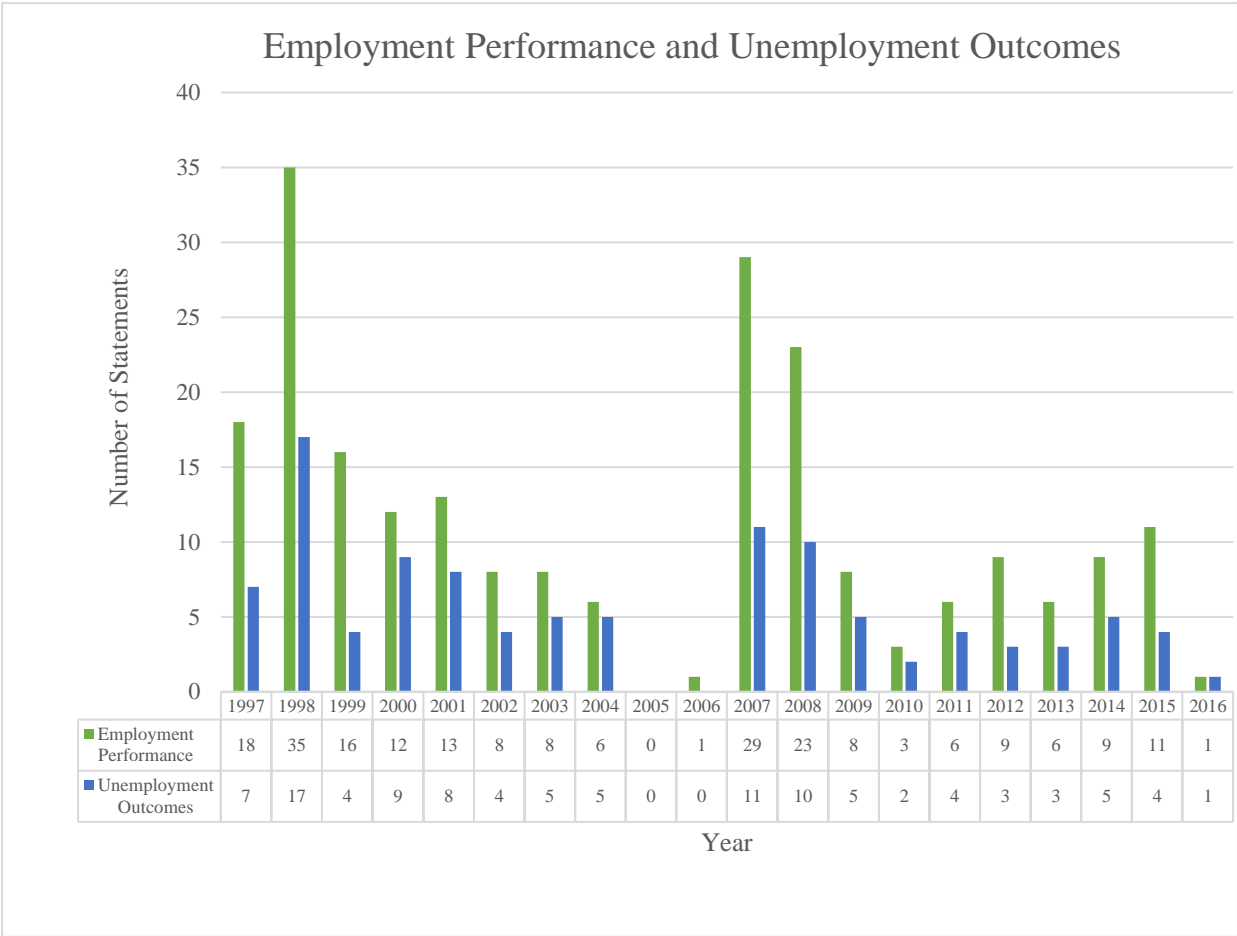


Figure 5 - Employment Performance and Unemployment Outcomes

An important research goal of this paper was to identify whether the socially conservative Social Threat Discourse or market-liberal Social Problem Discourse were deployed within ministerial statements. Unlike the previous category, the two coding categories found in Figure 5 separated statements that referred to lone parent employment generally, and statements that referred particularly to lone parent unemployment. Here, we found that over 50% of statements recorded referred to general lone parent employment levels, while only 25% of all ministerial statements directly mentioned the question of lone parent unemployment.

This result was notable for several reasons. First, it suggests that the ratio in use of affirmative lone parent activation discourse, and stigmatizing lone parent unemployment, did not change based on which government was in office. Therefore, the potential use of affirmative or stigmatizing discourse was not dependent on the ideology of the party in office. Second, the economic circumstances of each year did not correlate precisely to the percentage in use of either of these two categories. Based on the results of the literature review, we had anticipated more noticeable shifts to occur in the use of language regarding lone parent unemployment after the 2007-2008 Financial Crisis. Nevertheless, this result suggests that the decline in the use of the Social Threat Discourse in Parliament since the mid-1990s had continued regardless of the 2008 financial crisis. Ultimately, Figure 5 indicates that the Labour, Coalition and Conservative Governments deployed equivalent language around the topic of lone parent employment outcomes in the years of study. Moving forward, the results below reflect how variations in language use did take place on more specific themes relating to lone parent employment and activation during the research period.

### 5.2.3 References to Activation Policies

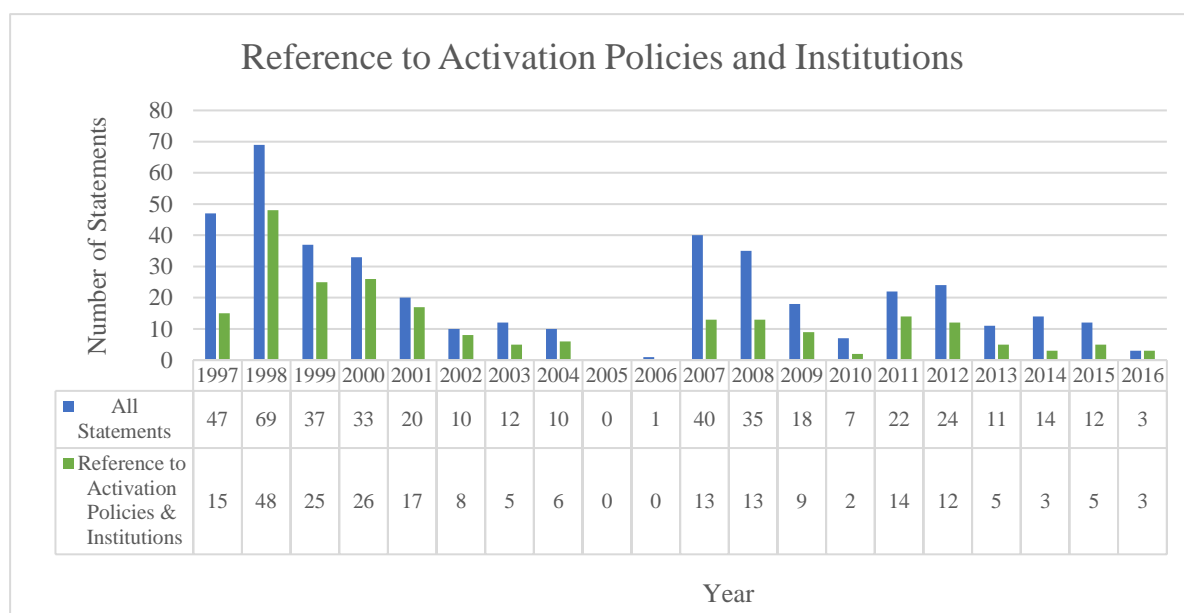
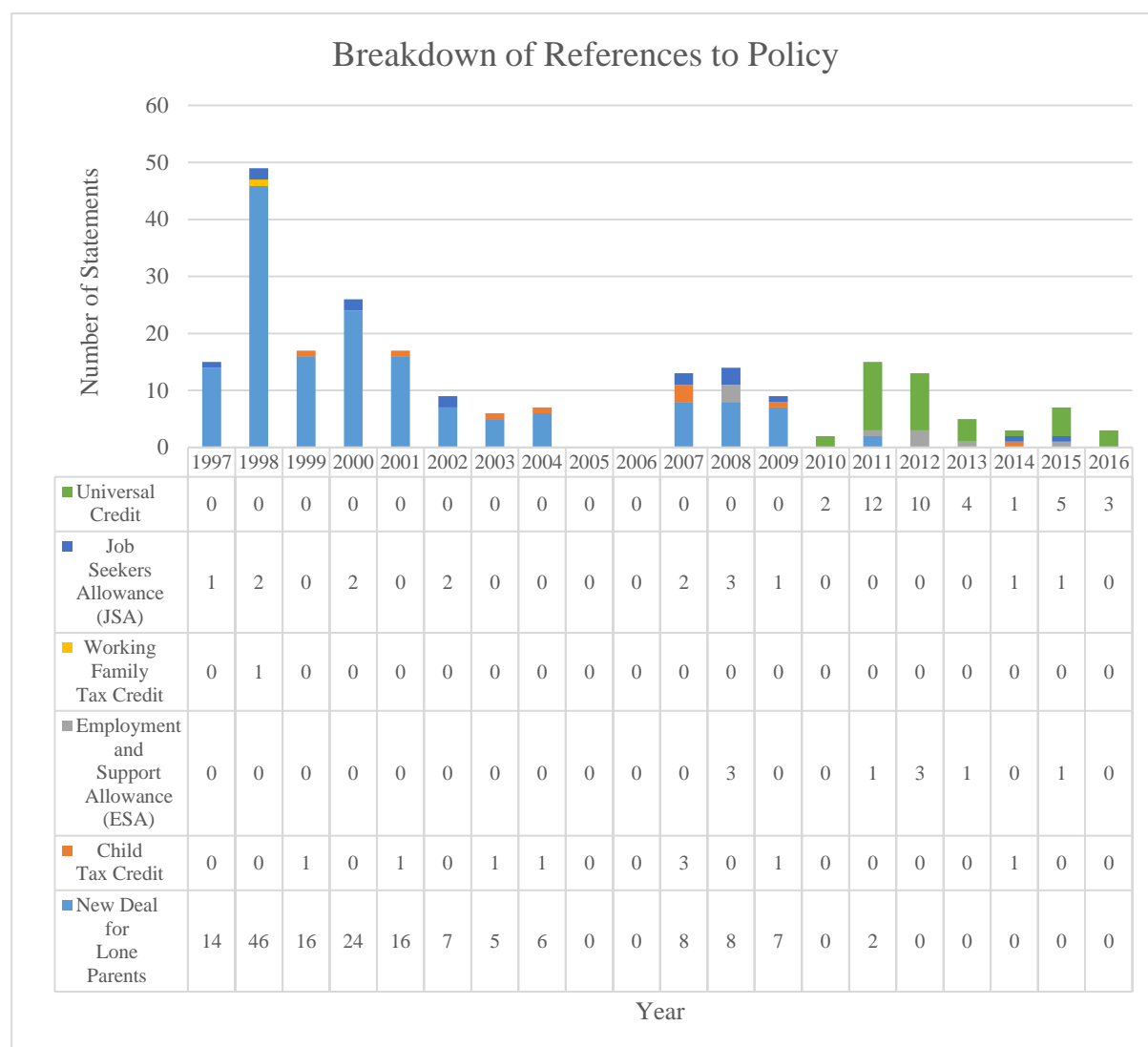


Figure 6 - References to Activation Policies and Institutions

Another noteworthy result from our content analysis was the correlation between statements that referred to the figure of lone parents and statements that specifically referred to labour market activation policies and institutions. Overall, 60% of all statements on lone parents by Ministers referred directly to at least one of the following labour market activation policies or institutions: *Jobseekers Allowance*, *Universal Credit*, *New Deal for Lone Parents*, *Working Families Tax Credit*, *Employment and Support Allowance*, and *Child Tax Credits*, *Jobcentres* and *Personal Career Advisors*. Should multiple policies be mentioned in a statement, they were still only counted as one statement in Figure 6. An expected result was that, between 1998 and 2001, 80% of statements by Ministers that mentioned the issue of lone parents made direct reference to one of the terms listed above. Here again, we can conclude that the figure of lone parents was primarily raised in reference to activation policies between 1998 and 2004 and 2011 and 2013. The following section will explore these results in more detail.

## Breakdown of References to Policy



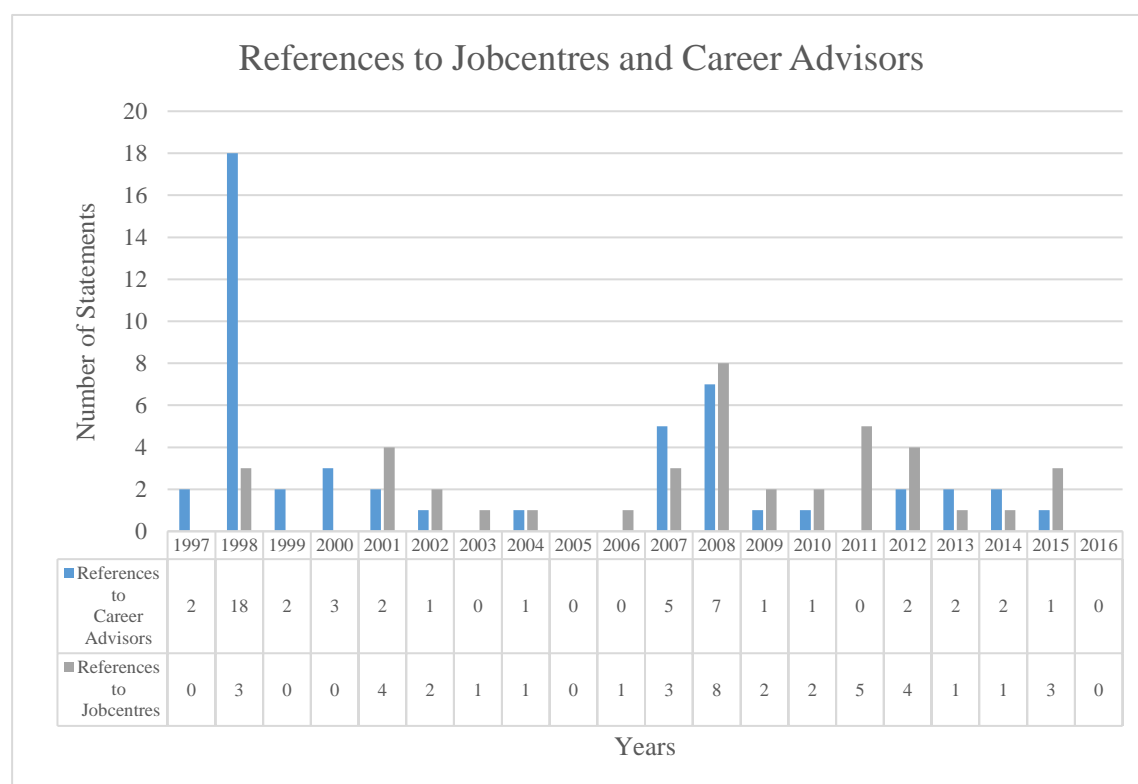
*Figure 7 - References to Policy*

In Figure 7, we can see that the launch of the NDLP resulted in the issue of lone parent advisors being debated at length by Ministers. As the policy title had the text string “lone parent” within its name, our results in Figure 7 were skewed between 1997 and 2001. Nevertheless, a surprising result was that other activation policies, namely, Working Tax Credits, ESA, JSA, and Child Tax Credits were all seldomly referred to in statements regarding



lone parents. Equivalently, the launch of Universal Credit meant that it was referred to substantially by Ministers in statements in 2011 and 2012. Universal Credit was mentioned 37 times in statements that referred to lone parents between 2010 and 2016, despite the low volume of statements made on the topic at all during this period.

### Career Advisors and Job Centres

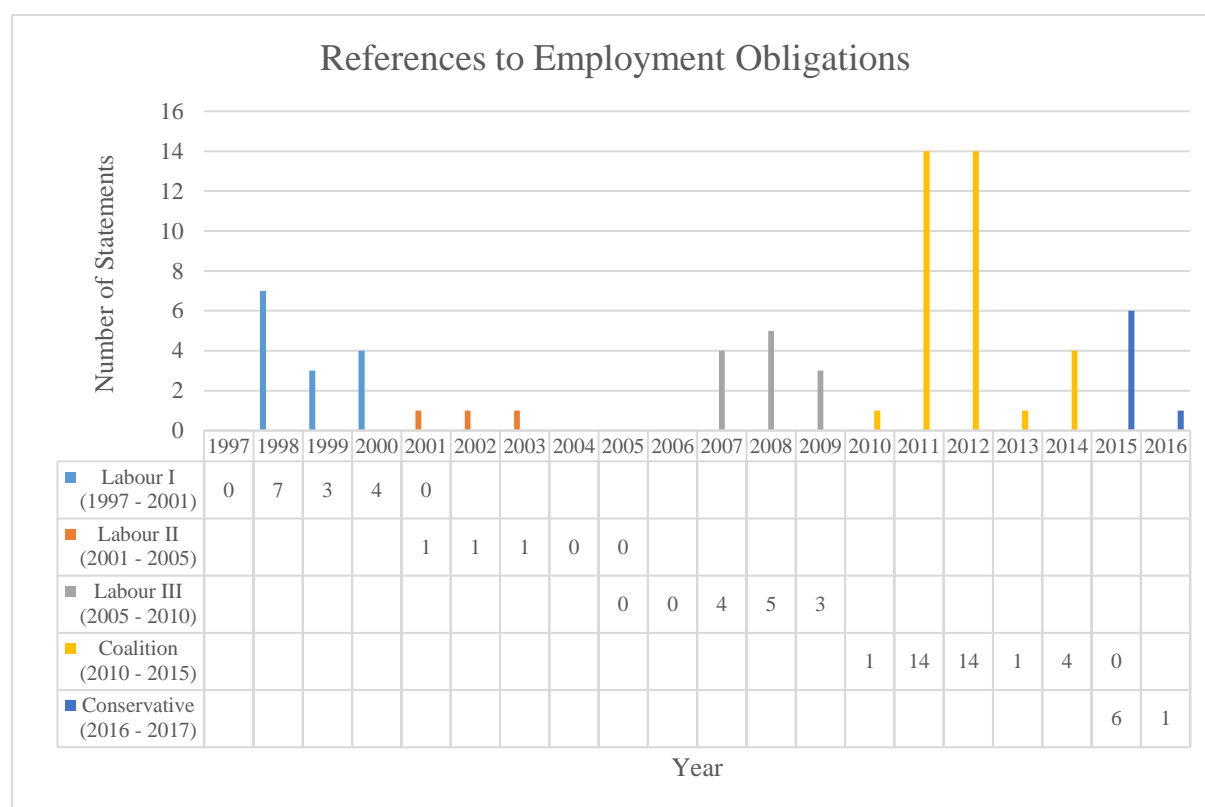


*Figure 8 - References to Jobcentres and Career Advisors*

A second interesting outcome in the policy category was that the strings “Job Centre” and “Advisor” slightly peaked in 2007 and 2008 during the onset of the financial crisis, signalling that lone parent labour market activation had become a greater topic of concern for Ministers in this period. As will be discussed later, this represents the policy response to rising unemployment and welfare receipt in the UK during this period, and a narrative shift away from

employment encouragement towards a more coercive narrative of activation. However, despite this being reflected in statements by political actors outside of Parliament during this period the small sample size from 2010 – 2016 limits the extent to which such a conclusion can be reached from this data alone, despite literature on the topic being in favour of such an assessment.

## Employment Obligations

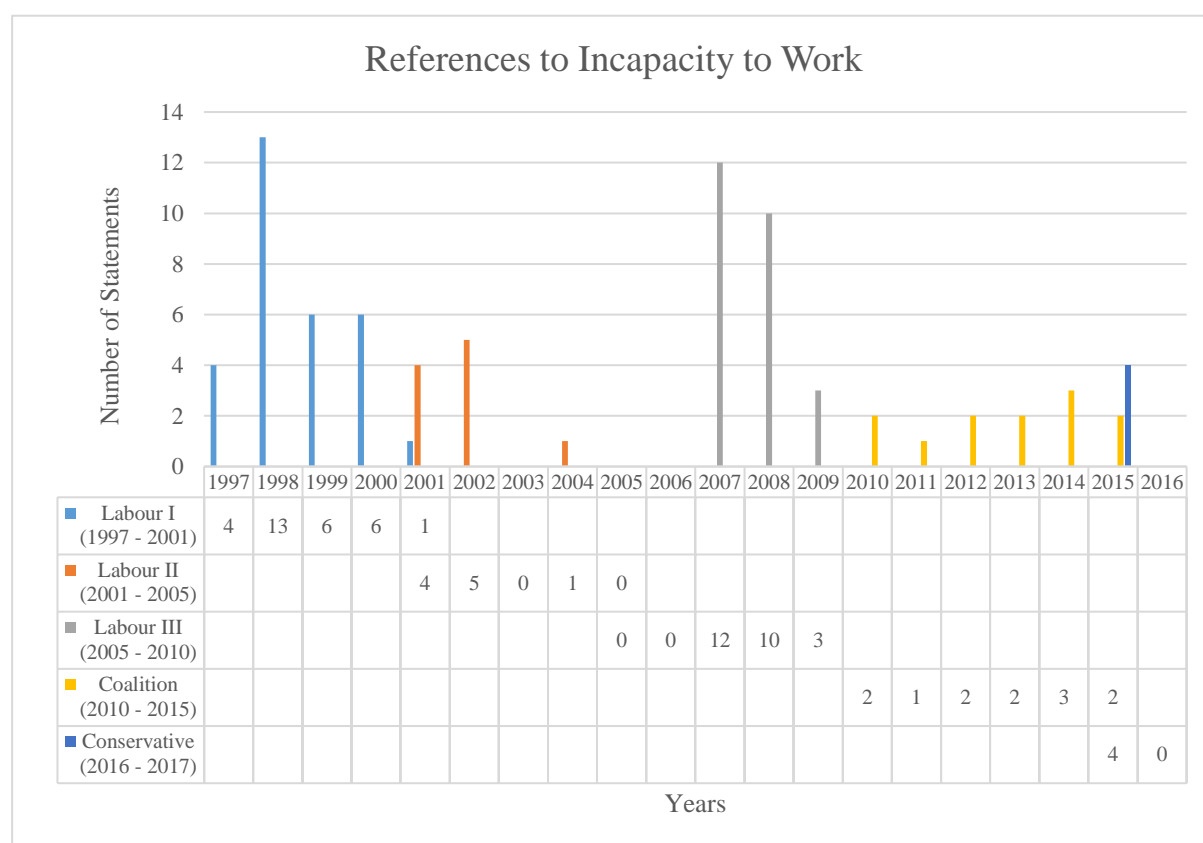


*Figure 9 - References to Employment Obligations*

In this category, we sought to measure the use of phrases relating to lone parent employment obligations. In particular, there were several debates on how many hours of work lone parents should work to be entitled to child tax credit and working tax credit. Despite our uneven sample distribution, this was one of the only categories that had a higher frequency in the sample after 2001. Most interestingly, the debate surrounding working hours increased

initially during 2007-2008 during the onset of the financial crisis, but especially between 2011-2012, where approximately 60% of statements made by Ministers in these years containing reference to the expected working hours for lone parents. This outcome was anticipated. Unlike the Labour Government's narrative of opportunity and pathways, the debate surrounding working hours and shift times was part of a more coercive approach in which the role of the welfare state was retrenched, and the role of the labour market increased, in providing incomes to lone parent households. Therefore, the result in Figure 9 is one of the most conclusive indicators that reflected the broader normative process of re-commodification that was taking place in the UK as of 2007.

#### 5.2.4 Incapacity to Work

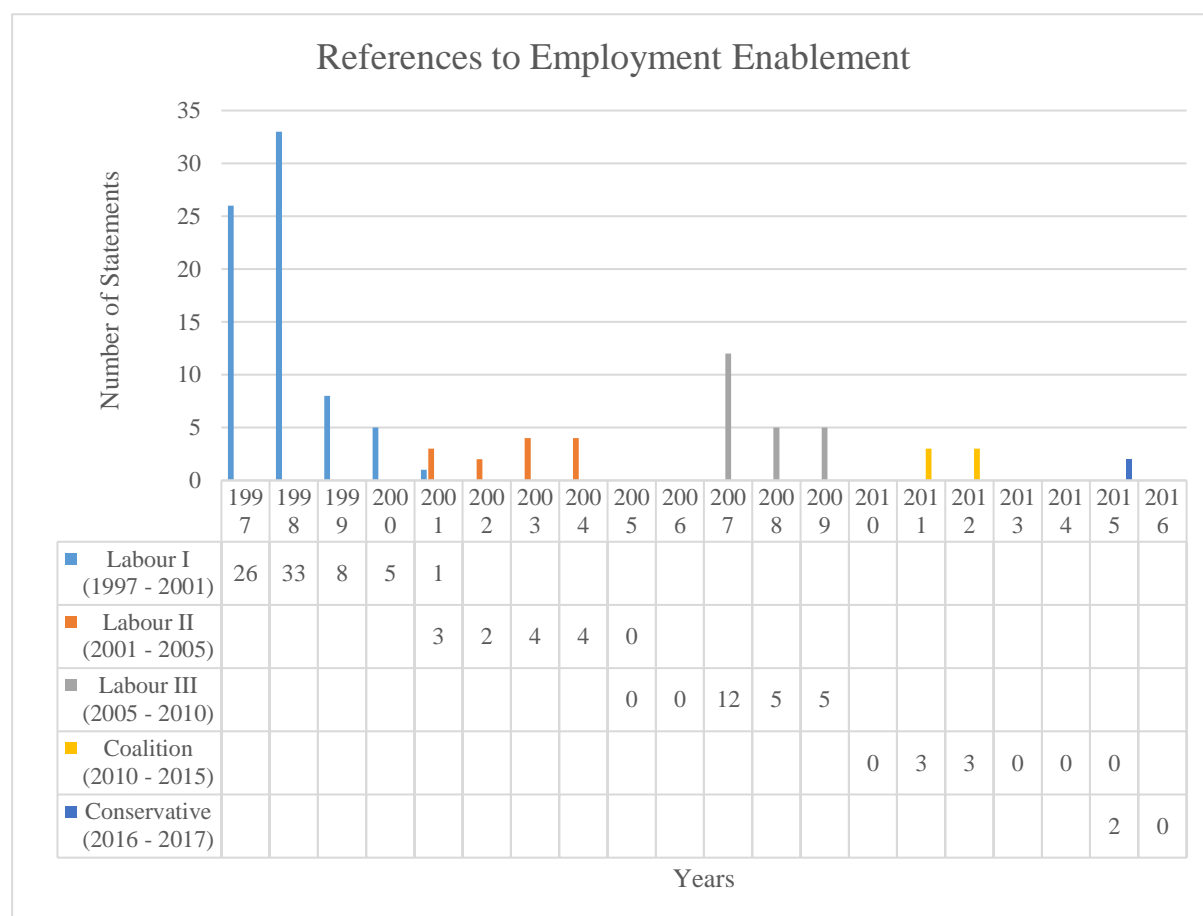


*Figure 10 - References to Incapacity to Work*

In this category, we identified all references to lone parents who suffered from disabilities, injuries, and other forms of work incapacity. This topic recurred throughout many statements on the issue of lone parent employment. The continued presence of references to disability in statements can primarily be attributed to the following policy dilemma in the UK. As welfare entitlements were made more restrictive and conditional towards labour market participation, many lone parents transitioned onto the more stable and less conditional Disability Living Allowance to avoid workplace activation criteria, namely, job searching requirements. The peaks in statements relating lone parents to disabilities in 1998, 2007-2008, and 2015 all took place during debates where the welfare conditionality for lone parents was being reformed by extending job searching requirements to parents with ever younger children. Although these results do not provide us with any further conclusions, they demonstrate that the controversy surrounding the high percentage of lone parents receiving disability benefits has persisted during the time period of this research.

## 5.3 Competing Narratives

### 5.3.1 Narrative of Enablement

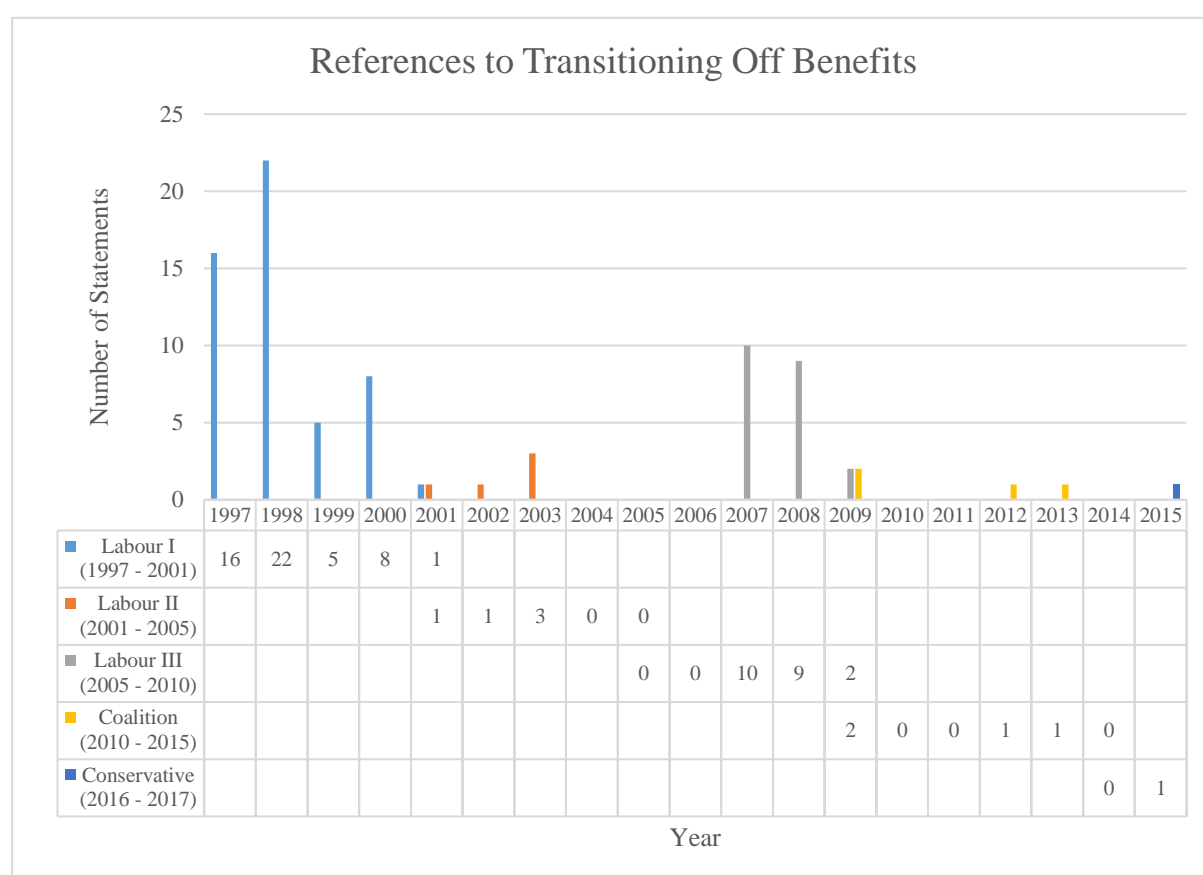


*Figure 11 - References to Employment Enablement*

This category was developed to gain a more detailed understanding of narrative shifts that took place regarding lone parent employment discourse. To do so, all phrases were recorded that related to the promotion of work opportunities for lone parents, for instance, “giving lone parents a chance to work” or “opportunity to participate fully in society and to support their families through work” (Annex 1). Here, we found one of the few distinctive changes in terms of changing narratives between different political parties in the UK. During New Labour’s first

term, the “opportunity” discourse was found to be more present in ministerial statements, being key to their policy narrative at the time. Moreover, during the onset of the financial crisis, the use of this narrative by the Brown administration experienced a brief resurgence. Nevertheless, although this may be distorted by the small sample size between 2010 and 2015, this table suggests that the language of enablement was discounted over a more coercive activation narrative after the 2010 election.

### 5.3.2 Value Of Employment Narrative



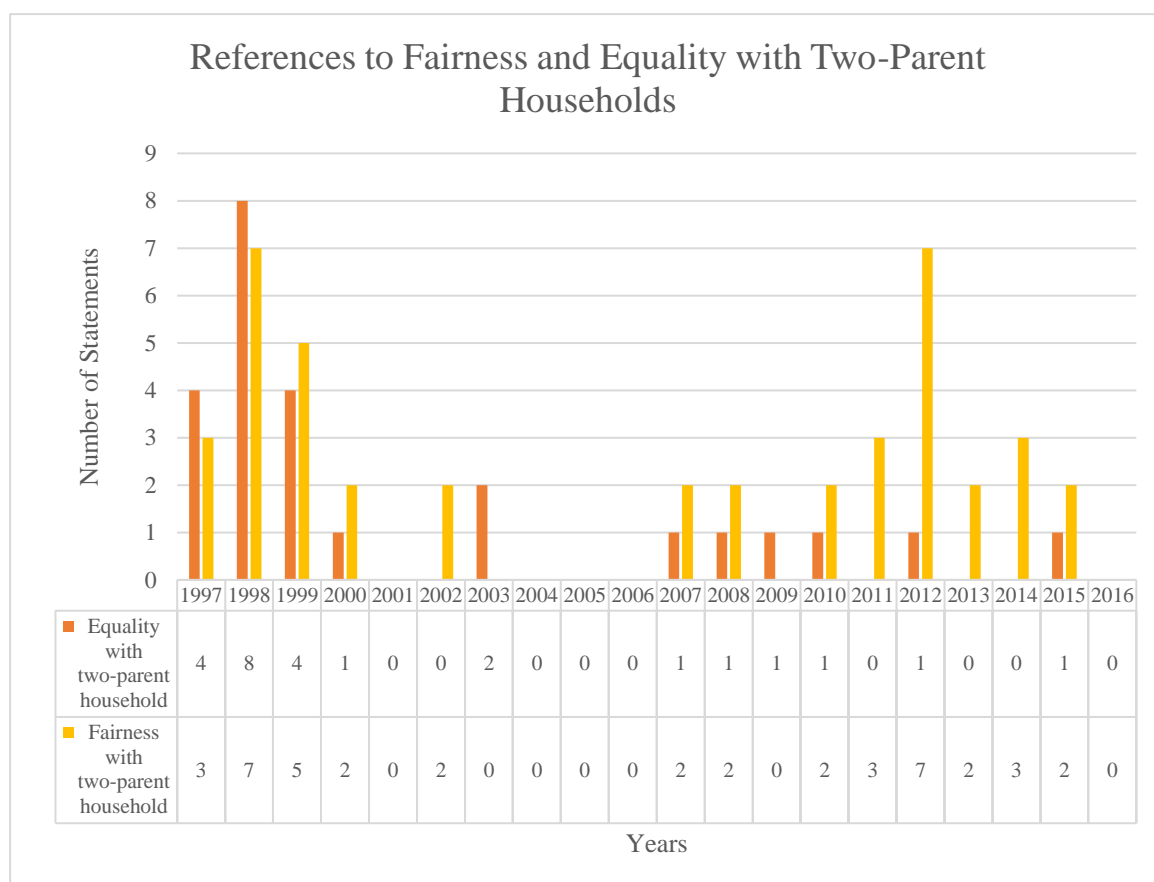
*Figure 12 - References to Transitioning off Benefits.*

A common phrase that has been symptomatic of the past three decades of welfare reform in the UK is that unemployed welfare recipients are “better off in work”. Accordingly, this

segment of the coding manual sought to record the use of phrases such as “better off in work” and “transition off benefits”. Here again, the results found in this section went against the hypothesis found in the literature review. The arguments that lone parents should be transitioned off welfare benefits into the labour market was far more visible during the early era of reforms in the late 1990s than during the onset of the financial crisis.

However, a cursory overview of ministerial statements after 2010 nevertheless showed that the “better off in work” narrative indeed persisted between 2010 and 2016. The reason why it did not appear in the dataset was that lone parents were not mentioned in the “better off in work” statements at the time. Although this is a speculative statement, this result may allude to the tensions between the socially conservative and economic liberal ideologies of the Coalition Government. On one hand, the policies adopted by this government sought to re-commodify the labour of lone parents by reducing the value of welfare transfers coercing their return to the labour market. On the other hand, the conservative ideal of the female homemaker does not align neatly with this “better off in work” narrative, meaning that Ministers at the time may have been more reluctant to associate the two issues than their predecessors.

### 5.3.3 Narratives of Fairness with Two-Parent Households



*Figure 13 - References to Fairness and Equality with Two-Parent Households*

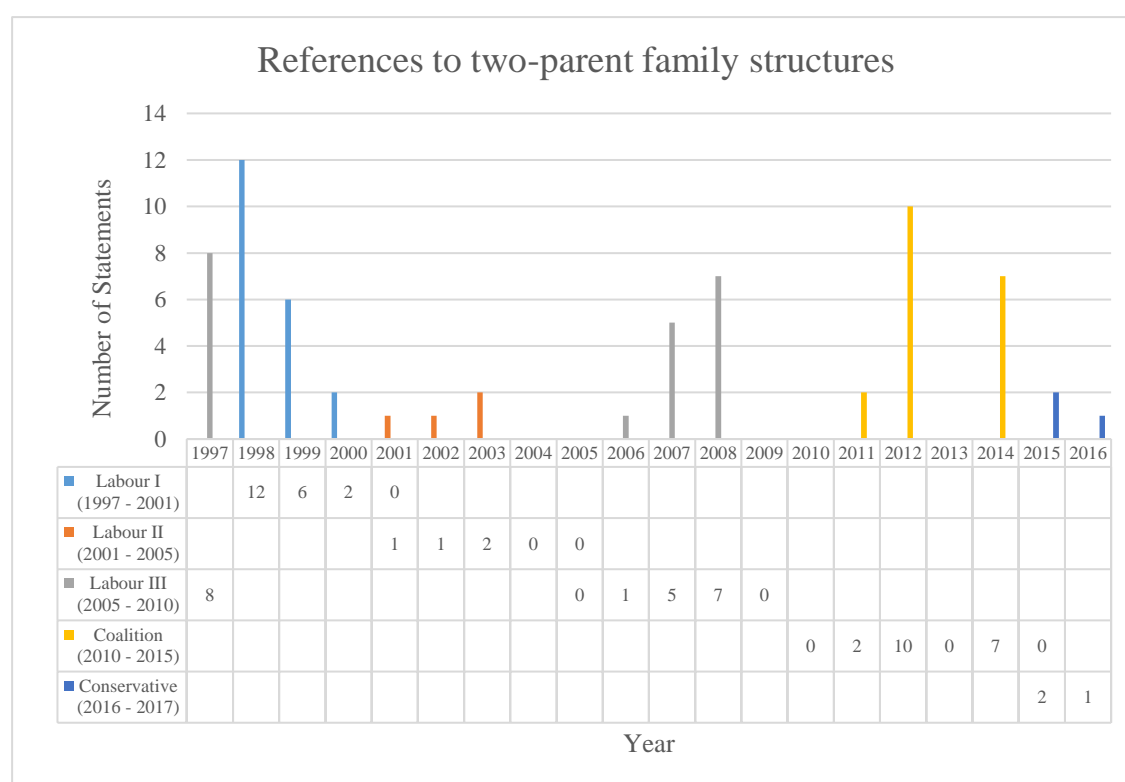
An interesting distinction in the use of language by different governments was their utilization of the phrase's "fairness" and "equality" with working families when discussing welfare reforms that were going to affect the incomes of non-working lone parents. Specifically, the narrative of promoting fairness between married nuclear families and unmarried non-working households became especially prominent as a justification for welfare reforms after the financial crisis. In the 1997 – 2001 period, the equivalent fairness narrative was coupled in statements with narratives behind promoting equality within the welfare state. Although this reflects the ideological differences of the respective political parties in terms of their use of discourse, the growth in the use of fairness narratives during the 2010 – 2015 era of welfare



reform is significant. Narratives that contrast the normal two-parent employed family with the deviant single mothers reflects a broader conservative social agenda that frames lone parents as a social threat, indicating the use of the Social Threat discourse discussed in the literature review continued to hold some importance within ministerial statements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 5.4 Household Outcomes and Family Structures

### 5.4.1 Family Structures

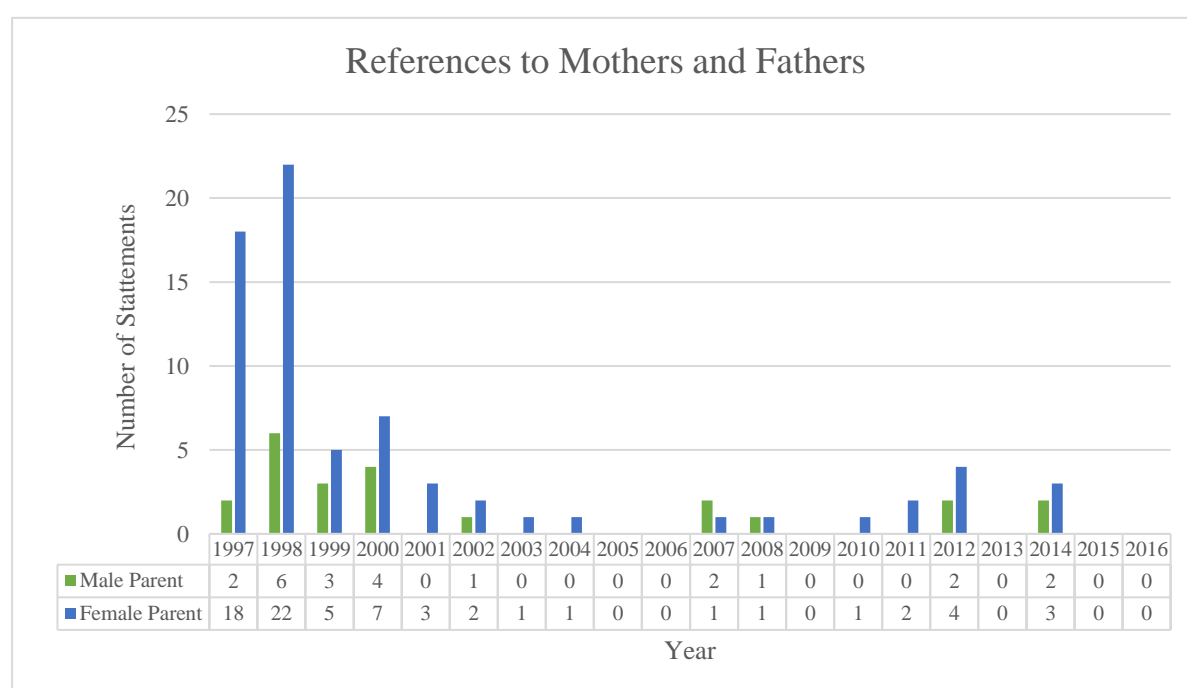


*Figure 14 - References to two-parent family structures*

Comparisons with working married couples played an important component of lone parent employment discourse. References to married, two-parent households, and couples, were present in most years of research. While their frequency is equal in absolute terms, it should be noted that their share of statements annually was higher after 2010. In particular, the peak in

comparisons with nuclear two-parent households in 2012 was primarily the result of the many debates surrounding the 2012 Welfare Bill, whose effects on lone parent incomes was disproportionate. Nevertheless, the results of this section suggest that the binary between unemployed lone parent households and two-parent working households was not tied to a specific political party, and therefore represents a common theme in British policymaking discourse.

## 5.4.2 (Lack Of) Gendered Discourses

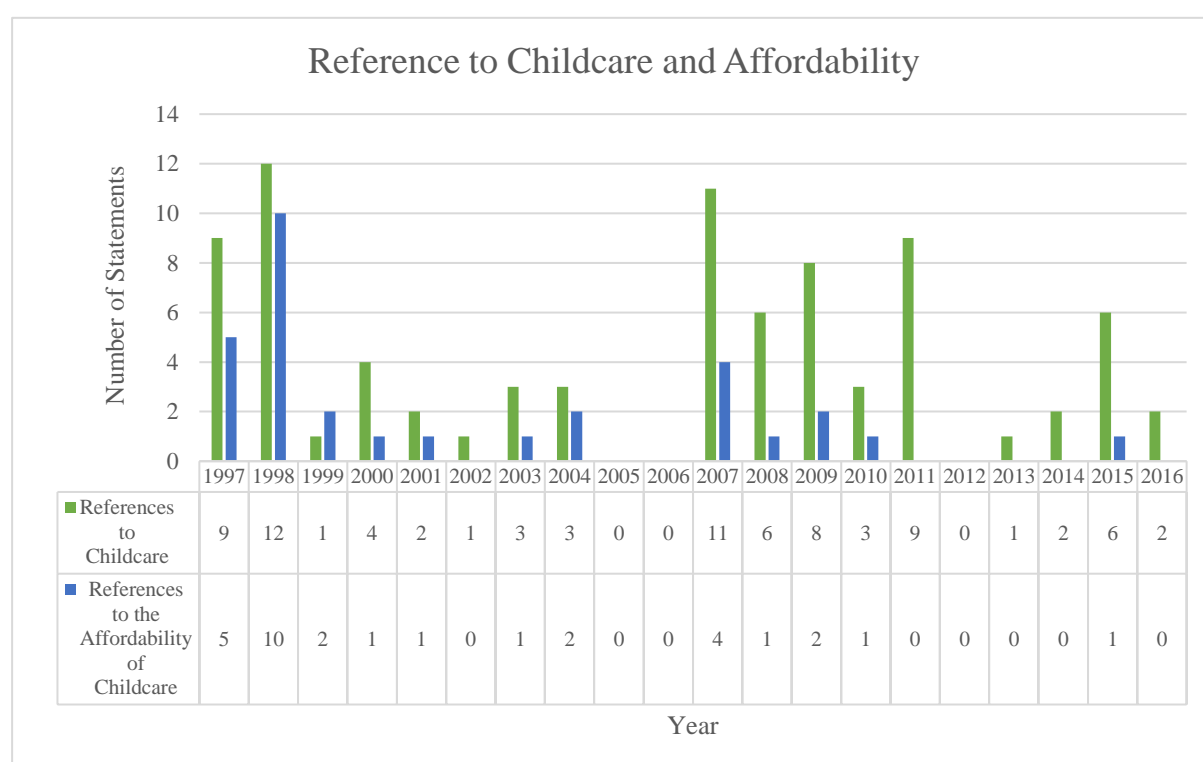


*Figure 15 - References to Mothers and Fathers*

A highly unanticipated result was the general lack of gendered language within ministerial statements. From the literature review, we anticipated that the Coalition and Conservative governments would place a bigger onus on the role of fathers in family structures. Yet, as reflected by Figure 15, gendered terminology was seldomly used after 2000. Although most lone parents are female, we also expected the term “mother” or “mum” to be seldomly

used during the 1997 – 2001 administration. Instead, the large use of the phrase mothers between 1997 and 2001 was mostly used in statements interchangeably with the phrase lone parents. As a policy issue, it is evident from this research that Ministers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century were less willing to use gendered language within their parliamentary statements. However, as was discussed in the previous section, the lack of gendered terms did not mean that statements at this time did not contain a broader social narrative regarding idealized nuclear family structures.

### 5.4.3 Childcare



*Figure 16 - References to Childcare and Affordability*

References to childcare persisted throughout the research period, and similarly to activation policies, were one of the few categories that was consistently mentioned by all political parties. Even in years where very few statements on lone parents were made in the British Parliament, the role of childcare and educational institutions was nevertheless

continuously found in ministerial statements on the topic. However, the issue of affordability of childcare did not persist during the research period. Except for one statement in 2015, the affordability of childcare was never mentioned in reference to lone parents after 2010, once again reflecting a transition in the narrative surrounding lone parent labour market activation after the financial crisis. Specifically, it appears that the issue of childcare affordability was decoupled with the role of childcare in labour market activation within ministerial discourse after 2010. When combined with the rise in the use of obligation phrasing in statements in Figure 9, these results equally indicate how the narrative of creating opportunities and reducing barriers to employment was replaced by a more coercive narrative of activation and re-commodification.

## **6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

In this section, we will examine how the discourses identified by this research between 1997 and 2016 have formed the basis of popular understanding of this controversial policy issue. As we have witnessed the emergence of a shared paradigm in how this issue is framed in ministerial statements by competing political parties, we will now discuss what the implications of these results are.

### **6.1 Lone Parents and Employment Outcomes – A Consistent**

#### **Priority**

Primarily, this research has demonstrated that the social issue of lone parenthood, and the economic question of lone parent employment, were constantly tied together by Ministers in their statements in Parliament. Returning to our theoretical framework, this result has several implications. First, by responding to Dermott and Pomati's (2015, pp.4) question, we have found that lone parents are particularly targeted in ministerial statements that refer to both their employment status and to government activation policies. Second, the results above provide evidence that the market-liberal Social Problem Discourse continued to hold importance in how Ministers framed the issue in Parliament. With employment outcomes being a category from the coding manual that was particularly visible in the results of our content analysis, it is clear that the Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments each promoted a common ideal of lone mothers as employed breadwinners instead of workless homemakers. Notably, the increase in references to labour market activation policies and institutions after the financial crisis, namely, Jobcentres and Career Advisors, reflects how the financial crisis changed the expectations of policymakers towards lone parents in terms of their employment outcomes.

This conclusion was also reflected in the increase in statements that referred to lone parent employment obligations between 2007 and 2012.

## **6.2 Social Threat or Social Problem?**

Despite this economic imperative being clear in their statements, a resurgence of the socially conservative agenda Social Threat Discourse was not conclusively identified by the results of our research. For instance, a surprising result from our research showed that the use of gendered language was far less visible than anticipated. The issue of absent fathers was seldomly referred to in statements, showing that the welfare reform agenda to reduce family breakdown did not hold importance in ministerial statements on the issue. Nevertheless, the use of rhetoric that promoted “equality” and “fairness” in the design of welfare and unemployment policies concerning two-parent households was visible throughout the research period. This suggests that the Social Threat Discourse was visible during the research period, but in more subtle terms than originally conceived by our theoretical framework. The presence of the Social Threat Discourse was also identified by the regular references to the value of two-parent households in terms of social stability and poverty outcomes. Nevertheless, outside of these categories in the content analysis, the presence of Social Threat Discourse was far lower than anticipated. Specifically, the expected resurgence of the Social Threat Discourse after the financial crisis did not take place. Instead, as a departure from the traditional social conservatism that preceded it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of labour market participation and self-sufficiency of lone parents was promoted while the value of domestic care and parenting duties was discounted. With the election of the Coalition Government, we had mistakenly anticipated recording more measurable differences in the type of discourse deployed by Ministers.

Turning to the market-liberal Social Problem Discourse, here we reached more tangible results from our content analysis, both in terms of the visibility of these categories and their variation in use. Phrases that stated that employment was the best pathway out of lone parent poverty persisted throughout the research timeframe. This echoes the material covered in the literature review that British welfare policy sought to re-commodify the labour of lone parents, both in terms of actual policy initiatives as well as within political discourse. Notably, the Social Problem Discourse of enablement, by, for example, increasing the affordability of childcare, was particularly central to New Labour's NDLP. From 1997, narratives of "opportunity" and "reducing barriers to employment" began to dominate policy discourse regarding lone parents. Behind this activation narrative was the notion that being an unemployed lone parent was the result of both individual behaviour and structural conditions. Nevertheless, through their use of discourse, Ministers increasingly questioned the welfare deservingness of groups that were deemed to be deviant or socially problematic for not participating in the labour market.

However, the Social Problem discourse on the issue of lone parents was not homogenous. In terms of social exclusion, Labour continued to emphasise participation labour market as a cure to the social exclusion faced by lone parents. As a result, the language of enablement persisted after the Financial Crisis until the 2010 election, as it justified greater government intrusion within the lives of lone parent households via welfare conditionality. Withstanding the language of support and empowerment, New Labour's policy agenda for lone parents was "unapologetically interventionist" (Gillies, 2005, pp.14). Overall, the rise of the Social Problem Discourse between 1997 to 2001 reflected a clear transition in terms of the expected duties of lone parents, away from parenting duties towards market-oriented labour market performance. After 2008, the figure of the "good" lone parent who was employed and financially independent from the state was contrasted with the "bad" lone parent, who was

dependent on welfare and whose worklessness was the cause of poverty within lone parent households.

## 6.3 Implications

The results produced by the content analysis confirmed that lone parent employment has been more presented in more market-liberal terms than in socially conservative discourse terms from 1997 to 2016. First, as reflected by the persistence of the Social Problem Discourse, we confirmed that the general issue of lone parenthood was continuously associated with employment outcomes and activation policies, despite the economic and demographic trends moving in the opposite direction. Second, we found that the ministerial discourse surrounding the topic had transitioned away from a language of opportunity and enablement towards a narrative of coercion and obligation. This reflects a transition away from a framing of lone parents as home keepers towards a working-parent social model. Third, the surprising amount of shared discourse on the topic between rival political parties indicates that a market-liberal consensus around this social issue became entrenched during this period. Overall, between 1997 and 2016, employment continued to be presented as a panacea to the social and economic challenges faced by lone-parent families by all political parties in question.

Nevertheless, the persistence of narratives that contrast the normal two-parent employed family with the deviant unemployed single mother demonstrates how the ghost of social conservatism nevertheless continues to hold importance within policy debates on lone parenthood. For instance, between 2010 and 2015, statements that argued that the welfare state was unfair towards two-parent households due to its generosity towards lone parents re-emerged. Although it is clear that this socially conservative approach to lone parents is experiencing a slow decline, its partial resurgence after the financial crisis is noteworthy.



Consequently, it is our view that the aforementioned Social Threat Discourse has been reformulated during the research period, and is now appearing in more discrete terms than it was in the 20th century.

Successive welfare reforms have each sought to increase lone parent employment rates by creating sufficient financial incentives and social support. Yet, despite the variation in the use of rhetoric surrounding the issue of lone parent employment, what both the Social Problem and Social Threat discourses share is a perspective that autonomous employed citizens should be contrasted with deviant, welfare-dependent and unemployed lone parents. In this sense, the Social Problem Discourse adopted by New Labour, Coalition, and Conservative Governments was a reformulation of the Social Threat Discourse that preceded it. Overall, by omitting references to the more stigmatizing and socially conservative critiques towards lone parents, the Social Problem discourse represents a more socially acceptable means of achieving similar goals regarding employment outcomes and family structures.

## 7. LIMITATIONS

The methodology adopted in this research was suitable to reach conclusions on how the issue of lone parenthood, and lone-parent labour market activation, was presented by Ministers in Parliament differently between 1997 and 2016. Nevertheless, three specific limitations were identified upon the completion of the paper that should be taken into consideration when designing future research in this field.

First, the small size of statements collected after 2010 and during the mid-2000s significantly limited the extent to which robust conclusions could be drawn on changing discourse practices between 1997 and 2016. The drop in the number of statements between 2002 and 2007 created challenges in interpreting the results of this research, as it made it difficult to justify the presence of linear changes to narratives in years where very few statements took place. Therefore, future studies should consider including ministerial statements that occurred outside of Parliament. Such statements may be able to provide a more nuanced perspective on how Ministers sought to frame the issue in other public settings. For instance, the narrative component of the results section would have benefited from identifying whether motifs of fairness with working families and two-parent households occurred more often in different contexts. By collecting statements from different settings, we could have determined the extent to which Ministers were at greater liberty to make more politically charged statements in more informal contexts whereby they are not bound by parliamentary etiquette. Alternatively, recording statements by Shadow Ministers could have equally produced a more concrete understanding of how opposition actors contested the issue in Parliament over time.

Second, the theoretical framework adopted in this research was more suited to research that studied 20<sup>th</sup>-century discourse on the topic. The significant amount of alignment in statements by different political parties was not anticipated when designing this research, as we had anticipated to identify more measurable shifts in the use of discourse during the research timeframe. Unlike our research, we would encourage future studies to use a more up-to-date theoretical framework that had been developed after the research timeframe.

Third, in hindsight, the methodology used in this research, and the measurement categories developed by the coding manual, were both vulnerable to producing noisy data. Noisy data is defined as data in which is distorted by signals that are unrelated to the subject of measurement. For example, when seeking to measure references to activation policies, the regular references to “New Deal for Lone Parents” resulted in a lot of data being collected in 1997 and 1998 in the sample. The noisiness of the data was increased by the relatively small number of statements identified on the topic between 2002 and 2006, something that was not anticipated before the data collection was completed. Nevertheless, recognizing this in advance meant that measures were adopted to mitigate to reduce the risk of drawing inaccurate conclusions in the results and discussion sections of this paper.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Between 1997 and 2015, we have witnessed the emergence of a new paradigm in how the issue of lone motherhood is framed by policymakers in the UK. Instead of a threat to social stability, the political discourse examined in this research demonstrates how the rise of lone parent households has become framed as a threat to economic stability that necessitated intrusive policy responses. Accordingly, political rhetoric began to articulate a new discourse that reappropriated and redefined lone parents as ideal targets for labour market activation policies in the UK. In this sense, lone parent labour market activation was presented as a panacea to the social and economic hardship faced by lone-parent families by all political parties. As part of the neoliberal trend of the era, a rationale of self-improvement and coercive labour market activation became the focus of ministerial statements using the Social Problem Discourse.

In conclusion, the past two decades of political discourse on the topic of lone parents have facilitated greater government intervention in shaping and controlling the practices of parents, particularly in terms of their labour market participation. Instead of addressing the social and material circumstances of lone parents, this discourse seeks to frame employment as the only means to breaking cycles of deprivation, social exclusion, and family breakdown. What the New Labour rhetoric of the late 1990s and the Coalition government reforms of the 2010s had in common was that paid work was praised and alleged welfare dependence was condemned. What differentiated the two discourses identified by this research were how New Labour's discourse promoted a discourse of enablement and opportunity, while the Coalition and Conservative Governments promoted a narrative of employment obligation and fairness with married couples.

As a final point, both of the discourses measured by this research represent a departure from the 20<sup>th</sup> century state-centric notion that welfare and other labour market policies should be used to de-commodify the labour of lone parent households (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp. 50). Rather, within the context of the historic liberalisation of reproductive and marriage rights, there is little evidence that Ministers recognize that the rise of lone parenthood is the result of a demographic pattern in which individuals, namely women, now have greater autonomy on what sorts of relationships and family structures they engage in. Drawing from the work of sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995, pp.2), the stability of the nuclear family structures has been reduced thanks to the emancipation of women within households, whose “equal rights [...] no longer conveniently come to a halt outside our private lives”. As such, the rise of lone parent households does not mark the end of the society of two-parent households. Rather, this transition, away from the nuclear family towards the negotiated family, is itself the result of the breakdown of an antiquated model of traditional gendered divisions of labour that are no longer suited to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economy. Therefore, the emergence of lone parent households should be viewed as a global social phenomenon in developed countries that should be embraced and not feared by policymakers.

## 9. APPENDIXES

### Appendix 1: Coding Manual

Code Number	Category	Content	Information on Coding Category
<b>Basic Information</b>			
1	Unique Identifier	Example: <i>NLI-17</i>	Randomly Generated during coding exercise
2	Name of Minister	String Text	Full name
3	Date of Debate	DD/MM/YYYY	
4	Government in Office	Labour I, Labour II, Labour II, Coalition I, Conservative I	Automatically generated based on date of debate
<b>Primary Data</b>			
5	Ministerial Statement Text	String Text	Ministerial Statement copied in full from Hansard's online record of Parliamentary Debates
<b>Content Analysis Categories</b>			
6	References to Employment Outcomes (General)	Yes & No	Use of key terms: " <i>employment</i> ", " <i>employed</i> ", " <i>unemployed</i> ", " <i>unemployed</i> ", " <i>in work</i> ", " <i>out of work</i> ", " <i>in a job</i> " " <i>out of a job</i> "
7	References to Employment Performance	Yes & No	Use of only key terms: " <i>employment</i> ", " <i>employed</i> ", " " <i>in work</i> ", " <i>in a job</i> "
8	References to Unemployment Outcomes	Yes & No	Use of key terms: " <i>unemployed</i> ", " <i>unemployed</i> ", " <i>out of work</i> ", " <i>out of a job</i> "
9	References to Activation Policies: Universal Credit	Yes & No	Reference to policy in name
10	References to Activation Policies: Job Seekers Allowance	Yes & No	
11	References to Activation Policies: Working Family Tax Credit	Yes & No	

12	References to Activation Policies: Child Tax Credit	Yes & No	
13	References to Activation Policies: New Deal for Lone Parents	Yes & No	
14	References to Institutions: Job Centres	Yes & No	Use of key term: <i>"Jobcentre" or "Job Centre"</i>
15	References to Institutions: Personal Advisors	Yes & No	Use of key terms: <i>"personal advisor", "career councillor", "work councillor", "career advisor"</i>
16	Reference to Obligations	Yes & No	Reference to lone parent obligations: <i>"minimum working hours to receive tax credits", "working shifts to receive tax credits"</i> . Also recorded in statements on whether lone parents should be required to work night shifts, and challenges in fitting employment obligations with childcare duties
17	Reference to Incapacity to Work	Yes & No	Use of key terms: <i>"disability", "disabled", "injured", "incapacity"</i> , but <b>not</b> incapacity benefit, disability allowance specifically
18	Referenced to Enablement	Yes & No	
19	Reference to Opportunity to Work	Yes & No	Use of key phrases: <i>"opportunity to work", "chance to work", "opportunity to enter into paid work", "chance to enter into paid work", "opportunity to participate fully in society"</i> , or similar phrases
20	References to Transitioning Off Benefits	Yes & No	Use of key phrases: <i>"better off off benefits", "transition off benefits", "move off benefits", "transition off benefits", "move into work"</i> , or similar phrases
21	Comparison with two-parent households: fairness	Yes & No	Use of key phrases: <i>"fairness with married couples", "fairness with two-parent households"</i> , and similar
22	Comparison with two-parent households: equality	Yes & No	Use of key phrases: <i>"equality with married couples", "equality with two-parent households"</i> , and similar

23	References to two-parent family structures	Yes & No	Use of key terms: " <i>married couple</i> ", " <i>marriage</i> ", " <i>two-parent households</i> ", " <i>cohabiting</i> ", " <i>married households</i> " and similar
24	Reference to Gender: Mothers	Yes & No	Use of key terms: " <i>mothers</i> " and " <i>mums</i> "
25	Reference to Gender: Fathers	Yes & No	Use of key terms: " <i>fathers</i> " and " <i>dads</i> "
26	Reference to Childcare	Yes & No	Use of key terms " <i>school(s)</i> ", " <i>childcare</i> ", " <i>nursery</i> " and <i>similar</i>
27	Reference to Childcare Affordability	Yes & No	Use of key terms " <i>school(s)</i> ", " <i>childcare</i> ", " <i>nursery</i> " <b>paired</b> with statement on either cost or affordability



Appendix 2: List of debates where Lone Parents were referred to by Ministers:

<b>Debate Number</b>	<b>Date of Ministerial Statement</b>	<b>Debate in House of Commons</b>	<b>Number of Statements Recorded</b>
1	17 November 1997	Lone Parents*	4
2	25 November 1997	Pre-Budget Statement	4
3	26 November 1997	Engagements	1
4	27 November 1997	Economic And Monetary Union	1
5	01 December 1997	Welfare, Pensions And Disabled People	12
6	02 December 1997	Social Security Up-rating	1
7	03 December 1997	Engagements	1
8	10 December 1997	Child Benefit For Lone Parents*	14
9	10 December 1997	Engagements	9
10	14 January 1998	Engagements	1
11	11 February 1998	Engagements	2
12	18 February 1998	Engagements	1
13	18 February 1998	Social Security	1
14	23 February 1998	Lone Parents*	5
15	27 February 1998	Women (Government Priorities)	6
16	11 March 1998	Engagements	1
17	19 March 1998	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	6
18	23 March 1998	Lone Parents*	3
19	23 March 1998	Single Gateway	1
20	25 March 1998	Engagements	2
21	26 March 1998	Child Care	1
22	26 March 1998	New Deal (Training)	1
23	27 April 1998	Good Parenting	2
24	13 May 1998	Power To Reduce Child Benefit For Lone Parents*	1
25	25 May 1998	Social Welfare	1
26	08 June 1998	Income Support (Lone Parents)*	5
27	06 July 1998	Lone Parents*	6
28	07 July 1998	Social Security Regulations (Lone Parents)*	2
29	13 July 1998	Department Of Social Security	5
30	17 July 1998	Pensions	4
31	28 October 1998	Welfare Reform	4
32	16 November 1998	Lone Parents*	5
33	25 November 1998	Trade, Industry, Education And Employment	2
34	10 December 1998	New Deal	2
35	11 January 1999	Lone Parents*	2
36	26 January 1999	Tax Credits Bill	1

37	08 February 1999	Lone Parents*	4
38	23 February 1999	Welfare Reform And Pensions Bill	6
39	08 March 1999	Child Support Agency	1
40	08 March 1999	New Deal (Lone Parents)*	7
41	15 March 1999	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	1
42	17 March 1999	Payment Of Tax Credit By Employers Etc	1
43	17 March 1999	Repeals	1
44	23 April 1999	Lone Parents (Benefits)*	1
45	22 June 1999	Payment Of Tax Credit By Employers Etc	4
46	01 July 1999	Child Support Reform	1
47	05 November 1999	Family Friendly Employment Policies	2
48	09 November 1999	Pre-Budget Statement	2
49	11 November 1999	Working Families Tax Credit	1
50	11 January 2000	Child Support, Pensions And Social Security Bill	1
51	07 February 2000	Lone Parents (Education)*	2
52	07 February 2000	New Deal (Lone Parents)*	2
53	09 March 2000	Work-Life Balance	1
54	21 March 2000	Budget Statement	1
55	27 March 2000	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	5
56	03 April 2000	Lone Parents*	2
57	15 May 2000	New Deal (Lone Parents)*	2
58	08 June 2000	Pensions	1
59	19 June 2000	Child Care	1
60	19 June 2000	Lone Parents*	4
61	19 June 2000	Pensioners	1
62	17 July 2000	Lone Parents*	6
63	31 October 2000	Exclusion From Benefits	2
64	08 November 2000	Pre-Budget Statement	1
65	07 December 2000	Health And Social Security	1
66	18 December 2000	Social Fund (Administration)	1
67	24 January 2001	Engagements	1
68	01 March 2001	Full Employment	1
69	07 March 2001	Budget Statement	1
70	15 March 2001	New Deal	1
71	22 March 2001	Poverty (Scotland)	1
72	25 June 2001	Long-Term Unemployment	1
73	25 June 2001	The Economy, Trade And Industry	2
74	05 July 2001	Department For Work And Pensions	1
75	25 October 2001	Social Security	1
76	12 November 2001	Lone Parents (Employment Targets)*	2

77	12 November 2001	New Deal (Lone Parents)*	2
78	12 November 2001	Welfare To Work (Mothers)	2
79	10 December 2001	Lone Parents (North-East)*	3
80	10 December 2001	Tax Credits Bill	1
81	01 February 2002	Long-Term Unemployment (Glasgow)	1
82	05 February 2002	Social Exclusion	1
83	25 February 2002	Social Security	1
84	04 March 2002	Equal Opportunities	1
85	21 March 2002	Mothers	1
86	17 April 2002	Budget Statement	1
87	18 April 2002	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	1
88	15 July 2002	Spending Review	1
89	24 October 2002	Un Convention On The Rights Of The Child	1
90	27 November 2002	Pre-Budget Report	1
91	10 March 2003	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	1
92	17 March 2003	Employment	1
93	09 April 2003	Budget Statement	1
94	11 April 2003	Parenting	1
95	14 April 2003	Employment	1
96	03 June 2003	Early Years Learning (South Somerset)	1
97	18 September 2003	Employment Opportunities	1
98	28 October 2003	Pension Provisions (Younger Women)	1
99	09 December 2003	Child Care For Working Parents	2
100	10 December 2003	Engagements	1
101	10 December 2003	Pre-Budget Report	1
102	09 February 2004	New Deal	3
103	09 February 2004	Return To Work	1
104	24 February 2004	Social Security And Pensions	1
105	17 March 2004	Introduction	1
106	23 March 2004	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	1
107	17 June 2004	Gershon Review	1
108	22 July 2004	Child Poverty	2
109	07 June 2006	Tax Credits	1
110	19 February 2007	Social Security	1
111	06 March 2007	Child Poverty	1
112	12 March 2007	Lone Parents (Employment)*	3
113	15 March 2007	Tax Credits	1
114	21 March 2007	Financial Statement	1
115	23 April 2007	Work-focused Interviews	3
116	01 May 2007	Lone Parents (Employment Opportunities)*	1

117	17 May 2007	Child Poverty	1
118	17 May 2007	Government Employment Strategy	2
119	11 July 2007	Social Policy and the Relief of Poverty	1
120	18 July 2007	Engagements	1
121	18 July 2007	Full Employment	9
122	09 October 2007	Pre-Budget Report	1
123	17 October 2007	Worklessness (West Ham)	1
124	14 November 2007	The Economy and Pensions	1
125	19 November 2007	Foreign Workers	1
126	19 November 2007	Topical Questions	1
127	26 November 2007	Welfare and Skills	5
128	28 November 2007	Welfare Reform	2
129	05 December 2007	Benefit Simplification	3
130	07 January 2008	Child Poverty	2
131	07 January 2008	Lone Parents*	2
132	18 February 2008	Lone Mothers (Work Assistance)	4
133	21 February 2008	Social Security	3
134	13 March 2008	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	1
135	01 May 2008	Child Poverty in Scotland	1
136	06 May 2008	Welfare to Work (City Strategies)	2
137	02 June 2008	Topical Questions	1
138	19 June 2008	Deprivation/Child Poverty	4
139	07 July 2008	Child Poverty	1
140	07 October 2008	Unemployment in the UK	1
141	05 November 2008	Work and Welfare	4
142	24 November 2008	Lone Parents*	2
143	10 December 2008	Welfare Reform	5
144	11 December 2008	Benefits Uprating	1
145	15 December 2008	Economy, Pensions and Welfare	1
146	05 March 2009	Support for Women (Economic Downturn)	2
147	17 March 2009	Welfare Reform Bill	1
148	02 June 2009	Family Benefits (Absent Teenage Fathers)	1
149	29 June 2009	Employment Programmes	1
150	20 July 2009	Child Poverty Bill	1
151	19 October 2009	Economic Recovery and Welfare	1
152	19 October 2009	Topical Questions	1
153	27 October 2009	Family Finances	1
154	10 November 2009	Welfare Reform Bill	7
155	25 November 2009	Home Office - Work and Pensions	1
156	15 December 2009	Benefit Reform	1
157	10 June 2010	Tackling Poverty in the UK	1
158	22 June 2010	Financial Statement	1

159	28 June 2010	Capital Gains Tax (Rates)	1
160	14 September 2010	Low-income Households	1
161	22 November 2010	Benefits Regime (Gender Impact Assessments)	1
162	22 November 2010	Housing Benefit	1
163	22 November 2010	Universal Credit	1
164	14 February 2011	Universal Credit	2
165	09 March 2011	Welfare Reform Bill	2
166	28 March 2011	Universal Credit	1
167	11 May 2011	Back to Work Agenda	2
168	11 May 2011	Women Offender One-stop Shops	1
169	13 June 2011	Topical Questions	1
170	13 June 2011	Welfare Reform Bill	8
171	18 July 2011	Topical Questions	1
172	24 October 2011	Child Care Costs	1
173	28 November 2011	Topical Questions	1
174	30 November 2011	Working Tax Credits	2
175	14 December 2011	Unemployment	1
176	18 January 2012	Female Employment (Scotland)	4
177	01 February 2012	Welfare Reform Bill	2
178	05 March 2012	Living Standards	5
179	06 March 2012	Working Tax Credit	2
180	24 April 2012	Working Tax Credit	1
181	26 June 2012	Topical Questions	1
182	11 September 2012	Child Poverty	1
183	11 September 2012	Universal Credit and Welfare Reform	4
184	18 October 2012	Universal Credit	2
185	05 November 2012	Topical Questions	1
186	18 December 2012	Welfare Reform (Disabled People and Carers)	1
187	08 January 2013	Universal Credit	1
188	09 January 2013	Transforming Rehabilitation	1
189	28 January 2013	Business Start-ups (Government Support)	1
190	20 May 2013	Employment	1
191	26 June 2013	Spending Review	1
192	01 July 2013	Work Programme	1
193	18 November 2013	Benefit Cap (Employment Outcomes)	1
194	18 November 2013	Universal Credit (Lone Parents)*	3
195	05 December 2013	Autumn Statement	1
196	14 January 2014	Strengthening Couple Relationships	2
197	05 February 2014	Job Insecurity	1
198	06 March 2014	Women's Contribution to the Economy	1
199	19 March 2014	Budget Resolutions And Economic Situation	1

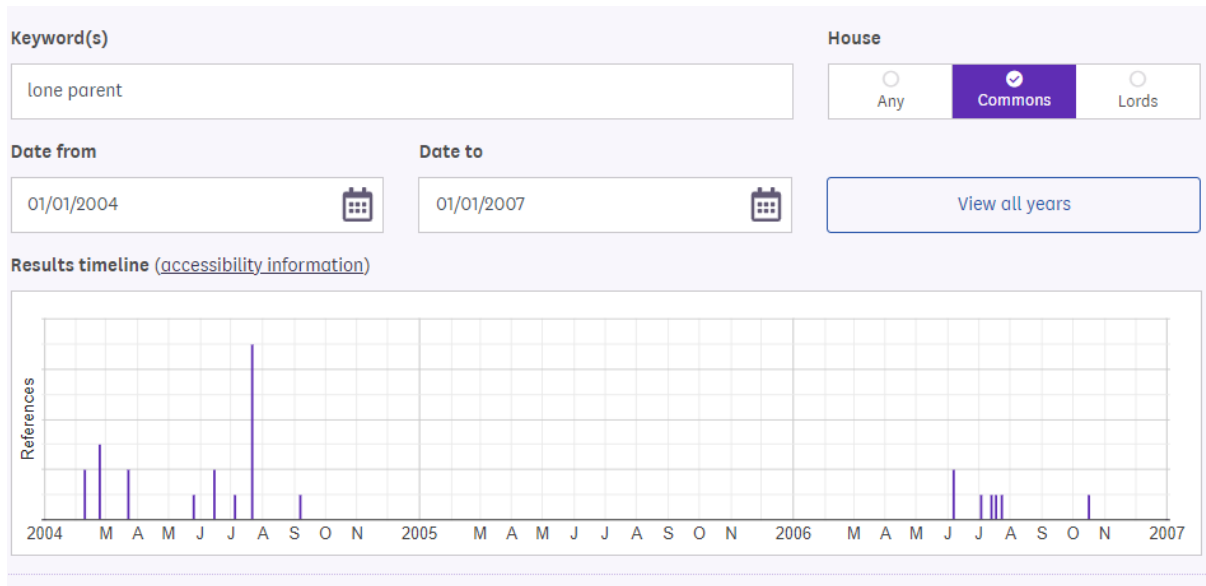
200	31 March 2014	Universal Credit	1
201	11 June 2014	Jobs and Work	1
202	14 July 2014	Childcare Payments Bill	2
203	29 October 2014	Engagements	1
204	25 November 2014	Universal Credit	1
205	08 December 2014	Self-Employment	2
206	04 February 2015	UK Poverty	1
207	11 February 2015	Compulsory Jobs Guarantee	1
208	23 March 2015	Amendment of the Law	1
209	30 June 2015	Scotland Bill	1
210	08 July 2015	Financial Statement	1
211	17 September 2015	Welfare Reform and Work Bill (Sixth sitting)	1
212	13 October 2015	Welfare Reform and Work Bill (Eighth sitting)	2
213	20 October 2015	Welfare Reform and Work Bill (Eleventh sitting)	1
214	19 November 2015	Universal Credit (Work Allowance) Amendment Regulations 2015	1
215	07 December 2015	Topical Questions	1
216	09 December 2015	Women and the Economy	1
217	06 January 2016	Universal Credit Work Allowance	1
218	14 March 2016	Welfare Reform	1
219	11 July 2016	Disadvantaged Families and Children: Life Chances	1
<b>Sum Total</b>			<b>425</b>

*\* The exploratory analysis was developed on statements from debates that have an asterisk.*

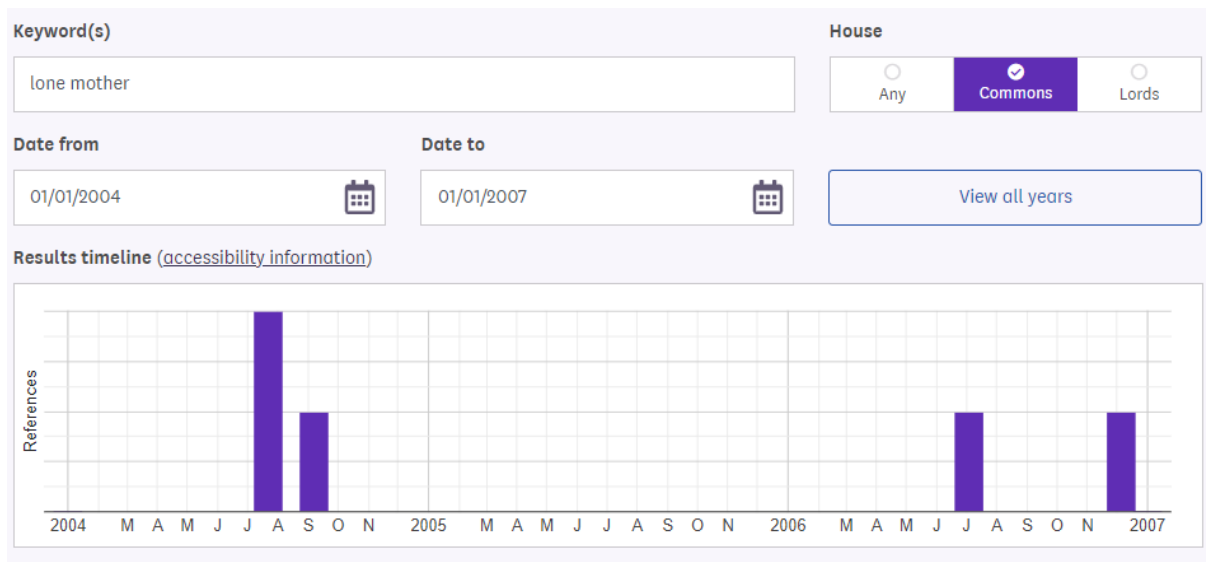
## Appendix 4: Hansard Extracts, 2004 – 2007:

Screenshots confirming that no statements were made on lone parents by Ministers between 2004 – 2006. Extracts available at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/search>

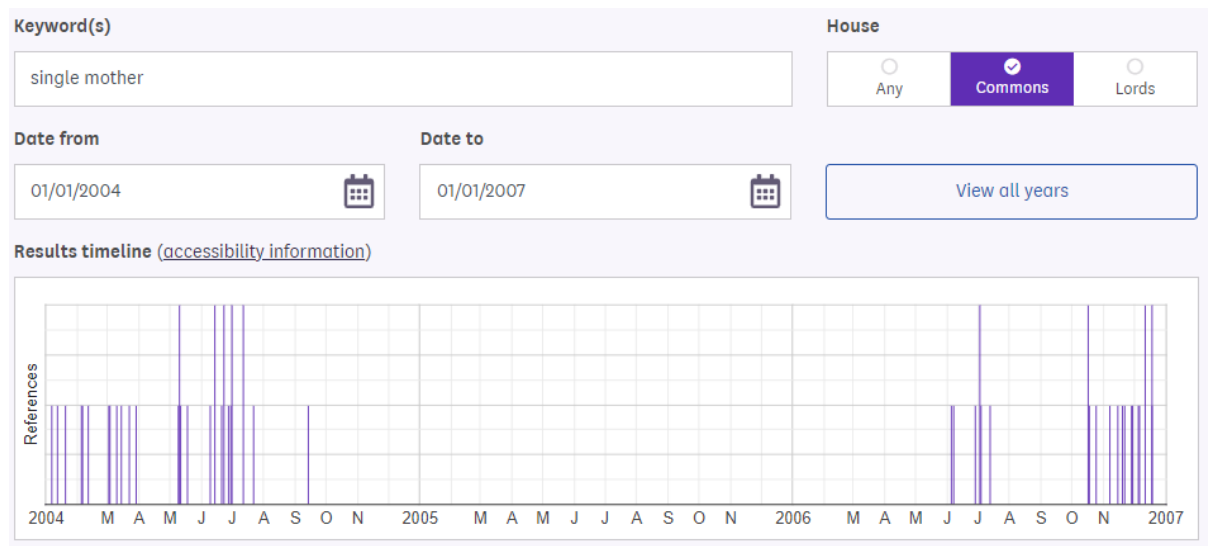
### Search for “lone parent”, 2004 - 2007



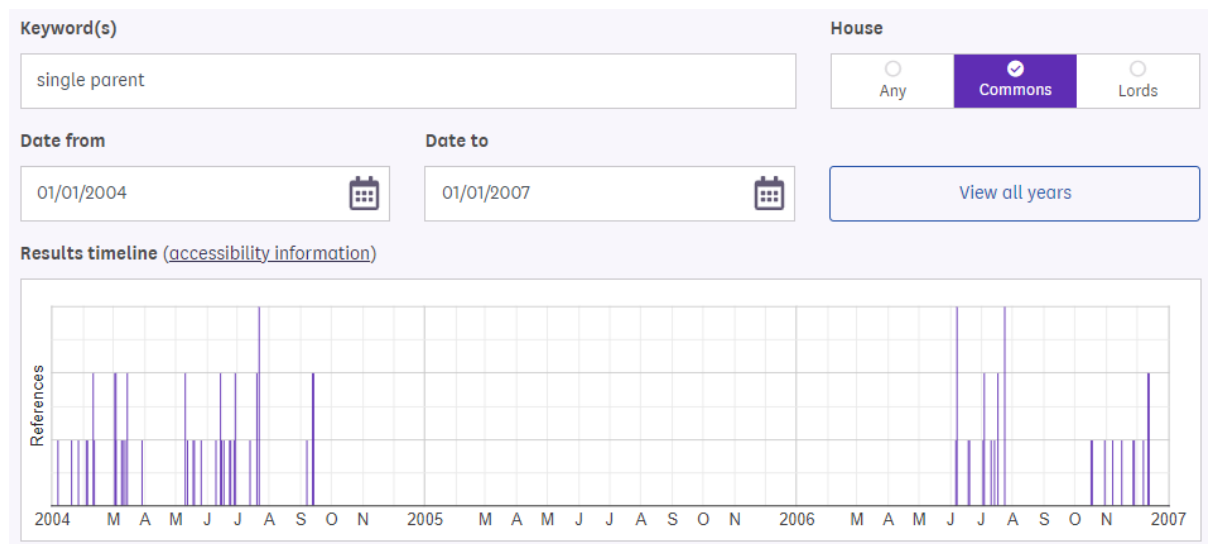
### Search for “lone mother”, 2004 - 2007



### Search for “single mother”, 2004 - 2007



### Search for “single parent”, 2004 - 2007





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