

Profile of Single Mother Families, 8 July 2026



How many single parent families with children are there in Australia today?

In June 2025 there were three quarters of a million single parent families with dependent children aged 0–24 years. ([ABS Labour Force Status of Families, June 2025](#)).

How many of them are headed by mothers?

In 2025, 4 in 5 (79%) of single parent families with children and dependents were headed by single mothers. ([ABS Labour Force Status of Families, June 2025](#)). Single mothers make up more than 1 in 5 of all Australian mothers with dependent children aged 0-24 years. ([ABS Labour Force Status of Families, June 2025](#)).

More than 9 in 10 (94%) of the poorest single parents (those relying on Parenting Payment Single) are mothers. ([DSS Demographics](#), December 2025).

How many children live in single parent families?

There were more than 1.3 million dependent children aged 0-24 living in single parent families in June 2025. The majority of these were children aged under 15 years – 926,000 or 72%. There were more than 350,00 who were dependent students aged 15-24 years. ([ABS Labour Force Status of Families, June 2025](#)). More than 630,000 children live in single parent families receiving Parenting Payment Single ([DSS Demographics](#), December 2025, noting these children are aged under 14 due to eligibility for PPS).

How many single mothers participate in paid employment?

In 2025, 71% of single mothers with dependents were employed (compared with 81% of single fathers). ([ABS Labour Force Status of Families, June 2025](#)).

Nearly 2 in 5 (38%) of Parenting Payment Single recipients have earnings from employment. This is the highest percentage of any income recipient except for Austudy/Youth Allowance Student Apprentice. ([DSS Demographics](#), December 2025). Nearly 155,000 PPS recipients are subject to the activity test which commences when the youngest child turns 6 years. This is 46% of all PPS recipients. ([DSS Demographics](#), December 2025).

Do more women than men work in the paid care sector?

Women comprise more than 8 in 10 (85%) of the care and support workforce. ([2025-26 Women's Budget Statement](#) based on 2021 Census data).

Post separation, is parenting and care for children shared equally?

Around 1 million children are impacted by the child support scheme and mothers undertake most of the care of these children. Only 14% of care arrangements were defined as shared care, meaning between 35-65% of the year or 5 to 9 nights per fortnight ([Child Support Program Data](#), September 2025).

Which Australians are doing it toughest in terms of cost of living and poverty?

Single parent families face the *highest rates* of poverty, material deprivation and financial stress. They also have the highest rates of housing stress of all family types including single people and couple families (22% compared to 6.9% for couples with dependent children). ([2024 HILDA Report](#) and [Life for single-parent families in Australia is harsh](#)).

The rate of poverty for children in single parent households (37%) is more than three times that for children in couple family households (12%), where poverty is defined as living below 50% of median household income. ([Child Poverty in Australia, November 2025](#)). Total income support for single parents with 2 children is \$200 a week less than what is required to cover their basic costs of living. ([Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2026 Report](#)).

What are the consequences for children growing up in poverty

Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience ill-health during childhood and poorer health in adulthood. Educational attainment is also severely compromised. ([Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2026 Report](#)). Children from poor households are 3.3 times more likely to suffer adult poverty than those who grew up in households that were never poor. ([Breaking Down Barriers Report 1, Melbourne Institute, 2020](#))

What are some factors driving the extreme rates of housing stress experienced by single parent families?

Single parents are likely to be low-income renters, those who have experienced the largest increase in rents. Lower quartile rents increased by nearly 18% in 2021 and 2022 compared with just over 11% on average. ([Child poverty in Australia 2024](#)). Despite increases in Commonwealth Rent Assistance, the gap remains significant. In December 2025, a single parent with two children paid \$400 per week in rent and received \$108 in rent assistance – leaving a gap of around \$290 per week. (Figures are all median, [DSS Demographics](#) December 2025).

What proportion of single mothers rent?

In December 2025, 51% of single parents reliant on Parenting Payment Single were renting in the private market and the percentage who owned outright or were buying their own home had nearly halved from 21% in 2002 to 13% in 2025. ([FACS Annual Report 2001-02](#) and [DSS Demographics](#) December 2025). For couples who need to sell the family when separating, future home ownership is much less likely for women than men. Only 44% of women had purchased a family home within 10 years of separating compared with 55% of men. ([Analysis of HILDA data by Brendan Coates, The Grattan Institute](#)).

How much money did single parents lose when eligibility to parenting payment was cut from the youngest child being 14 to 8?

According to the [Parliamentary Budget Office](#), more than \$5 billion was taken from single parent families due to the loss of Parenting Payment Single when their youngest child turned 8 years old between 2006-7 and 2018-19 alone (not including changes to family payments). This figure will be much higher when calculated to September 2023 when the policy was improved. Individually women lost on average at least \$100 per week in payments plus more if they had earnings from paid employment due to the harsher income test of unemployment payments (2023 figures).

What was the impact of the Federal Government's change to eligibility for Parenting Payment Single in September 2023?

The increase in eligibility for Parenting Payment Single (PPS) from September 2023 has meant that an additional 110,000 families supporting ~630,000 children can now access higher levels of payment (226,635 in June 2023 to ~335,000 December 2025). While a significant improvement on JobSeeker Payment, this payment still leaves far too many single parent families and their children living in poverty. In 2019-20, [ACOSS/UNSW](#) found 72% of Parenting Payment Single recipients lived in poverty, the highest rate of all income support recipients, including those receiving JobSeeker payments. The payment is particularly important for many First Nations families who make up over 17% of PPS recipients.

How many single mothers are affected by family and domestic violence?

[The choice: violence or poverty](#) published by Dr Anne Summers in 2022 confirmed single mothers had experienced a very high prevalence of physical or sexual violence by a partner– 60% compared to 17% of women more broadly. Drawing from the 2016 Personal Safety Survey, she found 185,700 of the 311,000 single mother respondents to the 2016 survey had experienced this violence since the age of 15. In the financial year 2023-24, nearly 100,000 people received support from Centrelink social workers [due to domestic violence](#) - an indicator of the scale of the issue.

What is the most important financial support currently available for mothers' leaving violence.

Parenting Payment Single (~335,000 recipients) is the most important income support payment for women and children leaving violence. The payment is particularly important for many First Nations families who face higher rates of violence and make up over 17% of Parenting Payment Single recipients. Since the welcome increase in eligibility for Parenting Payment Single from children turning 8 to 14 years, the number of single JobSeeker recipients with children has reduced to ~26,000. ([DSS Demographics](#) December 2025).

The Centrelink Crisis Payment provides only one week of income support and is restricted to applicants who were *already receiving* a Centrelink payment. In 2023-24 only 30,000 income support recipients received this payment due to domestic and family violence. In the same year nearly 100,000 people received support from Centrelink social workers [due to domestic violence](#), indicating the inadequacy of the Crisis Payment. The Leaving Violence Program provides a one-off \$1,500 in cash and \$3,500 of in-kind support (goods and services or direct payments of bonds, school fees or other support to help establish a safe home) as well as safety planning, risk assessment and referrals to other essential services for up to 12 weeks.

What are the financial consequences of relationship breakdown for single mothers?

One estimate finds women who leave relationships experience around a 20% drop in household income but for single mothers who flee violence, the loss is 34%. Of the 185,700 single mothers who had previously experienced violence, 60% had struggled to pay for essentials in the 12 months before the 2016 survey. ([The choice: violence or poverty](#), Dr Anne Summers, 2022).

Contact Terese Edwards Terese@smfa.com.au, 0439211493 or Toni Wren Toni@smfa.com.au 0405 705 442.