

Respect, Reform and Recovery, Swinburne University's survey of 2,600 single parents published in August 2025. Key findings and recommendations

1. **The significant time spent on unpaid care**

The survey supports previous research that mothers provide the bulk of unpaid care work. This is especially the case for single mothers, and even more so for single mothers who have left a violent partner. The mothers reported spending 44% of each day on unpaid care. Six in 10 had sole care (100% of overnight care) of their children; a further 25% had between 65 and 99% and only 8% had shared care with the other parent.

As one woman said, we need "*More recognition of the incredibly hard job many women do in single parent families."*

2. **The competing pressures of mothering**

The emotional burden carried – alone – by single mothers is intensified in the context of poverty and exacerbated when the family faces additional stresses. Mothers felt that the Herculean workload they undertook to raise the next generation of healthy, happy and productive adults was not understood by society or appreciated by the government.

"*The stress is in every direction. Even once having ended the relationship. I'm not at threat of violence but am constantly behind financially; trying to meet all my children's needs alone; and I also need to keep myself going every day."*

3. **The long tail of violence which is unrecognised**

Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) of respondents had experienced intimate partner violence and nearly 1 in 5 (17%) were currently experiencing intimate partner violence. Current violence included emotional/ psychological abuse (37%) with around 1 in 3 experiencing financial abuse or coercive control. Women continued to endure unacceptable rates of physical harm (18%), sexual abuse (15%) and stalking (14%).

Mothers wanted the government to know that, in addition to managing their own recovery, they were supporting their children (who were also victim/survivors) to recover. The additional time, resources and energy are currently largely invisible to government policy and available family violence services.

"Fleeing DV can leave you financially crippled, and systems can make it worse. It takes over a decade to build back up from nothing. Parents who care for children deserve a living wage and superannuation top ups. Plus we want homes, our own homes! Not just social or affordable housing (there's none anyway) but we want rent to buy homes, we want a home we can raise our family in that's truly ours."

Recommendations:

- Provide a Safety Supplement of $23,000 payable in instalments over 12 months via the Family Tax Benefit A for women who have experienced domestic and family violence.
- Significantly reform child support – a proven method for perpetrators to continue abuse after separation. Separating child support from Family Tax Benefits removes the ability for perpetrators to weaponise it, creating debts for women. Government treatment of these debts and reductions for child support not even received, is a legislated form of 'Robodebt' for women.

4. Paid work is an integral part of most women's lives

Wages and salary was the main source of income for nearly 2 in 3 women. Almost 1/3 received income support from the government as their main source of income. Nearly 8 in 10 received some form of income support (2 in 10 family payments only with one third receiving Parenting Payment Single).

The report found that despite a strong desire to undertake paid work, government polices impede rather than support, women to engage in it. Current 'mutual obligations' policies which women must meet to maintain their income support include restricting their ability to complete valuable qualifications (placements are not counted) and undertake voluntary work (often an importance stepping stone to paid work).

Recommendations:

- Abolish mutual obligations for women who are caregivers.
- Repurpose the resources and policy focus away from workforce providers to services that build community networks to support women in finding employment and to assist with the cost borne by women in their transition to paid work.

5. Ongoing and unrelenting financial insecurity

Almost four out of five single mothers (78%) spent 'a lot' or 'almost all' of their time worrying about, planning for, or ensuring their family's financial wellbeing. For the 40% of mothers caring for children with additional needs, this figure rose to more than 80%.

Recommendations:

- The Parenting Payment Single should be available to all single parents until their youngest child turns 16 or continues until the youngest child completes high school.
- Parenting Payment Single should be raised to match the single age pension rate.
- Reforming child support detailed above will reduce financial insecurity for women and children.

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