

# Lone Parents, Higher Education and Activation

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# Research Questions...

- At what rate does educational acquisition occur in parenthood?
- Are there differences according to family structure?
- What are the characteristics of parents (including lone parents) who improve their education levels?
- What impact is activation likely to have on Lone Parent education levels in the future?

# Why Lone Parents, Higher Education and Activation?

- Concern with **Low Education Levels of Lone Parents** (NESF 2001; Smyth and Byrne 2004; CSO 2007, 2012)
  - In 2011, 40.8% of lone parents had less than upper secondary education, 45.8% had upper secondary or higher, but less than a degree, and 13.4 per cent had a degree or higher
  - Substantial variation across European countries in the educational attainment levels of lone parents (Chzhen and Bradshaw 2012)
  - Ireland emerges as a country where the share of lone parents with lower secondary education or below is high (41%) alongside Belgium (37%), Luxembourg (44%), Estonia (54%) and Malta (78%)
- **Reform of One Family Payment and Activation Measures for Lone Parents**
  - Opportunities for educational acquisition?
  - Literature from other institutional contexts finds that activation for lone parents has reduced the capacity for lone parents to acquire higher levels of education
  - Too soon in the Irish context to test this, but we can examine patterns of education acquisition among lone parents prior to OFP reform
  - Recessionary climate and impact on DSP supports for lone parents, and HEA/DES supports for HE, childcare policy and housing also strong influences

# Why Higher Education?

- Little research on lone parents and HE in the past
  - The areas of financial support, flexible modular education, childcare and supports for teen parents are areas that have been identified broadly in previous research studies
- Lone parents have attracted considerable policy attention in welfare and education and training, much less specific attention has been paid to lone parents in Higher Education and Widening Access policy.
  - Lone parents and teen parents named in the National Plan for Equity of Access 2015-2019, but no specific actions named to increase participation
  - Data deficits
  - Limited provision of part-time and flexible HE
  - No additional funding for part-time and flexible HE
- Very limited focus on lone parents in ALMP research
  - Policy decisions taken from research without an indicator for lone parenthood
  - Existing international research is critical of stringent activation policies for lone parents in other institutional contexts where HE pathways are de-emphasised in favour of rapid labour force attachment.

# Why Higher Education

- Acquisition of additional education to HE has been found to
  - Reduce household poverty risks
  - Reduce child poverty risks
  - Reduce labour market inactivity (Chzhen and Bradshaw 2012)
- Education exerts a positive independent effect on these outcomes, important in the Irish context given that research in Ireland has consistently identified lone parents as a group at higher risk of social exclusion, financial exclusion and economic vulnerability
  - Parenting behaviours (Byrne and Smyth 2010)
  - Improve family circumstances – increasing time spent with children in both family and school activities, and more child-friendly books in the home (Domina & Roska 2012).
  - The advantages of higher education also appear to be transmitted across generations, further increasing its returns (GUI 2016; McGinnity, Russell and Murray 2015; Byrne and O'Toole 2015; Hannan, Halpin and Coleman 2013).

# Methodological Approach

- Secondary analysis of the Longitudinal GUI
  - Infant cohort: How do the education levels of PCGs differ from the time the study child is 9 months (T1) to Age 5 (T3): 2008/09-2013
  - Child cohort: How do the education levels of PCGs differ from the time the study child is 9 years (T1) to age 13 years (T2): 2007/08-2012/13
  - Representative of OFP/JST period
- Samples restricted to:
  - W1 and W2 for the child cohort
  - W1 and W3 for the infant cohort

# Approach

- Modelling approach
  - Uses baseline data (variables measured at T1 unless otherwise stated) to measure all predictors
  - 2 sub-samples captured within each of the cohorts
    - PCGs who reported having less than Upper Secondary at T1 '**Early Leavers**'
    - PCGS who reported having at least an Upper Secondary but less than HE at T1 '**School Completers**'
    - Those with a HE were excluded for the purpose of this analysis
- Dependent Variable
  - Increasing educational acquisition v Same Level of Education (Lower Secondary or Less, Child)
  - HE acquisition v Same Level of Education (Upper secondary or lower, child)

At what rate does educational acquisition occur?

Are there differences according to family structure?

Are there differences by cohort (representing the age of the study child)?

# Infant Cohort

- Wave 1 (9 months) Sept 2008-April 2009
- Wave 3 (5 years) Jan 2013-Sept 2013
- Upgrading of educational qualification more prevalent among those with lower levels of education
- Some difference according to family structure, but similar rates in general

|                                                       | Education Level at T1<br>(when Study child was 9 months old) |                           |             |                                                              |                           |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                                                       | Lower Secondary<br>or Less                                   |                           |             | Upper Secondary<br>or Higher (Excluding Degree<br>or Higher) |                           |            |
|                                                       | Lone<br>Parents                                              | Parent<br>with<br>Partner | All<br>PCG  | Lone<br>Parents                                              | Parent<br>with<br>Partner | All<br>PCG |
| Education Level at T3<br>(When Study Child was Age 5) | %                                                            | %                         | %           | %                                                            | %                         | %          |
| No Formal/Primary Education                           | 9.6                                                          | 7.9                       | 8.4         |                                                              |                           |            |
| Lower Secondary                                       | 51.7                                                         | 49.8                      | 50.4        |                                                              |                           |            |
| Upper Secondary                                       | 13.3                                                         | 17.1                      | 15.9        | 33.6                                                         | 25.3                      | 26.4       |
| Technical/Vocational/Apprenticeship                   | 21.7                                                         | 17.3                      | 18.7        | 35.4                                                         | 27.6                      | 28.7       |
| National Certificate/Diploma                          | 2.5                                                          | 5.1                       | 4.3         | 24.0                                                         | 39.4                      | 37.2       |
| Primary Degree or Higher                              | 1.2                                                          | 2.8                       | 2.3         | 7.1                                                          | 7.7                       | 7.6        |
| %                                                     | 100                                                          | 100                       | 100         | 100                                                          | 100                       | 100        |
| <b>% Changed Education Level</b>                      | <b>38.7</b>                                                  | <b>42.3</b>               | <b>41.2</b> | <b>7.1</b>                                                   | <b>7.7</b>                | <b>7.6</b> |

# Child Cohort

|                                                        | Education Level at T1<br>(when Study child was 9 years old) |                          |             |                                                              |                             |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
|                                                        | Lower Secondary<br>or Less                                  |                          |             | Upper Secondary<br>or Higher (Excluding Degree or<br>Higher) |                             |            |
|                                                        | Lone<br>Parents                                             | Parents<br>with Partners | All<br>PCG  | Lone<br>Parents                                              | Parents<br>with<br>Partners | All<br>PCG |
| Education Level at T2<br>(When Study Child was Age 13) | %                                                           | %                        | %           | %                                                            |                             | %          |
| None or primary                                        | 10.0                                                        | 19.7                     | 12.2        |                                                              |                             |            |
| Lower Secondary                                        | 57.9                                                        | 49.5                     | 56.0        |                                                              |                             |            |
| Higher Sec/Tech Voc/Both                               | 28.5                                                        | 25.8                     | 27.9        | 59.3                                                         | 54.0                        | 58.5       |
| Non Degree                                             | 2.8                                                         | 4.5                      | 3.2         | 33.7                                                         | 35.7                        | 34.0       |
| Primary Degree or Higher                               | 0.9                                                         | 0.4                      | 0.7         | 7.0                                                          | 10.3                        | 6.5        |
| %                                                      | 100                                                         | 100                      | 100         | 100                                                          | 100                         | 100        |
| N                                                      | 511                                                         | 1,733                    | 2,244       | 647                                                          | 3,318                       | 3,965      |
| <b>% Changed Education Level</b>                       | <b>32.2</b>                                                 | <b>30.7</b>              | <b>31.8</b> | <b>7.0</b>                                                   | <b>10.3</b>                 | <b>6.5</b> |

- Wave 1 (9 years) Sept 2007-April 2008
- Wave 2 (13 years) Aug 2011-March 2012
- Upgrading of educational qualification more prevalent among those with lower levels of education
  - Similar levels according to family structure
  - Has slowed down overall from 41.2% to 31.8%
- Some difference along the lines of family structure in terms of HE acquisition greater among PCGs with partners, than among lone parents (10.3% compared to 7.0%)

What are the characteristics of parents (lone parents) improve their education to Degree level?

# Summary of Rates of Higher Education Acquisition

|                   | Lower Secondary or Less<br>'Early Leavers' |                     |         | Upper Secondary or Higher (but not Degree)<br>'School Completers' |                     |         |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------|
|                   | Lone Parent                                | Parent with Partner | All PCG | Lone Parent                                                       | Parent with Partner | All PCG |
| 9 Months to Age 5 | 1.2                                        | 2.8                 | 2.3     | <b>7.1</b>                                                        | 7.7                 | 7.6     |
| Age 9 to Age 13   | 0.9                                        | 0.4                 | 0.7     | <b>7.0</b>                                                        | 10.3                | 6.5     |
|                   |                                            |                     |         |                                                                   |                     |         |

# School Completers: Probability of Attaining a Degree or Higher among Infant Cohort PCGs Between 2008/09-2012/13

|                                                                  | Model 1        | Model 2         | Model 3         | Model 4         |  | Lone Parent Sample |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|--------------------|
| PCG Lone Parent<br><i>Ref: PCG has Partner</i>                   | -.104 (.061)^  | -.074 (.061)    | -.053 (.061)    | -.041 (.061)    |  |                    |
| 2 children or more<br><i>Ref: Lone Child</i>                     | -.610(.141)*** | -.629 (.141)*** | -.588 (.142)*** | -.584 (.142)*** |  |                    |
| PCG Age                                                          | .000 (.003)    | .007 (.003)*    | .007 (.003)*    | .007 (.003)*    |  | -.019 (.009)*      |
| White Irish<br><i>Ref: Minority Ethnic Group</i>                 |                | -.794 (.048)*** | -.858 (.049)*** | -.862 (.049)*** |  | -1.286 (.125)***   |
| Usually Employed<br><i>Ref: Unemp/Inact/Training</i>             |                |                 | .308 (.040)***  | .301 (.040)***  |  | .552 (.114)***     |
| Difficulty in making ends meet<br><i>Ref: Fewer difficulties</i> |                |                 | -.101 (.040)**  | -.098 (.040)**  |  | .417 (.113)***     |
| Welfare Dependency 75-100%<br><i>Ref: W Dep &lt;75%</i>          |                |                 |                 | -.283 (.123)*   |  | .247 (.183)        |
|                                                                  |                |                 |                 |                 |  |                    |
| Nag R <sup>2</sup>                                               | .002           | .018            | .022            | .022            |  | .063               |
| Constant                                                         | -2.570 (.101)  | -2.100 (.105)   | -2.161 (.108)   | -2.121 (.109)   |  | -1.601 (.274)      |

# School Completers: Probability of Attaining a Degree or Higher among Child Cohort PCGs Between 2007/08-2011/12

|                                                                  | Model 1        | Model 2        | Model 3         | Model 4         |  | Lone Parent Sample |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|--------------------|
| PCG Lone Parent<br><i>Ref: PCG has Partner</i>                   | .389 (.057)*** | .360 (.057)*** | .339 (.061)***  | -.047 (.068)    |  |                    |
| 1 child (study child)<br><i>Ref: more children</i>               | .203 (.064)**  | .248 (.064)*** | .320 (.065)***  | .361 (.065)***  |  | -.432 (.121)***    |
| PCG Age                                                          | .003 (.004)    | .006 (.004)    | .006 (.004)     | .010 (.004)**   |  | -.056 (.009)***    |
| PCG Migrant<br><i>Ref: Always lived IRL</i>                      |                | .633 (.054)*** | .594 (.054)***  | .613 (.055)***  |  | .046 (.127)        |
| Usually Employed<br><i>Ref: Unemp/Inact/Training</i>             |                |                | -.517 (.045)*** | -.337 (.047)*** |  | -.312 (.120)**     |
| Difficulty in making ends meet<br><i>Ref: Fewer difficulties</i> |                |                | .089 (.051)     | -.043 (.053)    |  | .014 (.107)        |
| Welfare Dependency 75-100%<br><i>Ref: W Dep &lt;75%</i>          |                |                |                 | 1.259 (.078)*** |  | 1.373 (.118)***    |
|                                                                  |                |                |                 |                 |  |                    |
| Nag R <sup>2</sup>                                               | .006           | .016           | .027            | .047            |  | .158               |
| Constant                                                         | -2.745 (.166)  | -2.978 (.169)  | -2.730 (.173)   | -2.997 (.176)   |  | 2.307 (.267)       |

# Summary

- Less educational acquisition among school completers
  - Levels are lower in childhood than infancy (6.5% compared to 7.6%)
- Substantial proportion of 'early leavers' acquire higher levels of education
  - Early leaver parents appear to be more likely to upgrade their education levels when their children are younger: 41% infant cohort parents compared to 31% child cohort parents
  - Some differences by family structure: greater difference evident among lone parent families and two-parent families in the infant cohort

- What are the characteristics of parents (lone parents) improve their education to Degree level?
  - Both infant and child cohorts: family structure does not differentiate among those who achieve a Degree versus those who have not
  - Infant cohort:
    - Those with more than one child, White Irish, High welfare dependency, Difficulty making ends meet are less likely to achieve Degree, while older PCGs and those usually in employment are more likely to do so.
    - Some differences among lone parent families: older PCGs, and White Irish are less likely to achieve Degree while those are usually employed, and have difficulty meeting ends meet are more likely to do so. Level of welfare dependency does not differentiate.
  - Child cohort:
    - Those with more than one child, migrant lone parents and those usually employed are less likely to achieve Degree, while older PCGs and those with high levels of welfare dependency are more likely to do so.
    - Some differences among lone parent families: older PCGs, those with one child and those are usually employed are less likely to achieve a Degree while those with high levels of welfare dependency are more likely to do so.

# Early Leavers (Child cohort): Model of the Factors Associated with Attaining an Upper Secondary Education or Higher

|                                             | Model 1         | Model 2         | Model 3         | Model 4         |  | Lone Parent Sample |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|--------------------|
| PCG Lone Parent<br>Ref: PCG has Partner     | -.133 (.041)**  | -.127 (.041)**  | -.001 (.044)    | .240 (.046)***  |  |                    |
| 1 child (study child)<br>Ref: more children | .005 (.049)     | .031 (.050)     | -.130 (.051)*   | -.171 (.052)*** |  | -.288 (.092)**     |
| PCG Age                                     | -.024 (.003)*** | -.024 (.003)*** | -.025 (.003)*** | -.029 (.003)*** |  | -.067 (.006)***    |
| PCG Migrant                                 |                 | .792 (.047)***  | .862 (.048)***  | .903 (.049)***  |  | .358 (.110)***     |
| Usually Employed                            |                 |                 | .694 (.035)***  | .476 (.036)***  |  | .415 (.093)***     |
| Difficulty                                  |                 |                 | -.166 (.037)*** | -.011 (.038)    |  | -.497 (.083)***    |
| Welfare 75100                               |                 |                 |                 | -.993 (.056)*** |  | -1.088 (.097)***   |
|                                             |                 |                 |                 |                 |  |                    |
| Nag R <sup>2</sup>                          | .007            | .030            | .061            | .089            |  | .158               |
| Constant                                    | .203 (.111)     | .092 (.113)     | -.082(.119)     | .187 (.121)     |  | 2.307 (.267)       |