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**PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NEW BENEFIT RULES FOR LONE PARENTS  
– BUT ATTITUDES VARY BY CHILDREN'S AGE**

There is general public support for recent government initiatives to link lone parents' receipt of benefits to their seeking work. But, according to the latest NatCen British Social Attitudes report, views about whether lone parents should work depend on the ages of their children.

In 2008 the government introduced a policy requiring single parents to look for work as a condition of lone parent benefit receipt, if their youngest child was aged 12 or over. This age threshold will reduce further in the coming years.

Public views about whether lone parents should look for work or stay at home to look after their children depend on the age of the child:

- One in two people (52%) think a lone mother with a child *of* school age has a 'special duty' to *go out to work* to support her child, up from 44% in 1998. The proportion of people who think she should 'do as she chooses' has dropped from 45% to 37% over the same period.
- But for a lone mother with a child *under* school age, the proportion who think she has a 'special duty' to *stay at home* and look after her child has increased – from 24% in 2005 to 36% now.

There is reasonable public support for the government's policy of requiring lone parents to look for work:

- Most people think a lone parent's benefits should be affected if they do not, when asked, visit a job centre to help them find work. A quarter (25%) think their benefits should be stopped, 12% think they should be reduced a lot, and 45% that they should be reduced a little.
- A third (33%) of people think parents should be required to look for work as a condition of their benefit receipt once their child has started primary school (aged 4-5 years). Nearly one in five (18%) think this should happen slightly later, during the early primary school years (aged 6-7).

Matt Barnes, co-author, comments:

'There is a reasonable level of public support for the expectation that lone parents look for work as a condition of receiving benefits. The next few years will show us how successful these new rules have been in raising employment rates among lone parents, and how new work schedules have affected families' home lives and well-being.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Lone parents and benefits: an obligation to look for work' by Matt Barnes and Wojtek Tomaszewski, in *British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report*, published by Sage for NatCen.

## Notes to Editors

- 1 **British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report** is published on Tuesday 26th January, 2010 by SAGE, price £50.00. It is edited by Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips, Elizabeth Clery and Sarah Butt. SAGE is at <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book234304&series=Series30&>.
- 2 The report includes two additional chapters not covered by this press release. Findings from these chapters, on religion, were released earlier in the year.
- 3 British findings are from the British Social Attitudes survey, with the exception of the chapter by Andy Ross and Amanda Sacker, which also uses data from the British Household Panel Study, and the chapter by Rossy Bailey, Elizabeth Fuller and Rachel Ormston, which also uses data from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey and the Health Survey for England. Findings that compare Britain with other countries are taken from the European Social Survey ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)) or the International Social Survey Programme ([www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org)).
- 4 The British Social Attitudes survey series has been conducted annually since 1983. The 2008 survey consisted of 4,486 interviews with a representative, random sample of people in Britain.
- 5 The survey is funded by charitable and government sources. The questions in the 2008 survey were funded by the following government Departments: Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (now Business, Innovation and Skills); Children, Schools and Families; Health; Transport; and Work and Pensions. Other funders came from: the Economic and Social Research Council; the Food Standards Agency; the Gatsby Charitable Foundation; the Hera Trust; the John Templeton Foundation; the Leverhulme Trust; and NORFACE.
- 6 NatCen, Britain's largest independent social research organisation, aims to promote a better-informed society through high quality social research ([www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk)).

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