

**The challenge of increasing economic and social participation. Describing the disadvantage experienced by lone mothers receiving income support.**  
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Recently, research and policy initiatives in Australia have focused on welfare dependence and intergenerational dependence. Particular concern has been expressed about the low levels of labour force attachment of lone parents. The process of welfare reform is, in part, a response to these concerns, with the goal of increasing individual's economic and social participation. The government has announced a number of initiatives to assist lone parents, including the introduction/expansion of a transition to work program, access to dedicated Personal Advisers and a significant increase in the availability of professional psychological staff. Research (both in Australia and internationally) shows that sole parents experience significant personal barriers that are likely to limit their participation and their ability to benefit from assistance. This paper presents data from a larger project examining the relationship between receipt of income support payments and social disadvantage, including poor mental health. The analyses compare single mothers with partnered mothers receiving income support payments and with those not in receipt of payments. The data demonstrate elevated levels of disadvantage among sole parents receiving income support payments, including the presence of mental disorders and substance use disorders, physical disability, experience of traumatic and stressful life events and poor socio-economic circumstances. The paper examines the presence of multiple barriers within these different populations and discusses possible policy implications.