

Twice the challenge: Single parents in employment

36 baua: Facts

In Germany, nearly one-fifth of families with minor children are single parent families, and nearly one-third of these single parent families is at risk of poverty.¹ Taking up a job is important for single parents, but given their family responsibilities, work puts additional strain on them. To learn more about the work and health situation of working single parents, we analyse data from the BIBB/BAuA Employment Survey 2018. The results show that single parents in employment have to cope with occupational and financial insecurities and report certain health problems more frequently.

To learn more about the work context and health conditions of single parents, we look at persons who work more than ten hours per week, do not live with a partner, and have at least one minor child living in their household (n = 808). They are compared with employed persons in two-parent families, who live with at least one minor child and a partner in the household (n = 5,774), and with other employed persons who do not (or no longer) live with minor children in the household (n = 13,324). The purpose of the comparison is to examine the particular challenges that working single parents face in their everyday lives. Overall, about three out of four working single parents are women. Most working single parents have children of school age or older (6–13 years: 45.3 %; 14–17 years: 35.3 %). The majority of single parents works in the service sector (38.6 %) and in public services (26.7 %). The most common occupations among single parents are in care and nursing, education, and sales.

Occupational and financial insecurities for single parents in employment

Single parents are more likely than other employed persons to work reduced hours: 41.1 % are employed part time (up to 34 hours/week) (see Figure 1). Women are more likely to work part time than men, but gender differences go beyond this. Single fathers tend to work part time more often than fathers who live with a partner, but among women, single mothers work part time less often than mothers who live with a partner. A lower number of working hours is often accompanied by a lower income: around 30 % of working single parents report a gross monthly wage that is less than 1,500 euros (two-parent families: 17.0 %, other employed persons: 16.6 %). Mo-

thers are particularly often affected by this. It is also clear that 17.5 % of single parents work in temporary employment. This form of employment is more than twice as common among single parents as it is among employees who live in a two-parent family. Single parents, especially women, are thus more often affected by an insecure financial situation than other employed persons, even if they have a job. However, only a relatively small share of employees think that the risk of their contract not being renewed or being dismissed from the company is (very) high (single parents: 9.6 %, two-parent families: 6.1 %, other employed persons: 7.6 %).

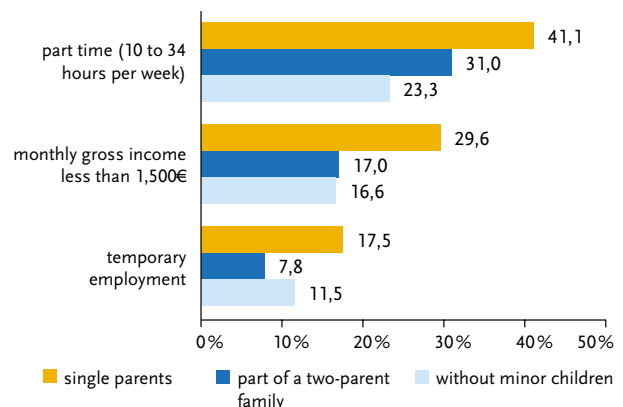


Fig. 1: Employment conditions in comparison (in %)

Compromises in balancing family and career

Balancing work schedules and family responsibilities is a major challenge for single parents. Nearly one-fifth (18.8 %) report that they can rarely or never manage to take family and private interests into account when planning their working hours (two-parent families:

15.0 %; other employed persons: 17.8 %). More than half of the parents (living with or without a partner) report having made sacrifices in order to balance family and career. Of these, 34.4 % of single parents have made very large sacrifices, a proportion twice as high as that of employed persons who live in a two-parent family (16.9 %). This concerns sacrifices in the professional and private area. Furthermore, almost one in five working single parents (18.5 %) is less satisfied or not satisfied with her/his occupational position (two-parent families: 10.4 %, other employed persons: 11.6 %). Thus, single parents in employment often have to balance work and family individually and accept cutbacks in their professional career.

Single parents in employment are more frequently affected by health problems

Analyses of the available data (see Figure 2) show that working single parents more frequently report certain psychosomatic complaints than others. More than half of the employed single parents suffer from general fatigue and tiredness; 43.4 % and 35.2 %, respectively, report headaches and emotional exhaustion.

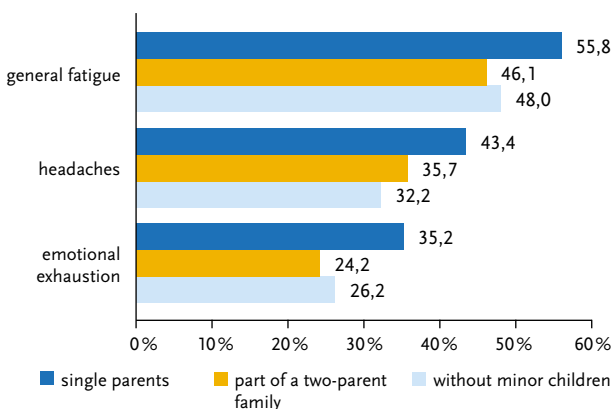


Fig. 2: Health problems of employed persons in comparison (in %)

Conclusion

Single parents in employment find themselves in a difficult situation: they want to spend time with their children, yet at the same time they have to earn a living on their own. The analyses show that single parents are more often employed part time and on a temporary basis than other parents. Despite being employed, single parents sometimes have to come to terms with financial insecurities and deal with professional and private cutbacks. The results further suggest that single parents are more likely to report certain health problems.

Supervisors should be aware of their responsibilities towards all employees. It is important to support them as best as possible in balancing family and career. Employers can, for example, participate in the audit “workandfamily”³ (audit berufundfamilie) to evaluate and further develop their policies for a family-friendly work environment. Moreover single parents should pay attention to their health and try to schedule recreational breaks into their daily routine.

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Further information

- 1 Statistisches Bundesamt (2018). Alleinerziehende in Deutschland 2017. Available at: www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressekonferenzen/2018/Alleinerziehende/pressebroschuere-alleinerziehende.pdf
- 2 Rattay, P.; Lippe, E. v. d.; Borgmann, L.-S.; Lampert, T. (2017). Gesundheit von alleinerziehenden Müttern und Vätern in Deutschland. Journal of Health Monitoring, 2(4), S. 24–44. doi: 10.17886/RKI-GBE-2017-112
- 3 audit berufundfamilie: www.berufundfamilie.de