



The Right2Eat Project

Short Report: Black Single Parents in the UK

Summary of Key Points:

1. Households who identified from a black ethnic group had the highest proportion of lone parents
2. Black single parent households are particularly vulnerable to poverty and economic insecurity.
3. Black single parent households are particularly vulnerable to health disparities and mental health issues.
4. Black single parents in the UK are nearly twice as likely to be in poverty as white single parents.
5. Black single parents are more likely to have lower educational qualifications than their white counterparts, leaving them less equipped for the labour market.
6. Black single parents are more likely to have lower median incomes than other ethnic groups, suggesting that they are more likely to experience economic insecurity.
7. Children of black single parents are at greater risk of underachievement at school, and are unlikely to achieve the same level of educational attainment as white children.
8. Black single parents have higher levels of mental health distress and are more likely to experience racial discrimination.
9. Black single parents are more likely to be affected by the structural inequalities that exist.
10. Overall, more needs to be done to better understand the experiences of black single parent families.

Report

Single parent families are on the rise in the UK, and this is particularly true for those from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds with one in four (24.3%) of black households and one in five (19.1%) of mixed households were single parent families (see Dromey et al 2020). According to the most recent figures (See ONS, 2021) more families had only non-dependent children in 2021 (17.1%) compared with 2011 (15.8%), while fewer families had dependent children (41.5%) compared with 2011 (43.0%); of all couple families, 41.3% had no children. Further, there was a higher proportion of lone parents aged 50 years and over in 2021 (41.8%) than in 2011 (33.4%) and fewer lone parents were aged 24 years and under in 2021 (3.6%), compared with 2011 (7.5%). Individuals who identified as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean had the highest proportion of lone parents; over half were lone parents in 2021 (51.0%), an increase from 2011 (48.5%). Another important finding in the 2021 statistics was that over half (52.4%) of children with a second parent or guardian's address usually lived in a single-family household that contained a female lone parent family, an increase from 44.8% in 2011.

The disproportionate number of black single parents in the UK raises important questions about the experiences of black single parent families and the policies that affect them. Research shows that black single parent families in the UK are at risk for economic insecurity, educational attainment disparity, and health disparities as a result of both structural racism and the broader economic and social context in which black families are embedded. This article examines some of the most important challenges facing black single parent families in the UK, as well as the strategies and support services available to them.

Socio economic Inequality

Research commonly shows that single parent households, and especially black single parent households, are particularly vulnerable to poverty and economic insecurity. A recent report found that relative poverty for children in lone-parent families has risen at a significantly faster rate compared with other households (Cribb et al, 2022).

Educational Attainment Disparities

Research suggests that inequality in educational attainment contributes to this, as black parents are more likely to have meaningfully lower educational qualifications than their white counterparts, leaving them less equipped for the labour market. Further, black families have lower median incomes than other ethnic groups, suggesting that they are more likely to experience economic insecurity. The poverty and economic insecurity experienced by many black single parent families is partly due to disparities in educational attainment. In general, research shows that children of single parents are at greater risk of underachievement at school due to shrinking financial resources which they can access (see Oppenheim, 2019) with the lack of material resources and constraints on time and energy leading to reduced educational attainment.

Health Disparities

Research also suggests that black single parent families in the UK are more likely to experience health disparities than other groups. Studies suggest that black single parents have higher levels of mental health distress and are more likely to experience racial discrimination, which can contribute to decreased access to healthcare and poorer outcomes when accessing health services (see House of Commons Committee report, 2023)

Furthermore, black single parent families are more likely to be affected by the structural inequalities that exist such as a lack of access to financial resources, health interventions or educational facilities all of which can significantly affect not only their chances of a better quality of life but also their children. Ultimately, this results in uneven social, economic and political arrangements meaning that their voice is often overlooked, and their needs not met. Such experiences of structural inequalities can lead to higher levels of health disparities and poorer health outcomes among black single parent families in the UK.

Strategies for Supporting Black Single Parent Families

Given the challenges facing black single parent families in the UK, there is a need for policies and initiatives that support them. Interventions should be focused on tackling the structural inequalities that contribute to economic insecurity, educational attainment disparity, and health disparities experienced by black single parent families.

One strategy is to address the educational gap between black children and their peers. Targeted support could be provided to black parents, to help them support their children's education and develop their own economic skills. For example, this could include targeted initiatives to improve the educational attainment of black children such as government funded private tuition or weekend classes to help with schoolwork. It is often not recognized that one of the reasons black children fall behind their peers from other ethnic groups in educational attainment is that they are more likely to be raised in harsh ecologies characterized by deprivation and anti-social behavior as well as come from stressful family backgrounds. Further, they are more likely to have extra responsibilities such as caring for siblings whilst their parent is at work or caring for an elderly grandparent etc. All of these factors can impact negatively on their mental well-being which in turn negatively effects their ability to perform well at school.

Secondly, targeted programmes could be implemented to reduce health disparities among black single parent families. These could include initiatives that promote financial security and access to healthcare, such as subsidized healthcare plans and health care subsidies. In addition, programmes to build financial literacy among black single parent families should also be developed.

Finally, there is a need for greater support for black single parent families in terms of access to social services. This could include programmes to support their access to housing, employment, and social networks, as well as initiatives to provide them with resources and information about legal and other services. One of the initiatives that we are actively embarking on as part of the right 2 eat project is a project specifically targeted at black single parent families experiencing food insecurity/food poverty - The Lone Parent Project. This project aims to address food insecurity amongst black single parent families by offering financial advocacy in the form of budgeting support as well as free staple foods (e.g., potatoes, rice, soy beans, milk, meat etc.) and essential household items (e.g., cleaning products, toilet rolls, kitchen towels etc.) so that the money saved on these items can be used to buy other essential items for their household or put towards their children's upkeep. Taken together such initiatives could go a long way towards preventing and addressing the challenges facing black single parent families in the UK.

Summary

In summary, it is evident that black single parent families in the UK experience a range of difficulties, from economic insecurity and educational attainment disparity to health disparities. To address this, there is a need for targeted initiatives that seek to reduce the structural inequalities that contribute to these challenges. Such initiatives should, ideally, be focused on the specific needs of black single parent families and emphasize both economic empowerment and access to social services. With such support, black single parent families in the UK can gain greater access to the resources and support they need to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives.

Prepared by S.M.T White

Reading time: 5 minutes

Keywords: single, black, parent, families, education, inequality, health

Words: 1,398

References

Cribb, J., Wernham, T and Xu, X (2022). Pre-pandemic relative poverty rate for children of lone parents almost double that for children living with two parents [Comment] The IFS. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/pre-pandemic-relative-poverty-rate-children-lone-parents-almost-double-children-living-two> (accessed: 10 September 2023).

Dromey, J., Dewar, L., Finnegan (2020) Tackling single parent poverty after coronavirus: Learning and Work Institute: Leicester. Available at: <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tackling-single-parent-poverty-after-coronavirus.pdf> (accessed 10 September 2023).

House of Commons Committee report (2023) Black maternal health. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmwomeq/94/report.html> (accessed 10 September 2023)

Nichols-Casebolt, Ann M. "Black Families Headed by Single Mothers: Growing Numbers and Increasing Poverty." *Social Work*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1988, pp. 306–13. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23715581>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2023.

Oppenheim, M (2019) Children raised by single mothers are achieving less because of lower income, study finds, *Independent*. available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/children-single-mothers-achieve-less-grades-jobs-low-income-a9210576.html> (accessed 10 September 2023).

Office for National Statistics (ONS) released 10 May 2023, ONS website, article, Families in England and Wales: Census 2021. See

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/articles/familiesinenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=Family%20reference%20persons%20who%20identified,increase%20from%202011%20\(48.5%25\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/articles/familiesinenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=Family%20reference%20persons%20who%20identified,increase%20from%202011%20(48.5%25).). Retrieved 06/09/2023.

Further Reading

Reports:

Dixon, J, Ruby, F and Clery, E (2023) Single Parents in 2023 An overview of single parents in the UK today, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis: Gingerbread

Regina S. Baker, Heather A. O'Connell (2022) Structural Racism, Family Structure and Black-White Inequality in Poverty: The Differential Impact of the Legacy of Slavery among Single Mother & Married Parent Households, Working Paper Series No. 836

Berrington, A (2014) The changing demography of lone parenthood in the UK, ESRC Centre for Population Change, Working Paper 48, Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), Cross National Data Center

Links:

Statista Research Department (2022) Poverty rate of Black families with a single mother in the United States 1990 to 2021. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/205114/percentage-of-poor-black-families-with-a-female-householder-in-the-us/> (accessed 10th September 2023).

Families and households - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/families-and-households/latest>. Retrieved 22/08/2023.

Half of all children in lone-parent families are in relative poverty | UK cost of living crisis. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jul/04/half-of-all-children-in-lone-parent-families-are-in-relative-poverty>. Retrieved 17/07/2023.

Nearly half of UK children now growing up outside 'traditional' family, says review. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/nearly-half-of-uk-children-now-growing-up-outside-traditional-family-says-review-12686586>. Retrieved 22/08/2023.

Young, single and black: Britain's Caribbean community has a high proportion of lone-parent families. It must find ways to support and encourage its children, argues Herman Ouseley. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/young-single-and-black-britain-s-caribbean-community-has-a-high-proportion-of-loneparent-families-it-must-find-ways-to-support-and-encourage-its-children-argues-herman-ouseley-1482420.html>. Retrieved 08.08.2023.

American Psychological Association (2009) Exploring the mental health effects of poverty, hunger, and homelessness on children and teens? Available at:

<https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children> (accessed 10th September 2023).

The Right2Eat Copyright 2023