

Residential mobility and single parents in Scotland

September 2018

**How do single parents experience residential mobility?
Are some single parents more mobile than others?
Is residential mobility more of a positive or negative experience?**

Why this matters

As Shelter Scotland's [Homelessness is Far From Fixed](#) campaign highlights, many people in Scotland still do not have access to a home. However, the transition to single parenthood, and the experience of being a single parent, might also mean that challenges have to be addressed by those single parents who are not facing the most extreme forms of housing deprivation – the residential moves that can accompany single parenthood may lead to vulnerability and a weakening of established social ties. The experience of residential mobility and single parenthood needs to be better understood.

What do we already know?

Residential mobility is often linked to life course events such as having a baby, getting married or separating. In general, we know that families with small children are more likely to move home. Additionally, the Millennium Cohort Study (2016) on [Neighbourhood and residential mobility](#) tells us that 54% of lone parents with children up to the age of five are most likely to live in social housing. We also know from much of the literature that single parents face challenges in terms of securing affordable housing in safe areas. The paper: [Disparities in Residential Mobility among Women with Children](#) revealed that single parents residing in highly deprived areas were less likely to move to less deprived areas when compared to those with partners. It has been documented that single parents in Scotland share this experience and are also most likely to live in areas of high deprivation as evidenced by Growing up In Scotland in their report [Lone parent families with young children](#). More recently the [Surviving Poverty: The impact of lone parenthood](#) research published by the Poverty Alliance highlights that this continues to be the case in Scotland. The report also notes the extent to which residential location can impact on support networks which are often necessary for single parents to cope with the daily challenges they face.

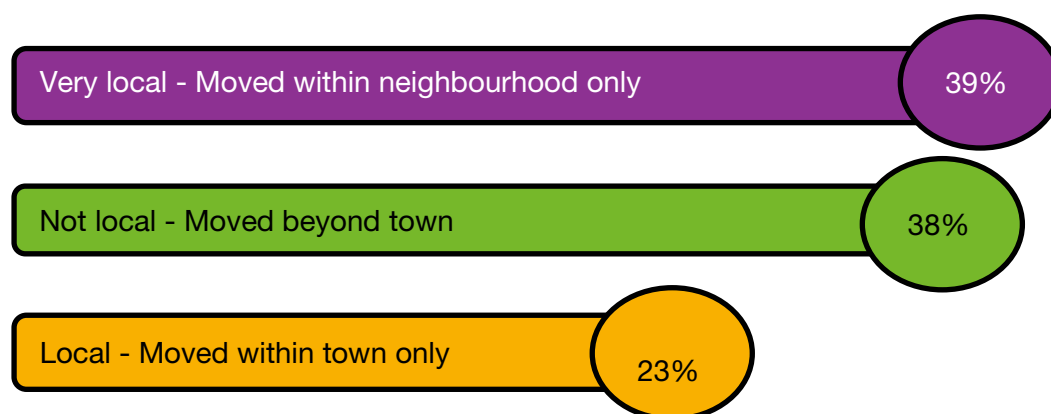
Our research

This is the sixth of seven research briefings arising from the Single Parent Community Connections project. With the support of the European Union and the Scottish Government, this [Social Innovation Fund](#) project has two aims. First, it aims to better understand isolation and loneliness among single parents in Scotland. Second, it aims to use this knowledge to design and deliver practical service delivery options to tackle these problems.

An online survey was designed by the [Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit](#) and approved by One Parent Families Scotland. Almost 900 single parents completed the survey in the Spring of 2018. The survey was introduced as aiming to find out more about the nature of the challenges that single parents face in Scotland and to explore what could be done to address them. Residential mobility was one of the broader issues that were explored to better understand its relation to social isolation and loneliness. The numbers that are reported in this briefing have been quality assured, including weighting some results to ensure that they are representative of single parents in Scotland, as a whole. Twelve in-depth interviews were also undertaken across Scotland to explore the key issues in greater depth. The anonymity of participating parents is protected in this briefing. More details about the research can be provided on request.

Findings - What's the big picture?

Two thirds of single parents had moved home since becoming a single parent (69%), with more than one in every five reporting that they had moved at least three times (22%). For the majority of single parents, moving house also means a move to a new neighbourhood. For parents of younger children, a move beyond the neighbourhood is more likely to mean a move to a new school for their children (given that nursery and primary schools have more localised catchment areas, compared to secondary schools).



How then are these house changes experienced by single parents? We asked those who moved house to rate whether things have improved for the better, stayed the same, or got worse for seven different things that might change following a house move. On the whole, it seems that the overall impact of the house move is positive. If we take away one point for every negative experience and add one point for every positive experience, and we then add up the scores for the seven things we researched, then we find that one in every four single parents return an overall score of zero (25%), meaning that the overall impact of the

house move was neither positive, nor negative. Among the remainder, single parents are as likely to have a more positive (47%), as a more negative experience (29%).

For the individual aspects of house moves that we researched, most single parents reported that things had not changed. However, it is interesting to note that, on a positive note, more single parents reported that the quality of their house/flat had improved than worsened after a house move, while, on a negative note, fewer single parents reported that access to friends had improved than worsened. It is important that we consider the non-material impact of moving house.

<i>Aspects of House move</i>	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Quality of house/flat	29%	31%	41%
How easy for children to access their school?	16%	48%	36%
Quality of area in which they live	23%	48%	29%
How easy to access other family members?	18%	58%	25%
Access to public transport	17%	55%	28%
How easy for children to access their friends?	20%	57%	24%
How easy to access friends?	23%	59%	18%

We were also interested to find out about how strongly single parents associated with their local community. We found that single parents were evenly split between those who felt a strong sense of attachment and those who did not. Although more than one-third of single parents would like to be more involved in their local community (39%), it was most common for single parents to report that they were happy with their current level of involvement (58%). Furthermore, almost half felt they already had strong connections with their local community (47%). However, almost all single parents who were interviewed felt disconnected and isolated from their local communities regardless of age or location, which they felt was mainly a result of the stigma associated with being a single parent:

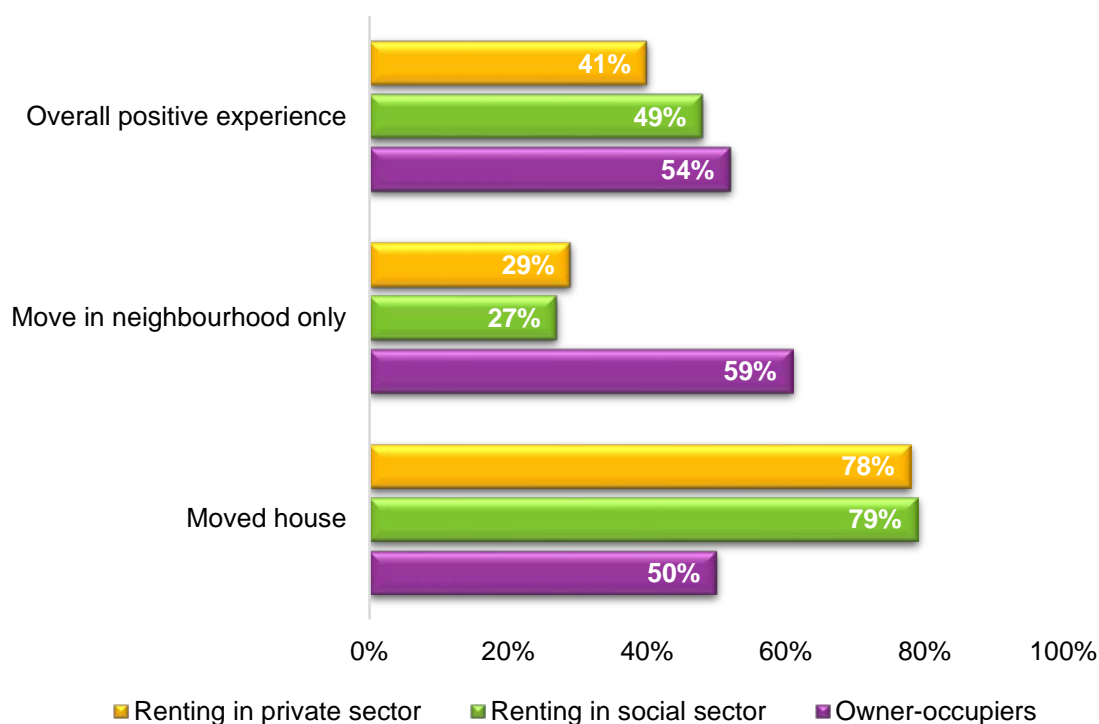
“The minute I mentioned I was on my own I felt the whole dynamic of the conversation change. Now that could be they’re feeling awkward about that I don’t know, or maybe they don’t know how to address it.”

Findings - Are there key differences among single parents?

Residential mobility is particularly associated with some groups of single parents. Understandably, those who have been single parents for a longer time, were more likely to have made a house move. What may be more surprising is that those who had been single parents for longer were more likely to have made house moves over greater distances. For example, twice as many who had been a single parent for less than two years moved within their neighbourhood (63%), compared to those who had been single parents for five years or more (30%). Indeed, those who had been a single parent for more than five years were more likely to have made a more that involved a change of town (40%), rather than a move within their town (30%) or within their neighbourhood (30%). Interestingly, it was this same group who were more likely to have reported positive change following their house move. One half of those who had been single parents for more than five years reported a more

positive outcome (51%), compared to one in four who had been single parents for less than two years (24%).

Independently of this, residential mobility also varies by tenure. Owner-occupiers have a very different experience compared to others, with fewer moves, a more local geography to their moves and slightly positive outcomes, as the illustration shows below.



Conclusion

It is evident that residential mobility is something that is frequently experienced by single parents in Scotland with many facing the challenge of moving several times before finding a place to settle. That aside, single parent’s residential mobility is seen to have a positive impact on their lives with moves often resulting in better quality housing. We now also know those who are relatively new to single parenthood are more likely to move within their neighbourhood rather than further afield. These findings provide fresh insight into the nature and impact of residential mobility on the lives of single parents in Scotland.

Referencing this paper

McKendrick, JH, Campbell, L-A. and Hesketh, W. (2018) Residential mobility and single parents in Scotland. *OPFS/SPIRU Briefing 2018/6*. Edinburgh: OPFS.



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