

## Fawcett Society

# Who Benefits? An independent inquiry into women and Jobseekers Allowance

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*Significant changes from the draft of 12 April 2014 are shown in red*

### SUMMARY

This submission addresses two issues: whether the JSA sanctions regime affects women more than men, and how it affects lone parents. Leaving household structure aside, men are almost 50% more likely to be sanctioned than women. The real issue is that sanctions are abusive and are causing immense damage to men, women and children across the UK. Approaching 90% of lone parents are women, and the sanctions regime bears harshly on them. It is argued that the overwhelming British focus on getting lone parents into work arises from a mistaken understanding of the factors underlying the rise in female lone parenthood, which have much to do with the decline in employment opportunities for men. In pursuit of this focus, work-related conditions have been progressively imposed on lone parent claimants of Income Support (IS) since 2001, including work-focused interviews while on IS and progressive transfer to JSA. Sanctions for not participating in work focused interviews (WFI) have risen from around 0.3% of the caseload per month in 2004-05 **to just under 0.8% per month now**, with the percentage of those who claimed IS in a given year who were sanctioned in that year rising from 4.3% in 2005 to well over 7.0% in 2007 to 2010. Even the comparatively mild sanctions of the IS WFI regime cause a lot of stress and ill health to lone parent claimants. Sanctions for lone parents on JSA have risen from under 200 per month prior to 2008 **to 4,700 per month now**. The rate of sanctioning against lone parent JSA claimants in the latest three months was as high as the highest rate of sanctioning of *all* claimants seen before the Coalition government, at almost 4% per month. The percentage of lone parents who claimed JSA in a given year who were sanctioned in that year almost doubled from under 8.0% in 2000 to 14.0% in 2011, and will now be higher. Lone parents are sanctioned at a lower rate than other JSA claimants. Nevertheless sanctions cause them severe stress and damage. Conditions and accompanying sanctions will be extended further under Universal Credit. The state claims that being in work promotes the welfare of lone parents and their children, and this is often true. But there are many instances in which it is not, and there are severe conflicts between the demands of work and those of parenting. In these cases the state is pressurising lone parents into sacrificing their interests and those of their children to the prevalent 'work first' philosophy. **Moreover since the introduction of lone parent conditionality, around twice as many lone parents have stopped claiming IS or JSA as have moved into employment.** It is sanctions that shift state policy on lone parents' employment from an enabling framework which respects parental responsibilities, to an exercise in bullying. They should be abolished.

## Introduction

1. For 29 years to 2010 I led Glasgow City Council's housing policy and planning unit and I have been a specialist adviser to the House of Commons Environment, Social Security/Education & Employment, and Scottish Affairs Committees. I have been researching unemployment and related issues, including lone parenthood, for 20 years and my PhD by published work is available at <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/1720>. I am currently carrying out a critical examination of unemployment benefit sanctions and disallowances in Great Britain since 1911. The present comments are based on this work.

2. The focus of the Fawcett Society inquiry is on potential differential impacts of the JSA/ESA sanctions regime on men and women. If household structure is left aside, men appear to be treated less favourably than women. However the real issue is that the sanctions regime is abusive and is causing immense damage to men, women and children across the UK. There is no serious evidence base to justify the use of sanctions at all, and they breach the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (2012).<sup>1</sup> I hope the Fawcett Society will join me in calling for their abolition.

3. There is a major issue about the treatment of lone parents. Almost 90 per cent of lone parents are women and on the whole male lone parents are better off than female, because they have mainly come to be on their own as a result of the death of their wife or partner, who is likely to have been earning less. The sanctions regime bears harshly on lone parents and it has been intensifying.

4. This submission looks first at the question whether women are in general treated differently from men, and then moves on to consider the treatment of lone parents. **The data on sanctions are from the DWP's Stat-Xplore database and have been fully updated to December 2013. Other data are from other DWP statistics, ONS or the Census. All figures are for Great Britain unless otherwise stated.** The analyses for lone parents relate to all lone parents, without distinguishing men and women. If women were separated out, these lone parent analyses would look much the same.

5. On the question of the abusive nature of the sanctions system, I have set out my analysis and conclusions in various papers which I am attaching to this submission. They are listed at the end.<sup>2</sup>

## GENDER-RELATED ANALYSES

### JSA sanctions

6. **Figure 1** shows that there has been no consistent tendency for men to attract more *referrals for sanction* (i.e. referrals by a DWP adviser to a DWP decision maker) than women, or vice versa. Women were more at risk in the early 2000s, and men have been more at risk under the Coalition. However there is a clear and consistent differential between men and women in relation to the number of *actual sanctions* (i.e. decisions adverse to the claimant following a referral). The rate of sanction (sanctions per month as a percentage of JSA claimants) is consistently higher for men.

7. **Figure 2** plots the same information but in a way that makes gender comparison clearer. Men used to have a lower rate of referral than women, but reached parity around 2006. Since 2009 their rate of referral has risen sharply more than that of women. Men have always had a higher rate of actual sanctions than women, and the differential steadily increased until plateauing from 2011.

8. **Figure 3** shows that the proportion of referrals resulting in a sanction has always been higher for men. The proportion of referrals resulting in sanction has risen for both men and women, although plateauing for men from around 2007. **From July 2011 the proportions for men and women moved sharply closer, and until the most recent quarters have fallen. The falls will have been due to the administrative problems of the Work Programme, where contractors have some 40% of their referrals for sanction cancelled due to errors and omissions in documentation (see my May 2014 statistics briefing).**

9. **Figure 4** puts all the above information together to summarise it. It shows that since 2008 the relative position of men has got worse in relation to referrals but better in relation to the proportion of referrals resulting in sanction, the net result being that the relative position of men in relation to actual sanctions has got worse. **In the three years to December 2013, male JSA claimants were almost 50 per cent more likely to be sanctioned than women.**

10. **Differences by age are at least as big as differences by sex. Young people are much more likely to be sanctioned. Figure 5 shows the rates of sanction per month for men and women aged 18-24 and 25-29. Young men aged 18-24 are now being sanctioned at the rate of 11% per month, and women of the same age at 7% per month. The rate for all JSA claimants is now just over 6% per month.**

11. I am not aware of any research evidence on why men are more likely to be sanctioned. It could be due to such things as differences in their behaviour, staff attitudes or the greater likelihood of women being able to cite caring responsibilities as a 'good reason' for not meeting requirements.

### **ESA sanctions**

12. The DWP data on ESA sanctions have so many cases for which sex is not recorded as to render analysis valueless.

### **Impact of sanctions on men and women**

13. There does not seem to be any research evidence to suggest that the impact of sanctions is worse for women than for men, or vice versa. Sanctions have many damaging effects on their victims and on society, which are dealt with in my attached papers. They are deliberately designed to make poor people destitute.

14. It should be borne in mind that women are often affected by sanctions imposed on men, and vice versa. So, for instance, sanctions on teenage or young adult men appear to be a common contributor to relationship breakdown with their mothers. Sanctions affect the whole nuclear family, and frequently the extended family as well.

## **ANALYSES RELATING TO SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON LONE PARENTS**

15. Lone parenthood, and especially female lone parenthood, has increased enormously in Britain since the 1960s (Rowthorn & Webster 2008). The reasons for this are controversial but certainly include a more permissive attitude to unpartnered pregnancy and greater tolerance for the mothers to keep their children; worsened employment opportunities for less skilled men; and better employment opportunities for women. The paper I wrote with Professor Robert Rowthorn of the University of Cambridge (Rowthorn & Webster 2008) showed that between 38% and 59% of the increase in lone parent families between 1971 and 2001 could be explained by the fall in male employment resulting from the decline of industry.<sup>3</sup> British policy on lone parenthood has ignored the role of male employment, and has focused instead on raising employment rates for female lone parents themselves. This emphasis has stemmed from what I consider misleading comparisons with European countries where lone parent employment rates have been higher simply because there has been less decline in male employment opportunities; and also by persistent promotion by right-wing interests of the views of very ideological American writers such as Lawrence Mead and Charles Murray who on the basis of shallow analyses of parallel processes in the USA have advocated driving lone parents off ‘welfare’ through punitive approaches (Webster 2000). The ‘New Deal for Lone Parents’ which was a feature of the earlier period of the last Labour government received generally rather favourable responses from lone parents themselves, because it was voluntary and offered the option of access to education and training rather than to jobs where lone parents considered this appropriate. The Labour government however later shifted to forcing lone parents directly into work via the JSA regime, and this emphasis has been increased by the Coalition, both by further reducing the age of the youngest child at which parents are transferred to JSA, and by intensifying the sanctions regime.

### **Extension of work-related requirements**

16. The result has been a progressive extension of work-related requirements to lone parent claimants of Income Support (IS), accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance:

- (i) A requirement for ‘work-focused interviews’ was rolled out to all lone parents on IS between April 2001 and April 2004 (although since 31 October 2011 this has not applied to those with a youngest child under 1). This requirement is supported by a sanction for non-attendance, taking the form of a 20% reduction in the amount of the Income Support personal allowance, which applies indefinitely until compliance.
- (ii) Since 2008, lone parents on IS with a youngest child under 16 have been progressively transferred to JSA and made subject to the full JSA conditionality and sanctions regime (the ‘Lone Parent Obligation’ - LPO). The stages were: November 2008, youngest child over 12; 26th October 2009, youngest child over 10; 25th October 2010, youngest child over 7; and 21st May 2012, youngest child over 5.<sup>4</sup> Sanctions under JSA are very much more severe than those under IS, and were further increased in October 2012. Normally, lone parents would be considered as belonging to a ‘vulnerable group’, and while under sanction would, if they apply for them, receive ‘hardship payments’ of 80% of their JSA. However there are many accounts of sanctioned claimants not being told about hardship

payments, and/or losing their Housing Benefit through similar lack of information.

17. The LPO has resulted in a large transfer of lone parents from IS to JSA. In August 2008 there were 744,680 lone parents on IS and 7,800 on JSA. By February 2013 there were 504,890 on IS and 158,575 on JSA (**Figure 6**). **These figures have since fallen to 485,000 on IS in November 2013 (the latest figure available) and 114,590 on JSA in April 2014.**

18. **While the recent sharp fall in the number of lone parents on JSA probably owes a lot to the current recovery in the labour market, the LPO has also had a major effect in driving lone parents off benefit altogether.** A DWP evaluation (2013) of the earlier phases of LPO found that nine months after losing entitlement to IS, the share of lone parents receiving any out-of-work benefit had fallen by between 13 and 16 percentage points. This was much larger than the increase in the share in work, at between eight and ten percentage points.

### IS sanctions

19. **Figure 7** shows that sanctions against lone parents on IS for not participating in work focused interviews began at the rate of around 0.3% of the case load per month in 2004-05, **rose to around 1% per month in 2008-12 and since then have fallen back to just under 0.8% per month.**

20. **Figure 8** shows that the percentage of lone parents who claimed IS in a given year who were sanctioned in that year rose from 4.3% in 2005 to well over 7.0% in 2007 to 2010.

21. It is clear from the research of Joyce & Whiting (2006) that even the comparatively mild sanctions of the IS WFI regime cause a lot of stress and ill health to lone parent claimants.

### JSA sanctions

22. **Figure 9** shows the huge escalation that has taken place in sanctions for lone parents on JSA. The highest number in any month prior to the LPO was 172 (in August 2007). In the latest three months for which data are available (**October-December 2013**) **the number averaged 4,700 per month.** The increase is due both to the increase in the number of lone parents on JSA, and to an increased rate of sanctions.

23. **Figure 10** shows that **the rate of sanctioning of lone parent JSA claimants in the latest three months was as high as the highest rate of sanctioning of *non-lone parent* claimants seen before the Coalition government, at about 3.5% per month.** It is lower than the rate for all claimants, which is now over 6%. This is probably because lone parents' caring responsibilities make it easier to give 'good reasons' for not meeting JSA requirements such as attending interviews, applying for jobs etc.

24. **Figure 8** shows that the percentage of lone parents who claimed JSA in a given year who were sanctioned in that year almost doubled from under 8.0% in 2000 to 14.0% in 2011. This figure will be higher now and would be higher still if the period of analysis was longer than a year. Clearly sanctions do not just affect a small minority of lone parents.

25. Lane et al. (2011, pp. 4, 69), in an official DWP report, stated 'There is a very low incidence of sanctioning of lone parents on JSA according to Department for Work and

Pensions (DWP) administrative data.’ I do not believe that this was a reasonable statement to make even at the time it was written. It is a pity that the authors did not quote the actual figures.

26. **Figure 11** shows that the 114,590 lone parents on JSA at April 2014 were disproportionately concentrated among those with the youngest children (over the officially-mandated age of 5). Only a quarter (27,177) had a youngest child of secondary school age, while one third (37,405) had a youngest child aged 5 or 6. This is presumably because for many lone parents, having a young child really is a serious barrier to employment, so that it is those with older children who find it easiest to get a job. The consequence must be that the impact of the sanctions regime falls disproportionately on the lone parents with the youngest children.

27. The brutal and often unfair and dishonest sanctions of the JSA regime cause very severe stress and damage to lone parents, as was graphically conveyed by a panel of sanctioned lone parents who spoke at a seminar ‘From Welfare to Work’ in Glasgow on 18 October 2013 organised by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health. Lane et al. (2011) commented ‘Lone parent interviewees who had been sanctioned or disentitled reported struggling financially during the period with no benefits, which was often stressful and had longer-term consequences than the length of sanction or disentanglement would suggest. For example, it was common for disentitled lone parents to go into debt with utility companies and to borrow money from friends or family.’<sup>5</sup>

### **ESA sanctions on lone parents**

27. The DWP does not publish ESA sanctions statistics separately for lone parents. They are relevant to the present inquiry and data on them could be obtained via a Freedom of Information request.

## **OUTCOMES OF THE LONE PARENT CONDITIONALITY REGIME**

28. The objective of policy since 2001 has been to get lone parents off benefits and into work. How successful has it been?

29. The proportion of families with dependent children who are headed by a lone parent increased further between 2001 and 2011, from 25.6% to 29.0%. However, this represents a considerable slowing down of the rate of increase. In terms of percentage points, it was the smallest decennial increase since 1951-61 (**Figure 12**). ONS (2013) figures suggest that since 2011 there has been no further increase in the number of lone parent families in the UK. Adherents of the Murray/Mead thesis would attribute the slowdown to the withdrawal of benefit support, but the Rowthorn & Webster thesis suggests that it could be related to the stabilisation of the rate of working age male non-employment.

30. ONS (2013) estimates of the proportion of lone parents with dependent children in the UK who are in employment show an increase of 16.4 percentage points, from 43.8% in 1996 to 60.2% in 2013 (**Figure 13**). Almost half of this increase (7.7 percentage points) took place before the introduction of work-focused interviews in 2001. Of the remaining increase of 8.7 percentage points, over half (4.9 points) took place before the introduction of the Lone Parent Obligation in 2008. Since the LPO there has been an increase of 3.8 percentage points.

31. **Figure 13** also shows figures for the proportion of lone parent families with dependent children in GB who were claiming IS or JSA. The figures for the Census years 2001 and 2011 are exact, and show a fall from 50.5% in 2001 to 33.6% in 2011. Figures for other years have been estimated by making a *pro rata* adjustment to the UK figures for numbers of lone parents with dependent children reported in ONS (2013). Since 2001 the fall in the proportion of lone parents with dependent children claiming IS or JSA, of about 20 percentage points, has been approximately twice as large as the increase in the proportion in employment, of about 10 percentage points. To the extent that WFIs, the LPO and their associated sanction regimes have had any effect, it has been much greater in getting lone parents off IS than in getting them into work. This confirms the finding of DWP (2013) mentioned earlier. Of those who have moved off IS/JSA but not into work, some will have moved on to ESA, and the rest will simply not be receiving benefits (other than Child Benefit), so that their incomes will have fallen.

32. Goodwin (2008), in research carried out before the introduction of the Lone Parent Obligation, provides some evidence about the WFI sanctions regime. She concluded that ‘there was no evidence that suggested that non-compliance was an active decision’, that ‘imposing a sanction had only a negligible effect on customers’ labour market decisions’ and that ‘those who have incurred a sanction and those who have continued to live with a sanction.....in comparison to the wider sample in this study, demonstrated higher levels of ill health, both of themselves and of their children.... Additionally, a greater prevalence of debt was noted’.

## UNIVERSAL CREDIT

33. Universal Credit, currently only applying to a few thousand claimants in pilot local authority areas, extends the conditionality regime further. In particular, the provisions requiring part time workers to seek more hours and to sanction them if they are considered not to be making enough effort, are obviously likely to affect lone parents particularly badly. There are also many other rule changes which reduce the respect given to lone parents’ childcare responsibilities.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

34. **British state policy has become highly directive towards lone parents who claim benefits. The emphasis now is overwhelmingly on getting them off benefits, and the figures show that this is the main outcome.** Whether they move into employment is not regularly monitored and is not a primary focus of interest. There is no interest in the quality or sustainability of the jobs, or in longer term training or education. Nor is there much interest in the welfare of the children. I have been horrified to read reports from One Parent Families Scotland of cases where Jobcentre staff have told lone parent claimants to leave young children unsupervised at home in order to attend interviews or take up jobs.<sup>7</sup> The state claims that being in work promotes the welfare of lone parents and their children. The research indicates that this is often true. But conversely it also indicates that there are many instances in which it is not true, and there are severe conflicts between the demands of work and those of parenting. In these cases the state is pressurising lone parents into sacrificing both their interests and those of their children to the prevalent ‘work first’ philosophy.

35. It is sanctions that shift state policy on lone parents' employment from an enabling framework which respects parental responsibilities, to an exercise in bullying. They should be abolished.

## PAPERS ATTACHED TO THIS SUBMISSION

Rowthorn, R. and Webster, D. (2008) 'Male Worklessness and the Rise of Lone Parenthood in Britain', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 1 (1), April, 69-88

Webster, D. (2000) 'Lone Parenthood: Two Views and Their Consequences', Chapter 8 in I. Anderson & D. Sim (eds), *Social Exclusion and Housing*, 108-130, Coventry, Chartered Institute of Housing

Webster, D. (2013) 'JSA Sanctions and Disallowances', Written Evidence submitted to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry into *The Role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system*, 22 May, revised and corrected 8 August. Available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/90147/>

Webster, D. (2013) 'Jobseeker's Allowance Sanctions and Disallowances', *Working Brief* 233, Autumn, 6-7. Available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/88620/>

Webster, D. (2014) *Evidence submitted to the Independent review of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) sanctions for claimants failing to take part in back to work schemes*, 10 January, revised 13 January. Available at <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/oakley-sanctions-review-responses-other-organisations>

Webster, D. (2014) *Briefing: The DWP's JSA/ESA sanctions statistics release, 14 May 2014*. Available at <https://paulspicker.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/14-05-sanctions-stats-briefing-d-webster-may-2014.pdf>  
or <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/2014/03/the-great-sanctions-debate/>  
or <https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=https://www.refuteddotorgdotuk.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/sanctionsstatsbriefingd-webstermay2014.pdf>

Webster, D. (2014) *Not So Smart!* Comments on the Policy Exchange report 'Smarter Sanctions: Sorting out the system' by Guy Miscampbell, 24 March. Available at <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/share-your-views/>

## OTHER REFERENCES

Dept for Work & Pensions (2013) *Lone Parent Obligations: an impact assessment*, Research Report 845, July

Dept for Work & Pensions (2014) *Income Support Lone Parents Regime: Official Statistics, Quarterly official statistics bulletin, 14th May*



Goodwin, Vicki (2008) *The effects of benefit sanctions on lone parents' employment decisions and moves into employment*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No 511, HMSO

Joyce, Lucy and Whiting, Karen (2006) *Sanctions: Qualitative summary report on lone parent customers*, Department for Work and Pensions Working Paper No 27, Leeds, Corporate Document Services

Lane, Pippa, Casebourne, Jo, Lanceley, Lorraine and Davies, Malen (2011) *Lone Parent Obligations: work, childcare and the Jobseeker's Allowance regime*, DWP Research Report 782, Sheffield, Dept for Work & Pensions

Office for National Statistics (2013) *Working and Workless Households, 2013 - Statistical Bulletin*, 28 August, at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/working-and-workless-households/2013/index.html>

One Parent Families Scotland (2014) *Written Submission to the Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee*, 1 April 2014

## DATA SOURCES

Numbers of lone parents on JSA are from the DWP Statistical data set *Lone parents receiving JSA: monthly claimant count*, 11 June 2014, and data on other JSA claimants are from NOMIS.

Data on JSA sanctions per month are from the DWP Stat-Xplore database released on 14 May 2014. This contained heavily revised figures, especially for recent months.

Data on the proportion of lone parents on JSA in a given year sanctioned in that year are from DWP Freedom of Information responses 3634-2013 and 5156-2012. **These figures have not been revised to reflect the May 2014 revisions but will not have been much affected by them.**

Numbers of lone parents on IS are from the DWP Tabtool. Lone parents on IB/SDA/ESA do not appear in the IS lone parent caseload figures. Data on IS sanctions per month are from DWP (2014) and from DWP Freedom of Information response 2339-2013. Data on the proportion of lone parents on IS in a given year sanctioned in that year are from DWP Freedom of Information response 3634-2013.

Estimates of lone parents in employment are from ONS (2013).

Sources for male and female non-employment rates are as in Rowthorn & Webster (2008), updated from ONS Labour Market Statistics, June 2014 (Table A02). Lone parent and other families with dependent children are from the Census, or from ONS (2013) adjusted as described in the text.

The original spreadsheets underlying the charts are available on request.

Figure 1

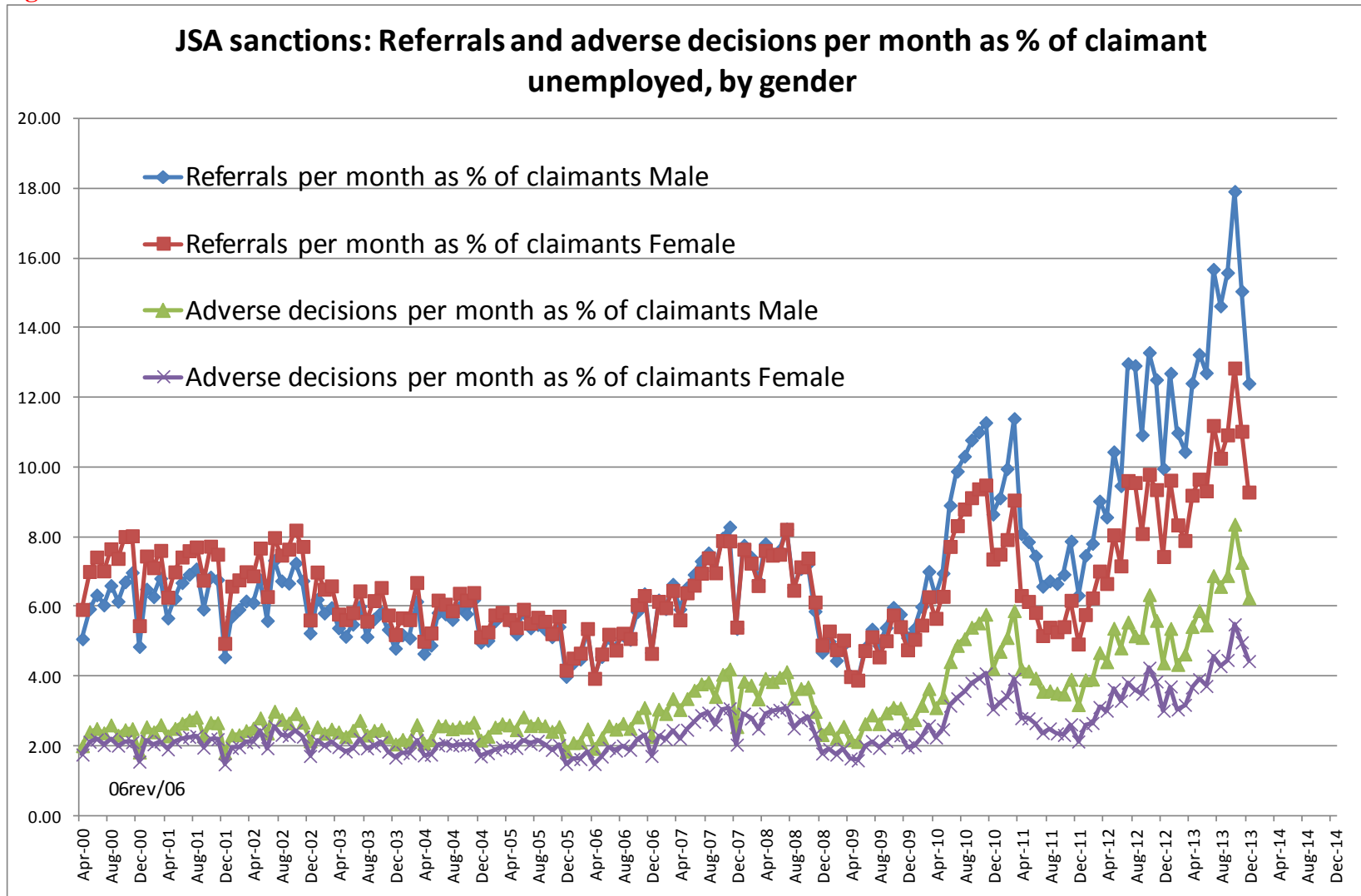


Figure 2

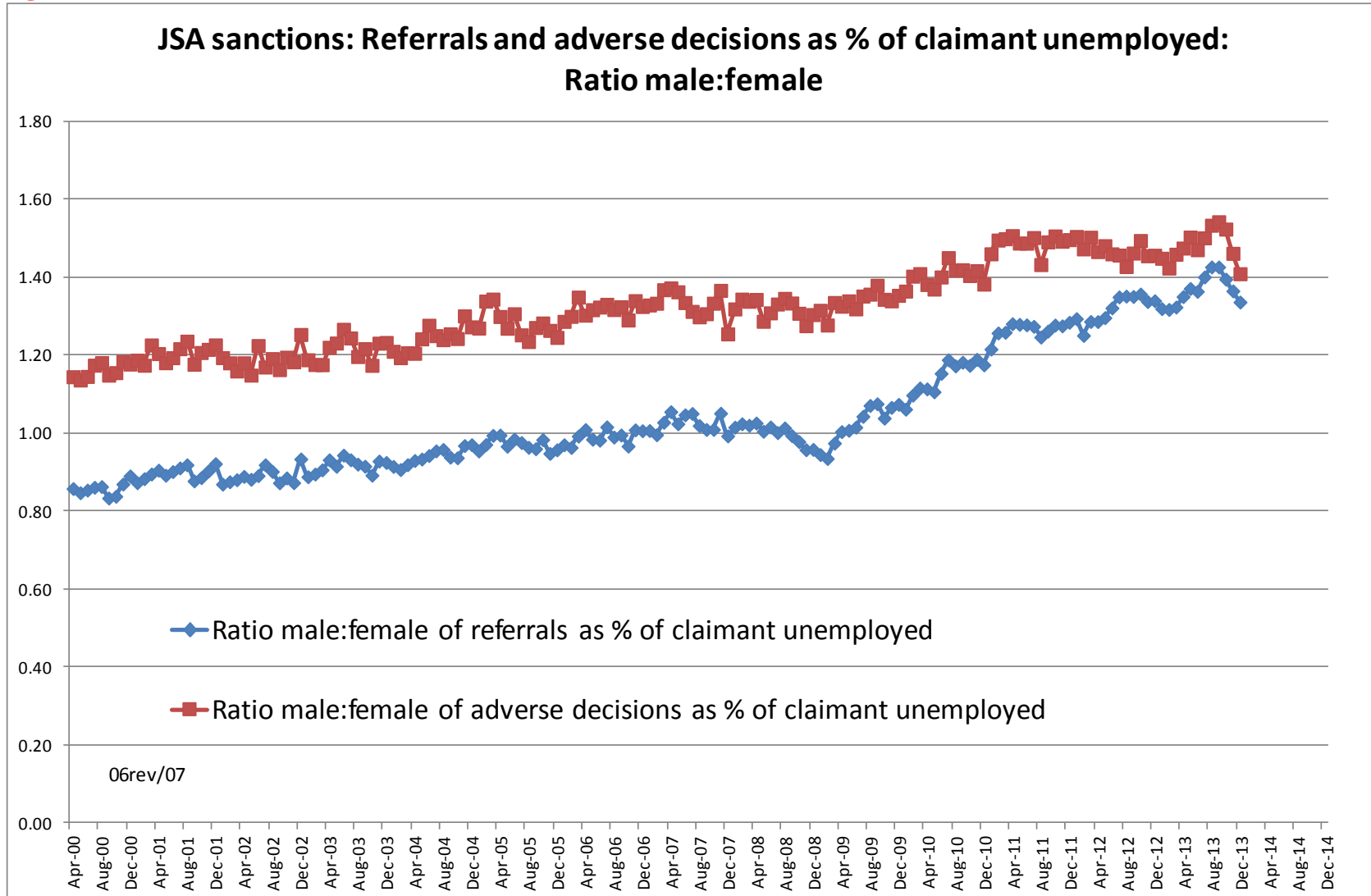


Figure 3

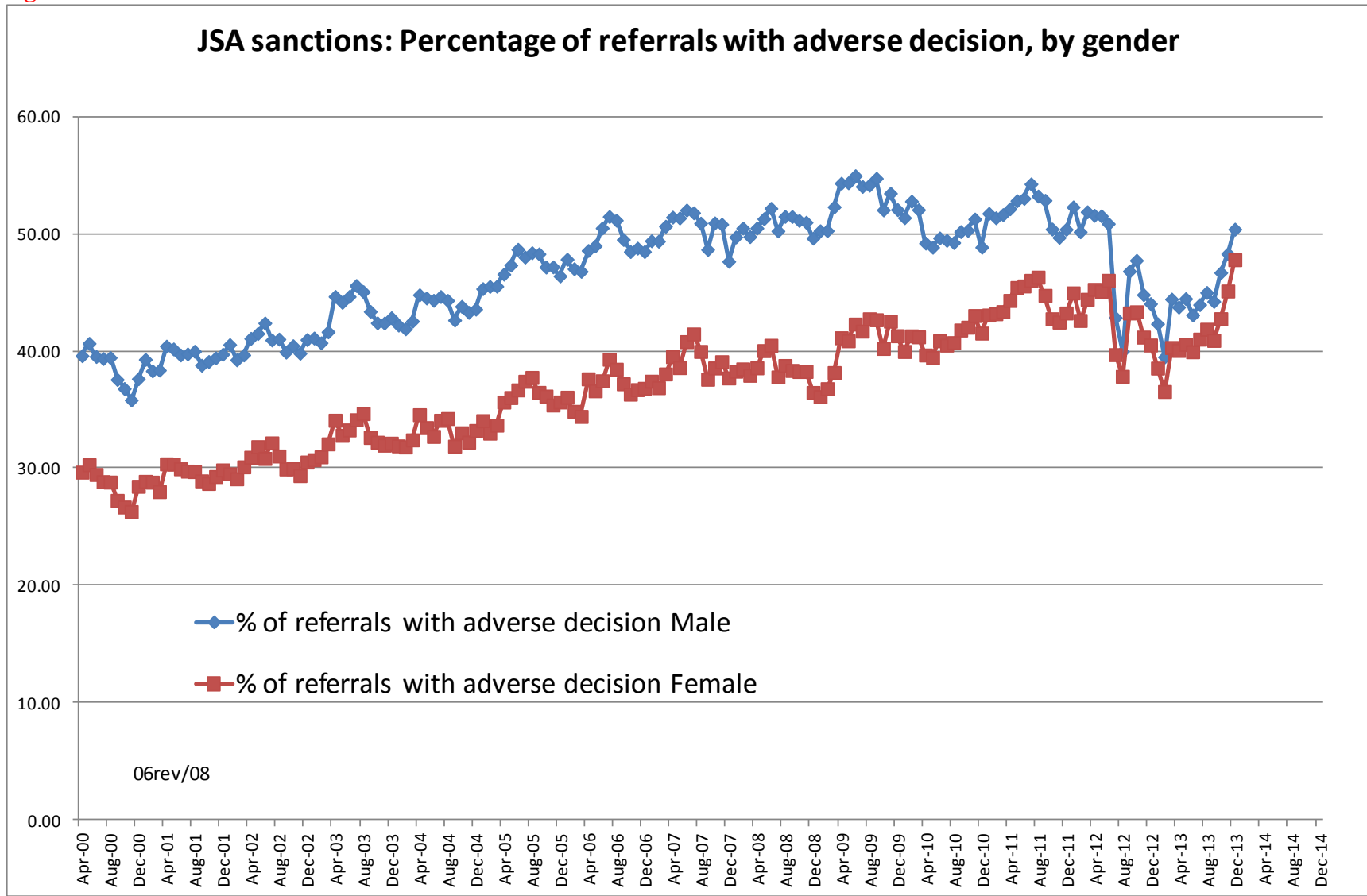


Figure 4

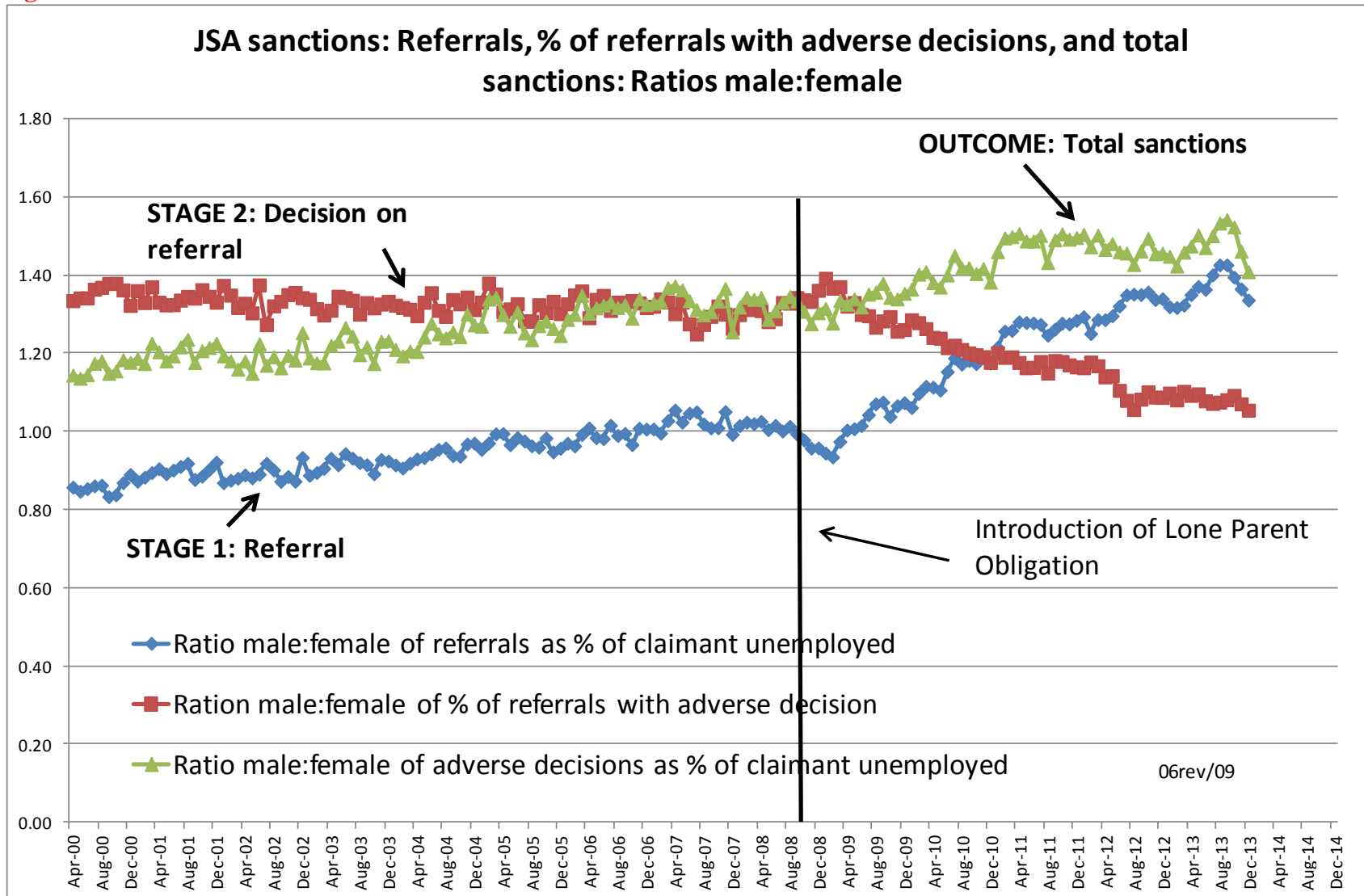
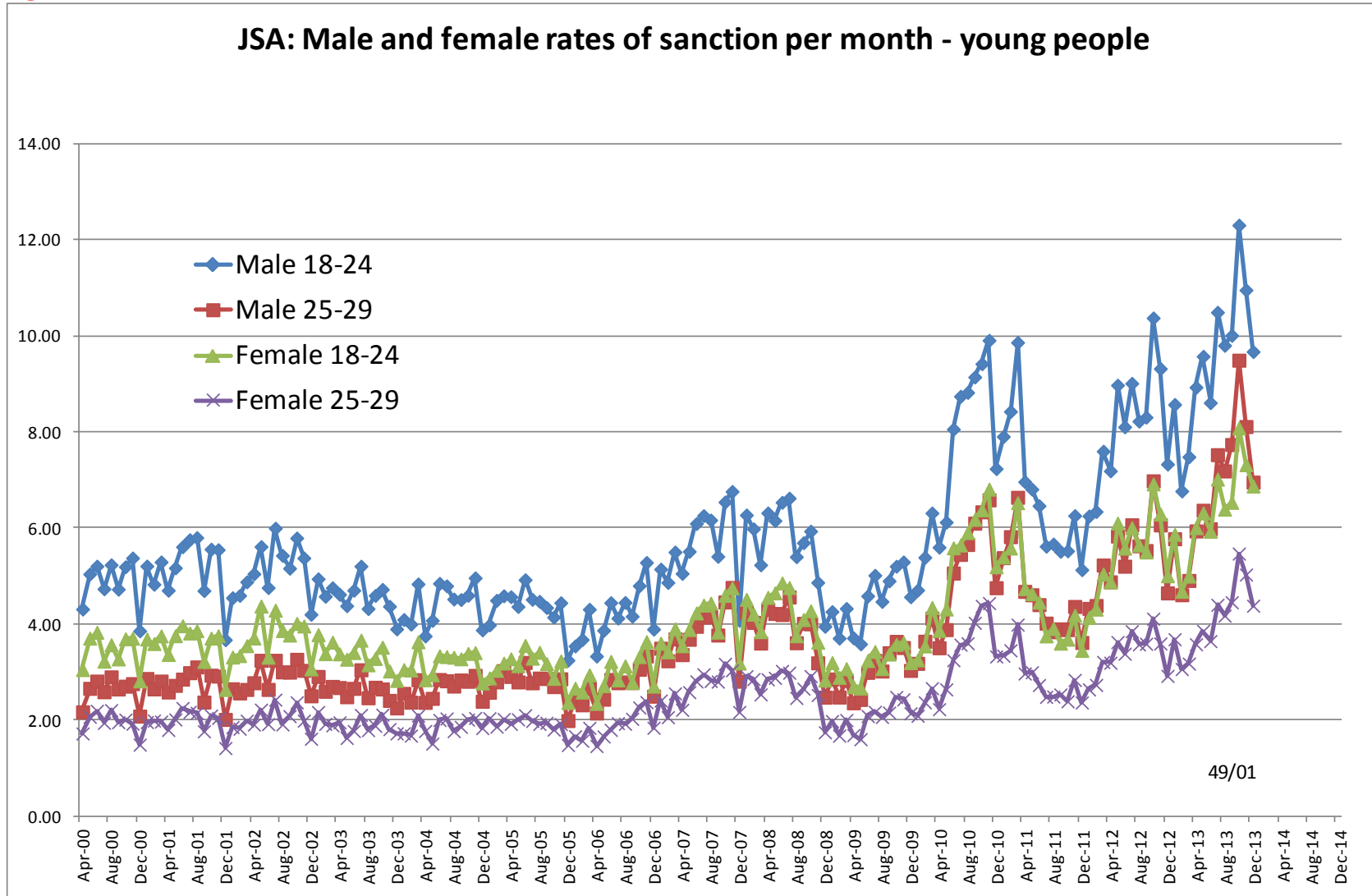


Figure 5



**Figure 6**

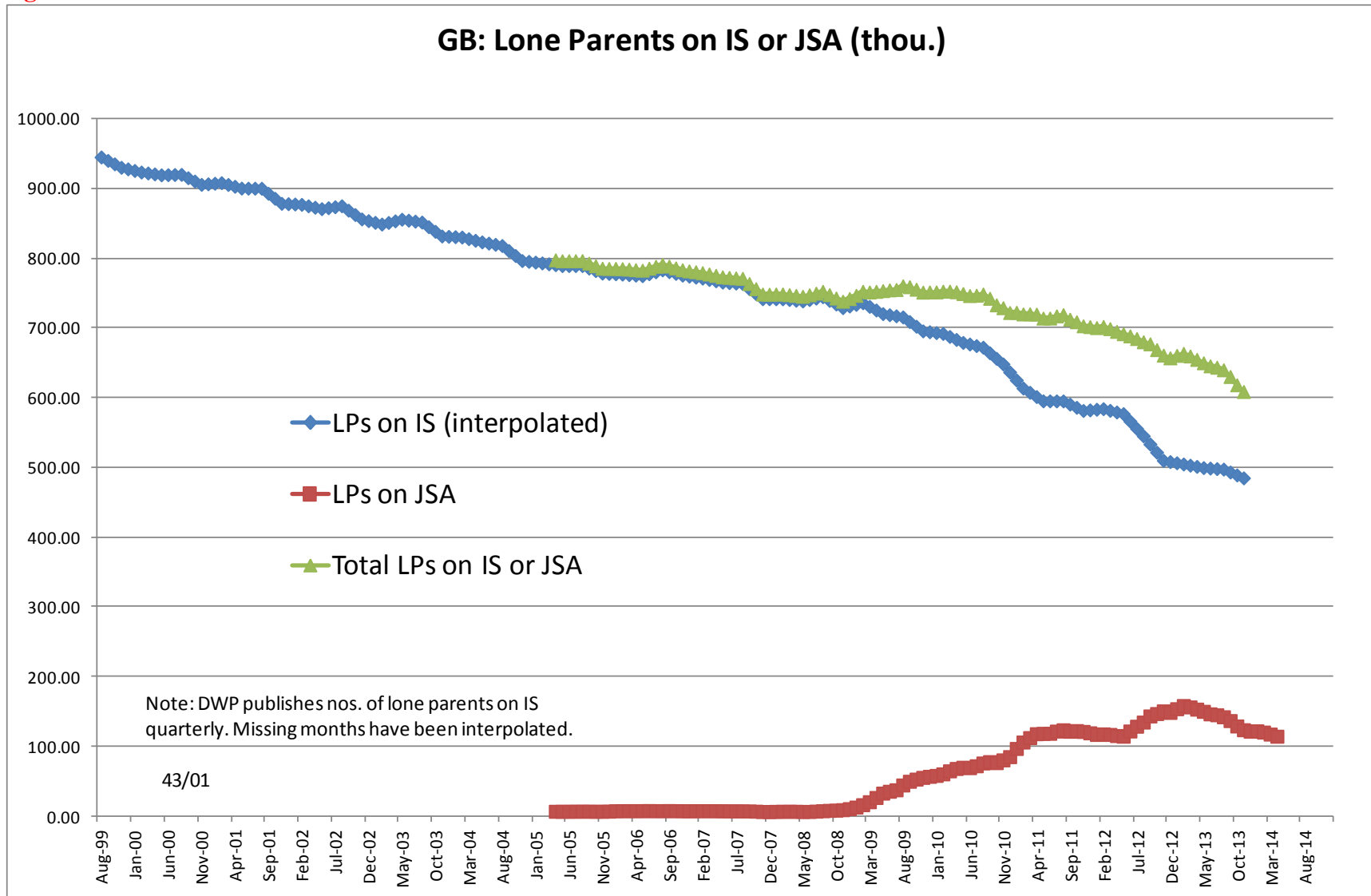


Figure 7

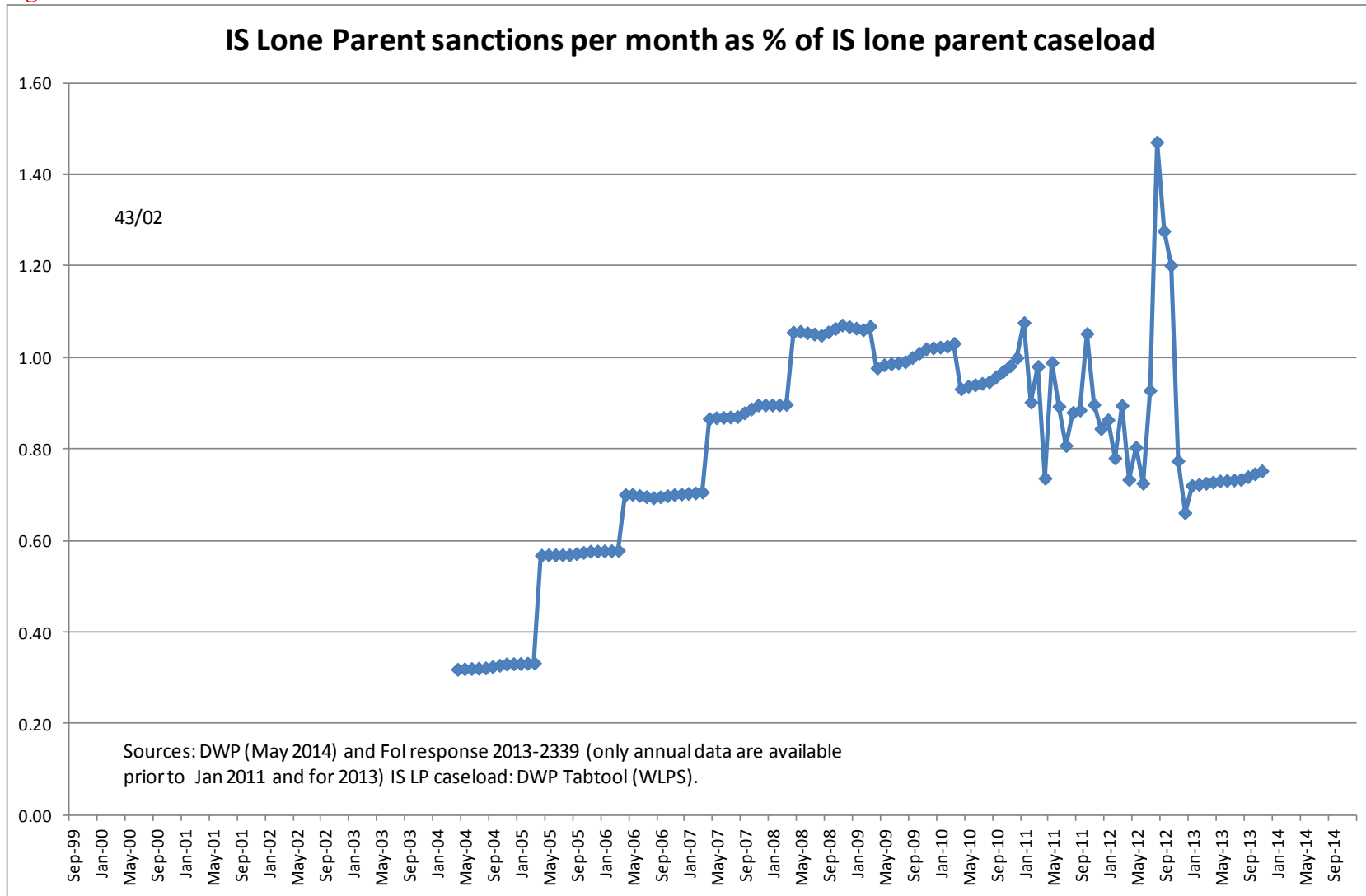
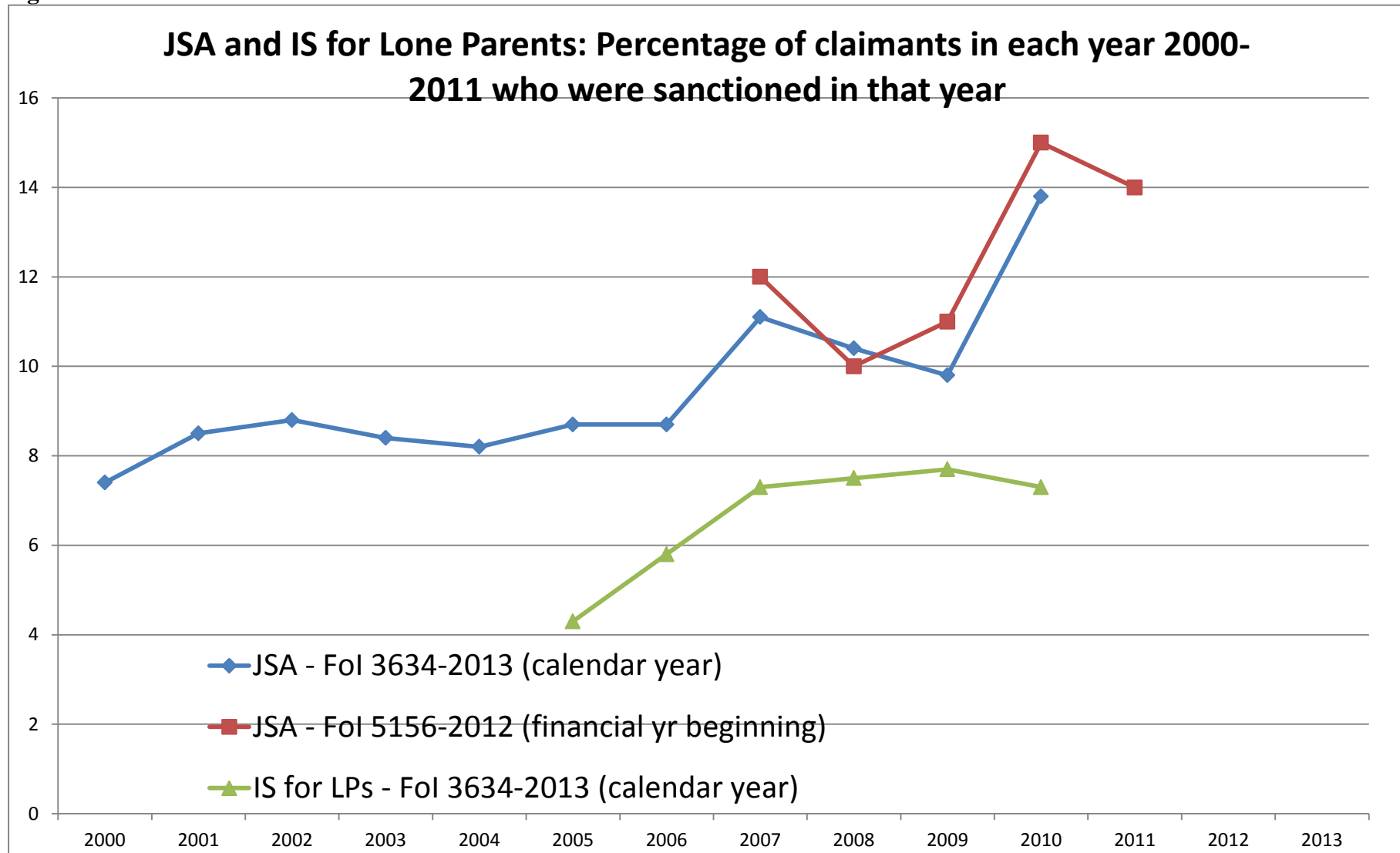




Figure 8



**Figure 9**

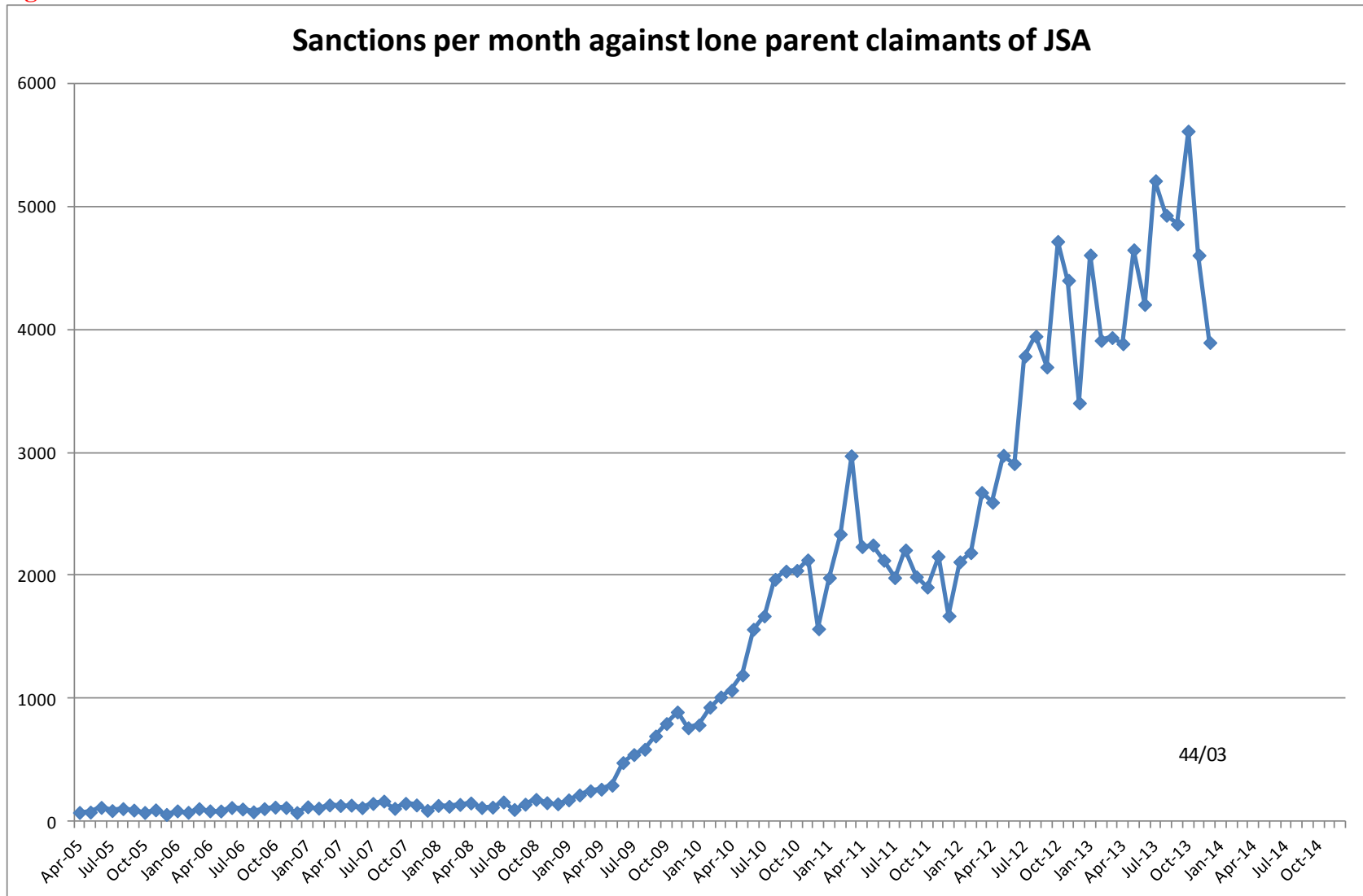
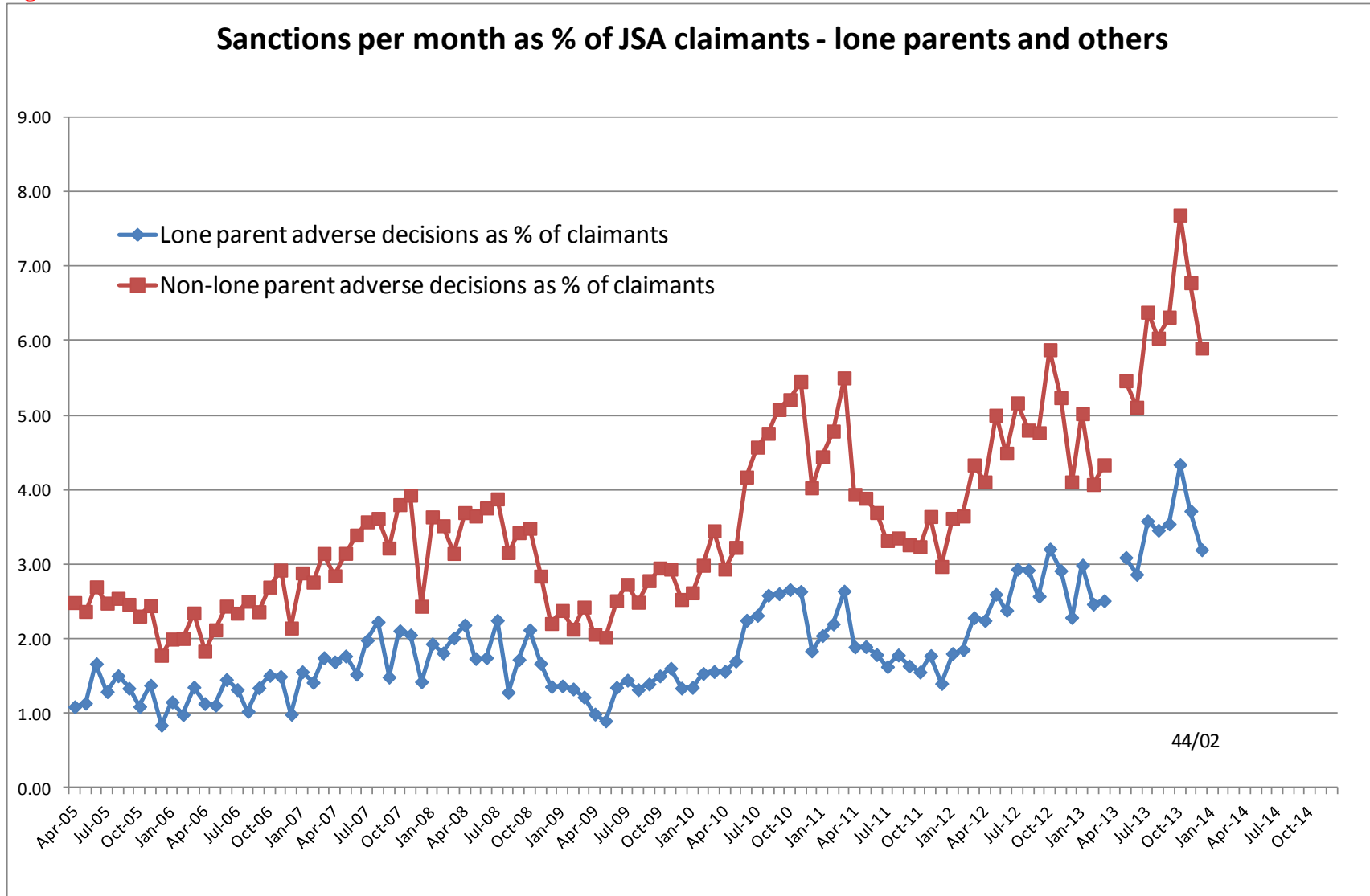


Figure 10



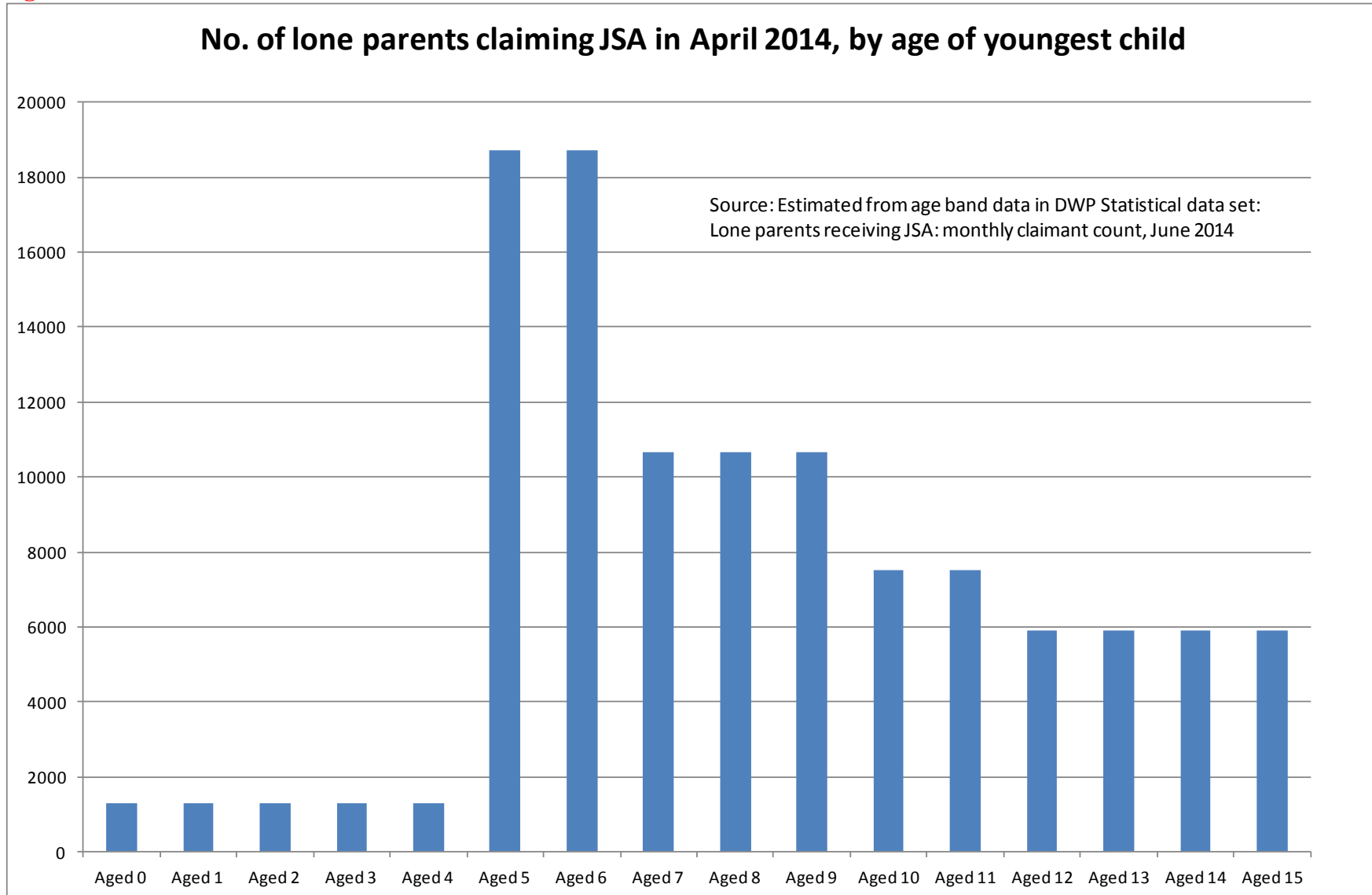
**Figure 11**

Figure 12

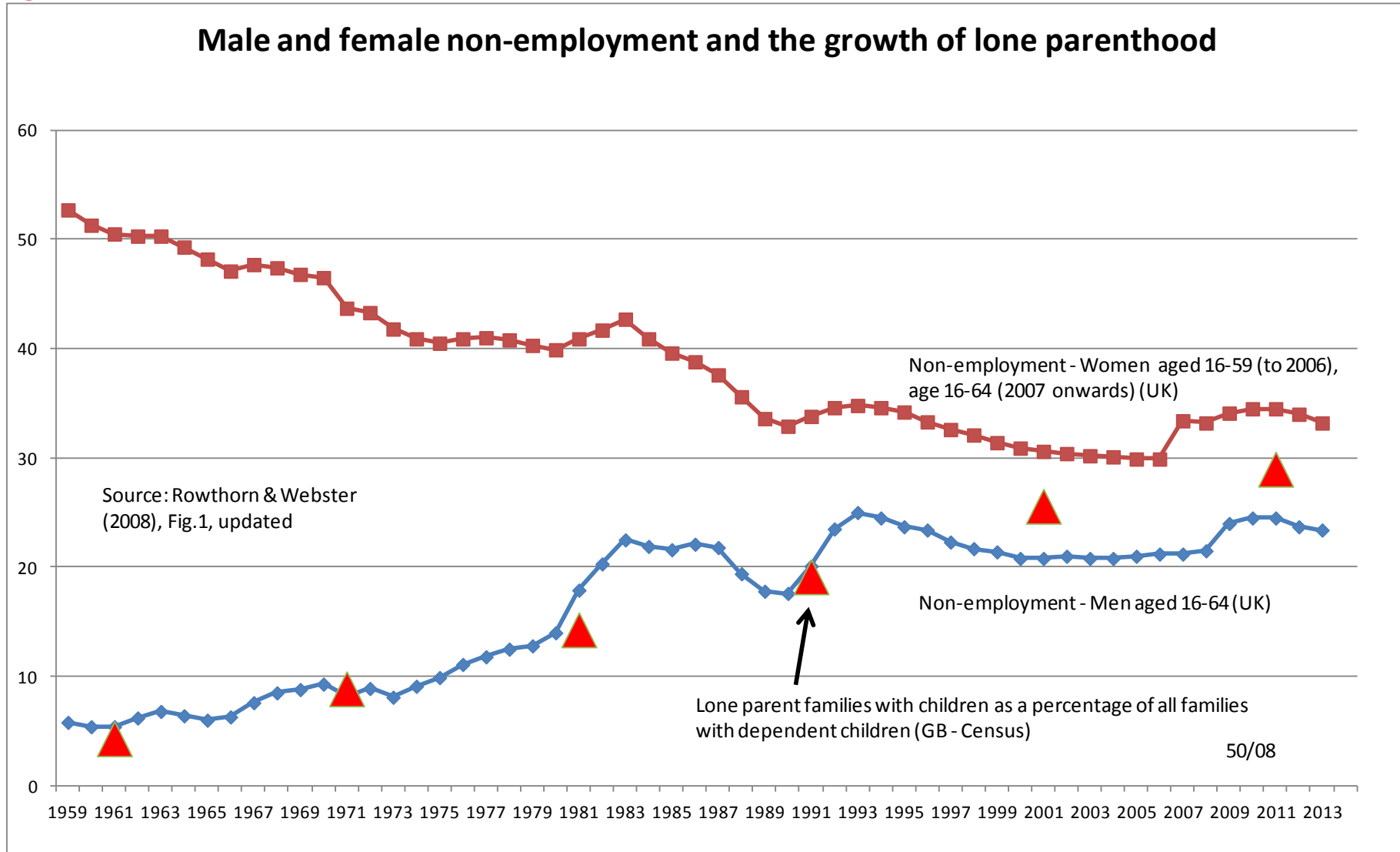
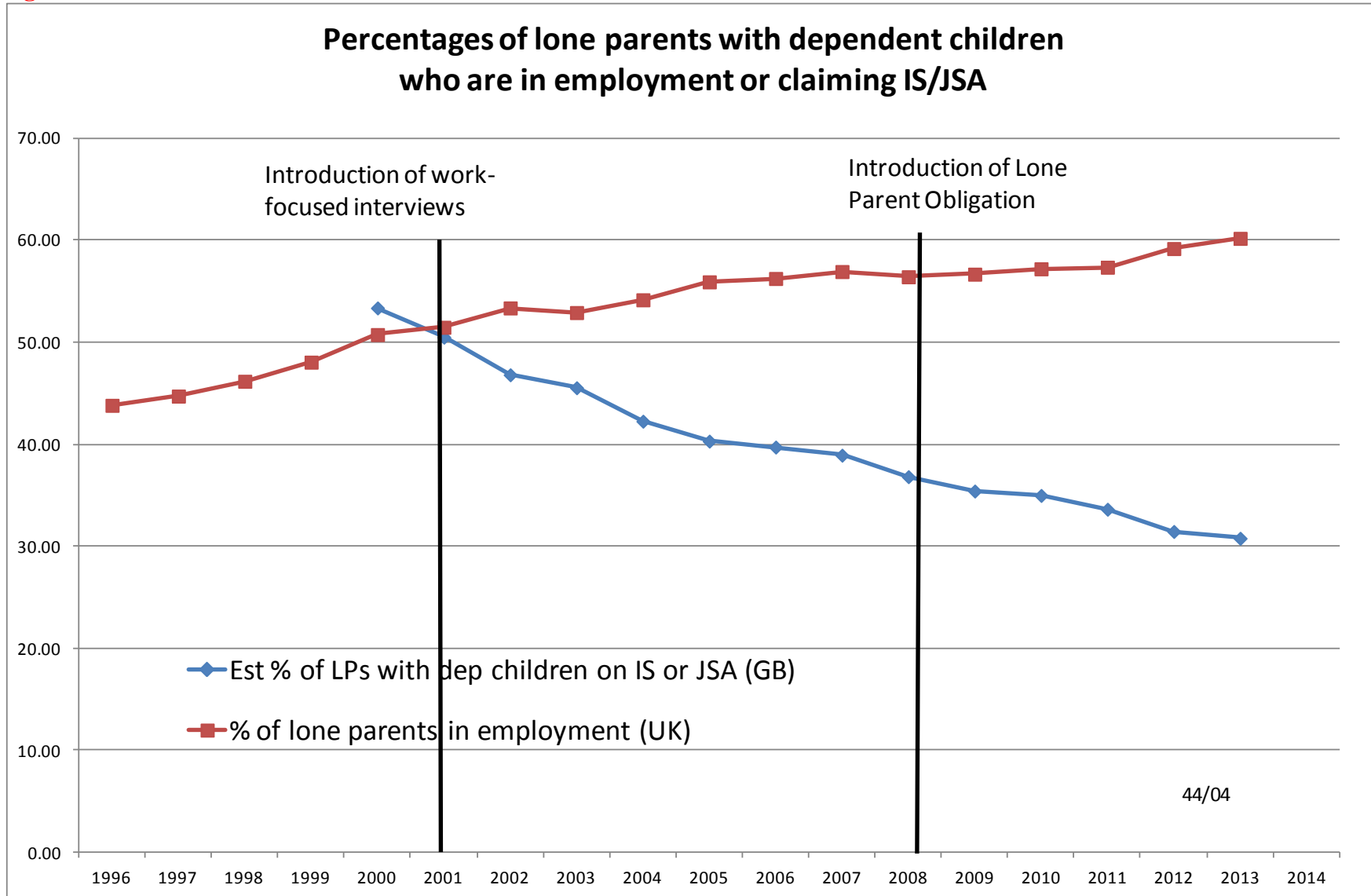


Figure 13



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<sup>1</sup> Relevant sections of the Guiding Principles are: 'States should: ....take corrective measures, to be implemented both immediately and progressively, to provide access to adequate food' (para. 76) and 'Persons living in poverty must be recognized and treated as free and autonomous agents. All policies relevant to poverty must be aimed at empowering persons living in poverty. They must be based on the recognition of those persons' right to make their own decisions and respect their capacity to fulfil their own potential, their sense of dignity and their right to participate in decisions affecting their lives.' (para. 36)

<sup>2</sup> I have written some other papers on JSA sanctions which seem less relevant to the present inquiry. They are at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/90148/> and at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/90156/>

<sup>3</sup> We intend to update our analysis using data from the 2011 Census but have not yet had the opportunity to do so.

<sup>4</sup> Coalition policy has been particularly negligent in failing to recognise that many children start school only after their fifth birthday.

<sup>5</sup> Other relevant DWP research reports not specifically cited here are Nos. 710 (2010), 736 (2011) and 818 (2012).

<sup>6</sup> One Parent Families Scotland (2014), pp.8, 13-15.

<sup>7</sup> One Parent Families Scotland (2014), pp. 5, 6, 10, 11.