

UK Benefits System - Punishing the Most Vulnerable

Friday 6 October, 2017

EMBARGOED TILL: 09.10.17

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) today published research which they say shows the present benefits conditionality regime disproportionately affects vulnerable single parents, particularly those who have poor health or are disabled, often leaving them distressed, impoverished and reliant on food banks. OPFS says sanctioning does not help people into work but is more likely to make it harder to get a job. Satwat Rehman, Director of OPFS said today:

"Our research involving interviews with single parents over a period of 2 years shows the current benefit conditionality regime, and the fear of being sanctioned, is resulting in worsening health, especially mental health, with resulting negative impacts on children. "

The report **"Why Conditionality is Unnecessary, Unjust and Ineffective"** points out that one in seven single parents receiving jobseeker's allowance were sanctioned in a single year.

"I've been sanctioned and this means I need to regularly go to food banks and go to the Salvation Army for help with gas and electricity. This is embarrassing but I need to go or I can't feed myself or my child."

"It's caused me mental health problems, I'm not sleeping, I'm worrying constantly about how I can manage to pay for things I need and to heat my house."

"I need to do without to give the kids what they need and this is affecting my mental health and in turn makes me not want to leave the house. I cry a lot when I'm on my own."

OPFS argues that the conditionality regime should be abolished and replaced by a system that treats parents and their children with dignity and respect.

Key findings of the report are:

1. Conditionality doesn't work & isn't necessary – Westminster should pilot alternatives to replace financial sanctions and current conditionality regime.
2. Safeguards are not in place with resulting impact on family health & wellbeing – Scottish Government & partners should support and fund a national anti-stigma campaign to support single parents others living with conditionality.
3. Single Parents are being forced into inappropriate jobs – Scottish Government & partners should develop specific programmes of action within Fair Start Scotland to support single parents to access fair work

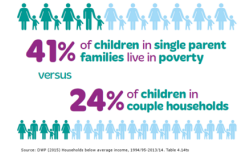
Satwat Rehman, Director of OPFS, said:

"Sticking stubbornly to the line that sanctions are necessary favours political convenience over effective policy. It ignores the unfair and disproportionate rules that don't reflect the realities of single parents who are seeking paid work. It ignores the overstretched and undertrained advisers behind poor decision-making. It ignores a proper assessment of whether what government spends its money on actually makes any difference – other than making those with little even worse off."

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Notes to Editors

- Download the 'Single Parent Families, Benefit Conditionality and Wellbeing' report [here](#). A summary version is also [available](#).
- One Parent Families Scotland has been supporting and campaigning for single parents for over 70 years.
- OPFS helps thousands of lone parents every year through its Lone Parent Helpline, advice information family support and employability services. It also runs projects in Glasgow, Dundee, Edinburgh, Aberdeenshire, Falkirk and Lanarkshire.

Company Contact:

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One Parent Families Scotland

T. 01315563899

E. tariq.ali@opfs.org.uk

W. <https://www.opfs.org.uk>

Additional Contact(s):

Marion Davis - 07794226484

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