



**One Parent
Families Scotland**

changing lives, challenging poverty

COVID-19

Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



Issue 1 March 2020



Parents Experiences



Parents Experiences - Single Parent Proofing

In this new situation we are gathering information about the experiences single parents are facing through our local and national channels. We are also taking information coming from the single parents' experience to feedback into OPFS response to the needs of parents, to policy makers and those in charge of service delivery to encourage responses that are 'single parent proofed'.

To ensure we understand the impact of the crisis we have implemented a new '**COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring System**'. This enables us to gather in all we can from parents through our five local teams, our national advice and information service channels and website. We are now tracking and communicating key service responses and policy relevant issues arising from direct work with single parents.



Parents Experiences



There are five elements:



Impact knowledge: Data from parents is systematically collected and analysed.



Monitoring Emerging Issues: Arrangements are in place to monitor policy impacts and highlighting emerging issues.



OPFS Response: Our services respond by working to meet the needs identified.



Dissemination and Communication: Impact information and emerging issues communicated to key influencers.



Policy Response: OPFS policy response to parents experience which informs our campaign priorities.



Parents Experiences

We have gathered feedback on some of the key issues single parents are experiencing through our local and national channels.

This report is based on feedback gathered across OPFS channels on single parent enquiries including:

- **OPFS Advice and Information services advisor daily highlights**
- **Ask an advisor a question on the website**
- **OPFS local community based services**

The report content is organised by topic headings which mirror the OPFS website topic headings www.opfs.org.uk. Within these headings we report back on **key themes** arising from our contact with single parents across OPFS.





1. COVID-19 Impact

Access to information about COVID-19

Lack of access to clear information about guidelines. Parents feel bombarded with information - on TV and internet (if they have access).

Lack of access to food and shops

Most parents don't want to take their children to shops with them to avoid social contact, but don't have childcare either. Parents are worried about not having enough money to buy what is left in the shops as the cheaper brands are going first and folk are still panic buying.

Access to healthcare and essential items (prescriptions, medication, top-ups)

Getting medication for the family can be difficult, especially when the parent has a mental health problem & struggles going outside or cost of travel if taking all the children. Concerns about top up for utilities for e.g. fuel.

Drug addiction - those on replacement medication concerned about still being able to get their scripts and former users are concerned about their anxiety and concerns making them think about using again.

Parents who have long term and enduring mental health issues are being impacted by anxiety and uncertainty about what is currently happening, this is further impacted by the lack of services and family members withdrawing.





2. Health and Wellbeing

Stress, anxiety and impact on mental health

Increasing anxiety and impact of stress whilst managing alone at home with children on mental health. Many parents OPFS work with locally have lost any emotional and practical support they were getting.



Now they have to care for too many people and take care of too many things so feel mentally & physically exhausted as they're on their own. This lack of emotional support is affecting even parents with no previous mental health problems, as the parents miss their own support network.



A lot of parents suffering with sleep problems.



Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

Specific concerns as many came here as asylum seekers; no one to turn to; no support and suspicious of state services such as social work.

Welfare Calls

Some families are being inundated with welfare calls from schools which, in reality, is only adding to the family's stresses as the calls offer no practical support.





3. Your Money

Financial Concerns and Poverty

Energy debt, extra costs from being at home, credit card debt, overdraft, owing money to family, budgeting.

Paying housing costs - rent, council tax, mortgage. Worry about being made homeless. Families already in poverty feel they are sinking even deeper.

Digital Exclusion

A lot of parents request help with broadband and iPads for their kids to allow them to do their homework while self-isolating. The majority of parents we support don't have laptops or PC's and do things on the internet via their phones.



4. Your Benefits

Universal Credit and other benefits

Fear of continuing job search obligations and sanctions
Difficulties accessing benefits especially Universal Credit. Financial uncertainty and problems with benefits are causing a lot of stress and anxiety.

5. Support for you

Loneliness, social isolation and access to essential services

Trapped in the home with children and no adult company.

Lack of access to key services and support. Families with social work input have not had much contact with services.

Increased stresses on family relationships

Family arguments have been increased. Being realistic, for some families just surviving the next few months together will be a real struggle.



6. Separating/Being a Single Parent

Children - Sole Carer responsibilities (schoolwork, shopping, keyworkers)

Most parents feel very worried about what will happen to their children if they fall sick, as they have nobody else to help.



A lot of worry and anxiety with schoolwork, some parents feel they lack the education to support their children with it at home.



The news and the rapid changes are causing children anxiety and parents have to deal with this on their own.



Parents from different areas saying supermarkets stopping single parents taking their children in to buy essentials. Examples include local authorities, when assessing the childcare for key workers, asking about partner's key worker status without the option to say there is no partner.





7. Your Home

Keeping up rent or mortgage payments

Housing and finances are causing even more anxiety for households at this time and despite the emergency legislative measures and parents are concerned about what happens when those measures are lifted.

Single parents looking for advice to keep their current home and looking for advice on improving their financial situation to afford their housing costs. It is a worrying picture and a trend that we predict will be on an upward trajectory.



8. Work/Education/Training

Employment Rights

Self-employment; having to work & childcare; sick pay.

A lot of parents find it impossible to work from home, which causes a lot of worries for their jobs & income.



9. Your Children

Child Contact and Child Maintenance

Single parents concern about children's physical contact with the non-resident parent and moving between households. This is causing high levels of concern, anxiety and real fear for some parents.

Single parents reporting child maintenance in arrears but not being pursued by the Child Maintenance Service.





Observations

We can see from the evidence of parents experiences that COVID-19, beyond its immediate impacts on health, jobs and incomes, is increasing people's anxiety and worry, affecting their social relations, trust, personal security and sense of belonging. The impacts of COVID-19 is and will continue to be particularly severe for those single parent families who are financially insecure, compounding existing inequalities.

The spillover effects on multi-dimensional aspects of poverty (health and nutrition, education, living standards) will be manifested in the medium and long-term.





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If you have any questions about anything in this report, please contact us at:

One Parent Families Scotland,
2 York Place, Edinburgh EH1 3EP

Tel: 0131 556 3899

info@opfs.org.uk

www.opfs.org.uk

 /oneparentfamiliescotland

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