



**One Parent
Families Scotland**

changing lives, challenging poverty

COVID-19

Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



Issue 2 April 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

- Families need help with accessing food parcels, medication and fuel.
- Some food referrals, but this is due to parents waiting on their pay due to furlough money being delayed rather than poor management of money.
- Parents not having enough money to feed their children.
- Parents have problems accessing food due to heightened anxiety and lack of money.

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

- Not being able to go out because of self-isolating.
- Parents find getting medication for themselves or their children challenging especially when the parent has a mental health problem and struggles going outside (Mental Health medication is not always available locally).
- Parents raise concerns about being unable to go out and get fuel top ups.
- Concerns about being able to collect prescriptions.
- Drug addiction, those on replacement medication are 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.





2. Health and Wellbeing

Stress, anxiety and mental health

- Parents experiencing a lot of emotional stress and anxiety. Parents are more anxious about the future, i.e. stress within the family group due to self-isolation.
- Emotional anxiety and increased parental stress levels prevail the longer lockdown continues, for example, parents have been crying on the phone to staff. Staff across local services providing high levels of emotional support to parents and their families.
- There are a few parents with mental health issues who are struggling without the appropriate services to support them. In these cases, routine has not been established and as time goes on things are getting more difficult for them.



A lot of parents are suffering with sleep problems.



- Parents worry about the impact this pandemic is having on their children both now and in the future. Some are also concerned about their children's weight and lack of exercise.





3. Your Benefits

Universal Credit

- Difficulties accessing benefits especially Universal Credit
- Fear of continuing job search obligations and sanctions.

Other Benefits

- Parents facing financial uncertainty and problems with benefits are causing stress and anxiety.

4. Your Money

Financial Concerns and Poverty

- Families who have not seen a change in their income are experiencing extra costs from being at home, for example, heating costs. Consequently, there is a high demand for energy grants. Families already in poverty feel they are sinking even deeper. There has been an increase in requests for money and food parcels.
- Due to reduced hours in work, furloughing, losing jobs, spending more time at home, issues around free school meals vouchers, using more food and fuel due to lockdown and ongoing poverty issues faced.



5. Digital Exclusion

- Many parents worry that their children are falling behind in their schoolwork because they have no access to laptops or broadband during lockdown for studying. As a result, they are struggling to home school their children without the appropriate resources.

As a result, OPFS staff have been trying to source laptops/tablets families.

- Parents are also lacking IT equipment to stay connected with each other and have access to online information and to connect with Job Centre Plus.



6. Support for you

Loneliness, social isolation and access to essential services

- Lack of access to key services and support, for example, limited peer support from other parents from groups they used to attend.
- Parents reported feelings of loneliness and isolation particularly when having to shield and not being able to go out due to social distancing.
- Some parents feel very lonely and have no money to top up mobile phones to stay in contact with friends and family.
- Parents are engaging more and more with services for emotional support.



Parents feel depressed and anxious about the future.

Increased stresses on family relationships

- Parental conflict - a few situations in which COVID-19 has fuelled conflict between parents. Lockdown and worries about spreading the virus have impacted on child contact arrangements.
- Services have noted an increase in the number of domestic abuse calls.
- Some parents are struggling to find a balance between motivating children to do schoolwork and diffusing arguments when their children refuse to comply.
- Children not going to see grandparents, family, friends or seeing other parents which is causing anxiety for them.



6. Separating/Being a Single Parent

Children - Sole Care responsibilities

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

Keeping children entertained during lockdown is a struggle.

- There are difficulties in trying to keep their children's education going, for example, when working from home. Parents have reported that children are not doing their schoolwork and are finding it difficult to motivate them.
- Parents whose children have additional support needs, such as ADHD and Autism, are feeling particularly isolated and unsupported.

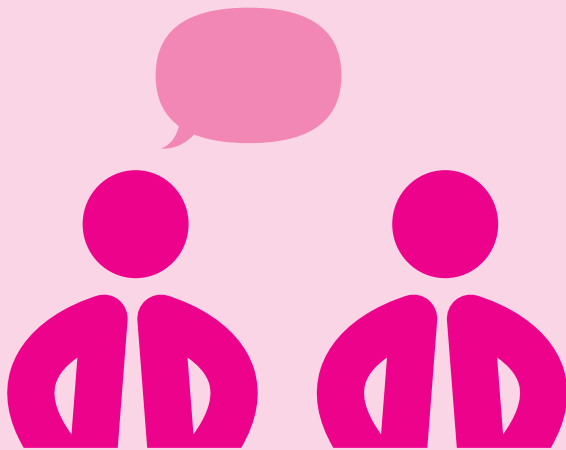
7. Your Home

- Homeless concerns due to limited income, domestic violence and unemployment.
- Worries about paying rent or mortgage as income dropped and expenses gone up.
- Impact on relationship with neighbours of having children home all day every day.





8. Work/Education/Training



Employment Rights.

- Balancing the demands of the employer when working from home and managing childcare. Employers making unreasonable demands regardless of the persons personal circumstances at home.
- Worries over accessing and entitlement to statutory sick pay.

9. Your Children



Child contact and Child Maintenance

- Conflict over contact arrangements.
- Worries over child maintenance not being paid and Child Maintenance Service not pursuing non-payers.
- Single parents have concerns about children's physical contact with the non-resident parent and moving between households.



Observations

Children are not the face of this pandemic. But what is becoming clear is that they risk being among its biggest victims. While they have thankfully been largely spared from the direct health effects of COVID-19 - at least to date - the crisis is having a profound effect on their wellbeing. All children, of all ages, are being affected, in particular by the socio-economic impacts and, in some cases, by mitigation measures that may

inadvertently do more harm than good. This is a universal crisis, and, for some children, the impact will be lifelong.

Moreover, the harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally. They are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest neighborhoods, and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations.



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

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