



**One Parent
Families Scotland**

changing lives, challenging poverty

COVID-19

Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



Issue 4 June 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:

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

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

- Children are often eating too much and this is leading to health concerns, for example, becoming overweight.
- Family are consuming more food due to changes in routine and boredom leading to bigger food bills.

Access to information about COVID-19

- Parents are having problems accessing medication and prescriptions.
- A few parents report increases in medication or they have been offered other medication by their GP.





2. Health and Wellbeing

Stress, anxiety and mental health

- Parents are anxious and stressed about what happens once restrictions are lifted. For example, they have fears over children returning to school.
- They worry about children's health and wellbeing, for example, they have concerns about the amount of time spent watching television and playing video games compared with spending very little time outdoors or exercising.
- Some parents have resigned themselves to accepting the current situation as their new normal rather than fret about things out with their control.
- The feedback from some local services indicates that parents' mental health remains a significant concern.



Will my children be safe at school?





3. Your Benefits

Universal Credit

- Problems accessing UC, for example: when to claim, age restrictions, eligibility criteria, the length of the claims process.

Other Benefits

- Child Benefit - “How long can I still claim for it?”
- “Can I get support whilst presenting as homeless with a 2-year-old child?”
- “What benefits can I claim?”

4. Your Money

Financial Concerns and Poverty

- Parents are concerned they do not have enough money to pay their direct debits.
- Reports over rising overpayments, for instance, some parents report having tax credit overpayments. These overpayments can result in the Department for Work and Pensions clawing back money which then leads to deductions on individual benefits. Consequently, making it harder for people to budget.
- Parents continue to need help with energy costs.
- Scottish Government are providing Carers allowance supplement due to COVID-19, but parents are unsure if this will be paid with their June payment.
- Parents are looking for financial help with school clothing grants and information on how they can apply for it.



- Parents may struggle financially yet have their applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) rejected.

As noted by one family support worker,

“Parents contact OPFS because they are struggling financially. We check that they are getting all the benefits that they are entitled to. It comes down to a lot of reasons for them financially struggling and for which they could apply to the SWF. For example, a mum who has had to relocate due to domestic abuse and is short of clothes for her kids, things for the house but was refused a Community Care Grant. She is now short of money for fuel and basic items. Some parents cannot phone the SWF and cannot do online applications as they do not have an IT device, or it is broken, or the children are doing home schooling on their parent’s phone or they don’t have the internet or have the IT skills themselves. Telephone lines are very busy, and people are not getting through. All the above can be barriers to accessing support from the SWF normally but even more so just now.”

- Parents may struggle financially yet have their applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) rejected.

Recurring questions include,

- “How many times can I apply to the Scottish Welfare Fund?”
- Fuel poverty - “How can I claim the grant?”
- “Are there any other grants that I can apply for?”
- “Is there any financial help or grants available for post graduate education?”

Financial Concerns and Poverty

- There continues to be a lack of digital resources for families, for example, laptops.
- Parents report difficulties in using and accessing online resources because of limited digital literacy or language barriers.



5. Support for you

Loneliness, social isolation and access to essential services

- Many parents are struggling to cope with their children's behaviour during lockdown.
- Many continue to feel lonely and isolated.

Increased stresses on family relationships

- Coercive behavior by partners/ex-partners.
- Domestic violence: local services note an increase in the number of referrals.
- There is also a rise in calls looking for advice and support on separation and divorce.



6. Separating/Being a Single Parent

Children - Sole Care responsibilities

- A few parents are relieved that Scottish schools have not returned before the summer holidays as they feel anxious about virus transmission risks.

“**Keeping children entertained during lockdown continues to be a challenge.**”

- Parents worry how their children's education will be affected now and in the future as a result of the current health crisis.
- The motivation for home schooling is on the wane with many parents no longer having the stamina to maintain the effort required.
- Some parents are challenged by the behaviour of their teenager children during lockdown.
- Parents are raising concerns over using small devices like mobile phones to access schoolwork.

7. Your Home

- Some parents have very limited opportunities keeping their children physically active, for example, living in a flat, no access to a garden, restrictions on going outside, no parks open and play parks closed.
- Parents are finding relationships with their neighbours challenging due to the stress of lockdown. As tensions are running much higher and tolerance levels are lower.



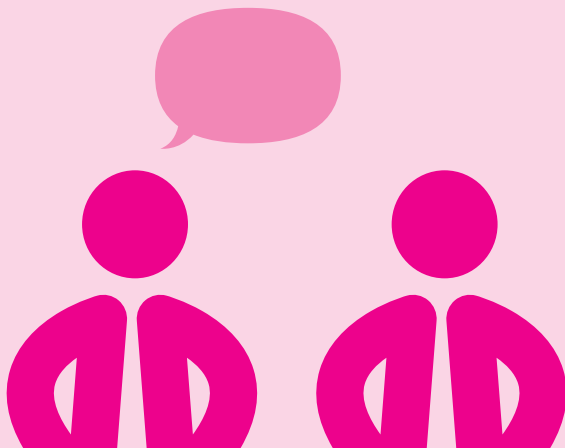


8. Work/Education/Training

“How can I go back to work when school/childcare are not open?”

Employment Rights.

- For parents currently employed, they are worried that they may lose their job once the furloughing scheme ends.
- Parents are desperate for more flexible working patterns given the current school/childcare situation.
- Parents worry about their employment rights, especially those on zero-hour contracts.



9. Your Children



Child contact and Child Maintenance

- Some parents need legal advice regarding child contact but cannot afford a solicitor.
- Concerns remain over child maintenance payment enforcement.
- Mediation issues regarding child contact were raised.
- Parents want to know when contact centres will be open again.



Spotlight Issue: Young Single Parents

Over the course of lockdown, the impact on all families has been profound.

The normal challenges for example,

- Having enough money to pay for food/fuel
- Finding employment
- Childcare provision
- Health and wellbeing support

have all been exacerbated by the coronavirus health crisis. However, young single parents have been particularly affected. For one thing, they face additional financial challenges including problems when claiming and applying for benefits such as Universal Credit (UC). Although they face the same costs as older single parents, aged 25 and over, young parents are paid benefit at a lower rate.

"I had to move onto Universal Credit, and obviously because I'm under 25 I'd be getting even less money. And I don't understand how someone over 25 gets more for being in the same situation that I am. We both need to buy the same things. Even though they've put the money up on Universal Credit during the pandemic, it's not really going to help when the money gets cut again because people are going to get used to having that bit extra money which helps you. Even just now I'm struggling with Universal Credit." (Young single parent, Glasgow)





Spotlight Issue: Young Single Parents

"I don't think it's right that just because of my age someone older than me that's got a child the same age as my child is getting more help. That doesn't really make sense to me – we're doing the same thing. We've both got a child and we've both got to do the same things, so I don't understand why there is a difference. I didn't know when I switched over that I was going to lose out on money. It's just difficult when you're used to being paid weekly or fortnightly. It is a big change, so you need to really think about budgeting. You need to prepare for it as much as you can because it doesn't seem like it's going to be a big impact, but it really is." (Young single parent, Lanarkshire)

A family support worker in the Glasgow service noted,

"Young single parents' income is significantly less than it would have been if they were over 25 and on UC. This makes a big difference to families who would have already been struggling to make ends meet before having the extra costs of lockdown to consider: extra food, electricity, gas and travel costs which are all items that most young parents already struggle with."

The last 100 plus days of lockdown have been a stressful time for many families. For younger parents the impact has been no less severe. Their resilience is challenged by their limited experience and perhaps having to deal with their first major crisis alone.

"It's quite rubbish... I'm totally by myself with my daughter. The pandemic has made me more isolated, being in the house myself. I'm all alone. I've got nobody. I normally depend on my mum and my family coming over to help me, because I don't cope very well being by myself... I'm by myself basically living off of nothing. It's not good on my mental health either. I've been more depressed and really moody all the time. I'm never happy just now. It's just been a nightmare." (Young single parent, Glasgow)





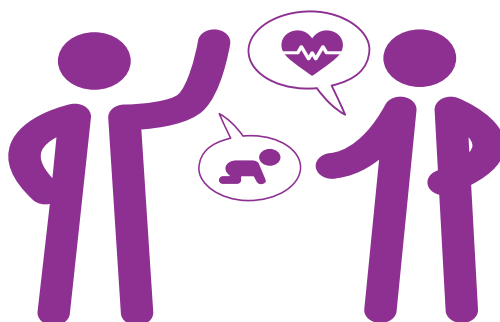
Spotlight Issue: Young Single Parents

These parents are missing out on valued peer support and access to local services such as OPFS hubs. Not all young single parents have access to online platforms for social interaction. For example, for those who are unable to get online at home, access to computers and Wi-Fi connectivity at the local library or community centres is no longer an option. Alternatively, mobile phones may not be topped up if other priorities such as shopping for food take precedent. For those who can put money on their mobile phone, non-leisure demands such as benefit and housing applications may use up the phones credit. Consequently, young single parents may be unable to engage with others because of their financial circumstances or limited resources.

The impact of lockdown has meant that young parents face additional challenges in their normal daily lives, such as managing childcare alone. They may not be equipped to educate their children through home-schooling or deal with discipline issues which can be more prevalent in an enclosed environment.

*“Parents have been under considerable pressure to keep up with schoolwork provided on top of dealing with the fear and anxiety of a global pandemic. Many children don’t learn well at home and parents can find that difficult and put themselves under quite a bit of pressure”.
(Support worker, Glasgow)*

“I have encouraged parents to email the school for support and advice. However, many parents were reluctant to do this because of the stigma attached to it. Emotional support has been key including encouraging and helping to reassure parents that they are doing a good job and making sure they are not being too hard on themselves”. (Support worker, Lanarkshire)





In some cases, their own educational background may limit their ability to help their child learn and complete schoolwork. Regardless, feelings of guilt or depression may be present.

“It’s changed pretty much everything. The whole being stuck 24/7 is quite daunting, and my little boy is at school so he’s used to having that time away from me and now he’s stuck with me all the time and he just can’t be bothered with me anymore.” (Young single parent, Lanarkshire)

The above-mentioned quotes from individuals and family support workers highlight the inequalities experienced by young single parent families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Observations

As the Office for National Statistics highlights, only 1% of single parents are teenagers. Indeed, the average age of a single parent is 39. Even so it goes against natural justice that the benefit system favours the older parent and fails to fully take into consideration the specific needs of the 1% as spotlighted in this report.

After weeks of lockdown, many single parents are struggling to cope with the resulting added financial burden on their households. As we come out of lockdown both National and Local Governments will inevitably be re-evaluating the nations key priorities in the wake of Covid-19. It is incumbent on us and our partners to lobby on behalf of young single parents so that we draw attention to the specific challenges they face.



One Parent Families Scotland

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