



**One Parent
Families Scotland**

changing lives, challenging poverty

COVID-19

Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



Issue 7 September 2020



Parents Experiences



Parents Experiences - Single Parent Proofing

COVID-19 is a global public health crisis which has also resulted in an unparalleled economic catastrophe. Before this crisis single parent families already faced significant challenges: poverty, isolation and loneliness, poor health or disability and judgemental attitudes.

The majority of single parents are women in their mid-30's, so gender inequality is a key issue. Single parent families face twice the risk of poverty as couples - 48% compared to 26%. A third (36%) of all children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family.

We are extremely troubled about the impact of this crisis on every child affected by poverty. As a society, we should all be concerned about the longer-term impact on Scotland's aspiration to reduce child poverty by 2030. The steps we take should not only support families now but also underpin progress towards ending child poverty.



Parents Experiences

OPFS has developed a model of gathering the experiences of single parents through our local and national channels to capture key areas of concern. We use parents' experiences 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 that we understand the impact of the crisis we have implemented a '**COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring System**'. OPFS gathers parents' experiences through our 5 local teams, our national advice and information service channels and website. We track and communicate key service responses and policy relevant issues arising from direct work with single parents.

There are five elements:



Impact knowledge: Parents experience is systematically collected and analysed



Monitoring Emerging Issues: Emerging issues are drawn out and highlighted



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



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



Single Parent Proofing: Using single parent feedback to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of policy and practice so that they respond effectively to the needs of single parents.





Parents Experiences

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 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. Health and Wellbeing

Stress, Anxiety and Mental Health

- Parents continue to feel isolated, lonely, unsupported and stressed in their role. Recent limits to household gatherings indoors have led to added pressure on families.
- Mental health continues to be a huge concern.
- Concerns over physical health – with the limitations on hospital and/or dental appointments, parents worry how this will impact on their family's health.





2. Your Benefits

Universal Credit (UC)

- Parents looking for advice on Capital Limits, savings and better off calculations.
- UC and concerns over student funding.

“ I need financial help towards my gas, electricity and with food. My UC has been cut. Where can I get help? ”

“ I have taken a cut in my UC, an advanced deduction and debt repayment that I did not know about.

Where can I get help with this? ”





Recurring questions include:

- Am I better off on UC or Tax Credits?
- Will changing jobs change my claim from Tax Credits to UC?
- Will my son's Education Maintenance Allowance application trigger a UC claim?
- What is UC, how much will I get, how do I apply, and what does it cover?
- If I change over to UC how will this affect my Tax Credits?

Other Benefits

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) - some parents struggling to fill out complicated benefit forms.

Recurring questions:

- Can I still claim benefits when my son moves out?
- What maternity benefits are there?



3. Your Money

Financial Concerns & Poverty

- Parents are needing help to pay for food, fuel and white goods.
- Some families are needing access to household items, for example, beds.
- Food poverty – The need for food vouchers was highlighted.
- Parents are having problems paying their energy bills and are struggling financially
- Parents continue to experience rising debt levels.
- Requests for fuel payments.
- Some parents are looking for Home Energy Scotland Grants or help with their energy supplier.

I am struggling financially and cannot get anymore Scottish Welfare Fund payments

Recurring questions:

- Can I get help towards my student finance?
- Can OPFS give me money towards my fuel bill?
- Can I get help with childcare costs?
- If I reduce my working hours, how will this affect my income?
- Can I get financial support towards my nursing degree?
- I am starting an HNC course. What financial help am I entitled to?



4. Support For You

Increased stresses on family relationships

- Domestic abuse cases are continuing to rise with several parents needing to leave their family home.
- A rise in coercive and controlling behaviours by ex-partners is noted.

“ I am worried about the behaviour of my ex-husband when he takes our four-year-old son. My son gets very upset and does not want to go with his dad. My ex-husband is very controlling. ”

5. Separating/Being a Single Parent

Children - Sole Care responsibilities

- Parents who have been shielding are worried sending their children back to school- some are not allowing them to go back, some are very anxious about this and it is adversely impacting on their mental health.
- Parents are looking for legal support after separating from their husbands.
- Some parents are worried about children having to isolate for 14 days and having no free school meals provided during this period.



6. Your home

- Some parents are looking for financial grants where homes are needing adapting, repaired and extended.
- Parents report high rent charges.
- Parents are reporting issues around essential repairs by private landlords. Because of COVID-19, repairs are not being attended to.
- General housing issues.

I have two children and one on the way. I am very worried. I rent privately and now have two months' rent arrears and my landlord is going to see a solicitor about it. What are my options and where can I get help? Money is very tight.

I am a single parent and have been turned down for PIP and have six adult children living with me with all disability or mental health issues. I had to go to the solicitor to appeal PIP decision. I cannot work. My rent has been reinstated to £500 after losing Disability Living Allowance (DLA). I cannot afford to pay rent. What can I do?

7. Work / Education and Training

- Parents worry about increasing their working hours and how this will affect their Tax Credits – could I be moved onto UC?
- There continues to be ongoing concerns about future job losses when the furlough scheme ends.
- Some parents are concerned that UC will be affected when they enter Further Education.

I lost my job after maternity leave, and then coronavirus hit. I am studying but struggling financially. I have debt and cannot make ends meet. What help can I get with this?



8. Your Children

Child contact & Child Maintenance

- Parents continue to report child maintenance concerns.
- Some parents feel their ex-partner is controlling and demanding child contact regularly and at short notice.

“ My ex-partner is not paying child maintenance for our daughter as he says he is on UC and is not working... He is self-employed, and I have proof he is working. What can I do about this? ”

“ My ex-husband says I have to pay child maintenance for my daughter while she is at University. Is this true? He is threatening me with the DWP and a solicitor if I stop now. ”

Recurring questions:

- When do I stop paying child maintenance for my child?
- How much should my ex-partner be paying?
- Do I have to allow child contact when my child's father has been out of the country and should be self-isolating?
- Is it possible to ask for backdated payments if the child's father's earnings have increased?





Observations

With tighter Covid-19 restrictions being re-imposed across various Local Authorities throughout Scotland, single parent families are once again having to make difficult decisions, for example,

- choices between working and caring responsibilities.
- managing rising debt and avoiding the risk of homelessness.

Financial concerns and issues have been significant throughout this crisis, as highlighted in the very first and each of the subsequent Covid-19 impact reports. The September report is no different. It is noteworthy that the optimism of the economy opening-up due to the easing of lockdown restrictions has been short lived. With the second wave of infections and the consequent withdrawal of liberties, people's financial situation will inevitably become even more problematic.

Both the Scottish and UK Governments stress the importance of looking out for one another and emphasise that we are all in this together. Consequently, OPFS recognises the role we must adopt to support single parents at this challenging time. We will continue to provide families with a range of financial, emotional and practical support to facilitate their journey out of this current health crisis, despite the spectre of Local Authority cuts to budgets.



One Parent Families Scotland

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