



Scottish Parliament Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice (EHRCJ) Committee Meeting – Tuesday 14 December 2021

Women's Unfair Responsibility for Unpaid Care and Domestic work

OPFS Evidence Paper

December 2021

Background

The EHRCJ Committee¹ has agreed to undertake some introductory work into the impact of women's unfair responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work during the pandemic and as we emerge from it. The Committee focus includes the following:

- The increased demands placed on older/younger women, disabled women, minority ethnic women and single parents as a result of the pandemic.
- How the pandemic has affected women's ability to maintain work and the demands of unpaid caring and domestic responsibilities.
- What impact the pandemic has had on the financial security of disabled women, minority ethnic women and single parents.
- To what extent the pandemic has impacted those with caring responsibilities.
- Whether there has been an impact on the physical and mental health and well being of women in these groups and if there are different impacts for different groups.
- How increased rates of domestic abuse and violence against women specifically impacted different groups of women and what support is in place to address this.
- What measures have been put in place to support women in these groups through the pandemic and what would be key to providing further support as the country recovers.

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS)

One Parent Families Scotland is the leading organisation working with single parent families in Scotland.² OPFS provides single parent tailored information, advice and support, along with training activities, employability programmes and flexible childcare. We campaign with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems that cause child poverty. Our vision is of a Scotland in which single mothers and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly. Single mothers are involved at various levels in OPFS. This briefing will use the experiences and input of single parents, experts by experience, to inform our evidence .

Introduction

The majority of single parents are women we are therefore very pleased the committee has chosen to investigate the impact of women's unpaid care during the pandemic.

Unpaid care and domestic work keeps families, communities and businesses running. It is a positive and valuable contribution to the Scottish economy and the functioning of our society. From birth to adulthood, people need care that enables them to grow, learn and function, and then to contribute to society in their own ways - as workers, thinkers, artists, entrepreneurs, political leaders and more. Care comes in many forms,

¹ [Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

² <https://opfs.org.uk/>

from raising children to caring for disabled and elderly family members to keeping homes clean and safe and putting meals on the table. Individuals, our society and economy simply cannot operate or flourish without this type of care and support.

The unequal and heavy share of unpaid care and domestic work done by women and girls is holding women back from full participation in the labour force, and so acting as a significant barrier to unlocking the economic boost that would come from achieving gender equality - estimated to be as much as 26% of global GDP/US\$28 trillion.³

When the virus pandemic began and lockdown was introduced we became quickly aware that many single mothers, often on their own with no support, had been put in a perilous situation. During lock down many OPFS front-line staff were still supporting mothers and children directly - delivering food parcels, power cards, tablets & wi-fi connectivity cards, clothes and toys for babies and activity packs for children and linking parents into foodbanks.

We know from our work in communities that many single mothers were, and still are, often worried about food, heating, rent or mortgage payments and how to access local help. They are also concerned about their children's education, social development, and mental health. During lock-down many didn't have a computer or tablet and access to wi-fi to enable children to continue with on-line education; to be able to deal with the Job Centre Plus and to do on-line shopping. Single parents often only have a pay-as-you-go mobile.

There is also the impact on single parents of ongoing restrictions around: dealing with the non-resident parent, coping with employment when their child has been instructed to isolate at home as a precautionary measure, closed childcare, being made unemployed, accessing benefits, the cost of living, worry about benefit conditionality, ability to do daily tasks and mental health. Many also lost child maintenance as the staff in the Child Maintenance Service were transferred to deal with the huge increase in UC claims which meant the service no longer acted on the enforcement powers available to them so that children receive the payments they deserve.

Many of the single mothers who contacted our helpline during lockdown experienced some form of domestic or economic abuse by a former partner, including controlling money and resources, limiting how money and resources are used.

Single Parent Families in Scotland

There are 144,000 single parent families in Scotland, which is 25% of all families with dependent children. Nine out of ten of these families are headed by a lone mother.⁴ Around eight out of ten single parents are aged between 25 and 50 years old, and just 1% are teenagers.⁵

³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

⁴ http://healthscotland.scot/media/3133/child-poverty-in-scotland_priority-groups_lone-parent-families_briefing.pdf

⁵ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/policy-campaigns/publications-index/one-four-profile-single-parents-uk/>

A recent briefing from Public Health Scotland⁶ shows

- Most (65%) single parents with dependent children in Scotland are in paid employment
- Four in ten (90,000) children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family and 39% of children in single parent families live in poverty.
- Two thirds of children in poverty in single parent families (66%) live in families where no one was in paid employment. A quarter (23%) live in families where the parent works part-time.
- Families often belong to more than one priority group. For example, among children in poverty: 40% of children in single parent families also have a disabled person at home; over half (54%) of children in a family with a younger mother are also in a single parent household.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets statutory targets to reduce levels of child poverty that require the Scottish government to ensure fewer than 18% of children are living in poverty by 2023/24, with less than 10% in poverty by 2030. It also says that Scottish Ministers must, when preparing a “delivery plan”, set out what measures they propose to take in relation to children living in single-parent households⁷

The Scottish Government published a ‘Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan’ in 2018, setting out policies and programmes to support progress towards reaching the child poverty targets.⁸ It is currently in the process of developing the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, which is due to be published in March 2022. The scale of the challenge is significant, and the 2022-2026 delivery plan will be vital to achieving the interim and final targets.

Progress on actions in the delivery plan and an update of the current knowledge base is summarised in the Scottish Governments annual progress reports.⁹ The Plan identified six priority families where children are more likely to live in poverty: lone parents, families with a disabled adult or child, young mothers, minority ethnic families, families with a child under one year, and larger families (with three or more children).¹⁰

The figures below on child poverty for these groups compare to 24% of all children who live in poverty after housing costs . The table shows that 38% of children living with a single parent live in poverty.

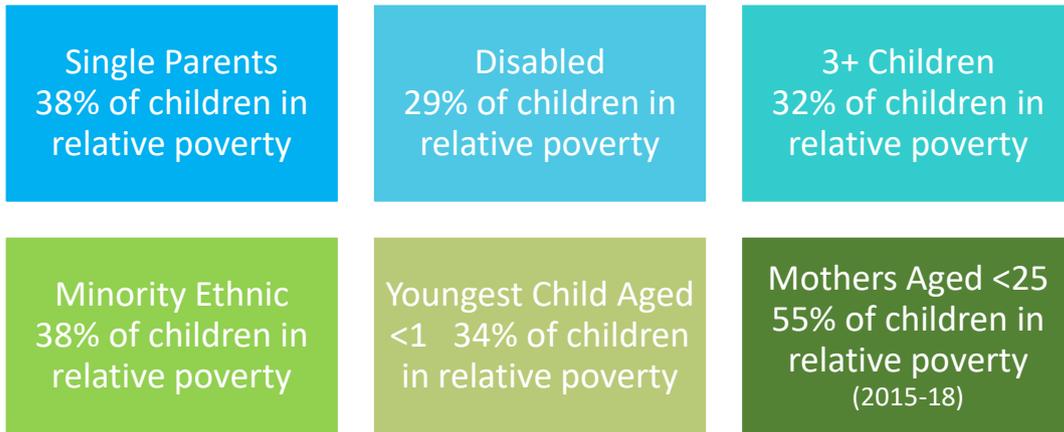
⁶ [Child Poverty in Scotland: priority groups - lone-parent families \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](https://publichealthscotland.scot)

⁷ [Microsoft Word - Queen's Print Cover.doc \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

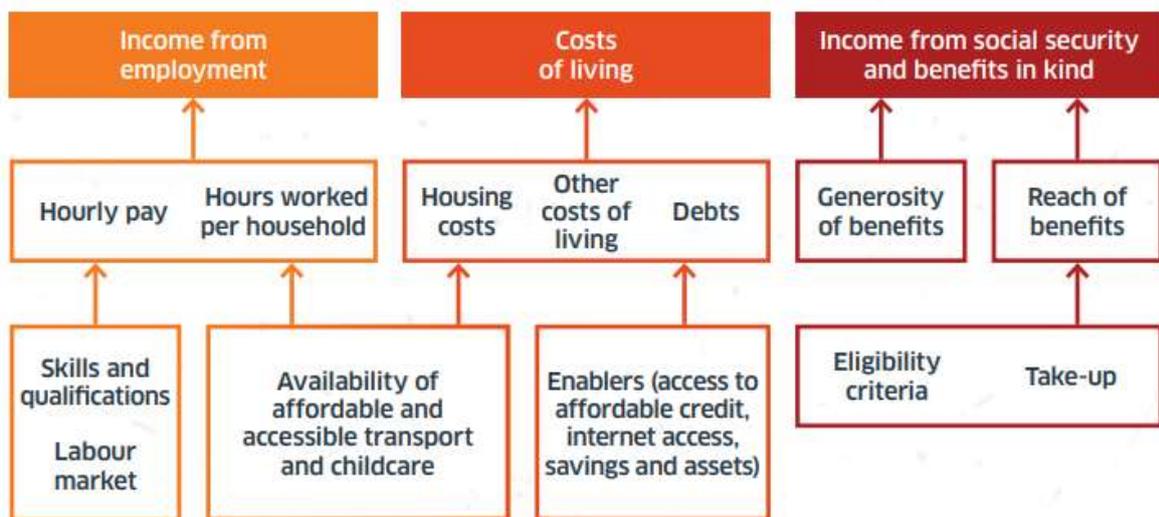
⁸ [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/collections/child-poverty-statistics>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/> Pages 110/13



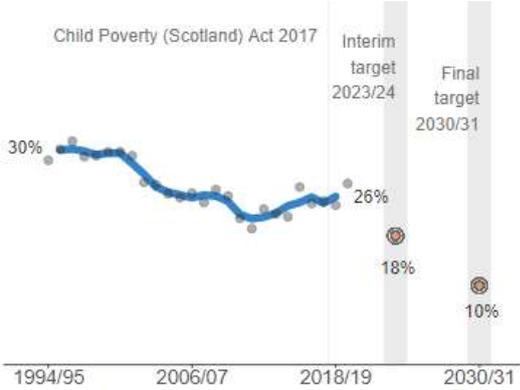
The Delivery Plan described three key drivers of child poverty reduction and also includes a strong focus on mitigating the impacts of poverty on children - helping to reduce child poverty in the longer term. The drivers of child poverty reduction are set out in the diagram below and demonstrate the wide-ranging action required to support families.



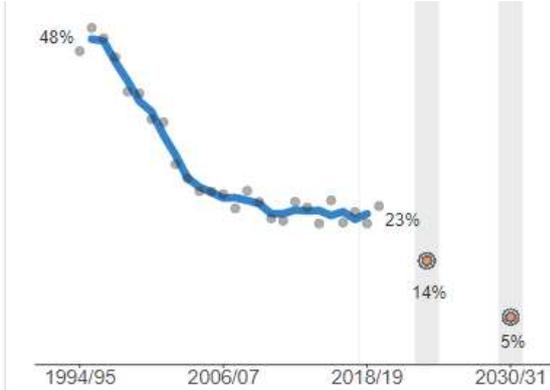
A second four-year plan is due in March 2022 for the period 2022-26. This plan is crucial if the 2023 targets are to be met and sufficient progress is made towards the 2030 targets. As can be seen from the diagram below child poverty is not reducing at the level required to meet the targets¹¹.

¹¹ [Child poverty summary \(data.gov.scot\)](#)

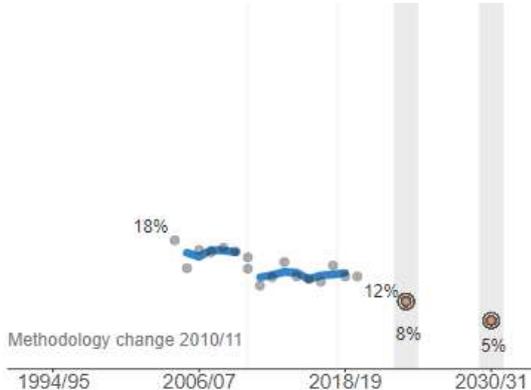
Relative poverty



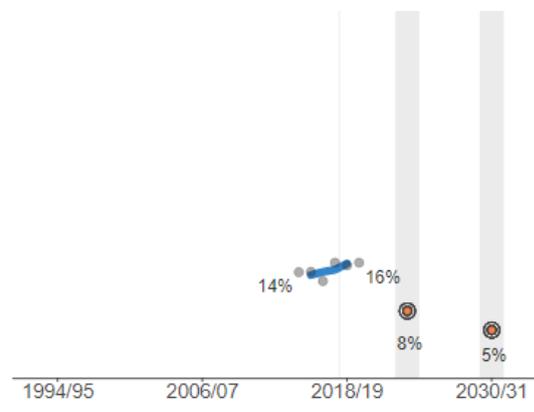
Absolute poverty



Combined low income and material deprivation



Persistent poverty



The challenges for single parent families

The Poverty and Inequality Commission has highlighted that 37% of all children in Scotland living in poverty live in a single parent family.¹² Coming into the COVID-19 crisis, single parent families in the UK were more exposed to financial insecurity than other family types. Nearly two in five (44%) children in a single parent family were in poverty, compared to just one in four (26%) children in other families.¹³

The financial and economic impact of lockdowns has entrenched pre-pandemic inequalities. Over half (53%) of single mothers said they were struggling financially, compared to 35% of married mothers.¹⁴ Single mothers face financial insecurity because they cannot rely on a second income source if they are out of work or unable to work. They also face additional pressure in balancing both paid work and unpaid work. This restricts women who are single parents from getting into work, affect the type of work they can take on, and limit working hours and opportunities to progress. Single mothers are also more exposed to the demands of caring for children during

¹² <https://povertyinequality.scot/2018/02/Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice-February-2018.pdf>

¹³ [Tackling single parent poverty after coronavirus.pdf \(gingerbread.org.uk\) page 9](#)

¹⁴ [General-parents-FINAL-VERSION.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](#)

lockdown, while schools and nurseries are closed, or while children are advised to isolate or stay home.

New Research from the Learning and Work Institute supported by JRF shows.¹⁵

- Single mothers are more likely to have lost their jobs, with nearly one in ten (9%) falling out of employment. One in three (34%) single mothers have been furloughed, compared to just one in four (25%) coupled parents.
- Single mothers who remained in work saw the biggest decline in hours, with working hours shrinking by an average of 7.6 hours.
- Single mothers are more likely to say they are finding it difficult to manage their finances (11%) and that they are behind with their bills (13%) than couples with children.

A national survey looking at single mothers' views and experiences of single parent discrimination has revealed 80% of single parents have experienced discrimination. When combined with those who had not experienced discrimination but believed it to exist, this figure becomes a shocking 96% of single parents. 100% of single parents reported a negative impact on themselves from the discrimination, specifically: mental health (96%), increases outgoings (81%), lowers income (77%), and decreases ability to work (76%). The research showed accessing the right support at the right time to reduce poverty & inequalities is a key priority. People do not always know that there are services or support out there. Feelings of stigma and being judged is often the biggest challenge facing single mothers when accessing services and 96% wanted single parents added as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act.¹⁶

Research recently published by JRF shows too many people are experiencing destitution. This means not being able to afford the absolute essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean. Single parents, almost always women, have become more common in the destitute population. The research found that households in the 'severely poor' group are predominantly (68%) headed by a woman, many of whom are single parents.¹⁷

Poverty and isolation have an impact on parent's and children's wellbeing, causing stress, anxiety, and poor mental health. The challenge for single mothers of being both sole carer and breadwinner has been magnified by the impact of the present Covid 19 crisis. We know from research by Caledonian University that 84% of single mothers reported being lonely before lockdown. Isolation, loneliness, and poverty have a significant impact on mental health - causing anxiety, low mood, and depression.¹⁸

Why Are Single Mothers More Likely to be in Poverty?

Being both sole carer and income provider is a difficult balancing act for single mothers because of the lack of flexible, affordable, high-quality childcare and out of school care as well as the lack of secure, well paid, family-friendly employment.

¹⁵ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

¹⁶ [Single+Parent+Discrimination+Full+Report.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

¹⁷ [Destitution in the UK 2020 | JRF](#)

¹⁸ [Community Connections Project - One Parent Families Scotland \(opfs.org.uk\)](#)

Gender is a key issue as to why such a high percentage of single mothers and their children live in poverty. The majority of people living in poverty are women and female-headed households are more likely to be poor. Single parent households account for 22% of homeless households in Scotland, and 79% of them headed by a woman.

Single parent families' life chances are affected by a range of UK and Scottish Government policies. However, welfare reform has been the key policy driver to increasing women and children's poverty in single parent families. There has been a particular focus by the UK Government on cuts to out-of-work benefit in order to reduce welfare spending and encourage people into paid work. However, most non-working single mothers are out of work because they are caring for very young children, studying or unable to take up employment because of disability or poor health. The combination of balancing the responsibility for childcare and household earnings alone, while facing income pressures as a result of social security cuts, means many single mothers have been pushed to the brink.

Research by Loughborough University uncovers drastic income shortfalls for working single mothers whether they earn the 'national living wage' or have median earnings. Half of all single parents in full-time work do not have the income needed for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. The freeze on working age benefits, cuts to tax credits and universal credit, stagnant wages and sharp rises in the cost of some essential foods, public transport, domestic fuel, Council Tax and childcare have left families on the 'national living wage short of what they need for a basic, socially acceptable living standard.'¹⁹

Young Single Mothers

Young single mothers are up to £66.13 worse off per month under Universal Credit compared with the legacy system - a drop of 20%. This is because rules have been changed so that single parents under 25 years no longer receive the same rate as over 25-year-olds.

People under 25 receive a lower allowance of benefits than people aged 25 and over, but before Universal Credit was introduced there was an exemption for single parents in recognition of the cost of caring for a child alone. Now, that exemption has been removed.

For parents receiving benefits this means a drop in their family budget when they move to Universal Credit – often through no choice of their own, and with little or no warning. It therefore means that they can find themselves quickly having their benefit cut at a time when they are adjusting to a monthly budget as UC is paid monthly in arrears. This change affects young mothers in employment as well as those not in paid work.

¹⁹ [One in four children growing up in homes with "very low income" | Loughborough University \(lboro.ac.uk\)](#)

The government rationale for young people receiving less benefit is that they still live with their parents and if they went to work, they usually receive a lower wage. This is not true for young parents. Most do not still live with their parents and many are unable to take up paid work because of the lack of affordable, flexible childcare. For young single parents this is particularly challenging because they are the sole breadwinner and carer for their family.

Shannon, single mum, aged 21, Lanarkshire explains:

“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 - we’ve both got a child, we’re both needing to buy the same things and do the same things. I didn’t know when I switched over that I was going to lose out on money. It was hard not only going from being paid every week to monthly but also getting less money.”

We don’t think it’s right that single parents under 25 should get less financial support than parents over 25. We want the UK govt to act now to change this.

COVID-19 – A Severe Impact on Single Parents and Children

For many families, the COVID-19 pandemic meant their home has also become a workplace for the parent and a classroom for their children. This shift has had a severe impact on diverse families across Scotland, including their experiences of coping with and recovering from the impacts of the government’s measures to reduce the spread of the virus.

Beyond this, many single parent families, face the potential for financial problems stretching beyond the immediate pandemic period. The crisis in employment brought about by COVID-19 is experienced differently based on class, gender and ethnicity with these factors contributing to who performs ‘key work’ and who is able to work from home.²⁰ A broad range of research shows that the COVID-19 crisis will affect women adversely as they are 47% more likely to have lost their job.²¹ Some single mothers face the choice between food and fuel with rising debt levels.

Selma from Motherwell describes the pressure:

“I am feeling lonely and anxious with everything that is going on just now. I have a child off school self-isolating. I have had a benefit check and I am getting what I am entitled to, but I do not have enough money to live on? I am feeling overwhelmed with worry about COVID-19 and the cost of Christmas looming. I feel a failure as I cannot afford to buy Christmas presents.”

The pandemic therefore poses a unique challenge for single mothers particularly as they depend on one income and don’t have the support of another adult in the home to share childcare and parenting responsibilities. It is clear that Government actions to limit the spread of the virus have put enormous stress on single parents. The

²⁰ [Covid-19-and-inequalities-IFS.pdf](#)

²¹ [Coronavirus Crossroads: Equal Pay Day 2020 report | The Fawcett Society](#)

consequences for families during this time has increased anxiety for many of the parents and children supported by OPFS. Adding to this, ongoing disruptions to school and nursery provision means that many single parents, who struggle daily with the delicate balancing act of being able to earn and raise their children, are placed under immense pressure, with some thrown into poverty.

Lee from Dundee explains what it's like:

“My supervisor doesn't understand, they will say, ‘well I've got kids and I work’ but what they don't realise is they might have support, they might have family that can help, I don't have that.”

“I have seen what it's like, they tell you they are flexible, but they mean you need to be flexible for them. But it should go both ways. You worry when you ask about flexibility or time off for your kids, you know they will just replace you.”

Analysis by IPPR shows that, coming into the COVID-19 crisis, single parent families in Scotland were more exposed to financial insecurity than other family types.²² Meanwhile, research by the UK Women's Budget Group shows that the financial and economic impact of lockdowns has entrenched pre-pandemic inequalities. Over half (53%) of single mothers said they were struggling financially, compared to 35% of married mothers.²³

It is vital that policy makers take account of the different economic position of women and men and the specific challenges faced by women, particularly single mothers. This includes their higher levels of poverty, homelessness, the unequal load of unpaid care work and widespread violence against women. Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic, disabled, low-income women and single mothers will be particularly affected by a gender-insensitive response to this crisis as their economic position is more disadvantaged.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the injustices already felt by low-income single mothers. The sectors where many single mothers are employed - such as retail, care and cleaning – have been hit by job losses, along with a decrease in availability of new roles.²⁴ The pandemic emphasises the need for investment in single-parent focused support. Single parents are often trapped into poverty by a combination of factors

- the escalating cost of childcare and its lack of flexibility ,
- increasing costs of living (particularly housing),
- a lack of quality flexible and part-time job roles,
- and a social security system which is not fit for purpose for their lives.

A combination (and often all) of these factors makes moving out of poverty close to impossible for women who are single parents. In particular, in-work poverty is a

²² <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-10/weathering-the-winter-storm-oct20.pdf>

²³ [The uneven impact of lockdowns on mothers and lower income parents – Women's Budget Group \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/the-uneven-impact-of-lockdowns-on-mothers-and-lower-income-parents/)

²⁴ [COVID-19: Children, young people and families October 2020 Evidence Summary \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/evidence/2020/10/covid-19-children-young-people-and-families-october-2020-evidence-summary/)

reality of many single mothers' lives. With low levels of pay, precarious contracts (uncertain numbers of hours per week) and reductions in benefits, working is not necessarily a route out of poverty.

“Childcare costs are crippling - I earn what I always considered to be a reasonable salary, but it costs more than I earn to send my two children to nursery for only 3 days a week. I'm too scared to leave my job as I don't want to lose the skills or have to try to break back in to job market.”

“Lack of child care in my area especially out of normal office hours. Plenty jobs in care available but must be able to work shifts and weekends where there is no childcare.”

Mental Health & Family Wellbeing

COVID-19 has caused major disruptions to families' lives in many ways, including through social distancing, home learning requirements, and lockdown. This is also a rapidly changing situation where different pressures have arisen and continue to arise for children, young people, and their families over time. Parental stress and depression were elevated during the first lockdown (when most children were home-schooled) and reduced when the lockdown restrictions eased in summer 2020. However, parental stress, depression, and anxiety increased between November and December 2020 when new national restrictions were introduced; and higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety were reported by parents from single parent and low-income families.²⁵

The impact of national and localised 'lockdowns' have been experienced very differently by different groups in society and has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities.²⁶ Single parent families in particular have faced multiple adversities during lockdown, making coping more difficult. Single mothers have expressed a need to maintain normality within childcare and schooling as far as possible in any future restrictions. Previous disruption in this area had resulted in a knock on effect on their own wellbeing.

We know from OPFS '**COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Reports**', where we gather feedback on some of the key issues single parents are experiencing through our local and national services, that mental health and family wellbeing are the primary issues affecting the families we work with.²⁷ For single parents or their children who have suffered from mental ill health in the past, the ongoing pandemic has the potential to be particularly damaging. We see single mothers and children lose self-esteem due to digital (and therefore social) exclusion. A range of key children's charities report increased financial stress and associated anxiety,

²⁵ [Report_07_19JAN.pdf \(ospaceoxford.org\)](#)

²⁶ [Mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland on vulnerable groups](#)

²⁷ [One Parent Families Scotland \(opfs.org.uk\)](#)

loneliness, and more complex mental health problems amongst the families they work with.²⁸

Parents and children who pre-coronavirus, had previously received counselling or family support have experienced difficulties accessing the full range of service that they usually do. Young people have not been able to access the full range of support services usually available at school. As the world remains online for the foreseeable future, organisations like OPFS that deals with families needing support with finances, family wellbeing and mental health issues face having to scale up substantially and continue to adapt their services to continue to work virtually and respond to meet the desperate need facing so many single parent families

Even once vaccines have been rolled out and the pandemic recedes, many single parents will need help to restore their social support networks and get back into some kind of normal life. Experts say the coronavirus crisis poses the greatest threat to mental health since the second world war, with the impact to be felt for years after the virus has been brought under control.²⁹ The Government and policy makers can and must take steps now to prepare for this additional need among families. A proactive, timely, compassionate, and effective response with input from the third sector will help single mothers and their children experiencing mental health difficulties before they reach crisis point.

Actions

This crisis - and the way we respond to it - risks deepening prevailing economic divides. While this crisis is touching everyone in different ways, it is important that both UK and Scottish Governments recognise the financial challenges and personal sacrifices that many are being forced to make as they continue to focus its response and the support it provides in the recovery phase.

COVID-19 has made it even more critical that the Scottish Government prioritise action to tackle women's in-work poverty when trying to meet their child poverty targets.³⁰ The link between women's poverty and child poverty is widely recognised. In turn analysis and action on child poverty should recognise the fact it is impossible to tackle child poverty without tackling women's inequality in the labour market.

- Government at all levels should **recognise the diversity of families, including 'single parent proofing', when implementing policy and designing services in response to the COVID-19 crisis.** Janey from Maryhill sums up what many single mothers tell us:

"I think some politicians are so out of touch with how hard-up single parents are rising costs in everyday life all adds up with no increase in wages/cuts to Universal Credit feels like there is no light at the end of the tunnel. This impacts

²⁸ https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/evidence_of_families_needs.pdf

²⁹ [Covid-19 and the nation's mental health: October 2020 | Centre for Mental Health](#)

³⁰ [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

on the social and mental wellbeing of my family. Sometimes I feel - how can I go on, what's the point?"

A 'single parent proofed' initiative is a family proofed initiative. Single parents, most of whom are women, face specific challenges in keeping their head above water through these times of extreme difficulty. They are also more at risk of multiple disadvantages, such as low qualifications, limited work experience, low self-confidence, debt, housing problems, ill-health, disability and of ongoing coercive control from a previous partner.

If we listen to and involve parents, then their direct evidence of experience highlights new issues and new connections. The challenges and problems that single parent families confront when trying to escape poverty, retain a work-life balance and sustain employment, illuminate many of the difficulties faced by all low income families. Policies and practices that enable a single parent to provide and care for their children are more likely to have beneficial effects for two parent families.

As one single mother Carol, from Glasgow described it:

"Not one thing will eradicate the poverty experienced by single mothers... services need to come together and provide families with the support they need, and government should enable access to a decent standard of living. Some parents want to focus on full-time parenting when their kids are young, others want to get into education and employment. Wages need to be higher and benefit rates better to allow families to live a decent quality of life, but further education should be an option too. As part of this policy makers should recognise the unique challenge single parents face of sole responsibility for the care of their children as well the economic survival of their family."

- **Social Security payments are a lifeline for many single parents, whether in work or not. Barriers to entering and progressing in work, high living and childcare costs and unpaid child maintenance all add to the financial strain on single parent families, which means state support is often vital.** The Scottish Governments various on the Impact of Welfare Reform shows that the effects on single parents of UK Government social security reforms introduced since the Welfare Reform Act of 2012 Welfare Reforms³¹ have been immense. As an example:

The Two-Child Limit: Child tax credits and universal credit child payments are restricted to the first two children in a family. As of April 2019, 8,540 families across Scotland have been denied entitlement for a third or subsequent child and 40% were headed by a single parent.

³¹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/annual-report-welfare-reform>

The Benefit Cap The benefit cap, introduced in 2013, is a policy that sets a limit on the total annual payment a household can receive from means-tested benefits. Since 2016, the benefit cap has been set at £20,000 per year for couples and single parents. A total of 3,320 Scottish households were benefit capped as of May 2019, two thirds were lone parent households. The Benefit Cap policy causes real misery to single parents with very young children – babies & toddlers – who are subject to the cap despite there being no official requirement for them to find work. Single parents with children under two do not qualify for free childcare and so find it difficult and often impossible to juggle working the minimum 16 hours a week required to evade the cap while finding means to care for the child.

The benefit cap and 2 child policy forces single parents and children affected into poverty and homelessness. The UK government should end these child poverty creating policies.

Scottish Government should consider mitigating the benefit cap in full through DHPs and to secure a joint commitment with local authorities to ensure no child is evicted as result of benefit cap, with a commitment to use DHP where this is the only way to avoid eviction.

- **OPFS supports the need for a ‘Minimum Income Guarantee’ (MIG)³² - an assurance that no one will fall below a set income level that would allow them to live a dignified life.** The COVID-19 pandemic is both a health crisis and an economic one. The NHS is dealing with the former, the social security system should be the safety net for the latter. For too long the political priority has been to restrict social security spending combined with punitive measures such as the benefit cap, two child policy and benefit penalties. A MIG can be delivered through employment, targeted social security payments and through other types of universal basic services according to need such as: flexible, affordable, high-quality childcare; public transport, affordable housing and equal access to ICT and connectivity to be provided or subsidised by the state.
- **A new national focus on care, care workers and unpaid carers is urgently required, we want to see a new ‘National Outcome on Care’ to be added to the Scottish Governments National Performance Framework.³³** It is important we recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the crucial importance of care, much of it carried out by women, to all of our lives. Too often caring for someone, whether paid or unpaid, and whether for adults or children, results in significant personal and economic costs, for individuals and their families, including poverty.

³² <https://consult.gov.scot/social-security/minimum-income-guarantee/>

³³ <http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NPF-Report.pdf>

We support making Scotland one of the first countries in the world to include such an explicit, cross-cutting and comprehensive commitment to care within its performance framework.

The performance of unpaid care within the household presents one of the largest gender gaps. However, it is often forgotten about and left out of policies. Transformative change for women needs policy that recognises, reduces, and redistributes unpaid care work. Government incentives can support this change, such as through “cash for care” subsidies to compensate parents affected by school and daycare closures and for employers that provide workers with paid leave. In the end, whole communities and governments need to be involved in the provision of care. This will free up women, who are able, to contribute more to the paid work economy, to engage in voluntary and leisure activities, to have more time for themselves, and to safeguard their careers with less compromise to, and negative effect on, their mental health and general wellbeing.

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