

# Single Parent Families Impact Report

Issue 28

Domestic Abuse

July 24



**One Parent  
Families Scotland**

*changing lives, challenging poverty*

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# Introduction

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OPFS regularly collects the experiences of single parents across Scotland. Through our five local services, national advice and information service and online support we capture the key issues affecting single parents in real time.

Our bi-monthly monitoring reports uses this data to describe the impact of parental separation, the cost of living as well as the low level of social security benefits and ongoing UK welfare reform.

There are five elements to our impact tracking model:

- **Gathering knowledge:** Parents' experiences are systematically collected and analysed.
- **Monitoring emerging issues:** Emerging issues are described and highlighted.
- **OPFS response:** Our services respond by working to meet the needs identified.
- **Dissemination and communication:** 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.

There are four areas covered in this report:

1. Money and family income
2. Separating / Being a single parent
3. Child maintenance
4. Domestic abuse / coercive control

These areas reflect the key issues which single parents have contacted us about over the last two months. We finish the report with a spotlight section, focussing on domestic abuse, followed by policy recommendations.

# Main findings

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Over the course of June and July parents' concerns have been centred around domestic and economic abuse, inconsistent child maintenance payments, delays receiving Universal Credit, and family breakdown/separation financial distress. Consequently, we have decided to focus our spotlight topic on domestic abuse and the impact this is having on the rising tide of family hardship.

We remain ever vigilant to the needs of the single parent families. We are committed to advocating for positive social change on their behalf.

## 1. Money and family income

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The National Centre for Social Research tells us that in 2023,



*more than 60% of the lowest income households were going without essentials such as food, heating, toiletries or showers..*

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and that,



*15% of people were in arrears of some sort, with people 'finding it very difficult' to make ends meet and nearly 35 times more likely to have household bills arrears than those 'living comfortably'.*

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<sup>1</sup> [National Centre for Social Research, 2023. The Price We Pay: the social impact of the cost-of-living crisis.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2023

The ever-present cost of living crisis does little to alleviate these concerns but instead leaves many parents fraught with worry as to how they are going to survive day to day. Our service delivery teams, working with single parents across Scotland, have highlighted the following key issues:

- Universal Credit advance payment delays
- Rising debt e.g. utility debt, topping up pre-payment meters and financial debt.
- Struggle to pay for the cost of essentials.



*I badly need a fuel voucher for my electricity. I have been using foodbanks, but they don't seem to have any fuel vouchers. I have a little food left but I need fuel. I can't get a Universal Credit advance and have had my three payments for crisis grants through the Scottish Welfare Fund in the last 12 months...*

**Single parent mother**



*I have my two sons to stay every weekend but am really struggling financially. I have a bit of debt too through rent arrears (I am in temporary accommodation) and have fuel arrears. It is very stressful. I need help to sort out my debt.*

**Single mother with two sons**



*I am really struggling with food costs until I receive my next Universal Credit payment date.*

**Single mother with two children**



*I am really struggling with the rates debts as they are taken from our pre-payment meters, and it is difficult when topping them up.*

**Single mother with two children**

## 2. Separation/being a single parent

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Separation is a significant life event that carries an increased risk of negative consequences and poorer life chances for both parents and children. For many children, family break-up brings social and emotional instability coupled with financial disadvantage that can impact on all areas of their lives, from economic and material to social and emotional insecurity. Key factors are resultant living conditions (lower incomes and poorer quality housing), post-separation parental relationships and post-separation relationships between children and non-resident parents. Many families – most often resident parent households – experience a substantial reduction in living standards and/or a drop into poverty post-separation.<sup>3</sup>

Feedback from our local and national services regarding parental separation highlights:

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<sup>3</sup> [Family Separation Scoping Study Report\\_final.pdf \(nuffieldfoundation.org\)](#)

- loss of family relationship – parents grieving and finding it difficult to navigate this new reality
- the loss of financial support after separating
- struggles with mental health and wellbeing
- benefit entitlement insecurity, financial and housing concerns.



*I am so unhappy and upset. My partner and I have a two-year-old daughter. I thought my partner and I would be forever, and I feel so guilty, but I don't think I can go on with this. We are going to counselling but he puts on a facade for others and shows lots of affection to our daughter but not to me. But how will I live, and can I stay in our house or will I have to live elsewhere with our daughter? Will I get help with housing costs? I have a good salary, but will I get any benefits?*

**Single parent mother with a two-year-old daughter**



*I am really struggling since my separation earlier this year, it was very sudden I feel I am still in shock. No one seems to understand how I feel. People keep saying it's time to move on and meet another partner. I don't want this at all. I feel quite isolated where I stay in the countryside.*

**Single parent mother**



*My partner has left me and is staying in a hotel with his new partner. We have two children aged eleven and five. I work part-time but am not sure if I will get any benefits. Can you tell me what I might get. Also, we have a joint mortgage. How does that work? ... If money is coming into my account for his share of the mortgage, will that affect my Universal Credit. Should I close our joint accounts?*

### **Single parent with two children**

The impact of separation on families is often negative, leading to a detrimental impact on overall family health and wellbeing. At this vulnerable time, single parents need the right information and correct advice, sensitive counselling and a listening ear. At OPFS, in addition to our general services, we offer practical support for those who find themselves in times of family breakdown, through our,

1. [Helpline and online chat](#)
2. [OPFS Single Parent Forum](#)
3. [“My Life and Me”](#).

## **3. Child maintenance**

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Child maintenance remains a top concern for many single parents. Feedback from parents over the course of June/July clearly suggests that the child maintenance service (CMS) continues to let them down. They describe the lack of correct advice, the unreliability of child maintenance payments and the falsehood of an ex-partner failing to report true earnings, seeking loopholes, or just simply refusing to pay.





*I have a son aged two and do not get any child maintenance from his dad. His paternal grandmother gives me money and sees my son a lot, but I have stopped my ex seeing our son as he lets him down and does not show up, but our son asks for his dad. How can I get child maintenance as we have no contact now?*

**Single mother of son aged two**



*I am complaining about the CMS and was told, having been on the phone for two hours, that I need to request call transcriptions and that I can do this via my online account. There is nowhere to do this on my on-line account and there is no chat function. How can I get in touch with them?*

**Single parent**



*Single mum with a teenage son looking for child maintenance but apprehensive about applying to CMS given past domestic abuse/violence from her ex-partner.*

**Single mother with teenage son**



*My ex-partner is not in my young child's life, and he has another baby and he and his partner live together. He is not paying any maintenance to me for my child at all. I want to go to college and need to see how studying might affect my benefits and household income can you help with this?*

### **Single parent with young child**

Even though parents may live apart, their shared responsibilities towards their children should continue wherever possible. There is an obligation on the part of the parent living apart from his/her children to pay financially towards the costs of a child, where financially viable. We need to have confidence in a robust system of child maintenance that fairly upholds the rights of both parties involved in bringing up children and ensures that children are not disadvantaged by an ineffective system.

## **4. Domestic abuse / coercive control**

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Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour by a partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse is overwhelmingly experienced by women and perpetrated by men.<sup>4</sup>

The impact on family welfare of domestic abuse is significant and it also affects the wider society: children's participation in education, sustaining employment, the forming of relationships and trust, anti-social behaviour and crime, and the impact on health services due to health-related concerns. It is not always easy to ask for help and stigma can also be a prevalent issue.

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<sup>4</sup> [Domestic abuse | Scottish Women's Rights Centre \(scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk\)](https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk)

Concerns raised by parents at the time of this report, include,

- Difficulties in adapting to new home relocations e.g. rural area placement.
- Stalking concerns
- Worries over repeated controlling behaviour
- Mental health and wellbeing challenges



*I had to be rehomed to another part of Scotland due to domestic abuse. I am feeling very isolated as I live in a rural area now.*

**Single parent**



*I really need support. I have fled domestic abuse... I was told my ex-partner has been seen near the children's school. I feel very alarmed about this. Who can I speak to about getting a Court Order in place to keep him away from us? It is very worrying.*

**Single parent**



*My ex-partner has appeared on the scene after many years... He has been stalking me and making me feel uneasy. Can I get a non-harassment order out against him? I have started keeping evidence of his behaviour. I dealt with controlling behaviour from him in the past for many years.*

**Single parent mother**



*My ex-partner was abusive/controlling to me but is a good father to our daughter. We have been separated for two years. But once a month when he has his daughter with him, I see a friend in London. I am never late back or have to change arrangements etc, but my ex is now saying that we must have a legal document about contact as I shouldn't be going to London to see this friend. I feel the control is carrying on. Is it ok for me to go to see my friend when he has our daughter?*

**Single mother with daughter**

The act of domestic violence is a crime. For many families that we support, this crime too often goes unrecognised, leaving the victim without a voice, traumatised and vulnerable. We believe that Scotland has and continues to have a significant problem with domestic abuse. It is an epidemic which requires a longer-term solution, stronger safeguarding and robust advocating measures to better support suffering families.

## Spotlight topic - Domestic Abuse

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Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner (Scottish Women's Aid).

When we refer to domestic abuse, many people might assume or think of physical abuse being the only or primary form of abuse - however, abuse can take many forms and you do not have to have experienced physical abuse to have experienced domestic abuse.<sup>5</sup>

For many single parents in touch with OPFS domestic abuse occurs in the home, during separation and often for significant period post separation.

The issue of domestic abuse in all its forms is ever prevalent in the feedback we receive from single parent's month on month. Distance from the abuser does not always eradicate the problem: for example, the single parent may still have to deal with stalking from their ex-partner, economic abuse resulting from limited or no child maintenance provision and controlling behaviours regarding child contact arrangements.

The following two case studies exemplify what it is like for single parents living with domestic abusive relationships and how OPFS can help families in such difficult times. Both case studies underline the impact that domestic abuse can have and shows that intervention through one-to-one support from our local services can enhance resilience and achieve positive outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> [Domestic abuse | Scottish Women's Rights Centre \(scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk\)](https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk)

## **Rosie single parent with a 7-year-old son.**

### **Initial Referral**

*Rosie (not her real name) referred herself to OPFS for support with managing her mental health as well as coping with her own physical health issues. She has cerebral palsy and was looking for some strategies to support with this after leaving her abusive ex-husband.*

*She stated she would like help with energy advice and bills in general. She was also looking for support with benefits.*

*She said she would like to return to work at some point but needs to receive family support first.*

*Her son has additional needs, and she wanted some support around managing this. She was also wanting to improve family relationships.*

### **Service input**

*In our initial meetings, Rosie disclosed that she had left her abusive husband and there were ongoing legal proceedings. She was not allowing him to see her son due to the nature of the abuse which had led her to needing hospital treatment. She had moved back to Dundee where her family stay. The after-effects of the abuse and the upcoming court cases were causing significant anxiety, leading to her struggling with her emotions. Her fear around her son and his safety was heightened and she was always on edge.*

*We supported Rosie to prepare for the trial and attended with her. Her ex-husband was charged and sentenced. The end of the case against him for abuse was followed up by him looking for access to his son. This was again a cause of significant anxiety as she was really terrified of him having contact. Her son is non-verbal, and she said she would always be concerned about his actions around his son.*

*The court case was ongoing and with support from the school there were delays in a decision being made regarding contact. Our support around*

*the abuse involved emotional support allowing Rosie to talk through the events as well as how it was impacting her. She found this useful as it was impacting every aspect of her life. We looked at possible outcomes, how to reduce her anxiety, strategies for her when her ex-husband was out.*

*The exact dates of when her son was to spend time with his dad was yet to be set but it was going to be supervised contact and Rosie was given some strategies to use while this was taking place.*

*There were several other issues around her sons schooling as there was a significant incident at school where her son was left behind on a trip. This exacerbated her anxiety around his safety, and she was incredibly emotional around this. We supported her with school appointments, complaints, and contacting MSP's and other relevant people.*

*Rosie received financial support through funds for Eid and she was supported to apply for benefits. She was also supported to get her blue badge.*

*Rosie attended the health and wellbeing group and found the strategies and the peer support beneficial.*

*OPFS were also able to support Rosie by giving IT equipment so she could begin her search around employment and training.*

### **Outcomes**

*Rosie is better able to manage her mental health, her son is in a new school, and she is happy with how he is managing. The exact dates of when her son was to spend time with his dad is yet to be set but it will be supervised contact and Rosie feels more confident in using the strategies she has learned in order to keep calm while this is taking place.*

*Rosie's financial circumstances improved due to the funds she applied for around fuel, as well as Adult Disability Payment being allocated.*

*Rosie feels more capable in dealing with relationships supporting a positive environment for her son. Rosie's schooling situation for her son has improved. This has positively impacted both their lives.*

### **Feedback from Rosie**



*One Parent Families Scotland has supported me in so many ways, in the most difficult parts of my life when I needed it. I couldn't have done it without their support! So, thank you.*

### **Mary, single parent mother with one child**

*Through discussions while supporting Mary (not her real name), she has often mentioned the abuse she suffered from her child's father. Mary has severe anxiety due to her past experiences. She mentions he stubbed cigarettes out on her body, broke her arm and that she was often beat up.*

*He previously abducted her daughter which leaves her living in fear. Once she had the courage to leave him, he still continues to frighten her.*

*She never prosecuted due to him being let off for abusing his mother. She also states she would not like her daughter to read about him in newspapers as this would have a huge impact on her.*

*OPFS has supported Mary to be rehoused which has made her feel safer. She does not allow her daughter to upload photos etc of her new home.*

*Hopefully she can move on with her life now, but she knows it will take a long time.*



## Kerry, single mother with one child

*Kerry is a single mother who is renting a new house from a local housing association. She had moved after leaving an abusive relationship which left her feeling anxious. Her mental health was severely affected, and she suffered from depression and PTSD. Her son had shown signs of being on the spectrum of autism, but he has only recently been tested and his diagnosis confirmed. Although Kerry had tried to move away from her abusive ex-partner, he was living in the same area in a private let. Even after she was able to get away from him, he continued to try to control her life through economic abuse.*

*Her ex-partner would frequently stop the agreed maintenance payments and would buy her son presents rather than provide financial support to the family. This made Kerry feel anxious that her son would feel that his father gave him gifts that she could not. Her son was older, and his father was repeatedly trying to coerce him into moving in with him, when this did not happen, he started to cause as much trouble for Kerry as possible.*

*He had built up Council Tax arrears when they were in a relationship as he had total control over the family finances and had claimed to have paid the bills. The local council then pursued Kerry for the whole debt as he was using an assumed name. He also reported to her housing office & DWP the lie that she had a new partner and obtained credit in her name which she had no knowledge of. These issues were only resolved after Kerry took out court action against him. The whole situation was very traumatic for the whole family. Kerry said:*



*I felt as if I constantly had to prove that I was on my own. It was a case of having to prove I was telling the truth rather than my ex-partner being held accountable.*

## Conclusion

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Scotland has implemented several policies to tackle domestic abuse, focusing on prevention, support, and legal measures. We recognise that funding and legislation alone is not enough to tackle domestic abuse. In the UK around one in four women have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 and at least one woman a week is killed by a male partner or ex-partner<sup>6</sup>. The statistics and insights from Scottish Women's Aid<sup>7</sup> as well as the harrowing stories we hear from mothers we work with, tells us that we need a substantial shift in our approach to domestic abuse. But to do this, we need to coordinate a response that addresses the structural causes of domestic abuse and extends beyond the criminal justice system.

We need more than prevention programmes to intervene earlier. To prevent domestic abuse, survivors need to have confidence that they can access the appropriate support they need to leave. And this requires a society that invests fully in its response to domestic abuse. It also demands increased leadership accountability to address the police, health, and welfare responses to domestic abuse, working in partnership with specialist organisations and backed by sufficient funding and training. And this must unequivocally include migrant survivors.

Above all, we need a national network of sustainably funded specialist domestic abuse services which has the resources to help women rebuild their lives and live free from abuse. Women's specialist services understand and address the needs of survivors and are uniquely able to meet the needs of the survivors they support, providing a place of true safety and understanding for the groups experiencing additional forms of inequalities.

These services are extremely valuable not only to the women and children they support but to the whole of society- their cost is a drop in the ocean compared to the millions that domestic abuse costs society a year.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> <https://womensaid.scot/>

Domestic abuse survivors need a whole-system response - where all parts of society, government departments and agencies work together to increase the safety and freedom of survivors.

This impact report covers the period of June and July 2024. It covers the topics of Money/family income, separation, child maintenance and reflects upon the detrimental impact domestic abuse has on family situations.

Despite these struggles it is important to acknowledge that single parents with the right support, tools and advice have the capacity for strong resilience. We will continue to raise the profile of single parent experiences and circumstances so that they are elevated to Government policy.



**One Parent  
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If you have any feedback 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](mailto:info@opfs.org.uk)

[www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk)

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