



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

(How) Does Welfare Conditionality Work?

Presentation by Professor Peter Dwyer to the
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Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change (2013-2018) ²

Twin aims

To consider the ethics and **efficacy** of welfare conditionality

Explore conditionality across a range of policy domains

Recipients of social security benefits (unemployed people, lone parents, disabled people, UC), homeless people, social tenants, individuals/families subject to antisocial behaviour orders/family intervention projects, offenders and migrants

Fieldwork with three sets of respondents

- Semi-structured interviews with 40 policymakers/actors
- 24 focus groups with frontline welfare practitioners
- Three rounds of repeat QL interviews with a diverse sample of 480 WSU who are subject to conditionality (up to 1440 interviews in total)

Welfare conditionality: what is it, how is it intended to work?

Purpose

- Realign the relationship between entitlement/support and conduct/behaviour (Dwyer 1998, 2004; Betzelt & Bothfeld, 2011)

DWP statement 2008: *Conditionality embodies the principle that aspects of state support, usually financial or practical, are dependent on citizens meeting certain conditions which are invariably behavioural*

Aspects

- **Amorphous** (behaving responsibly) – **concrete** (tightly specified) conditionality (Paz-Fuchs, 2008)
- **Conditional** (sanctioning irresponsible behaviour) and **earned** (rewarding positive behaviour) citizenship (Flint, 2009)
- **Sanctions** and **Support** (sticks and carrots), positive potential for coercive welfare (Phoenix, 2008)

Case 1: sanctions

A missed appointment, they said. They put me under the sanction... I was on zero income. Zero Housing Benefit, zero Council Tax Benefit. Towards the end I put in a nil income form, which activated my Housing Benefit temporarily. But I think once I had nil income for four and a half months...

I turned to prostitution. It was the most horrific time of my life. I got raped. I got raped. I got [hesitates] beaten up, raped and buggered, trying to [hesitates] earn money via prostitution. I was working with [two support organisations]. They were liaising with the benefits as well. It made no difference.

(Jane, sanctioned ESA claimant)

Case 2: support

[Support organisation] are pukka, everything, paperwork, like support if I've got problems... When I used to feel really low, I used to hit the bottle. Now rather than hit the bottle I'll just ring [support worker] up and he'll say, 'Right do you want to come to speak to someone?' You know, which is great, that's all I need. Whereas if I didn't have them I don't know where I'd be now... I've never felt more confident. Now I've got my head screwed back on. I've got a job interview for [company] on the 17th through these guys. They're interested in me. So hopefully, fingers crossed, I'll be off benefits and back on proper money. Yes, that's all I want.

(John, ex offender, ESA claimant)

Behaviour change?

Initial findings

- International evidence indicates that benefit sanctions substantially raise exits from benefits, and may increase short-term job entry; but there are unfavourable longer-term outcomes for earnings, job quality and employment retention
- Those with specific vulnerabilities and individuals with multiple and complex needs, such as lone parents, disabled people or homeless people, have been disproportionately affected by intensifying welfare conditionality
- Concerns about the unintended consequences that welfare conditionality may trigger include: distancing people from support; causing hardship and even destitution; displacing rather than resolving issues such as long-term worklessness and substance misuse; and negative impacts on children

Early lessons learnt

- A pressing need for evidence from the sharp end of the conditional welfare state: diverse (positive and negative) outcomes probable
- 21st century welfare state: increasingly constrained and conditional
- Sanctions and Support unbalanced
- Individual causes and solutions to poverty, unemployment and disability are being foregrounded as social/structural aspects are marginalised
- Universal Credit – redefines ‘welfare dependency’
- Conditionality: a paradigm underlying current social policy that threatens the rights of claimants (Paz-Fuchs 2008b : 198)



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