Welfare Conditionality and Anti-social Behaviour:
Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change

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Outline

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1 About the Study

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council is gratefully acknowledged.
2 Conditionality and Anti-social Behaviour: Rationalities and Mechanisms
New Labour and ‘coercive welfare’

- A belief that “everyone can change” and that the state can ‘grip’ families and make them change their behaviour
- Increasing focus on the take-up of support:
  - It is possible ‘to make people who need help take it… households can be forced to take help’
- A belief that sanctions provide a very strong incentive to encourage those households to undertake rehabilitation when they have refused other offers of help
- A belief that such support is non-negotiable
Policy measures

- ASBOs, Parenting Orders, Family Intervention Tenancies, Pilots of Housing Benefit Sanctions
- Based on set of prohibited behaviours (ASBOs) or required behaviours (Parenting Orders)
- Viewed as a contractual arrangement (as well as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts), balancing support with sanctions for non-compliance
- Family Intervention Projects: different models but focus on key worker model with holistic whole-family approaches
- Latter focus on early and supportive interventions (mirrored in the Scottish Government’s approach)
Coalition Government and a rehabilitation revolution?

- Belief that ‘current measures impose stringent measures to prevent future ASB but don’t address underlying causes’
- Need for simple, clear and effective sanctions regime
- More rehabilitative and restorative rather than criminalising and coercive, but still ‘real consequences for non-compliance’
- Continuing belief that ‘sanctions provide a proper deterrent to the ‘persistent minority’ and that Parenting Orders can compel parents to attend programmes
- Recognition that some practitioners reluctant to use sanctions, relying on a voluntary ethos
- Reduction in ambition from ‘everyone can change’ to ‘government working with people who want to take the necessary steps’
- To provide support beyond the welfare support system and to reduce top down state intervention: ie, localised provision with greater role for community, voluntary and private sectors
Troubled Families Programme

- Troubled Families Programme: to ‘turn around’ the lives of 120,000 families during the 2010-2105 Parliament
- ASB one of four criteria for inclusion in the programme and payment by results partly determined by reductions in ASB
- Retrospectively supported by two DCLG research publications
- Five key intervention factors: a dedicated worker; practical hands on support; a persistent, assertive and challenging approach; considering the family as a whole and gathering the intelligence; and a common purpose and agreed action.
Anti-social, Crime and Policing Act 2014

- Existing measures/powers consolidated to six new powers
- Broadening of the definition of ASB
- Powers easier to use, extended geographical reach and available to more agencies
- Crucially, new Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance and Criminal Behaviour Orders can impose positive requirements upon individuals as well as prohibitions (this was not possible with ASBOs or ASB Injunctions— it was possible with Individual Support Orders but these were not widely used).
3 Research Evidence
Previous research findings

• Importance of key worker role with assertive approach and ‘non-negotiable expectations’
• Importance of holistic whole-family approach, identifying and tackling underpinning issues
• Recognising centrality of relationships with family but also liaison and advocacy, not just direct support
• Recognising importance of crisis management, stabilising and ‘soft’ transformative outcomes as prerequisite for ‘hard’ and ‘measurable’ outcomes
• Concerns over limited time period for working with families, exit planning and longer-term outcomes
• Concerns over resources, access to expert services and flexibility of key agencies to support families
• Understanding voluntary and engaged ethos of many interventions
Contested research evidence

- Claim that evaluations of Family Intervention Projects have over-estimated positive outcomes
- Considerable controversy about Louise Casey’s report on troubled families and arising conclusions and recommendations
- Critique that, despite all the research, there has been very little ‘accumulated learning’ about how to tackle ASB and troubled families
4 Understanding Interventions and Outcomes
Understanding interventions

- Assessment
- Direct Support (Emotional, practical, financial)
- Liaison and Advocacy

- Engagement – assessment - support plan and contract - provision of support - exit planning
Understanding all outcomes (not just ‘hard’ transformative ones)

- **Crisis Management**: reducing immediate risk or harm and responding to trauma
- **Stabilising**: maintaining environments, relationships and dynamics
- **Transformative**:
  - *Soft Outcomes*: improved self-esteem, mental and physical health, domestic environment and management, inter-family relationships
  - *Hard Outcomes*: Education (attendance and attainment); employment/training; reduced risky behaviour or ASB; prevention of eviction or entry to criminal justice system
5 Initial Findings from the ESRC Study
Indicative early findings

• Confirms existing evidence and evaluations
• Individuals/households with range of vulnerabilities, exacerbated by welfare reform
• Still need to address underpinning problems
• Chaotic and dynamic situations in which ‘rational and future-orientated decision making’ challenging
• Tension between ethos of support and use of sanctions
• Many individuals not fully aware of nature of interventions, forms of sanction or behavioural requirements
• Concerns about resources and extent to which expertise is being lost due to budget reductions
• Reduction of ASB as priority impacting on partnerships
Indicative early findings 2

• Complex relationship between sanctions and support
• Sanctions ineffective without any form of support (but not necessarily visa versa)
• Key role of key workers, including new role to negotiate sanctions regime
• Emphasis on employment sanctions rather than tackling underpinning causes
• Lack of joining up of different sanction elements (housing, ASB, benefits)
• Varied views on the extent to which threat of sanction acts as a motivation or catalyst for engagement in support
Further reading


See also: www.welfare@conditionality.ac.uk for ASB and other briefing papers and more information about the study.