



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

First Wave Findings

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An ESRC large grant



Welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change (2013-2018)

Twin aims

- To consider the ethics and efficacy of welfare conditionality

Fieldwork with three sets of respondents

1. Semi-structured interviews with 52 policy stakeholders policymakers/actors
2. 27 focus groups with frontline welfare practitioners who implement policy
3. Three rounds of repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews with a diverse sample of 480 welfare recipients who are subject to welfare conditionality

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Welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change (2013-2018)

- **Exploring welfare conditionality across a range of policy domains and groups**

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

- **Locations in England and Scotland**

Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, London, Manchester, Peterborough, Salford, Sheffield, Warrington

Sanctions

- **Negative impacts universally reported by WSUs**

[The hospital] were saying, 'You've lost weight.' I said, 'Well I can't eat. I've got no food, I've got no money.' (WSU, disabled man, England)

- **Disproportionate and inappropriate sanctions**

Because I didn't fill my book in properly, they didn't really explain to me properly how to do it. I am a bit dyslexic; I can't read or write practically. (WSU, offender, male, England)

- **Counter productive and negative consequences**

I got sanctioned for a month...It made me shoplift to tell you the truth. I couldn't survive with no money. I was homeless... So if I needed something I'd have to 'borrow it' from [supermarket]or something. (WSU, homeless man, England)

Support

- **Negative experiences of support widespread**

There's no support for me when I get there. All I do is sit there, sign and go out again. (WSU, Jobseeker's Allowance recipient, male, England)

- **Some limited good practice is evident**

It's down to the individual who they assign to be your [Work Programme] coach. I'm lucky enough that the person who is currently my coach is a brilliant person. He is really accommodating in the sense that he respects the fact I'm a lone parent. (WSU, lone parent, female, England)

- **The significance of support**

I don't know where I would have been if I didn't get the help that I did get. Things could have come out a lot worse. (WSU, ASB, female, England)

Improving implementation

- **Lack of communication and understanding**

17 years... we've always been secure tenants and suddenly we're a five year contract... 'We're doing that with all our housing now'... my husband is living on his nerves now thinking what's going to happen at the end of the five years? He doesn't need the stress or the pressure. (WSU, female, social tenant, England)

- **Flexibility in responding to additional barriers and needs**

I need work that will fit around me, rather than me fit round it... I need rest periods... [not] standard business hours and like it or lump it... You know if you can't fit round that then tough. (WSU, disabled woman, Scotland)

- **Undermining the logic of conditionality**

[through interpreter] Because he was new to the country he didn't know all the systems, how it went, so it was very difficult for him... But one day he missed his a appointment to sign and when he went the next day they sanctioned him for a month, he wasn't paid for a month so that time was very difficult. He'd not anything even to eat. (WSU, migrant, male, Scotland)



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Behaviour change

Dr Sharon Wright
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Behaviour change in principle

- A stated aim of conditionality is positive behaviour change to:
 - prepare for or find paid work
 - maintain and advance in paid work
 - encourage responsible behaviour
- This assumes that positive behaviour amongst target groups is not possible without coercion

Behaviour change: our evidence

- Wave A offers users' retrospective reflections
- Waves B and C are tracking changes (where it occurs) and will offer further insights

Behaviour change: our evidence

- Virtually all welfare service user interviewees expressed the desire for the types of positive behaviour intended

'If I get into employment, it's about being a good example for my kids. It's positive... it's good for the family situation, and that's the road I want to go down.'

(WSU, long parent, female, Scotland)

- Limited evidence of welfare conditionality bringing about positive behaviour change

'I think it does change your behaviour because you've become dependent on the benefit because of the situation you're in. So you are a little bit more scared that if you don't do what they say, they're going to stop your money' (WSU, disabled man, England)

Behaviour change: our evidence

- Rare that conditionality worked to move people closer to the labour market

'It's not like because of this rubbish experience with the sanction, I'm getting a job now, I'm getting a job because I want a better life. (WSU, migrant, female, England)

- A minority of practitioners and users did acknowledge positive outcomes

'I think confidence kicked in then, or maybe I had become more reconciled to the fact that this was what I was doing. I don't know, but something changed, and it was psychological; something shifted.' (WSU, disabled woman, Scotland)

- Behaviour change to comply with process at the expense of outcome

'applying for jobs that I was never going to get because you had to apply for jobs.' (WSU, Jobseeker's Allowance recipient, male, England)

Successful outcomes

- Transitions into paid work or the cessation of problematic behaviour were not so much brought about by threat or experience of sanction, but by action (self-help) and the availability of appropriate individual support

'We're seeing a lot of unhappy parents, stressed parents and parents being forced back into employment, and I have to say with not a lot of regard to the actual employment they're being forced into... it is well known that yes a lot of single parents go into work but they also come out of work because it's not sustainable.'
(PS39, Senior representative, lone parent voluntary sector organisation)

Counterproductive conditionality

*‘Sanctioning is counterproductive... it marginalises people even further than they probably already are.’
(FG14, Jobseeking, England)*

- In-work Universal Credit interviewees did not think they should be subject to the same sanctions as out-of-work claimants
- In-work conditionality could be counterproductive and introduce new disincentives to work
- Mismatch between flexibility required by employers and rigidity of JCP appointments
- Imbalance between weight of sanctions and absence of in-work support



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The ethics of welfare conditionality

Dr Lisa Scullion
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Support for conditionality?

- **Broad support for the principle of welfare conditionality (i.e. 'rights' being linked to 'responsibilities')**

It's not fair if people are going out paying their taxes and you've got people like sitting on the backsides just like doing nothing and still getting money. (WSU, UC recipient, male, England)

- **But ... this did not mean uncritical acceptance - widespread concern around:**
 - **Inappropriate application**
 - **Proportionality**
 - **Desert**
 - **Lack of personalisation**

Inappropriate application?

- **Concerns around the extension of conditionality to previously exempt ‘groups’ (e.g. disabled people, lone parents)**

I’m a mother, I want to be a mother, I want to give my son his breakfast in the morning. I think it’s wrong to demand I work and a stranger gives him his breakfast...Why’s that wrong, for me wanting to be a mother and to be there for my children? (WSU, lone parent, female, Scotland)

- **Concerns around ‘in-work’ conditionality**

I was working at the time... it was something like, ‘We’re going to charge you £10 a day for seven days’ and I said, ‘What, you’re going to fine me £70 for missing an appointment that I couldn’t even ring you to tell you that I’d be late?’ ” (WSU, UC recipient, female, England)

- **What level of sanction is acceptable for non-compliance?**

They should be a bit stricter with some people... but don't put them in a position that they haven't got food on their plate or anything like that... You can't be like that to people, it's absolutely wrong. (WSU, migrant, female, England)

- **The need to retain a basic minimum even when sanctioned**

[As] long as there's a roof over their head, and for example depending on how many dependent children there are, so much per head for that week, and that's their minimum amount. (WSU, UC recipient, male, England)

Questions of desert?

- **Many WSUs assert their entitlement to welfare by stating that welfare conditionality is fair when applied to other of ‘undeserving’ groups (e.g. ‘druggies’, migrants, people ‘on the sick’)**

They need to knock out the alcoholics, the drug takers, like the heroin addicts and the smack heads and things like that, they need to sort out them and also the people that are claiming ESA and going out working. I know three people that are claiming ESA and going out working... they're like, 'Oh we can get you some work.' 'I can't work. I am poorly. I'm not lying. You're blagging the system.' ” (WSU, disabled man, England)

- **Everyone has their own legitimating position/frame contributing to discourses around ‘deservedness’**

Personalised welfare conditionality?

- **A need to treat people as human beings**

I think there should be more discernment in the way the system operates. It's like a machine isn't it ? There is no humanity left in it (WSU, disabled man, England)

- **'One size fits all' approach seen as flawed and unfair**
- **A more personalised approach reflecting people's needs, capabilities and responsibilities outside the paid labour market is required**



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Thank you

Project website: www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk

Follow us on Twitter @WelCond

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