



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Benefit sanctions: what is the point?

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Professor Peter Dwyer, Dept. Social Policy and Social Work,
University of York, UK



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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 55 Policy Stakeholders
 2. 27 focus groups with frontline welfare practitioners
 3. Three rounds of repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews with a diverse sample of 480 welfare recipients who are subject to conditionality (i.e. 1,000+ interviews in total).

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Welfare conditionality?

- **A principle of (behavioural) conditionality**

Access to certain basic publicly provided welfare benefits and services should “be subject to the condition that those who receive them behave in particular ways, or participate in specified activities” (Deacon, 1994: 53)

- **Combinations of Sanctions (‘sticks’) and Support (‘carrots’)**

Does ‘coercive welfare’ offer a potential for positive outcomes ? (Phoenix, 2008)

Conditionality within UK social benefit system

Intensified, extended ,and personalised i.e. WFIs, work search, training activities

“Conditionality embodies the principle that aspects of state support, usually financial or practical, are dependent on citizens meeting certain conditions which are invariably behavioural” (DWP, 2008, p1).

First wave findings: impacts of 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**

After about ten minutes this woman eventually came up and said 'Can I have your card?'... 'You're late... Well I didn't see you here you've only just got here'. (WSU, JSA recipient, male England)

Totally incapacitated due to an accident at work... didn't turn up to his interview... ended up being sanctioned for six months... he'd gone into the sausage machine. (PS4, Former government minister)

- **Punitive and counterproductive**

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

A kind of state imposed destitution in many ways. (PS42, Policy officer, welfare rights agency)

Sanctions: what sort of behaviour change?

- **Disengagement and/or movement into survival crime**

I just gave it up [the benefit claim]... carried on just going out everyday thieving. (WSU, offender, male, England)

- **Fear and compliance**

An HGV driver right, I had to apply for that but I don't drive. Now where's the logic there? (WSU, UC recipient, male, England)

In a rush but you're also panicking... constantly time watching, making sure you're not late because if you're late then that's it, sanction. Then it's a month of no money. (WSU, JSA recipient, male, England)

- **Anything to survive: an extreme example**

A missed appointment... 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 [hesitates] beaten up, raped and bugged, trying to [hesitates] earn money via prostitution. [Two support orgs.] They were liaising with the benefits as well. It made no difference. (WSU, disabled female, England)

Sanctions: promoting positive outcome?

- **Many were unsure why they were sanctioned**

I went up one day and she says I hadn't done something on this book and she sanctioned me. I didn't even know what she was talking about. (Lone parent, female, Scotland)

[Interpreter] He didn't know all the systems... one day he missed his appointment when he went the next day they sanctioned him for a month... He'd nothing even to eat. (WSU, migrant, male, Scotland)

- **Very limited evidence that sanctions move people toward paid work?**

Before getting sanctioned I was all right; I had a laugh with everybody, everybody knew me. Then when the sanctions started kicking in I just changed; I couldn't be bothered, wasn't going out, I wasn't bothered about looking for a job. I just went right downhill. (WSU, lone parent, male, England)

- **In work UC conditionality inhibits paid work**

I was working at the time... '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)

Conclusions: sanctions, support and behaviour change?

- **Evidence that sanctions are effective in promoting paid work is at best limited**
 - Suspending people's benefit payments can lead to rent arrears and homelessness. While these consequences can encourage some people to look for employment they can undermine other's efforts to find work (Public Accounts Committee, 2017)
 - Our review of the available evidence suggests the Department's use of sanctions is linked as much to management priorities and local staff discretion as its to claimants' behaviour (NAO, 2016)
 - Gulf between rhetoric and evidence of the effects of sanctions' (Griggs and Evans, 2010)

- **Providing support *not sanctioning* is the key to changing peoples lives**
 - The impacts of benefit sanctions are universally reported by welfare service users as profoundly negative. The availability of appropriate individual support is the common thread linking stories of successful transitions into work, or the cessation of problematic behaviour (Dwyer and Bright, 2016)



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For further information contact:

Fleur Hughes, Project Manager
Department of Social Policy and Social Work,
University of York, YO10 5DD, UK,
tel: +44 (0)1904 321299,
email: fleur.hughes@york.ac.uk

Website: www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk

Twitter: @WelCond



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