



# Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND  
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

## Benefit sanctions and behaviour change?

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## Benefit sanctions: some background

- **Benefit sanction**

“is a reduction for a specified period of the amount of benefit payable to a claimant who has failed to meet specified requirements to prepare and look for work” (Vaux,2017) *inc.* more/better paid work under UC .

- **1.4m recipients of 4 social security benefits subject to WC**

JSA, ESA, IS and UC

11,000 Work Coaches agree Claimant Commitments (NAO, 2017)

- **The extent of sanctions**

**JSA** – 2 million

**ESA** – 88,000 [Oct 2012 - Dec 2016]

**IS** – 4,300 [Oct-Dec 2016] – **UC** 220,000 [Aug 2015-Dec 2016] (DWP, 2017)

400,000 sanctions imposed in 2015 across all four benefits

24% of all JSA claimants received a sanction 20110 -2105 (NOA, 2017)

- **Sanctions among our 481 WSUs in wave a**

**186** sanctioned: **104** once; **69** 2-5 times; **13** more than 5 times

# Sanctions: the rationale and the critical response

## ■ Advocates of sanctions

**Reciprocity** (collective) rights come with (individual) responsibilities

**Engagement** with employment support/PLM

**Deterrence** against idleness/‘welfare dependency’

**Discipline/penalise** claimants who do not comply (positive)

## ■ Adversaries of sanctions

**Rights/entitlements** based on need and common humanity citizenship

**Disengagement** with collective social security systems

**Discipline/control** of poor people (negative)

**Illogical individualism** ignores wider structural factors and ignores the irrationality that is part of the human condition

## ■ How do these contrasting theories play out in practice?

Impacts, effectiveness in changing behaviour, efficiency of benefit sanctions

## Impacts of benefit sanctions

- **Negative impacts routinely 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)

*I was without heating for ages... pawned everything I had ... you're literally going, Do I eat or do I have light* (WSU lone parent Scotland)

- **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)

- **Destitution and despair: 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)

# Effectiveness of benefit sanctions in changing behaviour

## ▪ **Disengagement and /or movement into survival crime**

*Woman advisor very helpful. They changed my Jobcentre I got some young advisor and... everything was a problem 'Oh, your looking for work is not proper; you don't do enough to find work' ... At this moment I think I can care for myself and I don't bother to go. (WSU migrant, male England)*

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

## ▪ **Very limited evidence that sanctions move people towards work**

*With the hassle and everything, I just wanted to get out of the system... plus it's not the job that I want, because I'm a cleaner... Or else they were sending me to something to do with fishes - so it was, so I felt that if I didn't take this then it's just, I'll be going round in circles. For my mental health, it was just totally stressing me out. (WSU, migrant, female Scotland)*

## ▪ **Fear and compliance rather than employment opportunities**

*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)*

*Panicking... constantly time watching, making sure you're not late because if you're late then that's it, sanction. (WSU, JSA recipient, male, England)*

## Inefficiency of benefit sanctions

### ■ Inappropriate implementation of sanctions

*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)*

### ■ Ignorance of expectations and requirements

*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. (WSU 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)*

### ■ Costs: benefit analysis sanctions good value for money?

Costs: **£30m–50m** for admin plus **£35m** for hardship payments

Savings: **£132m** of benefit savings via sanctions

**Unknown** impact of sanctions on wider public spending through additional support or savings arising from increased employment. (NAO , 2017)

## 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 it is 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)