

Authorship of the Report

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The report has been proofread by Laura Richards and Sarah Purcell.

Cover image: A word cloud image of some of the common words used by single parents in the research.

The Single Parent Rights' Campaign

The Single Parent Rights' campaign is the national campaign to end discrimination towards single parents. It is led and delivered by a diverse group of single parent volunteers with the support of a broad coalition of organisations.

For more information visit www.singleparentrights.org or follow @SglParentRights on twitter.

Acknowledgements

The Single Parent Rights campaign would like to thank every single parent who took the time to complete the survey and take part in follow up questions. We would also like to thank those who shared the survey far and wide.

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Finally, we would like to thank all the other individuals and organisations who helped to cascade the survey across the UK (a full list of organisations is available in appendix 2). With a special thank you to the Single Parent Rights' supporter organisations who continue to support the campaign behind the scenes, namely:

Amicable	Asian Single Parents' Network
Career Mums	Frolo
Global Equality Collective	Happity
Independent Mothers	Mush
Neesie	One Parent Families, Scotland
Only Mums and Only Dads	Parenthood Matters
Save the Children, UK	Single Mums Business Network
Single Parents on Holiday	Single Parent Support and Advice Services
Single Parents Wellbeing	Talented Mums

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Acronyms

BAME = Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

CMS = Child Maintenance Service

DWP = Department of Work and Pensions

N = Number of respondents

RP = Resident Parent

SP = Single parent

CPAG = Child Poverty Action Group

DSS = Department for Social Security

JRF = Joseph Roundtree Foundation

NRP = Non-Resident Parent

SPR = Single Parent Rights' campaign

Section 1: Executive Summary

Background

Evidence shows that single parents disproportionately live in poverty, have low-paid employment and face poorer mental health (page 6). Identifying a lack of research into single parent discrimination, the Single Parent Rights' campaign - launched in 2020 - undertook an online survey in late 2020 with 1146 respondents (page 9).

Key Findings

Our research shows single parent discrimination is widespread. 80% of single parent respondents experienced discrimination¹ and 96% experiencing or identifying its existence². Prejudice, institutional bias, and a lack of legal protections has resulted in an environment marked by distrust and disrespect for single parents, creating second-class citizens. Single parents living with a disability, from a BAME background, young and/ or on a lower income experience greater levels of discrimination. Given these groups were underrepresented in the sample, actual levels of single parent discrimination are likely to be higher than those identified here. 96% of single parent respondents supported the addition of single parents as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act.

Areas of single parent discrimination

- Fees and charges (holidays, tourist attractions etc) (reported by 66%)
- Employment (recruitment, career progression and redundancies) (reported by 59%)
- Covid-19 restrictions (lockdown rules and restrictions) (reported by 51%)
- Access to finances (mortgages, loans, pensions) (reported by 40%)
- Government benefits (child benefit, income support, funded childcare hours) (reported by 32%)
- Housing (reported by 26%)

Impact of single parent discrimination on single parents

100% of single parents reported a negative impact from the discrimination, the most common areas were:

- Mental health (reported by 96%)
- Increased outgoings (reported by 81%)
- Lowered income (reported by 77%)
- Decreased ability to work (reported by 76%)

Impact of single parent discrimination on the child(ren) of single parents

73% of single parents reported a negative impact on their child(ren), the most common areas were:

- Children's mental health (reported by 54%)
- Children at risk of harm (reported by 34%)
- Child-parent relationship (reported by 47%)
- Living in unsuitable housing (reported by 32%)

Conclusion

Discrimination of single parents is pervasive and results in increased challenges, which can create a vicious cycle. Whilst some single parents thrive despite this, others face heightened discrimination. Without action, single parent discrimination will continue, negatively impacting single parents, their children and wider society.

Recommendations

We have identified a three-pronged approach to tackle single parent discrimination which aims to address the lack of legal protections, the high levels of stigma and the discriminatory policies and practices within key sectors which were identified within this research.

1. Add single parents as a protected characteristic to the Equality Act
2. Address the prejudice and stigma towards single parent families, specifically:
 - a. Broaden the definition of 'family' to reflect modern Britain and incorporate single parent families
 - b. Promote positive narratives of single parent families within the media

¹ This includes 16% who reported maybe and went on to provide details of the discrimination.

² This is made up of the 80% in the previous figure, plus a further 16% who had not personally experienced discrimination but reported they had identified or had 'maybe' identified single parent discrimination.

- c. Train family/ child related professionals in single parent inclusive policies and practices
 - d. Identify more inclusive methods to collect data on the number of single parents in the UK (e.g., counting sole carers, majority carers, fifty-fifty carers, minority carers etc)
3. Tackle sector specific single parent discrimination as outlined below:
- Fees and Charges: Create inclusive products and fees for single parent families, specifically:
 - a. Offer single parent family tickets for products, services and fees
 - b. Ensure products and promotional materials reflect single parent families
 - Employment: Create flexible employment and affordable childcare for single parents, specifically:
 - a. Make flexible working the default for all jobs
 - b. Make it mandatory for employers to publish flexible working options for all roles
 - c. Make it mandatory for employees to be allowed to request flexible working at any point
 - d. Encourage employers to enact single parent inclusive HR policies³
 - e. Ensure appropriate, flexible, cost-effective childcare is available for single parent families
 - f. Increase the national minimum wage to be in line with the living wage
 - Covid-19: Consider single parents in the Coronavirus pandemic restrictions, specifically:
 - a. Grant a temporary legal right to furlough for single parents with significant childcare challenges
 - b. Guarantee social bubbles for single parents in all lockdowns/ restriction levels permanently
 - c. Prioritise children of working single parents for childcare/ school places during lockdowns
 - d. Add all primary aged children of single parents to the 'not included' list for outdoor meet ups
 - e. Extend the track and trace isolation grant to single parents unable to work due to isolating children
 - f. Maintain the Free School Meals voucher/ cash system for lockdowns, including holidays⁴
 - Access to Finances: Grant the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) statutory authority to monitor and address lenders' financial inclusion policies and practices, including single parent borrowers
 - Government benefits, CMS, pensions and taxes: Ensure the system supports single parent families, specifically:
 - a. Make the £20 Universal Credit uplift permanent and include recipients of legacy benefits
 - b. Increase the Universal Credit standard allowance for single parents and equivalent in legacy benefits
 - c. Remove the benefit cap and the two-child limit policy
 - d. Raise the level of the high-income child benefit charge to £100,000 for single parents to be inline with household income levels of two-parent families
 - e. Reduce the Universal Credit taper rate for single parents from 63p to 50p per £1 earned
 - f. Provide thirty hours of funded childcare for 3–4-year-olds of single parents who are registered-carers
 - g. Amend inheritance tax calculations so all families benefit from the same tax-free inheritance levels
 - h. Increase the council tax reduction to 50% for single parents and fund it through central government
 - i. Raise the earning limit for tax free childcare for single parents to be inline with two-parent families
 - j. Remove the £10,000 earning limit for auto-enrolment in workplace pensions
 - k. Ensure the Child Maintenance Service is fit for purpose and protects the rights of the child
 - Housing: Ensure the housing sector protects single parents, specifically:
 - a. Establish a Regulator for the private renting sector to address DSS and single parent discrimination
 - b. Encourage the Property Ombudsman to tackle DSS and single parent discrimination
 - c. Encourage rental agencies to follow the law on DSS discrimination and work towards eradicating single parent discrimination within the sector
 - d. Wavier the bedroom tax for Non-Resident Parents with overnight care of their children

³ Suggested policies have been outlined in appendix 5.

⁴ It should be noted in Scotland a cash-based system is used and we support this approach being expanded across the UK, or - at a minimum - the voucher system to be maintained throughout the crisis.

Section 2: Literature Review and Research Methods

Literature Review

Make up of single parents in the UK: large, transitory, and growing

There were 2.9 million single parents in the UK in 2019 according to the Office of National Statistics⁵. This equates to one in four families⁶. However, single parenting is often a transitory state and a study by the University of Sheffield concluded that around one in three families will experience some period of single parenting within a six-year period⁷. It should be noted that the 2.9 million figures do not include Non-Resident Parents. Between 1999 and 2019, single parent homes increased by 14.5%, this has remained relatively stable over the last ten years⁸.

Eighty-six percent of single parents are women⁹, although the percentage of single fathers rises slightly as children become older¹⁰. Rates of single parenting differs across ethnic groups, with 19% of single parents from a BAME background, whilst 14% of the general population are from a BAME background¹¹. The average age of a single parent is 39 years, with 80% of single parents being aged between 25 and 50 years¹². Single parent families tend to be smaller than coupled families, with nearly 90% of single parent families having two children or fewer¹³.

Economic circumstances of single parents in the UK: challenging and worsening

Those families on low incomes and in receipt of government benefits have been particularly hit by welfare reforms and inflation over the last ten years¹⁴. Single parent homes have seen the fastest growth in poverty; three in ten children in single parent families are now in poverty, compared with two in ten in 2010/11¹⁵. Lone mothers living in destitution increased between 2017 and 2019, accounting for almost 10% of single parent homes now.¹⁶

While single parent employment is at record highs of almost 70%¹⁷, the poverty rate of single parents is one of the highest it has ever been. Overall, working age single parents have the highest rates of poverty amongst working adults with 43% living in poverty¹⁸. In homes with full-time working single parents, poverty has risen from 13% in 1996/97 to 22% in 2018/19. Whilst poverty rates for part-time single parents decreased in the period 1998/99 and 2010/11, they have since increased to 41%¹⁹. This high rate of poverty is reflected in the high usage of food banks by single parent families, compared with coupled families²⁰. Meanwhile single parents in work are just as likely to need to borrow to make ends meet as those out of work²¹.

Research from the Child Poverty Action Group in 2019, highlighted that single parents earning the median wage was an insufficient income for a two-child household. This shortfall between available, and required, finances increases when the single parent is earning the minimum wage, and even more so where the single parent is not in paid employment²². Furthermore, only 26% of single mothers own their home compared with the UK baseline of 65%, placing greater financial pressures on single parents²³.

Single parents and employment: high employment and low pay

The rise in single parent employment since the late 1990s has been due in a large part to in-work benefit support (e.g., Working Tax Credits and more recently Universal Credits) and the benefits conditionality placed upon single

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2019>

⁶ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

⁷ https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.8121611/file/Sheffield_Solutions_Modern_Families.pdf

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2019>

⁹ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tackling-single-parent-poverty-after-coronavirus.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://singleparentsonholiday.co.uk/single-parent-statistics-new-facts-and-figures/>

¹¹ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

¹² <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

¹⁴ https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/CostofaChild2019_web.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

¹⁶ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

¹⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2019>

¹⁸ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

¹⁹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/child-poverty>

²⁰ https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf

²¹ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

²² https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/CostofaChild2019_web.pdf page 11.

²³ https://www.fairpensionsforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NP266_Underpension_report_Jan2021.pdf

parents. The latter raised concerns regarding the long-term benefit of such conditionality which has led to single parents accepting insecure work with limited benefits for their family²⁴. 22% of single parents starting work were back on job seekers allowance within a year²⁵ and many are being pushed into unsustainable self-employment²⁶.

Single parent employment is often low-paid and unstable. High childcare costs and other barriers make it challenging for single parents to access better employment opportunities²⁷ meaning they are less likely to progress within their career²⁸. In 2020, it was reported that the average cost of 25 hours a week childcare for a child under 2 years was £127, amounting to £6,600 per year, rising to over £9,000 in inner London²⁹.

The pension rates of single mothers reflects the long-term impact of these high poverty levels. The average pension pot of a single mother is £18,300, compared with the average person's being £80,690³⁰. This is partly due to 31% of single parents being ineligible for auto-enrolment in workplace pensions due to low-paid, part-time work which means they do not meet the threshold of £10,000 income per annum in a single role³¹.

Single parents' health: challenging

Single parents are more likely to have a disability and even more likely to have a child with a disability than non-single parent families; 27% of single parents live with a disability, compared with 21% of coupled families whilst 16% of children in single parent homes have a disability compared with 9% of children in coupled homes³². Living with a disability further exacerbates a single parent's likelihood of living in poverty³³. Where there is also a disabled child in the home, this poverty rate rises to 40%³⁴.

Understanding Society data - the UK's largest household longitudinal study - has shown children living with parents reporting symptoms of emotional distress is higher amongst single parent families. 37% of single parents out of work, and 34% in work, reported emotional distress compared with 26% of couples with at least one parent in work³⁵. Twenty nine percent of single mothers report problems with their mental wellbeing, compared with 16% of partnered mothers³⁶ and have approximately three times the prevalence of depressive episodes compared with other groups³⁷.

Attitudes towards single parents: stigma and misrepresentation

The heterosexual two-parent family is seen as the legitimate family structure within the UK³⁸. Single mothers have long been shamed in Western Christian society with single pregnant women being admitted into asylums until the 1970s³⁹. Through the 1980s and 1990s single mothers were viewed as 'amoral' based on the 'family values' discourse of the Thatcher led government⁴⁰. This attitude was reignited on the back of the London riots in 2011 and comments of 'Broken Britain' from the then Prime Minister, David Cameron⁴¹. In more recent years, the stigma towards single mothers has centred around their 'deservingness' linked to benefit claims⁴². A study at the University of Huddersfield highlighted that media misrepresentation was the biggest factor in single mothers feeling judged, with media depictions of single mothers almost universally linking them with benefits⁴³.

²⁴ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

²⁸ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Gingerbread-Untapped-Talent-Report-D2.pdf>

²⁹ https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Childcare%20Survey%202019_Coram%20Family%20and%20Childcare.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.nowpensions.com/press-release/single-mothers-pension-pot-one-third-the-size-of-uk-average-woman/>

³¹ https://www.fairpensionsforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NP266_Underpension_report_Jan2021.pdf

³² <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/information/disabled-single-parents/>

³³ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

³⁴ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-living-with-parents-in-emotional-distress-2019-update/statistical-commentary-children-living-with-parents-in-emotional-distress-2019-update>

³⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17203237/>

³⁷ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/Creating%20Connections%20full%20report.pdf>

³⁸ <https://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/34358/1/FINAL%2520THESIS%2520-%2520Carroll.pdf>

³⁹ <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/75251/3/Morris%2520Munt%2520Final%2520April18%2520clean%2520copy.pdf>

⁴⁰ <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/75251/3/Morris%2520Munt%2520Final%2520April18%2520clean%2520copy.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/english-riots-david-cameron-blames-1109491>

⁴² <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/34358/>

⁴³ <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/34358/>

Outcomes of children in single parent households: poverty related and positive

Claims that being raised in a single parent home has a negative outcome on those children is a sensitive subject, not least because of the negative attitudes outlined above. The evidence suggests the reality is much more complex and nuanced than often implied by the media and politicians.

Whilst some studies have shown that being raised in single parent homes leads to lower basic education skills and outcomes⁴⁴, others have suggested that the key causal factor is not family set-up, but poverty rates which – as highlighted above - are consistently high within single parent homes regardless of employment status. A study led by the University of Bristol highlighted that lower income and resources almost solely caused the lower educational outcomes amongst the children of single parents⁴⁵.

A study by the University of Sheffield, found no evidence of a negative impact of living in a single-parent household on children's well-being in terms of their self-reported life satisfaction, quality of peer relationships, or positivity about family life. Children within single parent families scored as highly – or *higher* – against each measure of well-being as those who continuously lived in two parent families⁴⁶.

Whilst policymakers have often assumed single parenting is negative for a child and focused on policies to encourage marriage/ civil partnership, the literature shows a more nuanced understanding of single parent families is needed which appreciates the role of poverty, mental health and support networks.

Single parents and Covid-19: exacerbating inequalities

Given the existing vulnerabilities of single parents, it is not surprising that the Covid-19 pandemic has hit single parents hard with inequalities facing single parents having increased⁴⁷. Single parent earnings fell by more than double that of households with two parents⁴⁸. Universal Credit figures showed 58% of single parents were reliant on Universal Credits compared with 10% of coupled families in August, 2020⁴⁹. Single parents have been disproportionately furloughed and lost their jobs through the pandemic⁵⁰ due to the “double impact” on single parents who are more likely to be working in Covid-hit sectors *and* have experienced greater challenges in working through the closure of schools and childcare. Research has shown that single parents have been particularly struggling with personal finances during the pandemic^{51,52}.

Summary: great job in challenging circumstances

While it is clear single parents face specific vulnerabilities and challenges the literature suggests that despite this, single parents are doing an incredible job at raising their children to have positive identities and peer relationships. The impact of poorer mental health and poverty should not be diminished; in reality these factors can each exacerbate the other. However, the literature lacks details on the experience and impact of discrimination faced by single parents (if any). It is this gap that the SPR campaign has set out to address in undertaking this research.

⁴⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-47057787>

⁴⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/children-single-mothers-achieve-less-grades-jobs-low-income-a9210576.html>

⁴⁶ https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.812161!/file/Sheffield_Solutions_Modern_Families.pdf

⁴⁷ <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/u8ytc/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.uea.ac.uk/news/-/article/women-and-single-parents-most-impacted-by-effects-of-covid-19-on-social-housing>

⁴⁹ https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/single-parents-universal-credit-coronavirus_uk_5f32badbc5b6fc009a5defc9?guccounter=1

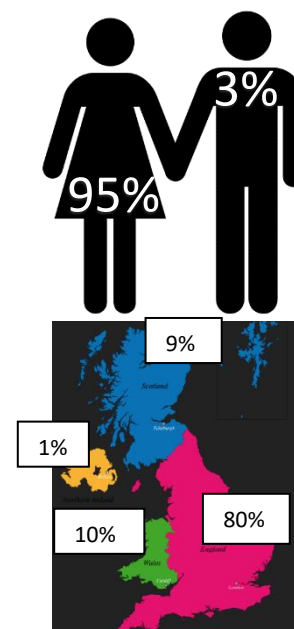
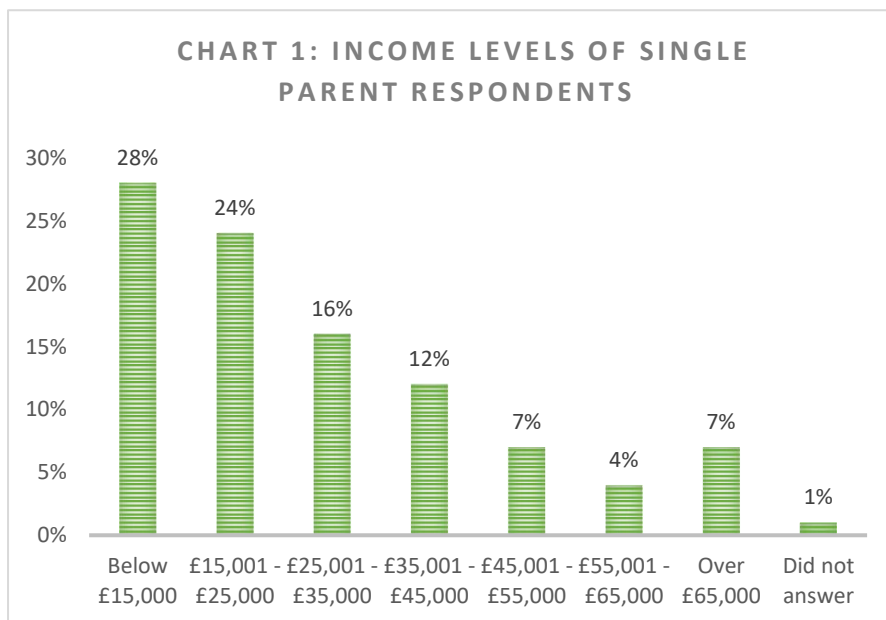
⁵⁰ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tackling-single-parent-poverty-after-coronavirus.pdf>

⁵¹ <https://www.stepchange.org/Portals/0/assets/pdf/tackling-the-coronavirus-personal-debt-crisis.pdf>

⁵² https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Poverty-in-the-pandemic_update.pdf

Section 3: Survey Respondents

The survey received 1146 responses (discounting empty entries and those who did not agree to the terms and conditions). 1083 respondents were single parents (of whom 47 were former single parents and were answering according to their experiences of their time as a single parent). 63 respondents had never been a single parent (their responses will be considered in section 9 of this report).



Top right image: Image 2: Female/ male breakdown for single parent respondents

Bottom right image: Image 3: Nation breakdown for single parent respondents

Table 1 below shows that while the survey was completed by a relatively diverse group of respondents, this does not fully reflect the background of single parents in the UK. The survey had a good spread of respondents by income level (see chart 1); however, single parents tend to have lower income levels than the general population. In terms of the gender representation, the sample is skewed towards females (95% vs 90% in the UK single parent population). It should also be noted that the survey was open to both resident and non-resident parents. However, the national statistics on single parents do *not* count non-resident parents and given most non-resident parents are male, this means there is a greater under-representation of males in this survey compared with male single parents in the UK.

The ethnicity of the survey respondents was primarily white, which reflects the general UK population, however, BAME respondents are underrepresented in this sample when compared with the number of single parents from BAME communities in the UK. In terms of disability, those single parents living with a disability were underrepresented in the sample, with 11% reporting a disability, compared with 27% of single parents living with a disability amongst the UK population.

Table 1: Background of single parent respondents

Category	Answer	No. of respondents	Percentage in the survey	National average of single parents
Nation	England	875	80%	N/A
	Scotland	95	9%	
	Wales	105	10%	
	Northern Ireland ⁵⁴	7	1%	
	Did not answer	1	0%	
	Total	1083		
Disability⁵⁵	Yes	61	11%	27%
	No	486	87%	73%
	Rather not say	10	2%	N/A
	Did not answer	2	0%	
	Total	559		
Gender	Female	1030	95%	86%
	Male	37	3%	14%
	Blank	6	1%	N/A
	Non-binary/ third gender	5	0%	
	Rather not say	4	0%	
	Other	1	0%	
	Total	1083		
Ethnicity	White	977	90%	81%
	Black	22	2%	19%
	Mixed/ Other/ Arab	49	5%	
	Asian	32	3%	
	Did not answer	3	0%	N/A
	Total	1083		
Income bracket	Below £15,000	304	28%	41.2% ⁵⁶
	£15,001 - £25,000	259	24%	31.6%
	£25,001 - £35,000	175	16%	16.4%
	£35,001 - £45,000	125	12%	7.1%
	£45,001 - £55,000	81	7%	2.4%
	£55,001 - £65,000	47	4%	
	Over £65,000	78	7%	1.2%
	Did not answer	14	1%	N/A
	Total	1083		

⁵⁴ It should be noted that Northern Ireland was not proactively targeted in the research because the UK Equality Act does not apply there.

⁵⁵ It should be noted that only 559 respondents were asked this question hence the smaller response number.

⁵⁶ The national statistics on single parent income levels were analysed from data provided by the Office of National Statistics, it should be noted the exact income levels do not map across identically, however, they show that the respondents tended to be from higher income levels than the average single parent.

Section 4: Single Parents' Experiences of Discrimination

Levels of single parent discrimination

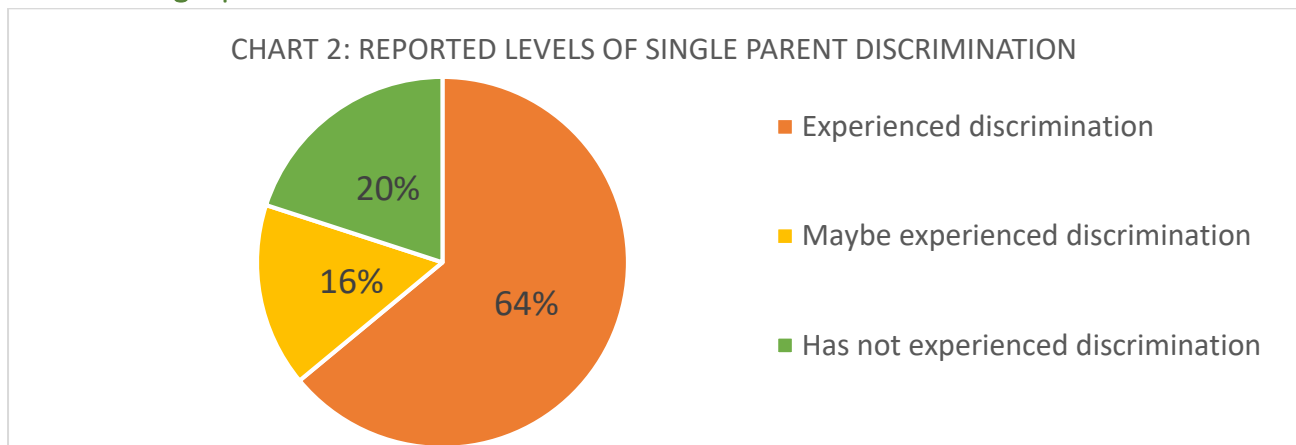


Chart 2 shows that 64% (n=696) of single parents experienced discrimination and a further 16% (n=170) felt that they had 'maybe' experienced discrimination. Of those who stated 'maybe' to personal experiences of discrimination *all* went on to give examples of areas in which they felt they had been discriminated against suggesting that many if not most of those who answered 'maybe' had in fact been subjected to personal discrimination. It is therefore reasonable to assume that 80% of single parents have experienced some level of discrimination.

Table 2: Views of single parent discrimination from single parents who have not experienced discrimination

Do you think single parents face discrimination?	Number	Percentage
Yes	94	44%
Maybe	80	37%
No	42	19%
TOTAL	216	100%

Table 2 above shows the responses of those single parents (n=216) who did *not* experience personal discrimination (20% of single parent responders) 44% of those respondents believe single parent discrimination does exist and 37% think that it might exist.

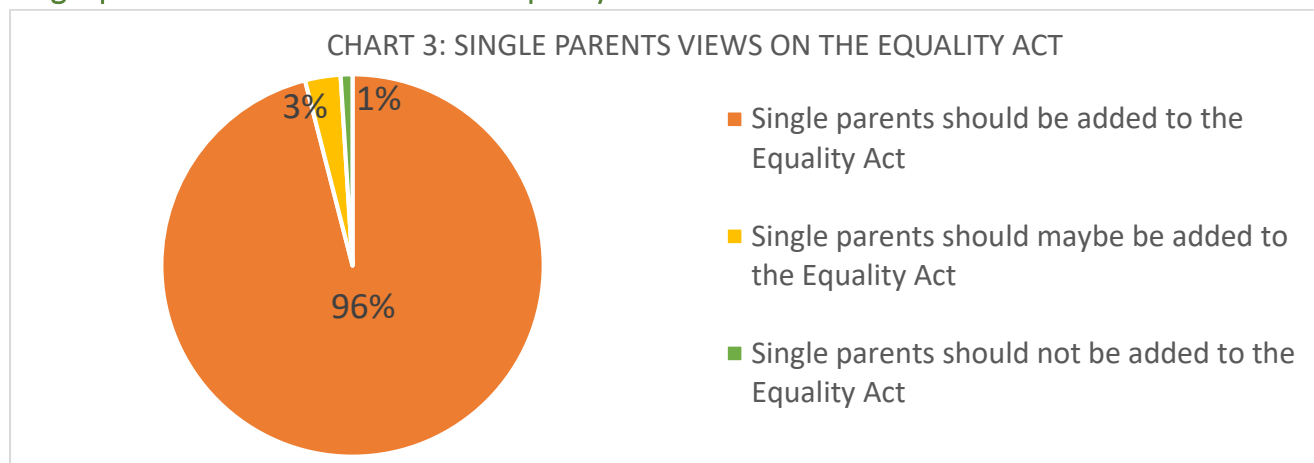
This means 96% of single parents believe single parent discrimination exists or have personally experienced it, while only 4% of single parent respondents do *not* believe that single parent discrimination exists (n=42 out of 1082 respondents).

Even if we assume those who initially answered 'maybe' to their own experience of discrimination, and went on to provide examples of their own discrimination, are not 100% certain that single parents experience discrimination, we still end up with the following results:

73% of single parent respondents reported that they have experienced discrimination, or that single parents do experience discrimination.

23% of single parent respondents reported that they may have, or that single parents may, experience discrimination.

Single parent attitudes towards the Equality Act



The research found that 27% of single parents were aware that being married or in a civil partnership was a protected characteristic in the UK Equality Act, while 69% were not aware and 4% were not sure.

Chart 3 shows that 96% of single parents believe that single parents should be added as a protected characteristic to the Equality Act while a further 3% think single parents should 'maybe' be added to the Act. Only 1% were not supportive of this change in the Equality Act. The qualitative data supports this finding in that lack of legal protections were raised as an example of discrimination and a cause of other areas of single parent discrimination (for a more detailed discussion of this issue see section 5 below). As one single parent stated, *"Single parent discrimination isn't something that should exist in 2020 the very fact you are judged because you are on your own for whatever the reason is, it's something that we all face in most settings across the country there needs to be some protection."* Another stated, *"Single parents should be given the same protection as married people under the UK Equality Act 2010."*

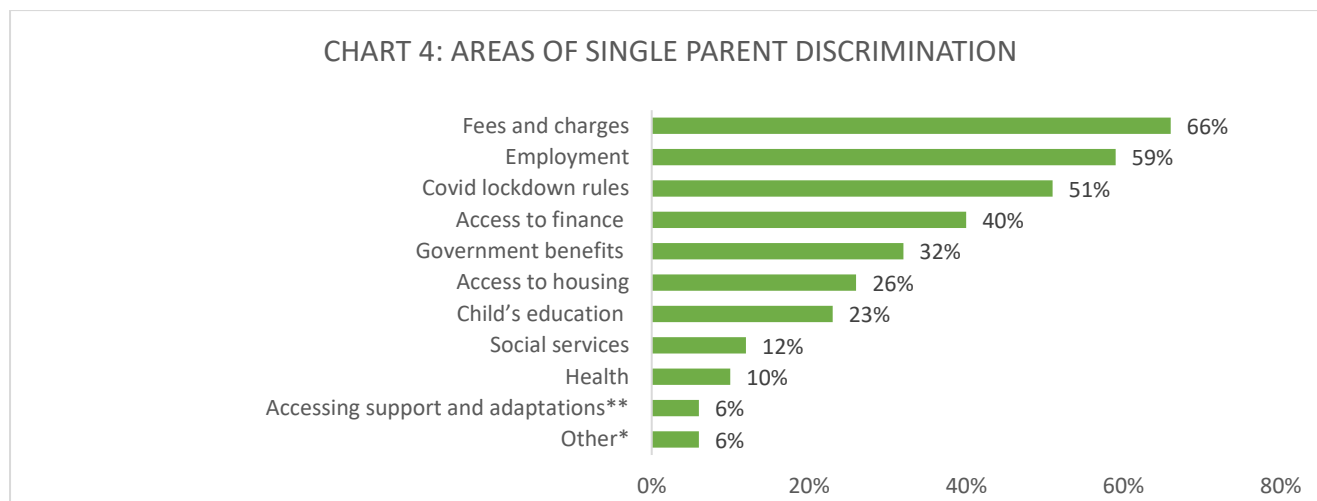
The Equality Act -background information

The Equality Act, 2010 outlaws discrimination towards certain groups who are deemed to have 'protected characteristics'. Currently, there are nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Although a natural corollary to many of the current protected characteristics, single parenthood is not included which means despite the challenges single parents face, invariably through no fault of their own, employers, businesses and policy makers are not encouraged to proactively consider how they treat single parents and where unfair treatment occurs, it cannot be legally challenged.

Section 5: Areas of Single Parent Discrimination

Overall areas of discrimination for single parents

All single parent respondents who reported experiencing discrimination or 'maybe' experiencing discrimination were asked to identify the areas in which they experienced discrimination. Respondents were able to select as many options as they wanted from a list of pre-set categories (as listed in chart 4 below) and one open category named 'other'.



* 'Other' included: negative attitudes/ exclusion (11), family courts (7), childcare (4), child maintenance (3), legal aid (3), student loans/ funding (3), pensions (2), attitudes of professionals (2), polices at pools/ gyms (2), legal status, college requirements, self-discrimination, political propaganda, social, Cafcass, police, Covid testing facilities, discrimination from single parent charities, access to fertility treatment, unmarried widowed discrimination, council tax, admission to university, setting up a business, education maintenance allowance, accessing education, miscellaneous appointments, and neighbours moving.

** Full title, 'Accessing support and adaptations for children living with a disability'.

Chart 4 shows that the most common area of discrimination was in fees and charges with 66% of respondents (n=572), followed by employment (a combination of workplace, recruitment, redundancy and 'other' which referenced issues connected to the workplace), with 59% (n=508) of respondents, then Covid lockdown rules with 51% (n=439) of respondents, followed by access to finance at 40% (n=344) and government benefits at 32% (n=280). Access to housing was reported by 26% (n=225) of respondents, this is likely to have been a much higher percent of those in rental properties given the qualitative data highlighted how pervasive this issue was for those in the rental market.

The key areas of discrimination raised in the quantitative and qualitative data are considered in further detail below.

Institutional bias, prejudice and social exclusion

Although not a category that respondents could select in the 'areas of discrimination' question, many single parents highlighted institutional bias as critical to the discrimination they faced. There was often an implicit, and explicit, assumption that children lived in two-parent homes, and that parents have a partner to rely on. There was little understanding of the needs and realities for those who lived outside this and very little accommodation to support them. This left single parent families feeling invisible and uncatered for.

This bias was shown to exist throughout society, in ticketing price structures, school systems and lessons, and assumptions made by health professionals and employers. As one single mother from Scotland stated, "Every aspect of modern society is designed around two parent dual income households. Taxation, benefits, cost of childcare all assume that there are two earning adults in every home. Employers demand and expect that you can travel for work without considering that you might need to employ a babysitter overnight in order to catch a red eye flight to attend a meeting in another city. Employers expect you to log on in the evenings without considering that you might have meals to cook and packed lunches to make and a whole households cleaning and laundry to do, unsupported. I've had to turn down a promotion that would have been incompatible with single parent life and have had to fight hard to get flexible hours that allow me to spend any time with my some [sic] during the week." Another

single parent stated, *"It's simply shocking that in 2020 in a nation as modern as the UK there is still so much stigma around single mothers in particular and that the 'traditional' family consisting of man and wife is preferred."*

Prejudice, stigma and negative stereotypes towards single parents were widespread. Single parent respondents talked about the role of the media, politicians and 'docusoaps' in creating and fuelling these attitudes. The stigma and discrimination was experienced by both single mothers and single fathers, with different stereotypes common for each. Single mothers were referred to as lazy, benefits scroungers, whereas single dads often faced the assumption that they didn't have regular contact with their children. Both parents were stereotyped as 'bad' parents, although single mothers talked more about professionals blaming them for issues with their children and assuming they couldn't cope, whilst single dads talked about being excluded from parenting groups and not being taken seriously.

One single mother stated, *"Culturally there's an assumption that is negative when it comes to single and lone parents, and definitely single mothers in particular; we're subjected to incorrect assumptions about the experiences leading us to become single parents (out of date, Christian and patriarchal incorrect assumptions) and about our effectiveness as parents."* Another stated, *"It's the benefit mum view. It dehumanises needs and people treat you like uneducated scum- I went to university and had a great job before all this but all they see is benefits and single mum status."*

One single dad stated, *"schools have refused to accept that the children live with me - asked mother for permission to confirm status to dwp [Department of Work and Pensions]....other parties solicitor refused to accept i was resident parent and entitled to maintainance [sic]."* Another single dad stated, *"[there's an] assumption I am not the resident parent by school...dwp refused to accept I was resident parent for DLA [Disability Living Allowance]...people say keep your chin up why isn't your ex looking after the children[,] Children need their mum."* Another stated, *"There is a common perception that single dads were the reason why a relationship came to an end in the first place. Whilst this can, of course, be true, it is not universally true, yet we are cast in the same light regardless. We are also seen as part-time parents, even when we have at least 50% custody of our children. I have lost count of the number of times schools, doctors and more have defaulted to their mother's contact information when I remain the primary carer and remain living in the same home with my children whilst their mother has long since left."*

The stigma held by many impacted how people treated single parents in both formal and informal environments, with some single parents describing it as being treated like, "second-class citizens". One single parent summed it up as follows, *"Read any thread about Marcus Rashford on Twitter and thousands are calling single mum's scumbags. Tattooed drunk crack heads. MPs say we swap food parcels for crack and prostitutes [sic]. Leave their kids starving. Can't feed them don't breed them. I can hear it over and over in my head. I'm sobbing writing this. I'm still ashamed I needed free school meals when I really did need them. I'd worked all my life and paid taxes but left an Abusive [sic] marriage with nothing but debt and my children."* A study by Carol (2017) also found that stigma towards single parents led to social exclusion, as has been indicated by this research.⁵⁷ Another single parent explained how, *"The head of a private school was pretty obvious that as a single parent I wouldn't fit in with the other parents."*

These negative attitudes created an environment of social exclusion across the board, from antenatal classes to schools and the wider community. Single parents reported feeling unwelcome, being pushed out, looked down on and ignored. This impacted both their mental health and that of their children who were also excluded from invitations. It also meant some single parents were unable to access community support, something which was considered beneficial by those who did receive it (see section 8: Another Way is Possible, for more discussion on this).

These findings tell a similar story to research conducted by One Parent Families Scotland which highlighted that 74% of single parents had experienced stigma or negative attitudes within a two-year period⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/34358/>

⁵⁸ https://opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/survey-results_201411_single-parents-and-stigma.pdf

Case study 1 highlights Emma's experience of social exclusion as a single pregnant mother attending private antenatal classes and shows how this comes from the fees charged, the wording in the promotional materials and the attitude of the staff and peers.

Case Study No. 1: Emma - 'I was shunned in antenatal classes'

Emma, 37, works with deaf adults and lives with her almost one year old son in London. She became a single mother when her relationship of six-months ended at the beginning of her pregnancy. After discussing that the relationship was not working out, Emma decided to go it alone and, as so many expectant parents do, signed up for local private antenatal classes in the hope of making friends with other new mums. However, the classes left Emma feeling isolated.

Despite attending alone, Emma was expected to pay the same price for the course as two people and the teacher was surprised Emma was unaccompanied. The role of the father/ partner in pregnancy, the birth and parenting was emphasised throughout the two-day course and instead of feeling more prepared, Emma started to worry that she wouldn't be able to cope. Emma opted out of the breastfeeding classes altogether. She recalls, *"the email literature on this course specifically said it was "planned for couples" (their exact words) and it was better for mothers to have a partner to enable successful breastfeeding. I felt excluded. I felt that there was no planning to help new single mothers with breastfeeding and I would feel alienated and uncomfortable going on the course."*

After the classes, the other parents set up an informal WhatsApp group and arranged a few 'couples' meet-ups. Emma did not feel she could attend. At a time when peer support is essential, Emma felt excluded and uncomfortable.

"There are many definitions of family," Emma says, "Not only the traditional one of a couple with a child or children. Single parent households are becoming more and more the norm and as common as the so-called "nuclear family. Individuals and organisations need to recognise this and respond to it to make all environments inclusive for single parents so they feel confident and able to equally access all services, education, and work, and all parts of society in the same way as couples and the traditional family."

Emma has since made friends with other single parents through the app frolo which brings together single parents. *"Connecting with other single parents is important to me... they totally understand the challenges, advantages and disadvantages of being a single parent as they are in the same boat. It's a source of comfort."*

The prejudice towards single parents sometimes negatively impacted how professionals interacted with single parent families in various settings from schools to social services with words like 'interrogated', 'aggressive' and 'blamed' used to describe these interactions. There appeared to be a lack of respect or trust and their parenting approach was often questioned rather than the circumstances or the children's needs, being considered. This had wide-reaching impacts on the single parents in the study and directly impeded their ability to access appropriate and timely support. For example, single parents were denied appropriate health care and the children of single parents were denied timely diagnoses of medical conditions and additional support needs.

One single parent of two-children stated that she was sterilised at 27 years of age so she could not have more children without being given any counselling, *"I believe due to [the] fact I was single parent [it] got rushed through."* Another single parent explained the challenges she had in accessing support for her child, *"instead of my child being assessed for a neurological condition....my parenting is called into question as I am a single parent. Finally started to get somewhere with [NAME] hospital however the school has not been as supportive. Clearly they see my single parent status rather than the fact that I myself am a lecturer in education!"* Another explained the situation with her young son, *"In primary 1, my youngest child was having trouble adjusting, he cried every day going to school and was really unhappy despite breezing through nursery at the same school with great reports. His teacher was anything but helpful when I approached her, and said it wasn't really any wonder he was "acting out" as children from single parent families are statistically more likely to fail in the school system. I was so shocked I burst into tears*

and couldn't even have a coherent conversation. I left the school feeling ashamed of my situation and couldn't bring myself to tell anyone what had happened for months afterwards."

Other respondents highlighted that there appeared to be a lower threshold for social services involvement for single parents. As one single parent described, *"My son fell from the sofa and as a single first-time parent I was worried and had no one to call. So I called 111 just to make sure there was nothing I'd have missed when I checked him over. When she found out I was a single parent she got social services involved who had to visit and realised all was fine. I felt really discriminated against, like I wasn't good enough on my own."*

The combination of the lower threshold for social services involvement and the negative stereotypes that single parents were often subjected to by professionals, meant that some single parents reported not accessing support for fear of a lack of understanding, blame and negative repercussions. As one stated, *"It's extremely difficult to voice anything about being a single parent without feeling judgement. The feeling is that this was a choice (bad relationship choice etc) and that I've made my bed which I now must lie in!"* Another single parent stated, *"I've been referred [sic] to for support and it always leads to me wasting my time there is none[.] I am expected to work like I don't have children and to parent like I don't work[.] I cannot cope I don't trust any authority[;] school[,] social services[,] doctors."* Another single parent stated, *"It's very easy for professionals to gaslight a stressed-out single mum because they see the stereotype, not the real situation."*

Fees and charges

This was the most common area of discrimination experienced by single parents with 66% of respondents reporting it. Single parents repeatedly talked of being charged a 'single supplement' which funded the discounts offered to 'traditional' families (2 adults, 2 children). Examples included ticket prices at attractions and events and the cost of family holidays. There were also incidents where single parents were rejected from attending because they did not meet the minimum requirements for a family ticket. In most incidents the issue was that the price of a single parent and child(ren) was higher per person than in a two-parent family, however, on the odd occasion it was cheaper for a single parent family to purchase a two-parent family ticket rather than to buy individual tickets. Some single parents also raised this as an issue with other services such as family health insurance and antenatal classes. One single parent described her frustration, *"as a single parent why am I being expected to pay for a person in a package that is not suitable for me?"*

Single parents repeatedly raised the idea that the definition of 'family' needs to be modernised to reflect the reality of single parent families and pricing structures should reflect this with single parent family offers. It was felt that the children missed out because of this and it added to financial strains on parents who went without to enable their children to have the experiences and opportunities of other children. Some single parents reported this impacting their relationships with their own children.

Employment

59% of single parents reported experiencing discrimination within employment, with 42% experiencing discrimination in the workplace around promotions and professional development, 31% experiencing discrimination at the recruitment stage and 8% experiencing discrimination when it came to selection for redundancies.

There were three key issues creating and exacerbating the discrimination faced by single parents within employment. Firstly, single parents faced negative stereotypes and prejudice within the workplace/ recruitment. Secondly assumptions were made about single parents' circumstances and availability. Thirdly, employers were often unsupportive of single parents' parental responsibilities.

These three issues intersected to have wide reaching impacts on single parents. Many single parents found they were denied employment opportunities and excluded from professional development opportunities and promotions due to the stereotypes held and assumptions made regarding their availability and commitment. In job interviews, single parents were asked questions about their single parent status and this was often identified as the reason they were rejected. One single parent highlighted how they felt excluded from even applying for certain roles due to the terms and conditions, *"Lots of jobs automatically discriminate by including 'occasional [sic] unsociable hours/occasionally [sic] overnight stays/flexible hours' etc. As a single parent this basically means 'do not apply'."* She went on to give another example, *"I was asked in an interview about how I would be able to do a job that required flexibility as a single mom. Something that would not have been asked if they didn't know I was*

single, or had I been male. I stopped mentioning I had a child immediately after this interview and got the next job I interviewed for.”

Single parents in employment were often excluded from overtime, promotions, bonuses, pay rises, travel opportunities and training opportunities, this was typically done without a discussion with the employee concerned and often did not reflect the choices the single parent employee would have made if they had been involved. One single parent described her experience, *“Last year I spoke to my then boss about promotion & he said that ‘someone like me’ wouldn’t be suitable. When I questioned him further he talked about being a single parent & struggling to cope. He had made that assumption.”* Some also raised the issue that a lack of notice of professional development opportunities made it hard for them to engage in them.

Another single parent respondent stated, *“[I was] excluded from post work networking events as ‘they didn’t think I could get childcare’ they didn’t even ask me”*. Another single parent described how they were, *“[r]efused promotion - very qualified, done the role successfully in the past, told I wasn’t eligible due to working part time (4 days out of 5) I did the role part time at a previous employment. They’ve given the role to a man who is very inexperienced, one year into the job.”* Another described the challenges she faced when trying to apply for one job, *“[they had] ‘concerns’ in interview about [my] ability to manage [the] job as [a] single parent (I was less reliable as a socialite in my 20’s).”* In another role, that respondent also faced assumptions that they couldn’t travel, *“[I was] told I could not travel nationally in the UK for meetings due to childcare restrictions (there was ample time).”*

Employers were often unwilling to try and accommodate single parents’ needs for flexibility and single parents sometimes struggled to access flexible, affordable childcare to meet their employers’ needs. In some cases, single parents identified other staff members being given flexible work opportunities that they were being denied. As one single parent respondent explained, *“I was verbally informed I did not have the same right to work from home that mothers with partners had.”* The stigma and assumptions held about single parents created this lack of trust and/or belief that single parents would not be able to cope, meaning single parents while often in greater need of support and flexibility, were often denied it over employees in two-parent homes. Another single parent highlighted how her request for flexible work was rejected whilst a colleague who required adjustments due to their disability was provided these, highlighting the Equality Act can ensure individuals from included groups are treated fairly and given appropriate support. Case study 16 in section 7 of Nicole’s experience as a single mother being denied flexible work opportunities highlights this issue and also shows how race can intersect to heighten this lack of trust faced by single parents.

The discrimination faced by single parents in the workplace means employers are often not maximising the outputs from their single parent employees. Single parents reported working below their skills and experience and facing burn out due to the lack of flexibility and support from their employer. One single parent who was a qualified nurse was unable to work in healthcare and was instead in minimum wage employment. Another single parent reported, *“[I’ve] been advised to find other forms of work and told that being a single parent doesn’t really work in the investment banking field.”* Another single parent who had previously worked as a social worker described the impact of the discrimination as, *“I was bullied from my relatively well paid social work position and now an [sic] a very low paid support worker (not much above the national minimum wage).”*

There were examples where single parent employees were told they didn’t fit the ‘lifestyle’ of the company. There were also a number of examples of single parent employees being treated disrespectfully. For example, one single parent employee was told there was no need for a payrise, as they could “get benefits”, another single parent respondent was told by her employer that she shouldn’t have had as many children.

In extreme cases, the prejudice and discrimination within the workplace led to single parents feeling pushed out of their roles. One highlighted how they lost their job because they couldn’t work night shifts, *“I lost my job as my company wanted to change my working hours (to nights) and [I] had no childcare. I was told I was not passionate enough about my job as if I was I would do the night shifts. I have no local family to provide childcare [sic]”*. 8% of respondents reported being made redundant due to single parent discrimination as seen in case study 2 with Bridget’s experiences of being made redundant due to her childcare responsibilities.

The findings from this research add understanding to the well documented existence of single parent poverty and highlights some of the factors behind why single parents are 80% more likely to be stuck in low-paid work compared with a mother in a couple and four times more likely compared with a father.⁵⁹

Case Study No. 2: Bridget – ‘Single parents should be protected at work’

Bridget, 40, from Carmarthenshire, Wales, became a single mother when her marriage ended after four years - she and her husband had been together for ten years. Bridget believes her childcare responsibilities as a single mother were the cause of her redundancy.

Bridget had worked part-time as an operational administrator with an organisation in Swansea for seven years, doing 25 hours a week, when her employer asked her to relocate to another office and increase her working week to 37 hours.

The changes would have added almost an hour a day to Bridget’s commute time and would have meant she could no longer pick up her six-year-old daughter from after-school care. Bridget requested flexible working instead.

Although other employees were granted the right to work from home, Bridget’s request was rejected, as was her request to job-share. Bridget recalls, *“I do believe they were trying to get rid of me because of my child caring responsibilities.”* In the end, Bridget was made redundant.

Although Bridget soon found alternative employment, that role ended within a few months due to a restructuring in her new team and her role being made redundant once again. In September 2019, Bridget applied for Universal Credits, however due to them wrongly counting her mortgage insurance as income, they reduced her entitlement from £550 to £0. Bridget turned to credit cards to cover her bills over the eight-month period that she was unemployed. She fell behind in her council tax payments and despite now being back in paid employment Bridget is still struggling to repay the debt which now amounts to £6,000.

“It is unfair that single parents’ rights aren’t protected in law when we are a minority group,” says Bridget. *“It is of the utmost importance that we do all we can to ensure single parents are supported adequately in the workplace.”*

Covid-19 lockdown rules

51% of respondents reported discrimination within lockdown rules. This was a key area where the institutional bias of assuming families comprise two parents was felt strongly by respondents.

The open responses from single parents highlighting this discrimination included: single parents being turned away from shops, refused the right to flexible work, pressured to work until late into the night to make up hours due to very young children in the home, and - in line with findings from Gingerbread⁶⁰ – facing furlough and redundancy due to the lack of childcare during lockdown/ Covid-related restrictions. One single parent described her experience of going shopping, *“At the start of lockdown I was refused entry to a supermarket as children are not allowed inside and you must shop alone. I wasn’t sure where I was supposed to leave my 6 year old?”*.

Many single parents reported having to balance full time work with caring for young children in the home 24/7, in some cases parents felt their child(ren) weren’t safe due to the lack of attention they were able to give them, however, they were refused the opportunity to furlough. The isolation and additional pressures faced by single parents during lockdown were seen to have significant impacts on the mental health of single parents and their children, and also on the family’s finances. One single parent stated, *“[In] lockdown, my son was suicide [sic] and towards the end so was I. He was so scared he wouldn’t even have the windows open. We don’t have a garden and he didn’t feel save [sic] enough to go for a walk. We had emergency intervention via CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services]. I could not cope 24/7 with just the two of us.”* Another described the mental health impact,

⁵⁹ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tackling-single-parent-poverty-after-coronavirus.pdf>

⁶⁰ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tackling-single-parent-poverty-after-coronavirus.pdf>

“Covid lockdown was horrific. I will not cope doing it again on my own. I went weeks without speaking to another adult. My mental health will not survive it.”

The situations single parents found themselves in were often impossible, *“I work in retail so during lockdown was a key worker. I had to work, there was no option to be furloughed but was not allowed to use my parents for childcare because of lockdown rules. I was put in an impossible position!”* Another single parent described her situation, *“Manager questioning working hours during lockdown saying i was working too late at night and this was not approved or appropriate (we were told we could work flexible start and end times) and my children were interfering with my working hours.”* Whilst another single parent highlighted her concerns should there be further closures of childcare settings, *“I have been told that I have to take annual leave or unpaid leave if my daughter is at home with me, so if her nursery closes for Covid reasons I could be quickly in a lot of trouble financially. If I had a partner we could share childcare but I don’t have that option. The Covid lockdown rules make it difficult to find support as my family live far away.”*

A lack of trust between employers and their employees to fulfil their work obligations was highlighted as an issue and led to some employers refusing flexible working requests. Some single parents felt they were treated differently to colleagues who were not single parents. One single parent stated, *“I was the first one expected back into work and had to find childcare (where there was none nationally yet as everyone was still in lockdown) for my children when 99% of the staff workforce have not been asked to return to work. My role is 100% location flexible and yet I am the only person that is expected in the office daily.”*

Support bubbles for single parents were only introduced on 10th June, more than 11 weeks after the first national lockdown was announced in the UK on 23rd March, and over four weeks after the rule of plus one was announced which indirectly excluded single parents of children who could not be left at home alone. Even after the introduction of support bubbles in June, in later restrictions in Wales these were not allowed to cross county borders meaning some single parents lost access to their support bubbles.

Case study number 3 highlights Gillian’s experience of missing out on medical care due to single parents being forgotten in the pandemic. Case study number 4 highlights how the Covid lockdowns have exacerbated discrimination within the workplace for single parents like Andrea.

Case Study No. 3: Gillian – ‘The assumption I have a partner has left me unable to access medical care’

Gillian is a single parent to her son and was called for a medical procedure in 2020. She was told that she would need to take a Covid test before the procedure and then immediately self-isolate until the procedure was complete. Gillian explained to the medical staff that the only way she could immediately self-isolate after the test was to bring her son with her otherwise she would be unable to collect him from school afterwards. They refused and suggested that his father collect him instead. When Gillian explained that she was a single parent and this wasn’t an option the staff, *“were really awkward about it.”*

Gillian believes the system is designed with only coupled parents in mind. *The assumption is always that the ‘other’ parent will be available. The whole system is set up this way. There is always an assumption that there is a second parent available. In lock down they expected parents to be able to do loads of home learning. With 2 people it may have been possible, taking it in turns, whilst also trying to do the job we are paid for. But with 1 parent, who is in employment, absolutely no chance.”*

Gillian has now been waiting months for an injection into her spine, without which she is left in daily pain. *“You could say it’s because of Covid,”* says Gillian, *“but the fact is if I had a partner and could have then followed their Covid procedures I would have had it done last Friday.”*

Gillian’s son is also impacted by this, as she explains, *“He does also worry about what will happen if I’m struggling with my mobility and how we will manage if I am laid up, because he knows no one else will help. This is very upsetting and I’ve reassured him as much as possible and told him he doesn’t need to worry about it, although between us I’m incredibly worried about it.”*

Case Study No. 4: Andrea – ‘Lockdown as a single mum cost me my job’

Andrea lives alone with her two-year-old in London and has done since filing for divorce in late 2019. When the first lockdown hit in March 2020, Andrea had been working as a head of department for her firm for over six years. An exemplary employee, Andrea tried to make the best of a challenging situation. The days were long, usually starting when her daughter woke at around 6.30am. Andrea tried to work during her daughter’s nap time and once her daughter had gone to bed, meaning she was often working until 11pm at night. The situation took its toll on Andrea’s health. Feeling like she was close to burn out, Andrea asked her company to furlough her. Initially the company refused saying furlough was not available for people in her situation. Later, based on a companywide policy, the staff under Andrea were furloughed, putting her under additional strain. Andrea recalls this as her, “*breaking point*”. Eventually, the company agreed to furlough Andrea.

Shortly after being furloughed, government restrictions began to be lifted and the company reopened full activities. Andrea’s manager contacted her to ask her to return to her normal hours. Given Andrea was still without childcare, she requested that the furlough be continued for three more weeks until the nurseries reopened. She offered to work one day a week in the meantime. The company agreed to this. When the nurseries reopened, Andrea contacted her manager to let her know she could return to work. She was then asked to wait until the end of the month when her furlough period came to an end. However, before the month was up, Andrea received a call from her manager and HR telling her she was being made redundant.

Andrea describes the time as very worrying, “*I was just really panicked, obviously I have a mortgage, I’m on my own, we are in a pandemic, the sector has fallen off a cliff. There are no jobs. I feared for me, my daughter and my home. I was tied into various financial things, like the car and I asked to get out of it but I couldn’t.*”

Andrea believes that her company treated her this way because of her caring responsibilities as a single parent. “*They aren’t out to get single parents, but I wasn’t convenient for them anymore.*” Andrea goes on to explain, “*they send these emails round saying your mental health is important but then it’s not followed through with actual support. It’s just lip service. They never thought of my health and how that [the lack of support and subsequent redundancy] was going to affect me. They just don’t like that I’ve not been able to come back to work so I’m out. That type of thing can tip you over the edge. You know, I’m going through a divorce and all these awful things are happening in the world, it’s just out of greed to squeeze more pennies out of this situation.*”

Luckily, Andrea secured another role and although the pay is significantly lower than her previous role she has savings to see her through this difficult time. Andrea is also undertaking studies so that once she is requalified, she can progress into better paid work again and hopes her new role will be more practical for flexible working.

Access to finances

40% of single parents reported discrimination with access to finances. The qualitative data showed that the most common area was with access to mortgages, although store cards, credit cards, loans and other finance products were also mentioned. The lack of access to financial products meant that single parents were unable to secure mortgages, including – in some cases - those who already had a mortgage and needed to renew. It also meant that single parents were excluded from products with the best rates so ended up spending more on interest rates than they might do otherwise. One single parent described this impact, “*Unable to access fixed rate mortgage as salary as a single parent was too low. Kept on variable rate which rose and eventually drove us out of our home.*”

Many single parent respondents reported being unable to access a mortgage yet having to pay a higher amount in rent. Some respondents specifically mentioned that it was not due to their income levels that was the issue, but that their status as a single parent was used in calculations and meant they were unable to access the mortgage product in question. It was also found that many mortgage providers did not count universal credit payments and most (if not all) did not count child maintenance payments in mortgage affordability assessments, all factors which were seen to indirectly discriminate against single parents. One single parent stated, “*My mortgage advisor made it very clear that being a single mum would mean I would need more than double a deposit.*” Another stated, “[the]

mortgage company...said being a single parent is a riskier lend. I'm just trying to get a safe and secure roof over our head, that costs close to half of what I pay in rent!! Mortgage companies need to look at rent delinquency (or non rent delinquency) into account. I've made sure I've never missed a payment even through furlough." Whilst another stated, "I have been unable to access a mortgage due to being directly told I am a single parent to a young child and that it may affect my earning capacity in the future (despite having an adequate deposit and income)."

The issue of single parents accessing mortgages is not purely about low-income, but of lenders risk appetite. As the online mortgage advisor states, *"Getting a foot on the property ladder can be tough at the best of times, but if you're looking to take out a mortgage loan as a single parent, the process can be even more challenging."*⁶¹ Given much of this is based on internal systems, algorithms and lender discretion, it is hard to know how frequently single parents are excluded from mortgages, but this research suggest it is having a wide-reaching impact on them.

Government benefits and the tax system

32% of respondents reported being discriminated against in government benefit rules, across all income levels.

In the lower- and middle-income groups, many single parents felt that the rates of benefits were unrealistic for single parent families and that it was unfair in comparison to the rate of benefits coupled families were entitled to given that many costs are not significantly reduced when there is only one adult at home. This is backed up by the evidence from CPAG (Child Poverty Action Group) that the cost of raising a child for single parent families is higher than for coupled families because it is based on the additional costs the child adds to the existing family members⁶². There were also concerns raised in how the system operated and some of the attitudes of staff in job centres, as seen with Elizabeth's experiences in case study number 5. For example, there was a lack of understanding by staff in the benefits office around the time single parents had to look for work when they had young children at home, and a lack of support to access decent work, rather than just pushing individuals into low paid work.

Working single parents talked about not being better off working, or working additional hours, due to childcare costs. As one single parent respondent stated, *"we need a better and more fair welfare system. It is not a welfare system if it leaves people perpetually teetering on the brink of a breakdown. It's hideous."* Another single parent highlighted their struggles, *"I have also always struggled with benefits because I earn 'too much' apparently. (I definitely don't) I work full time & literally live hand to mouth. I can't afford to put the heating on in my house but apparently am not eligible for benefits or help due to my job. My son & me sleep in hoodies, dressing gowns & slippers to keep warm."* Another single parent stated, *"I work in the NHS, and managed to continue working part time throughout my separation and divorce. Because I am still living in the family home, my outgoings every month are huge, and I only just make enough to pay my mortgage and bills. I applied for universal credit but was turned down because apparently I earned over the threshold. Yet I know many coupled families who are still in receipt of child tax credit, and who haven't been phased on to universal credit, who certainly earn collectively more than I do."* Case study number 7 of Ife's experiences, highlights how challenging this can be.

For the higher earning groups, the main concern was around the calculations for child benefit which results in single parent families losing out on child benefit at a much lower household income level than coupled families⁶³. See case study number 6 for Geraldine's experience with her two adopted children. Again, given the additional costs of raising a child in a single parent home compared with a two-parent home⁶⁴, this discrepancy in child benefit calculations is detrimental for single parent families. As one single parent stated, *"I earned a good salary so when the new rules came in re child benefit I could no longer claim but married friends earning less than me individually but more than me as a household were able to claim"*. Whilst another explained how she thought the calculations for child benefit should be altered, *"Capping child benefit where EITHER parent earns over £50K definitely discriminates against single parents, for example a two-parent household with one child can be earning almost £100K between them and they would still be eligible, but a single parent of two on just over half that amount (like myself) would get nothing. It's not the case that one less adult in the house halves your living expenses so the cap should be based on the combined adult income of that household."*

⁶¹ <https://www.onlinemortgageadvisor.co.uk/mortgage-application/single-parent-mortgages/>

⁶² https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/CostofaChild2019_web.pdf_page_12.

⁶³ Child benefit calculations means that once one parent's income goes above £50,000 child benefit is impacted. However, in two-parent families both parents can earn £49,000 and not impact child benefit payments.

⁶⁴ https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/CostofaChild2019_web.pdf_page_12.

The rules regarding thirty hours of funded childcare for three-year-old children of carers were highlighted as discriminatory. For coupled families if one parent is in work, the child of a registered carer (whether for the child or for someone else), is entitled to these hours. However, if child is in a single parent home they cannot qualify. Case study number 8 shows Sarah's experience of this and how it adds extra pressure and impedes her job search.

Concerns were also raised around the UK tax system in response to the open questions. Specifically, the inheritance tax system was highlighted as discriminatory because an individual can pass on their tax-free allowance to their spouse. Calculations vary, but in basic terms the child(ren) of two-parent families can benefit from approximately £600,000 inheritance tax free, whilst for the child(ren) of a single parent this would be £325,000⁶⁵. The basis for tax free childcare support and childcare vouchers were also seen as discriminatory because they work in favour of coupled families. Meanwhile the married tax allowance, which allows one partner in a marriage/ civil partnership to transfer £1250 of their tax allowance to their partner if they earn below the tax threshold⁶⁶, was also highlighted as discriminatory. According to a study by Sussex University, it was the negative attitudes from government towards single parents that led to the introduction of the marriage tax allowance in 2015⁶⁷, reversing the reforms in the 1990s which created independent taxation and provided independence for women⁶⁸. This supports the findings of this report that the stigma and prejudice towards single parents underpins the discrimination towards them.

Case Study No. 5: Elizabeth – ‘Job centre staff need to be professional, not judgemental’

Elizabeth, 33, lives in London with her three boys aged 12, 7 and 3 and works in banking. Over the years she has been shocked by some of the attitudes she has faced from the staff in the job centre.

When Elizabeth was pregnant with her first, she had to access support from the job centre due to her zero hours contract not providing maternity pay. At the job centre the advisor asked, *“what about the baby’s father, it’s his responsibility to pay for his child, not for you to be on benefits.”* Elizabeth recalls, *“I was really upset, I was only young and I was surprised by her attitude, it was really abrupt and I wasn’t expecting it... She left me in tears sitting in the chair... So many things could have happened for me to be in that situation.”*

Around five years later when Elizabeth's second born was just eight weeks old she went to the job centre to add him to her tax credits claim. Again, Elizabeth was shocked by the reception she received. *“I was sleep deprived and feeling a bit rubbish and the guy I saw was asking me lots of questions. That was quite a long appointment, it lasted about an hour. The first question that threw me – he asked which number child it was, when I said two he then said “you know they are capping tax credits at 4”. Then he asked if they were both from the same father.”*

Despite not wanting to answer the question and not receiving a reasonable explanation as to why it was being asked, Elizabeth felt forced to answer because the advisor threatened to stop her claim if she did not. *“I felt helpless... I was forced to answer but the information was not relevant to the claim. I was being judged as lying because I’m a single parent.”* Talking about both incidents, Elizabeth says, *“It’s not even about being understanding, just be professional. It’s your opinion but this is not the place to express your personal opinion.”*

Case Study No. 6: Geraldine – ‘Working hard means I lose out’

Geraldine is a single mother to two children via adoption. When Geraldine's salary increased by £54 a month she lost her entitlement to her child benefit which was £136 per month. Geraldine felt this was unfair, especially when her married friends were earning £100,000 between them and received the full child benefit for one child.

Geraldine was left feeling disheartened, *“What is the point in trying to get promoted? When everything comes out of one wage £136 a month is a lot. My children are both...incredibly challenging. I need high energy places like trampoline parks to allow them to run off energy but we have had to reduce this now as less money [is] coming in.”*

⁶⁵ <https://www.which.co.uk/money/tax/inheritance-tax/inheritance-tax-thresholds-rates-and-who-pays-avrzm3k7kgxw>

⁶⁶ <https://www.aviva.co.uk/aviva-edit/your-money/articles/what-is-marriage-allowance/>

⁶⁷ <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/75251/3/Morris%2520Munt%2520Final%2520April18%2520clean%2520copy.pdf>

⁶⁸ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1990-07-11/debates/6f8f9eac-354f-4a86-bc5e-bcb3b4e0a066/IndependentTaxation>

Case Study No. 7: Ife – ‘Working single mothers can’t survive’

Ife, 30 years old, lives in West London with her 3-year-old daughter. Her experiences of contract work and claiming benefits landed her in £8,000 of debt and unable to pay her monthly bills.

Ife returned to work when her daughter was eleven months old. At that time, her take home pay was around £1600 a month, while her daughter’s nursery fees were almost £1600 a month and her rent was £480 a month leaving Ife in an impossible situation. According to Universal Credit rules, Ife had to pay the nursery fees upfront and then request a refund for part of the fees. However, despite doing this, due to an error in processing by Universal Credits, Ife did not receive a penny for the first three months.

After much back and forth and calling on Citizens Advice for help, Ife was able to rectify the problem with her Universal Credit payments going forward. However, Universal Credits refused to refund the money she was owed, claiming that she was now outside of the required timeframe for refunds, despite the original claims being made well within the timeframe.

Even once Ife’s Universal Credit payments began coming through, Ife was still left with a huge gap between her incomings and outgoings. Although the majority of her rent was covered by a direct housing payment to the landlord, Ife generally only received £100-300 a month to assist towards her childcare costs and living, leaving her struggling to pay for the basics like food and heating.

Ife believes that the support provided to single parents on a middle salary is inadequate. *“I thought when my daughter turned two I’d get 15 hours of free childcare because that’s how they advertise it, but it’s only available for people under £15k. On my contract work I was earning around £25-26k per annum so I didn’t qualify.”* Over this time, Ife had to rely on credit cards and loans to get through the month, and regularly missed bills putting her into greater financial problems. *“At one point my dad was giving me money every three months, I wasn’t asking for it because it’s hard to ask when you’re struggling but my dad could see my clothes had holes or my daughters’ clothes were getting too small, so he helped by buying her clothes and shoes, both my parents did.”* Ife’s dad also offered to take care of his granddaughter on his day off so Ife was able to reduce her childcare costs to around £1300.

Ife believes the system is stacked against single mothers like herself, who earn just enough to have benefits reduced, but not enough to afford the basic bills. *“For me, now, I wouldn’t recommend for people to work if you’re a single parent until your child is five. There’s just no point.”*

“There needs to be something there, a safety net, because it’s horrible seeing so many people struggle. People can’t afford to work and have their kids. They’re falling out of their careers. The amount of times I heard ‘you’re choosing your career over your kid’, but I worked so hard to get where I am. I’ve had to find a new career but the fact loads of people end up giving it up is horrible. People make you feel like you’re a stain on society and people look at you differently.”

Ife has managed to secure a better paid role now and has used money she has saved from not having childcare during lockdown to pay off some of her debts. Looking back on her struggles, Ife says, *“It’s been hard because when you’re in that situation you don’t get to enjoy your kids. But now I’m enjoying her. Saturday is just reserved for me and her, it’s different when you’re not stressed out about what you’re going to eat.”*

Case Study No. 8: Sarah – ‘My son is denied 30 hours free childcare because I’m not married’

Sarah is a single parent and registered carer to her three-year-old son Alfie who is registered blind. Alfie has received 15 hours free childcare a week since he turned two because he is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and requires an early education to help with his development. *"I've been really grateful for these free hours as not only does it give me a consistent break it's also been a real benefit to Alfie getting an early education. He attends a local private nursery with the support of a one-to-one keyworker, who supports his development by focusing on specific areas that will help him to attend a mainstream school when he's 5. Some of his focus areas in nursery are different to the ones at home. In particular it gives him an opportunity to develop his social skills with other children the same age as him, something which his disability makes harder for him to do."*

When Alfie turned three, Sarah learned that if she had a partner in work, Alfie's childcare entitlement would increase to thirty hours a week. However, because Sarah is a single parent her son is not entitled to these extra hours.

Sarah believes this ruling is unfair. If the childcare is to give the parent-carer a break, enable them to work or to help the child - or a combination of all these, *"Why wouldn't all these reasons apply to single parents too?"* Sarah asks. Learning that she and her son are disadvantaged compared with couples has been upsetting for Sarah. *"I'm devastated knowing my son has been disadvantaged purely on the basis of my marital status"* says Sarah.

Alfie has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place which comes with funding to support his needs such as employing a one-to-one keyworker and any additional resources he may need for adaptations. This funding is enough to cover a full-time nursery place so Sarah is frustrated that Alfie cannot access this support because he only attends 15 hours a week due to her being a single parent.

Sarah states, *"I want the government policy to be changed so there is equal access to 30 hours free childcare for single parents that are carers, not just for couples. I want Alfie to have the same opportunities as other children born to parent-carers in a couple."*

"It would also help me get back into work as the specialist support Alfie needs to attend nursery will already be in place. Alfie can't just increase his hours at short notice and often new employers want immediate or short notice starts, which can't be guaranteed in my situation due to needing to employ one-to-one keyworkers to support Alfie."

Access to housing

26% of single parents reported experiencing discrimination in accessing housing. Through the open responses we can see that the vast majority of this was in private rental properties where single parents reported being discriminated against both for their single parent status and (for some) for their reliance on housing benefit which is indirectly caused by their single parent status. According to data from the DWP, over half a million single parents were in receipt of housing benefit in April 2018 (approximately 18% of all single parents)⁶⁹. Case studies 9 and 10 highlight Tracey's and Nadia's experiences of the discrimination towards single parents within the rental market.

The qualitative data highlighted that single parents were repeatedly told that properties were not available for single parents, or for those on housing benefits. This issue was more than just an economic one, as single parents not in receipt of housing benefit and with a positive rental track record were repeatedly rejected from viewing rental properties and from renting them with agents merely stating that the landlord would not rent to a single parent. The data identified that agents (more so than landlords) considered single parents to be 'bad' renters. Single parents also reported being told that they would not fit in and that the area was not suitable for single parents. Other agents claimed the property was not suitable for a single mother and baby/ child due to overcrowding, despite it being available to rent by two adults. As one single parent stated, *"I have been told landlords don't want single parents in their properties."* Another one explained, *"I've been refused viewing on a one bedroom flat (all I can afford) as they told me I can't share a room with my young daughter, but explained if it was another adult I'd*

⁶⁹ Data accessed from DWP data at www.gov.uk using the Stat-Xplore data analysis tool.

be allowed to share it.” Another emphasised how the discrimination was continuing despite ‘no-DSS’ policies from agencies and landlords being outlawed⁷⁰, “The discrimination single parents face in housing is enormous! The illegal stating of no DSS by some landlords or agents is not being paid attention to and it is still happening.”

Some single parents on maternity leave reported that many agencies counted their income as zero, despite this not being factually correct, which meant they had almost no chance to enter into a new rental agreement during their maternity leave. In one incident, a landlord requested ‘extras’ from the female tenant to cover increased charges.

Given research from the Joseph Roundtree Foundation has shown that the reliance on rental properties is increasing; between 2001/02 and 2017/18 the private sector housing market doubled while the social housing sector has continued to shrink,⁷¹ the number of single parents facing this kind of discrimination is only likely to increase. It is therefore not surprising that 50% of those in temporary housing are single parents⁷². Furthermore, the high risk of homelessness amongst single parents – 92% of parents homeless in 2017-2018 were single parents, with single parents and their children eight times more likely to be made homeless than parents in couples⁷³ - emphasises the imperative to improve the housing situation for single parent families.

Case Study No. 9: Tracey - ‘Estate agents think single mums aren’t reliable tenants’

When Tracey, then aged 36, divorced after eight years of marriage, her husband’s debts meant they had to sell their marital home. At that point, Tracey decided to move from Bedfordshire to North Yorkshire to be near her parents. However, as she looked for a house to rent near York, Tracey was repeatedly met with negative responses from lettings agencies.

Two agents told Tracey that, as a single mother with two children, she would not be considered a reliable tenant to landlords. This was despite earning almost £40,000 as a serving police officer and having previously taken out a mortgage. Another agent told Tracey she would need to pay a lump sum of £4,000 as a deposit, and she was also told her parents would have to act as guarantors to cover her in case of rent arrears or damages.

“These agents made me feel ashamed of my position,” Tracey says, “When actually I should be anything but. I am doing what has historically been considered the job of two people... we should look at the person rather than the fact they happen to be a single parent. I didn’t have children thinking that three years later I’d end up virtually homeless and alone, I am pretty sure no-one does. Look at the income of the person and any references before you check my marital status and whether or not I have children. I could be with a partner and not pay the rent or ruin

Case Study No. 10: Nadia – ‘I can’t get a decent home as a single parent’

Nadia was pregnant with her first child when she was repeatedly dismissed by landlords and letting agents despite working full-time. Nadia recalls how she felt at the time, *“I was desperate for somewhere to live and at risk of being homeless if I couldn’t find something. My parents even offered to act as a guarantor but I was rejected left, right and centre. It was extremely scary.”*

Eventually, Nadia was able to secure a home, *“[T]he flat was small and developed black mould - it was all I could find at the time so we had to make do with it.”* However, she did not dare disclose her pregnancy until the tenancy agreement was signed. The worries of her housing added to an already challenging situation for Nadia as she was dealing with abuse from her unborn baby’s father.

Non-resident parents

Non-Resident Parents (NRPs) faced specific forms of discrimination. This mainly stemmed from the fact that they were not considered a ‘parent’ in terms of allocation of social housing or benefits. This meant that NRPs were often

⁷⁰ <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2020/07/no-dss-landmark-court-ruling>

⁷¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

⁷² <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

⁷³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45800186>

living in overcrowded housing and were charged bedroom tax. The financial challenges were also heightened as NRPs were not entitled to access benefits based on their parental responsibilities because the state does not recognise these responsibilities. The majority of NRPs were fathers and so this disproportionately affected male respondents. These cases had hugely negative impacts on the NRPs' mental health and finances, and some single fathers reported having breakdowns and being hospitalised for mental health concerns. See case study number 11 for Jonathan's story of overcrowded living below and case study number 19 in section 7 for Dave's experiences with the bedroom tax.

This exclusion of support for NRPs may be linked to the fact that NRPs are not counted in national statistics; the 2.9 million statistic for single parents from the National Office of Statistics effectively only includes the primary carer of the child⁷⁴, meaning the government do not have accurate data on the number of NRPs or their needs.

Case Study No. 11: Jonathan – 'My children deserve their own room'

Jonathan is a single dad to two young children aged five and seven. His children live with him fifty percent of the time in Jonathan's mother's two-bedroomed house in York. Jonathan has been unable to secure suitable private accommodation because of the high rental prices in the area and most properties being rented as house shares for students. Due to not being in receipt of child benefit for his children, Jonathan is ineligible for housing benefit as a family unit.

Jonathan explains, "[the council] are aware of my situation but as the kids have their own bedroom at their mum's house they won't consider 2+ bedrooms for me as they only look for children to have one secure home."

Jonathan's room is incredibly cramped with three beds, meaning the children do not have space to play in their room when they are with him, and Jonathan also lacks his own privacy. "There does not seem to be any legal provision for both parents to be allocated social housing when they have a 50:50 childcare arrangement...this could affect the stability of a family unit when both parents are still involved in their children's care."

Jonathan believes there should be legal provision for the allocation of social housing when parents have a 50:50 shared care arrangement to avoid the pressures that living in overcrowded and housing places on families like his.

Other areas

Single parents also highlighted discrimination in a few other areas. 23% of single parents reported discrimination within their child's education. Much of this related to the attitudes of teachers/ headteachers, arrangements for parents evening and reports which did not consider that children can have two homes (due to domestic violence incidents attending jointly one parents evening slot is not always possible), and that activities often disregarded modern family makeups. Some respondents also reported their child being treated negatively when they were in receipt of free school meals. One single parent stated, "Head teacher stated I was a bad parent because I was single, so wasn't allowing my children a male role model." Another highlighted that there was a "General opprobrium from staff including a headteacher because I was a lone parent. Discrimination in terms of temporary exclusions and isolation whereas other children from nuclear families [were] support[ed] with suggestions of therapy". In terms of the support provided by pupil premium funding (Free School Meals), some single parents felt this was not used appropriately for their children and broad assumptions were made about their needs, as one single parent stated, "In school my children were put into groups with naughty children so that they had use of the TA [Teaching Assistant]. The school used this as what their "pupil premium" was spent on. My children didn't need support, my son is predicted 9A* and the rest A at GCSE. What they needed was access to enrichment activities that we couldn't afford to have."

It should also be noted that single parents raised the issue of discrimination within their own education, from access to college and university courses to support and funding for those courses. The funding of PhD students was raised as a specific issue because this fell outside the funding available for other degree courses. Issues around Child

⁷⁴ Taken from direct communications with Centre for Aging and Democracy, Office for National Statistics.

Maintenance Service (CMS) payments being counted as income for student funding was also felt to be inconsistent given for other tax purposes it is not counted as income.

12% of single parent respondents reported experiencing discrimination from social services. Again, this linked to the stigma and stereotypes of single parents and meant that single parents did not access the support they needed. As one single parent stated, *“Any request for practical or emotional support as someone who has no support network of their own gets met with a referral to Early Help who put me through assessments and stress and ultimately don't have the ability to provide actual support.”* In another account, one single parent reported a very traumatic experience concerning the police and social services, *“social services wouldn't find me a foster home to go into with my son to keep us together. Everything was done to keep us apart during the first year of his life. One occasion, the police took me to the cells for my own safety and I was left to leak breastmilk all over my own clothing. The cell was cold (end of November), I was soaked through, in pain and was eventually given a too small jumper and some sanitary pads to soak up whatever else leaked. It was humiliating. Rather than allowing me to go home, shower and change after that ordeal, I had to sit with social services for an hour, smelling, cold and wanting to hold my 4 week old baby.”*

10% of single parents reported discrimination in health. This often related to single parents' experiences being dismissed, especially as they had to 'keep going' and were therefore 'not that bad', whilst the reality was they had no alternative but to keep going. At other times it was because the single parent was not deemed as worthy of support. This led to single parents having delayed diagnoses for illnesses which doctors had dismissed the symptoms of previously. One single parent stated, *“As for medical discrimination, the fact I had pneumonia wasn't picked up when I made my way to the GP after dropping my son at nursery. I think the fact I had no choice but to walk there and be out and about as a single parent counted against me and she didn't think I could be that sick. Two days later I was taken to hospital by ambulance.”* Another described the challenging relationship she had with her GP, *“My GP is just discriminative on everything. He offered no support and [I] just get told to pull yourself together as I chose to be a single parent! No response when I asked if he thought a domestic violent relationship was better!”*

6% of respondents reported discrimination in accessing help for support and adaptations for their children with disabilities. This often related to single parents feeling that they were unable to access diagnoses for their children. One single parent stated, *“My son only got diagnosed as autistic and dyslexic this year after years of fighting. As I work full time I don't have the capacity to go to the school and argue it every day. I also wouldn't dare ask for time off from work as they already moan about part timers.”*

The CMS, family courts and Cafcass (Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) were also mentioned in the open responses, with many respondents stating they were unfit for purpose and discriminated against single parents. Some single parents felt that the failure of the CMS was discriminatory because if any other group were affected so significantly there would be political will to address the failings. The issues around family courts and Cafcass were often seen as discriminating on the grounds of the gender of the parent involved and a lack of understanding of domestic abuse/ discrimination towards those who had experienced domestic abuse. These concerns were raised by both single mothers and single fathers. The issues contained here were complex, but it is clear that the system is not working from the point of view of both single mothers and single fathers. The lack of legal aid available to many single parents was also highlighted as heightening the issues with the family courts.

The lack of legal protection was also repeatedly raised within the open questions, with single parents feeling that their rights were not protected and there was no body to raise their experiences of discrimination with. As one single parent stated, *“the UK equality act is inadequate. The single/married⁷⁵ person protection is only for employment. I think the wider issue is recognising different family structures and this should be protected generally not just for employment.”* Another highlighted that, *“You're treated badly. You are expected to be able to live like a dual couple but we have very specific needs, social, mental, financial etc and very little thought has been given to this.”* Another explained what being a single parent had taught them about discrimination in the UK, *“In England there are no agencies to help, no laws to prevent inequality/ abuse toward lone parents/ children of lone parents [sic] families. I now realise you can be well mannered, well-educated with a wealth of experience and passion for a career. But if you are a lone parent, this is all irrelevant. You are not entitled to be treated equally and there is nothing you can do to stop the inequality.”*

⁷⁵ NB there is no protection for single people under the equality act, the protection is for those who are married/ in a civil partnership only.

Section 6: Impact of single parent discrimination

Impact of single parent discrimination on single parents

Respondents were asked to rate the impact that the discrimination had on them in seven impact areas (listed in chart 5 below), ranking the impact as 'not at all', 'a little' or 'a lot', for each area.

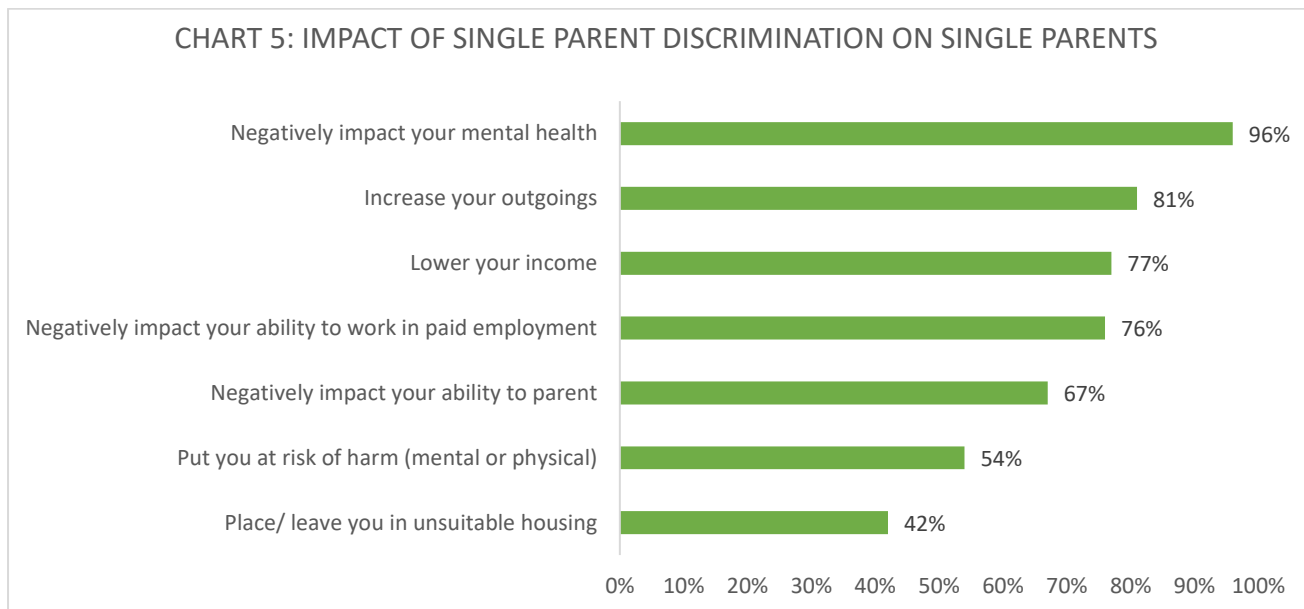
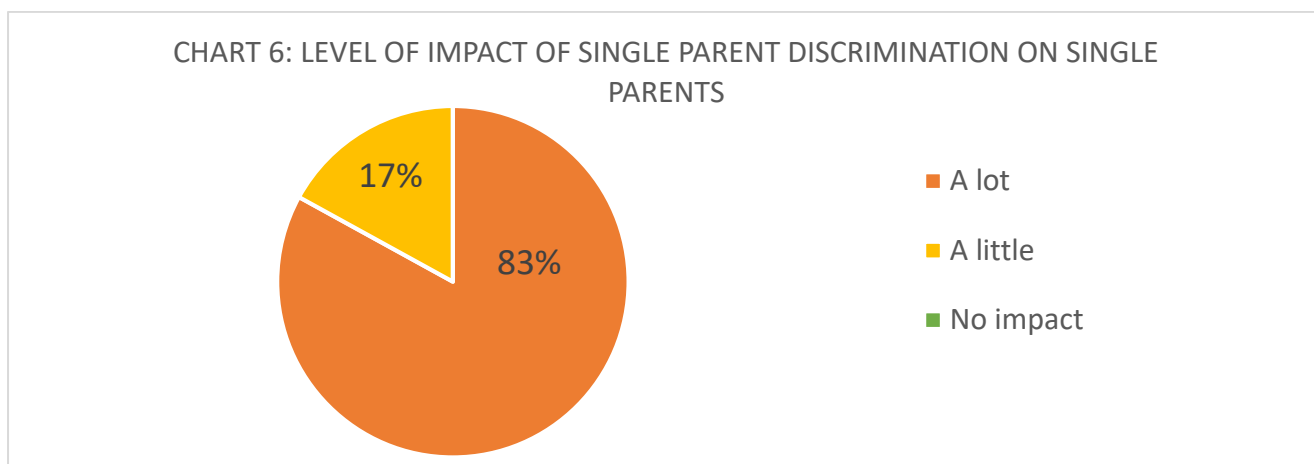


Chart 5 shows those who reported an impact as either 'a little' or 'a lot' in each of the seven impact areas respectively. The largest impact, with almost all respondents (96%) selecting it, was on the respondents' mental health, followed by increasing their outgoings (81%), lowering their income (77%) and negatively impacting their ability to work (76%).

Chart 6 below shows that the number of single parent respondents who highlighted that the impact of the discrimination was 'a lot' in one or more areas was 83% (n=709) whilst 17% (n=148) of respondents experienced 'a little' impact in one or more areas. There was only one respondent who selected 'no impact' in one or more areas meaning essentially 100% of single parents who reported experiencing discrimination suffered a negative impact from it.



The ratings respondents gave, were given a score of 0-2. The highest total impact score a respondent could receive across the seven areas was 14. The average impact score across all respondents was 7. A score of 9 or more was considered a 'severe' impact. 27% (n=290) of single parent respondents recorded a severe impact score when rating the impact of the discrimination on themselves.

The open responses from single parents showed how the discrimination had a negative impact practically, financially, and in terms of health. Single parents talked of having to use food banks and going without food. One single parent described the financial struggles, *"I've had periods of living on beans in [sic] toast as I couldn't afford healthy nutritious food. I've had periods of severe depression and guilt where I feel so run down and exhausted I don't feel I'm enough."* Other single parents talked about how they were unable to save or build up pensions.

Within the workplace, single parents talked of being unable to progress and earning less money due to the discrimination and some talked about wanting to give up. One single parent stated, *"I have been forced to take menial low paid work as opposed to the level and pay that my experience and qualifications should offer. I am living on a high dosage of anxiety and depression medication. I have been suicidal and feel vulnerable at all times."* Case studies, numbers 12 and 13 show Dan and Alison's experiences respectively and how they are impacted years later.

Discrimination around housing often had great impact on single parent families, including the stress of dealing with inadequate and poor housing, from leaks to living in cramped conditions. One single parent explained how being rejected as a single parent from rental properties led to her having to move into temporary accommodation, *"My daughter and I are now in temporary accommodation which costs more (Almost double) than the flat I wanted to move to."* Another described the mental health impact associated with housing issues, *"The stress of trying to find suitable/affordable housing in my area that would enable my children to continue to stay with me during the week and be able to take them to their separate schools has become a great strain."* Others reported how issues with housing meant they had to move resulting in loss of access to their support network which, as shown in section 8 of this report, are critical to single parent families. Others reported having to move to poorer areas with poorer schools and the subsequent negative impact this had on their children. One respondent also reported getting back together with an abusive ex due to the issues caused by housing discrimination.

The mental health impact was clear with repeated mentions of being stressed out, exhausted, overwhelmed, depressed, anxious and suffering breakdowns and instances of self-harm and suicidal thoughts. In turn, this led to single parents being signed off work and needing to access mental health services. Some single parents also highlighted that the discrimination had an impact on their physical health and lead to both weight-gain and weight-loss. In some instances, single parents reported the discrimination negatively impacting their bonding with their baby. One single parent explained, *"[g]reat anxiety is caused when you feel unable to control certain aspects of your daily life due to others discrimination against you. You are unfairly held back from achieving more in life & ultimately are penalised socially & financially because you are in a vulnerable minority."* Another stated, *"This had a huge impact on my mental health, I was left anxious and depressed and almost suicidal as this manager made me feel as though I was unsuccessful at my career. I ended up on anti-depressants."* Case study number 19 in section 7 shows how the discrimination Dave faced led to his mental health breakdown.

Case Study No. 12: Dan – 'I was let go because of caring for my baby boy'

Dan, from the Wirral, England, is a single dad to his son. When Dan became a sole carer for his three-month-old son, he had been working in his role at a customer service call centre for six months. Dan informed his line manager of his change in circumstances at home and from that moment on was not given any over time.

Dan felt that the company singled him out for less support because of his single parent status. *"They favoured giving overtime to people who they knew could do it even though I did say I was available most days for overtime. There was no reason to assume that I wouldn't be able to do any overtime."*

Occasionally Dan had to take time off due to childcare issues or hospital appointments for his young son, but instead of being understanding and discussing ways to support him, Dan's employer handled these incidents as disciplinary matters. When Dan questioned his manager on why others were given time off for caring responsibilities and he was denied this, no satisfactory explanation was given.

In the end, only three months after becoming a single dad, Dan's employment was terminated on the basis that he had been given too much time off. Dan explained, *"The company had a history of getting rid of people who didn't fit their ideal profile and have a high turnover of staff."* Dan has been unable to find secure employment since, almost two years on.

Case Study No. 13: Alison – ‘Bullied for being as a single mother by choice’

Alison was pregnant via donor sperm as a Solo Mother by Choice when the primary school where she was employed first became negative towards her. After telling her employer about her pregnancy and her route into motherhood, they used it against her. *“They did not want an unmarried mother working in their environment”,* Alison recalls of the time, *“I was harassed and bullied by my employer”*. The pressures this placed Alison under led to a deterioration in her mental health and she began to suffer with panic attacks.

Ultimately Alison decided to leave her place of employment. Despite it being three years on, Alison still does not have a permanent post and her mental health continues to suffer. Talking about the impact on her, Alison states, *“[I] question my abilities all the time to do my job. Even when I am told I am good at what I do.”*

Impact of single parent discrimination on children in single parent homes

Respondents were asked to rate the impact that the discrimination had on their children in four impact areas (listed in chart 7 below), ranking the impact as ‘not at all’, ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’, for each area.

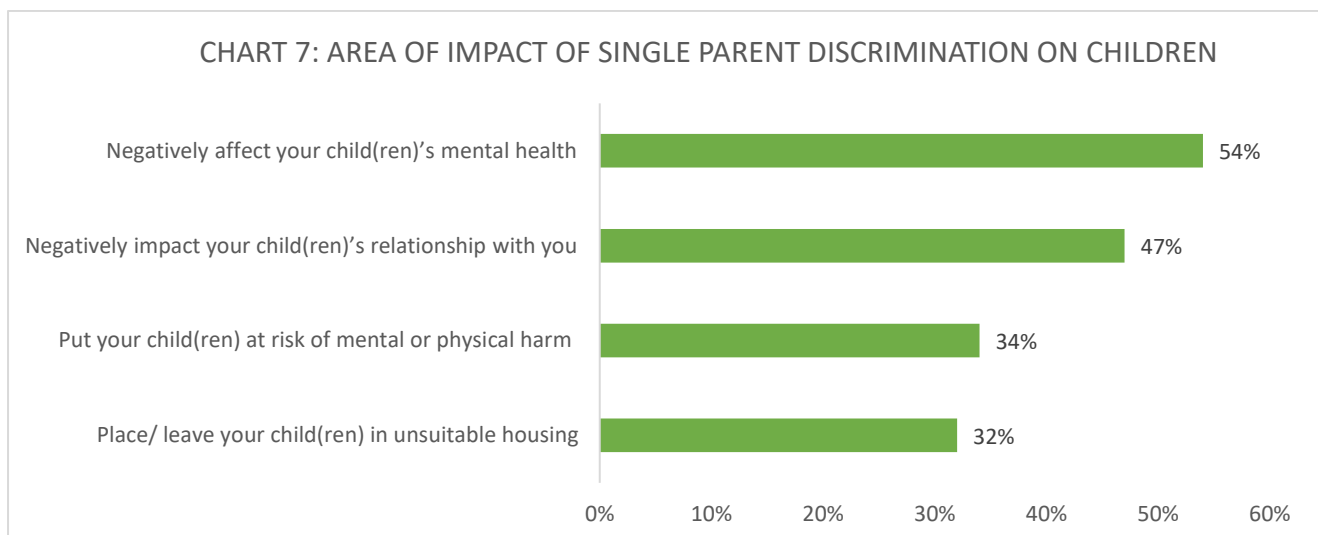
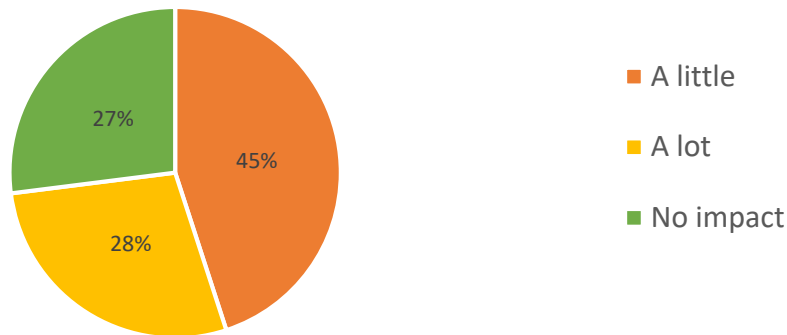


Chart 7 shows those who reported an impact of either ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’, in each of the four areas respectively. The largest impact, with over half of all respondents (54%) selecting it, was on the impact on the respondent’s children’s mental health, followed by impacting the relationship between the children and the parent (47%), and putting their child at risk of harm (34%).

Chart 8 (on the next page) shows that the number of single parent respondents who highlighted that the impact of the discrimination on their child(ren) was ‘a lot’ in one or more areas was 28% (n=227) whilst 45% (n=361) of respondents reported their child(ren) experiencing ‘a little’ impact in one or more areas. 27% (n=220) of respondents stated that there was ‘no impact’ from the discrimination on their children. It is noticeable that the impact on children is generally reported as less than the impact on the single parents themselves although overall, 73% (n=588) of respondents reported a little or a lot of impact on their children highlighting that children are being widely affected by the discrimination their parents experience.

CHART 8: LEVEL OF IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION ON CHILDREN



The average impact score for the impact on the child(ren) was 2 out of 8. A score of 5 or more was considered a 'severe' impact. 15% (n=119) of single parent respondents recorded a severe impact score when rating the impact of the discrimination on their child(ren).

Looking at the open responses single parents gave regarding the impact of the discrimination, many single parents referred to 'protecting' or 'shielding' their child(ren) from the impact on them. Meanwhile, many others reported that they believed it was impossible to prevent the impact on them also impacting their child(ren). It may be that the level of impact on the child is therefore being under-reported by parents who may feel any impact on their child(ren) reflects a failure in their own parenting and therefore is not something they want to report in a survey. As one single parent stated, *"It is impossible to appropriately support yourself and your children while not being adequately supported by government policies."* A few single parents highlighted that because their children were still young, they were not yet sure what the impact on them would be.

The impacts on the children that were reported included, 'hardening' them, missing out on experiences due to a lack of finances, and social exclusion. This also led to some children being bullied and/ or not invited to activities with their peers. There were also mentions of the impact of inadequate housing and repeated house moves and changing schools on children. The stigma of single parents was also considered to impact children's self-esteem, as one single parent stated, *"My girls are very politically aware and when they read the news about the Prime Minister making comments such as 'children of single parents are ill-raised' this does not help their self-esteem one iota."*

The mental health impact on children was highlighted with children being upset by the exclusion they faced, and in more serious incidents, children suffered with anxiety and even suicidal thoughts. The youngest child who was reported to have suicidal thoughts was only seven years old.

The relationship between the single parent and their child(ren) was often impacted, with it being described as challenging due to the lack of space, child(ren) and parent avoiding each other, and the relationship becoming 'confrontational'. Others described how their child(ren) consoled them when they were struggling/ upset due to the discrimination. One single parent stated, *"[the children] can sense my anxiety in terms of financing our home and lifestyle and have asked several times if we will have money for food. My anxiety also puts a strain on our relationship and there are many conflicts over trivial matters. It has come to the point where we rarely spend quality time together as we prefer to spend time on our own. This is not good for us as a family nor as individuals."*

Single parents also reported feeling unable to focus on their children due to always having to fight against discrimination and to access support/ services. As one single parent explained, *"[My son has] had months of missed bedtimes and a parent continually working or on the phone because everything takes longer and is harder as a single parent."* Another stated, *"As sole carer, my child deserves their one parent to be feeling adequately supported and able to provide the emotional and financial resources to raise them in a safe and secure environment. It's unfair for my child to see their parent so often stressed, crying and angry."*

The Covid restrictions were repeatedly mentioned as having a negative impact on the child-parent relationship and having a negative impact on the child's development. *"During lockdown it's been horrible not being able to homeschool well due to working and my son who used to love books is now addicted to screens because we had to*

compromise so he could stay engaged while I worked. I feel like it's damaging for my son to feel like he's a constant inconvenience, when he's the whole reason I work so hard anyway."

Case studies number 14 and 15 of Louise and Xenia respectively, highlight how the impact from single parent discrimination impacts the whole family.

Case Study No. 14: Louise – ‘My child is suffering because of the discrimination I experience’

Louise, 33, from Edinburgh, is a single mother to thirteen-year-old Seth and has been for the last ten years. Throughout that time Louise has worked within museums and galleries. Over those years Louise has faced discrimination as a single parent in various settings. From rental agencies who have refused to rent to her, to her workplace denying her opportunities for progression because she was unable to travel. In the end Louise hid the fact she had a child from the rental agencies so she could secure a home for her family.

In work, Louise was on a zero hours contract. Over time her hours were reduced because her employer considered her to be a less reliable employee due to her childcare responsibilities as a single mother. Louise had to rely on credit to make ends meet each month because her income did not cover her costs. When Covid hit, Louise was made redundant. She has been on universal credits ever since as it has been impossible to find employment in the current climate.

Louise describes the impact, *"I've been a single parent for 10 years and the negative discrimination has taken its toll on my mental health, I suffer from anxiety and depression and although I've always been a really ambitious person, my self-worth and self-belief has really suffered."*

Louise believes this has also impacted Seth. *"[He has] suffered due to our inadequate housing and lack of space (to have friends over etc pre-covid times) and the stress of our situation and the fact we are living in poverty has put a strain on both our mental wellbeings and our relationship."*

The impact on Louise's income due to the discrimination she has faced in the workplace has also taken its toll on Seth. *"He is now in teenage years when to them it feels so important to have 'the right' things to fit in with friends etc and he really notices that we are 'poor' compared to other families. He misses out on so much because I just can't afford it - particularly extracurricular activities at school and school trips etc which he can't go on because they are too expensive."*

Unfortunately for Louise and Seth, the challenges continue. In January 2020 Louise and her son were evicted from their flat. Louise hopes that the coronavirus pandemic will give people, *"a deeper understanding of the pressures single parents are under,"* and that single parents will be treated *"fairly and equally"*. However, she worries that, *"things will get worse before they get better."*

Case Study No. 15: Xenia – ‘The lack of support makes me believe the emotional abuse from my ex’

Xenia is a single mother living in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. She was evicted from her home when she refused to pay the landlord "in other ways" when he kept increasing the rent and Xenia was unable to afford it.

Xenia recalls feeling *"worthless"*. *"All I hear in my head is my abusive ex saying, "You will fall flat on your face without me." He was right."* However, when Xenia tried to access support, she was told nothing was available. In the end Xenia and her family were evicted at the time her daughter was transitioning to secondary school. This led to additional challenges for her daughter and resulted in her suffering from suicidal thoughts.

Instead of receiving the support she and her daughter deserved, Xenia was failed by services who didn't follow up with the challenges her daughter was facing. Xenia recalls being told *"we [sic] be "better off moving somewhere else where there are more people like u [sic]. Those words ring round in our heads."*

Section 7: Intersectionality

To analyse the impact of protected characteristics on single parent discrimination, the occurrence, area of discrimination and impact data was disaggregated by ethnicity, disability status and gender. It was also disaggregated by income level and nation to see if this had an impact.

The average impact score was used as a benchmark to establish if the discrimination had negatively impacted an individual or their child(ren). This meant that an individual was recorded as experiencing a negative impact on themselves if they had scored 7 out of 14, or higher. Whilst a negative impact was recorded on their child(ren) if they had scored 2 out of 8 or higher.

Impact of income levels on single parent discrimination

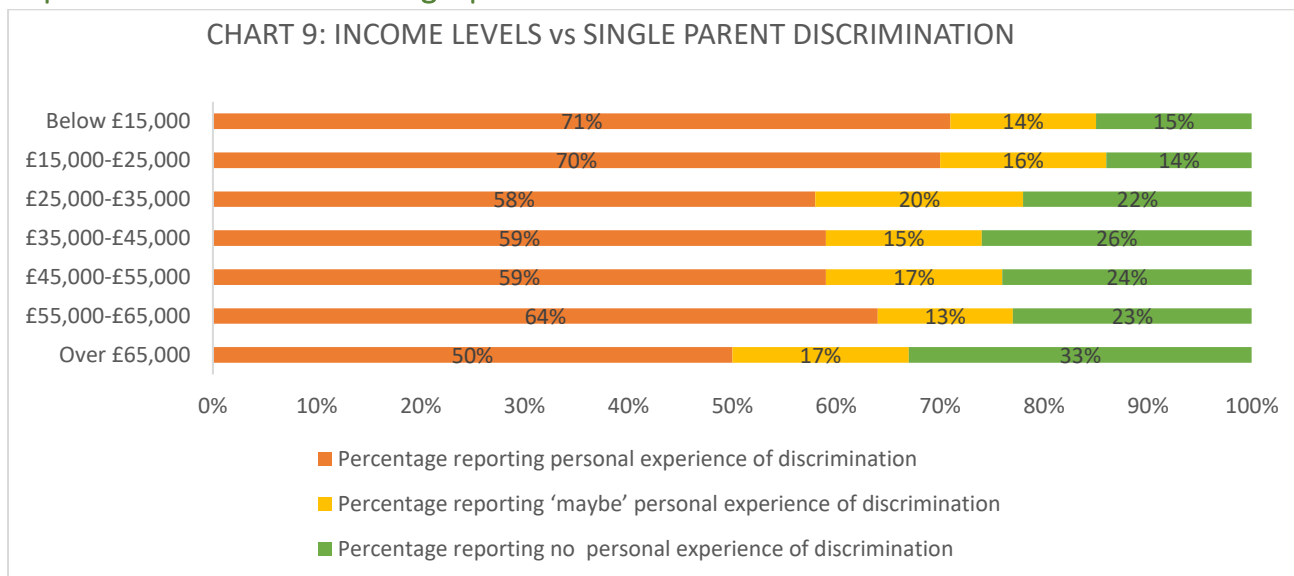


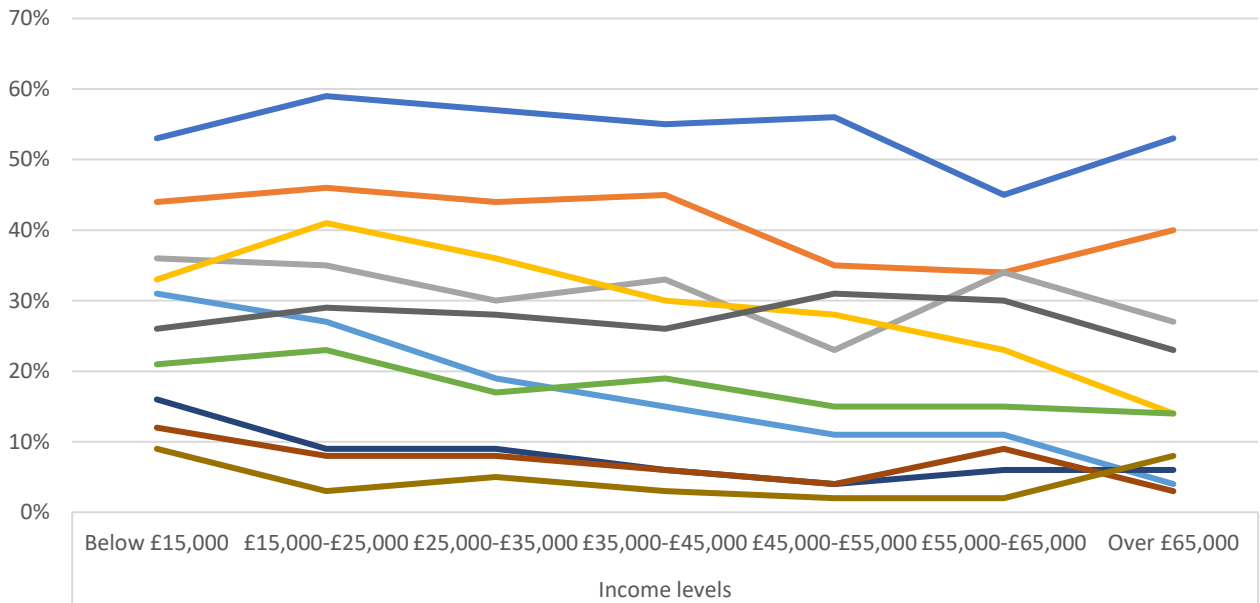
Chart 9 shows that the level of discrimination was highest amongst the two lowest income groups (71%: n=216), followed by the second highest income group (70%: n=182), discrimination levels then tended to decrease for the next three levels (58%, 59% and 59% respectively), followed by an increase (64%: n=30) for the next income bracket, before decreasing to 50% (n=53) for the highest income bracket. The increased incident of discrimination in the £55,000-£65,000 income bracket group might be explained by the fact that they are the income group excluded from child benefit entitlements.

Grouping together those who earned below £25,000 (the bottom two income groups) and those who earned above £25,000 (the other income groups), we find 70% of the former group experienced discrimination compared with 58% of the higher earning group. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.1% level when subjected to a Chi-squared test. Given the survey respondents tended to come from higher income levels than single parents in the UK (see table 1 in section 3), it is likely a more representative sample would have revealed significantly higher discrimination rates for single parents.

Chart 10 shows how the areas of discrimination vary between the income groups. The percentages relate to the percentage of individuals within that income level who reported that area of discrimination. Chart 10 shows that the discrimination tends to decrease as the income level increases. This is most pronounced for access to finance and access to housing which start off relatively high (33% and 31% respectively) and drop off to 14% and 4% respectively. This is perhaps unsurprising as those on lower incomes are likely to have less choices when it comes to finance products and those on lower incomes are also more likely to be renters as opposed to homeowners and therefore face potential discrimination within the housing rental market.

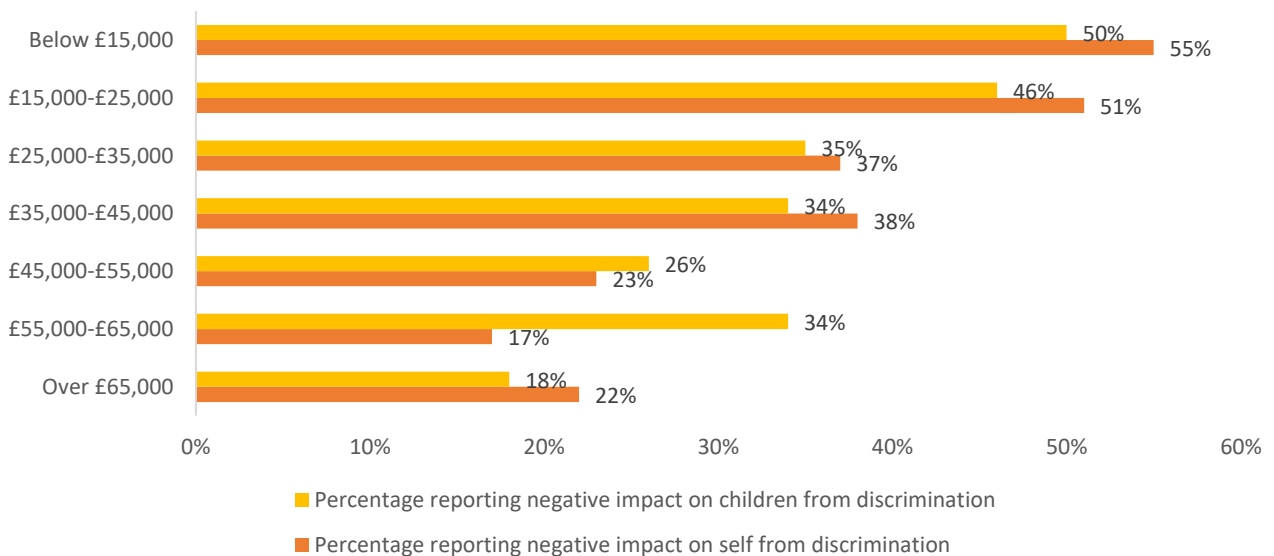
Meanwhile the experience of discrimination in government benefits only decreases from 26% to 23% and rises to a high of 31% for those on the income level £45,000 - £55,000. Given this is the income level at which the cut off in child benefit occurs, this could explain the rise here as those households are likely to feel the impact more than those who have an income significantly above the cut-off point, or indeed those on lower incomes who still receive it.

CHART 10: INCOME LEVELS vs AREA OF DISCRIMINATION



- Fees and charges e.g. tourist attractions, family holidays etc.
- Covid lockdown rules
- Employment (this is a combined category)
- Access to finance e.g. mortgages, loans etc.
- Access to housing
- Child's education
- Social services
- Health

CHART 11: INCOME LEVELS vs IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION



- Percentage reporting negative impact on children from discrimination
- Percentage reporting negative impact on self from discrimination

Chart 11 shows that the impact of the discrimination differed per income bracket in line with the experiences of discrimination. That is, the lower earners experienced greater impact from the discrimination, on themselves and on their child(ren). The difference in the level of impact on single parents due to income was significant at the 0.1% level when subjected to a Chi-squared test, whilst the impact on the child(ren) was significant at the 1% level.

This impact generally decreased as income levels rose (from around 50% in the lowest earning group to around 20% in the highest earning group), although there were a couple of anomalies. The impact on the child(ren) was more pronounced in the £55,000-£65,000 income group than the one below it, and the impact on the single parent was more pronounced in the above £65,000 level than the one below it. This may be related to the rules around child benefits, and the impact of higher earners feeling discriminated from days out and holidays which are often done for the child’s benefit.

Impact of ethnicity on single parents’ experiences of discrimination

To analyse the impact of ethnicity on single parents’ experiences of discrimination, all BAME respondents were grouped into one category and compared against all respondents who reported their ethnicity to be white as the sample sizes of the different BAME ethnic groups were too small to be analysed individually.

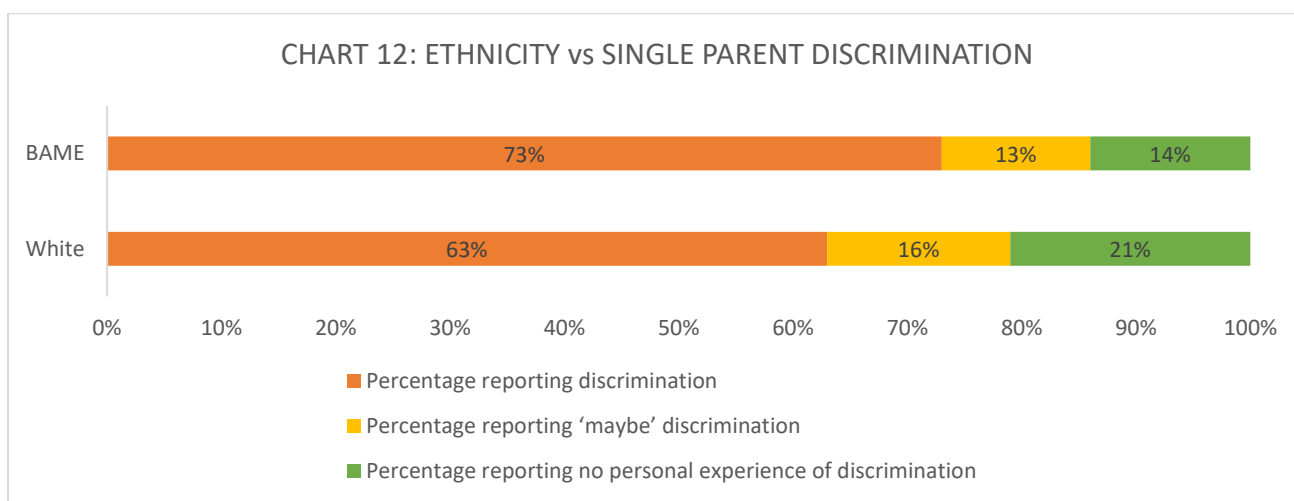


Chart 12 shows that 73% (n=75) of respondents from BAME backgrounds compared with 63% (n=619) of respondents from white backgrounds, reported discrimination. However, this difference is only significant at the 10% level when a Chi-squared test is applied hence we cannot definitively say that ethnicity impacts the likelihood of experiencing discrimination according to the quantitative data.

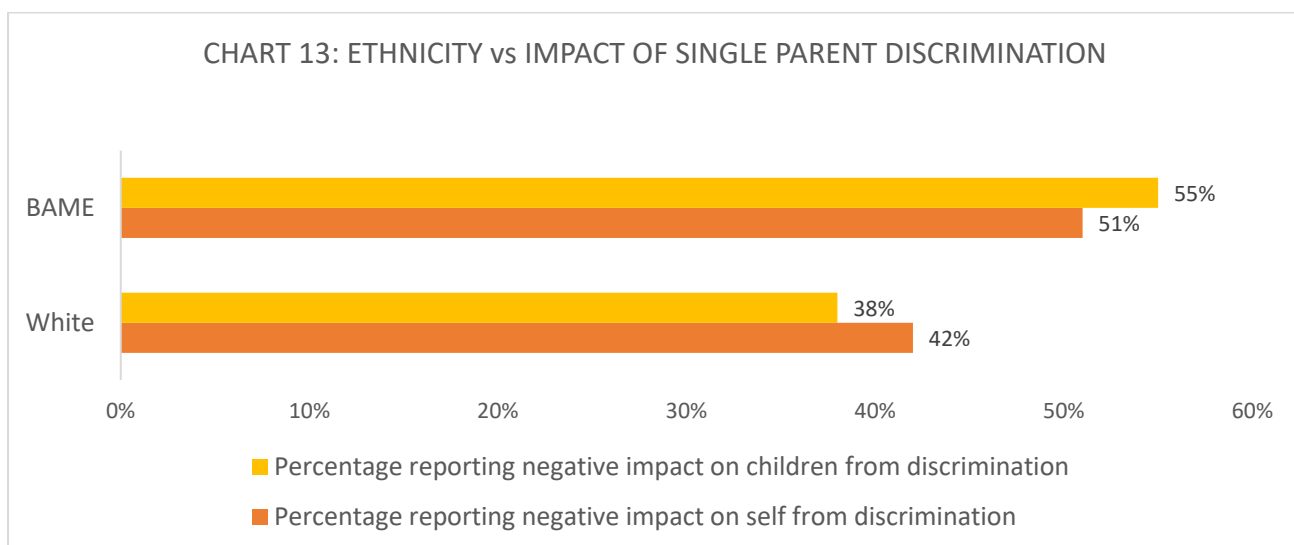


Chart 13 also shows that the impact of the discrimination faced by single parents from BAME backgrounds, was greater both on them as individuals (51% as opposed to 42%) and on their child(ren) (55% as opposed to 38%).

Again, the difference in impact on the single parents was only significant at the 10% level, however, the difference in impact on the child(ren) of the single parents experiencing discrimination was significant at the 1% level suggesting there is a link between impact on children and ethnicity of the single parent.

The open responses from single parent respondents highlighted patterns of heightened discrimination due to ethnicity. Some white single parents also reported that their ethnicity protected them from greater negative impact than otherwise (alongside other 'protective' factors such as income and support systems). As one single parent stated, *"I think being a black single mother comes with many stereotypes and I think that was massive factor in my housing officer issuing me with a notice of eviction after I had verbally agreed a payment plan with her. When speaking to this lady she told me "you're working full time so you have the money and that childcare is an optional expense which I didn't need to pay". I believe she treated me this way because a) im black and b) i don't have westernised name."* Another single parent stated, *"I've experienced unfair treatment as an Arab single mother. Including not getting support because authorities have assumed I've lied about being a single parent with the assumption that all Muslims are married."* Another one highlighted how extreme the discrimination was, *"I've never been made to feel so worthless in my whole life and I'm a black woman who has suffered racism. Nothing worse than being a black single mother."* Case study number 16 of Nicole's experience as a black single mother being pushed out of her job highlights how the lack of trust faced by single parents can be heightened for single parents from BAME backgrounds. Case study number 17 shows how Maya's Asian background compounded the judgement and lack of support she experienced in the hospital as a new mother.

Further research into the impact of ethnicity and single parent discrimination is needed. It is possible that the significance in the relationship between ethnicity and experience/ impact of discrimination is low merely due to the small sample size of respondents from BAME backgrounds as the qualitative data and the impact on the child(ren) suggests ethnicity does affect single parent discrimination.

Case Study No. 16: Nicole - 'Black single mothers are not trusted by employers'

Nicole started working as a Project Manager for a tech company when - unknown to her - she was one month pregnant. As her maternity leave approached, Nicole discussed her options with HR. Feeling 'guilty' for taking time 'off' to give birth to her first child as a single mum, Nicole agreed to only take three months maternity leave if her company accepted her request to return on a 9am-6pm work pattern, five days a week, with two days working from home. HR agreed to Nicole's request and wished her well on her maternity leave.

When returning to work, Nicole was informed that management were no longer willing to honour their agreement. Instead, she was asked to come back to the office five days a week and informed that she would be required to do one late night a week (9am – 8.30pm). Additionally, Nicole was given clients in the UK and the USA meaning she was on call almost all the time.

For a year, Nicole worked long hours, sometimes only picking her daughter from the childminder at midnight. In time, more women in the department became pregnant and returned to work. Some of these women were given flexible working conditions. On one occasion when Nicole raised the idea of flexible working with HR again, she was told, *"as a single mum we don't know how you'd be able to work from home with a child"*. Nicole reassured her employer that she would either have a childminder in the home with her, or she would take her daughter to local childcare so she could focus entirely on her job during her working hours. This was once more rejected.

Nicole believes it was her status as a single mother and a black woman that meant she was treated with a lack of trust compared to her colleagues. After two years working in this way, Nicole was exhausted both mentally and physically and decided to leave. Nicole has since secured similar work for another company but still worries that a similar situation could happen again.

Nicole said, *"once the HR person had a baby, she changed the system so that everyone could work from home two days a week but I was never given this opportunity. I was told I had been managing so I just had to continue. They pushed me out because I was a black single mother and they didn't trust me."*

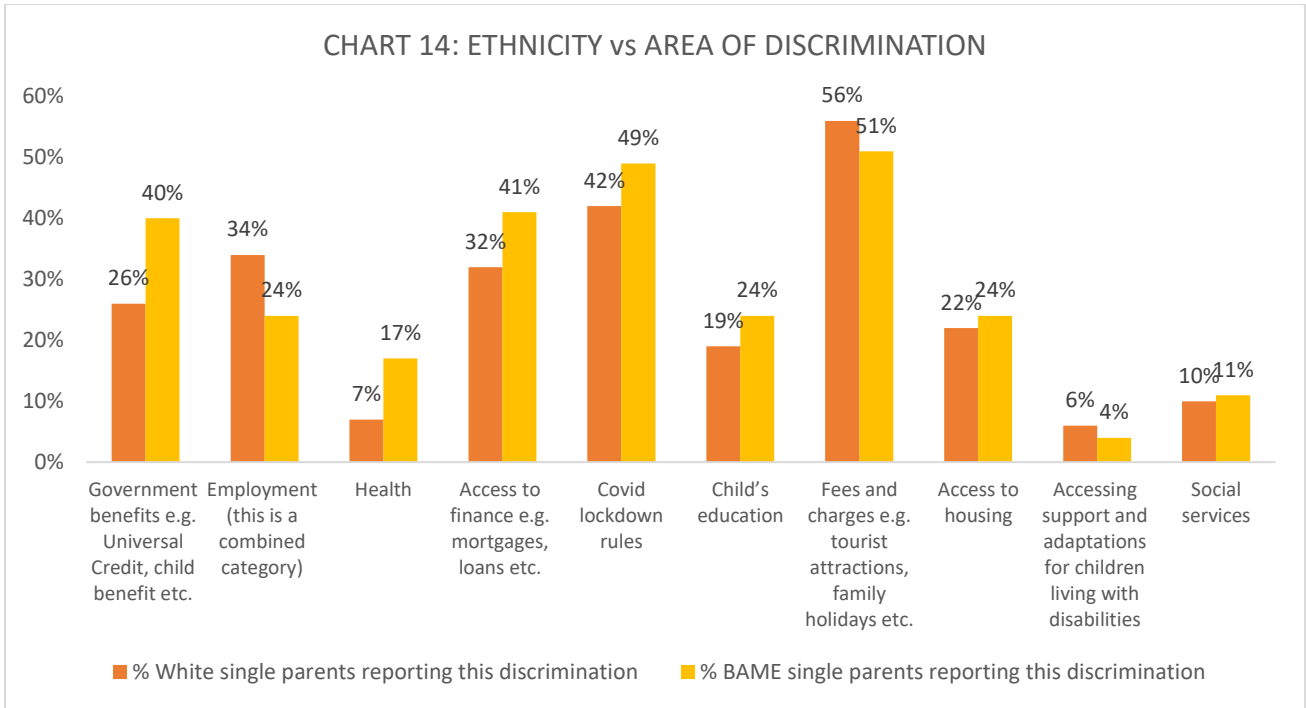


Chart 14 shows the areas of discrimination selected by respondents against their ethnicity. The three areas where the differences were 10% or higher were in government benefits, employment, and health. In government benefits single parents from a BAME background reported discrimination in that area at 40%, compared with 26% of single parents from a white background. In employment 34% of single parents from a white background reported discrimination in this area, compared with 24% of single parents from a BAME background. In health 17% of single parents from a BAME background reported discrimination in this area, compared with 7% of single parents from a white background.

Case Study No. 17: Maya – ‘Single parents should be allowed a support person in hospital’

Maya had her baby alone as a single parent. Initially the hospital stated that her mother, the child’s grandmother, could act as the ‘second parent’ and be allowed to hold the baby during their stay in the NICU [Neonatal Intensive Care Unit]. However, the staff then removed that right leaving Maya without support at what was a very challenging start of single motherhood.

Recalling the experience, Maya states, *“I was not able to heal from the birth and had to constantly be at the hospital, spending money on warm food and drink. I was exhausted as lack of rest so I was not able to produce enough breast milk.”*

Maya felt that the discrimination she faced as a single parent was further compounded by her Asian background. *“There was a lot of Asian health professionals and parents that could not understand how I went through with the pregnancy being a single parent.”*

Maya believes that hospitals need to allow single parents a second responsible adult in the NICU who can support them and is allowed to visit and hold the baby.

Impact of living with a disability on discrimination

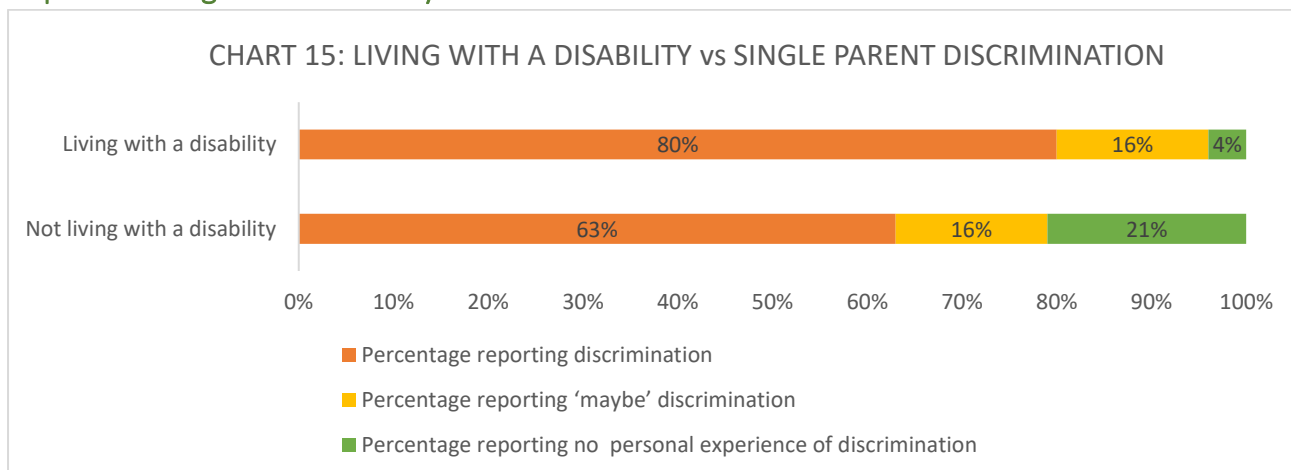


Chart 15 shows that 80% (n=57) of those living with a disability reported experiencing discrimination, compared with 63% (n=295) of those not living with a disability⁷⁶. This difference could not be subjected to a Chi-squared test due to the small number of those living with disabilities reporting no discrimination (n=3). However, it does suggest that living with a disability has a large impact on the likelihood of experiencing single parent discrimination.

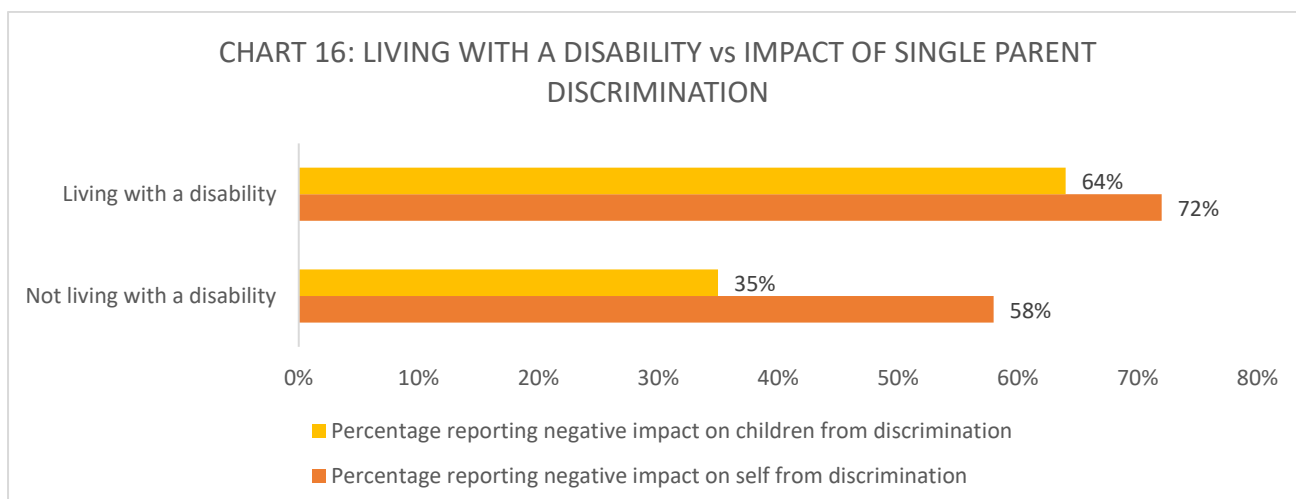


Chart 16 shows that the impact of single parent discrimination on single parents living with a disability was much higher than that of those without a disability (72% compared with 58%) and an even greater difference was seen between the impact on the child(ren) for those with disabilities (64%), compared with those without (35%). When subjected to a Chi-squared test both these impact results were highly significant at the 0.1% level. Case study number 18 of Susie's experiences as a single parent living with a disability coping during lockdown highlights how the impact on her children was heightened.

The responses in the open questions supported this observation with single parents living with disabilities referring to their disabilities as increasing the negative impact of their discrimination. One respondent stated, "Because I am a single, disabled parent I never last more than 2 years in paid employment, and am always the first to be dismissed for made up reasons." Another stated, "I am also disabled. This has made discrimination harder. It's like people sigh with exasperation that I'm making things more difficult on purpose!"

Given 27% of single parents in the UK live with a disability compared with the 11% of single parent survey respondents in this research, it is likely that a representative sample of single parent respondents would have resulted in higher rates of single parent discrimination than reported.

⁷⁶ It should be noted the discrimination data is only available for around fifty percent of overall respondents.

The data for those living with disabilities was not disaggregated by the area of disability as the numbers were too small to be able to identify meaningful results.

Case Study No. 18: Susie – ‘The government forgot about single parents living with disabilities during lockdown’

Susie, 40, from Leeds, is a single mother to three-year-old Isaac. Living with Chronic Fatigue/ M.E. since 2004, Susie regularly suffers with pain, fatigue and ‘brain fog’ which is not significantly improved by rest. This makes daily tasks such as housework and showering a struggle.

In 2019, Susie set up her own property management and maintenance company. A role which she could not furlough herself, or take a break from during lockdown. Susie usually works around 24 hours a week depending on her health, while Isaac attends nursery four days. She also relies on support from her parents.

During lockdown, Susie was refused support from the nursery yet still had to continue working around 20 hours a week. She found the lack of support or ability to rest hugely damaging to her own health. Describing the time in lockdown, Susie said, *“We had to develop coping mechanisms, which were so saddening. Every night I put cereal in a tupperware and milk in a feeder cup in the fridge. When [Isaac] woke up, he would go get his breakfast and bring it to eat next to me in bed, watching something on the tablet, whilst I dozed or rested. I had to take him for a walk every day, otherwise his behaviour became wild. We would walk round the cemetery, as it was the closest non car space to us, and then we would come home and get on the sofa bed. He would sit and watch a movie whilst I had a nap on the edge of the sofa bed, trapping him on the sofa so he was as contained as possible.”*

Susie has found the extended period with no rest has dramatically reduced what she can do physically. Susie believes, *“This deterioration in my health is a direct result of caring for my son on my own in an attempt to follow Government guidelines that failed to take into account the needs of single parents or people with a disability.”* She feels that single parents like herself should be listened to when asking for help and give the physical support they require.

HMRC have now stopped Susie’s entitlement to 30 hours free childcare because they estimate she will not make enough to qualify in this tax year. Susie feels this is a direct result of her inability to grow her business during this period and is now facing financial difficulties alongside her health challenges. *“Everyone has suffered during this pandemic and lockdown, but single parents have been disproportionately disadvantaged. We have nobody to support us when we can’t work, no partner to rely on, and if a single income gets reduced or disappears there’s no safety net for us. Add in to the mix being a disabled single parent who is fighting not to claim benefits, and it’s an absolute recipe for disaster. I feel extremely marginalised and ignored by all those in authority who I reached out to and asked for support.”*

Impact of gender on single parents' experiences of discrimination

Although the vast majority of single parent respondents were female there were still some interesting patterns identifiable within the data.

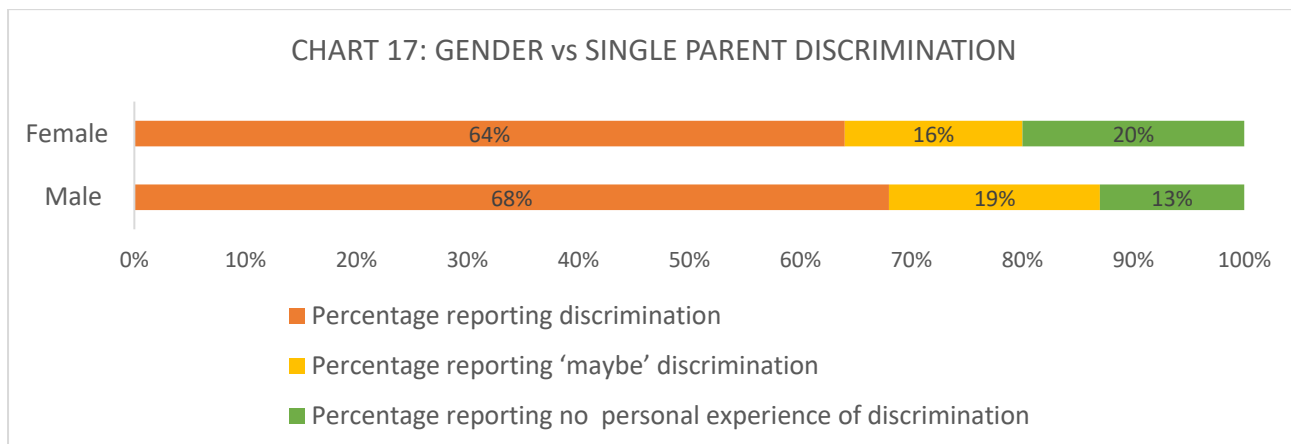
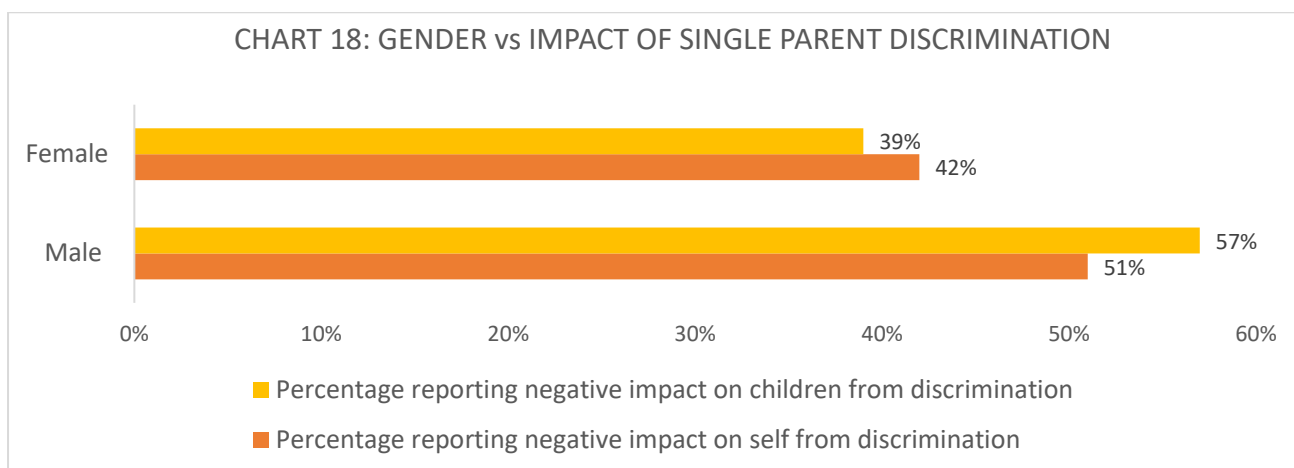


Chart 17 shows that the level of discrimination experienced by single mothers and single fathers does not differ hugely (64% vs 68%). Chart 18 shows the impact on the single parent between male and female single parents is also not hugely different (51% for males compared with 42% for females). Neither of these differences are significant when subjected to a Chi-squared test.



However, Chart 18 shows that there is a greater difference between the impact on the child in cases of discrimination by gender. For single fathers it was 57% as opposed to 39% for single mothers. This difference is significant at the 5% level when subjected to a Chi-squared test.

Table 3: Impact of gender on impact of discrimination on single parents

Gender	Negatively impact your mental health	Negatively impact your ability to parent	Negatively impact your ability to work in paid employment	Place/leave you in unsuitable housing	Lower your income	Increase your outgoings	Put you at risk of harm (mental or physical)
Female	74%	47%	55%	29%	55%	59%	38%
Male	81%	62%	65%	35%	62%	70%	43%

Table 4: Impact of gender on impact of discrimination on the child(ren) of single parents

Gender	Negatively affect your child(ren)'s mental health	Place/ leave your child(ren) in unsuitable housing	Negatively impact your child(ren)'s relationship with you	Put your child(ren) at risk of mental or physical harm
Female	40%	23%	34%	23%
Male	37%	15%	24%	24%

While tables 3 and 4 show some differences between the impact of the discrimination faced by male and female single parents these are not significant. Analysing the qualitative data, we can see that there is some link between the higher rates of single fathers referring to impacting their ability to parent (62% vs 47% for single mothers) – one key area which was repeated in the data was that single fathers felt their NRP status (which the majority of the single father respondents were), impacted their contact with their child and as such had a large impact on their ability to parent. Case study number 19 shows Dave's experience of discrimination around his housing situation and being charged the bedroom tax, led to a mental health impact, showing how this impact can occur.

The low numbers of male respondents (3% of all single parent respondents) makes it hard to draw conclusions in trends across the genders, as extreme examples were also evident amongst single mothers (e.g. one mother had her children removed from her care), however, there is a clear difference in how the state treats Resident Parents and Non-Resident Parents (NRPs) in shared care arrangements, and currently NRPs are not entitled to any financial or housing support in relation to their child(ren) even when their child lives with them up to 50% of the time.

It is also worth noting that many single mothers highlighted that they thought that being women added to the discrimination they experienced and that it was tied up in gender discrimination and misogyny. Others felt that because the majority of single parents are female, this added to the lack of will to end the discrimination faced by single parents. As one single parent stated in reference to being rejected from house rentals, *"I believe that had I been a single father, I'd have been looked upon more favourably."* Another single mother stated, *"As a woman we are expected to carry the full burden and have a whole host of intersectional issues, particularly in the workplace."*

Case Study No. 19: Dave – 'I was nearly evicted because my children's bedroom is considered unnecessary'

Dave, from Derbyshire, is a single dad who lives in a two-bedroom council flat. For half of the week his children – aged nine and thirteen -live with him. When Dave's children are staying with him, he shares his room with his nine-year-old son, while his 13-year-old daughter has the second bedroom. However, because Dave is classed as the Non-Resident Parent (NRP), he does not receive any financial support for his children and is subject to the 'bedroom tax'.

Dave found himself in financial difficulties because his benefit entitlement as a single adult was not enough to cover the costs of his children while they were living with him and he was unable to pay the bedroom tax. In December 2019, with Dave's debt at £800, the council served him with an eviction notice to vacate his home.

The financial stress, paired with the thought of losing his family home, pushed Dave to the point of breakdown and he was admitted to hospital with suicidal thoughts. Since then, Dave has worked with his MP and the law centre to secure a Discretionary Housing Payment from his council to cover the bedroom tax charges. However, this payment is not guaranteed for single parents in Dave's circumstances and many councils will only use this as a temporary measure while someone is found alternative (smaller) accommodation.

Dave says, *"if a child stays with their parent they should be automatically exempt from the bedroom tax. The bedroom tax is intended to prevent homes with 'spare rooms' being left empty, but that room is for my children and they have the right to a room in their own home."*

Impact of nation on single parents' experiences of discrimination

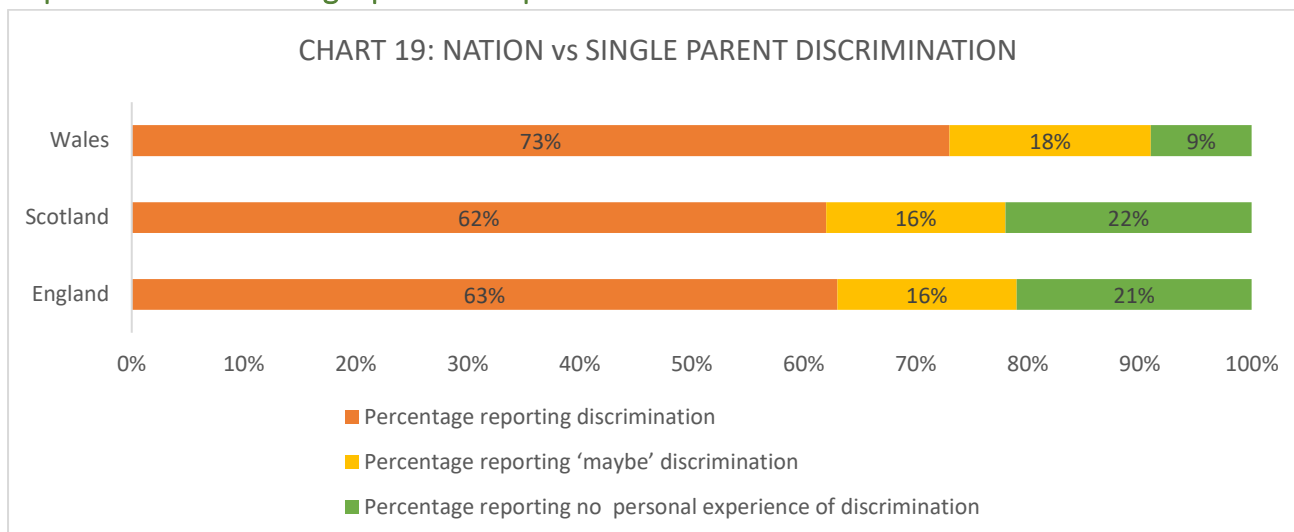


Chart 19 highlights differences in the rates of discrimination between England, Scotland, and Wales. The results from Northern Ireland were not included as the sample size was too small to analyse. The differences between discrimination rates in Wales (73%), Scotland (62%) and England (63%) were significant at the 5% level when subjected to a Chi-squared test. There are two potential explanations for this difference.

Looking at the income levels of the single parent respondents alongside their nation, we find that the income levels of those in Wales and (to a lesser extent) Scotland are significantly lower than the income levels of those in England (see table 5 below). Given lower income tends towards higher rates of discrimination (see chart 9 above) we can assume that at least part of this difference in discrimination experienced in Wales is due to higher poverty rates in Wales. Although this does not account for the lower discrimination rates in Scotland as opposed to Wales despite the lower incomes levels of the respondents there also.

Table 5: Income levels by nation for single parent survey respondents

	England	Scotland	Wales
Income level below £25,000	50%	63%	66%
Income above £25,000	50%	37%	34%

Two other facts might explain the lower level of discrimination experienced by those in Scotland. Firstly, this might be due to the different policies in place to address poverty and child poverty specifically within Scotland. The most recent data from the Social Metrics Commission shows that child poverty of children in single parent families after housing costs, is lowest in Scotland, at 44% compared with 45% in Wales and 52% in England⁷⁷ and Scotland has lower levels of income inequality than Wales (which has the highest in the UK).⁷⁸ Furthermore, Scotland is the only UK nation which has enacted the socio-economic duty (under the 'Fair Scotland Duty')⁷⁹, Scotland has higher proportions of social housing⁸⁰ and any liability for the bedroom tax by Scottish residents is fully mitigated by the Scottish government. These policies, and others, help to lessen the opportunities for discrimination and the impact of it when it does occur.

The higher rate of discrimination levels seen in respondents from Wales might, in part, be due to the sampling approach. The majority of survey respondents in Wales came through the networks of the Welsh single parent organisation, Single Parent Wellbeing (SPW). SPW has an active community of single parents, including a lobbying group who advocate for the rights of single parents within Wales and were very active during the lockdown restrictions. This could account for Welsh respondents being more aware of the discrimination they face as single

⁷⁷ <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Measuring-Poverty-2020-Web.pdf>

⁷⁸ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/poverty-levels-and-trends-england-wales-scotland-and-northern-ireland>

⁷⁹ <https://www.cloisters.com/a-legal-duty-to-tackle-inequality-scotland-first-wales-next-england-when/>

⁸⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/comparingaffordablehousingintheuk/april2008tomarch2018>

parents and being vocal about this within the survey. The Scottish respondents came from a more diverse mix of sources so there is less chance of a tendency towards one 'type' of single parent.

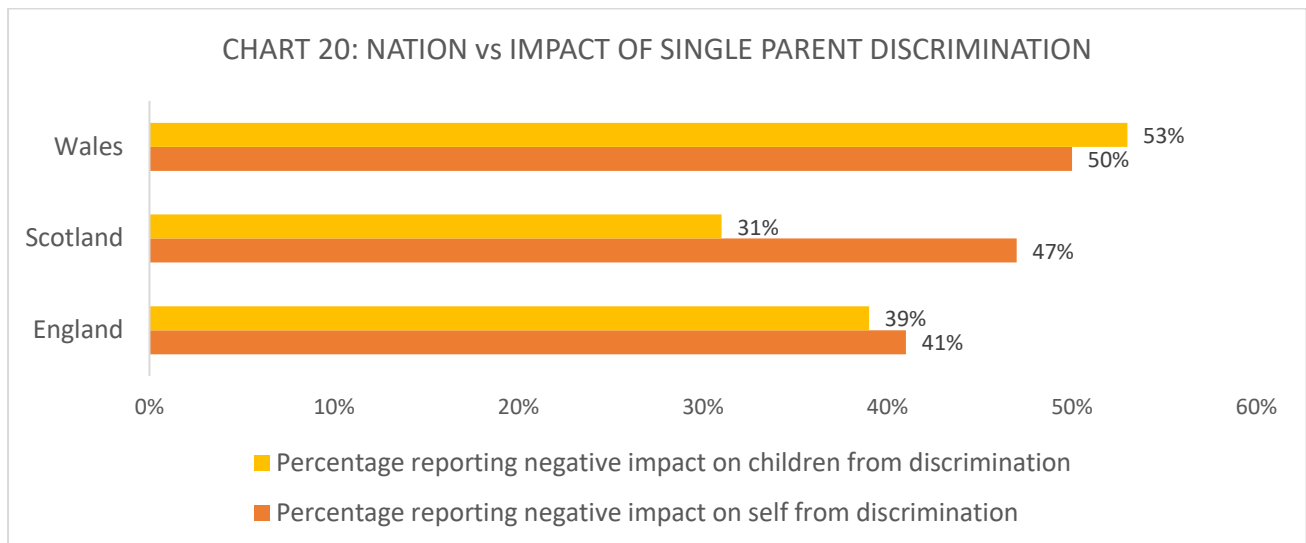


Chart 20 highlights that the impact of the discrimination was felt to be greatest in Wales (50%) followed by Scotland (47%) and England (41%), however, these differences were not statistically significant. The differences between the impact on the children was more pronounced. With the greatest impact felt on children in Wales (53%), followed by England with 39% and Scotland with 31%. This difference is significant at the 0.1% level. Again, the socio-economic duty in Scotland might be helping to lessen the impact of single parent discrimination on children.

Impact of age and pregnancy on single parent discrimination

Although the age of respondents and whether they were pregnant was not monitored, the open questions highlighted incidents of heightened prejudice and discrimination amongst young single mothers and pregnant single mothers. As one single parent stated, *"I've been discriminated or misjudged based on the combination of appearing young whilst also being a single mother in many areas from schools, housing, hospitals, doctors and even [single parent] Charity staff."* Another stated, *"I feel that my experiences are compounded by the fact that I look quite young. As a 23 year old parent I was spoken down to a bit by HCPs who often assumed I was 16/17, which actually I feel is worse because even if I was those ages I would still be a caregiver or patient and deserve to be treated and respected as such."* Whilst another single parent stated, *"Some single parents suffer more stigma and discrimination, especially young (teen) parents when they are mostly total sheroes [female heros]."*

A number of single mothers stated hiding their pregnancy from rental agencies due to discrimination, and one reported, *"One landlord refused to rent me their property when they realised I was pregnant and was going to be on maternity stating that my maternity pay alone would [not] cover rent. I offered to get a letter from HR to show that my maternity pay would cover rent twice over but they declined. So yes some of it [the discrimination] was due to my pregnant and maternity status."*

Vicious cycle

Many single parents talked about a negative cycle triggered by their experience(s) of discrimination. Housing and finance issues often had impacts elsewhere, and the mental health impact often had subsequent impacts on the entire family. This could be seen to place additional financial implications on the state and employers in terms of time off ill, mental health medication and talking therapies, an inability to get (back) into work and the costs associated with out of work benefits payments. One single parent described it succinctly, *"I was sacked for being a single pregnant mum. Which made me homeless."*

One single parent reflecting back on her experiences of discrimination and the culmination of challenges over the years stated, *"It was always just survival, nothing else. I was the best mum I could be but it was always such a fight with schools and work and government agencies and housing and the CSA [Child Support Agency]. I sacrificed so much, worked as many hours as I could, fought so hard and I have nothing really to show for it. I don't own anything. Have no pensions, savings, no investments, still in insecure housing. Still trying to get the CSA (now CMS [Child*

Maintenance System]) to force his dad to pay the arrears he's owed. I feel so guilty that I was never enough and I worked so hard all the time that I feel I missed out on his childhood years through sheer exhaustion." Another single parent stated, "The logistical challenges and discriminations received negatively affect mental health (depression, anxiety), which affects my ability to work and parent. The latter then negatively affect my mental health even further. It's a down-spiral, and hence I feel more vulnerable." Case study number 20 of the repercussions since Debbie was made redundant during Covid restrictions, highlights how worrying this is for some.

Case Study No. 20: Debbie – 'Single parent discrimination is a vicious cycle'

Debbie, from Sunderland, has three children and became a single mother two years ago, since then she has repeatedly faced discrimination. "The last 2 years since becoming a single parent and escaping domestic abuse, I have had to jump through hurdle after hurdle and drag myself back up to where I am now to the pit I was left in."

Debbie was evicted from the property she had been renting in Sunderland with her ex-partner when they split up. Despite Debbie having been the one who initially signed the contract on the property and assurances that she could pay the rent, the landlord told her, "[I] don't want some single mum and her kids living in my property". Debbie tried to challenge the eviction notice but was unsuccessful. She and her three children moved into a two bedroom flat. "The devastation to the children having to leave our lovely home and move immediately into a small cold flat was awful," recalls Debbie.

Things went well for Debbie for a while and she secured a good job in finance and rented a nice three-bedroom home with a garden. However, like many single parents, Debbie was badly affected by the first Covid-19 lockdown. Debbie's employer refused to furlough her and expected her to continue working despite Debbie telling them that she was struggling to work from home with her three children at home and no support. During that time of managing work and childcare, Debbie feels her children suffered greatly and it impacted their mental health, "we did nothing for months whilst I tried to work full time and the kids were forced to stay at home."

In May 2020, Debbie was made redundant and could not begin to look for work again until the schools reopened in September and she had childcare. Debbie believes the redundancy was directly related to her single parent status because the company kept on another member of the finance team who was on a temporary contract.

For Debbie, finding a job has always been additionally challenging because of her single parent status. As she recalls, "I feel I am discriminated against for being a single parent, whenever I have mentioned it I have not got the job."

Debbie has been unable to secure paid employment and is worried about the future. "Losing my income for a number of months has been very, very tough and I face losing my car soon if I don't find work soon as the payment break has now ended. I even had to start using food banks recently. I am a qualified accountant but struggle to find work, I think being a single parent especially in these difficult times is making finding work more difficult. I apply for jobs every day. I even apply for minimum wage jobs and still don't get an interview! The market is very tough anyway at the moment but being a single mum of 3 certainly doesn't help me get a job."

Summary

The impact of single parent discrimination is clearly wide ranging. Certain groups of single parents experience heightened discrimination and greater impacts. This includes single parents from BAME backgrounds, single parents with lower income levels, single parents living with a disability, younger single parents and those who are pregnant. Given these groups were underrepresented within the survey we can assume that a more representative sample would have revealed higher rates of discrimination across the board.

Section 8: Another way is possible

The positives of single parenting

The research highlighted the duality of single parenting. Alongside the prejudice and discrimination facing single parents, the research illuminated a positive story of single parenting too. A story of determined, tenacious individuals working hard to better their lives, both for themselves and their children. Single parents were referred to as “warriors” and single parents identified as being an “asset”, rather than the burden they were often treated as.



Image 4: A word cloud image of some of the positive descriptions used in the research.

Across the board, single parents talked about wanting to work hard to change things for their family with some talking of ‘surprising’ themselves with what they were able to achieve. Respondents talked about breaking the stigma and being positive role models for their children. There were stories of single parents juggling studies, childcare, and work, to improve their families’ prospects and often succeeding. Other single parents talked about overcoming challenges despite often not being afforded equal rights within society with the image of the single parent fighting for their rights one which was repeatedly mentioned in the survey responses.

Some respondents mentioned campaigning for broader change for single parents and talked about these experiences strengthening their children and teaching them a ‘fierce sense of justice’.

Single parent respondents also highlighted their contributions to society more broadly as active members within their community, from participating in community events and setting up businesses to volunteering on their Parent Teacher Associations at their children’s schools.

Looking at the factors which enabled single parents to succeed despite the prejudice and discrimination they faced, having supportive friends and family was key, as well as having access to other resources such as savings and homeownership. Some single parents acknowledged the privileges which were afforded them as white, cis-gendered, able bodied individuals and those on higher incomes. These were all considered factors which helped to minimise the impact of the discrimination they faced as single parents. ‘Luck’ was also mentioned over and over again, with many single parents acknowledging that their experiences of discrimination and the outcomes from these experiences, could have been much worse.

The support of other single parents was also highlighted as positive by some, as highlighted in case study number 21. This case study shows how Emma turned the social exclusion she faced in her pregnancy into a positive by reaching out to single parent networks. For more details on the exclusion Emma faced as a pregnant single mother see case study number 1 in section 5.

Single parents talked of their love for their children and their life, which was described as rewarding. Their children were not classed as a burden, but very much wanted through various means including in relationships, through fertility treatment and adoption. Their children were often the reason single parents gave for wanting to better themselves and their circumstances. Often single parenting was considered to make the parent stronger than otherwise. Despite often very challenging situations single parents reported not wanting to change their circumstances. One single parent commented that single parenting, *“makes me more capable, stronger and more adaptable.”* Whilst other respondents referred to being a better parent as a solo parent and having a more stable life than otherwise.

Case study No. 21: Emma – ‘Single parent friends are the best’

Emma became a single parent when she was pregnant. During her pregnancy she tried to build a network through joining local antenatal classes. However, Emma felt excluded from the group as all the other members were in couples.

Describing how she had built networks with other single parents since becoming a mother, Emma stated, *“Connecting with other single parents is important to me as I feel they truly empathise with my situation in a non-judgmental way as they are the same. I know that they totally understand the challenges, advantages and disadvantages of being a single parent as they are in the same boat. It’s a source of comfort. They’ve provided support in the sense that it makes me feel part of a community of likeminded people which makes me feel I am not isolated and not on the fringes of society. I have single parent friends and friends that are in couples and while I enjoy all my friendships, I really appreciate single parent connections as they provide support from the single parent perspective - sharing experiences that are more unique to single parents and being able to discuss the additional challenges that single parents face.”*

What single parents want

Many single parents talked about the kinds of changes they wanted enacted to help end single parent discrimination. These varied from legal protections, to improved childcare infrastructure. One single parent stated, *“[d]iscrimination against single parents is systemic in this country. I believe being a single parent should be a “protected characteristic” and the difficulties faced by single parents recognised by law.”* Another said, *“The biggest thing that would make a difference is legislation around part time work. EVERY POSITION should have to be advertised as part time. Including senior positions. It should not be legal for positions to only be full-time as this discriminates enormously against people with caring responsibilities and particularly single parents upon whom the burden falls most heavily/unavoidably.”* While another stated, *“This [single parent discrimination] is a huge issue In the UK, there needs to be better, more affordable childcare options available and being a single parent be a protected characteristic.”*

Below are some of the key comments single parents made on how things could be improved:

- Legal protection from discrimination/ protected characteristic in the Equality Act
- Fairer pricing structure for single parent families
- Truly flexible work
- More affordable and flexible childcare
- Workplace policies and practices to support single parents
- Fairer child benefit entitlement calculations
- Respect and support from professionals
- Recognition of all family types
- More understanding of the challenges facing single parents and more celebration of the positives
- An end to stigma and judgement of single parents

Section 9: Non-Single Parent Responses

Although the survey was almost exclusively promoted as a single parent survey, there was the option for non-single parents to complete the survey too. Non-single parents were asked questions around whether they had observed single parent discrimination and their views on the Equality Act.

Table 6: Background of non-single parent respondents

Category	Answer	No. of respondents	Percentage in the survey
Nation	England	59	94%
	Scotland	2	3%
	Wales	1	2%
	Northern Ireland ⁸¹	1	2%
	Did not answer	0	0%
	Total	63	
Disability⁸²	Yes	2	4%
	No	42	94%
	Rather not say	1	2%
	Did not answer	0	0%
	Total	45	
Gender	Female	59	94%
	Male	4	6%
	Blank	0	0%
	Non-binary/ third gender	0	0%
	Rather not say	0	0%
	Other	0	0%
	Total	63	
Ethnicity	White	51	81%
	Black	3	5%
	Mixed/ Other/ Arab	3	5%
	Asian	6	10%
	Did not answer	0	0%
	Total	63	
Income bracket	Below £15,000	3	5%
	£15,001 - £25,000	0	0%
	£25,001 - £35,000	10	16%
	£35,001 - £45,000	6	10%
	£45,001 - £55,000	8	13%
	£55,001 - £65,000	7	11%
	Over £65,000	26	41%
	Did not answer	3	5%
	Total	63	

Table 6 shows that the non-single parent respondents tended to be less representative of the UK in all personal data compared with the single parent respondents, except for ethnicity, where the sample was more representative than the single-parent responses.

⁸¹ It should be noted that Northern Ireland was not proactively targeted through this research because the UK Equality Act does not apply there.

⁸² This is based on the answers of 45 individuals as the data was not collected for all respondents.

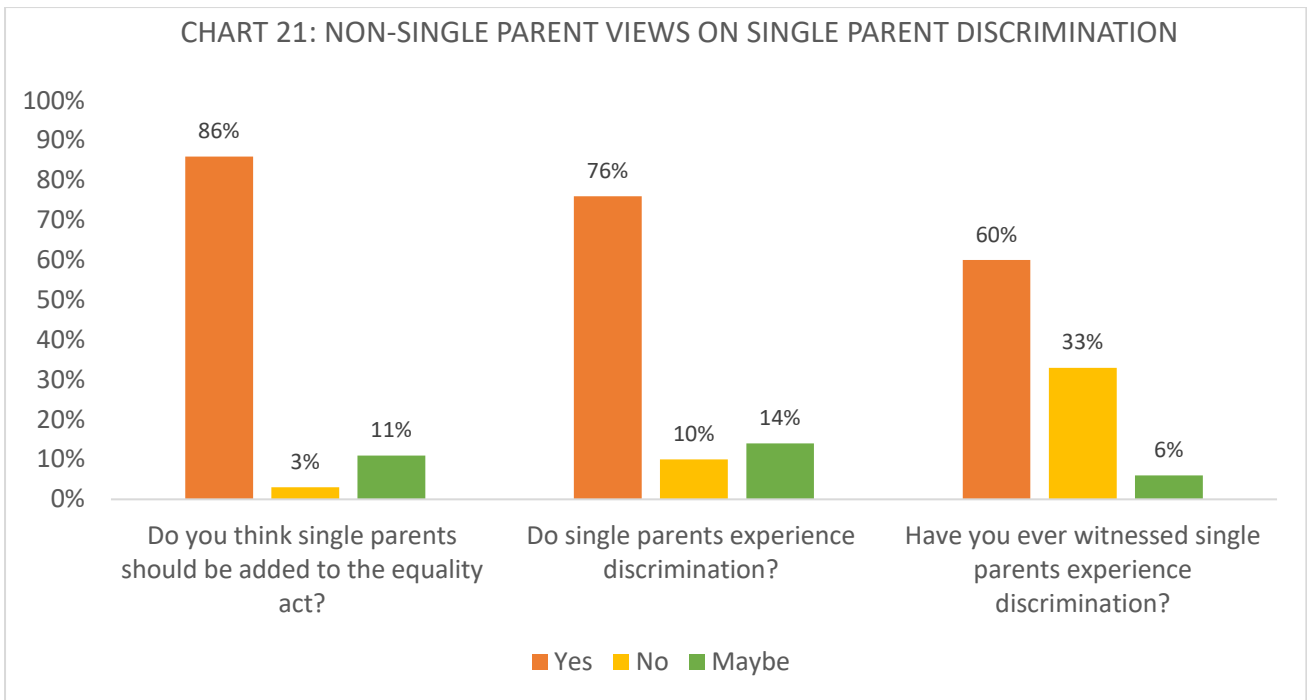


Chart 21 shows that 90% of non-single parents believe single parent discrimination exists or may exist. This is slightly lower than the level of single parents who have either experienced single parent discrimination or believe it exists (96%).

The qualitative data from non-single parent respondents highlighted similar issues that single parents had identified, such as being overcharged at attractions, not given equal access to child benefit, and generally forgotten about by policy makers. Non-single parents also gave examples where they had witnessed single parent discrimination, for example one non-single parent described how during an interview debrief it was commented that the interviewees single parent status would make them less flexible as an employee. Something which single parents themselves repeatedly raised in this research. One non-single parent also supported the view amongst single parents that professionals do not always take single parent views into account, *“Single parents view not given as much credit as cohabiting parents view when discussing child's behaviour with professionals. Implication that behaviour due to parenting rather than child's needs.”* Another stated, *“I feel that single parents are forgotten about and therefore discriminated against.”*

The experience of prejudice towards single parents was also highlighted, *“Single parents, mothers in particular, are seen as lower status. They're seen as irresponsible, labelled as bad by politicians, and discriminated against.”* Whilst another non-single parent stated, *“The stigma attached to single parenting, especially mothers, being labled [sic] promiscuous, is out of control in the UK.”* Another non-single parent stated that there is a stigma which, *“means eyebrows raised, condescending tones, general insults and assumptions in all areas of life.”*

Chart 19 shows the majority of non-single parent respondents (89%) were supportive of the single parents being added as a protected characteristic to the Equality Act. This compares to 96% of single parents who believe single parents should be added to the Equality Act (see chart 3). One non-single parent respondent stated, *“It's not just about creating equality but about creating equity.”* Another stated their support for change, *“Single parents need greater support, from the workplace to school. I want to be part of a societal change.”* Another supported the idea of a broadening of the definition of families, *“We need to recognise that a family takes many forms.”*

Section 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Single parent discrimination has been allowed to go unchecked for too long in the UK, encouraged by a trio of prejudice, institutional bias, and a lack of legal protection for single parents. This research has highlighted stories from the young single mother undergoing sterilisation without appropriate support to the many single parents who have been made redundant due to institutional prejudice, and a lack of willingness amongst employers to provide flexible working opportunities for single parents. The reality of the single parent is often one of fighting for the right to survive and it is testimony to the determination and perseverance of single parents that many succeed. However, life should not be this challenging.

80% of single parents reported experiencing discrimination⁸³ with 96% experiencing or identifying its existence⁸⁴. The impact from single parent discrimination was wide reaching, on single parents, their child(ren), and wider society. Single parents from black and minority ethnic groups, those from lower income households, those living with a disability, and young single parents, tended to experience heightened discrimination.

This research has highlighted a single parent penalty exists throughout family life, including days out, employment and accessing housing. Covid-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities and highlighted the bias towards two-parent families and the resulting discrimination they face. We have reached a point where single parents are having to make an impossible choice between family finances and their child(ren)'s wellbeing; it is a false dichotomy at best given the two factors are inextricably linked.

If single parent discrimination is left to continue unaddressed, the high levels of poverty and mental health challenges amongst single parents will continue. Single parents are doing one of the hardest jobs, with some of the least resources, they deserve to be treated fairly and supported so they, and their children, can thrive within the UK. Programmes aimed at tackling single parent poverty have been seen to fail in the long-term, often merely moving single parents from out-of-work poverty into in-work poverty⁸⁵. Without widespread policy change, single parents will continue to be at the mercy of discriminatory landlords, unfair pricing structures, tax systems and government benefits, and face insecure, low paid employment with little opportunity for professional development.

We have outlined a three-pronged approach to ending single parent discrimination which has been identified through this research and consulting with relevant bodies. The success of these recommendations will require the coming together of policymakers, businesses, the media, and wider society. The details of this approach are outlined in the recommendations section below. Firstly, we must incorporate single parents into the UK Equality Act. Secondly, we must address the inaccurate and damaging prejudice towards single parents. Thirdly, we must tackle the discriminatory policies and practices across key sectors in the UK.

As we enter the new post-Brexit, post-Covid world and the UK government focuses on its 'levelling up' agenda, we need to see single parent families placed at the heart of policy making so they too can benefit from all the opportunities the UK has to offer. It is essential the legal protections for single parents are an intrinsic part of the UK if we are to 'build back better' for all our citizens, not least the single parents who have suffered decades of invisibility which has culminated in the situation we are in today. By enshrining single parents' rights in the Equality Act – something which is supported by 96% of single parents - employers and businesses will receive the message that single parents are a unique group with specific needs they must respond to. Whilst pre-Covid-19 inequalities have been starkly highlighted in Covid's wake, so too have the opportunities for government to step in as seen with the Universal Credit uplift, Free School Meals vouchers and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the latter of which saw over 9 million jobs furloughed at the height of the scheme⁸⁶. Together, the UK can be a place that empowers its 2.9 million single parents to live fulfilling lives for the benefit of all.

⁸³ This is the number of single parent respondents who answered 'yes' (64%) or 'maybe' (16%) when asked if they had experienced single parent discrimination. It should be noted all those who answered maybe went on to provide details of the discrimination which occurred.

⁸⁴ This is made up of the 80% that experienced discrimination plus a further 16% who – although they had not experience discrimination, reported they had identified or had 'maybe' identified single parent discrimination.

⁸⁵ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Tackling-single-parent-poverty-after-coronavirus.pdf>

⁸⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics>

Recommendations

We have identified a three-pronged approach to tackle single parent discrimination which aims to address the lack of legal protections, the high levels of stigma and the discriminatory policies and practices within key sectors which were identified within this research.

1. Add single parents as a protected characteristic to the Equality Act
2. Address the prejudice and stigma towards single parent families, specifically:
 - a. Broaden the definition of 'family' to reflect modern Britain and incorporate single parent families
 - b. Promote positive narratives of single parent families within the media
 - c. Train family/ child related professionals in single parent inclusive policies and practices
 - d. Identify more inclusive methods to collect data on the number of single parents in the UK (e.g., counting sole carers, majority carers, fifty-fifty carers, minority carers etc)
3. Tackle sector specific single parent discrimination as outlined below:
 - Fees and Charges: Create inclusive products and fees for single parent families, specifically:
 - a. Offer single parent family tickets for products, services and fees
 - b. Ensure products and promotional materials reflect single parent families
 - Employment: Create flexible employment and affordable childcare for single parents, specifically:
 - a. Make flexible working the default for all jobs
 - b. Make it mandatory for employers to publish flexible working options for all roles
 - c. Make it mandatory for employees to be allowed to request flexible working at any point
 - d. Encourage employers to enact single parent inclusive HR policies⁸⁷
 - e. Ensure appropriate, flexible, cost-effective childcare is available for single parent families
 - f. Increase the national minimum wage to be in line with the living wage
 - Covid-19: Consider single parents in the Coronavirus pandemic restrictions, specifically:
 - a. Grant a temporary legal right to furlough for single parents with significant childcare challenges
 - b. Guarantee social bubbles for single parents in all lockdowns/ restriction levels permanently
 - c. Prioritise children of working single parents for childcare/ school places during lockdowns
 - d. Add all primary aged children of single parents to the 'not included' list for outdoor meet ups
 - e. Extend the track and trace isolation grant to single parents unable to work due to isolating children
 - f. Maintain the Free School Meals voucher/ cash system for lockdowns, including holidays⁸⁸
 - Access to Finances: Grant the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) statutory authority to monitor and address lenders' financial inclusion policies and practices, including single parent borrowers
 - Government benefits, CMS, pensions and taxes: Ensure the system supports single parent families, specifically:
 - a. Make the £20 Universal Credit uplift permanent and include recipients of legacy benefits
 - b. Increase the Universal Credit standard allowance for single parents and equivalent in legacy benefits
 - c. Remove the benefit cap and the two-child limit policy
 - d. Raise the level of the high-income child benefit charge to £100,000 for single parents to be inline with household income levels of two-parent families
 - e. Reduce the Universal Credit taper rate for single parents from 63p to 50p per £1 earned
 - f. Provide thirty hours of funded childcare for 3–4-year-olds of single parents who are registered-carers
 - g. Amend inheritance tax calculations so all families benefit from the same tax-free inheritance levels
 - h. Increase the council tax reduction to 50% for single parents and fund it through central government
 - i. Raise the earning limit for tax free childcare for single parents to be inline with two-parent families

⁸⁷ Suggested policies have been outlined in appendix 5.

⁸⁸ It should be noted in Scotland a cash-based system is used and we support this approach being expanded across the UK, or - at a minimum - the voucher system to be maintained throughout the crisis.

- j. Remove the £10,000 earning limit for auto-enrolment in workplace pensions
- k. Ensure the Child Maintenance Service is fit for purpose and protects the rights of the child
- Housing: Ensure the housing sector protects single parents, specifically:
 - a. Establish a Regulator for the private renting sector to address DSS and single parent discrimination
 - b. Encourage the Property Ombudsman to tackle DSS and single parent discrimination
 - c. Encourage rental agencies to follow the law on DSS discrimination and work towards eradicating single parent discrimination within the sector
 - d. Waiver the bedroom tax for Non-Resident Parents with overnight care of their children

Section 11: Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

Questions for single parents who had experienced discrimination

1. Your data will be used to better understand levels of discrimination towards single parents in the UK and shared with MPs and the media to raise awareness. Any personal details will be anonymised unless you give consent otherwise. The data you provide will be stored confidentially in accordance with GDPR and no identifying information will be shared with a third party. You can withdraw your permission at any time by contacting the campaign on singleparentrights@gmail.com If you agree to the conditions outlined here please select 'I agree' below, if you do not agree you will be taken out of the survey. Thank you for your time. *[Answer options: I agree to the conditions outlined above, I do not agree with the conditions outlined above (you will not be able to proceed with the survey)].*
2. Which part of the UK do you live in? *[Answer options: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland].*
3. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Rather not say].*
4. Which gender identity do you identify as? *[Answer options: Female, Male, Non-binary/ third gender, Rather not say].*
5. How would you describe your ethnicity? *[Answer options: White, Black, Mixed, Asian, Other (including Arab)].*
6. What is your annual household income? *[Answer options: Below £15,000, £15,001 - £25,000, £25,001 - £35,000, £35,001 - £45,000, £45,001 - £55,000, £55,001 - £65,000, Over £65,000].*
7. Are you, or have you ever been, a single parent? For the purposes of this survey a single parent is described as a parent/ carer who is solely responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and well-being of a child(ren) when that child is in their care (i.e. this includes single parents who co-parent with the child's other parent). *[Yes, I am currently a single parent, Yes, I am a former single parent, No, I have never been a single parent].*
8. Have you ever experienced unfair treatment or discrimination based on the fact you are, or were, a single parent? i.e. the unfair treatment/ discrimination was because you were/ are a single parent. *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
9. What forms of unfair treatment/ discrimination have you faced as a single parent (tick all that apply)? *[Answer options: Access to housing; Recruitment i.e. applying for/ being interviewed for employment; Workplace e.g. promotion or development; Selection for redundancy/ dismissal; Children's education e.g. school/ nursery/ college; Social services; Health; Government benefits e.g. universal credit, child benefit etc.; Accessing support and adaptations for your child with disabilities; Covid lockdown rules; Access to finance e.g. mortgages, loans, etc.; Fees and charges e.g. tourist attractions, family holidays etc.; Other].*
10. Please describe the unfair treatment/ discrimination you experienced. *[Answer options: open text box].*
11. Thinking about the impact on yourself, did the unfair treatment/ discrimination.... *[Answer options: Rating of 'Not at all', 'A little', 'A lot' against impacts of: negatively affect your mental health; negatively impact your ability to parent; negatively impact your ability to work in paid employment; place/ leave you in unsuitable housing; increase your outgoings; put you at risk of harm (mental or physical)].*
12. Please explain the negative impact the unfair treatment/ discrimination had on you, if at all. *[Answer options: open text box].*
13. Thinking about your child(ren), did the unfair treatment/ discrimination.... *[Answer options: Rating of 'Not at all', 'A little', 'A lot' against impacts of: negatively affect your child(ren)'s mental health; negatively impact your place/ leave your child(ren) in unsuitable housing; negatively impact your child(ren)'s relationship with you; put your child(ren) at risk of harm (mental or physical)].*
14. Please explain the negative impact the unfair treatment/ discrimination had on your child(ren), if at all. *[Answer options: open text box].*
15. Was the unfair treatment/ discrimination you experienced heightened due to your race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, religious belief, or pregnant/ maternity status? If so please explain. (Leave this question blank if not applicable). *[Answer options: open text box].*
16. Is there anything else you would like to say about single parent discrimination in the UK? *[Answer options: open text box].*
17. Did you know that married people are protected in the UK Equality Act, 2010 and that single parents/ single people are not? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Not sure].*

18. Do you think that single parents should be given equality within the Equality Act alongside married people? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
19. If you are willing for us to contact you about your answers, or to get more involved in the campaign, please provide your email below and press submit. If you do not want to share your email address, please leave blank and press submit so your answers are saved. *[Answer options: open text box].*

Questions for single parents who had not experienced discrimination

1. Your data will be used to better understand levels of discrimination towards single parents in the UK and shared with MPs and the media to raise awareness. Any personal details will be anonymised unless you give consent otherwise. The data you provide will be stored confidentially in accordance with GDPR and no identifying information will be shared with a third party. You can withdraw your permission at any time by contacting the campaign on singleparentrights@gmail.com If you agree to the conditions outlined here please select 'I agree' below, if you do not agree you will be taken out of the survey. Thank you for your time. *[Answer options: I agree to the conditions outlined above, I do not agree with the conditions outlined above (you will not be able to proceed with the survey)].*
2. Which part of the UK do you live in? *[Answer options: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland].*
3. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Rather not say].*
4. Which gender identity do you identify as? *[Answer options: Female, Male, Non-binary/ third gender, Rather not say].*
5. How would you describe your ethnicity? *[Answer options: White, Black, Mixed, Asian, Other (including Arab)].*
6. What is your annual household income? *[Answer options: Below £15,000, £15,001 - £25,000, £25,001 - £35,000, £35,001 - £45,000, £45,001 - £55,000, £55,001 - £65,000, Over £65,000].*
7. Are you, or have you ever been, a single parent? For the purposes of this survey a single parent is described as a parent/ carer who is solely responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and well-being of a child(ren) when that child is in their care (i.e. this includes single parents who co-parent with the child's other parent). *[Yes, I am currently a single parent, Yes, I am a former single parent, No, I have never been a single parent].*
8. Have you ever experienced unfair treatment or discrimination based on the fact you are, or were, a single parent? i.e. the unfair treatment/ discrimination was because you were/ are a single parent. *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
9. Do you think that single parents in the UK experience unfair treatment/ discrimination due to being single parents? i.e. they experience unfair treatment because of their single parent status. *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
10. Have you ever witnessed a single parent(s) in the UK being treated unfairly/ discriminated against due to their status as a single parent? i.e. it was because they were a single parent that they were treated unfairly. *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
11. What forms of unfair treatment/ discrimination did you witness the single parent(s) experience (tick all that apply)? *[Answer options: Access to housing; Recruitment i.e. applying for/ being interviewed for employment; Workplace e.g. promotion or development; Selection for redundancy/ dismissal; Children's education e.g. school/ nursery/ college; Social services; Health; Government benefits e.g. universal credit, child benefit etc.; Accessing support and adaptations for your child with disabilities; Covid lockdown rules; Access to finance e.g. mortgages, loans, etc.; Fees and charges e.g. tourist attractions, family holidays etc.; Other].*
12. Please describe the unfair treatment/ discrimination you witnessed the single parent(s) experience.
13. Is there anything else you would like to say about single parent discrimination in the UK? *[Answer options: open text box].*
14. Did you know that married people are protected in the UK Equality Act, 2010 and that single parents/ single people are not? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Not sure].*
15. Do you think that single parents should be given equality within the Equality Act alongside married people? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
16. If you are willing for us to contact you about your answers, or to get more involved in the campaign, please provide your email below and press submit. If you do not want to share your email address, please leave blank and press submit so your answers are saved. *[Answer options: open text box].*

Questions for non-single parents

1. Your data will be used to better understand levels of discrimination towards single parents in the UK and shared with MPs and the media to raise awareness. Any personal details will be anonymised unless you give consent otherwise. The data you provide will be stored confidentially in accordance with GDPR and no identifying information will be shared with a third party. You can withdraw your permission at any time by contacting the campaign on singleparentrights@gmail.com If you agree to the conditions outlined here please select 'I agree' below, if you do not agree you will be taken out of the survey. Thank you for your time. *[Answer options: I agree to the conditions outlined above, I do not agree with the conditions outlined above (you will not be able to proceed with the survey)].*
2. Which part of the UK do you live in? *[Answer options: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland].*
3. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Rather not say].*
4. Which gender identity do you identify as? *[Answer options: Female, Male, Non-binary/ third gender, Rather not say].*
5. How would you describe your ethnicity? *[Answer options: White, Black, Mixed, Asian, Other (including Arab)].*
6. What is your annual household income? *[Answer options: Below £15,000, £15,001 - £25,000, £25,001 - £35,000, £35,001 - £45,000, £45,001 - £55,000, £55,001 - £65,000, Over £65,000].*
7. Are you, or have you ever been, a single parent? For the purposes of this survey a single parent is described as a parent/ carer who is solely responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and well-being of a child(ren) when that child is in their care (i.e. this includes single parents who co-parent with the child's other parent). *[Yes, I am currently a single parent, Yes, I am a former single parent, No, I have never been a single parent].*
8. Do you think that single parents in the UK experience unfair treatment/ discrimination due to being single parents? i.e. they experience unfair treatment because of their single parent status. *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
9. Have you ever witnessed a single parent(s) in the UK being treated unfairly/ discriminated against due to their status as a single parent? i.e. it was because they were a single parent that they were treated unfairly. *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
10. What forms of unfair treatment/ discrimination did you witness the single parent(s) experience (tick all that apply)? *[Answer options: Access to housing; Recruitment i.e. applying for/ being interviewed for employment; Workplace e.g. promotion or development; Selection for redundancy/ dismissal; Children's education e.g. school/ nursery/ college; Social services; Health; Government benefits e.g. universal credit, child benefit etc.; Accessing support and adaptations for your child with disabilities; Covid lockdown rules; Access to finance e.g. mortgages, loans, etc.; Fees and charges e.g. tourist attractions, family holidays etc.; Other].*
11. Please describe the unfair treatment/ discrimination you witnessed the single parent(s) experience.
12. Is there anything else you would like to say about single parent discrimination in the UK? *[Answer options: open text box].*
13. Did you know that married people are protected in the UK Equality Act, 2010 and that single parents/ single people are not? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Not sure].*
14. Do you think that single parents should be given equality within the Equality Act alongside married people? *[Answer options: Yes, No, Maybe].*
15. If you are willing for us to contact you about your answers, or to get more involved in the campaign, please provide your email below and press submit. If you do not want to share your email address, please leave blank and press submit so your answers are saved. *[Answer options: open text box].*

Appendix 2: List of organisations that shared the survey

Amicable	Aple Collective
Asian Single Parents Network	Barking and Dagenham CVS
Career Mums	Children England
Children Scotland	Citizens Advice
Clean slate training and employment	Connect4
Dads Unlimited	Divorced Parents
Edinburgh Women's Aid	Equality Network
Family Gateway	Frolo
Global Equality Collective	Happity
HeadStart Blackpool	Independent Mothers
Kids come First	Leed's Dads
Mush	Neesie
One Parent Families, Scotland	Only Mums and Only Dads
Owls Group	Parenthood Matters
Poverty 2 Solutions	Race on the Agenda
Shakti Women's Aid	Single Mums Business Network
Single Parents on Holiday	Single Parent Support and Advice Services
Single Parents Wellbeing	Small Change UK
Solace Women's Aid	Talented Mums
The Childhood Trust	The Gender and Development Network
Thrive Teesside	Voice 4 Change England
Widowed and Young	Working Families
Young Women's Trust	

Appendix 3: List of Images, Tables, and Charts

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Appendix 5: Single Parent Inclusive HR Policies

There are 2.9 million single parents in the UK with 70% employed outside the home. Single parents are a valuable asset to all teams, and the motherhood advantage⁸⁹ can be seen time and again in single parents work ethic, from determination and multitasking, to motivation and efficiency. The policies outlined below are designed to help your employees be the best they can be, while enabling your organisation to succeed.

Flexible work

- Make all roles flexible by default and advertise them with flexible working opportunities
- Allow employees to request flexible working at any point in their career and work together constructively to find staffing solutions that fit employees' availability
- Prioritise flexible working requests from single parents

Parental leave

- Provide paid parental leave and give single parents a higher entitlement
- Have a flexible approach to the criteria for parental leave days e.g., allow reasons beyond illness such as court cases and social services

Professional development

- Where possible ensure professional development opportunities are within core working hours
- Establish a single parent mentoring scheme/prioritise single parents alongside other marginalised groups in existing mentoring schemes and hold sessions within core working hours
- Map and promote potential 'progression pathways' for staff, including those on lower-level roles/ part-time hours

Wellbeing

- Prioritise single parents in wellbeing services
- Establish a single parent staff support group

Childcare

- Reimburse childcare costs single parents might incur for activities outside core hours
- Have an SLA outlining a reasonable notification period for employees to participate in work related activities outside core hours e.g., overtime, professional development opportunities

Diversity and inclusion

- Include single parents as a core group alongside protected characteristics within the diversity and inclusion strategy and staff training
- Add single parent as a category on staff monitoring data and staff surveys so the impact of policies, practices and culture on single parents can be monitored and addressed as necessary
- Provide mandatory training for managers on supporting single parent employees

Pensions

- Where single parents are not eligible for auto-enrolment, encourage single parents to opt in and provide a minimum of 3% employer contribution even when earnings are below £10,000 per annum

Maternity

- Provide longer paid maternity/ adoption leave to compensate for the absence of any paid paternity leave
- Support single parents/ single adults undergoing fertility treatment/ adoption process by allowing time off for appointments

⁸⁹ <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/06/the-motherhood-advantage-the-evidence-suggests-that-becoming-a-mother-makes-women-better-not-worse-at-work.html>

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