

Achieving Equality for Single Parents – Information for Individuals



Single Parents in the UK

There are 2.9 million single parents in the UKⁱ, accounting for one in four parents. Around one third of parents experience some period of single parentingⁱⁱ, some through choice via adoption or donor conception, but far more through often challenging circumstances.

The average age of the single parent is 39 years and almost 70% of single parents are employedⁱⁱⁱ. Despite this, a third of children in working single parent homes live in poverty^{iv} and almost 30% (double that of coupled parents) report mental health concerns^v.

The Problem

Single parents face discrimination throughout their daily lives, from the workplace to accessing housing. This has knock on effects for them, their children and society as a whole.

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 aren't encouraged to proactively consider how they treat single parents and where unfair treatment occurs, it cannot be legally challenged.

Many single parents face multiple discrimination given 90% are women^{vi}, around 27% live with a disability^{vii} (compared with 21% of couple parent households), and black and mixed ethnicities communities have higher numbers of single parents^{viii} compared with white communities.

Discrimination towards single parents occurs in:

- the workplace when it comes to recruitment, professional development and promotion^{ix};
- housing, specifically accessing private rental properties especially for those reliant on housing benefit^x;
- child benefit calculations: a couple earning £98,000 combined will receive full child benefit for one child, whilst a single parent on £60,000 will receive no child benefit for two children;
- childcare vouchers with couples able to access double the amount of vouchers where both are working, regardless of the actual amount they spend on childcare;
- universal credit childcare payments^{xi};
- support and adaptations required for a disabled child to live safely in both homes where parents share care, see Pete's story in Single Parents Campaigning for Change^{xii};
- entrance fees at tourist attractions are often higher per person for single parent families than couple families^{xiii}. At the National Trust single parents pay 25% more per adult;
- membership fees e.g. for birthing/ parenting classes where the second parent in a couple is often 'free';
- inheritance tax with the child(ren) of a couple essentially have double the threshold compared to the child(ren) of a single parent;
- the cost of holidays^{xiv}; and
- government and business policies and rules during the Coronavirus lockdown 2020^{xv}.

This discrimination impedes single parents' ability to improve their own lives, preventing them from accessing housing, jobs and other services, and results in single parents spending time fighting these challenges rather than focusing on contributing to their family and life and society more broadly.

The Solution

We are calling on the UK government to add single parents as a tenth characteristic to the Equality Act.

The Benefits of This Law Change

- greater single parent employment for those applying for roles;
- better working conditions, professional support and career development for those in employment;
- reduced reliance on government benefits;
- greater disposable income for single parents to spend in society;
- more stable and decent housing for single parent families;
- better mental health for single parents;
- lower poverty levels for children of single parents; and
- better outcomes for the children of single parents.

Who We Are

A group of single parents campaigning against the discrimination we face, supported by Single Parents Wellbeing, Single Parents Support and Advice Services, Asian Single Parents Network, One Parent Families Scotland, Save the Children, UK, The Childhood Trust, Parenthood Matters, Single Mums Business Network, Frolo, Single Parents on Holiday, Amicable, Happy and Mush.

How Can I Support the Campaign?

- sign and share the petition: <http://chnng.it/FhdrG6bVp2>
- write to your MP (for a draft letter see <http://www.ellamentalmama.com/single-parent-rights>)
- complete the single parent discrimination survey and share with other single parents: <https://tinyurl.com/SingleParentDiscrimination>

How Can I Learn More About the Campaign?

For more information on the campaign go to: <http://www.ellamentalmama.com/single-parent-rights/> or email us on singleparentrights@gmail.com

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www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2019

ii www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.812161!/file/Sheffield_Solutions_Modern_Families.pdf

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

iv www.itv.com/news/2018-02-21/poverty-report-single-parent-families

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

vi www.statista.com/statistics/281640/lone-parent-families-in-the-united-kingdom-uk-by-gender/

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

viii www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/families-and-households/latest#ethnic-groups-by-household-type

ix www.kentonline.co.uk/herne-bay/news/single-mum-wins-sex-discrimination-15639/

x www.mirror.co.uk/money/single-mum-wins-huge-case-22348952

xi www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/universal-credit-childcare-rules-could-discriminate-against-women

xii inews.co.uk/opinion/single-parents-rights-lockdown-campaign-582986

xiii www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jul/05/revealed-hidden-costs-of-a-day-out-for-single-parent-families

xiv www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/holiday-firms-charging-single-parent-12869842

xv www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/coronavirus-lockdown-single-parents_uk_5e8c8175c5b62459a92f4e1e