

Single Parent Discrimination Research

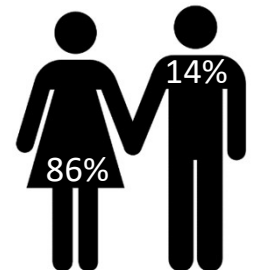
Background

There are 2.9 million single parents in the UK. 86% of single parents are women and 27% of single parents are living with a disability.

Evidence shows that single parents disproportionately live in poverty, have insecure and low-paid employment and face poorer mental health. Despite 70% of single parents being in paid employment, single parent homes have seen the fastest growth in poverty in recent years. 49% of children in single parent homes live in poverty, compared with 28% of children in homes with two parents. While 29% of single parents report problems with their mental wellbeing.

Despite the specific vulnerabilities and challenges single parents face, single parents are doing an incredible job. Recent research shows children raised in single parent families have positive identities and strong peer relationships, both critical for success in later life.

2.9 million



49% of children in single parent homes live in poverty

The Research

Identifying a lack of research into single parent discrimination, the Single Parent Rights' campaign - which was launched in 2020 - undertook a piece of research late that year into single parents' views and experiences of single parent discrimination. The report with the full research findings and complete recommendations is available to download from www.singleparentrights.org

The research centred around an online survey with open and closed questions, and follow up discussions with 24 single parents. Where the data has been analysed in the report and is reported to be highly significant, this means it was significant at the 5% level or above on a Chi-squared test. All names and identifying information have been changed/ removed to protect the identities of those involved.

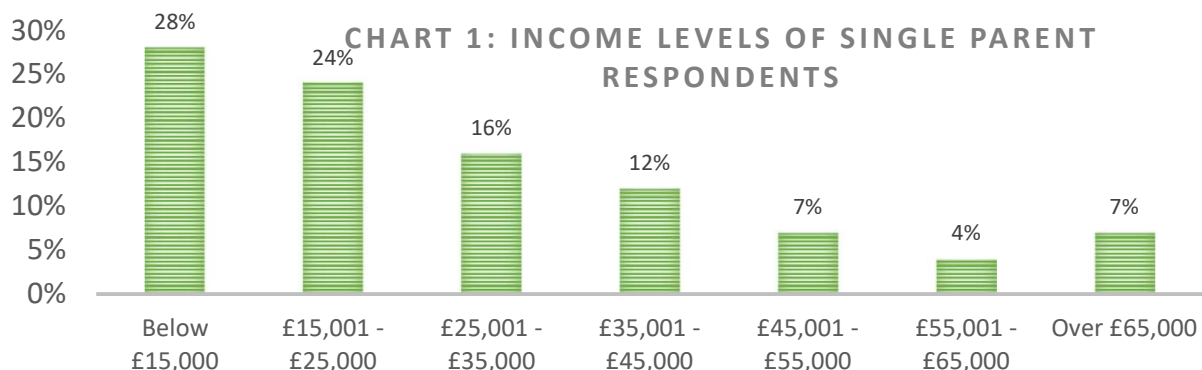
The survey was promoted through 350+ organisations and hundreds of influencers on social media. It received 1146 responses (1083 of whom were single parents).

The breakdown of respondents by nation were; 9% from Scotland, 10% from Wales and 81% from England.

11% of respondents were living with a disability, while 87% were not, the remaining 2% was made up of rather not say and did not answer.

95% of respondents were female and 3% were male, while the remaining 2% selected the option 'rather not say' or 'gender binary' on the survey, or chose not to answer.

90% of respondents were from a white background and 10% were from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.



Single Parent Discrimination

80% of single parents reported experiencing discrimination, including 16% who reported maybe and subsequently went on to provide details of the discrimination. When this figure is combined with those who had not experienced discrimination but believed it to exist or maybe exist, 96% of respondents reported this. Leaving only 4% of single parents stating that single parent discrimination had not impacted them or other single parents they knew.

Prejudice, institutional bias, and a lack of legal protections created an environment marked by distrust and disrespect for single parents, creating second-class citizens.

Key areas of single parent discrimination were: fees and charges, employment, Covid-19 restrictions, finance, benefits and housing (see chart 3). The findings in each of these areas are discussed below.

CHART 2: REPORTED LEVELS OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION

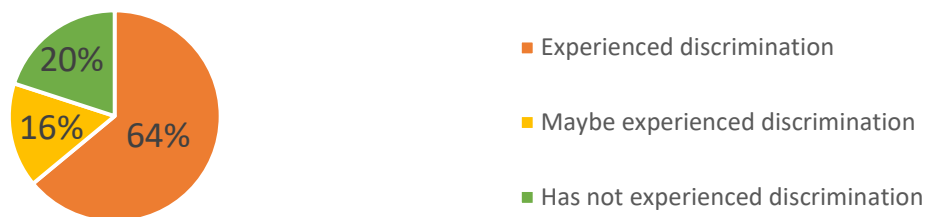
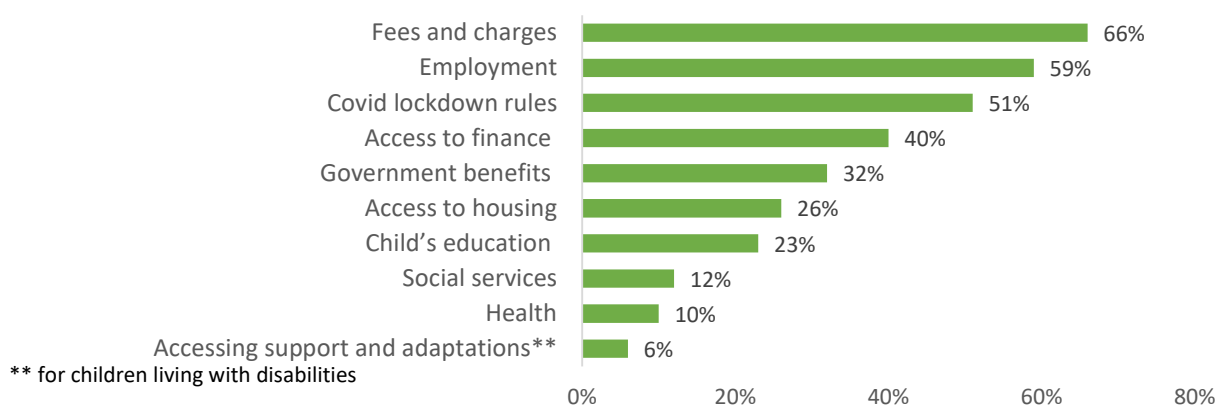


CHART 3: AREAS OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION



Fees and Charges (reported by 66% of single parents)

The lack of single parent family deals in services, holidays and tourist attractions was highlighted as discriminatory with single parent families almost always paying more per head than coupled families e.g. National Trust, health insurance, etc. Promotional materials also lacked consideration of single parent customers. Single parents want single parent family deals available alongside 2-parent family deals and to be represented in marketing materials and an end to single parents effectively subsidising discounts only accessible to 2-parent families. .

Employment (reported by 59% of single parents)

Three key discriminatory issues were identified within single parent employment. Single parents were subject to negative stereotypes and prejudice within the workplace and during job recruitment processes. Single parents found assumptions were made about their circumstances and availability – often incorrectly – without discussions involving them. A lack of support or flexibility for single parents was also highlighted.

These factors led to numerous challenges in the workplace including, single parents being denied opportunities e.g., new roles, travel, overtime, professional development and bonuses. Single parents were pushed out of their job and made redundant (8% specifically reported being made redundant due to discriminatory practices within their workplace). Single parents were denied flexible working opportunities compared with coupled parents. Single parents were found to have a high risk of burn out due to the discrimination they faced. And ultimately, single parents were unable to access decent, flexible work and often ended up working in poorly paid, part-time jobs below their level of experience/ qualifications meaning a loss of output for the employer and additional burdens placed on the state.

Case Study: 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 Restrictions (reported by 51% of single parents)

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted to many single parents the institutional bias towards two-parent families and the assumptions that parents had a partner to rely on throughout the crisis. Furthermore, the discrimination which impacted single parents throughout normal life, was heightened during this time. This led to a number of discriminatory experiences for single parents throughout the pandemic as outlined below. This discrimination resulted in single parents facing significant negative impact on their finances, careers and mental health.

Single parents were refused furlough or flexible working requests during lockdown/ closures of childcare and schools, and struggled to manage childcare and work simultaneously. Some reported fearing their young children were in danger as they were unable to pay full attention to them whilst carrying out their working duties from home. Some single parents lost their jobs/ hours due to childcare issues.

The restrictions placed on individual movements during the pandemic did not take into account single parents. The support bubbles were only introduced more than 11 weeks after the lockdown was first imposed. This left single parents feeling very isolated. Furthermore, single parents with children who could not be left at home alone were excluded from the plus one, outdoor meet up rule.

Shops, especially at the start of the pandemic, did not cater for single parents and some refused entry to single parents who had their child(ren) with them. Some medical institutions also did not take into account restrictions placed on single parents and some single parents reported challenges in accessing medical support due to this.

Single parent views on Covid restrictions

“The covid lockdown left me completely isolated (even more so than single parenthood already does) for months.”

“The way we are being treated during lockdown feels emblematic of how we are thought of generally: an inconvenient part of society that the government would like to forget.”

“I found lock down very hard. The constant pressure of doing everything while feeling I was doing nothing well: not able to do my job properly, but also not home schooling adequately, and as a consequence not parenting in my usual style and standard...Suddenly becoming your child's teacher (rather than parent) is a big change for a young child. It changes the dynamic of your relationship. When there are 2 parents, that can be managed more easily - not least in giving the parent who is having to do the teaching some moral backup. For single parents, that is all on them. I received no input from school to assist. We were completely ignored the entire period.”

Access to finances (reported by 40% of single parents)

Single parents are excluded from finance products including mortgages, credit cards and store cards. This means single parents are unable to secure the best deals and paying higher interest rates. The risk appetite of lenders is significantly reduced when a prospective borrower is a single parent however, the secrecy behind mortgage algorithms means it is hard to monitor the level of this exclusion and the resulting discrimination.

Single parent views on access to finances

"[My] 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."

"My mortgage advisor made it very clear that being a single mum would mean I would need more than double a deposit."

Government benefits and the tax system (reported by 32% of single parents)

Government benefits was seen as an area of discrimination across all single parent income levels.

The benefit rates for single parent families were considered too low to survive on in comparison with benefit rates for coupled households.

Single parents reported benefits staff lacking understanding their needs and treating them disrespectfully.

Those on higher incomes highlighted that the threshold for child benefit discriminates against single parents as a single parent family will have their child benefit removed once their income hits £50,000 whilst for a family with two parents each parent has this entitlement meaning in theory they can earn up to £100,000 as a household before losing child benefit.

Financial support for childcare was seen as discriminatory with childcare vouchers and taxfree childcare schemes favouring coupled families. Single parent registered carers were also excluded from accessing the thirty hours free childcare for 3-year olds which coupled parents can qualify for.

Inheritance tax was highlighted as favouring coupled families. While single parents were excluded from the marriage tax allowance.

Single parent views on government benefits

"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."

"Paying into the childcare voucher scheme I was limited to just pay in 1 amount per month, whilst colleagues in a couple could pay in double and get double the amount tax free."

Housing (reported by 26% of single parents)

Discrimination within access to housing was widespread, and this figure is likely to have been substantially higher in those who were private renters as opposed to home owners. The research found that single parents were denied rental properties due to being a single parent and due to claiming housing benefit.

The result of this was single parents facing disruptions due to house moves and single parent families living in overpriced unsuitable, poor quality, overcrowded housing in 'rougher' neighbourhoods with knock on effects to accessing public services and decent education. One single parent reported being exploited by a landlord who asked for 'extras' when raising the rent to unmanageable levels.

Non-Resident Parents with overnight care faced specific issues. Including being denied social housing/ housing benefit reflective of their child(ren) and being charged the bedroom tax for their child(ren)'s room(s).

Case Study: 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 inadequate housing places on families like his own.

Case Study: Tracey - ‘Estate agents think single mums aren’t reliable tenants’

When Tracey, then aged 34, 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 with her two children – her daughter who was then 7 years old and her son who was 5 years. 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 the property.”

Case Study: Sally - An ‘unreliable’ London tenant

Sally, a single mum with one child, faced challenges when she tried to move home in North London, an area where she’d been an active member of her community for many years. At the time Sally approached nearly every letting agent in the area, but was met with rebuttal after rebuttal.

Eventually Sally thought she’d met an agent who looked on her kindly and took her to see a flat. The flat was in disarray, with cigarette butts on every window ledge. When Sally expressed her frustration, he explained that no one would be willing to take on a single parent, even though she had her parents as guarantors.

Sally was told that it would make no business sense to rent to her when there was a high demand from ‘reliable’ tenants. It was suggested that she look further out of London, despite the disruption this would have caused to her and her son’s lives.

“I felt very much like I wasn’t valued and like I had no place there,” says Sally. “It’s an expensive area, but we were big contributors to the community.

“I had painted a mural for the local school for free, and was involved with a lot of community projects, including helping small businesses get off their feet. But on paper I was clearly an unreliable option.”

The Impact of Discrimination

The impact from the single parent discrimination was wide reaching both on single parents and their children. 100% of single parents reported a negative impact on themselves from the discrimination and 73% reported a negative impact on their child(ren) from the discrimination. Charts 4 and 5 show what areas this impact occurred in.

CHART 4: IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION ON SINGLE PARENTS

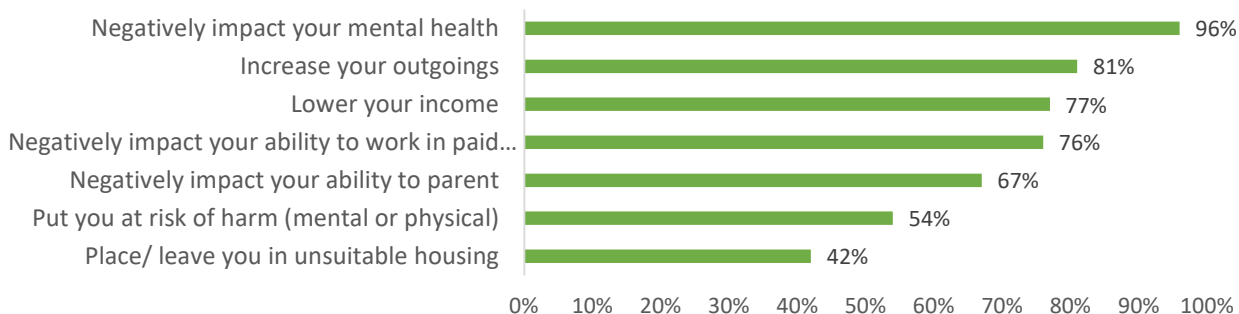
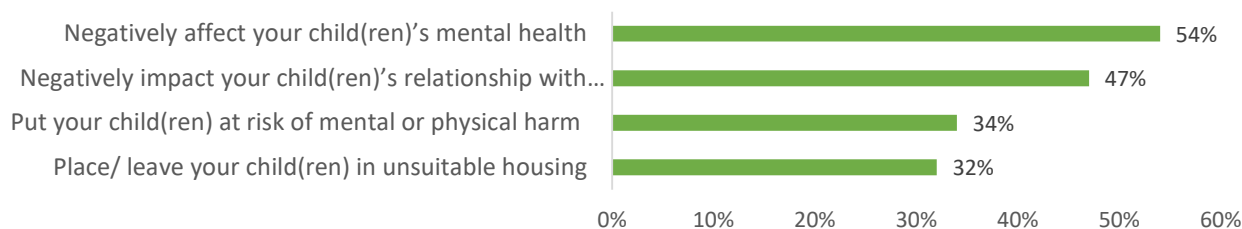


CHART 5: AREA OF IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION ON CHILDREN



Case Study: 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 including rental agencies refusing to rent to her. 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. *“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.”*

Intersectionality and Discrimination

Certain characteristics were shown to affect the level of discrimination single parents faced and the level of impact from the discrimination. Single parents on a lower income (below £25,000), from a BAME background, living with a disability, and those who were young single parents experienced heightened discrimination and/ or heightened impact from discrimination. Given these groups were underrepresented in the research sample, a more representative sample would reveal single parent discrimination occurs at even greater rates than identified here and with greater impacts.

Income levels and single parent discrimination

Charts 6 and 7 show that those on lower incomes, both below £15,000 and £15,000-£25,000, were more likely to experience discrimination and were more likely to experience a negative impact from that discrimination on themselves and on their child(ren). A 'negative impact' was considered to be where the respondent reported an average, or above, impact score. There is also a spike in experience of discrimination in the £55,000-£65,000 income level which may reflect the impact of this group being excluded from child benefit entitlements. This is also likely to explain the spike in the impact on the child at that income level given child benefit is intended to be spent on the child.

CHART 6: INCOME LEVELS vs SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION

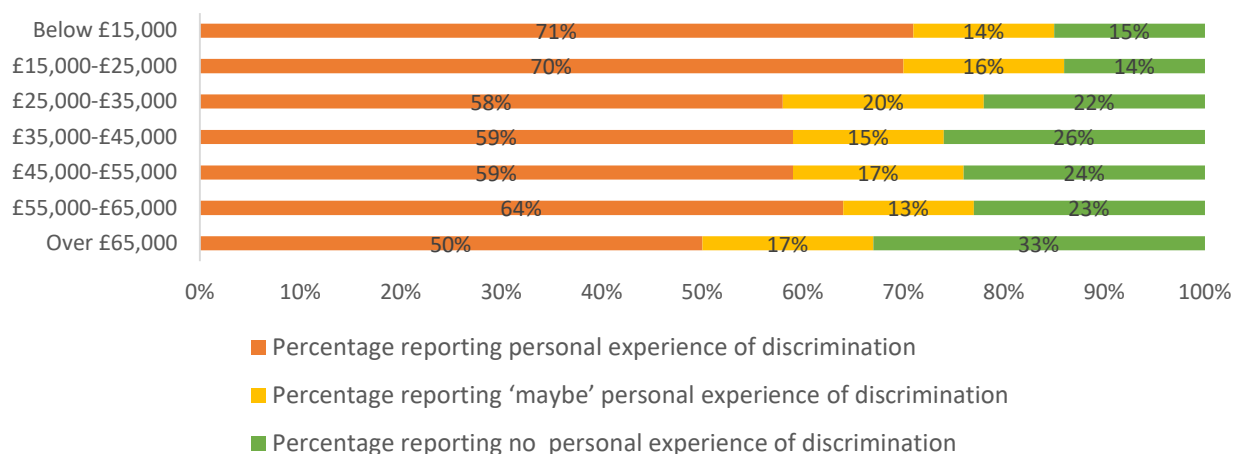
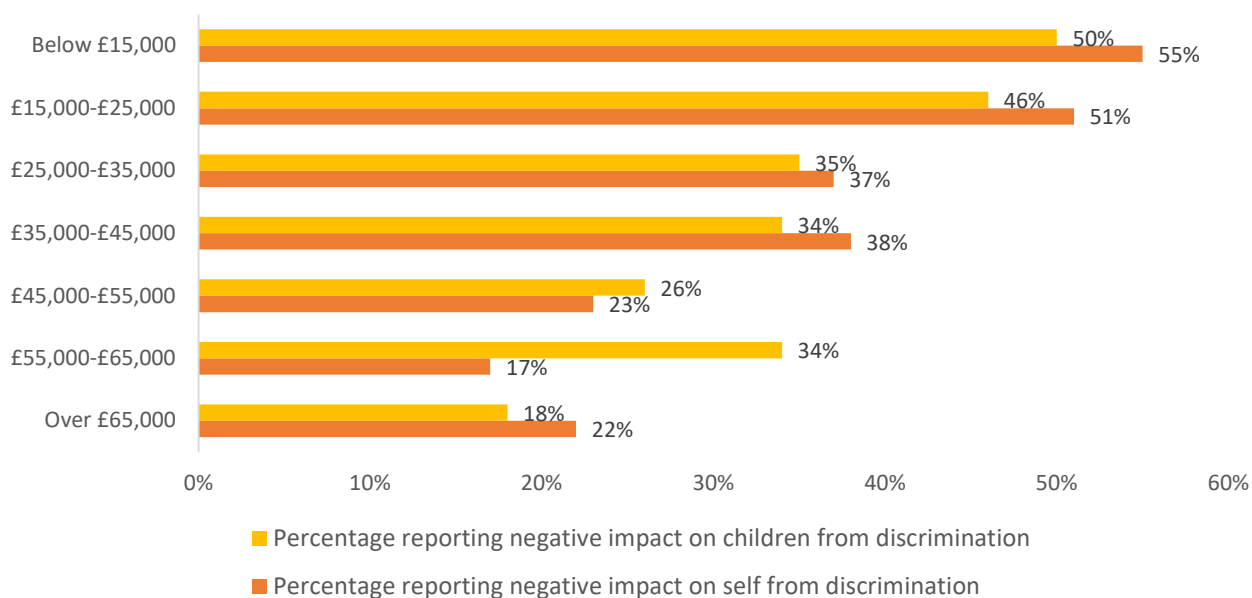


CHART 7: INCOME LEVELS vs IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION



Single parent views on intersectionality and single parent discrimination

"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."

"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!"

"[The discrimination was] partly heightened due to disability...systems are generally not designed with people with neurodiversity, or single parents in mind, so on these two counts, plus being female, I end up naturally disadvantaged to an extent."

"Not only do I look very young for my age but I also have a range of mental health conditions which I am extremely high functioning despite of. These two factors add yet more challenges to the already stigmatised role I hold as a single parent."

"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."

"My gender, sexuality, beliefs and marital status heightened the discrimination I faced."

"I was a young [single] mum and often the attitudes of schools was quite judgemental and condescending that I felt was due to my age."

Ethnicity and single parent discrimination

Chart 8 shows that 74% of respondents from BAME backgrounds compared with 63% of respondents from white backgrounds, reported discrimination.

The impact on single parents from a BAME background and their child(ren) was also heightened (see chart 9). The difference in the impact on the child(ren) was highly significant. A 'negative impact' was considered to be where the respondent reported an average, or above, impact score.

The open responses highlighted that the ethnicity of a single parent did impact their experiences of discrimination, with those from BAME highlighting that it heightened the discrimination, and some single parents from white backgrounds acknowledging that their ethnicity protected them from greater discrimination.

CHART 8: ETHNICITY vs SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION

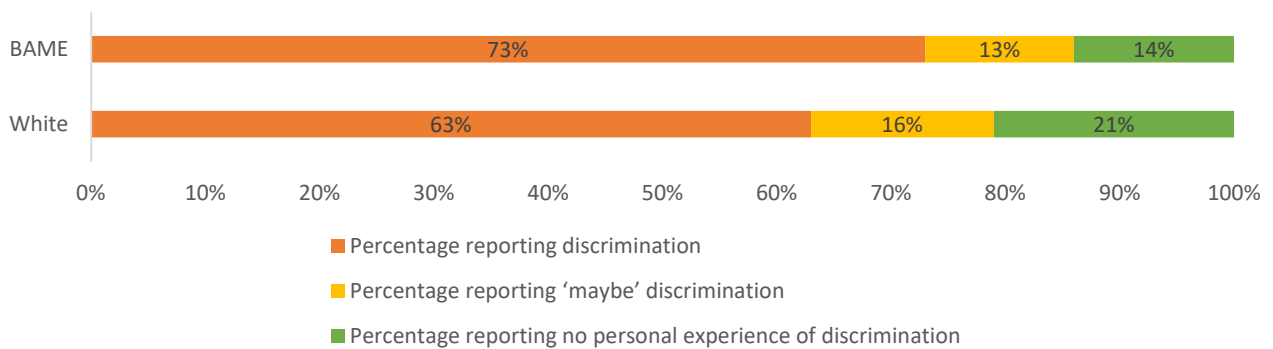
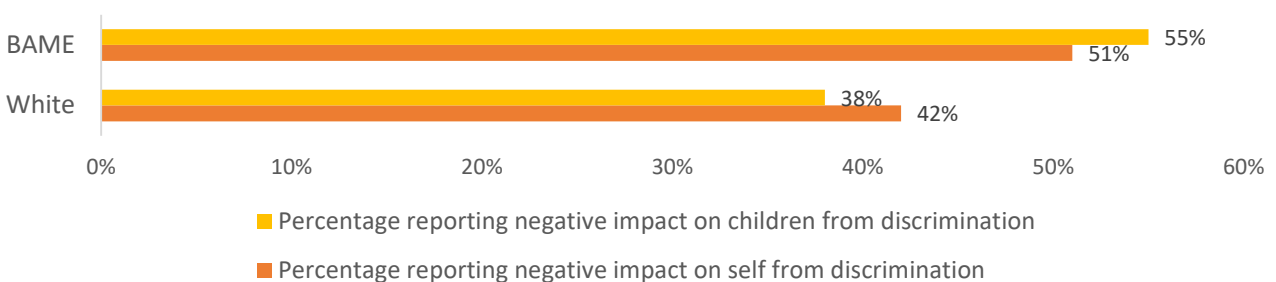


CHART 9: ETHNICITY vs IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION



Case Study: 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."

Living with a disability and single parent discrimination

Chart 10 shows that 80% of those living with a disability reported experiencing discrimination, compared with 63% of those not living with a disability. Chart 11 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%). A 'negative impact' was considered to be where the respondent reported an average, or above, impact score. Both these differences were highly significant differences. In combination with the open responses provided by respondents we can be confident that living with a disability heightens an individual's experience of single parent discrimination.

CHART 10: LIVING WITH A DISABILITY vs SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION

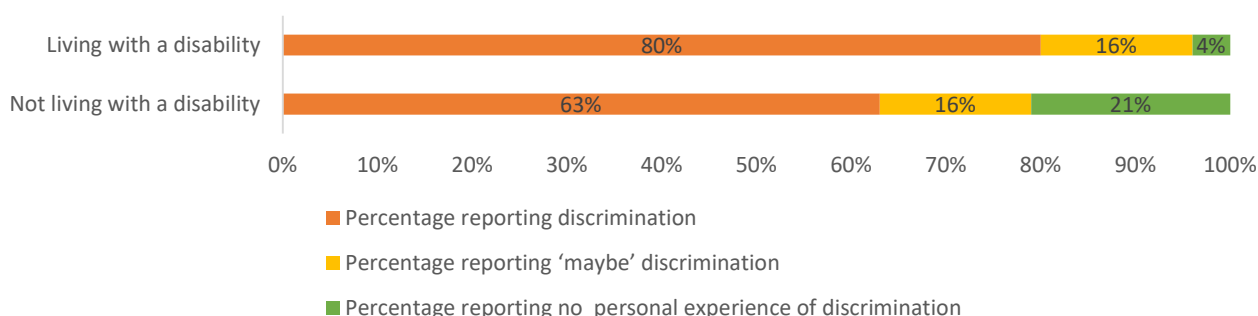
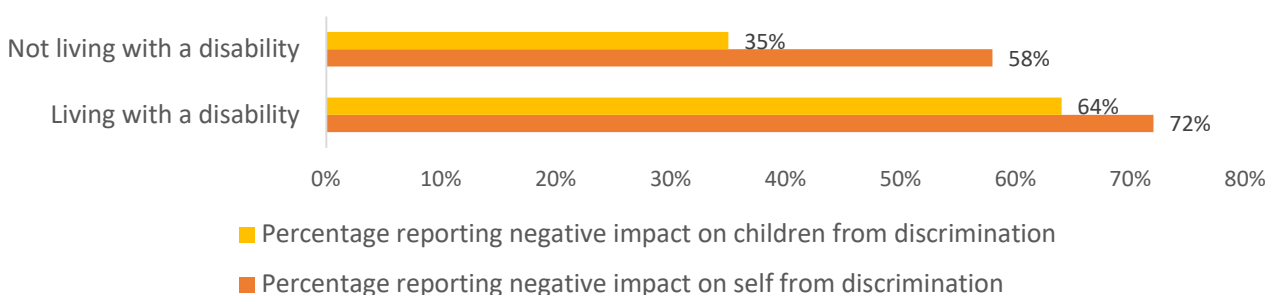


CHART 11: LIVING WITH A DISABILITY vs IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION



Case Study No. 15: 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.”*

Gender and single parent discrimination

Chart 12 shows little difference between experiences of discrimination due to gender (females reported discrimination at 64% whilst males reported it at 68%). However, the impact on the single parent was slightly more divergent between males and females (51% for males, compared with 42% for females). While the impact on the child(ren) showed a greater divergence still, 57% of males reporting a negative impact on their child(ren), compared with 39% for females, a highly significant difference. A ‘negative impact’ was considered to be where the respondent reported an average, or above, impact score.

The open responses from single parents give some explanation for this difference. Single fathers, who tended to be Non-Resident Parents, felt that the discrimination impacted their contact with their child(ren) and as such had a large impact on their ability to parent. Case study number 16 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.

However, the low numbers of male respondents (3% of all single parent respondents, n=43) 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.”*

CHART 12: GENDER vs SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION

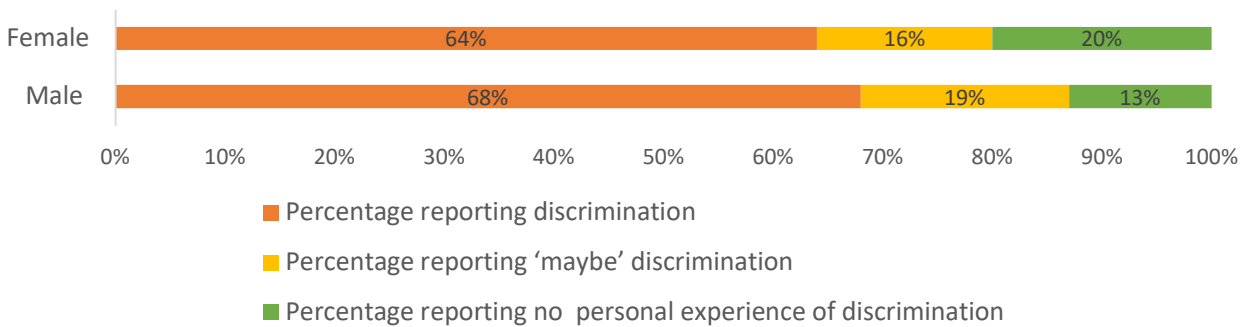
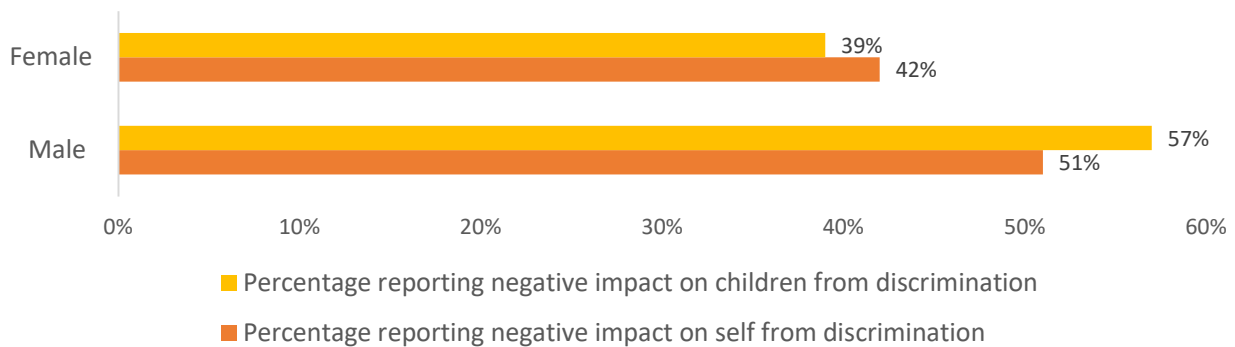


CHART 13: GENDER vs IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION



Case Study: 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), Dave 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.”

Single parent views on sexism and single parent discrimination

“[The discrimination I faced was heightened] due to me being female and that according to some managers in the workplace, that meant that my primary role was as a mother and carer.”

“I believe being a single mother has heightened my experience of unfair treatment. In my experience men get promoted when they have children, women do not.”

“There is still a perception in some workplaces that working mothers should be grateful to be allowed to be work at all and that they need to put in extra time in order to be taken seriously.”

Another Way Is Possible



Word cloud image of single parents responses around the positives of single parenting.

The positives of single parenting

The research identified some of the positives of single parenting. Single parents viewed themselves, and were viewed as, determined, tenacious, strong, hard working and active members of the community, who were trying to better their lives for their children. Single parents also found single parenting brought out their strengths, some talked about getting involved in campaigning for change, teaching their children important life lessons and breaking down negative stigma.

The factors identified as supporting single parents to thrive were, supportive friends and family, supportive employers, single parent support networks, saving financial resources/ own home and 'luck'.

What single parents want

Many single parents talked about the kinds of changes they wanted enacted to help end single parent discrimination. This included, 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 and an end to stigma and judgement of single parents.

Case study: Emma - 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."*

Single parent views on the positives of single parenting

"I keep reminding myself that if you look at the same story [of Marcus Rashford and FSMs] the hero is Marcus's mum too. She raised that kid. In poverty. She helped him chase his dreams. Single mums rock."

"I'm a better parent doing it solo."

"Some of the most empowered, enlightened people I know are single parents."

"I have managed to complete a degree in forensic psychology and secure a job as a trainee social worker, this is despite the discrimination I have received as a single parent."

"My manager has been really understanding and actually praises me for juggling everything."

Single Parents and the Equality Act

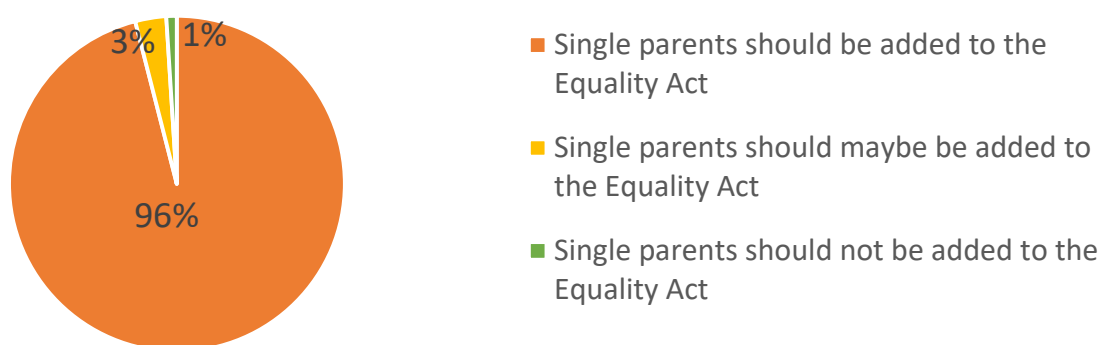
Equality Act

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.

Single parents and the Equality Act

The research found that 27% of single parent respondents were aware that being married or in a civil partnership was a protected status in the Equality Act. Chart 14 shows 96% of single parent respondents wanted single parents added to the Equality Act as a protected characteristic, while another 3% thought they should 'maybe' be added to the Act.

CHART 14: SINGLE PARENTS VIEWS ON THE EQUALITY ACT



The Single Parent Rights campaign to add single parents to the Equality Act

This research shows that single parents faced discrimination in numerous areas of life. Adding single parents as a protected characteristic to the equality act would bring many benefits: 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; fairer access to government benefits and tax allowances; 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.

Single Parent Rights are campaigning to add single parents as a protected characteristic to the equality act. You can find out more about the campaign and take action at www.singleparentrights.org

Single parent views on the Equality Act

"Single parent discrimination needs to be formally recognised in the UK with adequate support given to ensure the same opportunities for housing, support, employment and career progression are given."

"Discrimination against single parents is rampant and leaves us constantly in a vulnerable state."

"Single parent discrimination seems more acceptable than some other forms of discrimination to people."

"In England there are no agencies to help, no laws to prevent inequality/ abuse toward lone parents/ children of lone parents 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."

Conclusion and Recommendations

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. 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 discrimination with 96% either experiencing it themselves or identifying its existence (1). 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 single parents 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 poverty. Without widespread policy change, single parents will continue to be at the mercy of discriminatory landlords, face unfair pricing structures, tax systems and government benefits, and remain in insecure, low paid employment with little opportunity for professional development.

We have outlined a three-pronged approach to ending single parent discrimination which requires the coming together of policymakers, businesses, the media, and wider society. 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. 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 to 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. Together, the UK can empower its 2.9 million single parents to live fulfilling lives for the benefit of all.

Our three-pronged approach to ending single parent discrimination.

1. Add single parents as a protected characteristic to the Equality Act
2. Address the prejudice and stigma towards single parent families, broaden the definition of family and promote positive narratives of single parent families.
3. Tackle sector specific single parent discrimination, specifically:
 - Ensure fees and charges are inclusive for single parent families
 - Create flexible employment and affordable childcare for single parents
 - Consider single parents in the Coronavirus pandemic restrictions
 - Give the Financial Conduct Authority statutory authority over monitoring and addressing lenders' financial inclusion and includes single parent borrowers within this
 - Ensure government benefits, the Child Maintenance Service, pensions and the tax system, support single parent families and their children
 - Ensure the housing sector protects single parents from discrimination

The full recommendations are outlined in the full report, available at www.singleparentrights.org

(1). Figures breakdown: 80% is made up of 64% reporting discrimination and 16% reporting 'maybe', all of whom went on to provide details of the discrimination which had occurred. 96% is made up of the 80% plus a further 16% who – although they had not experienced discrimination themselves, reported they had identified or had 'maybe' identified single parent discrimination.

SINGLE PARENT DISCRIMINATION:
REALITIES AND THE WAY FORWARD
SUMMARY REPORT

WITH THANKS TO ALL THE
VOLUNTEERS AND
ORGANISATIONS THAT MADE THIS
RESEARCH POSSIBLE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE
WWW.SINGLEPARENTRIGHTS.ORG



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SINGLE PARENT RIGHTS