

Submission by FNF-Both Parents Matter Cymru

to Women & Equalities Committee, HoC

Call for Evidence

re: Coronavirus and the impact on people with protected characteristics

Submitted by Richard Bradford (Trustee-elect)

Issue & Evidence

- Disproportionately impacted protected characteristic: Sex (Male);
- Adverse impact: cessation of childcare arrangements in place prior to the “lockdown”;
- Salient finding: 52.9% of respondents to our UK-wide survey now have no contact or only indirect (electronic) contact with their children compared to 13.6% before the “lockdown”. (The survey was open to all, not confined to our service-users).
- Only 24.4% of respondents report that childcare arrangements remain mostly unchanged.
- 92% of non-resident parents are men.

Background

One of the many issues which arise during the Covid-19 “lockdown” is that of parents living apart, and the movement of children between two different domiciles where such arrangements were in place prior to the lockdown.

The Government has issued guidance on this matter, and the President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane, has reiterated the main point, which is this,

*“Where parents do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents’ homes. This establishes an exception to the mandatory ‘stay at home’ requirement; it does not, however, mean that children **must** be moved between homes.”* (emphasis as in the original).

Our survey has examined what is occurring in practice.

About FNF-Both Parents Matter Cymru

- We are an independent Welsh charity, registered since 2009.
- Our main business is support to non-resident parents and grandparents facing difficulties in maintaining involvement in their children’s lives following parental separation.
- We assist about 400 new service users per year, predominantly in Wales.
- About 92% of our service users are men (consistent with the national proportion of non-resident parents who are men).
- 51% of our service users are unemployed; 66% have an income less than £12,000 pa.
- 14% of our service users are disabled; 7% are BAME.

- Standard psychology tests indicate our clients score substantially lower than average on mental wellbeing; 40% of our service users score in the “severely lonely” range, compared with 5% of the general population.
- 15% of our service users report suicidality.
- Much of our service focuses on emotional support.
- 65% of our service users report domestic abuse. Of these, 36% score 14 or higher on the Safelives/DASH Risk Indicator Checklist, indicative of a MARAC level of risk.
- In view of the very high level of domestic abuse experienced by our service users we started a further service as a specialist provider of support to male victims of domestic abuse, including weekly drop-in facilities in Swansea and Neath.
- [NB: We do not climb on roofs in batman suits and never have, not least because our most active volunteers are grandmothers past retirement age].

Impact of “lockdown” on our services

- Contact with our clients is (was) primarily by face-to-face meetings via ten monthly meetings throughout Wales, plus the two weekly DV drop-ins in South Wales. All these have been stopped completely.
- Our one helpline is now very busy.
- Direct referral to us from solicitors was the single largest source of new clients prior to lockdown. The demand from this main source has doubled during lockdown.
- Much of the support to service users was provided by unpaid volunteers, especially as regards the essential emotional support. This element of support has moved to online channels and telephone, though this is a second-best arrangement and only a partial substitute for face-to-face meetings.
- Our services are now provided almost solely by our paid staff, of which we have less than 2 full time equivalents (servicing the whole of Wales).

Impact of “lockdown” on the service user population

We have conducted a UK-wide survey of child arrangements and how these have changed in the lockdown. The survey focusses on parents of children under 18 who do not live with them full-time, but the survey was otherwise open to any UK resident.

As of 28/4/20 we have 397 responses.

78% of respondents stated that they were aware of the detailed guidance issued by the UK Government about the care of children of separated parents during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

71% of respondents stated that they believed the other parent/carer was aware of the detailed guidance issued by the UK Government about the care of children of separated parents during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Detailed results are in the Appendix, below.

The most salient finding is that 52.9% of respondents now have no contact or only indirect (electronic) contact with their children compared to 13.6% before the “lockdown”.

Appendix (details of survey responses)

At 28/4/20: 397 responses

Respondents: 25% female; 75% male

87% of respondents have children under 18 who do not live with them full-time

78% of respondents stated that they were aware of the detailed guidance issued by the UK Government about the care of children of separated parents during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

71% of respondents stated that they believed the other parent/carer was aware of the detailed guidance issued by the UK Government about the care of children of separated parents during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Child arrangements before the Covid-19 “lockdown”

- For 64.5% of respondents their time with children was court ordered or via formal mediation;
- For 20.4% their time with children was informally agreed between parents/carers;
- 6.8% were seeing their children only when the main carer allowed, or as controlled by Children’s Services;
- 8.3% were not seeing their children.

Of four options, the best description of the respondents care of their children was,

- 18.1% were the main carer;
- 47.9% were not the main carer;
- 20.4% shared care roughly equally;
- 13.6% had no contact, or only indirect contact, with their children.

Child arrangements now, during the C-19 “lockdown”

- 14.1% I have more time with my child/ren than before
- 24.4% The previous arrangements have mostly remained the same
- 8.6% I have less time with my children
- 22.9% Now I only have INDIRECT contact eg Skype / phone etc
- 30.0% I have no time / contact with my children

66% of respondents do not agree with the arrangements for childcare that apply at present

Salient Point: 52.9% of respondents now have no contact or only indirect contact with their children compared to 13.6% before the “lockdown”.

This report to:-

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/94/unequal-impact-coronavirus-covid19-and-the-impact-on-people-with-protected-characteristics/>

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