

Study highlights the negative impact of benefit sanctions

by Graham Whitham

A major study launched last week confirmed what many of us already knew, benefit sanctions are an ineffective means of getting people into work and can have severe negative consequences for those they are used against. The [study](#), which brought together academics and researchers from several universities, tracked claimants over a five-year period and found that sanctions reduce people's motivation to search for work and hurt people mentally, physically and financially.

The findings run counter to government rhetoric which has argued greater conditionality has helped to push benefit claimants into employment. The study argues that where people have moved into work over recent years, it is much more likely to be the result of personalised employment support than sanctions. For people with complex needs or in particularly difficult situations (people with addictions or experiencing homelessness), sanctions act to push people out of the benefits system ('dropping out'). The consequence is people resorting to crime as a means of getting by and leaves them further removed from the help and support they need to move into employment and out of poverty.

The UK's social security system has long had elements of compliance and conditionality, but the intensity of these elements has increased considerably over the last six years. The use of sanctions has fallen from a peak in 2013/14 perhaps because of the growing realisation of the damaging impact of their use. However, despite the findings of the ESRC funded study, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) continues to argue that sanctions are an effective means of moving people into employment.

Many anti-poverty campaigners argued strongly against social security reforms during the first few years of this decade and have continued to do so. Campaigners warned of the consequences of an increasingly punitive and pernicious benefit sanctions regime. Those warnings weren't heeded by government, unfairly dismissed as the usual suspects making the same old arguments. As unresponsive as government may choose to be to the calls of campaigners, policy must be much more responsive to research and evidence. Now this study, sitting along other pieces of work, hammers home the failings of current policy and its findings must be responded to if the long-term goal is to support people into suitable and decent work and onto sustainable pathways out of poverty.



Graham Whitham

It is often said the UK leads the way when it comes to evidence and data about the population and our universities lead the way on various aspects of social policy. We have no shortage of knowledge and evidence, but for the potential of this expertise to be realised, central government policy needs to be much more evidence based and responsive when research findings highlight policy failings. If central government in Westminster won't heed this call, then we need think about what opportunities there are in Greater Manchester to develop evidence based social policy at a city regional level.



Penny's story

Penny's story demonstrates the importance of sustainable work as opposed to precarious work. Her community work also demonstrates how much people have to offer despite being in poverty.



Penny was born in Salford, and describes her early days, "We had no cots, the babies slept in wooden drawers. It was a big old Victorian house, which had half a roof, and the windows were missing. It was so cold you might have well been outside. We would burn anything we could just to keep warm. How we didn't set ourselves on fire I don't know."

Her family moved to Reddish in Stockport and she attended Reddish Vale High School. She didn't go to college, "Higher qualifications were never a thing for us. Going to college was unheard of unless you were wealthy", she says. Instead, Penny went into work straight from school. She packed cornflakes in "a big old Victorian mill, just by the Reddish bridge. A big local employer. My first wage packet was £43 after a week's work. I felt so rich it was unbelievable. But like much else, the factory doesn't exist anymore." She then worked for Adidas in another local factory, overlocking (sewing and cutting clothes). "I pushed myself really hard six days a week, fired up because we had grown up with nothing." Penny became Head Overlocker, training others and managing the apprenticeships.

Penny has a big smile, remembering her life at 30, when she had never had it so good. Money was plentiful, work was secure, and she was good at her job, respected and valued by her local working community. But then the Adidas warehouse closed and production moved to China. "Everything started unravelling for me. The Adidas warehouse was my home, and when it closed we all lost our livelihoods. When you're young you don't think of it like that. You think you'll walk into another job. But I never felt I belonged in any of them. They were all short term. And there was a lot of local competition for work, what with factories closing."

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Penny, now back living in Salford, had started a family when at the Adidas factory, but when the work dried up, and with two children, she had to turn to the social security system to survive. "I was struggling day to day existing, never really living. I was just trying to keep my children safe, having them do well in their education was my major struggle. With minimum wage and zero hours contracts jobs, half the people in Salford who are working have to have their wages topped up by benefits. This is dark age Britain, and so many people are struggling, it's not fair. They hide behind doors, afraid to come out of the house."

"In Salford we've got big companies with zero hours contracts. They say, 'we'll employ you for a bit, and then you'll have 8 or 9 weeks with no work.' I still have to go to the Jobcentre every fortnight, and sit there, feeling degraded. Maybe I could go to McDonalds and get work, but they'd give me a zero hours contract. The problem is if for 2 weeks I don't get paid, 2 months down the line I'm out on the streets with the kids. That's the reality of it. You might get a job so the Jobcentre can tick the boxes, but they don't look at the deeper situation. You will be thrown out of your house." Penny is also critical of housing policies. "When you're made homeless, you go to housing at the town hall. Because you've got kids, you get put straight away in a B&B or a hostel. So the DWP are paying you to be there instead of helping to pay your rent arrears off. How does that make sense?"

Penny, as well as being a commissioner in the [Salford Poverty Truth Commission](#), now does a lot of community work to support those in her local area. "A lot of it is to help the homeless" she explains. "I'm starting a social enterprise, called Street Support Salford, we want the community involved, supported with money for bus fares and dinners. It's made me more of a whole person. Seeing people suffer and even dying could send a person over the edge, and it nearly did for me, but I carry on regardless, helping the homeless and my community with no conditions. I wish I could do more, but I take comfort in the small things that do make a big difference to people's lives – it's not always about money. Caring, love and trust is what people need, and hope in all its forms. There's a lot of families around here who don't have enough to live off, and I want to help them to live instead of just existing."

*"People on "zero-hour contracts" are more likely to be young, part-time, women, and/or in full time education. Around 1 in 3 people (31%) on a zero-hours contract want more hours, with most wanting them in their current job, as opposed to a different job which offers more hours."
Source: ONS Paper "Contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours: September 2016"*

Scams Awareness Month

by Ali Craythorne

June marks Scams Awareness Month, an annual Citizens Advice campaign where we raise awareness of how to spot, avoid and report scams. Citizens Advice Manchester we will be working in partnership with Trading Standards, campaigning in the community and delivering a number of training sessions to help the public to become scam-aware.

According to the Local Government Association fraud is currently the most common form of crime. In 2017, there were [3.6 million](#) cases reported in England and Wales, which equated to around £10 billion lost in this area alone. This is likely to be much higher as an astonishing [95%](#) of scams go unreported.

Due to the economic climate and accessibility of information, scammers are targeting people more than ever. The breadth and range of this type of crime is huge. [Action Fraud](#) identifies over 100 different types of fraud and this figure will grow as techniques evolve and become more sophisticated.

Scams pose a real risk to financial security, and many victims get into debt and experience poverty as a result of being scammed. At Citizens Advice we receive over [3,000](#) contacts (face to face, email, webchat, telephone) every quarter from people who have been targeted by scams. We also receive reports from people that are unable to pay for essentials such as utilities and food as a consequence of being scammed. Some of the most common types include emails and texts purporting to be from banks and financial agencies aiming to extract passwords and login details. We see lots of fake lottery and inheritance emails that require you to pay fees before your windfall is 'released'; fake adverts and look alike websites offering non-existent 'designer goods' at bargain prices; and rogue traders who systematically target the most vulnerable people in society with bogus and often unnecessary repairs. Most worryingly, we now receive reports that people are receiving calls claiming to come from Citizens Advice and trying to take bank details, supposedly to resolve a financial issue.

Barry is an elderly man with chronic health problems. A scammer knocked on his door explaining that Barry's roof needed urgent repairs. The scammer charged him £2,000 for the repairs and never returned. Barry emptied his bank account and borrowed £500 from a friend. He was left unable to pay his utility bills and has now got into arrears.



Ali Craythorne

Scammers succeed because they prey on human needs and desires. They are designed to provoke an emotional response whether this be fear, excitement, lust or greed. Whilst anyone can be a victim of a scam, [research](#) conducted by Citizens Advice in 2017 indicates that older people, people with lower levels of education and those on low incomes are less likely to recognise a scam. In 2007, Trading Standards warned that there were approximately [300,000](#) people held on 'scam lists' in the UK and that they expected this to rise to 1 million by 2019.

If you suspect you may be the victim of a scam, we would always advise that you report this to [Action Fraud](#), or call our Consumer Helpline on 03454 04 05 06 if you need further support.

If you would like to attend our training on how to become more scam aware please book on this [link](#)

We hope you can join us at our next GM Living Wage Campaign Group on June 13th, 2018 from 2 - 4pm at the GM Chamber of Commerce, Elliot House 151 Deansgate, Manchester M3 3WD.

Plan for the Meeting:

2.00 - 2.15pm Registration & coffee

2.15 - 2.45 pm Workshop run by Chris Dabbs, Chief Executive, Unlimited Potential: Nudging towards the real Living Wage: Persuading more employers to adopt the real Living Wage, and then to become accredited Living Wage employers requires some nudging. The good news is that there is evidence about what can work to achieve this behaviour change. This workshop will introduce some basics of behaviour change and how these might be applied for the real Living Wage.

2.45 - 3.15pm Coffee and catch ups

3.15 - 3.30pm Update on Campaign actions

3.30 - 3.45pm Update from the Living Wage Foundation

3.45 - 4.00pm Update from GM Citizens

These are exciting times and together we can make a real difference to people working in Greater Manchester, so please join us on June 13th. In the meantime, should you have any questions, queries, comments or suggestions, please do get in touch via email to [Lynn](#) or call 07948 549485.

Forthcoming Events:



To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the TUC a series of events are taking place throughout the first week of June 2018. To find out more about these events please visit their [website](#)

Energy (in)efficiency: what tenants expect and endure in private renting on Thursday June 7th, 2018 from 2 - 30pm at the University of Salford, The Crescent, Salford M6 6PU

To understand the tenants' perspective, SHUSU disseminates a study that explored: how tenants understand energy efficiency; how the absence of it affects them; their relationship with their landlord and the barriers they face in challenging the status quo. [More info and book](#)

Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign Meeting

on Wednesday June 13th, 2018 from 2 - 4pm at GM Chamber of Commerce, Elliot House, 151 Deansgate, Manchester M3 3WD

How can we persuade employers to take the steps to become a real Living Wage employer? Email Lynn or call 07948 549485 to receive your invitation to this meeting.

Introduction to Community Organising

on Wednesday June 13th, 2018 from 9am - 4pm at Starting Point Community Learning Partnership, Woodley Precinct, Stockport SK6 1RJ

Looking for better ways to motivate people to get involved in your community or organisation? Bothered about what's going wrong in society? Bring people to work together to make a change. This one day training course introduces you to the core foundations of community organising - how to organise and motivate people to take effective action together to address common concerns. For more info about the Learning Partnership please visit their [website](#) The course is free and more information and booking is [here](#)

Manchester Day

on Sunday June 17th 2018 all day across the city centre

Manchester Day is an annual event that celebrates everything great about the city. It is a day for families, residents and visitors to get together and celebrate all things Mancunian that have made Manchester one of the world's most iconic cities. [More information](#)

Health and Social Care: Carers and the VCSE sector

on Wednesday June 20th, 2018 from 10am - 12.30pm at St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ

This Assembly meeting will enable the wider VCSE sector to find out more about the work going on across GM with regard to Carers. It will build on the GM Carers Charter and provide a strategic update. There will be examples of good practice and an opportunity for attendees to feed into a discussion on issues related to Carers and the commitments set out in the GM Carers Charter. [More information and book](#)

Do you have any events that you'd like GMPA to publicise?
Please [Email us](#) with the details.

National Minimum Wage Campaign



HM Revenue & Customs

If you are working and aged 25 and over, and not in your first year of an apprenticeship, you are legally entitled to at least the National Living Wage* of £7.83 per hour. If you think you are being underpaid, [register a confidential complaint with HMRC](#) or contact Acas on 0300 123 1100

If you are working and aged under 25, or an apprentice, you are legally entitled to at least the National Minimum Wage. If you think you are being underpaid, [register a confidential complaint with HMRC](#) or contact Acas on 0300 123 1100

It is your legal right to be paid at least the National Living* or Minimum Wage. Make sure you check your pay.

*Not to be confused with the real Living Wage

All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty Inquiry: Poverty Premium and Business Toolkit

You can read Greater Manchester Poverty Action's response to this enquiry [here](#)

You can also read our response together with the GM Living Wage Campaign to the **GM Employment Charter** [here](#)

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page.

We want to find new ways of working together, share the network's successes and provide a voice for the people living in poverty in our region but we can only do this with your help and support.

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#) If you would like to submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please [get in touch](#)

For more information please contact us by [email](#) or call 07419 774537 and we will reply as soon as possible.

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