

Petitions Committee: the cost of living and statutory parental pay

Introduction

To inform the petition debate in Parliament on Monday 19 June 2023, the Petitions Committee ran an online survey asking respondents about their experiences of statutory parental pay and the increase in the cost of living.

The survey was shared with signatories of the following petition, which triggered this debate:

- [Increase statutory maternity pay in line with cost of living crisis](#)

The contents of this brief are to be read as reflective only of the experiences of those who responded to the survey.

Response

521 survey responses.

About the respondents

- **83%** became a parent in the last three years
- **12%** were planning or expecting to become a parent soon
- **2%** were friends or relatives of a new/expectant parent
- **1%** were professionals working with new/expectant parents
- **3%** were not directly affected by the issue

New parents who responded received the following support:

- **42%** of new parents only received a form of statutory parental pay, and **48%** of those planning/expecting to become parents were only eligible to receive statutory parental pay
- **53%** of new parents received a form of statutory parental pay with a top-up from their employer, and **44%** of those planning/expecting to become parents were eligible for top-up parental pay from their employer
- **3%** of new parents and those planning/expecting to become parents were not eligible for any form of statutory parental pay but received Maternity Allowance
- **78%** of new parents received some form of benefit or financial support other than statutory parental pay

Statutory parental pay and financial support from the Government

The majority of respondents didn't agree that the Government's support for new parents was adequate. Many respondents said that, although they receive some kind of financial support from the Government, they are still struggling with the rising cost of living.

Respondents also expressed a range of concerns regarding the statutory parental pay they receive or are eligible for.

Statistics

- **93%** of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Government gave an adequate level of financial support to new parents

Quotes

- New Parent: "I cannot breastfeed my child and need to formula feed. She has reflux and needs specialist milk which costs £18 per tub and she needs this every 5 days – we are currently spending over £110 each month on formula alone, more than my child benefit payment. If I was a single mother, the statutory maternity pay wouldn't get me a roof over my head and essentials for the baby, let alone feed or clothe myself. Something needs to change."
- Planning/expectant parent: "Government needs to support all new parents and make policies that make it easier to have children and not to fall in financial ruin afterwards. Due to lacking policies and support I will most likely have only one child as 2 or more would be completely unmanageable."
- New Parent: "The monthly statutory maternity pay needs to be increased to be more in line with a basic wage, I don't know anyone who can live off of under

£1000 a month even with universal credit top ups. I and many other women felt they had to go back to work at 6 months because it wasn't possible to continue as I was. I also cannot buy a house because if I want another child I wouldn't be able to afford the mortgage payment whilst on maternity leave."

- New Parent: "If you are not on universal credit you basically are not entitled to help which means that we have had to use credit cards and borrow money from family to pay our household bills and I am having to return to work after maternity leave several months early. Statutory maternity pay doesn't even cover my normal share of the household bills let alone pay for things like clothes, nappies, any enrichment activities for my child."
- New Parent: "Statutory maternity/paternity pay doesn't get adjusted to account for the cost of living. It's just not a practical wage. In order to have children these days you need to plunge yourself into debt and deal with the aftermath afterwards."
- Planning/expectant parent: "Poor statutory maternity pay disproportionately affects mothers [more] than it does fathers, especially single mothers. The support is not in place for a woman to feel safe and secure when having a baby."

- Friend/relative of a parent: “The financial support given has not risen in line with the changes to the cost of living so what seemed like a fair amount a few years ago is no longer suitable.”

Cutting back on essentials

Respondents who received/were eligible for a form of statutory parental pay said that they had faced financial difficulties in accessing essential items. A large number of respondents also said that they faced difficulties affording transport (i.e. public transport and car/petrol payments) and their rent and housing payments. Some said that they had or had considered using a food bank.

Statistics

- **92%** of parents experienced financial difficulties accessing household utilities (i.e. central heating, electricity or water)
- **92%** of parents experienced financial difficulties accessing social activities (i.e. visiting family and friends or attending parent groups)
- **89%** of parents experienced financial difficulties accessing equipment for their child(ren) (i.e. prams, cots or car seats)
- **81%** of parents experienced difficulties accessing childcare
- **75%** of parents experienced financial difficulties accessing basic essentials for their child(ren) (i.e.

food, nappies, clothes or hygiene products)

- **53%** of parents experienced difficulties accessing mental health support (i.e. counselling)
- **42%** of parents experienced difficulties accessing medication
- **10%** said they have visited a foodbank.

Quotes

- New Parent: “We had to move with grandparents to not pay rent as we could not afford it with the rising cost of living and maternity pay.”
- Planning/expectant parent: “Statutory pay will not even come close to covering my share of the mortgage & household bills, as a working professional even I foresee struggling to meet the basic cost of living needs.”
- Planning/expectant parent: “Statutory maternity pay barely covers half of my mortgage (that has recently increased dramatically due to rise in interest rates). I also have a daughter who is in childcare, where the costs are astronomical, despite the Government ‘tax break’ on this and free hours because the centres aren’t properly supported. Having children in 2023 is no longer a choice you make with your partner about whether or not you want to have children, it’s a calculation on a spreadsheet to see whether you

can actually give them what they need.”

- New parent: The constant rise in bills is so concerning, as at the moment my maternity pay doesn't even cover a third of my monthly outgoings. The cost of everything has gone up so considerably, yet maternity pay has not increased as significantly. The only support we've been entitled to is maternity pay, and child benefit, without support from family and friends we would be using a food bank and unable to make out household payments.”
- New Parent: “I live in a rural location so the cost of fuel has meant I have to plan journeys and miss out of seeing family as much due to the cost. I have been given a lot of items but if I had to buy new clothes etc for my child it would have been a huge struggle. I have cut back on food shopping due the cost and been frugal elsewhere.”

Financial concerns and impact of the rising cost of living

The majority of new parents said that they were worried about the impact of the increased cost of living on their and their child(ren)'s physical and mental health and their quality of life. Many new parents said that financial concerns had affected their decisions about family planning and returning to work. The cost of childcare was a common concern, with parents stating

that they have had to either reduce their hours, leave the workforce, or return to work earlier than they would otherwise choose.

- **81%** of new parents were concerned about the impact of the cost of living on their physical health (**30%** were 'extremely concerned').
- **91%** of new parents were concerned about the impact on their child(ren)'s physical health (**44%** were 'extremely concerned').
- **97%** of new parents were concerned about the impact on their mental health (**53%** were 'extremely concerned').
- **90%** were concerned about the impact on their child(ren)'s mental health (**43%** were 'extremely concerned').
- **99%** of were concerned about the impact on their quality of life (**61%** were 'extremely concerned').
- **96%** were concerned about the impact on their child(ren)'s quality of life (**60%** were 'extremely concerned').
- **27%** of respondents either planning or expecting to become a parent have considered visiting a foodbank.

Quotes

- New Parent: "The lack of financial support puts so much pressure on partners to support the household, which can cause family breakdowns and affect their mental health too. The lack of financial support is a constant stress and worry, it almost stopped us having our child."
- New Parent: "The cost of living crisis has caused a major impact to my mental health to the point of not being able to bond with my daughter. I'm worried about returning to work after maternity leave due to childcare costs but I don't feel like I have a choice as fear I will not be able to feed my family and keep a roof over our heads."

New and expectant parents

People who were planning or expecting to become parents also shared their concerns about the impact of the increased cost of living. Some said that it had impacted their decision whether and when to become a parent.

Statistics

- **98%** of those planning/expecting to become parents were concerned about the impact of rising costs on their mental health (**54%** were 'extremely concerned')
- **98%** of those planning/expecting to become parents were concerned about the impact on their future child(ren)'s mental health (**62%** were 'extremely concerned')
- **100%** of those planning/expecting to become parents were concerned about the impact on their future child(ren)'s quality of life (**76%** were 'extremely concerned')
- Friends and relatives of parents and those planning/expecting to become parents also shared their concerns, with **100%** stating that they were extremely or moderately concerned for their friend/relative's mental health amid the rising cost of living.
- **94%** of new parents said that financial concerns affected their decision on returning to work after becoming a parent
- **70%** of new parents said the cost of living affected their decisions on when or whether to become a parent, and **84%** of those planning/expecting to become parents said that the rising cost of living affected their decision on when or whether to become a parent

Quotes

- Planning/expectant parent: "We did not intend on having a child in a cost of living crisis but my wage will cut by over half when I am on maternity leave, putting further pressure on my return to work. With childcare costs being exorbitant, it will be not economically viable for us to use childcare even on my full wage. I am very concerned."
- Planning/expectant parent: "I am really worried about paying for my child to go into childcare. I'm worried about the cost of living and I'm scared of what my future will be now I am having a child."
- New Parent: "Our newborn son's mother (my wife) made the decision early on to only have 3 months maternity leave because after this the pay is so low we are unable to afford mortgage, food and other essentials (such as child care for our older sons)."
- Friend or relative of a parent: "My friends are very clear to have a child, they would have to make significant sacrifices in terms of their quality of life. Having more than one is even more difficult. Several of my friends would prefer to have no children, than bring them into a world of financial hardship, particularly as we all rely on money from our parents in some form, and are unlikely to be able to provide that same support ourselves."

Have you been affected by this issue?

Find information about support for new parents:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/support-and-services/services-and-support-for-parents/>

Want to know more?

You can find out more about statutory parental pay on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

Methodology

Committee staff manually reviewed hundreds of individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection. They also analysed survey questions which produced statistical results.