

Written Evidence from Gingerbread (GRC0027) July 2020

Gingerbread is the leading national charity supporting single parent families to live secure, happy and fulfilling lives. Since 1918, we have been advising and campaigning for social and political change to improve living standards for single parents throughout the UK. There are six main areas we focus on: childcare, child maintenance, employment & skills, families & relationships, living standards & poverty and welfare reform. Single parents make up 1 in 4 families with dependent children. Even before COVID-19, almost half of single parent families lived in poverty, making them twice more likely to live in poverty than couple parents.

COVID-19 has made it even more difficult for single parent families as the realities of lockdown, holidays, home schooling, loss of work and income all hit home. Since lockdown began, calls to our helpline increased by 130% and our volunteer peer support group leaders have seen an increase in local single parents needing advice, support and information.

Our knowledge of the benefits system and coronavirus support leads us to believe that it would be very beneficial to extend maternity leave (and payments of statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance) during the Covid-19 pandemic. This would relieve a huge amount of pressure on single parents during this difficult time.

Regarding the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown on the mental health of new single mothers, we have had many cases highlighting this extra mental stress placed on single parents.

For example, we have heard concerns about:

- key workers being worried about falling ill themselves and no-one being able to care for their children
- loss of family support due to lockdown
- lack of availability of childcare as schools and nurseries closed
- loss of work
- employers refusing to furlough workers where they cannot find childcare (the government guidance for furlough scheme to cover this situation was late in being announced, and the furlough scheme is also at the employer's discretion)
- single parents threatened with dismissal if they are unable to return to work
- the complicated benefits system and worries about Universal Credit natural migration due to loss of work (and being potentially worse off in the longer term etc)