



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

‘Work, Welfare and Wellbeing? The impacts of welfare conditionality on people with mental health impairments in the UK

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Professor Peter Dwyer , Dept. SPSW University of York

Peter Dwyer, Dr Katy Jones, Dr Jenny McNeil, Dr Lisa Scullion and Dr Alasdair B. R. Stewart



An ESRC large grant



- 1. Welfare conditionality and UK policy re incapacity benefits and mental health**
- 2. Impact of welfare conditionality on people with mental health impairments?**
- 3. Effectiveness of welfare conditionality in supporting people with mental health issues into work?**
- 4. Conclusions**

- **Welfare conditionality**

Access to continued receipt of work related benefits to claimants' engagement with mandatory, work focused interviews (WFIs), training support schemes and/or job search requirements, with failure to undertake such specified activities leading to benefit sanctions (Dwyer, 2016).

- **ESA 2008**

Extended WC to working aged disability benefits for the first time

Work Capability Assessments - 3 outcomes: 'Fit for work'(JSA/UC), WRAG, Support Group of ESA

- **Ongoing transformation of Social Security** variously on JSA/ESA/UC

- **Mental health significant across our sample**

207/481 WSU wave a spoke about or identified mental health issues

Diagnoses inc. anxiety, depression, PTSD, OCD, Bipolar, Psychosis and Schizophrenia

Many, though not all, medication and/or various therapies and counselling

Some simultaneously dealing concurrently with addiction, homelessness

Impacts of WC on benefit claimants' mental health

- **Assessment process the WCA**

With my bipolar... if you happen to be having a particularly good day on your medical, they don't really see the effects the depression can have on you or the bipolar. They just think they're seeing a normal, well-adjusted, healthy person (GL-AS-024a)

- **Sanctions and the threat of sanctions**

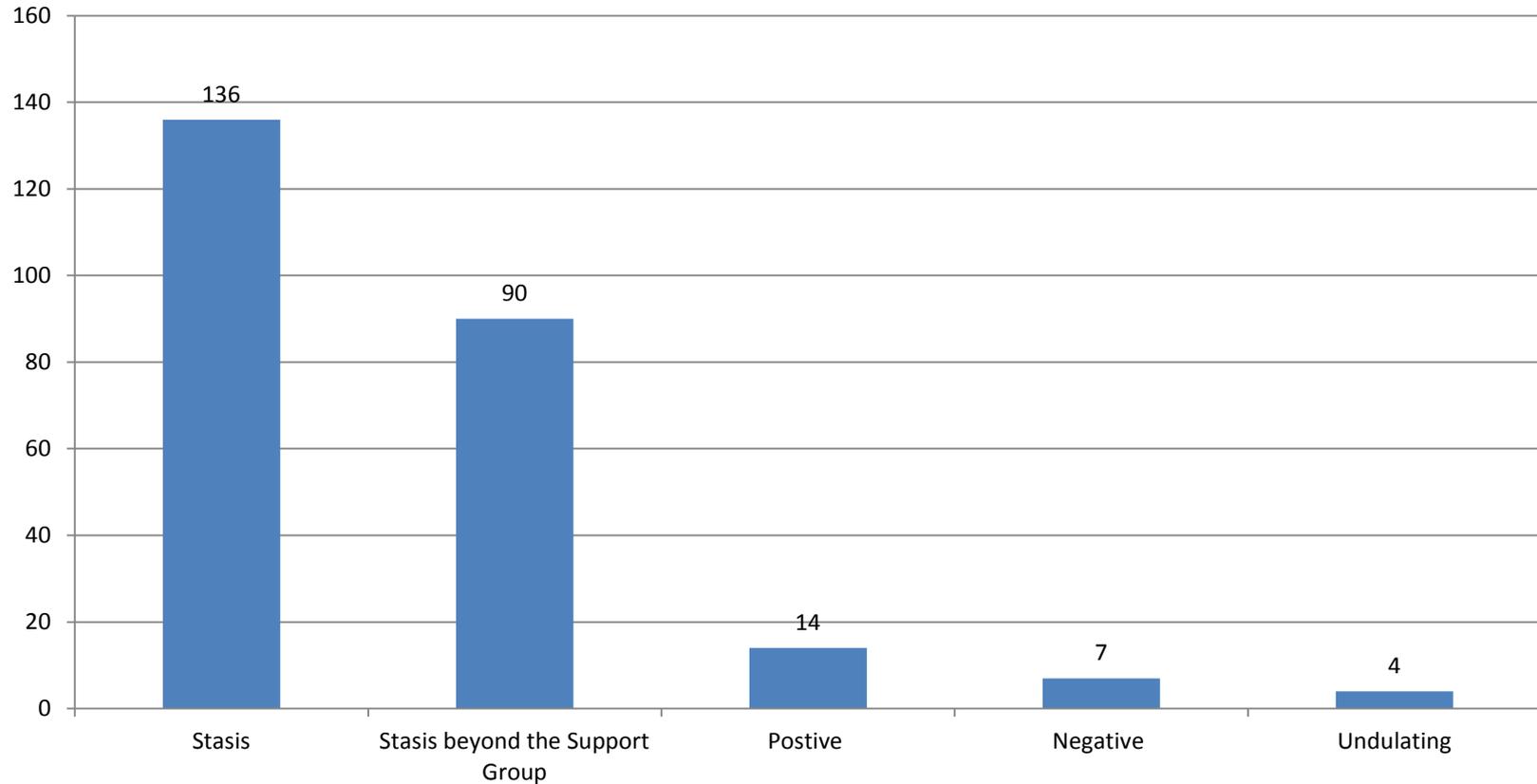
Utterly humiliated... in tears when I left the building, absolutely devastated, emotional wreck. Well, I'm going to be homeless. How am I going to feed myself? It had a serious impact on my health... I'm on heavy medication now... couldn't sleep lost weight... I'm reasonably fortunate that my mum and dad are retired and they've always been supportive. (ED-SJ-017a)

- **Support is enforcing mandatory work search and training**

Tell you that you're all right, everything's hunky dory in your life. There's nothing wrong with you, you can work, you can get a job. They can't see inside your head (GL-AS-016b)

[Wave a] Being bullied by the job coach to stick on UC... it's just overwhelming me, even more with my depression and anxiety, it's making matters worse [wave b] If I'm not fit to work then why am I talking to a job coach? [wave c] the stress of this UC, the stress of trying to get jobs, and just trying to function within a flat, I ran off to the woods at one point. (BA-JM-014 a-c)

Movements and trajectories in respect of paid work



Change in employment status across repeat interviews undertaken with 161 respondents with mental health issues.

Effectiveness of WC in moving people with mental health impairments into paid work

- **Welfare conditionality did not move people with mental health impairments into or nearer paid work - biggest outcome stasis**

[wave a]... ESA WRAG [wave b]... I'm ill at the moment, I'm unable to work [wave c]... Unfortunately, my health hasn't allowed me to come to work so far but I'm hoping to get back at some point. (Scottish male waves a-c)

It doesn't get people into work. Nothing in what they've done to me has assisted me in getting back into the employment market. (GL-AS-022b)

- **WC more likely to push people with mental health issues further away from PLM work**

The assumption that I'm trying to get something for nothing, the guilt that was laid on me when I was trying to find work and seriously mentally ill with depression and anxiety, the information from people at the Jobcentre that I should just pull myself together. I was actually blacking out two or three times a day. Yes, stress and distress. My body would simply decide it couldn't deal with this and I'd just put my head down and be away. I think if the system had been more humane I wouldn't now be quite so far away from the world of work (GL-AS-022c)

I remember when that sanction happened, I literally did feel really quite suicidal, lowest point, and just don't know why I'm - I felt trapped really and just it doesn't matter what I do, if it's not going to be enough then there's no point, there's no point carrying on. I do really want to work, I do want employment (BR-JM-002c)

Positive work trajectories

'Helped' into work via jobcentre then helps herself

I had an interview there and then... 'Well, we'd like to offer you the job'... Proper full-time paid work, 20 years...My daughter managed to get a full-time job at [retail] , which is near me, which is I've tried numerous times because it is right near me, and I've not managed to get anywhere. I said to my daughter... 'You can actually go to the manager and say, can I have an application form?'... so she got one and we came home, I filled it all out, she took it in; I got an interview (PE-JM-027b).

Into work but pushed to do more under in work conditionality in UC

Saw it online... were doing interviews at the Jobcentre... I've worked in shops... I got the job... Zero-hour contract... go in whenever I want and just do the things I'm supposed to do, put my timesheet in, and I get paid for it... check the store, they'll do me some more training, but nine times out of ten I'm on my own... I worked 22 hours in one week... exhausted. I was in agony. I couldn't walk

I'm at the stage now when they said I'd be in a wheelchair and I'm not... If I'm in a wheelchair I won't be able to do my job...what I'm enjoying. And then the depression will kick in again and, you know... Now I'm doing six hours, [Doctor] not worried as much, because I'm not pushing myself that extra bit. And when I told him [what] the Jobcentre wanted me to have he said, 'You just cut down to the right amount of hours and they want you to find another job?...Tell them to phone me. I'll tell them to piss off.' (BA-JM-011c).

Care and control: social (in)security and medical systems

- **Evidence medics/care proffs. mitigates proudly negative impacts of WC**

Whatever the medical profession are doing, the Jobcentre put all that anxiety back onto you, all the stress back onto you, which the doctors are trying to sort out in the first place, and it's just like it's a vicious circle. (BA-JM-014c)

My doctor signed me straight back off again because it was causing so much stress. I couldn't deal with it ... [JC+] didn't know anything about your health... It was all about, this is what you have to fulfil. (WSU-IN-AS-005a)

- **Some limited evidence of support in Social Sec. system**

I was suicidal last year and I mentioned it and he [JC+ adviser] went straight to my clinic support worker and told him, sort of grassed me up but I suppose I'm grateful because maybe I would have taken it further (PE-JM-018a)

- **'Psych compulsion' so called support/therapy as control**

Psychological conditionality - the requirement to demonstrate certain attitudes or attributes in order to receive benefits or other support (Freidli and Stearn, 2015)

Conclusions

- Implementation of WC **exacerbates** people's existing mental health impairments
- WC is largely **ineffective** in helping people with mental health issues into work and pushes some **further away** from the PLM
- The use of WC for people with mental health impairments and is punitive and **inappropriate**

(see e.g. Weston, 2012; Newton et al. 2013; Dwyer et al. 2014, 2018; Hale, 2014; Barr et al. 2015, 2016; Loopstra et al. 2015; Oakley, 2016; Dwyer, 2017; Reeves, 2017)

Other ways forward?

Separate benefit eligibility from setting conditionality and incentivise voluntary engagement with employment support (Oakley, 2016)

Abandon the use of welfare conditionality for Disabled People

End compulsion and the use of benefit sanctions

Personalised and negotiated packages of support to meet DP's people's needs re *both* paid work and rights to social security (Dwyer et al. 2018)



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Findings overview and nine group/issue specific final findings papers at
www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/publications/

Website: www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk



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Contacts

PI: peter.dwyer@york.ac.uk

Media: janis.bright@york.ac.uk

Project Manager: fleur.hughes@york.ac.uk



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