

Pre-Budget Submission 2023

Single Mother Families - An Australian Asset

Respect, Protect & Enable

The National Council & of Single Mothers Their Children Inc.

January 2022

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Eliminate and respond to violence, hardship and inequality for single mothers and their children.

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The National Council of Single Mothers & their Children Inc (NCSMC)

An organisation dedicated to single mothers and a platform whereby both the community and the Government can communicate. NCSMC can comment on policy and legislation and ensure that the lived experience is heard. NCSMC provides information, referrals, and assistance to single mothers through our electronic platforms. In the past year, we have responded to tens of thousands of individual requests whilst our information post can reach up to 100,000+ per week. One of our greatest strengths is our expertise and commitment to working with and for the advancement of single mother families who are affected by poverty, hardship, and/or domestic violence.

2023 Federal Budget

The 2023 Federal Budget follows the Jobs & Skills Summit, a summit that signalled a spirit of collaboration whilst shining a light on the inequitable distribution and treatment of unpaid care work in families, structural barriers that limit women's workforce participation, the inadequate valuing of unpaid and paid care in policies, all of which contributes to the stubborn national gender pay gap. Women will now have to wait [23.4](#) years to close the gap. NCSMC asserts that without policy intervention, the gap will continue to track in the wrong direction. It is our deep concern that single mothers' access to economic security is tenuous or absent. Policy settings expect women to work as if they don't have children and to parent as if they don't have paid work. Outcomes have ignored the additional demands and costs of single mothering; with no value identified for the labour of unpaid care and an unwillingness to address the economic consequences of gendered violence.

NCSMC identifies the 'reforms' of 2006 which included social security, family law, and child support as a particularly dark period for single mother families. It occurred during a period of economic prosperity and is relevant in contemporaneous policy debates, having generated and or reinforced structural disadvantages which are experienced in 2022. Single parents can no longer access a Parenting Payment if the youngest child is older than 8 years. The child support formula removed any recognition of the opportunity costs of limiting paid work to provide unpaid care for children and instead focused on the costs of consumables reducing child support paid by the non-resident parent. These changes together increased family poverty, making it harder for families to improve household income through paid work and. It is incumbent upon the current political decision-makers to 'reset' policy towards a fair go for single parent families. Poverty prohibits access to safety, and participation in the community and in the labour market and it prohibits future planning.

The Women Economic Equality Taskforce and The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee

The Committees will advise Treasury. It is anticipated that advice will influence priorities which will call for investment into all payments, so no one will be living below the poverty line or forced to live without heating or cooling, skipping meals & medication, and constantly fearful of defaulting on mortgages or rental payments. A car, a tent, or a couch is not a home, and it is no way to live. 2023 will be a progressive step towards addressing entrenched disadvantages, harsh systems, and gender

structures. NCSMC will make formal commentary and respond to these recommendations once known, and from a single mother and her children's lens.

Gender matters

Gender-responsive budget is welcomed and will be enacted whilst more women will continue to experience financial insecurity, interrupted paid work, insecure tenancy, and or homelessness. They will also continue to be harmed by violence and trauma whilst undertaking unpaid caring roles.

Nearly half the children in sole-parent families live in poverty (44%) compared with 13% for children living with both parents. In single-parent families in which the main earner is a woman the rate of poverty (37%) is twice that in which the main earner is a man (18%)

Our expertise is derived from our own research, and collaboration with others, and is steeped in the rich but often tragic experiences of women who have sought our service. It is from this unique but clear vantage point that we present our submission and recommendations

Recommendations

Investing, protecting, and enabling

Our Safety Net

1. Restore access to the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) for single mother families to children of 16 years.
2. Extend access to the Parenting Payments Single for up to 18 years if the family has been affected by gendered violence.
3. Incremental advances to lift the Parenting Payment Single to match the Single Age Pension to achieve the Governments ambition to reduce gendered structural disadvantage.
4. Index income support to wages as well as the Consumer Price Index, to ensure payments maintain pace with community living standards over the long term.
5. Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 50% to reduce rental stress.
6. Immediately lift taper rates for single parents on Jobseeker to the equivalent of the PPS (until access to the PPS is restored)
7. Apply the new taper rate provision, an increase of \$4,000 per annum as announced at the Jobs & Skills Summit to other social security claimants. A good idea should be shared.

8. Install a Services Australia 'reconnect process' for claimants who have not accessed an income support payment for up to 12 months due to paid work. Gaining income support is too difficult and prolonged that leaving becomes a risk.
9. Economic Proofing. For those unemployed for more than 3 months, maintain Jobseeker payments for up to 3 months after commencement of paid employment (threshold up to \$58,108), to allow for women to make up for the downward spiral of debt incurred whilst on Jobseeker.

Child Care

10. Remove the activity test. The activity test undermines the broader reform objectives of lifting access for children and workforce participation of parents.

Child Support

11. Restore "Care" in the child support scheme by resorting to a self-support amount that financially acknowledges the cost of the direct and indirect care as well as future earning limitations due.
12. Child support customers must lodge an annual tax return and disallow decisions on 'provisional income.'
13. Treasury to oversee targeted policy research on the minimum assessment.
 - a. The adequacy of the minimum assessment at \$459 per year.
 - b. The volume of minimum assessments. As of March 2022, nearly one one-third of child support is assessed at the minimum rate.
14. Link child support payments to Credit Ratings.
15. Abolish the [Maintenance Income Test](#). A threshold that reduces family payments and rent assistance based upon actual or assumed low levels of child support which occurs at a harsh annual level of \$1,752.00 p/a.
16. Establish a maintenance guarantee trial for women affected by family and domestic violence.
17. Restore the Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group.
18. Legislate the Notice of Requirement for Parents with a Child Support Assessment to Lodge a Return for the Income Year Ended 30 June 2022.

Skills & Training

19. Abolish any compulsory element of ParentsNext, a program that has suspended a third of participants' income support, their only means of economic survival. Suspension lasts an average of five days with women forced to re-engage and in the manner as stated by the provider or risk further suspensions or having their payments ceased. The hallmarks of coercive control, it is out of step with Australian human rights obligations.

20. Whilst mutual obligations continue enable volunteer work for single mothers of all ages by removing the 55-plus rule.
21. Abolish mutual obligations. NCSMC would argue that raising the next generation often with limited resources and support would be enough of a 'condition.' The harshness of the system & the cost of meeting the mutual obligations demands impinge on care and family functioning.
22. Implement evidence-based research to address the incompleteness of courses and studies for single mothers.
23. Support the jettison of women into work who were close to completing their study e.g., women may only need to complete the 'field placement'. Some remedies would include
 - a. Productivity Placement Payment
 - b. Enable placement to be part-time and or share placement options
24. Review the change in HECS thresholds in 2019 to ascertain the breadth of its effect on women reducing their workloads. The change has resulted in high effective marginal tax rates of 60%.

Gender and Gendered Violence

25. Uphold the recommendation of the 2017 House of Representatives inquiry into family law, to remove the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility (s.61DA) from the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth). Supporting the unified calls from national safety advocates and experts. Women with children must seek "permission" to relocate. Controlled by the perpetrator of violence. Enabled by family law. Women cannot leave even if they have secure employment and safety. A superior policy response would be to elevate the best interests of the child.
26. Trauma and grief counselling to be accessible and affordable and to be considered as part of a future planning terrain.
27. Crisis payment is too rigid with a 7-day application requirement.
- 28.** Whilst mutual obligations continue the first exemption should be for 12 months. It is currently 12 or 16 weeks.
29. Incentivise feminized workplaces and make visible the glass elevator.
30. Superannuation experts to explore remedies to address the gendered retirement gap due to paid and unpaid care and to examine ways for wealth creation.
31. Incentivise workplaces to '[Job Share](#)' enabling single mothers to undertake employment that is consistent with their talent, experience, and qualifications whilst meeting single mothering demands.
32. Paid Parental Leave access to be the same as paid family and domestic violence leave. Available to full-time, part-time, and casual employees effective from the commencement of employment.

Our Safety Net

Restore access to the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) for single mother families

Restoring access to the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) for single mother families whose youngest child is 16 years. Reversing a decision that reduced the child threshold to 8 years, minus any level of evidence or research. It proceeded despite recommendations and concerns from various parliamentary bodies that undertook high-level scrutiny. The matter is the subject of a United Nations complaint. The first complaint to which the United Nations are investigating against Australia under the optional protocol of The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. NCSMC remains steadfast that this outcome is a violation of single mothers' human rights. Furthermore, there has been a rejection of the calls to undertake independent research including the Family Law Amendment (Review of Government Support for Single Parents) [Bill](#) 2018 introduced by Wilkie, Andrew, MP, and seconded by Rebekha Sharkie MP.

Single mothers are now framed as 'unemployed' and 'not parenting' eroding the cost (direct and indirect) of care. Recent [research](#) found that the majority of the single mothers who lost access to the Parenting Payment were survivors of family violence and coercive control. The report states that 90,000 wanted to leave but couldn't, whilst [8,000 women](#) a year are forced to return to abusive partners. It was never about paid work but a harsh budget-saving mechanism. [Research](#) undertaken by ANU in 2016 concluded "Overall, due to lower government benefits and lower payment indexation many single-parent families are considerably worse off as a direct result of policy change enacted by various governments since 2005". Furthermore, additional research (2016) [found](#) that the 'Welfare to Work' settings forced women into a low rate of Unemployment benefits resulting in women accepting casual or part-time contract jobs without paid sick leave or superannuation payments, whilst inhibiting their ability to find long-term and meaningful employment.

Benefits to restoring the Parenting Payment Single

- Increases women's safety.
- Increases the ability of women to protect and raise children.
- Increases economic security and financial safety.
- Provides solid ground for women to gain entry into paid work, undertake work-ready tasks, study & skill enhancement. It enables future planning.

Furthermore, families affected by gender violence are enabled to access until the youngest child turns 18 years and or has finished secondary schooling. The Parenting Payment Single was not subject to the Harmer Review (2009) and therefore did not benefit from research to ascertain its fit for purpose or the remedies provided to other Australians to reduce gender hardship and inequality. NCSMC. Incremental advances to lift the Parenting Payment Single to match the Single Age Pension are consistent with the recommendations from research *The Choice: Violence or Poverty* which found that the majority of the single mothers who lost access to the Parenting Payment were survivors of family violence and coercive control it further achieving the Governments ambition to reduce gendered structural disadvantage. NCSMC is aware that recommendations from the Women Economic Equality Taskforce and the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee are to be presented. We request that the meaningful contribution be part of the gendered responsive budgeting process and NCSMC will make comments once these policies are public.

Taper Rates

Restoring access to the Parenting Payment will mitigate against the harsh and accumulated losses when the youngest child turns 8 years.

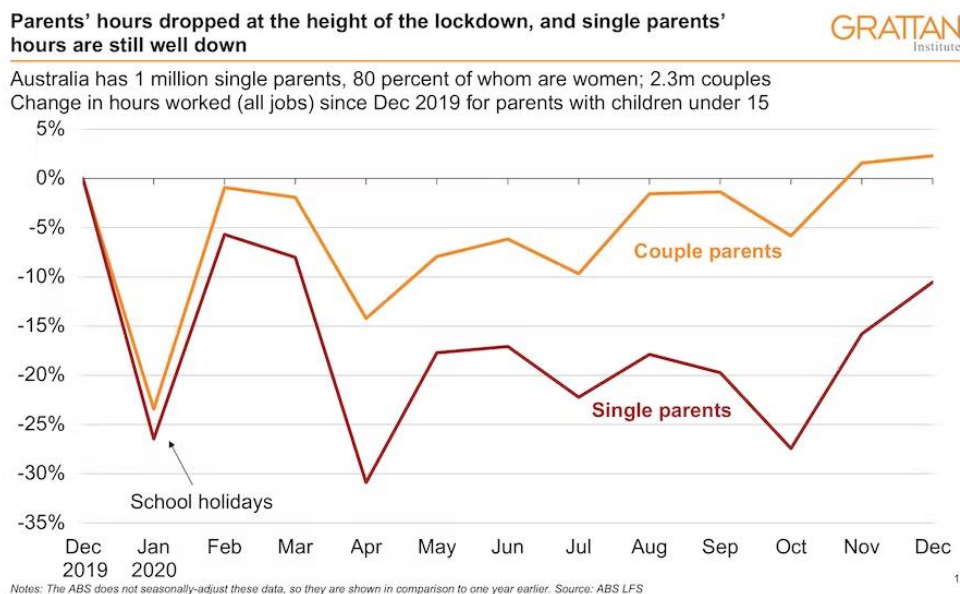
The Jobseeker payment for single mother families is \$691.00 per fortnight with the payment reduced once she earns \$150 per fortnight, at 40c per \$1. Whilst Parenting Payment Single is \$880.20 per fortnight with the payment reduced once she earns \$250.80 per fortnight (3 children).

Immediate Action: The structural barrier of the taper rates was recently realised at the Jobs & Skills Summit with an adjustment made for some social security claimants with an additional threshold of \$4,000.00. It would be strategic and prudent for consistent and higher provisions to be applied for all social security claimants. The current taper is a disincentive for paid work and an obstacle to financial security.

Extend access to the Parenting Payments Single to those whose youngest child is 18 years if the family has been affected by gendered violence. Promoting an opportunity for the child to finish secondary school. NCSMC welcomes the five exemptions for single mother families to retain the equivalent of Parenting Payment Single amount once their youngest child reaches 8 years. However, family and Domestic Violence are not considered enough of a reason.

Social Security & Paid Work

Develop processes and policies that support moving from social security to paid work. The fear of not having any income if paid work is no longer available can be stagnating. Single mothers are often the first to lose jobs in difficult circumstances and are least likely to bounce back. Illuminated through the pandemic, but an established pattern.



Install a Services Australia 'reconnect process' for claimants who have not accessed an income support payment for up to 12 months due to paid work. Gaining income support is too difficult and prolonged that leaving becomes a risk.

Economic Security For those unemployed for more than 3 months, maintain Jobseeker payments for up to 3 months after commencement of paid employment (threshold up to \$58,108), to allow for women to make up for the downward spiral of debt incurred whilst on Jobseeker (such as payment plans), enabling them to stay in their jobs longer and build a financial buffer. Catching up on health needs will assist with employment longevity. We know that women forgo their health needs due to hardship.

Myself and my two children all need to see a GP. No bulk-billing clinics near us. Can't afford the out-of-pocket cost of \$300. I should have been seeking treatment and advice to a reaction to medication – just can't afford it. Not sure if I should stop the medication or

manage the ongoing diarrhea. It's too much to pack up the kids and travel to the emergency department – about a 48-hour roundtrip.

Alison 16th September 2022

Child Support Scheme

Restore “Care’ in the child support scheme.

This would require adjusting the self-support amount resulting in a superior level for the primary provider of unpaid care. The Child Support Scheme was enacted with an acknowledgment of the direct and indirect cost of providing care, the impediments towards gaining and maintaining secure employment, and the inherent structural bias which all works against career promotion. Originally, the self-support amount was set at the equivalent of Male Average Weekly earnings, reduced on 1st July 1998, and then removed in 2006.

The children’s father sees the children at different times over his ‘every second weekend’. It depends upon his schedule. He has taken the glass elevator whilst I’m straddling with bits of part-time work whilst single parenting three children. All in primary school, huge costs but because it’s public school (it’s considered ‘free’) and not part of the Child Support formula. I won’t be able to reinvigorate my career until the children are in early high school. Meanwhile, we have the same self-support amount quarantine from the formula. I’m his free and flexible nanny service. How does that work? Tracy August 2022

Child support customers must lodge an annual tax return and disallow decisions on ‘provisional income.’

In examining the possibilities that are part of the Child Support scheme, the efficacy of the CSS should instruct further recommendations. The CSS is premised upon having accurate and timely financial information, details of the children, and time spent with each parent. NCSMC was verbally informed by the Australian Tax Office (2018) that 200,006 child support customers had not lodged a return in over two years. The statistical trends are consistent with reported data on 1 Apr 2021. Click here for the [link](#)

Number of years of non-lodgement	Number of customers
10	16,224
5	79,608
2	196,089
1	417,916

*These figures do contain the customers who do not have to lodge as they are under the threshold.

NCSMC has recently been informed of [legislation](#) that states, “Requirement for Parents with a Child Support Assessment to Lodge a Return for the Income Year Ended 30 June 2022”. NCSMC **would like to understand the implications and outcomes of this legislation and to ensure that it remains a permanent and meaningful feature. We particularly want to know if it has addressed the outstanding non-lodgements and how it will enhance the scheme in the future.**

Other issues

Provisional income estimates erode the efficacy of the scheme, as they can be used to manipulate child support assessments.

Family Payment Debts: Low and inaccurate child support assessment results in women receiving higher and incorrect family payments. Once a tax return is lodged (several years later), she will have a repayable debt to the Government with no guarantee of any collection of child support. NCSMC works with women who have had \$30,000+ debt.

It is gendered: Women comprise 85% of payees and 70% of payees have care of the children the vast majority of the time (more than 86% of the year). Click [here](#) for the Antipoverty Week Briefing Paper.

The motion echoes [recommendation](#) 3 from the Debts and Disappointment: Mothers' experiences of the child support system.

Do not recalculate child support on income estimates made without documentation.

Compel both parties to lodge a tax return annually (page iii)

Increase the minimum base amount of child support payments to something more reasonable than \$35 a month. Son's father has chosen not to work for 4.5 years now so

does not legally need to pay any more than the base amount, it is not sustainable and definitely doesn't qualify as equal by a long shot. Ashlee September 2022

Recent Media

Child support dodgers: 'make them file a tax return' Thu 18 Aug 2022. Click [here](#) for the link .

Tighten tax system to target child support avoidance: single parents. August 18, 2022. Click [here](#) for the link.

Link child support payments to Credit Ratings

To make inroads into the \$1.6 Billion which is owed to children NCSMC would seek that payments are linked to credit ratings. Payment patterns are more about choice than capacity. Illustrated by the [Departure Prohibition Orders](#) (DPO), more commonly known as 'Travel Bands.' DPO is the process by which payers with child support debts were stopped at an Australian airport and informed that they would not be able to leave until the debt was settled. The data available to NCSMC relates to Child Support Travel Bans from July to December 2018, aggregated by the various States and Territories. NSW: 276, QLD: 237, VIC: 221, WA: 160, Overseas residents: 114, SA: 32. NT: 14, TAS: less than 10, ACT: less than 10. Click [here](#) for the article.

The latest Parliamentary Inquiry Examining Child Support and Family Law (2021) acknowledged that parents' non-compliance with their child support obligations is equivalent to "stealing from children". It called for urgent action to reduce the existing child support debt levels and to promote the ongoing prompt payment of assessed child support. It also called for amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 (Family Law Act) to recognize the non-payment of child support as a relevant factor when determining the existence of financial abuse.

Abolish the Maintenance Income Test. A threshold that reduces family payments and rent assistance based upon actual or assumed low levels of child support which occurs at a harsh and low level of \$1,752.00 p/a. Abolish the Maintenance Income Test. It remains our preference for a complete decoupling as recommended in the [Debts and Disappointment: Mothers' Experiences of The Child Support System](#). The current system compels women to uphold the requirement and systemic burden of the child support scheme even if it fails in its purpose to transfer child support. Failure to take out a child support agreement results in reduced Family Tax Benefits (A). Moreover, the current system reduces Family Tax Benefit (A) and Rental Assistance even if child support is partially or not received. Automatic reductions are based upon the assumed transfer of child support.

An immediate first step would be to equalise the levels received from paid work and child support (unpaid work). Currently, paid work does not affect social security until \$58,108 whilst the receipt of child support reduces the Family Tax Benefit (A) and Rent Assistance at the low threshold amount of \$1,752.00.

Restore the Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group

The committee was a high-level committee that brought together the Government, researchers, and services who were concerned about post-separation circumstances, all of which spoke to care and work policy settings. The Joint Select Committee on Australia's Family Law System made the following statement.

The committee notes that a number of inquiry participants highlighted that the Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group (engagement group) no longer operates and has not met since 2014. When operational, this group was jointly convened by DSS and the then Department of Human Services and discussed current child support policy; child support service delivery; and child support administration processes. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government reconvenes regular meetings of the Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group, or an equivalent forum, to ensure that all relevant stakeholders can have their voices heard. In doing so, the committee recommends that the group reconvenes before the end of 2021. Recommendation 3. 4.20

Skills, Study, and Training

Abolish the compulsory nature of ParentsNext

Immediate Action

ParentsNext is a contentious pre-employment program that continues to operate despite human rights concerns and could be reimaged into a superior service. In June 2021, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR) found that the ParentsNext program impinges on human rights and presented a much-welcomed recommendation to remove ‘compulsory participation’ from the program. The inquiry unearthed that the ‘light touch program,’ a pre-employment program aimed to assist in areas of location disadvantage was responsible for 159,000 payment suspensions. Occurring since the incorporation of the Targeted Compulsory Framework (July 2018)

I left an abusive relationship only to have ParentsNext, it was the same, it was coercive control but this time I could not leave.

The statement made by Angela at the Workforce Inquiry on 7th December 2022

Reimagine ParentsNext

Establish community hubs with brokerage funds. Participants should be provided with quality career advice building towards a brighter and more financially secure future. The revised program would locate and/or provide the support that is required for the continuation or commencement of further education, and/or support to engage in job-ready options. It would work alongside and complement the Governments new investment in TAFE and VET. As requested by women, program providers could facilitate warm referrals to specialist support services with a connection to trauma-informed services. NCSMC presented an alternative model for the Current Workforce Inquiry, a Voluntary Community Hubs, and an Online Assistance model. The model incorporates the engagement and the wisdom of participants. Furthermore, during the consultations, NCSMC did not receive feedback from any participants that suggested that the current program was preferable to this proposed model. Despite engagement and consultation with current and recent participants in developing the attached model, we do not consider this model to have been co-designed and further consultation

and enhancement must occur. However, it does illustrate that alternative options that can assist rather than harm and control are possible,

I got a job in the traffic control business. I had to pay \$900 for my license. That was all of my Centrelink support, and I already had an advance payment, I don't get paid for a few weeks. I don't have any money for food, petrol, my rent, my medical appointment, and my medication (Sarah had been undergoing chemotherapy on her elbow). Sarah 13th August 22

I got a job interview, and there are not a lot of jobs in my area. I didn't have any petrol. I phoned (name removed of large crisis provider), and they told me that they could only help if I get the job. Suzie - 15th August 22

Enable volunteer work for single mothers of all ages. A significant step for women affected by gendered violence or who have had a long absence from the workplace. It builds connections, confidence, and skills. Mutual obligation rules limit volunteer work for 55+ years.

More flexibility in study options. Important for women affected by gendered violence and or who have had a long absence from the workplace. Part-time study assistance to be equal for single mothers as full-time study. Current rules allow a 50% course load to maintain full-time assistance. However, women report that Services Australia factors in semester breaks which puts them under the threshold, and that study time, writing assignments, and or field placements are not taken into consideration.

Having to leave study due to pressures of childcare- I won a Ph.D. scholarship in 2015 and thought I was on my way to a successful writing and academic career- however after trying to house, feed, and clothe myself and children on the 27k per year income, after passing my confirmation with flying colours two years in I had to withdraw as I simply couldn't afford not to work anymore... when I first started, I was a finalist in the Melbourne Lord Mayors Creative Writing Prize for a novella, alongside Jennifer Down... she just one this year's Miles Franklin Award... me, I've sent myself into a huge depression working 14 hr days throughout COVID whilst parenting without any support, with my eldest spine her entire VCE online and the second now having left school at the end of year 10... I haven't written in years because after 16 years of living in poverty parenting solo, I simply don't

have the capacity to do anything other than the most basic, fundamental tasks. Creativity, I've discovered, relies on being able to fill your cup, something most single mothers without child support simply cannot afford. Helena September 2022

Undertake research to ascertain the obstacles to study such as the upfront fees and reduced placements in the TAFE & VET, as well as why women leave. We suggest a key determinant will be when women lose access to the Parenting Payment Single (youngest child turns 8 years). Women don't finish their studies as they are forced to choose between forgoing their paid job or completing field placement requirements. There is no field placement assistance. Be informed of the churn of women into employment services RTOs or other courses that are a financial gain for the entities.

I am a single mum with a disability. Studying a teaching degree towards a better future for us. But the rigid placement rules prevented me from finishing. Students were only allowed 5 days of absence total during a full-time placement, with no option for part-time placement even for those with disabilities. I was single parenting, managing a full-time workload, and desperately hoped that neither of us got sick and that there was no pupil-free days during placement. It was impossible. If it had been part-time, I would be finished by now. My GPA was 6.6 and I have an amazing rapport with students. I have a deep passion for teaching. If I had been able to do placement part-time, I would be graduated, working now, and off the DSP. The rigid and discriminatory rules at the university destroyed my hard work and left me with a huge HECS debt.

Charlie 29-August 22

Work & Care in the Context of Gendered Violence

Recent research, [The Choice Violence or Poverty](#) found that the majority of the single mothers who lost access to Parenting Payment were survivors of family violence and coercive control. The report states that 90,000 wanted to leave but couldn't, whilst [8,000](#) women a year are forced to return to

abusive partners. We can no longer pretend that we don't know the breadth of this issue. The current social security does not provide a safety net.

Women with children must seek permission to relocate. Controlled by the perpetrator of violence. Enabled by family law. Women cannot leave even if they have secure employment and safety.

After leaving my ex I was offered employment 6 hours away. However, he wouldn't permit me to move and then moved 4 hours away and hasn't seen the kids for years. I could have bought a house with my secure employment. The kids would have had access to good schools, beaches, and a healthy lifestyle. I lived with anger, alcohol abuse, threatened violence, and coercive control and then was financially ruined after I ended the relationship.
Jodie 23rd August 22

The matter was subject to the 2010 report No Way to Live¹. The then attorney general Robert McClelland sought changes to the Family Law Act and by 2012 some of the harmful aspects had been corrected. However, despite strong and consistent voices from safety advocates and experts as well as the 2017 House of Representatives Inquiry into Family Law, the request to remove the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility from the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth), specifically s.61DA remains as unfinished business. The family law system continues to prioritise the right to contact over the right to safety. A superior policy response would be to elevate the best interests of the child. Furthermore, there are no restrictions upon the non-primary carer to undertake paid work and or to relocate for the purpose of accepting paid work. Such freedoms do not exist for the primary carer, even with substantiated safety concerns. Accepting work and enhancing a safer and superior life for herself and her family is not in itself enough of a reason.

The 'Crisis Payment' is too rigid with 7-day application requirement. NCSMC would ask the Committee to gain statistics and insights as what were the reasons for the 'crisis payment.' It is NCSMC view that family and domestic violence would be lower than as experienced within the community indication a systems error.

¹ Lesley Laing, 2010, No way to live: women's experiences in negotiating the family law system in the context of domestic violence, Benevolent Society University of Sydney.

Whilst mutual obligations continue the first exemption should be for 12 months (immediate action). NCSMC cannot locate evidence to support the current position which is a three-month exemption. To which women speak about as re-traumatizing, the need to re-tell and share personal information, it requires a burden of proof which would be repeated if she were to seek an extension. It is a deep concern that women who are affected by family and domestic violence will be referred to providers who are not trauma-informed specialist services. This is particularly apparent within the ParentsNext program. A service that commenced as a soft touch pre-employment program but once it was underpinned by the Targeted Compulsory Framework (TCF) in July 2018, it morphed into a program that is underpinned by surveillance, control, and suspensions. In under three years, the ParentsNext program was responsible for 159,000 payment suspensions and 1,072 parenting payment cancellations.

Twelve months exemption should be automatic if there has been family violence. I have been on a waitlist for ongoing specialist FV counselling for almost 12 months (coping by using phone services like blue knot and 1800 Respect, as well as a "temporary" phone counsellor offered by a local service to fill the gap). My children have also been on a waitlist for specialist counselling for nearly 12 months, following a very violent incident. Our housing situation is not yet determined (which makes it hard to find permanent work in a relevant location). Currently going through months of (expensive) legal property settlement proceedings; dealing with that is a part-time job in itself! I do not have to meet obligations due to my youngest being under the age limit, but I am concerned about how I could possibly manage if I did. There is just not the capacity to do work/study as well, and it's not reasonable to expect it. Women should not have to argue and advocate for themselves on this topic, it should be a given. Annie 7th September 2022

When I took my case to the AAT (Administrative Appeals Tribunal); they asked me for evidence why I don't work full time. I gave them three different letters (from my DV counsellor, my psychologist, and my boss). All stating that I am a victim of post separation and DV. The AAT asked me at the hearing (with this information provided to them) "when could I possibly start full time work." It should not this hard. Caitlin September 2022

Trauma and grief counselling is to be accessible and affordable and to be considered as part of a future planning terrain and this work cannot be carried out by employment services.

NCSMC welcomes the amendment to the Fair Work Act to provide 10 days of paid family and domestic violence leave as part of the National Employment Standards and endorse the extension of the paid leave entitlement to casual employees and that full entitlement will be accessible from the commencement of employment.

Other Solutions

Policy settings expect women to work as if they don't have children and to parent as if they don't have paid work. We ignore the additional demands and cost of single mothering; we don't value unpaid care or address the economic consequences of gendered violence. A lack of financial resources does not mean a lack of ambition or future planning. Progressive steps would include the elevating and valuing of feminized workplaces whilst making visible the glass elevator. NCSMC recommends the gathering of superannuation experts to explore remedies to address the gendered retirement gap due to the distribution of paid and unpaid care. We further seek that Government works with business and unions to incentivise workplaces to 'Job Share,' enabling single mothers to undertake employment that is consistent with their talent, experience, and qualifications whilst meeting single mothering demands.

What about women with qualifications and experience but who can't get decent work as EVERY role is full time (which is impossible when 100% solo parenting - OT, braces, psychology, and then any other things that can't be done on weekends). So stuck on half the hourly pay and no end in sight to overcome the financial strain.

Zalie September 2022