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'Unrelenting' demands leave single mothers voiceless

By Maeve Bannister, September 19, 2025



Single mums do not see themselves well represented in national policy approaches, a study found.

Photo: Joe Castro/AAP PHOTOS

Single mothers are juggling competing pressures of work, caring and financial insecurity yet these hardships are often overlooked by policies meant to benefit them. For single mum Aradia Sayner, it's clear that lived experience is not at the centre of policy decisions. Ms Sayner's adult son lives with severe autism and requires her full-time care. She also lives with her own disability. The pair became homeless for more than a year when their landlord sold the property they were living in.

During that time she was required to inspect and apply for at least 10 properties per week in order to remain housed in emergency accommodation.



Aradia Sayner says the system is making it harder for single mums.

"Policies are currently made by what people think should be the right thing, but not everybody fits into that narrow category," Ms Sayner told AAP. "Most policy is so black and white that it actually ends up making the situation worse. "Not only are you fighting to survive, you are also fighting a system at a time when you need the most support, but the system is making it harder for you."

[A study](#) of more than 2500 single mums by Swinburne University detailed the significant time they spent on unpaid care and the competing pressures of mothering. Almost 80 per cent of those surveyed said they spent a lot of their time worrying about, planning for, or ensuring their families wellbeing.

Six in 10 had sole care of their children, including all of the overnight care, while a further quarter per cent had between 65 and 95 per cent of night-time support. Just eight per cent of those surveyed shared care with the other parent. The survey also explored the long traumas left behind for those who had experienced a violent relationship. Nearly 70 per cent of respondents had experienced intimate partner violence and nearly 17 per cent were experiencing it.

The report also found that despite a strong desire for paid work, government policies impeded rather than supported, women to engage in it. Mutual obligation policies which women must meet to maintain income support restricted their ability to complete valuable qualifications and undertake voluntary work.

Single mums did not see themselves well represented in national conversations and policy approaches, Single Mother Families Australia chief executive Terese Edwards said. "The fact that 2600 time poor mothers took part in this survey showed these are women who are desperate to enter the conversation to try and make their lives better," she told AAP. The organisation is calling for reforms to child support, abolishing mutual obligations for women who are caregivers and the establishment of a safety supplement for women who experience domestic and family violence.



Single Mother Families Australia met with their new patron Governor-General Sam Mostyn last month.

In August, a delegation travelled to Canberra to meet with Governor-General Sam Mostyn who announced her patronage of the group. The opportunity to speak with the head of state and policymakers, including Social Services Minister Tanya Plibersek, was not one Ms Sayner took lightly. "To have the governor-general tell me that I mattered really meant a lot, because for so long I felt like I hadn't mattered to anybody," she said.