



Briefing: Personal Relationships & Poverty

This briefing looks at what works in reducing poverty in the area of personal (mainly family) relationships and is aimed at policy-makers and practitioners. It is based on wider research by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) on Personal Relationships and Poverty for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

PARENTS AND POVERTY:

Equal and non-transferable parental leave, paid at a high proportion of previous earnings. Caring for children can reduce parents' working time, depressing household income, while paying for childcare increases family costs. Having two earners and two carers is a route out of poverty but parents' choices are hampered by unequal paternity and maternity leave. If this were equal, mothers could take up or increase their work and fathers would be more involved with childcare which would reduce poverty risks – especially in event of relationship breakdown or unemployment.

Affordable and good quality childcare. Increasing employment reduces poverty risks, especially for mothers and lone parents. But this is only feasible with affordable and good quality childcare. Current state provision is limited and private childcare is expensive, of variable quality and often restricted in hours, leading to fewer UK mothers than the EU average in paid work.

In-work benefits/tax credits and training and support to make work pay. Employment is a route out of poverty but work is often low-paid and insecure, especially for mothers and lone parents. Supplementing low wages with in-work benefits and tax credits, and providing more intensive and ongoing training and support, are needed to overcome long-term poverty risks by supporting people's progress into stable work and higher wages. The work allowance for universal credit needs to be raised to make work pay and so more can be earned before benefits are withdrawn.

Equal Parental Leave



SUMMARY:

Anti-poverty policies that reconcile tensions and promote equal choices between family members – mothers, fathers, lone parents, separated and extended families - in how to balance work and care, reduce the risk of individual and family poverty. Policies are needed that:

Balance work and care tensions:

- Equal and non-transferable parental leave paid at a high proportion of previous earnings.
- Affordable and good quality childcare

Improve family finances:

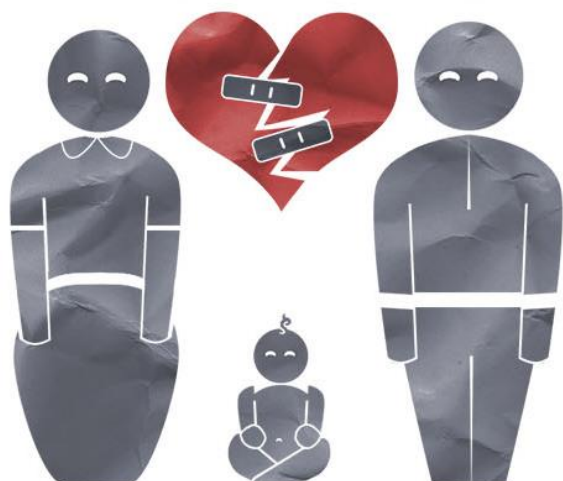
- In-work benefits, plus training and support to make work pay
- Sustainable child maintenance
- Keeping state pensions and credit at least at the current level

Reduce conflict and improve family relationships:

- Relationship support & couple counselling
- Holistic support for separated families



Couple Counselling



EXTENDED FAMILIES & POVERTY

Affordable and good quality childcare.

Grandparents and extended families often risk poverty by sacrificing employment in whole or in part to provide free and flexible childcare, especially for low-income and lone mothers. But with better childcare services, both mothers and grandparents could be in paid employment and care for children if they choose to – rather than out of necessity or lack of options.

Keeping state pensions and credit at an adequate level.

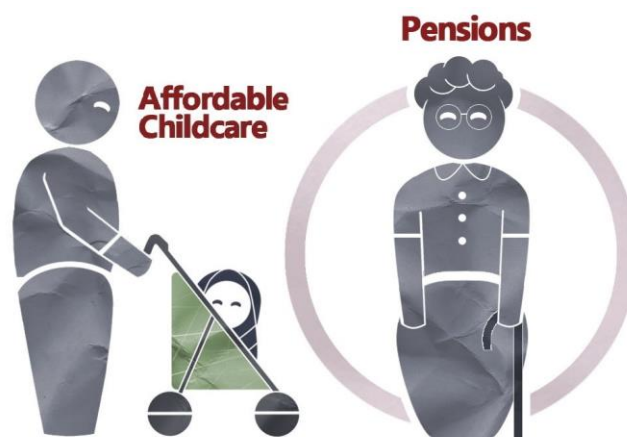
Extended families, in particular grandparents, also help with money when families are struggling on low-incomes and on benefits. But this risks that they fall into poverty themselves. Keeping pensions at an adequate level, combined with the above anti-poverty policies for families, means that any financial help given down the generations is out of choice and does not risk their own finances.

FAMILY SEPARATION & POVERTY:

Relationship support and couple counselling. The stress of living in poverty brings the added risk of relationship breakdown which in turn, can cause or increase poverty, especially for lone mothers caring for children. Interventions which reduce conflict and support stable couple relationships of all types before, during and after separation reduce poverty risks, by preventing or better managing breakdowns and promoting stable child maintenance - especially if targeted at low-income families under stress.

Sustainable child maintenance. Lasting and adequate child maintenance is essential to help lift separated parents with caring responsibility and their children out of poverty. But the new charges for using the Child Maintenance Service should be reviewed, as this may prevent its use by low-income or high conflict families that need it most.

Holistic support for separated families. When relationships do end, holistic practical and emotional support to address the multiple needs of all family members (fathers, mothers and children) can help alleviate poverty and adverse outcomes, especially when targeted at low-income families. These include financial hardship, couple conflict, mental ill-health and housing problems. But, services need to reach and support non-resident fathers more effectively.



FURTHER INFORMATION

This briefing is based on research by Laura Stock, Judy Corlyon, Cristina Castellanos Serrano and Matt Gieve, Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. The full report and other briefings in the series are available on the Tavistock Institute website, along with an animation visualising what works in reducing poverty:

<http://www.tavinstitute.org/projects/personal-relationship-poverty-evidence-policy-review>

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