Economic, environmental and health inequalities in a time of austerity

Reflections on research into the impact of welfare reform

Richard Machin – Senior Lecturer, Social Work and Health, Nottingham Trent University
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- My practice background is in local government advice services

- Research interests (Staffordshire University, Nottingham Trent University) are into the impact of government policy on vulnerable people (financial, health and wellbeing, impact on different groups)

- Honorary Associate with CHAD (Centre for Health and Development) looking at the social determinants of health
Research projects

1. Impact of the move from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment on people with mental health problems

1. Impact of the ‘Bedroom Tax’ on tenants in North Staffordshire
Overall impact of welfare reform

- Welfare reform has had a disproportionate impact on certain groups: families with children (particularly larger families), ethnic minority families, working age tenants in social housing, women, greatest financial losses felt in most deprived areas
- Many people are affected by multiple welfare changes and often by changes in other areas of government policy (e.g. housing policy, reform of legal aid, cuts to local authority budgets)
- People affected by welfare reform often have very little understanding of how changes will affect them before they are introduced and then little support/advice when they are implemented
- Often a mismatch between government rhetoric and public opinion, and actual detail of policy
Migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment

• In Stoke-on-Trent approximately 14,000 people are being migrated from DLA to PIP.

• Assessments are carried out by Capita, DWP make final decisions.

• 28.6% of reassessed claims are refused PIP – but there is a high success rate when these decisions are challenged with 67% success rate at appeal tribunals.
Migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment – overall findings

1. Overall process led to increased feelings of anxiety and uncertainty

a. Poor communication with DWP
b. Issues created by time-limited awards
c. Reluctance to appeal negative decisions

2. Problems with the PIP process

a. Problems recording complex mental health needs on the Personal Independence claim form
b. Issues with the Personal Independence Payment medical assessment
c. Feeling judged

3. Positive experiences/elements

a. Importance of additional income from disability benefits
b. Overall outcome for some participants
c. Importance of professional support
Overall recommendations

• A large-scale national review of the impact of the migration from DLA to PIP on claimants with mental health problems be conducted.
• It is recommended that Department for Work and Pensions guidance is reviewed so that claimants with severe and enduring mental health problems are included in the category of claimant judged to have needs ‘likely to stay the same or increase’.
• The Department of Work and Pensions should undertake an extensive review of PIP decisions which have been challenged through the mandatory reconsideration and appeal process to identify areas of the decision-making and evidence gathering process which can be improved.
• The Department for Work and Pensions to develop comprehensive guidance to be issued to claimants on the purpose and role of the PIP medical assessment
• Improvements should be made to both written and verbal communications between the Department for Work and Pensions and claimants/potential 24 claimants. In particular clarity should be provided on the decision-making timescales and the length of time claimants will have to wait for a PIP medical.
Migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment

‘The government appear to have overlooked the fact that the needs of disabled people don’t vanish because tighter benefit rules are introduced. This is important as the concessions that the government have been pressed into making are largely because claimants and disability campaigners have been able to clearly demonstrate that significant elements of PIP are not fit for purpose. An ill-conceived policy that seeks to save money invariably ends with compromise and additional cost that was not initially intended.’

http://www.social-policy.org.uk/50-for-50/personal-independence-payment/
Bedroom Tax: Research Findings

a. Lack of understanding about the bedroom tax
"Is it paying money to the government for having a spare bedroom?"

b. Unwillingness/inability to move
"I brought my children up here, I don’t want to be moved out of my own home. I like my neighbours"

c. Reliance on discretionary help
"It was by chance I was going on the internet and I saw you can apply for a discretionary payment."

d. Financial and emotional costs
“You’re skint all the time and when you are on a low income every day drags, especially these long nights. It’s horrible.”
Overall conclusion: Welfare Reform is a delusion

• Four reasons why welfare doesn’t work

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/four-reasons-why-welfare-reform-is-a-delusion/
The Welfare Reform Delusion

1. Welfare reform does not make economic sense
The Welfare Reform Delusion

2. Welfare reform is regressive
The Welfare Reform Delusion

3. Welfare reform does not produce the behaviour changes sought by the government
The Welfare Reform Delusion

4. We don’t spend more on our welfare system than other comparable countries
Social Security – the way forward?

The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 – A Rights-Based Approach to Social Security, Section 1:

(a) social security is an investment in the people of Scotland,
(b) social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights,
(c) the delivery of social security is a public service,
(d) respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system,
(e) the Scottish social security system is to contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland,
(f) the Scottish social security system is to be designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence.
Welfare reform research: Further reading (1)

• **The Bedroom Tax**


• **Transition from DLA to PIP**


Welfare reform research: Further reading (2)

• The 2 child limit for universal credit and child tax credit


• Welfare Reform

