

# Charity warns welfare reforms could push thousands of mothers into poverty <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Thousands of mothers in Wales will lose up to £68 a week under the Westminster Government's welfare reforms, a charity warns today.

Save the Children publishes research suggesting that up to 54,000 single mums in Wales will suffer because of the benefits changes, pushing a generation of children into a life of poverty.

The charity's analysis also shows the Westminster Government's Universal Credit proposals will make it less attractive for parents to move off benefits into work due to the lack of support with childcare.

If passed into law, Universal Credit would be in place by 2013 and would replace means-tested benefits such as into a single payment in an effort to streamline the process.

It would merge benefits such as income-related jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit, working tax credit, income support and income-related employment support allowance - into a single universal payment.

When he set out the details of the Welfare Reform Bill, which would introduce it, Prime Minister David Cameron said that it would "bring about the most fundamental and radical changes to the welfare system since it began".

But a new poll by Save the Children and Netmums showed that more than half (56%) of unemployed mothers in the UK said childcare costs were the main reason they could not work.

Save the Children also warned that the changes would affect so-called "second-earners" - most of whom were women earning a wage to supplement the main breadwinner's wage.

The charity warned that the changes could mean some families with second earners losing up to £1,800 of their income every year.

The report coincides with the launch of the charity's Mums United campaign with Gingerbread, the Daycare Trust and Netmums to increase pressure on Chancellor George Osborne ahead of Budget Day on March 21.

James Pritchard, head of Save the Children in Wales, said there was a "desperate need for a rethink" from the Westminster government.

"At a time when the economy is struggling and there are cuts to public services these benefit changes will be a terrible blow to families up and down Wales," he said.

"In trying to reform the benefit system the government is in danger of condemning a whole generation of Welsh children to a life of poverty.

"There is no doubt that the new Universal Credit will help lots of families, but our research has shown that mums - working to keep their heads above water - are its big blind spot."

He said that a mum on £370 a week "simply can't afford" to lose £70 as its projections said they would.

He said: "These are people who want to work more to provide for their children while juggling soaring childcare and living costs.

"If we want to see more mums in the workplace they should be getting more help, not less."

Save the Children called for Mr Osborne to ensure single, working mothers keep more of their incomes, before losing benefits and ensure that second earners keep the first £2,000 of their earnings without losing any benefits, as main breadwinners do.

Sean O'Neill, policy director for Children in Wales, said the plans would have a "huge impact" on children and families.

"This report is timely as it follows a report from the Welsh Government on rising concerns about additional levels of child poverty," he said.

"We are concerned in terms of the impact of a benefit cap on families, who are already struggling given the higher cost of living, paying for food, clothing and everything else."

Sally Russell, a co-founder of parenting site Netmums, said the impact on mothers could be "absolutely massive".

She said that morale was already "very low" in areas of the country, particularly in comparatively low-income areas such as Wales.

She added: "It is difficult to find work in certain areas, such as Wales, and I think it makes people very worried about what these changes might mean."

A spokeswoman for the DWP, said that it expected that by the time Universal Credit was implemented, the combined impact of take-up and entitlements would lift around 900,000 individuals out of poverty, including more than 350,000 children.

She added: "Save the Children are wrong to assert that lone parents will lose as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit.

"The truth is 600,000 lone parents will be better off under a system which will incentivise work and make work pay."

A Welsh Government spokesman said it was concerned that the proposals would have "significant negative implications in Wales".

"Although some of the aspirations of the UK Government's welfare reforms deserve support, we believe that the cumulative impact of the current proposals have the potential to drive many of the most vulnerable members of our society into deeper poverty," he added.

"We have committed in our Programme for Government to do all that we can to mitigate the impacts of the changes in Wales, as well as ensuring that associated resources are used to target the most vulnerable."

-reprinted from Wales Online

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