

Personal Stories (2013 Conference, Memorial M30 - Child support payments)

On 22 October 2008 the BBC1 programme *The One Show* included an item on changes to the Child Support Agency. Following the programme 314 comments were posted on its blog. Many were from non-resident parents (both men and women) suffering under the present regulations for calculating maintenance. Abbreviated extracts from some of the comments in this last category are given below. The comments are still (3 July 2013) available from http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theoneshow/consumer/2008/10/22/did_the_csa_need_to_change.html .

I agree absent parents should pay for the upbringing of their children. As a dad who does pay CSA I take exception to all us dads are shrugging our responsibilities. ... I love my twin boys with all I am. I see them every other weekend and in the week.

What upsets me is that I take home £196 pound a week. By the time I take out my rent, gas electric, council tax, water rates, food then my CSA I am left with £5 a week to live on. I have had to take my car off the road can't run it and walk to work every day 5 miles a day. It's actually getting to the point where I can't see my boys. I can't feed myself let alone them. So I lose out on seeing them and they lose out on seeing their dad. Then I would be branded an absent parent. Some of us men can't win.

On my contact days I can't even afford to buy my son anything or take him anywhere. My son's welfare should be paramount, but their decision is having a damaging effect on my life and his life. What a shambles.

I thought the CSA was a brilliant idea when it first came into being. I believed that every parent should support their children. However my own experience of the CSA was dreadful. ... After being assessed I couldn't believe just how much I had to pay (!) bearing in mind that I had nothing from the marital home except my clothes and personal items - and bearing in mind that I needed to get back on my feet somehow.

I felt I was treated as one of those dads who just didn't care. They knew how I felt, when they rang me and I broke down each time even threatening to end my life as I just could not see why it was worth living anymore. I was forced to move into a bedsit as I could no longer afford the little house. I lost everything. My family was the thing I cared about the most and I lost it all. My children were certainly affected by it all.

I haven't had hot water or heating in my house for 10 years as I could never afford it with what the CSA leave me to live on .

I'd just like to highlight the father's side - my son's marriage broke up through no fault of his own. He has two small children. He was up-front from the start about wanting to support them but the CSA took so much off him and he got so much into debt that he ended up trying to take his own life and was under a counsellor and crisis team for 9 months. When I contacted the CSA and said they were not leaving him enough to live on the only comment I got was 'Tough, he'll just have to find the money, won't he'.

My son has always understood he has to pay but this amount is untenable. ... Recently the situation has become so bad we his parents have to help him out or he would go under.

More Personal Stories

On 29 April 2013 the Daily Mail had an article about a suicide inquest. The inquest was told that Simon Pritchard, a 35-year-old hairdresser, hanged himself just five days after the birth of his twin daughters because of worries about how he would pay child support after splitting from mother.

After the article, 350 comments from around the world were posted online. The comments are wide-ranging and many reveal the misconceptions and general lack of understanding. Others are from those affected and abbreviated extracts for some of these are given below.

The full text of these and all other comments are still available (3 July 2013) at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2316545/Simon-Pritchard-hanged-days-birth-twin-daughters.html#ixzz2Xy8E9PDv>

How sad. RIP from one good single dad to another... We're not all 'absent fathers', many of us are hardworking, decent men who are desperately sad to be offered a secondary parenting role and don't have the funds or the equal rights to change it. The system ... is both shameful and a disgrace. Simon here is not the first, nor will he be the last...

... Maintenance assessments are so unrealistic that they literally leave men (and their second families) in an absolute desperate state, not being able to afford food for their children or even to pay basic bills like rent and utilities. In an ideal world money isn't everything - tell that to your landlord and the bailiffs that come to tow your car cos you defaulted as the CSA have robbed you of human rights to live.

I'm in a similar situation, and while my ex takes both of our kids on numerous holidays every year and to every theme park in the country, when it is my turn to have the kids I barely have enough money to buy them an ice cream. I feel alienated to the point that I think my kids think I don't care enough for them, which tears me up inside. I feel like I'm the parent who never takes them anywhere and never gets to buy them nice presents. The only thing that stops me from doing a similar thing as this dude is that I'm too cowardly to try anything. I have a great circle of friends and family but it's hard talking to them because they each have their own problems to deal with. I feel so sorry for this dudes family.

I agree with child maintenance however it is a disgusting amount. My dad lives in a tiny bedsit and forced to pay a huge amount of money he just cannot afford ... my dad has to struggle to get a decent place to live, keep himself warm, feed himself, dress himself. It's about time something was done about this.

There needs to be serious reforms in the child maintenance system. This puts parents under too much pressure to provide unreasonable amounts of money even if they have their child every weekend and provide for their child/children. ... Sad story, rest in peace.

I hope the politicians read some of these stories while on holiday again and see how the public are affected by their actions over the past years. Sympathy is fine, but we need some action, please, before more young people take their own lives.