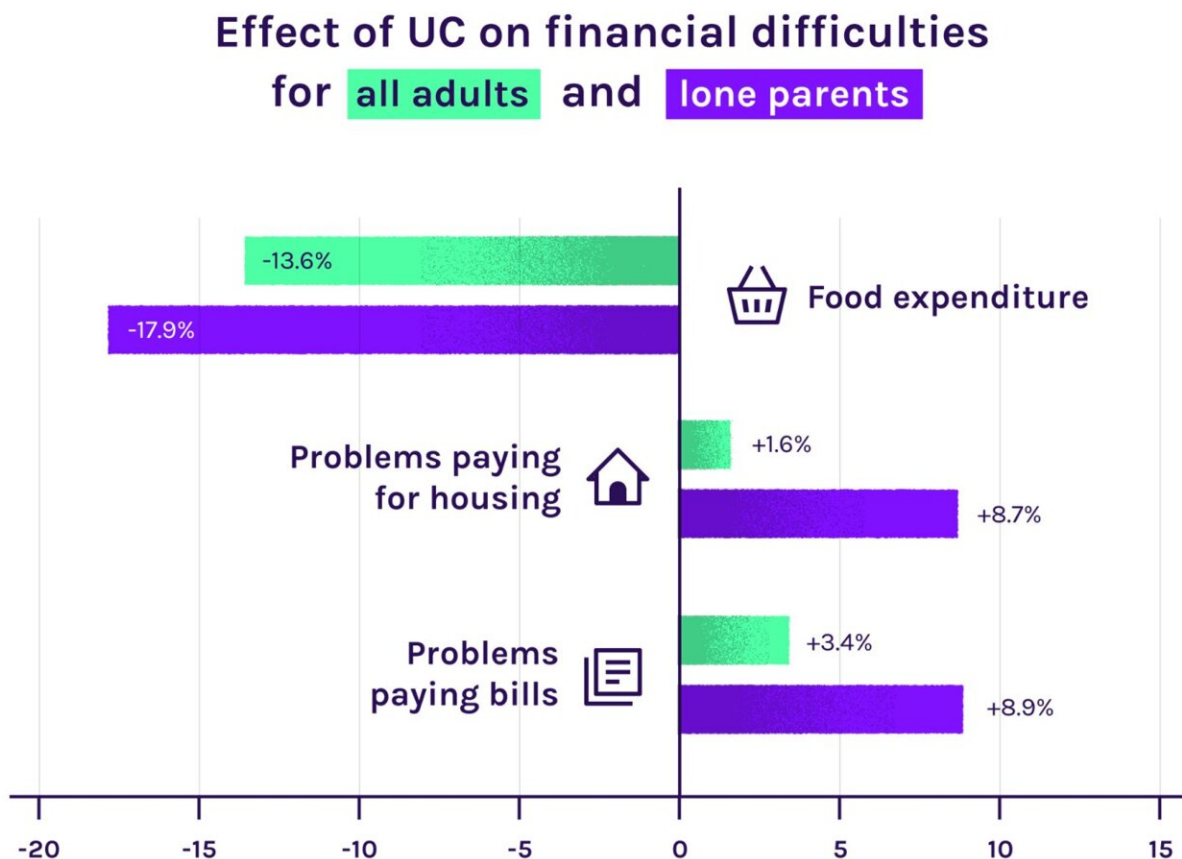


# UK report: Universal Credit harmful to mental health of lone parents

May 15 2023



Note: The figure represents the additional % change in measures of financial difficulties from being unemployed if claiming UC compared to legacy benefits, for all adults and lone parents. All effects reported in the figure are statistically significant. Credit: *Where's the Credit? Single Parents, Universal Credit and Mental Health* (2023).

A new study has shown that Universal Credit is harmful to the mental health of claimants, particularly lone parents.

The research, part of the Changing Realities program, showed that 32% of lone parents on Universal Credit (UC) experience [mental health problems](#), compared to 28% for all adults in receipt of UC.

Researchers from the University of York, Poverty Alliance, and Child Poverty Action Group, demonstrated that the number of lone parents on UC experiencing mental health problems was higher than the incidence of mental health problems for lone parents in receipt of legacy benefits, as well as for all adults in receipt of legacy benefits.

## Negative effect

Dr. Maddy Power, lead author from the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, said, "We combined analysis of the mental health impacts of Universal Credit with the accounts of lone parents and caregivers, charting their experiences of navigating the system and the additional challenges of doing so without the financial and [emotional support](#) that can come from a partner."

"Our results show that there is a direct link between experiences of Universal Credit and mental health problems and that this negative effect is particularly pronounced for lone parents."

Lone parents and caregivers documented the challenges of navigating the complex UC system without [family support](#), the stress associated with financial uncertainty created by UC, and the anxiety, distress and hardship created by [social security](#).

## Protect and support

They also described how the UC system does not recognize the burden of unpaid caring responsibilities, and the complexities involved in negotiating transitions of various kinds—whether to do with relationships or changing work patterns.

Dr. Power said, "Change is urgently needed to improve social security in order to protect and support the mental health of claimants. We outline a five-point plan for change, in partnership with parents and [caregivers](#) on low incomes, which would help make social security in general, and Universal Credit in particular, a force for good."

Dotty a lone parent participant in Changing Realities said, "Being on Universal Credit has meant that I was often faced with the decision of whether or not I should use my money to eat or heat the home, which has in turn, caused me a lot of anxiety about whether or not I'll have enough money to last me for the rest of the week after food and fuel has been paid for."

**More information:** Report: [changingrealities.org/write-ups/wheres-the-credit/](https://changingrealities.org/write-ups/wheres-the-credit/)

Provided by University of York

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