Welfare Conditionality and Anti-social Behaviour: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change

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Outline

1 About the study
2 Conditionality and Anti-social Behaviour: Rationalities and Mechanisms
3 Research Evidence
4 Understanding Interventions and Outcomes
5 Initial Findings from the ESRC Study
1 About the Study

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council is gratefully acknowledged
ESRC-funded study, 2013-2018

- Interviews with 44 key informants
- 24 focus groups with practitioners and stakeholders
- 10 case study cities and towns in England and Scotland
- 480 individuals subject to interventions, including ASB sample (39)
- Interviewed every 9-12 months in 3 waves
- Longitudinal qualitative research
- Key informant interviews, focus groups and wave 1 interviews completed
- Commencing wave 2 interviews
2 Conditionality and Anti-social Behaviour: Rationalities and Mechanisms
New Labour and ‘coercive welfare’

- A belief that “everyone can change” and that the state can ‘grip’ families and make them change their behaviour
- Increasing focus on the take-up of support:
  - It is possible ‘to make people who need help take it…households can be forced to take help’
  - A belief that sanctions provide a very strong incentive to encourage those households to undertake rehabilitation when they have refused other offers of help
- A belief that such support is non-negotiable
Policy measures

- ASBOs, Parenting Orders, Family Intervention Tenancies, Pilots of Housing Benefit Sanctions
- Based on set of prohibited behaviours (ASBOs) or required behaviours (Parenting Orders)
- Viewed as a contractual arrangement (as well as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts), balancing support with sanctions for non-compliance
- Family Intervention Projects: different models but focus on key worker model with holistic whole-family approaches
- Latter focus on early and supportive interventions (mirrored in the Scottish Government’s approach)
Coalition Government and a rehabilitation revolution?

- Belief that ‘current measures impose stringent measures to prevent future ASB but don’t address underlying causes’
- Need for simple, clear and effective sanctions regime
- More rehabilitating and restorative rather than criminalising and coercive, but still ‘real consequences for non-compliance’
- Continuing belief that ‘sanctions provide a proper deterrent to the ‘persistent minority’ and that Parenting Orders can compel parents to attend programmes
- Recognition that some practitioners reluctant to use sanctions, relying on a voluntary ethos
- Reduction in ambition from ‘everyone can change’ to ‘government working with people who want to take the necessary steps’
- To provide support beyond the welfare support system and to reduce top down state intervention: ie, localised provision with greater role for community, voluntary and private sectors
Troubled Families Programme

- Troubled Families Programme: to ‘turn around’ the lives of 120,000 families during the 2010-2015 Parliament
- ASB one of four criteria for inclusion in the programme and payment by results partly determined by reductions in ASB
- Retrospectively supported by two DCLG research publications
- Five key intervention factors: a dedicated worker; practical hands on support; a persistent, assertive and challenging approach; considering the family as a whole and gathering the intelligence; and a common purpose and agreed action.
Anti-social, Crime and Policing Act 2014

- Existing measures/ powers consolidated to six new powers
- Broadening of the definition of ASB
- Powers easier to use, extended geographical reach and available to more agencies
- Crucially, new Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance and Criminal Behaviour Orders can impose positive requirements upon individuals as well as prohibitions (this was not possible with ASBOs or ASB Injunctions- it was possible with Individual Support Orders but these were not widely used).
3 Research Evidence
Previous research findings

• Importance of key worker role with assertive approach and ‘non-negotiable expectations’
• Importance of holistic whole-family approach, identifying and tackling underpinning issues
• Recognising centrality of relationships with family but also liaison and advocacy, not just direct support
• Recognising importance of crisis management, stabilising and ‘soft’ transformative outcomes as prerequisite for ‘hard’ and ‘measurable’ outcomes
• Concerns over limited time period for working with families, exit planning and longer-term outcomes
• Concerns over resources, access to expert services and flexibility of key agencies to support families
• Understanding voluntary and engaged ethos of many interventions
Contested research evidence

- Claim that evaluations of Family Intervention Projects have over-estimated positive outcomes
- Considerable controversy about Louise Casey’s report on troubled families and arising conclusions and recommendations
- Critique that, despite all the research, there has been very little ‘accumulated learning’ about how to tackle ASB and troubled families
4 Understanding Interventions and Outcomes
Understanding interventions

- Assessment
- Direct Support (Emotional, practical, financial)
- Liaison and Advocacy

- Engagement – assessment - support plan and contract - provision of support - exit planning
Understanding all outcomes (not just ‘hard’ transformative ones)

- **Crisis Management**: reducing immediate risk or harm and responding to trauma
- **Stabilising**: maintaining environments, relationships and dynamics
- **Transformative**:
  - **Soft Outcomes**: improved self-esteem, mental and physical health, domestic environment and management, inter-family relationships
  - **Hard Outcomes**: Education (attendance and attainment); employment/training; reduced risky behaviour or ASB; prevention of eviction or entry to criminal justice system
5 Initial Findings from the ESRC Study
Indicative early findings

- Confirms existing evidence and evaluations
- Individuals/households with range of vulnerabilities, exacerbated by welfare reform and benefits sanctions
- Still need to address underpinning problems
- Chaotic and dynamic situations in which ‘rational and future-orientated decision making’ challenging
- Tension between ethos of support and use of sanctions
- Many individuals not fully aware of nature of interventions, forms of sanction or behavioural requirements
- Non-linear progress and fluidity of relations within interventions
- Concerns about resources and extent to which expertise is being lost due to budget reductions
- Reduction of ASB as priority impacting on partnerships
Indicative early findings 2

- Complex relationship between sanctions and support: in some cases sanctions acting as ‘catalyst’ for change
- Sanctions ineffective without any form of support (but not necessarily visa versa)
- Key role of key workers, including new role to negotiate sanctions regime
- Contrast between personalised and sustained ASB-related support and impersonal ‘automated’ benefits sanctions
- Lack of joining up of different sanction elements (housing, ASB, benefits)
- Varied views on the extent to which threat of sanction acts as a motivation or catalyst for engagement in support
- Support for principles of sanctions (ASB and employment-related) among subjects of interventions, but often disputed and challenged in own personal case.
Indicative early findings 3:

“They were just throwing these ASBOs and injunctions and all these like, official letters and things. I couldn’t sort of take it on board what I was reading. I don’t understand it, get it or anything really, I didn’t understand why I was getting it.”

“I would have like filtered it through and it would have been something totally different in my head anyway.”

“It’s a good thing in the sense that they can see that there is no need for them [project workers] anymore because we are starting to become like a proper family should be.”

“But I expect that there would have been a family out there that could have done with it a lot more than what I have to be quite honest with you.”
Further reading


See also: [www.welfare@conditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfare@conditionality.ac.uk) for ASB and other briefing papers and more information about the study.
Welfare Conditionality
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