

*Patriarchy in the welfare system:
Evidence from a small-scale qualitative
study of jobless households*

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The study

- Ongoing qualitative study of 'jobless households' in a disadvantaged area of Dublin
- Interviewed 33 households (one person per household), 16 local service providers, 11 employers; currently interviewing policy makers
- The experience of partnered women with children under 18 was not a particular focus of the study, but it became clear that their experiences were particularly interesting

The nine women

- Elizabeth – 50, on CE, husband on Invalidity Pension, ESL, many years work experience
- Grainne – late 30s, training, husband on Invalidity Pension, ESL, many years work experience
- Hannah – late 30s, QA, husband unemployed, has Leaving Cert, many years work experience
- Pamela – early 30s, QA?, husband unemployed, has Leaving Cert, many years work experience

- Julia – late 30s, Invalidity Pension, husband on Carer's, many years work experience
- Tammy – late 30s, main claimant & studying, husband is QA, qualified, some work experience
- Irene – early 40s, QA (previously OPFP), partner unemployed, ESL, poor work experience
- Catherine – 30s, Carer's Allowance, husband unemployed, ESL, no work experience
- Greta – 40, Carer's Allowance, husband unemployed, ESL, no work experience

Key issues found

- Two key issues:
 - Separate unemployment payments for the adults in a couple were rare in our study
 - Qualified adults were not contacted by Intreo for activation supports

Individual or household payments?

- 1993 – CSW2 report recommended *‘social welfare payments should be divided between the recipient and the qualified partner’* and that *‘the Government should work towards establishing by 1997 a system of individual rights and payments in the social insurance and social welfare system’*
- Several reports in late 1990s looked at changing the system.
- At this stage, it seems that there was some change, but overall mainstream policy does not seem to facilitate individual payments & supports when both partners are on unemployment benefits

Payments

- Variety in payments – but the dominant pattern was joint/household unemployment payments
- Why joint payments?
 - The fact that a household payment can be higher when claimed by one partner rather than the other, or when claimed by each partner separately.
 - Key issues are the age of the claimant, and the type of payment

Payment variations depending who claims

Cian, 24 & Jane, 25

- 1) - Cian claims JA, with Jane as QA = €102.70 each, €205.40 total, OR
- 2) - Jane claims JA, with Cian as QA = €147.80 for Jane, €128.10 for Cian, €275.90 total, OR
- 3) - Each claims separately for half the family rate applying to them = €137.95 for Jane, €102.70 for Cian = €240.65 total

Payment variations depending on who claims

Anna & Paul, 36:

1) Anna is on Invalidity Pension, so can claim €198.50 per week, plus QA for Paul of €141.70 = €340.20 total

OR

2) If Paul claimed JA, he would receive €193 per week, plus QA for Anna of €128.10 = total €321.10

See

http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/irish_social_welfare_system/means_test_for_social_welfare_payments/means_test_for_jobseekers_allowance.html

Why joint payments? (2)

- Traditional views
- People are not told they can claim separately or get paid separately
 - E.g. Hannah
 - Corroborated by other service providers
- A confusing range of options to split payments/claims! E.g. QA, separate claim, separate payments, spousal swops (until recently)
- Not even all DSP staff know the different options

Why joint payments?

- If you claim separately you have to be available for full-time work
- And the household has to decide who is the main claimant... so maybe it's easier to go with the traditional view

What do the women think?

- *I just can't understand why, when two people get together, why the man should have ... the main, you know, money ... you would think that was years ago (Queenie)*
- *It was a shock to me because I went from like earning, with my own money, my cheque, my payslip to, you know, to it... The thing that really affected me was depending on him always ... All the bills were in my name [but] you don't have money going into your bank so ... they're still in my name, but like he just pays them (Hannah)*
- *I went down [to the CWO] for beds, the girls needed new beds, we'd no money ... and he said to me - it's not your claim, it's your husband's ... I felt, like under a rock, it really bugged me ... I really felt like - oh my god, like how can you, how can you treat people like that because you're a spouse, you're a wife? (Hannah)*
- *I've a seventeen year old child, he has no dependents, I have to look after me child - now he's getting paid for the two of us! It doesn't make sense (Irene)*

No contact from Intreo

- QA were not contacted by Intreo – or women on a different payment whose partner was unemployed
- This was the case even where the women had a better chance of getting a job than their husbands (e.g. administration vs building)
- Instead a number of women were activating themselves, doing training, on CE, searching for jobs

What supports are available for QA?

- Some supports are available for QA, but not those which apply to a 'main claimant'.
 - Training – free day courses but no training allowance, no paid evening courses
- Spousal swops which facilitated access had been available but are no longer, requiring starting a new claim, and risking some secondary benefits

Why is the activation system operating like this?

- Some interviewees thought it was because the State didn't have the capacity to provide supports to both members of a couple, and to reduce costs of paying unemployment benefits
- Mary Daly – conflict between patriarchy and activation, with patriarchy winning out in welfare system
- Does the activation system approach reflect the pattern of women's work in Ireland?

Couple work patterns, Ireland, 2010

<i>Both work full-time</i>	<i>26%</i>
<i>Male works full-time, female part-time</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Female works full-time, male part-time</i>	<i>9%</i>
<i>One or both work part-time</i>	<i>11%</i>
<i>Male works full-time, female not in work</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>Neither work</i>	<i>15%</i>

- This shows that in at least 50% of couples in Ireland in 2010, both partners were in paid work

Future changes?

- Latest Pathways to Work does commit to ‘expanding pro-active engagement to other people of working age who are unemployed but not in receipt of a jobseeker payment’ – e.g.
 - changes in eligibility,
 - greater participation in education & training,
 - consideration of extension of JST model to QA
- Exactly what shape these will take is unclear, but it does seem at least that these changes would bring the treatment of partnered women more in line with the general patterns of couples in paid work in Ireland