

Young People and the ‘Troubled Families Programme’

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Background

In 2011 the government's flagship 'Troubled Families Programme' (TFP) was launched.

Troubled Families Programme Guidance published March 2012, confirmed national identification criteria as:

- **Youth crime/ASB**
- **Truancy/school exclusion**
- Worklessness
- Local discretion to consider other factors

It is intended that by 2015, 120,000 troubled families will have been 'turned around' (DCLG, 2013)

Phase Two (new headline criteria):

1. Parents and **children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour.**
2. **Children who have not been attending school regularly.**
3. **Children who need help.**
4. Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and **young at risk of worklessness**
5. Families affected by domestic violence and abuse.
6. Parents and **children with a range of health problems.** (DCLG, 2014b)

Young peoples perspectives

- Children/young people in family wide intervention projects such as the TFP are often passive or silent
 - How do young people perceive the TFP?
 - Is this different to other family members?
 - Are 'needs' distinctly different?
 - What tensions might arise?
- Dismantling of youth services/provision has implications for the 'success' of the TFP

The study – Qualitative exploration

- 12 semi-structured interviews with parents (10 mothers/2 fathers)
- 6 semi-structured interviews with key workers delivering the TFP
- 10 semi-structured interviews with young people aged 13-17 (8 males/2 females)
 - Timelines/relational maps

3 key areas covered:

- Tensions between negative representations of YP within the TFP and the harsh reality of their lives
- Young peoples perceptions of the TFP. How this varied/What tensions arose
- The TFP within the wider context of austerity, esp. the decimation to services and provision for young people.

Key findings (1) - Troubled? Or Troublesome Youth?

- **Troubled Young People** (Child in Need/Vulnerability) = These young people *have* problems
- **Troublesome Young People** (Dangerous/Risky) = These young people *cause* problems

Support for the most vulnerable

Positive for Youth

A new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19

Core principle of PfY (cross government policy for young people) = being positive about young people rejecting negative stereotypes

Progress review (2014) “Government funds support to all parents; resources LA’s to offer targeted support, and is funding new work with the most troubled families”.

Key findings (1) - Troubled? Or Troublesome Youth?

- Negative representations of YP within the TFP = Youth problem behaviours: *truancy, youth offending, anti-social behaviour*
- Moral imperative to regulate and control the behaviour of marginalised groups.



Revealed, the underclass: How dysfunctional behaviour cost the taxpayer £9 billion

1 in 6 of Britain's 120,000 'Shameless' families turned around after ministers order 'no nonsense' crackdown

- Dysfunctional behaviour
- Size of the country's 'underclass'
- Troubled families programme

By MARK DUELL FOR MAILONLINE

PUBLISHED: 12:50, 17 August 2014 | U



Britain's problem families are costing the taxpayer £9 billion a year, it has been revealed. The dysfunctional behaviour of 1 in 6 of the country's 120,000 'shameless' families cost the taxpayer £9 billion a year, it has been revealed. Ministers have demanded an end to the 'it's not my fault' culture which allowed up to 120,000 problem families to avoid taking responsibility for their own lives.

Scroll down for video



- Government claims troubled families cost the taxpayer £9 billion
- David Cameron ordered £450 million crackdown in the wake of 2011 riots
- Teams of experts get children back to school and adults into work
- Halfway through scheme 62,000 families are already being helped

By MATT CHORLEY, MAILONLINE POLITICAL EDITOR

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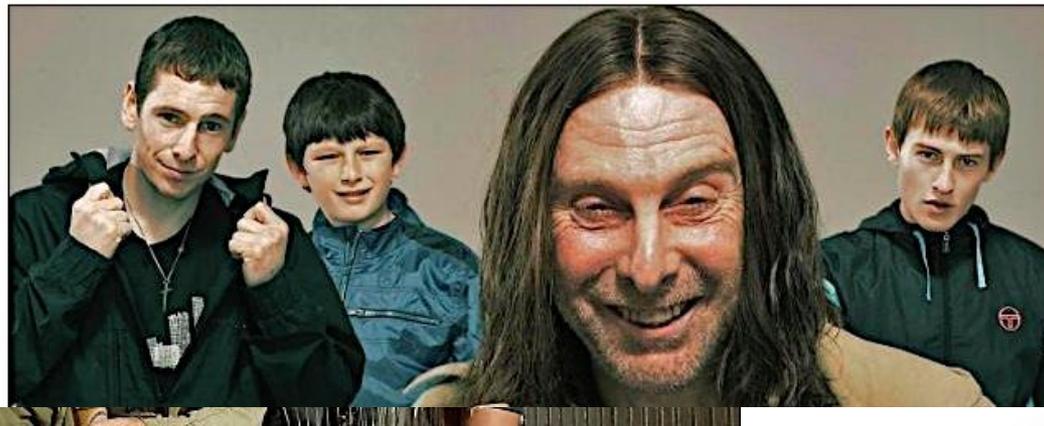


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More than one in six of England's most troubled families have been released from a 'cycle of despair', the government claims.

Some 22,000 of the so-called 'Shameless' families have been turned around, with children back in school, crime cut and thousands of parents back in work.

It follows ministers demanding an end to the 'it's not my fault' culture which allowed up to 120,000 problem families to avoid taking responsibility for their own lives.



Complex biographies/the experience of adversity

"I just remember the bad parts from when I was younger, from about 3 or 4. It sounds bad doesn't it, abuse... I've slept in bus stops... I've even tried jumping in the river and everything. Then I ran from home to come here and it was shit with my mum as well".

I couldn't cope with everything. I was trying to look after mum, her boyfriends and stuff, then Alex (friend) got stabbed, then my brother went to jail, then my dad he was abusing me (Male, 16)

Researcher: If you could change anything in your life what would you change?

I'd change mine and my brothers behaviour to stop us getting on my mums nerves. So she starts coping better... I'm happy now I am back with my mum, but I just don't want to be treating her like shit all the time.

Timelines

“They (Social Services) didn't’ understand everything. They just go in straight away for what they think is bad. They didn't’ listen to the situation we’re in. They started talking about care and that. And I said your not taking me to care, not a chance. I said I’m happy were I am. I want to look after my mum. I was panicking at school and that, thinking they were going to come and pick me up”

Identifying needs/measuring success

Merely returning PBR by sustaining a young person in education (over three-consecutive terms) is unlikely to provide the level of support required in dealing with the needs identified in the research.

“Exit is a lot quicker now because you’ve achieved the target you want, and got the payment...Sometimes you get feedback saying why are you closing this now, they clearly need more help. And it’s really difficult to say to the professionals, yes the family might be in complete crisis, but the kid’s in school and the mum’s got a job so we’re done”.

[Practitioner interview 1]

PBR –Expanded Framework:

1. Achieved sustained and significant progress, compared with all the family’s problems at the start of the intervention.

or

2. An adult in the family has moved off benefits and into continuous employment.

Key findings (2) - Young people's perception of the TFP

- “helping mum” – YP appreciative of key worker support.
 - Depression, debt, domestic abuse, drug/alcohol misuse, bereavement
- Developing trust in the key worker took time and involved being non-judgmental:

“With all the others I could see it on their face straightaway. I thought I’m not working with you. Say, if you came in here and it was a mess. You could see it on their face straightaway, they wouldn’t be happy. It’s the attitude. I’ll tell you something, our family is strong”.

- Relationships with key workers varied – some focused on the young person/others on the parent.

“She (keyworker) was more understanding... I mean the way she spoke. It was like having a friend basically. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't be were I was now. I'd probably be in jail or something”

- Young people cared/invested in the well-being of the wider family (relational maps)

Family time

Family deprivation limited opportunities for quality family time.

- Holidays/days out to the seaside:

*“We can fend for ourselves but that’s not the point. We want to treat ourselves. Like trips to * (seaside), that’s like £50/£60”.*

Experience/stigma of poverty:

“I get those food parcels and she (professional) ticks domestic violence but why because I’m not in domestic violence anymore? Why do they do that? There’s options at the bottom (of form) but I thought they’d put low income not domestic violence”... its tense, you have to sit and talk to someone and they bring you food and that. You talk about how your life is and that but you shouldn't't have to do that. You have to do it every time”

“At the age of 12 I was going out grafting, robbing lead and that, just to get food and what have you”

Majority of cases had been closed – young people left to carry on with hardship/caring/worrying for their parents well-being. Young people were left worrying about the future (not their own future, but predominantly that of their parents). Reinforces their passivity/silence within and through this process

“I worry about my mum. She’s out now. I know what she’s doing but I do worry for her. I don’t think she understands that though. i got her into counseling and that”

Key findings (3) - Trouble ahead?

Looking to the future:

- Trouble ahead? (Closed cases) Not one young person could name a professional who they were in contact with to provide support. Mechanisms of support had closed down despite a number of participants currently being NEET. Ironic considering how the majority of these young people had been a means through which to claim PBR. Success stories on paper but how do we measure success? Is this 'success' being sustained?

Aspirations for the future:

"Mum being proud of me"

"I'm doing everything I can, applying for apprenticeships, going to job centres, going to Connexions, ringing people up. Everyone is trying their hardest now aren't they to get a job. They (media) are on about all these shops opening and thousands and thousands of jobs but it never happens. I'm applying for over 30 a week." (Male, 17)

"All I want in my life is a job, a flat and a partner and then I'm happy"

- Multi-agency working – brokering in support at a time when provision is being dismantled.
- Austerity having a disproportionate effect on young people

NEET/Underemployment/low pay insecure work

- The costs of NEET = £160k life-time cost to economy for every person NEET (Coles et al 2010)
- Participants are vulnerable young people whose return to work may be longer term and complex = will require a commitment to complex and long term interventions
- Likely to require partnership arrangements (and alliances between different agencies) to have any significant impact

BUT

- Employment/unemployment are not static categories
- The most common and typical NEET career – involved “churning” between unemployment and insecure employment” (Coles, et al, 2010)
- Much of this is often the result of **labour market DEMAND** (the job-contracts on offer) rather than the characteristic of the young person
- Why governments usually try to avoid them, redefine them in their own terms (“scroungers” and “troubled families”)

Conclusion

- Tensions between parents/young people were not necessarily a feature of this type of intervention. However, some young people refused to engage with the key worker (we need to explore the implications of this on family relationships further).
- The TFP should not be viewed as a substitute to more conventional forms of youth services/provision even though key worker support can play a valuable role. TFP needs to be placed in its wider context – decimation of youth services and provision
- Considering the basis on which the TFP is measured it is vital we track young peoples experience of this. Importantly, we need to track short and long term outcomes as young peoples lives unfold.
- Phase two – Broader criteria = more families. But more resources? LA's effectively doing more with less. Definitions of 'significant and sustained progress' – life changing? Realistic?
- Family 'problems' are embedded in a history of poverty and multiple deprivation – FIP's themselves are unlikely to make any substantial difference unless the root causes are tackled.