

## A 'MONOPOLY' OF THE ARGUMENT

The 'single parent' charity Gingerbread has once more pulled the wool over the eyes of the public and the establishment. In an article in the Times headlined '**Fathers use elaborate tricks to avoid paying child support**' we hear the same one sided story that men are feckless 'high-rollers'



who care nothing for their children and create elaborate financial scams to defraud the hapless Child Maintenance and Tax authorities who are left trailing in their wake.

This is a part of a campaign that seeks to convince us all that men are bad, women are good and children need to be saved from having to have a relationship with their fathers. Gingerbread and others seek to 'monopolise' the argument

The Times sets out the ways that these 'typical' fathers continue to abuse their defenceless ex-partners and children. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/b55c6e12-59da-11e7-ad31-8e588690cd15>

### HOW DIVORCEES HIDE WEALTH

- Set up a limited company for professional earnings and pay a salary to a new wife or partner
- Run a limited company and take a small salary but with lavish benefits and large pension contributions
- Transfer large shareholdings to a family member so dividends are not declared on your gross income
- Draw income from ISAs or trust funds that are not liable for income tax and are "invisible" to HMRC
- Hold substantial wealth in assets and live off the capital while declaring little or no income

Well that doesn't sound like the 'typical' dad who calls our helpline or comes to our network of advice and support meetings across Wales.

Let me introduce 'Mark'. He's a dad of two living in South Wales. His eldest child lives with his mother. She's fought for almost a decade to prevent their child from having a relationship with his father. 'Mark' is currently receiving £73.10 per week in Job Seeker's Allowance. BUT, from those benefits he has £8.40 deducted by the Child Maintenance service and paid to the mother of his child. She works part-time and with the full array of benefits given to her because she is a single parent with a child she has a monthly income more than 20 times higher than 'Mark'. Mark's position highlights a further problem that impacts directly on children because this 'deduction' from his benefits takes food from the mouth of his second child leaving 'Mark' unable to pay for the most basic of items.

The Times article also makes no pretence about a 'gender-neutral' approach. Current estimates suggest that more than 10% of primary carers for children are men. So now let me introduce you to 'Emily'. She's a mum who isn't the main carer for her child. 'Emily' sometimes struggles with her mental health but always prioritises puts her child first. She works part time in a low wage job. She barely earns enough to pay National Insurance (currently £8,400 p.a.) The main carer for her child has a high powered full time career earning 5 times and more what 'Emily' does. Yet the Child Maintenance authorities pursue HER for a percentage of her annual income.

But surely these stories can't be right. How can the state create a system where individuals on benefits or in very low wage jobs can possibly have money deducted from them to pay to the 'main carer' who can readily access a range of childcare benefits and may earn substantial amounts from wage and investment income? How much do you have to earn for the Government to take money from you to pay to the other parent? Well the answer is £7. Yes - £7 per week. That's all you need to 'earn' before the Government will step in and take money from you to give to the other parent of your child.

The first £100 of weekly income results in a flat rate £7 charge. But when you start to really earn some cash then Child Maintenance properly kicks in. The threshold for paying a percentage of your



income is just £100 per week! 'Emily' only has one child. This means that from everything she earns above £100 a week the Government will take 17% of her gross income and pay it to the other parent who earns five times more than she does. So when 'Emily' has her child living with her she has so little money to care for her that it seriously undermines

the relationship between her and her child.

Child Maintenance does however have a mechanism for recognising that the 'paying parent' also has costs linked to being a parent. For each night that the child stays with the 'paying parent' the amount paid to the 'receiving parent' is reduced by 1/7<sup>th</sup>. But even that creates a perverse disincentive.

We see many fathers who are told that they can't have the child in their care overnight. One case that particularly stands out was a dad called 'Colin' who shared the care of his children almost equally following separation. The mother used child maintenance as a form of control over him – on several occasions unilaterally stating that she was stopping contact when he disagreed with anything she said about the care of their children. On one such occasion the father had the Child Maintenance service on the phone within 2 hours to 'adjust' his payments as they'd heard he was no longer seeing his children so couldn't claim the 'discount' for each night they were in his care.

The 'monopoly' of the argument around these issues by a man-hating pressure group is a gross distortion. We know that there ARE men who walk away from their responsibilities. But these media attacks portraying a one sided argument have to be challenged. Together with our sister charity

Families Need Fathers we made submissions to the House of Commons Work & Pensions Committee about the new Child Maintenance system. We know it is far from perfect – something that we can at least agree with Gingerbread – yet the evidence of real hardship – of manipulation by ‘receiving parents’ using coercive and controlling behaviours to ‘punish’ their former partners was completely ignored. Do we think the fact that more than ¾ of all suicides are by men has any connection with this problem? Well the answer is that we genuinely don’t know because no-one is interested in finding out why men in mid life seem so intent on killing themselves every year. But here are just some of the comments we received in response to a survey of the experience of al dads in Wales

***I attempted suicide ten years ago when my ex wife told me if I didn't hand the house over to her she would tell enough lies to ensure I never saw my children again***

***Having my children taken away from me. I was very close to my sons. Then having 42 allegations against me just so that she could get legal aid. Suicide seemed the best option. Twice I tried to hang myself and once I stood on a railway track. The Samaritans talked me off the track.***

Quotes from 2017 Welsh Dads survey p24 [https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/WELSH\\_DADS\\_SURVEY\\_2017\\_report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/WELSH_DADS_SURVEY_2017_report_FINAL.pdf)

So the next time you hear the same old argument that fathers are like ‘Rich Uncle Moneybags’ and use the system to oppress poor deserving mothers and their children maybe YOU’LL just pause to think whether that view is the whole truth. The ‘monopoly’ of the argument harms children – it’s time for a different voice to be heard.

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