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Research in Public Health

“Insidious Brutality” Universal Credit in North East England

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Translational Research in Public Health

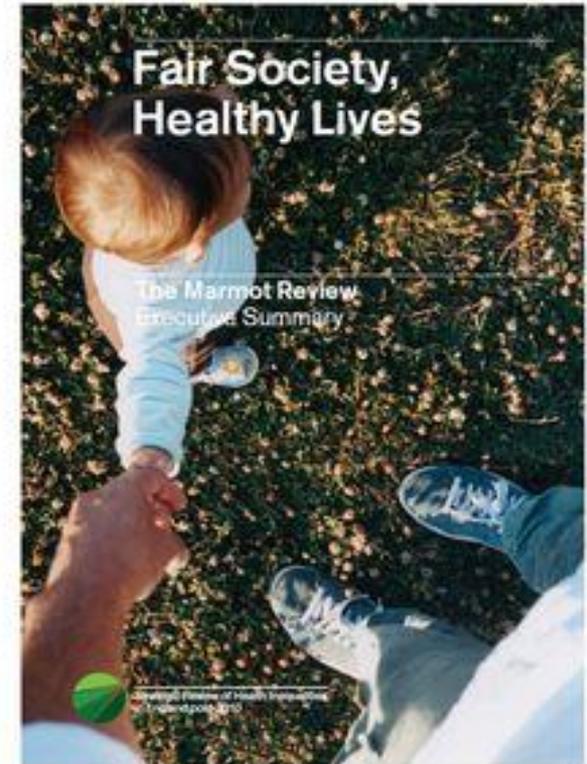
Dr Suzanne Moffatt, Newcastle University

Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health, Gateshead Council

Dr Michelle Addison, Northumbria University

Marmot review recommendations (2010)

1. giving every child the best start in life
2. enabling all children, young people and adults to maximize their capabilities and have control over their lives
3. creating fair employment and good work for all
4. **ensuring a healthy standard of living for all**
5. creating and developing sustainable places and communities
6. strengthening the role and impact of ill-health prevention.





Due North recommendations (2014)

1. **Tackle poverty and economic inequality** within the North and between the North and the rest of England.
2. Promote healthy development in early childhood.
3. Share power over resources and increase the influence that the public has on how resources are used to improve the determinants of health.
4. Strengthen the role of the health sector in promoting health equity.

DUE NORTH

Executive summary report of
the Inquiry on Health Equity
for the North

2012 Welfare “Reform” Act

Some “principles”

Benefits freeze – no uprating of benefits in line with inflation

Benefits cap – maximum amount to households irrespective of household composition

Increased conditionality for out of work benefits/
increased sanctions

Removal of spare room subsidy – “bedroom tax”

Universal Credit



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theguardian
website of the year



www.parliament.uk

In tenants' own words: why the bedroom tax makes you ill

The bedroom tax causes stress, depression, loneliness and and hunger, social housing tenants told an academic study



16 Mar 2015 34

According to the Newcastle University researchers, tenants were putting in a “monumental effort” to cope with the impacts of the bedroom tax. As one 72 year old male tenant told the study:

“ You just exist, you just survive in the best way you can

A qualitative study of the impact of the UK ‘bedroom tax’

S. Moffatt; S. Lawson; R. Patterson; E. Holding; A. Dennison; S. Sowden; J. Brown

J Public Health (Oxf) (2015) 38 (2): 197-205.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdv031>

Published: 15 March 2015

House of Lords debate on the under occupancy charge (‘bedroom tax’) Baroness Quinn (Lab):-
The Newcastle University study showed that many people had been forced into debt for the first time and that their **health and well-being, contrary to the Government’s claims, have suffered hugely** as a result.

Journal of
Public Health



**National Institute for
Health Research**



So how does the 'bedroom tax' affect lives?

Remember, this is BEFORE Universal Credit

- Difficulties affording basic needs - food, utilities, clothing
- Mental health & wellbeing
- **Family and community support**
- The meaning of home and community



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I just keep myself to myself. Well, you cannot go out ... **I used to**, when I used to take the bairn out, used to be a granda ... I meant **them days have long gone** ... they go on about old people and loneliness ... **sometimes I never see anybody for a week**, you know, sometimes longer ... and like I say, **they shut the library** so you might have went to the library and met one or two people and it's just nice to get up in the morning and say hello to somebody, good morning you know ... sometimes you're just sitting there and praying the telephone rings **just so you can talk to somebody**. (58 year old man)



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We're reforming the welfare system to help more people to move into and progress in work, *while supporting the most vulnerable.*

DWP Policy Statement



Aims of Universal Credit

- Simplify the benefits system
- Make work pay
- Reduce fraud / error
- Encourage people into work



“I believe in fairness and compassion, standing beside people when times get tough and helping everyone reach their full potential. These are the values at the heart of Universal Credit, and I am determined to deliver them.”

(Amber Rudd, speech on 11th January 2019)

Universal Credit – flagship “reform”

Approx 7 million households
will be affected

Rolled out incrementally,
Impact on claimants not
been measured by DWP
(National Audit Office, 2018)

Aim to examine impact of
UC on claimants and support
staff



The cover page features logos for fuse (The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health), Teesside University, Gateshead Council, and Newcastle University. The title is "It's hitting people that can least afford it the hardest" the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit in two North East England localities: a qualitative study. The authors listed are Mandy Cheetham¹ PhD, Suzanne Moffatt² PhD, and Michelle Addison³ PhD. The report is dated November 2018. Footnotes provide contact information for the authors at Teesside University and Newcastle University.

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Gateshead Council

Teesside University

Newcastle University

*“It’s hitting people
that can least afford it the hardest”*
the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit in
two North East England localities:
a qualitative study

Mandy Cheetham¹ PhD
Suzanne Moffatt² PhD
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Final Report
November 2018

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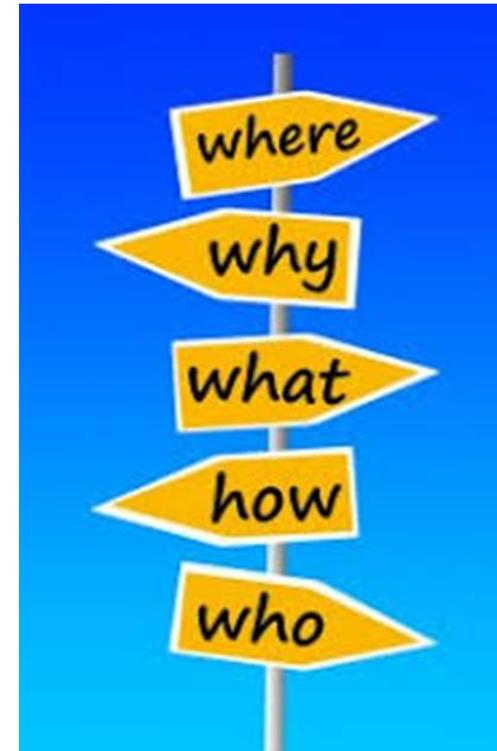
Research Questions

- What are the health and social effects of the roll out of Universal Credit in Gateshead?
- What are the benefits and risks of the transition to UC for different groups?
- Whose HWB is affected, in what ways, and what is the wider impact on the claimant, their family, and local services?
- What are the effects of the Council's actions to mitigate the impact of Universal Credit?
- What are the implications of the findings?

Qualitative research methods

Interviews with UC
claimants living in:
Gateshead (n=22)
Newcastle (n=10)
S.Tyneside (n=1)
Total (n=33)

Interviews and FGs
with staff working in
Gateshead (n=37)
Housing (n=4)
Local Authority
(n=11)
VCS organisations
(n=22)





Issues identified by claimants

➔ Online claims process

➔ 5 week 'wait' for payment

- Advance payments
- Incorrect awards
- Monthly payments
- Deductions

➔ Conditionality/sanctions (un)employment

- Difficulty resolving errors
- Appeals process overlong
- Increased debt / borrowing
- Housing security

Impact on claimants:-

➔ meeting basic needs

➔ health (mental/physical) (un) employment issues



Online application process

If you wanted to devise a system that discriminated against people with learning disabilities, this would be it ... it absolutely particularly discriminates against people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities (Staff IV 8).

If you're not au fait with a computer, it can be really a bit daunting (UC IV 6)





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Delays in payment

It was so difficult around those 6 weeks...the council gave me a food voucher but I still needed nappies for the baby. My health visitor brought some food for us, because when she came, it was so cold, she was concerned (UC IV 2)





Negotiating the claimant commitment



Looking for a job is a full time job anyway. I've got no problems with that. It's the hoops they make you jump through. They make it really, really difficult and they threaten you with sanctions at every turn (UC IV 16)

Employment support

Financially persecuting people is just not going to achieve your aim of getting people into employment (Staff IV 9)

You're not supposed to quit work while you're signed up to UC. I got so anxious thinking I'm going to get into a job and if I hate it, I'm not allowed to leave (UC IV 9)



One lad's kept me going. He's been fantastic, he needs a medal (UV IV 22)

Impact on ability to meet basic needs

It seems to be government policy at the moment to punish people for being poor (Staff IV 12)

The impact has been horrendous (Staff FG5)

I know one lass, her kids had to have shoes to go back to school and she had the rent money, so she spent some of the rent money to get her kids shoes (UC IV 7)





Food poverty

Some of the months, I'm living on £50 a week...I've even started going to the foodbanks. It's so degrading. I used to donate them. I never thought that one day, in this day and age, I would be using them

(UC IV 30)





Impact on mental health

*I ended up being **treated** for **depression** and **anxiety**, anyway, as well as the **insomnia**, still on **medication** now. I'm a lot better than I was then. I really was at the lowest ebb that I've ever been in my life I think.*

*Universal Credit was the straw that broke the camel's back. It really did sort of **drag me** really, really to a **low position**, where I don't want to be sort of thrown into again (UC IV1).*



Link to self harm

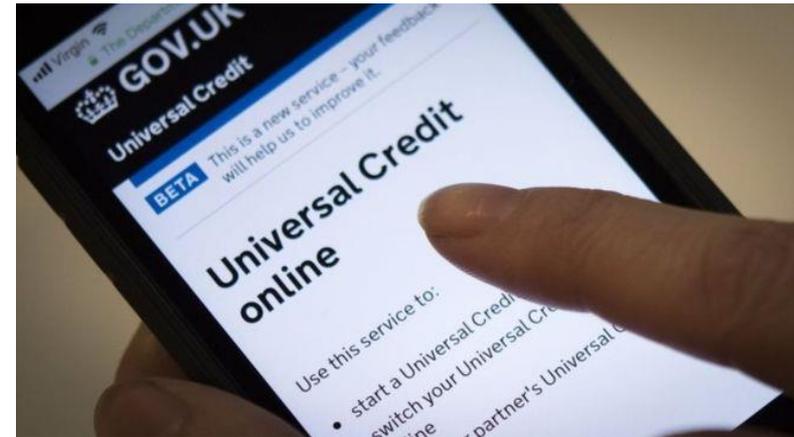
*He was in and out of hospital with his **depression**, like **self-harming** and that. It was just horrible. He spoke to the psychiatrist in the hospital. He was like, **we've got no money, what's the point, I can't go out, can't see people, can't even eat properly** (UC IV 11)*

*It's just not a safety net any more. It's almost being used as a **stick to beat people with**, you know (Staff IV 11)*



Link to suicidality

*I got to a stage where I'd **actually planned taking my life.** It gets me upset when I talk about it ... I could've easily done something horrific because these people at the end of the phone...that **anxiety** I was put through **drove me to a place where nobody should be** (UC IV 28)*



Staff views on impact on wider system

How much pressure is there on the NHS if let's say a sanction saves DWP £1000, how much is that costing the NHS? Is it costing the NHS £10,000 because you have a hospital admission because of it? (Staff IV 12).

People are being forced to do things that are actually making their health worse, and then that costs the NHS more, and then they reach crisis point, when actually they weren't in too bad a position when they started (Staff IV 9).



UC Equality Impact Assessment

Universal credit will lead to an increase in employment due to improved financial incentives, simpler and more transparent system, and changes to the requirements placed on claimants (DWP 2012: 3

Universal Credit Equality
Impact Assessment)

This Business Case clearly demonstrates that UC provides value for money and huge benefits for claimants, the broader population and the economy as a whole

Neil Couling, DWP 2018:3

UC Programme Full Business Case
Summary.



Recommendations and implications

- Halt UC roll out
- Monitor and review effects before managed migration
- Update Equality Impact Assessment
- Implement rec's from VCS /UN Monitor wider costs / impact on public spending
- Indep. academic research
- Integrated poverty reduction strategy
- Challenge stigma and discrimination
- Build local partnerships
- Support VCS
- Lobby for change / adequate resources



Doctors' concerns over universal credit are mounting

BMJ 5.12.18

GPs are seeing increased workload related to the benefit change, reports **Sophie Arie**, while public health professionals hear of people considering suicide

Exclusive: universal credit linked to suicide risk, says study

Universal credit claimants driven to consider suicide over stress caused by welfare reform, report finds

New study finds controversial new welfare benefit to be a 'complicated, dysfunctional and punitive' system that makes claimants increasingly anxious and 'simply doesn't work'

May Bulman Social Affairs Correspondent | @maybulman |
Friday 16 November 2018 11:15 | 2 comments |



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The Independent

Research for Gateshead council finds system increases depression and anxiety

Key points from UN envoy's report on poverty in Britain

Summary of Philip Alston's report which says austerity has inflicted misery on UK citizens



Patrick Butler Guardian 15th Nov,
Independent 16th Nov, Chronicle 19th Nov.

Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

*“British compassion for those who are suffering
has been replaced by a punitive, mean spirited
and often callous approach...”*

*The test and learn approach
to the (UC) roll out treats
claimants like guinea pigs and can
wreak havoc in real people’s lives”.*





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“Patients in deprived areas are not hard to reach but they are easy to ignore ... the inverse care law is not a law, but the consequence of policies ...”

Watt, BJGP Dec 2018



Source:

<https://extramuralactivity.com/category/type/print/>



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Why embedded research?

Timely

Relevant & responsive

Learning together

Knowledge translation as
part of the process

It's not all about
publications (but we've had
some of those as well)

**Exclusive: universal credit linked to
suicide risk, says study**

**Research for Gateshead council finds system increases depression
and anxiety**



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QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?

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