

To Social Security Advisory Committee
Evidence from Professor Christine Skinner
Open consultation: **Call for evidence on social security and
separated parents** - Published 19 March 2019.

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Professor Skinner, xxxxxx xxxx:
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Tuesday 16th April 2019

Dear SSSAC,

I am Professor Christine Skinner from the University of York and I am writing to provide evidence for the consultation. I am a social policy expert with an international reputation and 25 years' experience of conducting research on non-resident fathers and child support policies both within the UK and internationally. This letter provides a resume of a relevant body of work conducted by myself with colleagues at the University of York and with experts from the USA, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Hakovirta, M., Meyer, D.R., and Skinner C. (2019 – in progress) 'Does Paying Child Support Impoverish Fathers in the US, Finland, and the UK?'

This is a comparative quantitative analysis of Luxembourg Income data sets (LIS) looking at whether and how far payers (non-resident parents) are pushed into poverty by making child support payments. It also looks at receivers (parents with care) and the poverty reduction effects of receiving child support. This is the only comparative study of its kind and is the latest evidence available. We send a draft (dated 16.4.19) to the SSAC as an attachment in the same email as this letter.

Skinner, C. and Keung, A. (2017) *Non-Resident Fathers' Child Maintenance Payments and the Effect On Income Poverty: Analysis of the Family Resources Survey*. Written evidence submitted to the Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry into the Child Maintenance Service.

<http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Work%20and%20Pensions/Child%20maintenance%20services/written/39423.html>

This is a quantitative analysis of the UK looking at the poverty effect of paying child support on non-resident fathers (i.e. on fathers only and not just on all payers of child support which could include some mothers) using the Family Resources Survey. Consequently, it provides different results than the LIS data in Hakovirta, Meyer and Skinner (2019) above and shows higher rates of poverty post paying child support. This analysis helps provide a broader picture for the UK. Skinner and Keung are currently (2019) waiting for the latest release of the FRS to update the analysis and to extend it looking at other kinds of support separated fathers might provide for their children giving a fuller account of their contributions.

Skinner, C., Meyer, D., Cook, K. and Fletcher, M., (2017) *Child Maintenance and Social Security Interactions: the Poverty Reduction Effects in Model Lone Parent Families across Four Countries in Journal of Social Policy*, Volume 46 - Issue 3, pp 495-516. ISSN 00472794 OI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279416000763>

This is a unique analysis that explores the interaction effects between child support policies and social security benefits to show how these two policies combine to enhance or worsen child poverty among model lone parent families. We used 'model families' to help compare outcomes across four countries; the United Kingdom, United States (Wisconsin), Australia and New Zealand. We worked out the 'expected amount' of child maintenance that systems would require to be paid by applying the formulas and rules to these fictitious 'model families'. The results show that UK policies look relatively favourable, as generally speaking child maintenance payments were treated as a complement to social assistance benefits and therefore had greater poverty reduction potential than in other countries. We do not know however, if this improved incentives to pay among non-resident parents.

Hakovirta, M., Skinner, C., Hilamo, H., and Jokela, M. (2019 – published online) 'Child Poverty, Child Maintenance and Interactions with Social Assistance Benefits Among Lone Parent Families: a Comparative Analysis'. in *Journal of Social Policy*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279419000151>

This is also a unique comparative analysis that explores the interaction effects between child support policies and social security benefits to show how these two policies combine to enhance or worsen child poverty, but this time among real families using the (LIS) data sets. Four countries are examined; Australia, Finland, Germany and the UK. For the UK, it confirms the earlier results on model families found by Skinner et al (2019) but this time on real cases using reported amounts of child support rather than imputed amounts.

Andrews, S., Armstrong, D., McLernon, L., Megaw, S., and Skinner, C. (2011) *Promotion of Child Maintenance: Research on Instigating Behaviour Change, Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, Research Report No, 1, Volume I, Main Report*. Leeds: Corporate Document Centre.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120716161734/http://www.childmaintenance.org/en/pdf/research/Main-Report-Vol-I.pdf> [Accessed 13.4.2019].

This report should be highly relevant to the SSAC consultation as it looked at key drivers of child maintenance behaviours among separated parents, that is non-resident payers AND parent-with-care receivers. It was also funded by the DWP. The results of this study were highly influential in policy developments under the Coalition Conservative government and the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, as well as informing a new policy focus on the quality of parental relationships in separated families. Professor Skinner acted as consultant, contributing to the research design, analysis and interpretation of findings. She was also an academic expert on the DWP's 'Family Support Services Expert Steering Group' set up at this time and led by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Disabled People Maria Millar. The expert group was involved in scoping evidence on innovative relationship support services and was influential in the development of the Help and Support for Separated Families Innovation Fund (HSSF) for separated parents commissioned by the DWP.

Wikeley, N. Ireland, E. Bryson, C. and Smith R. (2008) 'Child Support and Relationship Breakdown Survey', Department of Work and Pensions Research Report No 503.

Skinner was a member of the National Centre for Social Research Consortium which conducted this survey and was closely involved in designing and analyzing the results. This study was also commissioned by the DWP. It attempted to achieve a representative sample of non-resident fathers from among the general population, but failed to do so as a result of the high level of stigma being attached to non-resident fathers at this time. It did manage a representative sample of payers and receivers from among the Child Support Agency case load and therefore provides some useful information on attitudes to child maintenance among that population of separated parents. Also, the study achieved a representative sample of separated mothers from the general population (who never had contact with the CSA) and thus provides unique information on their attitudes and reasons for pursuing or not pursuing child maintenance, which may be useful to SSAC.

Bradshaw, J., Stimson, C., Skinner, C. and Williams, J. (1999), *Absent fathers?* London: Routledge.

Along with her colleagues at the University of York, Professor Christine Skinner conducted the first ever national survey of non-resident fathers in Britain. This was a study partly funded by the predecessor department to the DWP. It provided the very first comprehensive set of evidence on the economic and social circumstances of non-resident fathers, how much child support they paid, whether they had the potential to pay more child support and the levels of contact with their children. It was supplemented by an in-depth study understanding fathers' (un)willingness to pay child maintenance. The in-depth work remains insightful and of relevance today and is reported in chapter 11 'Willingness to pay' and chapter 12 'negotiating child maintenance'. Indeed, this work informed the development of the much larger in-depth study commissioned by the DWP in 2011 (Andrews et al cited above). Whilst the econometric data may be out of date – the SSAC would be interested in the methodology used for examining the potential of fathers to pay more child support, given that policy at that time had two main objectives: one to make more fathers pay something, but also to make fathers who were paying, pay higher amounts of child support.

If I can be of further help to the SSAC please do not hesitate to ask, especially re my planned future projects.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Christine Skinner