

Critically Evaluate the Impacts of the Troubled Families Program, Engaging with Relevant Literature

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Abstract: *The Troubled Families Program (TFP) in the UK is a government initiative aimed at helping disadvantaged families with health issues, crime, employment, and violence. It is one of the only two government-funded family programs in the UK, with an estimated £9 billion spent on 120,000 troubled families. The program aims to reduce long-term public sector expenditures while improving outcomes for the community's most needy families. The government claims to have successfully turned around 99 percent of all troubled families in 2015, with the positive impacts including breaking down silos in the government, enabling a greater focus on collaborative whole-family work, and enhancing the capacity to deliver comprehensive services. However, the limitations of the program also can't be ignored.*

Keywords: Troubled families program; Child development ;Child and states, Child.

The essay focuses on the evaluation of the impacts of the Troubled Families Program (TFP) in the United Kingdom, and the United Kingdom is a typical type of welfare state in Europe. A welfare state is defined as "a system that allows the government of a country to provide social services such as healthcare, unemployment benefits" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019), and it's described as "a damage-limiting, problem-solving device rather than anyone's ideal social relationship" by David Garland (Garland, 2016).

The UK Department of Communities and Local Government has initiated a program to assist the most disadvantaged families in the United Kingdom. The Troubled Families Program (TFP) focuses on families struggling with health issues, crime, employment, and violence. One of the key objectives of the problematic family program is to reduce long-term public sector expenditures while simultaneously improving outcomes for the community's most needy families (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2017c). With the assistance of one key worker, the program addresses difficulties that impact the whole family. When a family is enrolled in the program, a key worker collaborates with them to develop a strategy to address any obstacles they may be facing. As a consequence of this plan, families will get better service, and government agencies will be able to break through their silos.

In reaction to the 2011 riots in England's cities and towns, the plan suggests a family preservation intervention approach that attempts to alter the lives of struggling families and aid them in achieving significant and long-term benefits. TFP is one of only two government-funded family programs in the UK (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2017b). In Cameron's words, "Last year the state spent an estimated £9 billion on just 120,000 troubled families across the country. We are committing £448 million to turn around the lives of 120,000 troubled families by the end of this Parliament "(Cameron, 2011)

When the government launched Community Budgets, these 120,000 households had been designated as policy targets. Local governments have adopted this strategy to centralize resources to support families with a range of social needs more effectively. (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2010). Among the many goals of the TFP program, one was to assist the 120,000 families it served to turn their lives around by lowering teenage criminality and anti-social behavior, re-engaging children in school, and re-establishing employment opportunities for adults. Instead of focusing on the difficulties these families were facing, the program shifted to focus on the issues they were causing. An estimated £9 billion a year is spent on safeguarding children from troubled households and reacting to criminal activity and anti-social conduct they undertake, according to government estimates (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2015a).

In 2015, the government claimed to have successfully turned around 99 percent of all troubled families, and the claims of near-perfect success were rapidly called into doubt (Crossley, 2015). The essay will argue the positive

and negative effects of TFP, as well as its impacts on the United Kingdom as a welfare state. Although it had some good effects on the operation of the government, its negative repercussions are more significant.

The discussion starts with the positive impacts of the TFP, and the first advantage of the program is the breaking down of silos in the UK government. Working in silos is one of the most challenging difficulties now facing the United Kingdom government. In the United Kingdom, adult and children's services are primarily administered autonomously, with little cooperation between the police, health, and education departments. The appearance of TFP began to emerge in different parts of the government system in an attempt to integrate them,

TFP has been made accessible to enable a greater focus on collaborative whole-family work. This recognizes how adult needs impact children and vice versa, as well as how children's concerns may impact adult demands (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2020). Through this policy, the integration of services for children and adults will be strengthened. In this approach, TFP intended to disrupt the conventional mode of operation, in which agencies that may operate together towards the same purpose modify it concurrently. The TFP has brought together organizations to collaborate on a family-related goal. The TFP key worker serves as the principal point of contact between the family and the several government agencies they may meet on a regular basis. The key worker facilitates a discussion of progress, obstacles, and future activities between the family and agency staff (Economy and Gong, 2017). As a consequence of TFP, interagency collaboration on individual family work has risen and has a more fundamental change in how agencies collaborate. Workers from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department of Health, and the police worked closely with the local TFP team in all investigated local governments to facilitate data interchange and coordination. The TFP personnel have access to the police database and are able to determine whether families have been flagged for domestic violence or abuse against women. The TFP and the DWP have greatly increased their cooperation. Family employment and welfare reform were significant government agendas. Locally, the TFP in Leeds uses a "Social Justice Team" comprised of two employment specialists and three community work coaches, with the assistance of the local DWP (Economy and Gong, 2017).

The second advantage of TFP discussed in the essay is the whole-family approach. The TFP program is allocated a single key worker who is responsible for offering the intervention to the whole family. A key worker visits a family, develops a plan with them, offers in-depth assistance, and links them to other local services. Regarding housing, welfare, debt, and parenting, the key worker is an excellent resource who can help the family get the necessary aid (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2015b). During the duration of an 18-month contract, a single key worker may anticipate working with six to ten families. The redesigned procedures gave key workers more flexibility to work holistically with families. When working with the whole family over an extended period, key workers concentrate on long-term solutions rather than quick remedies. (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2012). TFP offered the necessary platform and resources to raise awareness of this strategy among the social services of the community. The TFP program has significantly enhanced the capacity to deliver comprehensive services.

Moreover, the program focuses on the results and the impacts of the program. When local governments use data strategically, they shift the focus of their services to have an impact. Two advantages of utilizing data to monitor accomplishments include aligning incentives among key actors and establishing a clear framework for measuring success. According to local governments surveyed, the TFP initiative's payment-by-results component shifted the focus from leadership to service providers and the attainment of outcomes at all levels. It has been shown that a wide focus on outcomes is especially effective for aligning incentives and monitoring impact. (Economy and Gong, 2017). With the help of payment-by-results, local governments can be able to begin aiding "troubled families" in their areas and allow the family to get more funds if certain behavior standards are satisfied. (Crossley, 2018a)

As part of the Troubled Families Outcome Plan (TFOP), each participating local authority identifies the precise family outcomes they want to attain for each of the six DCLG-defined core indicators. Bristol's TFOP seeks to decrease police calls to family homes involving parents and children involved in crime or antisocial behavior by 60 percent over the course of six months. The TFOP's expected outcome also includes no criminal action by any troubled family member in the past six months and no known antisocial behavior by any family member in the previous six months (Bristol government, 2020). The local government provides a bonus to families that satisfy DCLG's TFOP targets. Payment-by-results have been extensively embraced by the central government of the United Kingdom. The local government reimburses a portion of the cost of improvements made by every household over an extended period of time. The reward is one thousand pounds for each household targeted and an

extra eight hundred pounds for each family that meets its targets (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2017a).

Even though the TFP has these beneficial consequences, its negative effects on society and the welfare state are substantially greater. The most two controversial issues of the TFP are the misrecognition and naming of "troubled family" and the austerity policies. Since its inception, the TFP has been under fire for a variety of reasons. After a survey found that 120,000 families were suffering from various disadvantages in the middle of 2000, the government erroneously concluded that these families were mostly to blame for society's problems at launch (Cameron, 2011). The 120,000 number is incorrect since it was derived from such a small sample of households. The usage of the term "troubled family" is a rhetorical strategy that is effective in promoting prejudice towards less affluent people by asserting that everyone who lives in tough households is disordered and troubled. (Levitas, 2012).

Constantly, the TFP has been accused of abusing or falsifying research results. Crossley asserts that Louise Casey's survey for the reform of public services was fabricated (Crossley, 2018a). The Dipstick data collection, which had been undertaken without adhering to ethical procedures, was promoted by Casey in several interviews with the national press (Crossley, 2018a). Despite the fact that the majority of dysfunctional families in the program's early phase did not participate in significant amounts of criminal or antisocial behavior, the report portrayed them as the worst of the worst, although many of their issues did not truly exist (Hellen, 2014). In response to a parliamentary investigation, it was determined that the DCLG had provided evasive answers to their inquiries on the delayed release of the report and the delays had contributed to a negative perception of the Department (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2016).

In October 2016, the government released its first assessment of the first phase. Data on the experiences and outcomes of families were gathered and an impact analysis was conducted.

The TFP had no substantial effect on outcomes such as employment, aid, health, education and child welfare protection. This research did not find any evidence indicated positive effects on these outcomes. For the vast majority of impact estimates, there were few good and negative consequences. Another survey-based study that examined employment, school attendance, and antisocial behavior revealed comparable findings (Bewley et al., 2016). Due to the emphasis on a single issue, the evaluation's other components got less consideration than they merited. According to family monitoring data, the majority of "troubled households" were not very antisocial. (Crossley, 2015).

The Family Survey Data Research, which analyzed data collected directly from families, concluded that the program had no effect. Comparing the findings of 495 families who had participated for nine months to those of 314 families who had just begun participating, it was revealed that the program had no effect on the outcomes. (Purdon and Bryson, 2016) The report indicated that there was little evidence that the Troubled Families Program had a significant impact on the families it assisted. According to the findings, primary caregivers in the troubled families group had a considerable increase in their financial and general well-being. Consequently, their hopes for the future increased dramatically. Regarding housing, employment, education, and health, neither positive nor negative effects have been seen. (Purdon and Bryson, 2016) According to official statistics, 99 percent of the "troubled families" the program was supposed to support were "turned around." During the evaluation process, TFP participants were not asked if their engagement had "turned around" their lives. Neither family income nor material deprivation was measured nor reported during the first phase of the program.

The discussion then moves to the austerity policies published by the UK government, which go against the TFP. As 120,000 of England's most "troubled families" had their lives "turned around" and were able to engage in society, according to official UK statements. The United Kingdom was poised to implement the most extensive welfare changes ever.

As a consequence of the 2007–2008 financial crisis, both coalition government parties chose to enact austerity measures. The goal to reduce government expenditure dominated their agenda. As a consequence, the United Kingdom's public expenditure would collapse to the lowest level among major capitalist nations, including the United States, and the welfare state would face its greatest challenge to date (Taylor-Gooby, 2013). Early in the coalition administration, several improvements and modifications were made to the state's financial assistance for the poor. It was determined that the Child Benefit would be stopped for three years, whilst the other tax credits might grow by 1 percent only during certain periods. The first implementation of benefit limits, which limit the

total amount of benefits a single family may get, occurred in 2013 and was followed by a drop in 2016 (Crossley, 2018a). For example, Employment Maintenance Allowance and Health in Pregnancy Grant have been lowered to zero (Crossley, 2018a). Child Poverty Action Group predicted that a child born in April 2011 would receive about 1,500 fewer pounds than a child born in April 2010 (CPAG, 2011).

The welfare changes have disproportionately harmed low-income families with children and disabled households. According to official government statistics, the number of children in poverty in the UK has increased by over 100,000 in only one year. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the proportion of children living in poverty will increase from 29.7 percent to 36.6 percent by 2021–2022 (Hood and Waters, 2017). Benefit reforms and delays instituted by the coalition government are responsible for a substantial increase in the use of food banks (Garthwaite, 2016). Universal Credit, the government's most important social policy initiative, is predicted to cost the poorest people £5.5 billion in benefits (Hood and Waters, 2017). Due to the two-child restriction, analysts believe that poor families with three or more children would lose a substantial amount of money if they switched to Universal Credit.

The number of people penalised and sanctioned for failing to meet the requirements for unemployment and "job-seeking" benefits has significantly increased as a result of these reforms, which led to the withdrawal of some benefits, the reduction of others, and the implementation of new assessment procedures and eligibility criteria. Despite the availability of "hardship payments", the poor suffer penalties like the loss of their benefit income for two weeks. The consequence, according to Webster, is that individuals are driven off of government support and assistance but not into steady, long-term work. (Webster, 2015)

Due to the stigma and the intricacy of the system, a significant number of individuals give up the benefits to which they are entitled. 25% of respondents to research on the stigmatization of benefit claims said that stigma had a factor in delaying or denying benefits (Baumberg et al., 2012). According to official government figures, forty percent of those eligible for aid do not apply. An estimated £12 billion in unclaimed benefits was unclaimed in 2015–2016. When assistance recipients are stigmatized or portrayed as "scroungers," distributional inequalities grow (Department for Work and Pensions, 2016).

Considering these results, it is difficult to assert that the government has made progress in effectively handling "troubled families" and minimizing social injustice. The government welfare reforms have increased children's and adults' dependency on food banks. Due to these policies, the "beneficiaries" of the TFP, low-income families with children, have suffered.

There is a widespread notion that poor and economically disadvantaged families are criminals, antisocial, and a drain on society's resources. The term "hardworking families" is often used to compare them. People who rely on food banks because their resources are so limited or uncertain must endure the shame and embarrassment of obtaining food from strangers at a time when the media and politicians portray those who are eligible for unemployment and disability benefits as "scroungers" and "benefits cheaters" (Garthwaite, 2016).

Currently, a large number of families need assistance. Some less fortunate families have more difficulties than others. In such circumstances, the state must offer help to families, without labeling the families as the "troubles" of the country. A high proportion of troubled families need support, the sufficient budget should be offered for the program. Families must get the support that does not stigmatize them, while yet ensuring they have the financial means to avoid being excluded from services, traditions, and activities that others take for granted. It seems that unfair treatment of "troubled families" and disproportionate distribution of austerity measures are on the rise under the present government in the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, TFP has several positive consequences, including the elimination of silos between government departments in the United Kingdom, the adoption of a whole-family approach, and the establishment of payment-by-results, which modifies the system. Nonetheless, TFP has a substantial negative impact on society. The government didn't target the proper families, and it appears that some "troubled families" have been incorrectly identified. Despite the fact that some families have issues, they are not as "troubled" as reported. Multiple pieces of research suggest that the program has very little effect on families. Moreover, the term "troubled family" is a kind of stigmatization since the citizens who require the most support are referred to as the country's difficulties; this fosters prejudice towards families whose origins are weak and poor. The UK government's austerity measures eliminate benefits for those who are unemployed, pregnant, have newborn children, or are

handicapped; yet, those who suffer the most are those who were deemed "beneficial" from the TFP, families with children who are experiencing financial hardship.

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