

P101

MEDICAL REASON FOR CLAIMING EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ALLOWANCE IN THE UK, SCOTLAND AND GLASGOW

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Objectives Employment Support Allowance (ESA) was introduced in 2008, for people incapable of work because of illness or disability and replaced Incapacity Benefit. Central to the allowance is the new Work Capability Assessment and the two-tier system of benefits. Claimants are found suitable for the Support Group (SG), Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) or Fit for Work. This study describes the characteristics (by medical condition, stage of claim and ethnicity) of the ESA population in the UK, Scotland and Glasgow.

Methods Analyses of Department for Work and Pensions aggregated data, representing individuals in receipt of ESA in May 2010.

Results The main reason for claiming ESA in the UK is mental health (39%). This category is higher in Scotland (44%) and in Glasgow (49%). The major health issue reported in the WRAG is mental health (42% in Scotland) followed by musculoskeletal problems (15% in Scotland). In the SG mental health problems are still the most common reason for claiming (31% in Scotland) but claims due to cancer represent 21% of the SG in Scotland. There are differences in claiming across ethnic groups.

Conclusions These data highlight differences in mental health ESA claiming across the UK and give important insights into the dynamics of the ESA population. DWP data should be used at a local as well as national level to guide and evaluate interventions to help this vulnerable group and by policy makers to inform priority setting to help this group back to work.