

A report commissioned by Twins Trust
Per Capita – September 2024

**Twins
trust.**

Twins and Multiples in the United Kingdom

Examining the experiences of parents
and families having multiple births



Summary Report

About

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This is a concise summary of the report. To access the full report visit twinstrust.org/state-of-the-nation



Introduction

Twins Trust commissioned Per Capita to examine the experiences of parents with multiples. The collaboration marks a concerted effort to delve into the multifaceted challenges encountered by parents raising multiples and to examine plausible policy responses. This partnership is underpinned by a collective recognition within the community of a perceived exacerbation of difficulties faced by these families.

The objective of this research initiative is threefold:

- 1. To comprehensively detail the experiences of parents grappling with the unique demands of raising multiples through a comprehensive survey**
- 2. To benchmark practices in the UK against international standards**
- 3. To consider substantive policy changes aimed at tackling the challenges associated with multiple births**

Twins Trust has established itself as a cornerstone in providing essential support and resources to families with twins, triplets and higher-order multiples. Leveraging their extensive expertise and deep-rooted connections within the multiples' community, Twins Trust brings invaluable insights and firsthand understanding to this collaborative endeavour.

Per Capita stands as a prominent research and policy institute with a steadfast commitment to social justice and equity. Through a meticulous and evidence-based approach, Per Capita seeks to contribute robust data analysis and policy recommendations that resonate with the lived experiences of parents raising multiples.

The impetus for undertaking this research at the present time stems from a prevailing sentiment within the community that the landscape of raising multiples has become increasingly complex and demanding. Factors such as heightened financial strains, evolving familial dynamics and broader societal shifts have converged to amplify the challenges faced by these families. This research initiative serves as a platform to elevate the voices of parents of multiples and to advocate for tangible policy interventions that foster a more supportive and inclusive environment.



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The unique experience of raising multiples

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The journey of raising multiples is indeed a unique and complex experience, marked by various stages, each presenting its own set of challenges and rewards.

The emotional impact of discovering a multiple pregnancy sets a distinct tone for the entire parenting experience. This initial phase often involves a blend of overwhelming joy and concern, as parents grapple with the reality of increased responsibilities and potential health risks associated with a multiple pregnancy and birth and raising multiples.

During the antenatal phase, the focus intensifies on medical care due to the high-risk nature of multiple pregnancies. This period is characterised by significant physical and emotional demands on the expectant mother, necessitating frequent medical monitoring and, in some cases, extended rest. The mental and emotional preparation for managing the wellbeing of more than one baby can be a source of considerable anxiety and stress for both parents, highlighting the importance of a strong support system.

The birth of multiples is rarely straightforward, with complex delivery methods compounding the physical and emotional pressure that began during pregnancy. This also marks the beginning of an intense period of early infancy care. Parents find themselves in a relentless routine of feeding, changing and comforting multiple infants, leading to acute sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion, even when all babies are healthy. This stage underscores the amplified demands of caring for multiples and the crucial role of support from family, friends, and the community. Per Capita, in dialogue with multiples' community members, identified elevated rates of Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)/ Special care stay terms within the community.

Financial considerations become increasingly significant when raising multiples. The immediate need for multiple sets of baby products, combined with the long-term financial planning for future expenses like education and healthcare, adds a substantial economic burden on

families. This necessitates careful financial planning, with parents often seeking external support or advice. Parents often need to manage complex caring responsibilities with career planning, placing pressure on vocational standing and outcomes.

Psychologically, raising multiples involves navigating complex family dynamics. Parents are challenged to nurture the individuality of each child while fostering a strong bond among the siblings. Addressing issues such as identity confusion, competition for attention and managing the distinct personalities of each child requires thoughtful parenting strategies. These challenges evolve as the children grow, influencing decisions about schooling, individual talents and managing sibling relationships.

Study observations

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The findings of the Twins State of the Nation Survey (TSNS) are instructive for policy formulation and convey the unique challenges of the twins and multiples' community.

While multiples can bring immense joy to their families, there are undoubtedly vastly greater challenges associated with multiple births in comparison to babies born in succession. Considering the findings of the study collectively paints a picture of these challenges, making clear that they are not isolated to any single category.

Per Capita identified that parents with multiples within the UK feel frequently unsupported, evidence high levels of anxiety and face significant financial challenges. There were a number of other notable findings, summarised for concision.

Amongst the most concerning discoveries are the high rates of declared low mood and anxiety, enduring not just in the immediate term post birth but often three years thereafter.

These elevated levels of anxiety, co-ordination difficulties, relative income declines, additional fiscal shocks and perceptions of feeling unsupported make the parental experience more challenging than the experience of singleton parents.

“Looking back I was almost certainly depressed due to isolation when my twins were born”

84%

of families had one or more parent who experienced emotional or psychological challenges in the first year

Twin prematurity may necessitate greater care and make maintaining gainful employment more challenging. Accessing supportive services post-birth is often more challenging for parents with multiples due to co-ordination challenges.

The financial challenges should not be understated, equating to thousands of pounds in additional non-discretionary expenditures. Parents frequently need to upgrade vehicles or purchase vehicles to accommodate their multiples. They incur greater costs associated with care, food, clothing and other consumables, as well as other items that must be purchased twice rather than being reused as is the case with singletons born in succession.

Further noteworthy observations pertain to the fact that parents of multiples are feeling increasingly less supported by key agencies and support groups. Parents of multiples in the most recent decade feel less supported than parents with multiples in earlier decades.

“No one gets it — twins cost such a lot and no one regards it as important”

72%

had to buy a new vehicle to accommodate their multiples



Multiples' Challenges

Multiplied joy but also many challenges come with multiple births.



Financial shocks – additional expenses



High levels of low mood and anxiety



Substantial income decline post-birth



Lack of perceived support for parents

These challenges evidenced strongly in the literature and within the current study, occurring in high frequency and concurrently within families with multiples. Genuine consideration from agencies and government departments supporting parents is needed.

Key Research Findings

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i

Raising children through infancy is arguably more difficult in the UK than almost all other advanced OECD economies, with maternity leave, paternity leave, care leave and the level of economic benefits provided to parents ranking in either the lowest third or lowest quarter of all countries, for all benefit types.

ii

Unlike most of its continental European contemporaries, the UK offers little by way of additional support to parents with multiples, beyond the Sure Start grant.

iii

The financial cost of having multiples is at least £20k more than having two singletons in succession – and families face the cost in one go rather than spreading it out.

iv

Families with multiples see a decline in income of approximately £12,500 on average, or approximately 15% of household income. This impact is robust across England, Scotland and Wales.

v

The parents of multiples feel less supported now (by government and relevant providers) than they have in prior decades. Per Capita estimates that parents from the 2020s feel less supported than parents pre-2000. These patterns are consistent across England, Scotland and Wales.

vi

Sleep deprivation, stemming from elevated caring duties, financial challenges and work/caring duty co-ordination challenges, rank amongst the greatest concerns for parents with multiples, for both mothers and fathers.

vii

Respondents to the Twins State of the Nation survey noted feeling supported by critical agencies most in the pregnancy year and thereafter respondents felt less and less supported by essential services and groups.

viii

High levels of self-declared anxiety persisted within families with multiples well into years two and three post-pregnancy.

ix

Narrative analysis of respondent statements suggests that access to affordable childcare remains a challenge for many families with multiples.

Key findings from the Twins State of the Nation Survey and complementary analysis



Low rank

The UK ranks among the lowest of all advanced economies in terms of maternity, paternity and multiple birth supports.



Financial hit

Families with multiples face a financial cost at least £20k more than having two singletons in succession.



Income decline

Families see household income decline by 15% after the birth of multiples.



Less supported

Families with multiples now feel less supported by essential services and group, than families having multiples in past decades.

Recommendations 5

Primary Recommendations

1

Paid maternity leave

The provision of additional paid maternity leave for parents with multiples, employing a simple multiple-funding approach whereby parents are afforded twice the support for twins and three times the support for triplets. Mothers are also able to extend their term of leave by four weeks for each multiple. This is a discretionary mechanism allowing mothers to return to work in a manner that accords with their needs and promotes continuity of employment.

2

Maternity Grant expansion

An expansion of the Sure Start Maternity Grant to take into account the financial hit faced by families having multiples.

3

Mental health support

Critical additional mental health supports are provided to families with multiples, acknowledging the significant additional challenges evidenced through the birthing process and in the early years of raising multiples.

4

Supported care

An allocation of hours of supported care be provided to every family with multiples, given the time and co-ordination demands associated with raising multiples. We recommend a programme of support consistent with other advanced OECD members with a scheme modelled on those enacted within New Zealand (care hours) or Belgium (financial aid for care hours). Decisions pertaining to means testing should be determined based on fiscal constraints, but Per Capita recommends non means-tested supports.



For a list of references and detailed findings and recommendations, access the full report at twinstrust.org/state-of-the-nation



For more information about the research and/or the work of Twins Trust to support families with multiples, please contact:



Twins Trust – CEO
Shauna Leven
shaunaleven@twinstrust.org



Per Capita
Dr. Michael D’Rosario
michael.drosario@percapita.org.au

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