

Women's Poverty Gender Poverty Indicators

Introduction to Engender

Engender works to make Scotland a fairer, safer place where women can flourish and contribute to both the social and market economies with dignity, freedom and justice. To this end we seek to increase women's power and influence; make visible the impact of sexism on women and on Scotland's social, economic and political development; and support people, organisations and government to make equality a reality.

One strand of our work is concerned with gendered poverty. We believe that women's poverty reflects women's unequal place in society, in the gendered division of labour, continued sex discrimination and gender stereotyping. Together these underpin women's position in the labour market, family and welfare state and the interaction between the three determines women's economic status over their lifetime.

Introduction to the 'Who Counts?' Project

Funded by the Esmée Fairbairn foundation, the project involved participatory research with diverse groups of women from different local authority areas across Scotland. The women brought their experience and understanding of poverty to identify gendered poverty indicators relevant to their local communities. This work was carried out using our 'life course' model that explores the risks, hazards and vulnerabilities to poverty that women experience over a lifetime.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation poverty has found that women are more at risk than men for both poverty and persistent poverty¹. Poverty should not be thought of as something that is measurable simply in terms of income, rather it is important to focus on the many ways people find themselves impoverished, that is deprived of resources and opportunities that are essential to their well being. This experience of poverty is especially true for women who already occupy a disadvantaged labour market position. Women's poverty is intrinsically linked to child poverty; the well being of children cannot be divorced from that of their mothers. Within the family, women often assume the role of 'poverty

¹ Smith, N and Middleton, S. (2007) 'A review of poverty dynamics research in the UK', *Centre for Research in Social Policy*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York.

managers', shielding their children from poverty's worst effects, making women feel these shocks more keenly.

The women who participated in the 'Who Counts?' project identified three key areas, these help to illustrate the concept of poverty as well-being deprivation and have generated the associated gender poverty indicators (GPI's) that they would use to measure progress towards poverty reduction:

Poverty in Employment

There is a lack of flexible working arrangements that offer hours that compliment caring responsibilities, especially for lone mothers. An employee must be working for 26 weeks or longer before they are able to ask for their employer for flexible working arrangements and even then, their employer is not obliged to grant the request. This can act as a barrier to lone mothers trying to re-enter to workforce who have caring responsibilities.

Flexible working arrangements are key to enabling lone parents to combine work and caring responsibilities.

GPI: Access to flexible working arrangements

Access to good, affordable childcare (including for older children) was identified as the strongest barrier to employment. *In 2011, the cost of childcare in Scotland went up by 8.3% - almost four times as much as the average wage².*

Recent surveys by The Day Care Trust and AVIVA have reported that child care costs in Scotland are higher than in the UK generally; A week's childcare in Scotland costs, on average, £100.38 compared with £93.28 in England and £80.25 in Wales. The typical cost of a full-time nursery place for a child under two is £152 a week – more than £7900 a year. With five-day childcare for 2 children taking almost £16,000 p.a. out of an average £25,428 annual salary many parents have found themselves working purely to cover the cost of childcare. This is discouraging almost half of parents (generally mothers) from returning to full time employment and some giving up work completely for at least 5 years. (Source: The Day Care Trust)

² Daycare Trust (2011) 'Childcare Costs Survey', <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-surveys.html>.

Affordable childcare is key to women's ability to manage work and care.
GPI: Childcare costs are not exacerbating poverty

Because it is still usually women that provide unpaid care there are four times as many women in part time work as men. Part time jobs are typically low paid, with less scope for promotion and access to training. *The median gross weekly pay for male single parents is £346, while for female single parents it is £194.4.*³ This, coupled with occupational segregation due to outdated stereotypes, lead women and men to do different types of work with work traditionally done by women being undervalued. The result is a higher rate of poverty for women than men.

The gender pay gap in the UK is among the worst in Europe. 65% of public sector work force are women and working in the lowest paid jobs. The concentration of women in public sector jobs means that women will be disproportionately losing their jobs due to public sector job cuts.

The lack of flexible work or adequate childcare provision forces women into part time, low paid work. Women part time workers earn 32% less than their male counterparts working full time. Part-time work does not generate enough money for living and childcare.

Any poverty strategy that relies on paid work as the main route out of poverty has to be an explicitly gendered strategy; paid work is not always appropriate or in the best interests of mothers and their children.

Statutory pay audits of public sector are key to solving women's poverty.
GPI: Public bodies are ensuring that they and their service providers are paying the same hourly rates for part time and full time workers doing the same jobs.

Poverty and Caring

Women are more likely to have lower incomes, less employment opportunities, less promotion opportunities and higher levels of debt over their lifetime stemming from their responsibilities of caring for children, the disabled and the elderly. More than 60% of Scotland's 650,000 carers

³ Fawcett Society (2011) 'Equal Pay - The Facts', <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=321>.

or sick and disabled people are women and carers receive little attention in the local authority SOAs.

Women's poverty in old age cannot be considered separately from their existence as workers and carers. Women who want to balance work and care should not be penalised.

The benefit system should acknowledge the contribution of carers' time as an endowment, they are not 'users' they are co-providers of services. Carers who want to maintain their jobs and careers should be supported to do so and not penalised.

GPI: Carers that work are better off (time and money) than if they were solely on benefits.

Education

Many women in our communities of interest felt that young girls are still being encouraged to study 'female friendly' subjects, which lead to stereotypically female related careers. *This can be seen in labour market statistic for Scotland that find 80% of administrative and secretarial workers but only 3% of chartered civil engineers are women⁴.*

They also felt that boys are still more likely to be offered jobs over girls, especially more highly paid jobs. *On average, women earn £96.40 less a week than mean in Scotland⁵.*

Many felt it was very difficult to combine being a single parent with going into further education (benefits are removed if you go into full time education and the bursary is insufficient to live on).

One way out of poverty is an education that enables you to escape the minimum wage trap. The cost of education should not prohibit lone parents who would need to access child care, transport and still be able to cover the bills for themselves and their children.

GPI: Lone parents in education are not worse off than they were on benefits.

⁴ Close the Gap 'The Statistics – Pay Gap', <http://www.closesthegap.org.uk/statistics.html>

⁵ Close the Gap 'The Statistics – Pay Gap' <http://www.closesthegap.org.uk/statistics.html>

The need for a gendered analysis

Income is not always shared fairly within the family however; policy and budget decisions are often informed by research and data that assume that the family 'shares' income. This is to the detriment of women as so much of women's poverty is hidden. Women's poverty is invisible in political debate and policy-making and is not mentioned in many of the Local Authority SOAs. Poverty and child poverty is assumed to be ungendered, as if children are poor in isolation of their parents.

We can conclude that if it is not mentioned, then it is not a priority for the local authority. Whilst local authorities have an obligation to promote gender equality through the SOAs under the Equality Act many are gender neutral or gender blind. Any equality impact assessments on policies that may have been conducted do not appear to have engaged with the issue of gender equality and the potential impacts on women and services.

The five Gender Poverty Indicators above have been proposed by women as the things they would want and need to see change in order for them to escape poverty.