

Who Counts?

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

The project began in November 2009:

- During interactive workshops a diverse range of women's groups from local authority areas including Aberdeen City, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Scottish Borders identified key gendered poverty issues of concern in their communities.
- We worked with a number of women to develop this pack as a tool to highlight the aims and objectives of the project and to engage with women's groups across Scotland.
- The pack has been sent out to at least 100 women's groups across Scotland and our Project Worker will follow up with all interested groups to encourage and support them to add their voices to the 'Who Counts?' Campaign.

What Counts? Day

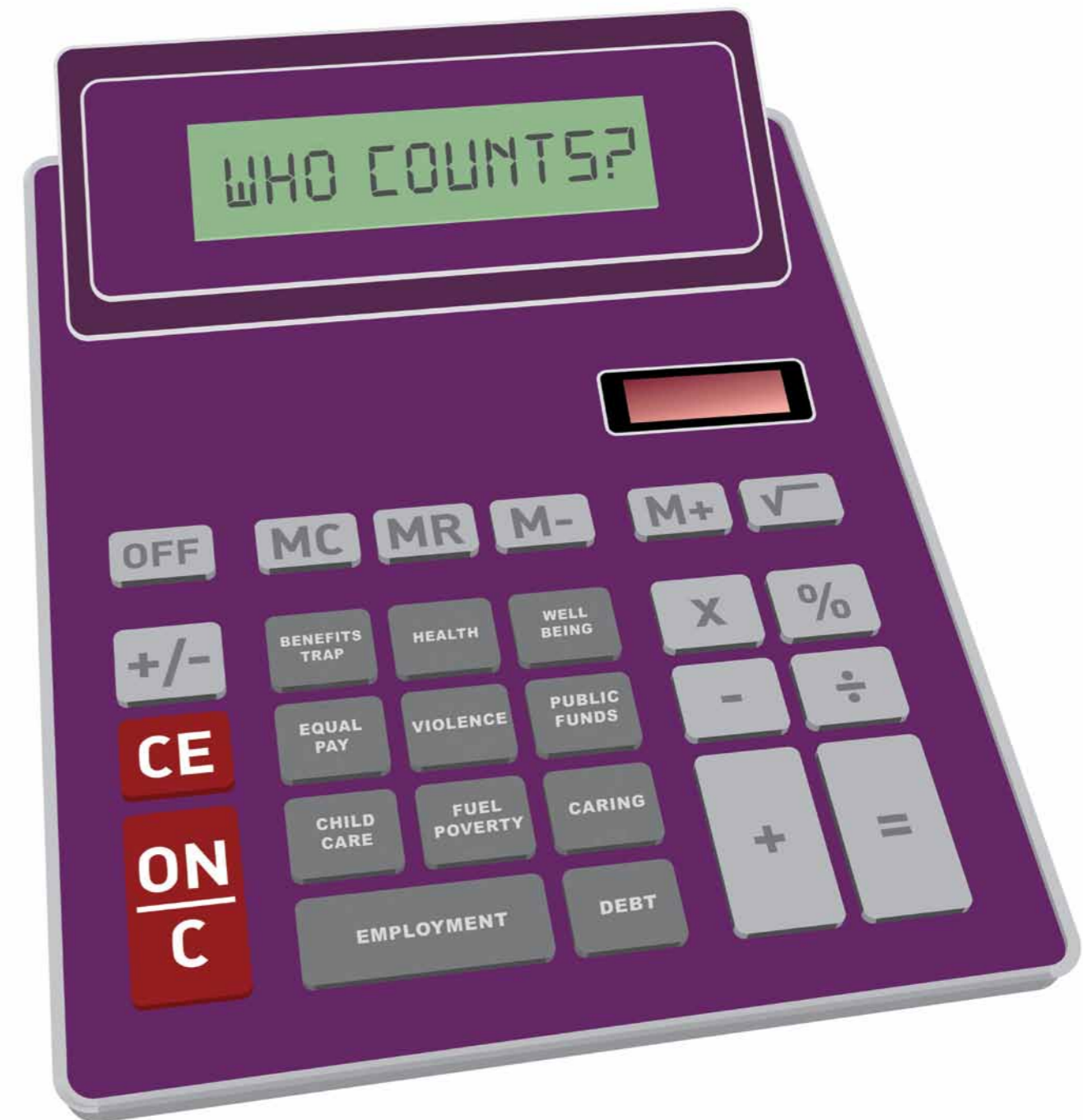
On 01 March 2011 we will coordinate a number of events and activities across Scotland, involving local women, to demand that public bodies acknowledge the gendered nature of poverty and agree to report on gendered poverty indicators as a way of ensuring that their policy and practice addresses poverty for women, children, pensioners etc.

Engender will support the women's groups with any requests for public body responses. We will follow up the events day with presentations to COSLA and to local authorities on the implications of their Single Outcome Agreements for gendered poverty; the findings of the research; and support in how to respond.

Follow-up/Impact

Engender will organise an event to be held at the Scottish Parliament to encourage MSPs to sign a statement of support for the women's demands for Community-Based Gendered Indicators

Who Counts?



Women's poverty reflects their unequal place in society and without a proper understanding and recognition of the gendered nature of poverty local authorities may develop policies and practices in ways that make women and children more vulnerable to persistent poverty.

The 'Who Counts?' campaign will engage women in campaigning for the inclusion of gendered poverty indicators in local authority 'Single Outcome Agreements', drawing on opportunities within equalities legislation such as the Gender Equality Duty and the requirements for gender impact assessment and stakeholder consultation.

= EMPLOYMENT

Supporting women into work has been a key part of both UK and Scottish governments' strategies over the last ten years to lift children out of poverty. Problems with this strategy include availability, cost and quality of childcare and many women are only able to get low-paid work leaving many trapped in a cycle of "low pay, no pay".

= EQUAL PAY

40 years after the Equal Pay Act, the gender pay gap remains a stubborn reality. In Scotland women are still being paid less than their male counterparts – an average of 12.2% less for full-time workers and a massive 32% for part-time workers.

= HEALTH

All aspects of women's life - social, environmental, economic and biological – affect their health outcomes. Women experience gender discrimination in the work place. They regularly lack access to power and opportunities. They often experience low-paid, low-skilled employment, and are more likely to manage a dual role of employee and homemaker. They also experience higher risks from violence. All of these factors can undermine their self esteem, confidence and increase the incidence of mental ill health.

= CHILDCARE

The high cost and availability of suitable childcare is a key barrier to work for many women. A well-paid and well-trained childcare workforce could provide a path out of poverty for many women.

= NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS

The 'no recourse to public funds' rule is directly responsible for forcing ethnic minority women into extreme poverty. The rule is an outrage and should be abolished.

Some women are being forced to negotiate between staying in abusive situations and keeping their children or starving on the street while their children are taken into care.

= FUEL POVERTY

Almost 543,000 Scottish households are fuel poor. The current sharp rises in fuel costs are making the situation worse and increases in income are unlikely to keep pace with fuel price rises.

The poorest in society continue to be targeted with higher fuel costs. There are real issues with Powercard meters in terms of lack of choice in certain types of housing and also the cost of gas and electricity provided through this system rather than by monthly bill or direct debit.

Key Stats

- The average woman working full-time is paid 12.2% less than a man. The pay gap is 32% less per hour for part-time workers
- Less than 12% of women receive the full basic state pension based on their own contributions, and a woman's average retirement income is 53% of men's because they take time out to care.
- 66% of Scotland's estimated 650,000 unpaid carers are women.
- Policy makers constantly talk about lone parents in poverty but fail to note that more than 90% are in fact lone mothers.

= CARING

Women constitute the majority of Scotland's unpaid carers, triggering a cycle of economic disadvantage for many families. The caring role restricts women's opportunities for exiting poverty and these barriers are heightened at particular key times over the life-course.

= DEBT

Poorer women are often targeted by credit companies as they are less likely to be able to access affordable credit. Reps from Loan and Catalogue companies come to the door, in certain target areas, offering easy instant cash or credit however typical APR can reach well in excess of 250%.

= BENEFITS TRAP

Lack of information and an increasingly complex system exclude some of the most vulnerable citizens from accessing benefits to which they are entitled. Groups of women who are particularly disadvantaged by the current system include lone mothers, carers of people with disabilities, carers of older people, carers of children (parents and other unpaid carers) and women returning to work after illness / mental health problems.

= POVERTY MANAGERS

As part of their role as poverty managers, mothers frequently act as shock absorbers, shielding their children (and sometimes partners) from the full impact of the inadequate financial resources at their command. This can mean mothers going without food, clothing and warmth. This is not just about meeting their children's material needs but also about defending them against the stigma all too often associated with poverty.

= EDUCATION

Gender segregation in the workplace is a key cause of the pay gap. The gender pay gap will not close if women continue to be trapped in low wage sectors of the job market. Girls must get the opportunities at school to study subjects that enable them to enter well paid jobs and to access on-going training in the workplace.

= VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of violence against women in its many forms. Poverty and specific aspects of women's identity, such as their race or ethnicity, leave some women more vulnerable to violence and women's inequality puts them at particular risk of poverty and exploitation.