

A summary and discussion of the implications of data from the Gender Audit of Statistics [Breitenbach, E. and Wasoff, F. Scottish Executive Social Research 2007] relating to care and caring prepared by S. Macpherson, Engender Associate and E. Thomson.

Gender Audit Findings

Political Representation:

- In 2006, 8 out of 51 MPs (14%) for Scottish constituencies were women.
- Of the eight female MPs in Scottish constituencies, seven were members of the Labour party (compared with 32 men) and one was a member of the Scottish Liberal Democrats (compared with 11 men).
- In 2006, 39% of MSP's (50 people) in the Scottish Parliament were women.
- Of the 50 female MSP's in the Scottish Parliament, twenty eight were members of the Labour party (compared with 22 men), nine were members of the SNP (compared with 16 men), four were Scottish Socialists (compared with 2 men), three were Conservative and Unionist (compared with 14 men), two were Liberal Democrat (compared with 15 men) and two were Green (compared with 5 men).
- In 2003 (the most recent council elections) 22% of those elected as councillors were women. More women were Liberal Democrat (33%), SNP (25%) and Conservative (23%) councillors, while fewer women were Labour (19%) or Independent (15%) councillors.

Attitudes to Politics:

- When polled in 2003, more women than men supported the continuation of the Scottish Parliament (56% of women, compared with 44% of men), while more men supported independence from the UK (45% compared with 53% of men).
- There is little variation between men and women with regard to reported voting patterns, with 71% of men and 73% of women reporting having voted in both local and Scottish Parliament elections in 1999.

Public Participation

- Women held approximately a third (34%) of public appointments in Scotland in 2006. Women were represented more in parole boards (58%), NHS bodies (approximately 42%) and Justice of the Peace Advisory Committees (35%), and less in nationalised industries (18%) and public corporations (only Scottish Water which had one female member from a total of seven).
- Women remain underrepresented in many senior positions in the public sector. In 2007, there are for example: 6 female council leaders compared with 26 male; four local authority chief executives compared with 28 male; five senior police officers compared with 38 male; seventy six head teachers in senior schools compared with 286 males; and three university vice-chancellors compared with ten males. This does however represent an improvement on the picture ten years previously.
- Scottish Household Survey (SHS) data from 1999/2000 show that women and men report similar levels of involvement in their local community, with 19% of men and 22% of women reporting 'a fair amount' of involvement and 46% of men and 43% of women reporting 'not very much involvement'.
- The SHS 2005 reported that 20% of adults volunteered, 19% male and 21% female. There were some differences in levels of female and male involvement in voluntary organisations, charity or community groups (31% of all female volunteers compared to 26% of all male volunteers), church, religious or faith based organisations (24% of all female volunteers, compared to 19% of all male volunteers), while a similar proportion of male and female volunteers were involved with youth groups (11%). Men were far more likely to volunteer in sports clubs than women (25% of all male volunteers compared with 8% of all female volunteers) while women were more likely to volunteer in children's groups (10% of all female volunteers compared with 5% of all male volunteers) and on School Board or Parent Teacher Associations (8% of all female volunteers compared with 3% of all male volunteers).

Discussion

There has in recent years been concern with increasing women's representation in political institutions in order to change the balance of political representation. In 2002, the UK Government passed the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act to enable political parties to adopt positive measures to improve the gender balance of candidates. Although theoretically further action could be taken by policy it is unlikely in practice, therefore this requires efforts to be pursued by political parties.

The introduction of the Single Transferable Vote system through the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 led to a system of proportional representation for local government elections. The aim was to offer greater diversity of representation. In its first outing in 2007 there was minimal change, with only 22% female councillors elected. Without a strategy to address gender inequality

it is unlikely that this new system could significantly change the gender split of party candidates. There is a need for more women candidates to be put forward, where women did stand there was a better record of success.

The Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc (Scotland) Act 2003 created a separate Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland. Their role is to regulate and monitor how ministerial appointments are made to the boards of Scotland's public bodies, with a key aim being to promote diversity in public appointments. In practice, while women and other groups can apply to boards of public bodies, there are problems with the application process, with assumptions built into the system that favour particular cultural practices. The Commissioner is not in a position to change this, only to highlight this issue to boards.

The Scottish Executive's Volunteering Strategy stressed the importance of volunteering to Scottish society. The main concern was to encourage under-represented groups such as unemployed and disabled people to participate, with young people a particular focus of attention.

The Gender Duty, introduced in April 2007, should lead to greater attention going to the position of women in relation to political representation and senior level appointments in central and local government, the judiciary, public sector departments and public appointments. This can inform political parties in relation to changing the gender balance of political representation and also provides a context within which public bodies might seek to promote gender equality, in particular how to address gender imbalances in senior managerial and decision-making appointments.

Responsibility for appointments in non-departmental public bodies lies with government departments. They might therefore consider how to better promote gender equality in public appointments in future, while non-departmental public bodies (NDPB) might use such data to inform their equality schemes both in relation to gender composition of employees and in relation to how the gender balance in an organisation may affect their responsiveness to the needs of service users.

There are a range of explanations for the relatively limited political participation of women, including: the responsibilities of family life; the tendency of women to wait to be asked rather than to put themselves forward; discrimination by selection panels; and political culture. Measures to increase the number of women participating in political life include both increasing motivation and resources to support participation and changing the rules and procedures that govern selection and political culture. Positive action offers one solution to challenge biases in selection procedures, ensuring that more women candidates are selected for winnable seats. Arrangements such as women only short-lists, twinning and zipping have been discussed and used by several political parties in Scotland and the UK, although often proving controversial measures.

Facilitating women's participation in political and public life is an important way of ensuring that those who make decisions that affect both men and women represent the positions and interests of both genders. Increasing the number of women involved in political and public life can potentially change the priorities and concerns of politics, and may also change political practices, moving away from the current adversarial mode of operation. Finally, it is important that women participate in senior and influential political and public roles as role models and advocates for all women in Scottish and UK society more generally.