



## Women, Children and Poverty

Report of a Public Health Network seminar, jointly sponsored by NHSGGC and Glasgow Caledonian University, exploring gender and poverty

## Poverty A Gendered Analysis

A seminar was jointly hosted by NHSGGC Public Health Network and Glasgow Caledonian University Business School to look at a gendered analysis of poverty and the impact of the Recession and Recovery.

The seminar discussion aimed to capture the views from planners, policy makers and practitioners to inform strategic work that is ongoing in relation to child poverty at a Glasgow City level. Key themes are highlighted in this report.

The two key note speakers for the day were Ruth Lister, Professor of Social Policy from Loughborough University followed by Professor Ailsa McKay from Glasgow Caledonian University who presented a gender analysis of the Recession and Recovery.

The Director of Public Health, Dr Linda de Caestecker opened the proceedings and the summing up was given by Mr Jim Cunningham, Assistant Director of Development and Regeneration Services of Glasgow City Council. Both are members of the Glasgow Child and Family Services Executive Group and they co-chair the child poverty sub group. Linda highlighted that this was the first of a series of seminars in relation to the impact of the recession to be launched by Glasgow Caledonian University in October and hoped that this would be the start of a fruitful relationship between the Academic sector the Voluntary Sector and Health in relation to social justice issues.

### Professor Ruth Lister

Ruth's presentation covered the incidence of child poverty, the management of poverty, and the impact on health and policy implications while recognising the risks of poverty among men and women Ruth focussed primarily on women taking a life course perspective.

It was important to understand women's roles in managing poverty within the home and to make the link between women and children's poverty and to recognise that women were at increased risk. Ruth highlighted key statistics that show women's risk of poverty but stated that this gives a limited picture as they are based on household income assuming incomes are shared fairly within households - however if you look at intra household income a very different picture emerges for women. Women's individual incomes were less compared to men's and indicated hidden poverty, especially low income women. Low income women are more likely than men to go without and do without themselves in order to provide for their families. An important element in low income households is domestic abuse. Domestic abuse against women is a key determinant of poor mental health.

An intra household analysis looks at who does the hard work of managing poverty. The unequal divisor of labour within households reveals that it is women who do most of the management of poverty & debt; this is difficult, time consuming and tiring. Women were more likely to suffer time and income poverty than men. Women, Ruth argues act as the "*shock absorbers of poverty*".

Ruth highlighted the concept of '*othering*' and how Mother's try to shield their children from the stigmatising effect of poverty. Qualitative research underlines the difficulties that women face in developing resilience in relation to '*othering*' in the face of poverty.

Ruth looked at the research on the impact of poverty on health in particular mental health issues.

The implications of child poverty policies puts the onus on parents to improve their own situation through paid work and emphasis on good parenting under the government coalition

is likely to be reinforced. In a voices of experience workshop depression emerged as a strong link between Mothers and poverty. Poverty undermines parenting capacity and undermines Mothers roles and has a damaging impact on Mothers morale and wellbeing.

Poor health impedes ability to get paid work. Ruth used Allan Marsh's work on lone parents to highlight this, Marsh emphasises the aligned spiral of hardship, poor health and low morale. The first step out of this is to improve benefits. Mothers' earnings play a critical role in keeping families out of poverty. Ruth highlighted the impact of the recession on women's work. Too much emphasis on work as the way out of poverty risks devaluing the unpaid work of bringing up children.

A gendered analysis points to how effective policies to tackle women's and by extension children's poverty needs to have access to an adequate, independent income from the labour market and or the state. Ruth went on to look at the key elements that are needed in antipoverty strategies to enable women to make the transition into work;

While recognising that not everyone is in a position to take up paid work and the role of carers needed to be given more recognition and given a higher value.

The role of public services was highlighted in the way that they treat women in poverty and that an equality and human rights culture should be central to our understanding of how we treat women and children when they come into contact with public services.

Ruth finished with a plea to ensure that women are engaged in the development of anti-poverty policies and to create opportunities for women who have experienced poverty to be more than witnesses to this poverty but should be actively involved in development of policy and its implementation.

### **Professor Ailsa McKay**

Professor Ailsa McKay began her presentation by describing gendered differences in the way we spend money. Thinking about this in terms of the economic downturn and these differences are the starting point for this discussion. Ailsa started by looking at the 5 C's of occupational segregation, caring, catering, cash registers, clerical and cleaning. The cause of the recession has been characterised as *men behaving badly!* However Ailsa pointed out that as well as bad behaviour from the banks we also need to look to our own behaviour in terms of our desire for low cost credit. We need to consider cause to know what the cure might be. Ailsa argued that while equality is mainstreamed is it making a difference across Scotland? The jury is out in terms of what difference is being made? Using the relevant evidence in terms of cure, Ailsa believes we are not coming up with the right policy responses because we are not taking a gendered analysis.

How is a gendered analysis relevant to our work in Glasgow on child poverty? "*Rallying round the cause of children without championing gender equalities is like stocking a sports team with players but failing to teach them how to play the game*". Everyone agrees we should do something about child poverty but using a gender analysis is unpopular. - We have *done* women and feminism is now a bad word. Women are disadvantaged in a modern capitalist economy because of emphasis on paid work. The hidden nature of the productive nature of work in society is because women's work is ignored.

Alisa went on to give her analysis of the current recession and the problem with a *gender neutral* stance. The first phase of the recession could be called a *mancession*. Initially men lost jobs in construction and manufacturing as they have done in every other recession. The next stage of the recession will impact significantly on the public sector and therefore on women's jobs. It will rapidly become a *womancecession*.

The recovery package has been built around a particular perspective on the role of public finance and the government have committed to reduce the borrowing because of the age old argument in orthodox economic theory that high levels of government borrowing will impact on interest rates and as these go up it will affect consumption and levels of confidence in the market. However interest rates will only go up if banks let them. The effect of these policies on the public sector in the recovery phase will be astronomical. Public sector cuts and a period of social austerity will be felt by women as providers and consumers of services.

Will these cuts and job losses revive the economy? If you want to stimulate demand you need to make sure the people who have money spend it. Evidence shows that women on low incomes are more likely to spend money in the economy than men or higher earners.

We need to consider women's relative disadvantaged position in the labour market. Ailsa maintains that women are cheaper because they don't have the same employment rights but they may also be more expensive because of maternity rights- a double edged sword for women in the labour market.

Is Scotland different in terms of the recession? The Scottish Government's overarching purpose is sustainable economic growth. There is a focus on government policy on the overarching purpose to reduce income inequalities and this resonates with Ruth's concept of intra household poverty. However if policies do not take gender into account women will continue to be more at risk of poverty and therefore their children.

In other words policies are not gender neutral. Ruth clearly laid this out in her analysis of women's poverty. Therefore the solutions cannot be gender neutral.

The statistics and evidence show that women remain disadvantaged in modern capitalist societies we need to get the message across and the reason's why. Occupational segregation shows us that women do dominate the 5 c's and our approaches to education are sustaining these occupational choices. What causes this? We need to question the focus on sustainable economic growth more forensically. GDP increasing year on year has not reduced inequalities or poverty.

We need to question the value system in relation to the economy and why the banks were bailed out at the expense of public services. Why do we not find a different way to manage our finances, why was there the political will to bail out the banks compared to the lack of political will to achieve equal pay in the public sector? Would this in the long run stimulate the economy more than a bank bail out? Will the bail out change behaviour in the banking sector?

We need to uncover the hidden value system that takes resources away from the public sector what is the position of the nations children and the aged, who is not housed adequately, who has the poorest health? If the budget did this we would have a cure but the bias in the system favours a capitalist mode of production and consumption. Ailsa finished with the comment that her desire to see a new value system would of course be in an ideal world!

To view the overheads from the presentations and to listen again to the presentations go to [www.phru.net](http://www.phru.net)

## Key Themes from the Discussion Groups

- An awareness of the hopelessness, stigma and shame faced by women in poverty from all groups
- Training for front line staff in relation to gender and poverty and making staff aware of the issue of 'othering'.
- Tension between being a 'good worker' and a 'good parent'
- Need to raise awareness of the impact of the benefits system and the choices that parents have to make and concern across all groups on the reforms of welfare benefits being proposed by Government.
- Need for agencies to work together
- Recording staff cuts during this time of cost savings
- Creative approaches to recruitment are important. Need to understand the reason behind occupational segregation and challenge stereotyping of roles.
- Gender pay audit should be prioritised.
- Differential impact on gender of the cost savings needs to be explored e.g centralisation of services may have more negative impact on women in low paid jobs
- Fathers' contribution to work and family needs to be explored e.g encourage equal uptake of family friendly NHS policies by all parents.
- EQIA on budget cuts need to work more closely together and systematically to evidence this.
- Examples of practice were given; Healthier, Wealthier, Children initiative will have an EQIA. South West CHCP are proposing to train 10% of staff in financial inclusion
- Increase participatory appraisal in planning processes
- Build gender into employment practice.
- We need to focus on outcomes so we can demonstrate the difference that is made by taking account of gender. This is not about gender-specific programmes but it is about integrating thinking about gender into all policy. Glasgow has included specific outcomes in relation to reduction of child poverty as one of a number of political priorities - the four pillars of the Council strategy: educating the young; supporting the vulnerable; protecting the environment; growing the economy.
- Need to raise awareness on gender and poverty issues and how it impacts on children.
- Need to ensure that women's voices are heard.

Report compiled by

Norma Greenwood & Jackie Erdman