

Cutting Women Out in Bristol

A Report of the Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Sector Spending Cuts on Women in Bristol, by Bristol Fawcett

Summary

In 2010, the Fawcett Society challenged the coalition government's emergency budget. Fawcett believed that the budget would have a disproportionately negative impact on women, and estimated that 70% of the cuts would hit women's purses directly.

What do the cuts in national and local budgets mean for the women living in Bristol? What is the impact on their lives, and what are the implications for gender equality and human rights?

An overview of the Bristol Fawcett report, October 2011

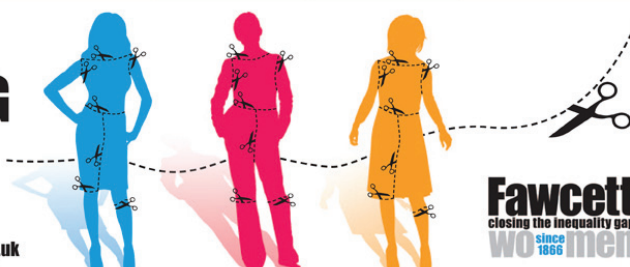
The report begins by looking at women's employment. Whilst overall more men than women are unemployed, the number of men in unemployment nationally has fallen by 31,000 since the start of the recovery. In the same time period, the number of unemployed women has risen by a dramatic 71,000. This is related to the impact of the spending cuts on public sector and part time jobs. In Bristol, 63% of council staff are women. In a city where the gender pay gap is higher than the national average, the outlook for women's employment is not good.

With unemployment increasing, women need to claim more benefits. Cuts to housing benefit will disproportionately impact on women, as women are more likely to claim than men. With the cuts causing a loss of up to £15 a week in income, the high rents in Bristol are becoming increasingly out of reach for women, and their families. And with no support to pay rent, where can women go? Cuts to social housing and homeless charities mean that more and more, women are finding themselves without the basic human right of shelter.

Just as women are more likely to claim housing benefit, they are also more commonly the recipient of other benefits too. This is the result of caring responsibilities, the impact of rising female unemployment and the over-representation of women in low-income work. Bristol Fawcett have discovered that the changes to the benefits and tax system will cost Bristol's women a shocking £44,825,450 - around double the cost to men. Fawcett have calculated that single mothers and their children, who are often raised with no financial support from their fathers (nationally £4 billion worth of child support is not paid annually), will be the worst hit by these cuts.

Bristol's bus fares are already amongst the highest in Europe. Cuts of £2.2 million will be made to Bristol's transport budget in 2011/12 and cuts to several transport services have already been announced. Women are more reliant than men on public transport, and the cuts to services together with rising costs are likely to leave women isolated and unable to get to work, education, and support services as well as impacting negatively on women's freedom of movement socially.

**STOP
CUTTING
WOMEN
OUT!**
www.fawcettsociety.org.uk



Women in Bristol, especially single mothers, are more likely to have primary caring responsibility for children. So the coalition cuts to education services hit mothers and their families hardest. The cut to the Education Maintenance Allowance means that around 3,000 students in Bristol will no longer receive the financial support they need to stay in education. An Equality Impact Assessment of EMA carried out in 2009 showed that this allowance was particularly important in helping teenage mothers and young people with special needs stay in education. Cuts to support and advice services, the removal of ring-fencing and the ongoing reduction of central support to schools threatens the adequacy of support services and the amount and quality of PSHE teaching which is vital for promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women and girls.

The spending cuts are also having an impact on some of the most vulnerable women living in Bristol – the victims of intimate partner violence. Between 15,400 and 22,000 Bristol women will experience domestic violence in a year, and it is estimated that 130 women are raped in the city each month. Domestic violence also has the highest rate of repeat offending of any crime. The women of Bristol simply cannot afford cuts in this sector. And yet cuts to services are looming. Cuts to the CPS will make it harder for women's cases to be dealt with. Cuts to the NHS make it harder for women to get the help and support they need. Cuts to housing benefits make it harder for women to leave a violent partner. Cuts to benefits could increase a woman's financial dependence on her violent partner, who may well control her access to money as part of the violence. And cuts to legal aid make it harder for women to access the help they need to leave a violent partner.

The cuts to legal aid in areas including education, family law, immigration, employment, welfare benefits and medical negligence will hit women first, and hardest. The proposed definition of domestic violence for legal aid is troublingly inadequate. As the report shows, women in Bristol have a lower income than men, and so are more dependent on free services. By denying women access to legal representation, women are being denied a basic human right to a voice, and to justice.

Research has shown that women are more likely than men to need access to health and social care. This is in part because women tend to have more caring responsibilities. The £7.3 million cut to the council health and social care budget, and the £19 million cut to the Bristol PCT budget will therefore impact on those who use it most – women.

Conclusion

Bristol Fawcett's report shows that the cuts will not only disproportionately impact on women, but they take place in a context of existing inequality between women and men. Women are on average poorer than men. They are more likely than men to rely on benefits and tax credits. They earn less both as a result of the pay gap and because they are more likely to work part-time due to their unpaid caring responsibilities. Their unpaid caring responsibilities are set to increase as cuts are made to statutory services. The spending cuts here in Bristol are therefore likely to widen the equality gap between women and men, and are likely to have a serious impact on women's human rights.

Full report available at <http://www.bristolfawcett.org.uk/Documents/Economy/BristolCuttingWomenOut.pdf>