

Cutting Women Out in Bristol

An 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.

In 2011, Bristol Fawcett catalogued the impacts of austerity on women in Bristol. Now the report has been updated for 2014 and the picture for women in Bristol is detailed across nine areas. 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 2014

The report begins by looking at women's **employment**. Although the pay gap between men and women is better than the national average in Bristol, the gap is still substantial and likely to increase. Pay gaps are likely to increase as a result of pay freezes because more women work in the public sector so more women than men will be hit by the public sector pay freeze. Women still earn less than men for full and part time work which may be explained by the greater role that women continue to play in bringing up children and caring for other dependents. Areas of investment selected by the Local Enterprise Partnership will do little for women's employment in Bristol. An increase in childcare costs and a reduction in the amount of childcare available may have an impact on the number of women in Bristol in paid work.

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. The experience of being 'homeless' may well be different for women than for homeless men, due to the 'invisibility' of women who may not sleep rough but end up in precarious, and often dangerous, places instead. Due to the changes in housing benefits many families have to move house. Women are usually responsible for organising children's schooling and access to any local services they may need. Women also rely heavily on informal networks of support to combine work and family life - moving to a new area can disrupt these and make it difficult to continue in paid work.

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. Nationally the tax and welfare changes are raising a net £3.047 billion (21%) from men and £11.628 billion (79%) from women. Fawcett have calculated that single mothers and their children will be the worst hit by these cuts - a high proportion (75.5%) of Bristol's children who live in poverty are in lone parent families.

Bristol City Council has protected a constant level of spending on supported bus services over the last two years, but there are planned changes to service timetables from 2015/16 which will reduce some routes' frequency. 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.



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. Learning English has become harder for women in Bristol. For some who are on Job Seeker Allowance English classes are mandatory, but for those who are not flexible enough to attend classes at any hours, the benefits are stopped. Single parents and mother with young children are particularly hard hit.

The spending cuts are also having an impact on some of the most vulnerable women living in Bristol – the victims of **intimate partner violence**. 68,800 women in Bristol are likely to experience domestic violence in their lifetime, 43,340 women in Bristol are likely to have been raped or sexually abused at some point in their lifetime. Domestic violence also has the highest rate of repeat offending of any crime. The women of Bristol simply cannot afford cuts in this sector. 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.

Research has shown that women are more likely than men to need access to **health and social care**. Any reductions in adult care, or support for carers will affect more women than men in Bristol because women are the majority of those receiving care and the majority of those providing care (both paid and unpaid). Caring comes at a financial and mental cost - Almost 1 in 3 (30%) carers had seen a drop of £20,000 or more a year in their household income as a result of caring and 92% said that caring has had a negative impact on their mental health.

The cuts to **legal aid** in areas including education, family law, immigration, employment, welfare benefits and medical negligence will hit women first, and hardest. 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.

Conclusion

Bristol Fawcett's report shows that the cuts 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.