

The Improvement Service

ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

# The Gendered Nature of Poverty



# What is the purpose of the briefing note series?

The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes will be directly produced by IS staff but we will also make available material from as wide a range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services as possible.

We will use the IS website and elected member e-bulletin to publicise and provide access to the briefing notes. All briefing notes in the series can be accessed at [www.improvementservice.org.uk/elected-member-guidance-and-briefings.html](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/elected-member-guidance-and-briefings.html)

## About this briefing note

This briefing is one in a series raising awareness of the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and highlighting some of the good practice around Scotland in tackling VAWG and gender inequality.

Specifically, this briefing aims to raise awareness of the gendered nature of poverty in Scotland and the role of VAWG in sustaining poverty. It also provides suggestions of the ways that elected members can help support a joined-up, strategic approach to be taken to tackling the poverty experienced by women and children within local communities.

# What is the issue and why does it matter?

## Gendered poverty in Scotland: statistics and facts

Women in local communities across Scotland are more likely to be in poverty, and find it more difficult to escape poverty, due to the impact of economic and labour inequality and prevalence of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).

While all women are negatively affected by these issues, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, disabled women, and refugee women are likely to face additional barriers to economic resources and support services.<sup>1</sup>

In the workplace, women's economic inequality puts them at a greater risk of poverty than men due to occupational segregation and women's over-representation in lower paid work:

- Women are paid on average 15% less per hour than men.<sup>2</sup>
- Twice as many female employees receive less than £7 per hour than male employees.<sup>3</sup>

In 2015-18, the relative poverty rate after housing costs was higher for lone mothers (39%) than for other single working-age adults.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, access to resources within shared households is often unequal, and women are likely to have more caring responsibilities and to work part-time. Women are also twice as likely to receive social security and are therefore at greater risk of poverty due to welfare reform and austerity.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, cuts in benefits and public spending since 2010 have disproportionately affected BME women in particular. Age is also a factor in sustaining labour market inequality in terms of unequal access to occupational pensions. Two-thirds of pensioners living in poverty across the UK are women.<sup>6</sup>

### The link between women's poverty and child poverty:

91% of lone parents in Scotland are women and women make up 95% of lone parents receiving Income Support.<sup>7</sup> In the UK, it is estimated that 27% of working lone parents are in poverty.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, women's poverty is intrinsically linked to children's wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Managing poverty can negatively impact the physical and mental health of mothers, which creates further barriers on the ability to find employment and therefore sustains poverty for both mothers and children.<sup>10</sup> Children living in poverty are more likely to experience poor mental and physical health and the negative

1 Engender (2017) [Engender Submission of Evidence on the Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Bill to the Scottish Parliament Social Security Committee.](#)

2 Close The Gap (2018) [Women, work and poverty in Scotland: What you need to know](#)

3 Engender (2017)

4 Scottish Government (2019). [Poverty and income inequality in Scotland: 2015-2018](#)

5 Engender (2017)

6 Close The Gap (2018)

7 Close The Gap (2018)

8 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018), [#IWD2018: time to loosen the grip of poverty on women in the UK](#)

9 Women's Budget Group (2005). [Women's and Children's Poverty: Making the Links.](#)

10 Women's Budget Group (2005)

impact on their wellbeing can continue into their adult life.<sup>11</sup> This is recognised in Scotland's engagement with the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) framework.<sup>12</sup>

### **The link between VAWG and poverty:**

Women who experience VAWG are at a very high risk of poverty. 89% of women experience financial abuse, as an aspect of coercive control, when experiencing domestic abuse.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, women experiencing abuse in their home will find it more difficult to leave their abuser if they are living in poverty, and poverty can be a factor in preventing women from being safe.<sup>14</sup> Women who leave domestic abuse are more likely to become lone parents and are therefore more likely to experience financial difficulties.

VAWG also creates barriers to employment and other economic resources by negatively impacting women's health and wellbeing. Women and children who experience VAWG are at increased risk of experiencing inequality of outcomes throughout their life, including lower levels of physical and mental wellbeing and increased risk of harm.<sup>15</sup> Many BME women, migrant and refugee women also have limited or no access to VAWG recovery and support services and therefore their experiences of VAWG can sustain poverty further.

Therefore, there is a need for VAWG and Poverty to be addressed collaboratively to ensure that adequate financial support is available for all women experiencing VAWG, as well as recovery services which address the impacts of VAWG and how these relate to poverty and economic inequality.

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11 NHS Health Scotland (2016), [Lone parents in Scotland: work, income and child health; in-work progression; and the geography of lone parenthood](#).

12 NHS Health Scotland, [Overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#)

13 Close The Gap (2018)

14 Women's Aid (2019), [The Economics of Abuse](#)

15 Zero Tolerance, accessed 2019: [Statistics](#)

## What does this mean for elected members?

We cannot effectively tackle poverty in Scotland if we do not recognise its gendered nature.

Many women and children will be living in poverty in the communities which elected members represent. Elected members have a key role to play in advocating for policy and practice that improves the wellbeing of women and children living in their local communities and ensuring a joined-up approach is taken to tackling women's social, economic and political inequality.<sup>16</sup>

A gendered analysis of poverty aligns with the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling poverty by addressing inequality through the Fairer Scotland Duty (2018) and Child Poverty Act (2017). If Scotland is to embed UNCRC and prioritise the eradication of child poverty, this needs to include analysis of gendered poverty. UNCRC Article 27 acknowledges the responsibility to provide parents with adequate resources to uphold children's right to a good enough standard of living.<sup>17</sup>

Elected members should consider their responsibility to children in their communities and approach child poverty by recognising how gender inequality impacts standards of living in this context. Elected members have a key role to play in holding individuals, services and organisations in their local area that have a responsibility to protect children to account, as set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014).

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16 Improvement Service and Zero Tolerance (2019). [Violence Against Women and Girls: Primary Prevention Guidance for Community Planning Partners](#)

17 [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, \(1989\)](#)

# What does good practice look like in this area?

The following areas of good practice have been identified as effective ways to encourage and implement a joined-up approach to poverty in local areas.

## **Encouraging a multi-agency approach to tackling poverty**

Elected members can play a strategic role in ensuring that the work of local multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) is supported and that this work is collaborative with child poverty leads and Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). Elected members can also use their strategic influence to include VAWPs in the process of challenging poverty alongside equality and diversity, health, housing, economic, and education sector stakeholders. This might also involve making sure CPPs understand the economic and social need to address the gendered nature of poverty and how this links to child poverty and the delivery of their Council's Equality Outcomes. Elected members could also ensure that local poverty work has strategic collaboration with Early Years and Health sectors, to acknowledge the necessity for improved childcare provision.

## **Acknowledging the relationship between VAWG and poverty and encouraging efforts to address this**

Elected members can use their leadership role to advocate that women and children who are experiencing or have experienced VAWG have access to sustainably funded, high-quality, specialist crisis and recovery services, which will support them in recovering from the trauma of their experiences. They can also acknowledge the impact of economic abuse and financial exclusion by advocating for services which offer support on debt and life after financial abuse.

## **Addressing income and workplace inequality in local policy work**

A gendered analysis of poverty locally would also include challenging the gender inequalities which sustain economic inequality such as the pay gap, occupational segregation, social security and welfare reform. Elected members should consider the impact of budget cuts on women in their local area and consider that cuts to sectors which have a predominantly female workforce will sustain poverty for women and children. Elected members can take concerted efforts to end the gender pay gap, by promoting work opportunities for women and advocating for equal pay for work of equal value. Acknowledging the additional barriers faced by BME women, refugee women, and disabled women in relation to poverty would also help to challenge the systemic inequality that enables this. In 2019, Close The Gap have piloted the Equally Safe at Work workplace accreditation programme across seven councils. This programme addresses workplace gender inequality as a fundamental step to preventing violence against women.<sup>18</sup> Going forward, there may be opportunity for elected members to use some of the key learning from this pilot to encourage a whole-council approach to tackling inequality in the workplace.

Implementation of the Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD) locally will also help to tackle socio-economic disadvantage experienced by families affected by VAWG and reduce inequality in the long run. Elected members should look out for a gendered approach to FSD assessment or integrated impact assessment with a particular focus on those affected by VAWG when being asked to take strategic decisions.

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<sup>18</sup> Equally Safe at Work, accessed 2019, [About Equally Safe at Work](#)

# Key actions for elected members to consider

Elected members can:

- Play a strategic role in setting up collaborative work between VAWPs and local child poverty leads
- Advocate for effective intervention and recovery services for women and children affected by VAWG within their local community and acknowledge the impacts of economic abuse and financial exclusion as forms of VAWG which increase the risk of poverty
- Work with their local child poverty leads to promote a gendered lens to child poverty, such as when analysing the Local Child Poverty Action reports and consider outcomes which will address gender poverty
- Conduct Equality Impact Assessments of anti-poverty policies over the life course to allow for consideration of the long-term effects of policies on women and children
- Include consideration of impact on women in Fairer Scotland Duty assessments
- Consider a gender budgeting approach which systematically involves women's organisations and civil society to fully assess the impact of economic policies on women and girls
- Consider introducing (where it doesn't already exist) a specific equality outcome focussed on tackling the gendered nature of poverty
- In local economic regeneration planning, encourage local businesses to pay a living wage and to use gendered analysis of poverty to make the case for this given the increased risk of poverty for women.

## Further support and contacts

The Improvement Service coordinates the National Violence Against Women Network, which provides support to multi-agency VAW Partnerships across Scotland. Please contact [vaw@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:vaw@improvementservice.org.uk) for more details on the work of local VAW Partnerships.

The Improvement Service is also working with the Scottish Government to support the implementation of the Fairer Scotland Duty and help public bodies to manage the intersections between duties focused on socio-economic concerns, human rights and equality. For more details on this work, please contact [miriam.mckenna@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:miriam.mckenna@improvementservice.org.uk).

The Improvement Service also hosts a National Coordinator for Local Child Poverty Action Reports who is responsible for working with local authorities and health boards to support the development of LCPARs. Please contact [hanna.mcculloch@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:hanna.mcculloch@improvementservice.org.uk) for more details on this work.

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Sept 2019

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