



Unravelling Equality?

A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Women in Coventry. May 2011

A Joint Report of the Centre for Human Rights in Practice, University of Warwick and Coventry Women's Voices.

Executive Summary

By Mary-Ann Stephenson and James Harrison



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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This is a summary of the key findings of the human rights and equality impact assessment (HREIA) carried out by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice at the University of Warwick (CHRIP) and Coventry Women's Voices (CWV). It analyses the public spending cuts that are currently underway and their potential human rights and equality impacts on women in Coventry.

A copy of the full report is available at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/chrp/>

The report examines eight broad areas where spending cuts are likely to have an impact on women. These areas are based on the priorities identified by individual women and women's voluntary organisations with whom we consulted during the drafting of the report.

The report concludes that many of the spending cuts will have a disproportionate impact on women. Others will affect both women and men equally but will have a potentially damaging impact on certain groups of women (for example changes to benefits for disabled people which will affect both disabled women and disabled men). Taken together these cuts will lead to greater inequality between women and men in Coventry. For some women the combination of cuts may have a negative impact on their human rights.

The report reflects the potential negative impacts of the cuts on women. It also highlights some areas where public authorities have taken measures to mitigate negative impacts on women (e.g. where Coventry City Council has provided additional funding to replace funding lost from national government).

2. Employment

Background: Women in Coventry are less likely than the national average to be in paid work.¹ The pay gap between women and men in Coventry is more than ten points higher than the national average pay gap.² Women in Coventry are the majority of workers throughout the public sector. For instance, 78% of City Council staff are women.³

The Cuts:

- Budget cuts are leading to public sector job losses in Coventry including at Coventry City Council, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust, West Midlands Police, the British Education and Communications Technology Agency and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.
- There is a two year pay freeze across the public sector.
- The childcare tax credit is being cut from 80% to 70% of childcare costs.
- Some providers are cutting childcare provision.⁴

The Impact: Women are likely to suffer disproportionately from job cuts and public sector pay freezes since they form the majority of public sector workers

Together with increased child care costs, this may lead to lower rates of employment for women and an increase in the pay gap. This will exacerbate overall inequality between men and women in Coventry

3. Housing

Background: Single women are the main recipients of housing benefit. In Coventry around 4,360 single women and 2,085 women in couples are claiming Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for private rented accommodation.⁵ There is also a shortage of

accommodation for single homeless women in Coventry.

The Cuts: From April 2011 there have been a number of changes to LHA including:

- LHA cut to cover the bottom 30% of rents rather than bottom 50%
- LHA will be linked to Consumer Prices Index rather than local rents meaning its value is likely to go down over time.

The Impact: Cuts to LHA will have a disproportionate impact on women since women are the main recipients.⁶ In the short term these changes will cost those affected in Coventry between £8 and £15 a week.⁷ This will lead to increased pressure on women's finances. Together with changes to other benefits and tax credits this will increase the income gap between women and men and may push some women into poverty, raising human rights concerns.

Over time the value of LHA is likely to fall relative to actual rents reducing the number of properties that people claiming LHA can afford. At this stage, the shortage of accommodation for single homeless women in Coventry may also become an issue.

4. Incomes and poverty

Background: Women in Coventry (as in the rest of the country) are poorer than men⁸ and receive a higher proportion of their income from benefits.⁹ 33,595 households in Coventry receive tax credits.¹⁰ 35,710 receive out of work benefits.¹¹

The Cuts and Changes: The changes to the tax and benefit system that will impact on women include

- Cuts to benefits to pregnant women and families with new babies, freezing of child benefit, cuts to childcare tax credit and cuts to those eligible for tax credits
- Lone parents will be required to seek work once their youngest child is five
- Disabled people are being moved from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance and will have to be re-assessed.
- Disability Living Allowance is being cut by 20%
- Someone caring for a person who loses disability living allowance will also lose carers allowance
- Sanctions for people the Job Centre believes are not seeking work will become more severe
- There has been an increase in the rate of Child Tax Credit
- There has been an increase in the personal tax allowance

The Impact: Although the increase in Child Tax Credit and the personal tax allowance will benefit many women, taken together the benefit and tax changes in the 2010 budget will cost women in Coventry £29,631,532.¹² The cost to men will be less than half of this.¹³ This will further increase inequality between women and men in Coventry. For some women this could lead to a significant loss of income, pushing those women into poverty and raising significant human rights concerns.

Lone parents, disabled women, carers and BME women are likely to be particularly badly hit by the changes.

5. Education and training

Background: Women are likely to be disproportionately affected by some of the changes in education funding. Women's life time earnings are on average lower than men's making it harder for women meet the increased costs of studying. Women also tend to be the primary carers for children so are disproportionately likely to be affected by cuts to school budgets.

The Cuts:

- The grant received by Coventry from the Department for

Education to pay for schools and colleges in Coventry has been cut by 24%

- Further education colleges are facing a 25% cut in funding
- Education maintenance allowance is being replaced by a bursary scheme and funding cut from £560 million to £180 million
- Funding for English language classes (ESOL) is being cut
- Tuition fees are set to raise. Fees at the University of Warwick will be £9000 a year. Fees at Coventry University will vary from between £7,500 and £9000 a year.

The Impact: Cuts to the schools budget have resulted in a cut to services provided for special needs and mental health support in schools. This will affect some of the most vulnerable children in Coventry¹⁴. It may disproportionately impact on women who tend to be the primary carers of children.

Cuts to further and higher education may

- **Act as a barrier to women obtaining educational qualifications** because of increased fees for higher education and reduced support for further education courses – particularly those who have children, are from poorer backgrounds, don't speak English and/or are mature students.
- **Have negative impacts on women in later life** – Women who are unable to obtain educational qualifications as a result of increased fees and reduced support may see their earning potential and job prospects reduced as a result.

6. Violence against women

Background: Violence and or abuse against women is a widespread, but often hidden abuse of women's human rights:

- 30,397 women in Coventry are likely to have been raped or sexually abused at some point in their lifetime.¹⁵
- 38,575 women in Coventry are likely to experience domestic violence in their lifetime.¹⁶

The Cuts: Women experiencing violence and abuse in Coventry will be affected by a number of cuts to funding and changes to welfare benefits. These include:

- **Services for women** experiencing violence in Coventry are under threat. Some agencies have already lost significant funding. Funding for other services is currently under review.
- **The police and Crown Prosecution Service** are both facing budget cuts which voluntary organisations fear may reduce the support available to victims and survivors of violence. The number of specialist domestic abuse officers has already been cut from eight to two.
- **The National Health Service** is facing a budget cut which may reduce the level of support available to victims of violence.
- **Cuts to legal aid** will reduce the ability of women suffering violence to get the legal help and support they need.
- **Cuts and other changes to welfare benefits** risk increasing women's financial dependency on men, making it harder for women to leave violent relationships.
- **Cuts to housing benefit** may make it harder for women to move area to get away from their attacker.

The Impact: As a result of the cuts there is a high likelihood of significantly worse outcomes for women in terms of the violence they suffer and its impact upon them. The most obvious impacts include:

- Less successful investigation and prosecution of offenders
- More ongoing mental, physical and sexual health problems for women
- More women trapped in violent relationships

7. Health, Social Care and Other Support Services

Background:

- Women in Coventry are more likely than men to need adult social care¹⁷ and more likely to be carers.¹⁸
- Certain health problems particularly impact on women. For example, women are two and a half times more likely than men to suffer anxiety and depression.¹⁹

The Cuts and Changes:

- Coventry's Adult Social Care budget will be cut by £2,160,000 in 2011/12.²⁰ Coventry City Council argues that efficiency savings can meet any shortfall in funding. Others are concerned that services will be cut.
- Carers' Organisations like Coventry Carers' Centre are finding that funding from other sources such as charitable trusts is harder to obtain, putting support services at risk.
- Coventry Primary Care Trust has to make savings of £5 million on its 2011/12 budget and Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust has to cut its workforce by the equivalent of nearly 560 full time posts
- Coventry PCT is preparing to close down, to be replaced by GP consortia. Public Health will become the responsibility of Local Authorities.

The Impact: Women in Coventry will be disproportionately affected by any cuts in social care and support services leading to greater inequality between men and women.

The full impact of the health cuts and move to GP commissioning is not yet clear. But there are concerns about services which are more used by women (e.g. mental health) and about funding for services addressing violence against women.

8. Legal advice services

Background: Women rely disproportionately on state-funded legal advice services for civil law cases. For instance, 62.2% of applications for civil legal aid are made by women, with higher percentages in areas like education and family law.²¹

The Cuts:

- **Legal aid will be cut** for welfare benefits, education and medical negligence advice and severely reduced for debt, employment, family law, housing and immigration advice
- **There will also be changes to eligibility criteria** (who will be able to receive legal aid), access to legal aid (how you get legal advice) and how much legal advisors are paid for doing the work

The Impact: These cuts will have a significant impact on advice services and those seeking advice in Coventry which will disproportionately affect women. The changes could lead to negative human rights impacts including:

- Violations of the right to fair trial where there is no legal advice in particularly complex cases.²²
- Removal of advice on complex welfare benefits issues, housing issues and immigration issues may also amount to human rights violations under Article 3 of the Human Rights Act.²³
- Significant restrictions on the local availability of services effectively creating 'advice deserts' could lead to no effective remedy for any abuses.²⁴
- Women in violent relationships will be particularly vulnerable to removal of legal aid and current proposals may lead to breaches of their human rights.

9. Women's Voluntary Organisations

Background: Women's organisations and voluntary organisations providing services to women in Coventry play vital roles in tackling discrimination and in promoting women's human rights.

The cuts:

- A number of funding streams from central Government for voluntary organisations have ended or are due to end.
- Coventry City Council is facing a cut of £38 million in its grant from central Government. Although the Council has sought to protect grants to voluntary organisations agreed for 2011/12 some grants have been cut, and the future of others is under review and currently uncertain.
- Other sources of funding such as grants from charitable and non-charitable trusts and donations from individuals are becoming harder to obtain.
- Many voluntary organisations are facing increased demand from the communities they serve as a result of the recession and the impact of other public spending cuts

The Impact: All voluntary organisations in Coventry are vulnerable to budget cuts. But women's voluntary organisations appear to be particularly vulnerable, with some expecting cuts of up to 70% of their funding in the next year. At a time when other cuts are having a negative impact on equality and in some cases women's human rights the role of the women's voluntary sector is more important than ever.

10. Action Required

- **Public authorities** have legal obligations to promote equality and not to breach human rights. In order to do this effectively they need to consider the potential impact of all budget cuts on equality and human rights and carefully monitor the actual impact.
- **Public authorities** should take account of the combined impact of different cuts on particularly vulnerable groups in their assessments and monitoring.
- **Public authorities** should ensure that they co-ordinate their policies and practices where multiple agencies have an impact on a particular issue.
- **Public authorities** should also pay due regard to the role played by women's organisations and voluntary organisations providing services to women in tackling discrimination and in protecting women's human rights
- **Other actors** can play important roles in monitoring impacts, campaigning, and bringing cases to courts.

11. About us

This report was funded by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice, School of Law, University of Warwick

Mary-Ann Stephenson is Chair of Coventry Women's Voices
James Harrison is Associate Professor, School of Law and Co-Director of the Centre for Human Rights in Practice, University of Warwick

Coventry Women's Voices is an independent group of women's organisations, organisations working with women and individuals that have come together to ensure women's voices in Coventry are heard and to improve the lives of women living in Coventry. For more information about our work see <http://www.vacoventry.org.uk/coventry-womens-voices>

The Centre for Human Rights in Practice is undertakes a wide variety of research, capacity-building and other project work aimed at promoting human rights, locally, nationally and globally. For more information about our work see <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/chrp/>

1. Office for National Statistics., *Labour market profile Coventry 2009-10*. [online] Available at: <http://nmweb.dur.ac.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431966/report.aspx#tabrespop> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
2. Ibid. Note ONS gives data for pay rates for people working in Coventry and people living in Coventry separately. We have looked here at pay for people working in Coventry.
3. Data supplied by Coventry City Council
4. For example Valley House has lost 15% of its funding for its children's services and is no longer offering day care.
5. 9,480 households in Coventry are claiming Local Housing Allowance (Office for National Statistics. 2009. *Neighbourhood statistics: housing benefit/council tax benefit claimants*. [online] August. <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=276801&c=coventry&d=13&e=4&g=373870&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1300219065156&enc=1&dsFamilyId=1037>), of these 46% are single women compared to 20% who are couples and 30% who are men. (Single Housing Benefit Extract, March 2010 & Family Resources Survey 06/07, 07/08 and 08/09 (for 'all non-HB private rented sector (PRS)' figures)
6. *Single Housing Benefit Extract*, March 2010 & Family Resources Survey 06/07, 07/08 and 08/09 (for 'all non-HB private rented sector (PRS)' figures)
7. : Department of Work and Pensions, *Impacts of Housing Benefit proposals: Changes to the Local Housing Allowance to be introduced in 2011-12*, (23 July 2010) <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/impacts-of-hb-proposals.pdf> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
8. *Women and Children's Poverty: Making the Links*, WBG, 2005 <http://www.wbg.org.uk/documents/WBGWomensandchildrenspoverty.pdf> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
9. Nearly a third (30% of women) but only 15% of men rely on state support for at least 75% of their income. *Who Benefits? A gender analysis of the UK benefits and tax credits system*, Fawcett Society, 2005 <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/Benefits%20final%20copy.pdf> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
10. Office for National Statistics, 2006. *Tax credit claimants Coventry* [online] available at <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=276801&c=coventry&d=13&e=4&g=373870&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1299853946228&enc=1&dsFamilyId=2117> [Accessed 21 April 2011]
11. Office for National Statistics, 2009. *Labour market profile Coventry* [online] available at (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431966/report.aspx?town=coventry#tabwab>) [Accessed 8th April 2011]
12. Based on an average national cost for women across the UK of £229.88 (see <http://www.yvettecooper.com/women-bear-brunt-of-budget-cuts>) and 128,900 women over 16 in Coventry (data from Coventry City Council, source ONS 2009)
13. Based on a national cost to women of £5.76 billion and to men of £2.295 billion <http://www.yvettecooper.com/women-bear-brunt-of-budget-cuts> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
14. Coventry City Council, 'Equality Impact Assessment on Adult Social Care 2011/12' in *Equality Impact Assessments on Budget Setting 2010/11* p.13 available at http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/894/equality_impact_assessment [Accessed 21st April 2011]
15. British Crime Survey shows a lifetime rate of sexual abuse or rape of 19.7%: Home Office., 2010. *Crime in England and Wales 2009/10 findings from the British crime survey and police recorded crime* (Third Edition) at p.72 [online] Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1210/hosb1210?view=Binary> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
16. 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence over a lifetime: Women's Aid, 2006. *Statistics: how common is domestic violence?* [online] Available at: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-articles.asp?section=0001000100200410001&itemid=1280&itemTitle=Statistics%3A+how+common+is+domestic+violence> [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
17. There are 19,600 women in Coventry over seventy compared to 14,000 men There are 28,709 women and 24,943 men in Coventry with a limiting long term illness. (data supplied by Coventry City Council)
18. At 2001 census 16,793 women in Coventry were providing unpaid care to another adult compared to 13,086 men
19. Mind, 2011. *Women and mental health*. [online] Available at: http://www.mind.org.uk/help/people_groups_and_communities/women_and_mental_health#_edn1 [Accessed 7 April 2011]
20. Coventry City Council, 'Equality Impact Assessment on Adult Social Care 2011/12' in *Equality Impact Assessments on Budget Setting 2010/11* p.24 available at http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/894/equality_impact_assessment [Accessed 21st April 2011]
21. Rights of Women, 'Briefing on the Ministry of Justice proposed changes to Legal Aid' 2010 accessible via http://www.row.org.uk/pdfs/Policy/Rights_of_Women_briefing_on_Ministry_of_Justice_proposed_changes_to_legal_aid.pdf at p1. Ministry of Justice, *Legal Aid Reform: Scope Changes* 'November 2010 accessible via <http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/eia-scope.pdf> at p46 [Accessed 7 April, 2011]
22. Airey v Ireland 32 Eur Ct HR Ser A (1979): [1979] 2 E.H.R.R. 305.
23. See case of *R (ex parte Adam) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2005] UKHL 66 Lord Bingham (para 7) "... the threshold [for a breach of Article 3] may be crossed if a late applicant with no means and no alternative sources of support, unable to support himself, is, by deliberate action of the state, denied shelter, food or the most basic necessities of life ..." Baroness Hale commented that to have to endure the indefinite prospect of rooflessness and cashlessness in a country where it was not possible to live off the land, was inhuman and degrading (para 78).
24. Liberty, 'Liberty's response to the Ministry of Justice Proposals for the Reform of Legal Aid' February 2011 at p13 accessible via <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/pdfs/policy11/response-to-ministry-of-justice-consultation-on-legal-aid.pdf> [Accessed 7 April 2011]