

## SWBG Briefing

### Addressing Child Poverty Through Parental Employment

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024

#### About us

The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) is an independent analysis and campaign group that aims to promote gender analysis in public policy and public finance decisions through budgetary processes. SWBG brings together a wide range of women from across Scotland who have an interest in women's equality and want to achieve better gender equality in our society. We have focused on encouraging active gender analysis in the Scottish Budget process since 2000.

#### Introduction

Child poverty is inextricably linked with women's poverty and inequality<sup>1</sup>. If we are to meet the Scottish Government Child Poverty targets by 2030, it is essential that intersectional gender analysis is core to the design and delivery of interventions. While the Social Justice and Social Security Committee's report comprehensively sets out the issues around child poverty and parental employment, it does so in a gender-neutral way.

This briefing sets out the key areas which SWBG believe need to be embedded into the Scottish Government's approach to successfully tackle Child Poverty.

#### Policy coherence and intersectional gender analysis.

Child Poverty will not be adequately addressed without improved policy coherence across all levels of Government. PSED and Fairer Scotland impact assessments need to evolve to consider the impact that decisions will have on different policy areas. Our work with Glasgow Disability Alliance has highlighted the impact charges for non-residential social care are having on disabled households. There appears to have been no consideration of how this policy impacts on households with children despite them being identified as a priority group in relation to addressing child poverty. The policy, which in many areas starts to recoup money from households at a lower level for under 60s than for over 60s, does not seem to consider the consequences of these practices on poverty levels in disabled households. Further information on this work can be found [here](#).

In addition, understanding the link between child poverty and women's inequality (and the causes of this) are essential if attempts to address child poverty are to be successful. **Gender neutral policymaking means that often women are disadvantaged because their circumstances are unseen.** In 2004 Diane Elson and Alisa McKay carried out an analysis of the New Deal for Lone Parents and found that while participation rates for men and women weren't much different, the factors which impacted on their ability to participate in the labour market were heavily gendered. 'Female lone parents tend to have younger children and are much more likely to be never married or divorced, to

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<sup>1</sup> [1---Women-work-and-poverty-what-you-need-to-know.pdf \(closethegap.org.uk\)](#)

have less education and training and less labour market experience than male lone parents, majority of whom had become lone parents after the death of their wives and have older children.’<sup>2</sup> The design and delivery of the New Deal failed to recognise these gendered differences which meant that the programme had limited impact.

Intersectional gender disaggregated data must be collected and used to develop and design appropriate policy interventions, linked to clear outcomes. This data must also inform monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes at the local and national levels.

### **Use of intersectional gender budgeting analysis**

Budget decisions need to support the policy aspirations at all levels of government ensuring that how we raise money and how we spend money link to policy outcomes. **There needs to be clear assessment of how budget allocations impact on inequality and poverty.**

While the Scottish Government publish the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement along with the Budget, there is a need for greater clarity on how equality evidence has been used to drive policy and budgetary decisions and the expected impact on inequality and poverty.

In this year's budget, there were several decisions made which will likely impact on the achievement or otherwise of Scotland's Child Poverty targets. **These include cuts to further and higher education funding, reductions in employability funding, reductions in the affordable housing supply programme and standstill funding for School Age Childcare.** It is unclear whether the Scottish Government assessed the consequences of these changes (or lack thereof) in budget lines. For further exploration of these issues see our Analysis of the Scottish Budget 2024-25 [here](#).

Similarly, as part of their budget process, Local Authorities have made decisions to stop provision of out-of-hours childcare, to make changes to early years provision and to reduce the provision of school transport. Yet, very little analysis has been carried out in relation to how these decisions will impact on unpaid care, who carries this out and how this impacts women's ability to undertake paid work and how this might increase child poverty.

### **The role of social infrastructure in supporting parental employment: childcare**

Lack of affordable and accessible childcare is a major barrier to women being able to take on work, or to move to better paying, more secure work. **The Scottish Government needs to be clearer about who the expanded offer of childcare will be available to by providing a robust definition of 'low-income families' and establish how this fits with Universal Credit conditionality requirements.**

Our recent [childcare survey](#) found that for 55% of the women who responded the challenges of managing childcare was impacting their ability to do paid work. This figure increased to 67% for single parents and 71% for disabled women. While 4% of respondents stated that they had given up work, which increased to 10% for women from minority ethnic communities.

In addition, the survey revealed that 16% of those who were eligible for funded childcare were unable to access the hours due to lack of flexibility in provision. For example, women working evening shifts

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.caledonianblogs.net/wise/2022/05/12/aisla-mckay-memorial-lecture-presentation/>

explained that the funding does not cover evening childcare. For these women, often working in hospitality, retail, or the care sectors, this increases their risk of experiencing poverty.

*'Nursery place is condensed to two long days per week post covid. Would benefit us to have full weeks back in place as it provides more flexibility for finding suitable work.'*<sup>2</sup>

The answers to our survey expose the extent to which the current system does not fully support parents and penalises women who are more likely to reduce their working hours to manage childcare responsibilities and/or to absorb the financial costs linked to it. 44% of women told us that their partners did not have to make any changes to their work arrangements to manage childcare, while only 10% of women said they didn't need to change their working arrangements. Similarly, only 9% of respondents said their partners had to reduce working hours to manage childcare, in comparison to 33% of survey respondents who made this change. In addition, single women and disabled women were more likely to report difficulties managing childcare costs, which indicates the precarious socio-economic conditions these households experience.

Addressing child poverty through parental employment must therefore consider the role of a more comprehensive childcare system that supports parents, and particularly mothers, into the labour market.

In relation to this, the Scottish Government needs to support providers of childcare services in the recruitment and retention of staff by ensuring a fair deal for all staff across care services.

### **Addressing in-work poverty**

In many households where children are in poverty there will be family members in work. Identifying and addressing issues that can create a poverty trap is essential, particularly where this is related to the tax and benefits systems and how this can disproportionately impact on lone parent households.

Our recent work with Fa'side Women and Girls Group highlighted the impact that not reviewing the thresholds at which people are no longer able to access support (i.e. school uniform grants) has had on them, particularly for lone parents.

*'I don't get school clothing grant as to qualify it's a low amount of income although I work 27.5 it's still part time. Paying for school milk isn't cheap depending on how many weeks there are in a term and only open so many weeks before a new term.'*<sup>3</sup>

Employers have a role to play in ensuring that they pay the Real Living Wage and that parents are supported through the provision of flexible work arrangements at all levels of organisations. The Scottish Government should consider how it can help incentivise flexible working.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the above, it is easy to see the link between women's inequality and child poverty, and how policy decisions in wide range of areas intersect with child poverty. It is crucial that an intersectional gendered analysis informs any parental support interventions aimed at tackling child poverty.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/SWBG-FWGG-Briefing-final.pdf>