Spirals of inequality
How unpaid care is at the heart of gender inequalities
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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is widespread and under-reported. Economic inequality makes VAWG more likely and makes it harder for women to leave violent or abusive relationships. At the same time, violence and abuse can affect women's ability to work or study, and thus their economic wellbeing.

Employers make assumptions about women's abilities and likely behaviours.

Women face discrimination in the workplace. Women's careers progress at a slower rate than men's. Women earn less per hour, and less overall. Women are less able to travel for work, restricting job choices. Women are less likely to be in high-skilled occupations. Women are more likely to be living in poverty... own less...

Women have less time for paid work, more likely to work part-time/in precarious employment. Women have more time for unpaid care and domestic work than men. Women are hardest hit by cuts to benefits, tax credits and public services. Women are under-represented in decision-making positions. Women rely more on benefits and public services.

This reinforces gender stereotypes about the interests and roles of women and men in society. Care is undervalued and women end up doing 60% more unpaid care and domestic work than men. The majority of MPs and other decision makers are men. Policies and laws are more likely based on men's needs.

Inequalities based on gender intersect with other forms of inequality based on race, disability, class, age, sexuality and so on. This means that inequality takes different forms and can be more severe for some women than others.

How do we break the cycle?
At the heart of gender inequality in the UK is the unequal division of unpaid work.

- On average, women carry out 60% more unpaid work than men.\(^1\)
- Women aged 26-35 do the most unpaid work (34.6 hours per week compared with 17.4 hours for men aged 26-35).\(^2\)

Women have less time to do paid work.

- Women are less likely to be in paid work: Women’s employment rate stands at 72.3%, compared to 80.4% for men.\(^3\)
- Women are more likely to work part-time: 41% of women in employment work part-time, compared to 13% of men.\(^4\)
- Women are more likely to be engaged in precarious forms of work: 3.6% of all women in employment and 2.4% of all men in employment were on zero-hours contracts at the end of 2019, with the highest rate among black women (5.5% of all black women in employment).\(^5\)
- Women aged 45-54 are more than twice as likely as men to have given up work to care and over four times more likely to have reduced working hours due to caring responsibilities.\(^6\)
- 75% of mothers face pregnancy or maternity-related discrimination (GB).\(^7\)

Women, on average, earn significantly less than men.

- Women make up 69% of workers on low pay.\(^8\)
- The hourly gender pay gap, in 2019, was 8.9% among full-time employees and 17.3% for all employees.\(^9\)
- In 2018, disabled women earned 24.8% less per hour than non-disabled men, on average.\(^10\)
- On average, women earn 43% less than men from paid work.\(^11\)

Women are under-represented in senior leadership positions.

- Women make up just 21% of senior civil servants, 25% of senior judiciary members and 21% of national newspaper editors.\(^12\)
- 29% of FTSE100 directors are women.\(^13\)
- 34% of MPs are women.\(^14\)
- Women from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background hold less than 1% of the 1000 most powerful jobs in the UK.\(^15\)

Over their lifecourse, women are more likely to live in poverty, save less, and have lower retirement incomes.

- Almost half (48%) of single-parent households live in poverty, and the vast majority of those single parents (86%) are women.\(^16\)
- Women save less than men, are less likely to save regularly than men, and less likely to hold investments, such as bonds and shares.\(^17\)
- Among all 65-75 year olds, median pension wealth for men (£164,700) is almost ten times the median pension wealth for women (£17,300) (GB).\(^18\)

Women are hardest hit by cuts to social security.

Because of their lower average earnings, social security makes up a larger proportion of women’s incomes.

- Women lost more than men from direct tax and welfare reforms (2010-2017) at every income level, with Asian women in the poorest third of households losing the most.\(^19\)

Economic inequality also makes violence against women and girls more likely. It also makes it harder for women to leave abusive relationships.

1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime and 1 in 5 experience sexual abuse (England and Wales).\(^20\)

*All statistics apply to the whole of the UK unless otherwise indicated*
Gender inequality across the UK

There are many commonalities, but also differences, in the way gender inequality is experienced across the four nations of the UK – England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Each of these national contexts also provides unique political, economic and institutional challenges and opportunities for building a more gender-equal economy.

England and Wales share a legal system, while Scotland and Northern Ireland each have their own distinct legal system. The degree to which powers have been devolved to each of the four nations also varies. Women in Northern Ireland are disadvantaged as their rights and protections are lower than elsewhere in the UK.

Northern Ireland is the only nation without a childcare strategy, and those experiencing violence, and anyone they disclose to, risk criminalisation if they fail to report the offence to police. The Welsh government has committed to becoming a feminist government, while Scotland, has been able to use its devolved powers around social security to mitigate some of the worst gender impacts of welfare reforms, including the bedroom tax and allowing split payments of UC for couples.

The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy is committed to taking into account the unique contexts, challenges and opportunities across the four nations as it develops its recommendations.

The Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy

The Women’s Budget Group’s Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy is working to develop alternative economic policies to promote gender equality across the UK.

With a panel of 17 expert Commissioners from business, trade unions, civil society and academia, the Commission is envisioning a fundamentally reshaped economy: an economy which puts the care and wellbeing of people and planet at its centre.

Travelling across the four nations of the UK, the Commission is gathering oral and written evidence, consulting with stakeholders and grassroots groups and developing a suite of policy recommendations intended to create a gender-equal economy.

We will launch our final report in autumn 2020.

2 Ibid
3 ONS (2013) Female employment rate (aged 16-64, seasonally adjusted) (https://bit.ly/2SnXqPf)
14 Ibid
15 Ibid