



The impact of austerity measures upon women

A case study of the North East of England

June 2013



The **co-operative** membership

Acknowledgements

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The Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Working Group for the North East was established in 2011 to build the capacity of women's organisations to use CEDAW along with human rights legislation to address women's (in)equality. It works in partnership with the National CEDAW Working Group to monitor and hold the Government to account, locally and nationally, on its obligations to women's rights under CEDAW.

NEWomen's Network was established in 2006 to strengthen the women's sector and ensure its survival by encouraging and supporting collaboration between women's voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) and building partnerships and alliances across other sectors.

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a charity which supports women's voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) to be more effective and sustainable. WRC members deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

NEWomen's Network
C/o The Angelou Centre
17 Brighton Grove
Fenham
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 5NR
Email: info@newwomens.net
www.newwomens.net

Women's Resource Centre
Ground Floor East
33-41 Dallington Street
London EC1V 0BB
0207 324 3030
Email: info@wrc.org.uk
www.wrc.org.uk

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Executive Summary

In July 2008, the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)² examined the UK Government's efforts to improve the equality and status of women. It found that although there were some advances, women's rights are far from being fully realised in the UK. Almost five years on, this case study begins to evidence the impact of the current UK Government's austerity measures and welfare reforms upon already unacceptable levels of gender inequality in the North East of England.

A mixed methodology has been used to compile this case study. This included fifteen participatory local events in localities across the North East involving 305 women and 154 different organisations. Calls for evidence about the impact of the austerity measures were put out to over 900 contacts from women's organisations. The links in the TUC Women and the Cuts Toolkit were also researched for any data pertinent to the North East. An interim report was produced in October 2012. In April 2013, all of the data sources were revisited and reviewed for this second edition of the case study.

Key findings

- As the UK Government's austerity measures and welfare reforms impact upon already unacceptable levels of gender inequality in the North East of England, there is a looming crisis in gender inequality for women that will inevitably have far reaching economic and social consequences for the well-being of children, families and the wider community.
- Rising levels of women unemployment in the UK are even worse for women in the North East.
- Elements of welfare reform are impacting disproportionately on women and risk increasing women's financial dependence on men. This is likely to have detrimental impacts upon both women and children and lead to increases in family breakdown.
- Women's organisations prevent problems from happening or from escalating, thus saving the government money and relieving the burden on public services. Yet these organisations are dealing with increased demand and diminishing resources and many in the North East are facing closure.
- The need for women-only space is even greater during challenging times yet not enough is being done by public bodies to protect women-only services from the impact of austerity measures.
- The changes to legal aid that came into force in April 2013 mean that women are being disproportionately disadvantaged by being denied access to justice.

If women cannot access equality before the law, then CEDAW rights are unenforceable for women in the UK.

Key recommendations

The UK Government should:

- Take urgent measures to redress the negative impact of the austerity measures upon women's economic well-being in the North East (e.g. increase access to childcare, education and training, invest in the women's sector and consider women's employment and economic independence in policy & planning).
- Implement the Equality Duty 2010 to promote and protect women-only services.
- Fulfil its obligations under CEDAW to financially sustain women's voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) addressing all forms of violence against women and girls in the North East.
- Reverse the changes to legal aid (April 2013) that will deny women's rights to access to justice.
- Regularly publish specific data showing the impact of the austerity measures upon women in the North East and identify the impact upon different groups of women.

Recommendations for other agencies:

- Public bodies in the North East should value and encourage women's active citizenship, as well as ensuring women receive the services they need.
- All elected members and MP's in the North East should work alongside women's VCOs to help prevent the devastating impacts of austerity measures upon women in the North East.
- Charitable funding bodies and grant making trusts should provide core grants to sustain women's voluntary organisations in the North East during the economic crisis and support NEWomen's Network to lobby around the above recommendations.

1. Introduction

In July 2008, the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women's (CEDAW) examined the UK Government's efforts to improve the equality and status of women. Following the oral examination, the Committee issued Concluding Observations that stated that, despite some advances such as the introduction of gender equality legislation and the establishment of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, women's rights were far from being fully realised in the UK.

Almost five years on, this case study begins to evidence the impact of the current UK Government's austerity measures and welfare reforms upon already unacceptable levels of gender inequality in the North East of England. It will inform the CEDAW shadow report being submitted by Women's Resource Centre³ to the next examination in Geneva in July 2013.

2. About CEDAW

CEDAW was established in 1979 and is often referred to as the Women's International Bill of Rights. Unlike domestic UK and European legislation on sex discrimination and equal treatment, the Convention is solely concerned with the position of women rather than discrimination faced by both sexes (which would include discrimination against men). The Convention places obligations on State parties (countries that have agreed to the Convention), to eliminate discrimination against women.

The Convention provides a framework for States to take responsibility for tackling (often embedded and historical) discrimination against women and achieving substantive equality for women in both the private and public spheres. The substantive model of equality is based upon the principle that discrimination is socially constructed and is not a natural principle of human interaction and recognises the need for concerted action against inequality and the institutional mechanisms that perpetuate it. Substantive equality promotes:

- Equality of opportunity through law, policy programme and institutional arrangements
- Equality of access by eliminating all obstacles that prevent access to the opportunities and taking positive steps to ensure the goal of equality is achieved
- Equality of results

The Convention outlines a comprehensive set of rights for women in all fields (civil, political, economic, social, cultural and other fields) and is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. As a signatory to CEDAW, the UK Government must fully implement the Convention, to ensure the practical realisation of equality between women and men in this country.

The Convention binds the Government and its agencies to take action to achieve substantive equality for women. This means that government policies, services, strategies and initiatives must recognise and respond effectively to the different needs of women and men, as also set out in the Gender Equality Duty. CEDAW requires that all areas of government (at all levels and including local public bodies) comply with its articles and general recommendations.

3. Methodology

A mixed methodology combining both quantitative and qualitative methods has been used to compile this case study. This included fifteen participatory local events from May 2011 to March 2012, involving 304 women and 154 different organisations (see appendices 1 and 2). Also, requests were made to over 900 contacts from women's organisations for data, information, case studies, research or any other forms of evidence about the impact of the austerity measures upon women in the North East. The TUC Women and the Cuts Toolkit⁴ contains links to statistical data and all of these were researched for any data pertinent to the North East. An interim report was produced in October 2012. In April 2013, all of the data sources were revisited and reviewed for this second edition of the case study.

A lack of North East data that is disaggregated by gender hampered the research and the ability to monitor progress against discrimination. In the TUC Women and the Cuts Toolkit⁵ the links to statistical data were researched for data pertinent to the North East but much of the data, where it was disaggregated by geography was not disaggregated by gender. Furthermore it was mostly impossible to identify the impact upon different groups of women due to the lack of availability of data. For example, the Office of National Statistics does publish regional unemployment data by gender. However, it does not drill this data down by race and ethnicity because of 'small sample sizes.'⁶

4. Findings

The North East has the highest levels of unemployment, long term sickness, and disability and benefit claimants and has some of the poorest, most deprived areas in the country.⁷ According to the Fawcett Society, with the Government's austerity measures, introduced to reduce the national deficit, women are facing a "triple jeopardy" arising from job losses, reductions in welfare spending and a 'looming care gap that women will be expected to plug'.⁸

Prior to the advent of economic recession in the UK in 2009, and the political changes that followed, together with the accompanying austerity measures, women in the North East were already more disproportionately affected by gender inequality than they were nationally. Evidence gathered by NEWomen's Network from 2007 to 2009, demonstrates that disproportionate gender inequality was prevalent in every aspect of women's social, political and economic lives.

The situation in the North East may have been compounded due to the lack of women in positions of influence. In 2009, although the proportion of women councillors in the North East was in line with the national average at around 31%⁹, there was not a single women leader of a local authority in the North East.¹⁰ There were also regional variations, e.g. in Northumberland County Council in 2008 only 21% of councillors were women. Black and minority ethnic (BME) women were virtually non-existent in North East Councils. In total, seven councillors were from ethnic minorities before May 2007 elections and this rose to thirteen, barely 1% of councillors in total; all but one were men.

The impacts of the national austerity measures, together with long-term, ingrained inequality in the region mean that the prospects for women in the North East are now bleak and urgently need addressing. Qualitative data gathered from across the North East for this report reveal that women feel undervalued in many spheres of their lives. Participatory events with women in local communities reveal they are extremely concerned about limited employment opportunities, the lack and cost of childcare, reduced services for young people and older people, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and gender stereotyping. This quote, from a report on the participatory events, demonstrates the impact of gender stereotyping upon the lives of particular women in the North East:

"Gender stereotyping was a major issue in the rural areas, former mining villages for example, as well as in Asian households where the woman's place is very much perceived as being in the home. This raised other issues again at every event around women's role as carers. The expectation is that daughters will care for parents or other family members but there is no such similar expectation for sons or male family members. Women's roles in general were an issue, as in women are expected to do it all."¹¹

Women expressed concern about the impact of reducing services in these areas. For example, reduced services for children, young people and older people place additional burdens of care on women, while domestic violence and sexual exploitation services are typically located in the third sector which is experiencing swingeing cuts and is particularly vulnerable to budget reductions. In addition, women expressed their concerns about diminishing gender-specific services, asserting that the need for women-only space is even greater during challenging times.¹² Other findings from the quantitative and qualitative research conducted are presented below. The situation prior to 2009/10 is highlighted at the beginning of each section and then the current situation is reported. The analysis reveals the declining opportunities and outcomes for women across a range of areas.

4.1 Education

The situation prior to 2009/10

The proportion of women of working age without a qualification in some parts of the region was higher than the national average (17%), for example the figure in Middlesbrough and Hartlepool was 25%, in Redcar and Cleveland it was 24% and in Tees Valley the figure was 22%. There was also a gap between the regional and national percentages of women of working age with NVQ4 and above; compared with 25% nationally, only 21% of women in the North East had a qualification of NVQ4 or above, this fell to 19% in Tees Valley. There was a gender bias in many subject areas in Further Education; construction, Planning and the Built Environment. Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies were all studied disproportionately by young men, whereas Retail and Commercial Enterprise subjects and Languages, Literature and Culture subjects were studied disproportionately by young women.¹³

There was also a strong gender bias in Work Based Learning, with male learners disproportionately represented in most subject areas. Young women dominate learning in Health, Public Services and Care subjects, and to a lesser extent in Retail and Commercial Enterprise subjects and Business, Administration and Law subjects¹⁴.

Despite being as qualified as their white counterparts, BME women in the North East were finding it harder to find work.¹⁵

Substantial cuts in education, especially in university budgets, mean that poorer women are now even less likely to access further education because of financial constraints (annual tuition fees alone have increased from £3,375 to a maximum of £9,000). This will seriously affect both their future employment prospects and their earning potential.

Women who want to return to education after raising children will struggle because there is little or no statutory funding for 'first steps' courses or for those returning to learning and no financial support for childcare or other caring responsibilities. Bridge Women's Education Project, a charity that provided specialist training and support to women in the North East went into administration in August 2012 with the loss of more than 100 women's jobs, around 1,800 learning places and support services that helped 600 women in 2011/12. Bridge received financial support from Sunderland City Council and Durham County Council in addition to charitable funding. The chief executive of Bridge is quoted as saying:

"Like many other voluntary organisations, Bridge has continuously struggled with funding difficulties and cash-flow problems and has always managed to 'ride the storm'. However, in this current economic climate we have been faced with many changes and restrictions to central funding within education: this and other factors led to reduced income and the dwindling of reserves."¹⁶

Restrictions for access to English Speakers of Second Languages (ESOL) classes are also severely hampering women's economic potential.

Case study example - Northumberland Sisters – a regional project of the Angelou Centre is delivering training, confidence building and skills development to BME women in rural areas. There is a real need for ESOL classes but there are problems around eligibility and the cuts mean that to qualify for ESOL participants must now be actively seeking work. Transport and childcare are major barriers to both learning and development. Some migrants have gained professional qualifications in their home countries but are unable to use their skills here because they have not gained sufficient knowledge of English. The result is they are working in low paid jobs and the economy is not benefiting from their skills and experience.

4.2 Employment

The situation prior to 2009/10

The North East had the highest rates of women employed in the public sector (45% against 18% of men).¹⁷

Full-time earnings had risen at a faster rate for women than men since 2000 though more women (31.6%) were earning less than £250.00 weekly compared with 16.5% of men for full-time workers. Nationally the gap between men's and women's salaries was 21%; in some parts of the North East the gap was as wide as 35%. In Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland women were even more disadvantaged; women's average weekly wage was only 65% that of men's weekly earnings nationally (£165 less) and 73% of men's weekly earnings regionally (£74 less). The highest pay gap was found in Wansbeck: 41% of difference.¹⁸

In 2007, although there was an increasing reliance on service industries, and women's activity rates were increasing more quickly than men's, GVA (gross value added) per head of population was declining.¹⁹

In 2008, a study of Equality and Diversity in the North East revealed that despite the existence of anti-discrimination laws, gender segregation in the labour market persisted in the North East with women over-represented in some service industries and under-represented in others²⁰:

- Only 18% of women were involved in management at higher and professional levels compared to 24% of men. There were regional variations with the biggest gap in Easington, where men were twice as likely than women to be in this category.
- Within the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) sector only 15% of employees were women.
- Women hold only 9% of Research & Development (R& D) jobs, and in industrial R & D only 1%. (2006)

In 2012, nearly half of women who were working in North East were employed in the public sector (46%)²¹ and two in three of public sector jobs were done by women.²² There are also regional variations to consider. For example, in Durham County Council in December 2011 61% of employees were women and 39% men and of the bottom 5% of earners, 64% were women and 36% men.²³ Women in the North East are therefore being harder hit than men by the cuts in the public sector in terms of jobs, pay freezes and pensions.

Cuts to council budgets resulting in major job losses as well as delivery of vital services, have not been fairly applied between the north and south. For example Sunderland had their budget cut by £39.6m compared to only £20.1m in Kensington

and Chelsea. With Sunderland having a much higher percentage of JSA claimants and children living in poverty this is disproportionate and unfair.²⁴ In Gateshead the Council lost more than half its workforce; from 5,900 to 2,500 in 2011²⁵. Newcastle Council has seen 1,300 job losses with 10 out of 18 libraries closing and the remainder being run by volunteers. Newcastle Council have also closed a swimming pool and transferred responsibility for 4 leisure centres.²⁶ Given women's greater reliance on the public sector, as both employees and users of services, these cuts will hit women particularly hard.

The latest public sector employment figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that two years into the Coalition government (Quarter 2 2010 and Quarter 1 2012), the North East has already lost 27,000 public sector workers according to ONS figures (the ONS do not break down these figures by gender). Figures obtained by the GMB union show that nationally 69% of the 14,603 people made redundant by local authorities since the 2010 General Election are women, with Northumberland County Council recording the highest figures at 86%. Other councils which have seen high proportions of women's redundancies include Redcar and Cleveland (82%), Darlington (69%) and Durham (68%).²⁷

The turnover of staff in Durham County Council in 2011 illustrates the disproportionate impact of public sector job losses upon women; 76% of employees were women and 24% were men. Employee turnover for reason of retirement, redundancy, voluntary retirement and/or voluntary redundancy was 79% for women and 21% for men (nationally this figure is 64% for women and 34% for men).²⁸ Incidentally in the same year, 73% of women returning from maternity leave left within three months (as yet there is no explanation for this trend).

4.3 Unemployment

The situation prior to 2009/10

Eighty per cent of men compared to 72% of women in the region were economically active. Unemployment rates were 8% for men and 5.3% for women. 22% of men and 74% of women were employed part-time. Only 4% of economically active women were self-employed, the lowest regional level in the country, as compared to a national average of 7%. However, there were variations across the region with higher rates of self-employment in rural than urban areas for example in Northumberland and Teesdale, both rural areas, the figures were 7% and 8%. The North East Regional Economic Strategy identified women as a target group that would benefit from the flexibility that self-employment brings and suggests that they should be supported and encouraged to become self-employed to more effectively contribute to the regional economy.²⁹

BME women in particular, were facing many barriers to work, including lack of childcare, poor English, low self-confidence, and the lack of availability of jobs.³⁰

According to Nomis Labour Market analysis the percentage of North East unemployed women claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in June 2012 (5.2% or 29,410) was the highest it has been since it peaked amid the recession in January 1990.³¹ The current female figure remains at 5.2%, against a national figure of 3.2% (Nomis, March 2013). The labour market statistics for September 2011 revealed that the number of women made redundant in the North East had increased 72.3% on the previous quarter and unemployment amongst North East women is at its highest since records began.³² Women's unemployment is currently higher in the North East (8.7%) than nationally (7.5%) (Nomis, March 2013). However, there are regional variations, in Middlesbrough women's unemployment is almost twice the national rate at 14.2%, followed by South Tyneside at 11.3% and Redcar and Cleveland at 10.1%.³³

Women are also affected disproportionately by the impact of public spending cuts in the voluntary community sector (VCS) as they are disproportionately employed in the this sector. Two reports from Newcastle in 2012 show that three out of five voluntary organisations have lost funding and in some cases staffing has been cut by 50% when demand for services was increasing.³⁴ In Newcastle alone, there are 6,500 people employed in the VCS and two thirds of these are women (although managers are predominantly men). The final participatory event for this study in March 2012 involved 60 women from the VCS across the region. Although the event was to mark International Women's Day, many found it difficult to celebrate anything positive as so many VCS services were closing down as a result of the cuts and several women at the event were facing redundancy or had already been made redundant.³⁵

National figures show massive disproportions in rising rates of unemployment for women over 50. According to ONS figures since May 2010, unemployment among women aged 50-64 has increased by 31% (142,000), compared with an overall increase in all unemployed people of working age of 4.2% (2.6m). According to research carried out by the Labour party 'women over fifty are bearing the brunt of the government's economic policies while often trying to cope with the increasing burden of caring for relatives.'³⁶

In 2009, a joint report by the Fawcett Society and Oxfam suggested that BME women were particularly at risk from the recession, with even more ethnic minority women being made vulnerable to poverty.³⁷ In 2012, Equanomics-UK, an agency that works to build awareness of structural and systemic racial disadvantage, submitted evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community that women generally and BME women specifically are disproportionately affected by the recession and government cuts, with the short term and long term employment and economic positions of "Black" young women in particular being harmed.³⁸ The following case study³⁹ demonstrates the impact of funding cuts to the VCS upon unemployment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women in the North East.

Case study example - The Angelou Centre was set up in the 1990s. It came about through campaigning and awareness-raising by women's organisations and groups, activists and community workers working with BME women in Newcastle. This was in response to demands from local women for support in developing skills and engaging in economic activity to supplement low family incomes and lift themselves and their children out of poverty and deprivation. They had identified the need for provision and support for BME women from diverse backgrounds who faced this common experience. During 2011 the Angelou Centre lost its Working Neighbourhoods Fund money and in the same year the income raised through crèche provision fell by more than half since the previous year.

The Centre faced further reductions in income at the end of March 2012 and the outcome of bids for new funding is uncertain. Meanwhile the Angelou Centre has experienced a rise in demand for its services; over the last three years four times as many have women approached the Centre for help as in 2010. The increasing level of need is attributed partly to cuts in services or closure of other organisations providing training, support and advice, changes in benefits, reduced availability of accommodation and increased pressure on women to find work. The resources available for children locally have also diminished. The Angelou Centre considers that current policy changes impact disproportionately on Black and minority ethnic women.

This quote, from one of the local participatory events illustrates the disproportionate impact of rising women's unemployment and diminishing support services upon women in rural Northumberland:

"In Northumberland 80% of public sector employees are women but all the emphasis concerning unemployment is about men and men's employability. Single parents are being forced into work but there are fewer services available to support them, for example, transport and childcare. There is a tendency towards gender stereotyping for men as well as women and careers advice service has now been reduced."⁴⁰

This quote is from a woman who took part in an online survey about the impact of the recession and the cuts in 2011.⁴¹

"I also feel that some of the behaviour of both my current employer and recruiters to whom I am currently applying has been outrageous and shambolic but in a buyers' market employers appear to believe they can behave how they like to employees and candidates. This makes me feel at best under-valued and at worst worthless"

In 2012, The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) commissioned a Government-supported Independent Economic Review, led by Lord Andrew Adonis.⁴² In January 2013, University of Oxford presented evidence to the review⁴³ showing that the North East has seen a decline in manufacturing industries but a rise in service sector employment especially for women. However, women are typically recruited at the bottom end of the sector, which is typically low paid, part time, flexible or contract employment. The jobs require good interpersonal skills with a reliance on empathy and caring which is reinforcing gender inequalities. This changing employment profile is exacerbated by a lack of access to training and gender gaps both in employment and in wages. Young women in the North East in particular are less likely to take up apprenticeships, enter employment in the private sector, work full time (especially following childbirth) and earn high wages.⁴⁴ The recommendations presented to the Independent Economic Review by the University of Oxford included; monitoring the impact of all policies for gendered effects, exploring ways of resisting downward occupational mobility for women after childbirth, local schemes and neighbourhood activism to challenge gender stereotyping and English language training for women migrants.

In 2008 CEDAW called upon the UK Government to increase transparency and to tackle the gender pay gap and other persistent inequalities and to promote the scope for employers to increase workforce diversity.⁴⁵ However, despite compelling evidence pointing to the centrality of women's unequal position within the labour market to a failing North East economy, when the Independent Economic Review Report was published in April 2013, there was not a single reference to gender inequality, women or females, demonstrating how women's experiences are made invisible in strategy documents.⁴⁶

4.4 Childcare and caring

The situation prior to 2009/10

Although more and more women were undertaking paid work, women in the North East were still carrying most of the burden of family care. This had significant consequences for women's labour market position, and was particularly important for single parents and those with caring responsibilities⁴⁷.

Women in certain ethnic groups were particularly likely to have caring responsibilities. Research conducted in Newcastle found that 63% of Bangladeshi Women and 43% of Pakistani women look after their family full time.⁴⁸

Women who were caring were more likely to work part time than full-time. For example, in Tees Valley of those of working age (16-74 years) providing care 60% were women (38,888). Of these, 25% were employed full time and 29% part-time, whereas the male rate of full-time employed carers was 53%, with only 5% working part-time.⁴⁹

Welfare reform has added around £500 per year to the childcare bill for working mothers/parents. Child benefit is frozen until 2014 as are some other tax credit benefits.⁵⁰ The childcare tax credit has been reduced to cover only 70% of childcare costs rather than 80%. There have been cuts to day nurseries and childcare offered through children's centres in many parts of the country. After-school and breakfast clubs have been hit by an increase in fees charged by schools and local authorities to use premises. In the North East the latest data shows closures of an unspecified number of Gateshead nurseries, two in Hartlepool and uncertainty for centres in North Tyneside and Newcastle.⁵¹ Women as the main carers will bear the brunt of these cuts.

What emerges is a pattern of women's increasing dependence on male partners and a reinforcement of gendered roles, with women leaving the workplace to take up domestic roles. Netmums recently carried out a survey on the effects of cuts to child tax credit and subsequent increase in childcare costs and found that 20% of women will stop work altogether, 29% will reduce their hours in order to reduce the costs of childcare and 27% will rely more heavily on informal childcare (more often than not grandmothers). This account from a research participant highlights the far reaching implications of unaffordable childcare upon women's economic position:

"I took voluntary redundancy two years ago from a local authority during my maternity leave. It was likely it would have become mandatory anyway and my wage would barely have covered childcare for our twins. Now I'm one of the hidden unemployed. I've thought of looking for part time work, though it would be a struggle to pay for childcare, I'm not registered as unemployed as my husband's wage wouldn't allow me to claim anything anyway. I don't have direct access to any money and I'm not eligible for reduced fees if I decided to retrain. It leaves one feeling very stuck, with wasted skills and no opportunities. My husband is great, but I dislike feeling utterly dependant."

Research participant by email, October 2012

Cuts to childcare provision, with centres closing or threatened with closure plus rising costs of childcare are a major concern for women in the North East; one that was raised at every one of the participatory local events. Concerns related to the resulting restriction on job roles, the expectations of mothers being the responsible parent, the cost and lack of childcare provision as well as concerns about the low pay and conditions for people, predominantly women, working in childcare. For example:

"Childcare is becoming both difficult to find and more expensive which is prohibiting women from going to work or means after childcare costs they have insufficient money to live on. If they are on benefits they may not get help with childcare costs and again they can't afford to pay. Thus either way women's choices are seriously limited in terms of education, training and

employment. Colleges used to help with childcare costs but this is no longer the case so women are unable to access courses. There is a lack of consistency in provision; even within one city there can be a postcode lottery for family centres and childcare. There is a massive demand for ever diminishing services.”⁵²

Diminishing availability of childcare can only worsen the economic situation for BME women. In a 2012 study of African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women in the North East, only a minority of the research participants were in paid employment. Lack of access to adequate and affordable childcare was identified as by far the biggest barrier to paid employment, education and training.⁵³ For the Bangladeshi and Pakistani women, care for adults was also perceived as their responsibility and it was often undertaken with little (or no) support and no recognition. Among all of those caring for adults, only one-third were accessing support for their caring role, either from adult social services or a voluntary organisation.

Women are often carrying out multiple roles and having to juggle childcare and jobs with family caring responsibilities; their unpaid roles actually save the state a considerable amount of money. It is estimated that unpaid carers are saving the UK £87 billion every year in potential care costs, amounting to more than the government's total spend on the NHS in the last financial year.⁵⁴

National estimates are that 58% of carers are women and 42% are men and research suggests that levels of unpaid caring in the North East are well above the national average.⁵⁵ Yet, Newcastle City Council has reduced the amount paid to Newcastle Carers Centre by £64,000 and Sunderland City Council has scrapped the Meals on Wheels Service where the majority of both users and workers are women.⁵⁶ One County Council in the North East that has conducted an Equality Impact Assessment acknowledges that women are more affected by cuts in public services as a consequence of their prominent role as both as carers and service users:

“It is expected that women will be disproportionately impacted by some service reductions as they are more likely to access local services either as service users or carers. There are a number of reasons for this including an ageing population with a higher proportion of women accessing services, pregnancy and maternity and because women are more likely to be carers they may rely more heavily on access to local services...

The proposals with the greatest impact on women include the review of day care charging, indoor leisure facilities review, changes to learning disability respite services, transport of service users, concessionary fares, reductions in contracted bus services and crèche closures.”

Update on the Delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan,
Durham County Council, 20th June 2012

The recession, with resultant pay freezes coupled with a freeze on tax credits and other benefits, is also adding to the pressure upon carers described in the following case study.

Case study example - Jane is a carer for two elderly parents, one in early stages and one in late stages of dementia, a lone parent with one daughter of school age who is also a full time student and works 16 hours per week as a personal carer. Jane has serious concerns about the introduction of personal budgets in social care. Although the money paid to the person that Jane supports comes from Northumberland County Council, it is paid directly to the person who then in effect becomes Jane's employer. This leaves her with none of the employment rights that a council employee would have. Although Jane does receive holiday pay, she only gets statutory sick pay which is only paid after the first three days of sickness. Furthermore it is an isolating position; Jane is an individual with no union, no team support and no bargaining power for a wage increase or to campaign for better conditions. Jane has experienced a wage freeze that is now in its fourth year which she calculates in real terms with inflation means a 15% to 20% cut in income over the last three and a half years. With tax credit set at only 1% annual increase this will also impact on her household income. Jane feels that women will be most affected by these changes as they are the main carers for children and elderly relatives.

Summary of an email sent by research participant, May 2013

4.5 Health

The situation prior to 2009/10

Life expectancy for women in the North East was one year below the national average; in some parts of the North East, women's health was worse than the national average. Almost 18% of white women of working age in Tees Valley had a limiting (disabling) long-term illness, this compares with 14% nationally. The highest levels of illness for white women were in Hartlepool (21%), Redcar and Cleveland (18.7%) and Middlesbrough (18.6%).

It is already recognised that poverty and living in a deprived area has a direct impact on health and as such women in the North East fare very poorly on a number of health indicators, including rates of cervical cancer, breast cancer, cardiovascular disease, longevity of life as well as life-limiting conditions such as rheumatism and arthritis.⁵⁷ Cuts being made by the NHS mean services are being reduced, including services that directly impact on women such as birth centres, midwives, health visitors, neo-natal services, printed guides on child health and development and services for older people.⁵⁸

The Maternity Unit at Northallerton Hospital has closed as has the Children's Unit. In June 2012, children's in-patient services in Gateshead and South Tyneside were reduced to short-stay assessment units (23 hours) and the only inpatient care at a single dedicated paediatric unit for South of Tyne & Wear is now at Sunderland Royal Hospital.⁵⁹ Among key issues raised at one of the participatory local events were cultural and language barriers, transport issues and distance barriers for women accessing North Tees Hospital now that Hartlepool Hospital has closed. This was reported as particularly affecting BME women, many of whom do not drive and women with children who have to co-ordinate bus timetables around school times and hospital visiting/ appointment times.⁶⁰

4.6 Transport

The situation prior to 2009/10

An extensive study carried out with women in the North East in 2005⁶¹ found a key reason for women's travel is to escort children and dependent relatives (e.g. to take children to and from school and other activities, to escort disabled and/or elderly adults, and to undertake household shopping).

The study, which came to inform the development of local transport strategies in the North East, found that even when women had high levels of access to public transport due to poor infrastructure the use of private transport was essential in order to allow women to negotiate the complexities of linking home and work. Furthermore, in car owning households, men's control over car use was found to restrict women's access to private transport, creating barriers to their access to paid work, education and training.

Lynn Dobbs(2005) Wedded to the car : women, employment and the importance of private transport. *Transport Policy*, 12 (3). pp. 266-278

Cut to public transport will disproportionately affect women because they are more likely to be public transport users. According to a North East study, almost two-thirds of public transport users are women (62%). As part of their budget cuts Middlesbrough City Council are ceasing to provide transport to school services.⁶²

Evidence from the participatory women's event suggests that cuts in transport are affecting women, particularly in rural areas, impacting both on social isolation and on access to training and employment opportunities. In addition cuts in supported transport schemes mean that children, older people and people with disabilities cannot access external provision (such as day centres.) and women will be left to care for them at home. Seventy per cent of Local Authorities are reducing funding for supported bus services. In Durham for example there was a cut of £1.3m to bus services in 2011 meaning 70 bus services were withdrawn. In June 2012, Durham

County Council acknowledged that this would have a disproportionate impact upon women:

“Women are less likely to have access to private transport and often have lower incomes as a result of lower earnings and part-time working.”⁶³

Tyne and Wear had a 50% cut in the transport budget. Stockton on Tees had a cut of over £200,000 in 2011 with a further £60,000 to come.⁶⁴

4.7 Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The situation prior to 2009/10

In 2005-06, domestic violence accounted for 25% of all recorded violent crimes reported to the police County Durham⁶⁵. There were more incidents of domestic violence than of burglary and robbery added together⁶⁶. In the same year there were 167 women victims/survivors and 4 men referred to Northumberland's domestic abuse support project. A regional study conducted by Durham University in 2012⁶⁷ found that at some point in their life:

- Over 160,000 women in the North East have experienced domestic abuse
- Nearly 150,000 women have suffered a sexual assault
- Over 30,000 women have been raped or experienced attempted rape

Despite reports of the high incidence of violence against women and girls in the North East, in 2009, Map of Gaps, which mapped services for women who have experienced violence, found the North East to have the lowest population distributions of services for violence against women of any other English region. Against a female population of 1,310,700, there were only 47 available services and only two of these provided specialist services for BME women. In 2010, there was only one specialist refuge for BME women between Leeds and Glasgow, this was in Newcastle and had only five bed spaces.

VAWG was raised as a key area of concern by women at the participatory local events. It was suggested that in many areas of the North East, particularly rural areas, gender inequality is still very pervasive with women's role seen as being in the home and the man being head of the household.⁶⁸ Yet as this testimony provided by one of the participants in this research demonstrates, domestic violence is one area where women's specific services are being eroded in favour of the needs of men:

“We are alarmed at the current undermining of gender specific services that is subtly taking place. A domestic violence project (run by a housing agency) has male workers working with women. We had one of these workers bringing a woman to access our support. From a discussion with one of the managers of the domestic violence services I questioned her about

recruitment in the future. She informed me that she would not use the existing legislation to appoint on a gender specific basis in the future, however she followed this up by saying that it would not be an issue as that particular funding stream would be ending before anyone needed to be appointed.”

Research participant by email February 2012

The charity Women’s Aid believes draft universal credit regulations, due to come before Parliament in autumn 2013, will make the provision of refuges for domestic violence victims more difficult and lead to them being closed. The changes could result in the closure of its 297 refuges nationally.⁶⁹ The Supporting People Programme (SPP)⁷⁰ has supported much of the work for women and girls experiencing domestic violence and also supported housing schemes for teenage mothers since its introduction in 2003. SPP has been cut by 11.5% with further cuts due in 2013/14.⁷¹ When the ring fence was removed in 2009 there were concerns that local authorities were using their SPP grant to fund other expenditure; according to media reports funding has been withdrawn entirely from 305 services, and reduced for a further 685 services.⁷² Disabled women are twice as likely to suffer from domestic violence as non-disabled women; these changes are likely to make them even more vulnerable. In a survey conducted with women’s voluntary organisations in the North East in 2013, cuts from Supporting People contracts were reported as being between 10% and for some agencies as high as 25%.⁷³

There is already insufficient and erratic provision across the North East for women who are victims of domestic violence⁷⁴ and recent national research shows that specialised providers of domestic violence services are being hit particularly hard.⁷⁵ Already extremely limited specialist provision for BME women in the North East is under serious threat from cuts in funding, for example, there is currently uncertainty surrounding future funding for the specialist BME women’s service at Options in South Tyneside.⁷⁶

A BBC news report stated that hundreds of women who have come from South Asia and Africa to the North East after arranged marriages to British citizens are being held prisoner in their own homes. The women from Africa and countries such as Bangladesh voluntarily enter into what seem to be promising marriages. It is only when they arrive in the UK that their husbands become violent and controlling. The Angelou Centre, a Newcastle based charity, has helped some of these women escape and to make new lives, yet it is now facing a financial crisis after losing some of its funding.⁷⁷ The Angelou Centre has seen a four-fold increase in demand for support and advocacy in its Domestic Abuse Support services for BME women and children since 2009/10.

With specific reference to funding of VAWG services CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6 (281, pp8-9) recommends:

“The establishment of additional counselling and other support services for victims of violence, including shelters, and requests the State party to enhance its cooperation with and support, in particular adequate and sustained funding support, for NGOs working in the area of violence against women”

According to research from Durham University, despite their essential benefits for service users and for the economy and the state, women’s organisations in the North East specialising in domestic violence services have a tenuous future, with the majority reporting that they are only partly sustainable (with funding for from 1 to 3 years).⁷⁸ Over half of North East women’s voluntary organisations who reported having decreased funding in 2012⁷⁹ specialised in addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). This corresponds with national research showing that ‘services aimed at helping vulnerable women, including refuges and rape crisis centres, are facing "disastrous" million-pound cuts as local authorities slash their budgets.’⁸⁰ Freedom of information requests reveal that local authority spending on VAWG services in the North East has decreased by an average of 9.2% and in North Tyneside by a staggering 40.6%. North Tyneside is among the top-ten highest local authority cuts to VAWG services in England.⁸¹ Yet demand for these services is increasing. A national report by Refuge in 2011 found incidents of domestic violence had gone up by 17% over the recession⁸². In the North East, domestic violence organisations are reporting increases in crisis cases of up to 27%.⁸³

There is likely to be a rise in sexual exploitation of young women in the North East through the growth of lap dancing clubs, with only one North East council having refused to licence clubs entirely (North Tyneside) and one having capped the number of clubs (Durham). Hartlepool, Stockton and Middlesbrough are continuing to grant licences on a case by cases basis.⁸⁴ Research from the University of Kingston published in 2010⁸⁵ found that the number of university students who knew someone who had worked in the sex industry to fund their studies had gone up from 3% to 25% in 10 years. In December 2011, the National Union of Students (NUS) reported to the BBC it estimated about 20% of women working in lap dancing clubs were students.⁸⁶ This is likely to increase with rising tuition fees, increases in poverty and a reduction in alternative employment opportunities.

4.8 Women’s voluntary organisations

Research conducted by the Women’s Resource Centre in 2009⁸⁷ found that the North East had the lowest number of women’s VCOs of all the English regions and they were most likely to be facing closure. A survey conducted by NEWomen’s Network later in the same year found that 42% of women’s VCOs had lost funding in the last 12 months and were providing fewer services and spaces for women.

Recent research found that on average over five years for every £1 invested in women's services between £5 and £11 worth of social value is generated for women, their families and the state.⁸⁸ A recent North East survey⁸⁹ suggests that 60% of women's organisations have a turn over of between £100 and £500K per year and for every £1,000 of public money invested a further £400 is generated from other sources such as charitable grants, donations and self generated income.

Women's organisations prevent problems from happening or from escalating. This saves the government money and relieves the burden on public services through preventing situations and problems becoming chronic. The North East has the lowest number of women's VCOs among all English regions and by 2009 they were already the most likely to be facing closure in the country.⁹⁰

The Equality Act 2010 makes it clear that women-only (and girl-only) services are legal and appropriate in certain contexts; it is still legal and appropriate for public authorities to fund (and provide) women-only services.⁹¹ A 2012 Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) review⁹² found that during 2009-12 there were considerable changes in policies covering women-only services, with devolution from central to local government of decision-making about resource allocation, and a shift from grant-aid to commissioning. Although some funders still procure women-only services through grant aid, contract sizes are increasingly driven by budget rather than need or quality, and all funders consulted expected that most of their services would be subject to competitive tendering over the next two to three years. In relation to the impact of commissioning upon Women's VCOs CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6 (273, pp7) recommends that:

"The State party conduct an impact assessment of its "commissioning" frameworks on the funding of women's organizations. The Committee requests the State party to include information on the funding of NGOs and women's organizations in its next periodic report."

In the North East, women's VCOs attribute the primary reasons for reduced funding to fewer grants being available, the economic recession and the Government's austerity measures. Of particular mention are decreases in funding from the Supporting People Programme (SSP); although nationally SPP has been cut by 11.5% with further cuts in 2013/14⁹³ cuts to women's organisations in 2012/13 were reported as between 10% and 25%.⁹⁴

In relation to the interpretation and application of the Gender Equality Duty CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6 (273, pp7) recommends that:

"The State party ensure that the interpretation and application of the Gender Equality Duty does not have a negative impact on the provision of "women-only" services or restrict the activities of women's organizations."

Yet there are also very serious concerns that women-only services are being threatened by misinterpretation of equalities legislation as expressed in the following quotes from two participants in the research for this case study, both working in women's VCOs:⁹⁵

“One organisation was excluded from tendering for a Domestic Abuse Service on the grounds of the requirement for a gender neutral service. This common issue around the misinterpretation of the Equality Act resulting in women-only services being excluded from tendering on the basis of gender neutrality and supposed equality needs highlighting. By the time we are able to challenge this, the timescales for tendering have been exhausted and the argument has been forwarded that given the cuts and limited funds available a gender-neutral tender meets the minimum requirements!”⁹⁶

“Gender specific work is proving to be increasingly difficult, with the limitations on funding they are fighting for single sex services. Funders tend not to be responsive to need and think of this type of work as discriminatory. Gender equality legislation seems to be used by more men than women.”⁹⁷

Local authority cuts have been passed on to VCOs which are struggling to meet the increase in demand for their services. Participants in the local events for this study highlighted the growing demand for counselling and support for women with mental health needs arising from stress and family problems occurring since the recession. This is put into focus by this research participant who is suffering long term mental health problems as a result of childhood sexual abuse that have been exacerbated as a result of changes in welfare benefit assessments for those with mental ill health:

“The austerity measures mean that many voluntary sector projects which support such vulnerable women are under threat and have to restrict the scope of their services. As for NHS and Local Government services, I have been a patient/client of the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) local to me for many years and have been thankful for their ongoing support. However in recent years I have been told by staff members repeatedly that limited resources combined with increased demand for support for people in distress caused by current ATOS and DWP procedures have restricted the range of priority services.”

Research participant by email, April 2013

In the North East, demand for women-only services is increasing. A survey carried out by NEWomen's Network in 2012⁹⁸ reveals that 56% of women's organisations reported an increase in demand for their organisation's services in 2012 (one domestic violence agency reported an increase of 27%) and this was attributed to women's needs increasing around issues such as poverty, domestic violence and homelessness as well as loss or lack of availability of other services.⁹⁹

However, the survey also reveals declining investment in the women's sector in the North East over a sustained period from 2009 to 2012. More than half of women's VCOs have lost funding year upon year, less than a third have sustained funding at the same levels and less than a fifth have experienced increases in funding. In 2012 there were six reported closures of women's voluntary organisations and services (there were 11 in 2011 and 2 in 2009-2010) and there were also reports of diminishing services across the board for women in rural Northumberland.

The dilemma of responding to increasing demand arising from the pressures that austerity measures are placing upon women amid dealing with funding cuts and diminished staff resources is expressed in this quote from research carried out with women's organisations in Newcastle in 2012:¹⁰⁰

"We're overwhelmed by case work – supporting women in crisis, we can't lift our heads to do more strategic work. The numbers [of women] and needs presenting are greater than ever. How do you provide more with less? How can you ensure your voice is heard in networks? Do the networks ever focus on women?"

The dilemma is also expressed in this short case study from a women's health organisation that aims to improve women's mental health and emotional well-being through its centres in Newcastle and Gateshead.

Case study example - Tyneside Women's Health (TWH) - Economic challenges for communities and women in particular appear to have contributed to an increase both in numbers of women requiring services and in complexity of need. During 2010 / 2011 453 service users engaged with TWH - a 25% increase on the previous year.

Service users are reporting that their mental health issues are exacerbated by debt, financial pressures and worries about changes in the welfare system. In 2010/2011 17% of first time service users reported debt and financial pressure as a concern. Although figures are not available, anecdotal evidence shows that service users with long term mental health conditions are more frequently describing how the stress of changes in the welfare system is having an adverse impact on their mental health.

The impact of national economic problems on the organisation has been mixed. As mentioned, levels of need have drastically increased which staff link to the economic downturn. However, TWH was fortunate in 2010 to secure grants from two new funders which took effect in 2011. The result is that the financial situation of the organisation improved, especially compared to the preceding years which were extremely difficult. Staff at TWH are only too aware that their position was not typical of the many other organisations which are experiencing a significant drop in funds.

The following are some quotes from women's organisations who participated in the research, demonstrating increasing uncertainty about the future:

"We have survived another year but it has been extremely difficult trying to maintain services that are crucial for local women."

"There are real worries about the future in relation to education and training as this year we have been faced with significant barriers in relation to the types of courses that are now funded (reducing choices for women) as well as massive reductions in funding to support women on courses and to provide the crucial childcare support."

"Times are really hard and it's worrying for everyone and women are most vulnerable."

4.9 Impact of welfare reforms

4.9.1 Welfare benefits

Elements of welfare reform are expected to impact disproportionately on women. In 2013 the Government is replacing current benefits (income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits (CTC), Working Tax Credits and Housing Benefit) with one single payment – Universal Credit (UC). Citizens Advice Bureau (CABx) report that "new parents, who already face losing the health in pregnancy grant, the sure start maternity grant and the baby element of CTC, are likely to experience a huge drop in support available from UC, compared with the present system."¹⁰¹ Although it is claimed that the benefit will help people become more independent, it will be paid to one person in the household and, where the male partner is the recipient, this risks increasing women's financial dependence on men.

The 2012 Budget announced that child benefit will be frozen for three years from April 2011; in effect this amounts to a cut in value because the cost of living has risen. The increase from 16 to 24 hours as the benchmark for claiming Tax Credits is seriously threatening women on three fronts; employers do not have the extra hours to give them, their family circumstances do not allow them to increase their hours and the additional cost of childcare makes it impossible to continue to work if they lose their tax credit, thereby leaving them no option but to give up work.¹⁰²

Benefits now make up one fifth of an average women's income compared to only one tenth of men's'.¹⁰³ For the first time in history, welfare benefits and tax credits will not rise in line with inflation and will instead rise by 1% for the next three years. The government is also in the process of reassessing all 2.6 million people on Incapacity Benefit - and its successor Employment Support Allowance (ESA) - by 2014 in an effort to encourage more people back to work and to cut the welfare bill. According to the charity, Mind, Government changes to the benefits system are already having a devastating effect on people with mental health problems.¹⁰⁴

Campaigners are particularly criticising the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), being used to re-assess people on Incapacity Benefit. For this research participant, a 56 year old woman who had to give up her career as a result of deteriorating mental health, these changes have a particularly damaging impact upon women whose mental distress arises from dealing with the trauma of being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse:

“I know of many other women through support groups and service user groups who have had to rely on claiming benefit at times when their mental health deteriorates and their employment is terminated. Claiming benefits due to illness of any sort but particularly mental illness has become a nightmare since the introduction of ATOS/DWP inhumane assessments, the stress of which has caused severe distress and panic to women. In addition, if the reason for her mental distress is that a woman is dealing with the trauma of being a survivor of childhood sexual and emotional abuse she can be at an even greater disadvantage of withstanding the stress of unprofessional and incompetent inquisition.”

Research participant by email, April 2013

Lone parents and divorced women will be less likely to seek child maintenance payments once the Child Support Agency has been dissolved as the replacement agency, the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, will charge a fee for any monies recovered. This, coupled with changes to legal aid, will mean seeking child maintenance will not be a viable option for women on low incomes. This quote is from a woman who took part in an online survey about the impact of the recession and the cuts in 2011:¹⁰⁵

“I lost my husband to cancer just over a year ago when our little boy was eleven months old. I don’t feel the Government adequately thinks about the needs of widows and widowers. Many of their policies with regard to cutting child benefit or tax credits will disproportionately affect us because we are the sole parent and sole earner.”

4.9.2 Housing benefit

Changes to housing benefits will affect women disproportionately, particularly lone parents, women with disabilities, BME women and recent immigrants fleeing domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds). The campaign by Women’s Aid states that survivors of domestic violence and particularly those using refuge services will be affected disproportionately by the welfare reforms, namely; the benefit cap, the removal of direct payment of housing costs to landlords, monthly assessment of Universal Credit payments and payment of Universal Credit to one partner.¹⁰⁶ Women’s Aid are calling for women in refuges to be exempt from the benefit cap as changes to Housing Benefit from weekly to monthly assessments will make rent collection in refuges sporadic and cause cash flow problems. Furthermore

the benefit cap may mean that women experiencing domestic violence, particularly those with large families, will be unable to afford to stay in a refuge. Under the benefit cap, fewer service charges are covered by benefits, meaning that communal areas in refuges and nursery provision etc may no longer be sustainable.¹⁰⁷

Homeless figures for the North East have increased by a staggering 40% since 2010 compared to a 19% increase nationally.¹⁰⁸ Rents are increasing in the private sector because of a growing demand for rented housing, enabling landlords to set rents at what the market determines. The Department for Communities will not be imposing any further regulations on private landlords allowing rent levels to be determined by market conditions. There are currently more private (80%) than social providers of housing with thousands of individual landlords. For the high number of households headed by women on low incomes, increasing rents will leave little or no money for food and essentials for the family.

What has been dubbed the “bedroom tax” was introduced on 1st April 2013. The aim of this, according to the Government, is to tackle overcrowding and encourage a more efficient use of social housing. People of working age and those unemployed claiming Housing Benefit who are deemed to have one spare bedroom in social housing will lose 14% of their Housing Benefit; those deemed to have two or more spare bedrooms will lose 25%. However in the North of England, families with a spare bedroom outnumber overcrowded families by three to one, so thousands of families will be hit with the tax when there is no local need for them to move.¹⁰⁹ The tax also prevents home-based workers from starting their own business or carrying out work from home, the highest proportion of whom are women. As noted by Dr Francis Hollis

“...this tax removes this option for some of the most deprived members of our society”
Guardian Wednesday 3rd April 2013

One group that could be severely affected by the “bedroom tax” are women prisoners and their children. In 2008, the Ministry of Justice found that 55% of women in prison have children under the age of 18,¹¹⁰ although another study estimated this to be as high as 69%.¹¹¹ Nearly 18,000 children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment each year.¹¹² A 2012 study by Pact (the Prison Advice and Care Trust) found that only 9% of these children are living with their fathers. Just over half are in care and it is assumed that the rest are taken in by “kinship carers”, such as grandparents, aunts or friends.¹¹³ HMP Low Newton, a women’s prison in Durham are already noting the potential damaging impact upon women prisoners and their children from the “bedroom tax”:

“We’ve already had an example of a Grandfather who currently has a two bedroom council house who has been told he will either have to pay additional rent for the second bedroom or move to a one bedroom flat. His circumstances are that his eleven year old grandchild stays with him for

approximately three nights per week [he shares the care of the child with his grandmother] while Mum is here at Low Newton. Mum is due for release later this year and had planned to live with her father and child. However if the rent increase is beyond his financial means then he will have to move to a one bedroom flat and his daughter may therefore be homeless on release.”

In response to call for evidence by email, 26.3.13

4.9.3 Legal aid reforms

Changes to legal aid contained in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012¹¹⁴ will limit women's access to legal advice and services in areas of civil law and for criminal cases and will significantly reduce the ability of women suffering violence to get the legal help and support they need. Under the terms of the Act, access to justice is effectively removed from vulnerable women and girls in the private family law sphere. Calls to the Community Legal Advice Helpline¹¹⁵ show that in the area of family law, approximately twice as many women as men seek advice. As the majority of those accessing family law remedies via legal aid are women, especially in relation to domestic violence, the Act will disproportionately impact upon them. In the North East, a Newcastle Law Centre faces closure due to the “devastating impact” the cuts are having on their services. This follows the closure of an immigration advisory service in Middlesbrough. Both agencies work or worked on cases that other practices refused to take on. Mia Sevonium, Manager of Newcastle Law Centre said:

“The new Act excludes even more people from legal aid, leaving them unable to enforce their rights relating to fair treatment at work, immigration and human rights, safe shelter, decent education and health care and to manage their debts and bring or keep their families together”.¹¹⁶

The changes to legal aid came into force on 1st April 2013 and mean that women will be disproportionately disadvantaged by being denied access to justice; if they cannot access equality before the law, then CEDAW rights, specifically, rights under Articles 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 15 and 16, and all of the recommendations under General Recommendation No. 19 (11th session, 1992)¹¹⁷ will be unenforceable by women in the UK.

A new Government consultation, “Transforming legal aid”, live until 4 June 2013, will cause further deprivation of access to justice to the most vulnerable women and girls in the North East. This consultation proposes to introduce a ‘residence test’ prohibiting anyone without legal status in the UK for the previous 12 months from getting legal aid. This will exclude victims of domestic violence, honour based violence, forced marriage, trafficked women and children. At present mothers without legal status who face having their children taken into care will get non means, non merits -tested legal aid to fight their case. From the autumn of 2013, those without ‘sufficient connection’ of 12 months continuous legal residence in the UK will not be

funded to access legal help to fight to keep their children. This impacts BME women more than white British women, and BME women more than BME men, because the women are more likely to be of uncertain visa status.

The following is a case study taken from real life cases to demonstrate how the more vulnerable women in the North East will be impacted as a result of these proposed changes.

Case study example - Sameera was brought to the United Kingdom as a spouse having been forced into marriage by her step mother in Pakistan. She has been married to a first cousin. Before the marriage she pleaded with the family not to make her marry the husband (who was a British Citizen of Pakistani origin and who has been married several times before, in each case his wife left him with or without the children as a result of severe physical abuse) but the family told Sameera that should she leave the marriage then she could not return to Pakistan in safety, and would be likely to be killed for dishonoring her family if she did so. Sameera managed to stay with her husband for 3 months before fleeing. There was police evidence and medical evidence (including photographs) proving abuse, but she would be unable to access legal aid to protect herself as she would not satisfy the residence test.

Extract from response of the Angelou Centre and the National BME Women's Domestic Violence Network to the Ministry of Justice Consultation on transforming legal aid (21.5.13)

4.10 Impacts upon children and families

Action for Children among others have reported an increase in family breakdown since the recession, with an increase in mental health problems due to decreased household income and rises in debt.¹¹⁸ The number of food banks opening in the North East is increasing. There were five food banks operating in the North East as reported by the BBC by April 2012 where previously there were none, with seven more expected to open in the near future¹¹⁹ At the beginning of this research the TUC reported that there was a new food bank opening every four days in the region but a recent BBC Look North news report stated this has increased to two per day to cope with a rapid increase in demand, not, as was previously, from homeless people but from families on low incomes.¹²⁰

A loss of voluntary and community sector provision of services for children, families and young people (closures of children's centres, community and neighbourhood centres) may exacerbate family breakdown. A lack of preventative work is also placing families at risk, putting them on to social workers' caseloads who are struggling to cope with demand. The number of children referred into care in England

has hit a record high. In January 2012, local authorities made 903 court applications to take children into care, the highest since Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) was set up in 2001.¹²¹ At 31 March 2009 there were 3,250 Looked After Children in the North East. By 31 March 2011, this had risen to 3,820, reflecting an increase of 17% (570 children).¹²² In Hartlepool the increase is 33%. The increase has resulted in a funding crisis for North East councils as soaring numbers of children are placed in care homes. The rise is partly attributed to the pressure placed on families as a result of the economic downturn, with reports of domestic violence leading to more council interventions and the situation likely to worsen with rising unemployment.¹²³ In their budget for 2013 Middlesbrough Council have significantly reduced their budget for the level and cost of placements for looked after children.¹²⁴

Middlesbrough is now in the top 20 local authorities with the highest levels of child poverty at 34%; Newcastle is at 31%, Sunderland at 26%, North Tyneside at 21% and Northumberland the lowest in the region at 18%. Pessimistic labour market forecasts such as increases in unemployment indicate that persistent poverty will worsen as the austerity measures take effect.¹²⁵

5. Conclusions

As the UK Government's austerity measures and welfare reforms impact upon already unacceptable levels of gender inequality in the North East of England, there is a looming crisis in gender inequality for women that will inevitably have far reaching economic and social consequences to the well-being of children, families and the wider community.

It seems ground previously gained will most certainly be lost. In the North East where, in many areas gender inequality is very much alive and kicking, the austerity measures will exacerbate the situation considerably through a loss of women's financial independence, lack of choice in key areas of their lives (such as where to live), training and employment opportunities as well as placing even more burdens of care upon them.

This case study demonstrates that women are not only in danger of sinking further into poverty but the austerity measures are also perpetuating and indeed, encouraging gender inequalities through reforms to welfare, education, services for families and young people, legal aid, and housing. Many of the recent achievements of redressing gender inequality are likely to be reversed and inequality is likely to worsen since we have only experienced a proportion of the cuts so far: according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies only 12% of the proposed cuts have been implemented.¹²⁶ The worst is yet to come.

There are deepening concerns over the diminishing gender-specific services and the misinterpretation of equalities legislation. All of the participatory research events carried out in the North East demonstrated the need for women-only space especially during challenging times. Women need to campaign using their collective voice.

The austerity measures are unravelling progress towards gender equality. In the North East, where gender inequality still persists, the austerity measures will exacerbate the situation for women. In terms of daily living, women are finding it hard to make ends meet and in terms of improving their situation through education and employment, for example, the picture is bleak. The longer term indications paint a picture of a very bleak future.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The UK Government should take the following measures to redress the negative impact of the austerity measures upon women's economic independence in the North East:

- a. Regularly publish specific data showing the impact of the austerity measures upon women in the North East, identifying the impact upon different groups of women.
- b. Increase access to childcare, education and training, investment in the women's sector and consider women's employment in policy & planning.
- c. Implement the Equality Duty 2010 to promote and protect women-only services.
- d. Fulfil its obligations under CEDAW to financially sustain women's VCOs addressing all forms of violence against women and girls in the North East.
- e. Reverse the changes to legal aid (implemented in April 2013) that are denying women access to justice.

6.2 Public bodies in the North East should value and encourage women's active citizenship, as well as ensuring women receive the services they need. Specifically they should:

- a. Collect and disaggregate data by gender at all levels and address intersectionality by ensuring equalities strands are not looked at in isolation from each other.
- b. Consult existing networks such as NEWomen's Network when seeking feedback about the issues faced by women in the North East both at organisational and grass roots level.
- c. Within their legal requirement to show due regard to eliminating discrimination and advancing equality of opportunity, monitor the impact of cuts and austerity measures upon women.
- d. Ensure appropriate action is taken where there is a failure to implement the legal requirements.
- e. Promote and where necessary, defend women-only space and gender-specific services, which are protected in law.
- f. Provide training for all sectors in the understanding and implementation of the Equality Act 2010 and its provision for women-only space.

6.3 All elected members and MPs in the North East should work to prevent the devastating impacts upon women in the North East outlined above by taking the following measures:

- a.** Protect women's equality and challenge local authorities wherever decisions are made which could negatively impact disproportionately on women.
- b.** Prevent women from being undervalued and challenge gender stereotyping in all of its forms; use the media, employers, local authorities and other organisations to reflect more positive, respectful values, and value women as workers and citizens.
- c.** Address the under-representation of North East women in national decision-making and spearhead a campaign to encourage women to take up public and civic roles in decision-making processes, including roles within their communities, as local councillors and as MPs.

6.4 Charitable funding bodies and grant making trusts should provide core grants to sustain women's voluntary organisations in the North East during the economic crisis and support NEWomen's Network to lobby around recommendations 6.1 to 6.4 and take the following measures:

- a.** Secure the support of key North East women, such as elected members, MPs, Trade Unionists, key business women and women in public positions to head campaigns designed to promote equality and value women's contributions to North East life.
- b.** Build the capacity of women's organisations to use the CEDAW along with public law and human rights legislation to address women's inequality in the North East.

Appendix 1: Participation in local events (women)

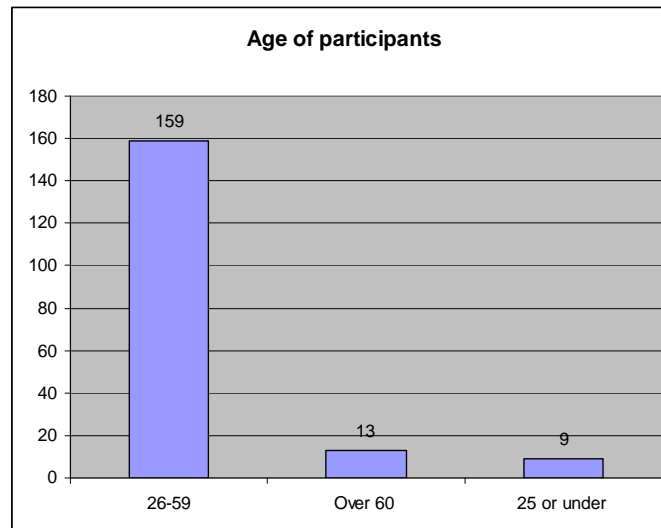
Fifteen events took place and a total of 304 women and 154 different organisations participated. The following table shows the date, location and venue of the events and the number of women participating at each.

Area	Date	Venue	Women participating
Government Equalities Consultation	25th May 2011.	Ben Hoare Bell's Office, Byker	10
North-Tyneside	30 th Jun 2011	Shiremoor Community Centre	16
North Northumberland	5 th July 2011	St James' Church Hall, Alnwick	20
Launch of CEDAW working group for the North East	15 th July 2011	Colby Court Fire Station, Elswick, Newcastle	27
Feminist Leadership Workshops (1)	7 th July 2011	Riverside Community Health Project, Benwell	18
Hartlepool	20 th Sep 2011	Salaam Centre	44
Newcastle (East)	27 th Sep 2011	Tyneside Women's Health, Byker	11
Newcastle (West)	27 th Sep 2011	Riverside Community Health Project, Benwell	28
Women with Learning Disabilities	29 th Sep 2011	Central Square, Newcastle	34
Feminist Leadership Workshops (2)	31 st October 2011	Women's Heath in South Tyneside	6
South Tyneside	18 th Nov 2011	Apna Ghar, minority ethnic women's Centre and Women's Heath in South Tyneside WHIST	33
Tees Valley	15 th Nov 2011	Middlesbrough International Centre	52
East Durham	18 th Jan 2012	Glebe Centre, Murton	15
'Power, Influence. Policy Training	24 th February 2012	Allington House Durham	11
International Women's Event	16 th March 2012	Sunderland Bangladeshi Centre	60

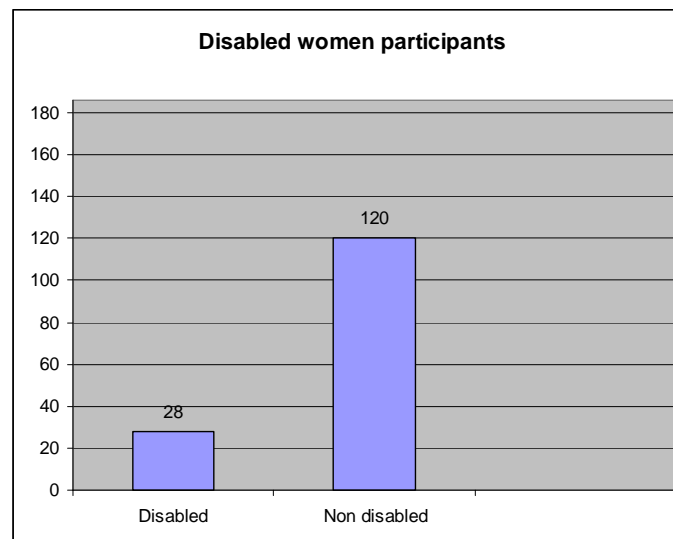
Equality and Diversity monitoring

186 (61%) of women participating completed monitoring forms:

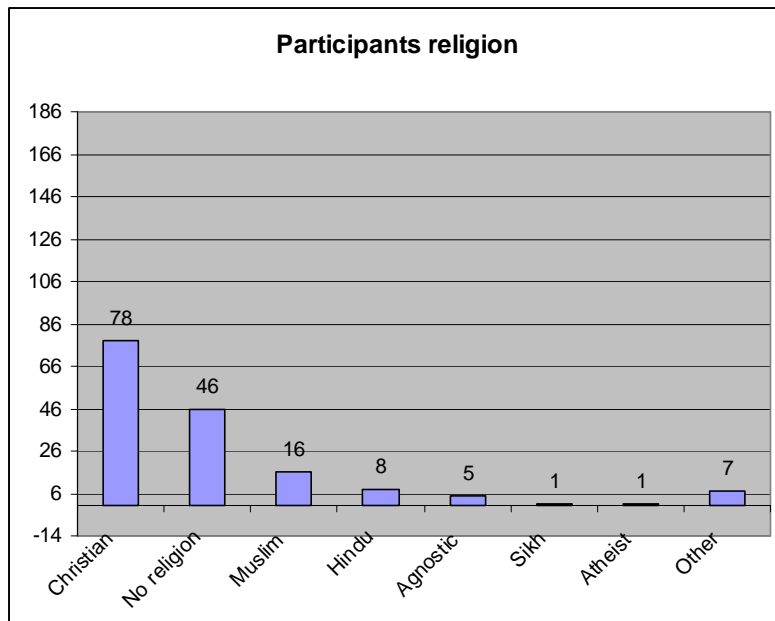
Age – The majority (159 or 88%) of the participants were aged between 26 and 59, 7% (13) were 60 or over and 5% (9) were between 17 and 25.



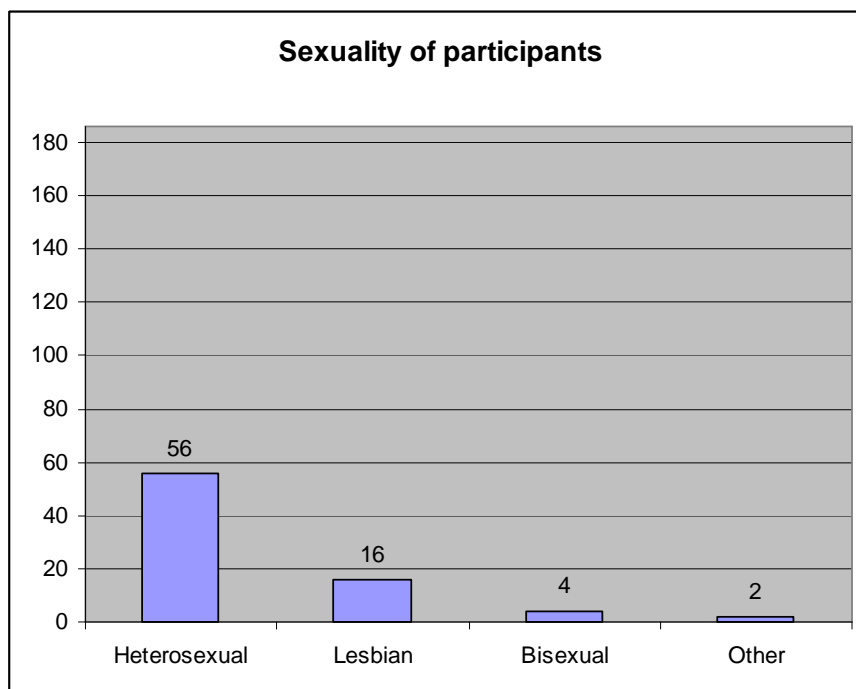
Disabled or Deaf women – 19% (28) stated that they were a disabled woman, 81% (120) stated that they were not.



Religion or belief – 48% (78) stated that they were Christian, 28% (46) had no religion, 10% (16) were Muslim, 5% (8) were Hindu and 3% (5) Agnostic.



Sexual orientation – information about sexual orientation was only gathered from 42% (78) participants. Of these 72% (56) stated that they were heterosexual and 21% (16) stated that they were lesbian, 6% (4) stated bisexual and 3% (2) stated ‘another orientation.’



Nationality and/or ethnicity – 73% (118) of the participants who completed the nationality and ethnicity monitoring stated that they were White British. The nationalities/ ethnicities of the other participants who completed monitoring forms were:

- Pakistani 4% (6)
- Asian British 4% (6)
- White and Asian 3% (5)

- Indian 3% (4)
- Bangladeshi 3% (4)
- Any other Black background 3% (4)
- Irish 1% (2)
- Other white background 1% (2)
- Other mixed background 1% (2)
- African 1% (2)
- Other Asian background 1% (2)

There was one participant with each of the following nationalities/ ethnicities Caribbean, Eastern European, Scottish and 'other ethnicity' (not stated). None of those who completed the monitoring forms stated the following ethnicities/ nationalities (although there were Roma and Chinese women involved in the events in Newcastle and Hartlepool):

- Chinese
- Chinese British
- Other Chinese background
- White & Black African
- White & Black Caribbean
- Roma / Gypsy / Traveller

Appendix 2: Participation in local events (organisations)

60 80 30
Acorn Project
Acumen
All you Can CIC
Alnwick Multinational Group
Angelou Centre
Apna Ghar
Aspire 2 Be
Bangladeshi Centre (Sunderland)
Barnardo's SECOS Project
Ben Hoare Bell Solicitors
Blackhall Women's Institute
BOLO- Bangladeshi Overseas Ladies Organisation
Breast Cancer Survival Trust
Bridge Women's Education Project
Business and Professional Women Centre for Women & Democracy
Chandi Group (South Bank)
Children's Centre staff
Children's Centre's South Hartlepool
Children's Social Care
CIIR-Commission for Inter-religious Relations
Communication Workers Union (CWU)
Community Action Northumberland
Community Action on Health
Community Foundation
Community Safety Advocate
Co-op Durham/ Councillor
Co-op Tyne and Wear
Crest
CWU
DTV Probation Trust
Durham County Council
East Durham AAP
East Durham Community Development Trust Limited
East End Community Development Alliance
Education Service
Escape Intervention Services
EVA Rape Crisis
Eva Women's Aid
Family Focus Parent's Group (Sunderland)
First Stop Darlington
Fourth Action
Freedom Project
Northumberland Community Development Network
Northumbria Police
NTyneside Labour Party (Women's Section)
Open Clasp Theatre
Open Gate
Options -SouthTyneside CVS
Oxfam
Panah
Panah Stonham
Pertemps People Development Group
Praxis
Purple Rose
R Social Enterprise
RBA Equality and Diversity Limited
RCHP Women's Group
Regional women & equality organiser
RHWE
Riverside Community Health Project
Riverside Women's Group
Roma Women's Group
Safer Hartlepool
Safer Middlesbrough Partnership
Salaam Centre (Hartlepool)
Sangini
School staff
SHINE
Sixty Eighty Thirty
Soroptimist International Northern
South Tees Hospital Foundation Trust
South Tyneside Women's Group
South Tynside LINK
Splinter Group
Sunderland People First
Sunderland Women's Centre
Sunshine Project
Sure Start Children's Centre's
SWAN
Tees Valley Iranian Community
Tees Valley Women's Centre
The Angelou centre
The Bridge Project
The Co-op
The Healthy Wellbeing
The Safe Project
Them Wifies

Friends of Walker Riverside Park
Gateshead Voluntary Organisation council
Harbour
Hartlepool Carers Centre
Hartlepool Chinese Association
Hartlepool College Counsellor
Hartlepool College of Further Education
Hillcroft College
hiwecanhelp
Home Start-Seaham
Housing Hartlepool
Inclusion North
Integrated Youth Support Service
Involve (in Murton)
Learning Choices Northumberland Ltd
Link Adapt
Lynfield Children's Centre
Lynnfield/ Stranton Centre
Mencap
Middlesbrough Council
Middlesbrough Library
Middlesbrough Mums
Milin Centre
Multicultural East Middlesbrough
NASUWT
National Assembly of Women
Newcastle City Council
Newcastle CVS
Newcastle Hospital Community Health
Newcastle Muslim Women's Group
Newcastle University Feminist Society
NIWE Eating Distress Service
North Northumberland Women's Network
North of England Refugee Service

Thorn tree ward
Transition Coaching, North East
TUC
Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service
Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre
Tyneside Women's Health
Tyneside Women's Training Group
Tyneside Women's Health
Unison
Unite the Union
University of Northumbria
VELA GROUP
Victoria House
VSW
WAVESWalker Detached Youth
Project
Wear Valley Women's Aid
Wearside Women in Need
Women Away
Women in Action
Women of wit and wonder
Women Supporting Women
Women Well Being Association
Women what do
Women, Girls and 50+ Officer NCL
Sport Development
Women's Health in South Tyneside
Women's Interfaith Media Network
Women's Health Advice Centre
Women's Well Being
Workers Educational Association
Your Voice Counts

Notes

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²

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²⁹ Regional Economic Strategy, 2006 to 2011, One North East

³⁰ Shakti Project, Sangini, Sunderland, 2010.

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http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2013265921/subreports/gor_us_time_series/report.aspx?

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³⁴ *Changing Times : Women's organisations in Newcastle, A study of the current challenges for women's voluntary organisations*, Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service, March 2012 -

http://cvsnewcastle.org.uk/assets/files/representinginfluencing/our_research/Changing_Times_-_Womens_organisations_in_Newcastle.pdf

The Heart of the City, The Voluntary & Community Sector in Newcastle, A report commissioned by Newcastle City Branch, Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service, February 2012 -

http://www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/assets/files/representinginfluencing/our_research/Union_Final_Report.pdf

³⁵ *Report on International Women's Event: A partnership project between Women's Resource Centre and NEWomen's Network*. 16th March 2012, Sunderland Bangladeshi Centre - <http://www.newwomens.net/>

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³⁷ *Poverty Pathways*, Fawcett Society and Oxfam, 2009 <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=968>

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<http://www.nelep.co.uk/media/2624/linda-mcdowell-skills.pdf>

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- ⁵⁴ <http://www.carers.org/news/carers-save-uk-economy-%C2%A387-billion-year>
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- ⁵⁹ <http://www.sotw.nhs.uk/yoursay/consultations/acute-health-services-for-children-and-young-people/>
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⁸⁰ *Domestic Violence: Women's Services Face 'Disastrous' Cuts As Councils Slash Budgets* - http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/31/domestic-violence-rape-crisis-cuts_n_2049137.html?

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⁸⁴ <http://www.object.org.uk/council-decisions-table>

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⁸⁷ From Not just bread, but roses, too: Funding to the women's voluntary and community sector in England 2004-07, Women's Resource Centre (2009)

⁸⁸ *Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary and community*, Women's Resource Centre (2012)

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- ¹²⁰ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk/england-17813116
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