

2008

The Scottish Women's Convention

Report on Dumfries Road Show
July 2008

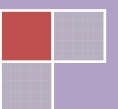


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Introduction

The purpose of the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is to communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy. Through the Convention's policy work, round table and celebratory events the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations. The SWC aims to provide an effective way of consulting with a diverse range of women in Scotland.

The Scottish Women's Convention has a network of over 300,000 women from relevant organisations throughout Scotland.

Background to Dumfries Event

In 2007 the SWC undertook a series of "Roadshows" across Scotland to consult and engage with women in order to draw together their views and comments on issues of concern in contemporary Scottish life. These were presented to relevant policy makers, interested parties and also made available to our wider network. The response was enthusiastic and SWC recommendations were delivered to appropriate decision making bodies on behalf of the women who have taken part.

The SWC Roadshows proved to be a popular and effective way to reach a large and diverse population of women who might otherwise have no opportunity to present their opinions or concerns.

It was against this background and agenda the SWC intends to continue with further visits to Scottish regions in 2008. We look forward to meeting many more of Scotland's women and providing them with a platform to voice their experiences of living in Scotland today and their aspirations for Scotland's future.

Our first regional visit of 2008 took place at Easterbrook Hall in Dumfries on the 10th July 2008.

Sixty women registered for the event. The format for discussion was centred on aspects of Poverty, Education, Violence against Women and Children, Sexual Health and Awareness of the National Conversation.

The SWC would like to thank the women of Dumfries and Galloway for the warm and enthusiastic welcome we received. Their wholehearted participation in this event made it a successful, informative and constructive day.

Dumfries and Galloway

Geographically Dumfries and Galloway Council area is the third largest in Scotland, covering 2,380 square miles with 239 miles of coastline. It ranks eleventh in terms of population, with approximately 148,300 residents and has one of the lowest average earnings of any local authority area. This reflects the rural nature of the economy with a predominance of traditionally low paid sectors such as tourism and agriculture.

The largest town is Dumfries with a population of 31,600. The two other main towns are Stranraer (10,800 pop.) and Annan (8,300 pop.).

All other settlements have populations of 4,500 or less.

Population density is 60 people per sq mile compared with the Scottish average of 168.

Agriculture accounts for 70% of the area with woodland covering another 25% ¹

The Region also hosts a unique educational venture in the Crichton Campus: Scotland's first multi-institutional university campus, Crichton is a joint venture between Glasgow and Paisley Universities, Bell College and Dumfries and Galloway College.

¹ <http://www.dumfries-and-galloway.co.uk/facts/info.htm>

POVERTY

"What are the issues of poverty which affect Women in Dumfries and Galloway?"

"Trapped"

"No choices"

"Isolation"

"Loss of pride"

These were just some of the immediate reactions provoked by this question to our participants.

A number of our respondents suggested that the degree of poverty experienced by too many people in Scotland was not acknowledged or understood by either decision makers or society as a whole. They also suggested that there is little comprehension amongst the public on the impact social exclusion has on the self-confidence and aspirations of those on lower income deciles.

"Most of the people in this country just don't think there is real poverty here. They associate poverty with third world countries. They don't recognise it is right here in Scotland."

"Poverty is stigmatised in Scotland and so are the people who suffer it. We are a millstone to society and politicians."

Recent research continues to demonstrate that women, on the whole, have income levels lower than those of men, and some groups of women (such as lone parents and older women) are likely to be disproportionately represented amongst those on lower incomes.

The experiences of a number of our delegates bear this assertion out. The women who attended confirmed they suffer many of the same issues, which contribute to symptoms of deprivation and poverty, as their peers throughout Scotland.

Poor access to job opportunities, limited occupational choices, inadequate affordable childcare provision, carer responsibilities and a lack of a liveable wage are examples the SWC hear all too frequently when talking to women in Scotland.

The familiarity of the argument should not distract the reader from the important messages of personal experience. The women from across

Social exclusion is a process, which causes individuals or groups, who are geographically resident in a society, not to participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/156593/0042063.pdf>

Poverty is technically defined as when a person's household income (adjusted for the size and composition of the household) is less than 60% of the UK average income.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Social-Inclusion/poverty>

Poverty and social exclusion are strongly linked. Lone parenthood and disconnection from employment increase the isolation of women who, not through choice, are unable to participate fully in their communities and the social and political life around them.

http://www.fawcett.org.uk/documents/pov_000.pdf

Scotland the SWC engage with, deliver to service providers and politicians, an opportunity to pursue strategy and improvements based on the realities for women living within lower socio-economic groups. The women do not want policy and outcome based on consultation with theorists who, they argue, pursue blanket approaches that too often are based on statistical analysis rather than real intimacy with the issues.

All of our delegates believed women have to overcome barriers and prejudices in too many aspects of their lives. If they are also exposed to poverty and deprivation the obstacles can seem emotionally and physically insurmountable.

It became apparent as discussions developed that structurally and individually there were several distinct issues being identified which present the biggest hurdles to these women.

Transport

Our respondents especially those in the more rural areas of the region highlighted both the cost and availability of transport as an issue which had a substantial bearing on their economic welfare.

A variety of research has suggested that social exclusion, especially for women, in rural areas is exacerbated by transport issues.

A number of women worried about rising fares and the cost of travel to work. Places of employment were often in peripheral urban locations with little or no transport or due to the rural location.

Low wages mean that rising fare costs were diminishing their ability to manage on a restricted budget.

"I worry about the cost of going to work and I worry about what will happen if I can't afford to go, money is that tight."

The women also highlighted the limitations of travel costs when you have children, free travel is provided for the under fives. They felt that the provision should be extended to older children.

"I left a violent marriage, became depressed and could not work. My children used to go to music lessons and swimming but I could not afford anything. I can't even afford to take them on transport to go anywhere so they end up out in the streets and that is even more to worry about."

The women also discussed subsidised fares and "family tickets" however for the majority of our delegates this was not an option. Using reduced fare tickets during peak hours was impossible and this was often when travel was required due to work or getting children to family or schools. If you worked part-time, a weekly ticket was not economical.

"£28 for a family rail card sounds fine but I could not scrape this together out of my budget in the first place never mind find the fares. People just don't get it, poverty is not about choices."

"If you get on a bus but prefer to get a train home for instance it costs so much. Why does one ticket in one direction not do all travel. That is a joined up system."

In accessible, remote and very remote rural areas, around 20% of households do not have access to a car. The same proportion do not possess a driving licence.

People living in rural areas are much more likely to find public transport inconvenient.

The Poverty Site – Access to Transport – Scotland – Key Points

Inadequate public transport has been received within the Scottish Executive as one of the major causes of social exclusion within rural communities.

<http://www.poverty.org.uk/S46/index.shtml>

The connection between unemployment and transport in Britain thus appears to suggest that the link between the two is strongest in rural areas, for women and in single parent families (which again are mostly women and their children).

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2001/05/9028/File-1>

As well as cost, the provision of services was a big issue for the respondents. In their view transport services were focused on profit not community. The women from both rural and urban areas of Dumfries and Galloway commented that most routes were about getting people into main towns in standard working hours but did not always connect local areas or villages which meant getting to family, friends, or local services was difficult and costly as it could mean using several services and a prolonged journey for what was essentially a short distance.

The services were often non-existent at night or on Sundays, making recreational travel without private transport impossible.

"It is not a service really. In some villages transport is non-existent. If it is not profitable it does not run simple as that."

Mobility even when transport was available was commented on by our participants who were disabled or parents of young children. The lack of or sporadic timetabling of low level buses frustrated and complicated travelling for them (Sanquhar was highlighted as having no low level buses). The women said the poverty of independence and flexibility for the disabled or the difficulties of travel with infants is being overlooked by transport providers when considering provision in the area.

At the time of the seminar the cost of fuel and its bearing on increasing transport costs whether fares costs or car journeys was very much at the forefront of discussions. A number of our delegates have very fragile budgets and the strain of substantial rising fuel costs can cause an acute reaction in other factors in their lives among the most pressing is basic sustenance.

"People assume if you have a car, even an old wreck you can't be poor. I can't run it with the cost of petrol and I therefore have to use local shops which are much more expensive."

"I have to use the car to get to work. I just don't have a choice. I am now cutting down the food in the house because petrol is just so expensive and the food is going up too I am at my wits' end."

Housing

The SWC support the view that bad housing has a serious effect on women's health and their self-esteem. Many women on low incomes have limited, if any, choice, when it comes to affordable, quality housing. Our delegates were of the opinion that proper consultation with women in local communities about the type of housing they require would go a long way to alleviating their frustrations and improving the quality of their lives and that of their families.

The population of Dumfries and Galloway is approx. 148,300. Scotland's People: Annual Report 2005/2006 figures show Dumfries and Galloway's Tenure of Housing in the rental sector as having approx. 50,422 people renting in some form.

- ❖ 15% Local Authority/Scottish Homes = 22,245
- ❖ 9% Rent - Housing Association/Co-op = 13,347
- ❖ 10% Rent - Private Landlord = 14,830

Taking these figures as a general illustration this means that approx 1/3 of the region's population rent housing.

Our delegates believe that a substantial amount of housing stock is below acceptable standard either due to community facilities or environment, cost relative to income or material structure.

The women cited concerns about the dampness and mould in some council properties. They did acknowledge regeneration is being undertaken however felt that some areas, especially in bigger towns such as Stranraer and Dumfries, are neglected due to perceptions about tenants.

"It's like they have decided to put all the drug addicts in one place. It is as if they want to control it by creating ghettos. What chance do other tenants have when this happens?"

Furthermore, the participants who rented from private landlords had more complaints about the standard of affordable accommodation on offer saying landlords frequently failed to upkeep or invest in their housing stock.

"They just don't care. It is easy money for them."

Single parent households in Scotland compared to two parent families are still much more dependant on rented housing and are more likely to live in a flat.

Although the majority of single parents (74%) rate their neighbourhood as very good or fairly good, this is a lower level of satisfaction than two parent families (91%).

This is reinforced by the fact that single parents are almost twice as likely as two parent households to experience problems such as groups of young people hanging about (50%), rubbish or litter lying around (45%), people drinking or using drugs (44%), vandalism, graffiti and property damage (35%) and noisy neighbours (20%).

<http://www.opfs.org.uk/factfile/stats02.html>

In the last 12 months did they feel that crime and anti social behavior had changed in their neighbourhood? 11% said no – their neighbourhood had improved. 58.7% said was no change. 21.5% said neighbourhood had worsened and 8.9% don't know. *September 2007 Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary Community Survey*

http://www.dumfriesandgalloway.police.uk/foi/class_cat/how_doing/public_consult/community_survey_07_08.pdf

A number of women emphasised that conditions of poverty often meant that they spend the major part of their daily life in and around where they reside. Poor facilities, a complete lack of affordable recreation and unsafe green space meant that opportunities for quality time as individuals or with their families was limited. This frequently meant that mental and physical revival was inadequate often to the point where it has a significant bearing on the health of them and their family.

"I don't know what the NHS spend on tablets for depression and dealing with addictions but if the government would spend as much tackling issues that would help us like liveable wages, childcare, things for the kids to do we can afford maybe I would not have to rely on tablets to keep going."

"I think they throw money at the symptoms but I don't think they really understand the root causes."

Women were keen to see more wardens and community policing especially at night. Some commented on neighbourhood watch schemes; however others did not think this was a good idea due to the risk of retaliation in some neighbourhoods.

Several of the women confirmed they were working to improve their communities or would consider doing so. However, for some, like many individuals who suffer poverty or continual deprivation, a number of them lack the confidence and internal capacity to do so. Our participants came from different areas and different social backgrounds however the shared common value expressed by them was the need for the renewal of "community values" and for improved access to social and employment opportunities where they lived.

The women on the whole do not feel particularly engaged with public policy or government strategy and worryingly do not see their issues of concern being addressed through legislation or political action.

"The Council is OK but to me politicians don't seem to make decisions based on any local knowledge. They just seem so far away in London or Edinburgh. Not much that they do seems to improve things here really, as far as jobs or houses go."

"You can't win. Either there is no housing available where the family live or where you have a job so you go to another area. You get a house, but have lost kinship support and there are no jobs available or you move to get a job and there is no affordable housing."

The younger women were keen to express their belief that more assistance and support should be provided to young people who were taking up tenancy for the first time. This very much echoed the view of the participants at the SWC Young Women's Seminar in May 2008 where it was suggested this kind of guidance should be provided within school curriculums.

Like the rising cost of petrol, domestic fuel prices are having a distressing effect on budgets even more so for those in housing which is damp, without adequate insulation or adequately maintained.

"These companies hold everyone to ransom businesses, householders, manufacturers everything. Everything we buy goes up in price because of the cost of petrol, gas and electricity it is sickening."

"I have damp and mould in my house and I am dreading winter. I will never be able to afford to heat it."

Despite their increased participation in the labour market, women remain disproportionately represented in low-paying sectors.

http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/lowpay/report/pdf/2008_min_wage.pdf

There is a 15%* gap between men's and women's full-time hourly rates, and a shocking 35% gap when you compare women's part time hourly rate to men's full time hourly rate.

<http://www.close-the-gap.org.uk/facts.asp>

The proportion of employees / workers earning less than £7 per hour is highest in Clackmannanshire and Dumfries & Galloway.

<http://www.poverty.org.uk/S31a/index.shtml?2>

Working-age adults without dependent children now constitute a third of all those in low income.

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/n104.asp>

Employment/ Benefits

When discussing matters of poverty and/or employment with women around Scotland the SWC have found three issues predominate.

- ❖ Childcare availability and cost.
- ❖ Women's role as the primary carer in society.
- ❖ The pay gap between men and women.

The SWC visit to Dumfries and Galloway further consolidated these findings.

The participants came from many localities within the region. Despite the variety of age groups and social demographics the women overwhelmingly thought positive leadership by the Scottish Government must be a priority in regard to addressing the gender inequalities perpetuated by these issues.

The women felt very strongly that despite much rhetoric on gender inequalities by politicians it produced little of long term benefit for women on low pay, in a caring role or who have been without access to skill improvement opportunities.

A number of our delegates raised a very similar question of policymakers. However it was succinctly put by one delegate as:

"Who decides what is work or employment? Why is so much undertaken by women so undervalued?"

The women expressed frustration that 21st century society in Scotland expects women to contribute to the economic growth of the country through work based employment. At the same time she is expected to fulfil the overwhelming majority of unpaid caring responsibilities for children and family members. Furthermore women, especially those who are lone parents, are expected by many in society to shoulder the blame for a perceived deterioration in values.

"It seems to me we bear the brunt of being in a state of poverty. Women are considered to be the key to the kids' upbringing, to providing proper diets, getting moaned at if the family can't afford something and caring and worrying for the family as a whole. Then we are told by some in society we are work shy and don't look after our kids."

Our delegates were of the opinion that while the role of caring in society whether professionally or within families is so undervalued women will not achieve any kind of parity in opportunity or economic independence.

They want to see a fairer evaluation of caring roles as employment by policymakers when assessing welfare provision or employment status.

The delegates clearly stated they would like to see kinship childcare financed through child tax credits in the same way as other childcare provision.

"It just does not make sense to me that if families can provide appropriate childcare they should not be paid for it. So many jobs now mean shifts or hours when nurseries are not open. Who do they think will do it?"

The lack of appropriate childcare in for disabled children was an issue for some delegates. Access to childcare, whether affordable or accessible, was a priority issue for the women who attended the Roadshow. It was the one of the principal assertions in their arguments that work was not always the way out of poverty due to the affordability especially if you had more than one child. The delegates were aware of legislation which require lone parents on Income support to claim Jobseekers allowance from Oct 2008 if the child is 12years old and by 2010, aged 7 years.

The women attending contend that at present the prevalence of low paid jobs in D & G create tensions between employment and benefit income which continued welfare reforms are failing to recognise or address.

"I am really concerned about imposing all these sanctions if you refuse work they offer. They make decisions based on rules but don't consider the local issues of transport, childcare, wage rates. If I am forced to work for the minimum wage my children and I will actually be worse off. How can that be better for us?"

Several delegates already cared for disabled or aging family members and were limited in work opportunity and employment income because of this. These women expressed particular concern over long term financial health and a lack of pension security for the future.

A number of women at the seminar were without formal qualifications and found accessibility to further education or training difficult in the widest sense i.e. economically, physically or emotionally. The only type of work offered to them, if available at all, was mainly in manufacturing, retail, caring or cleaning which are traditionally low pay sectors.

"A lot of training or courses are based in Dumfries or out of the region altogether. It isn't easy to access because of travel time, cost or getting childcare."

"You get so far doing a course then there is nothing else locally to follow through so it feels a bit of a waste of time."

"They tell you vocational courses can be done remotely but you need confidence to do that. I would need support locally."

On a more positive note a number of younger respondents confirmed that they were now pursuing courses which would hopefully present them with wider career choice but they did have concerns that job availability in the region would not match enhanced training.

According to a number of our older delegates returning to the employment market was proving particularly difficult. They say they are only aware of youth employment incentives they are not aware of any thing for older women. Additionally some said they had no idea where to go for advice. Their experiences suggest that there was a lack of focused support and guidance for older women, especially in the more rural areas, who had for various reasons been out of the job market for some time.

Mature participants would like to see more local initiatives and dedicated skill enhancement programmes for older women which would prepare them for employment. Opportunities for work experience, revitalising interpersonal skills and access to IT training were mentioned.

Delegates from Dumfries praised the work of community projects such as the North West Resource Centre Dumfries in providing this kind of support however they feel there is not enough of this kind of service across the region.

Continuing discussions by our delegates focused on a lack of flexibility by employers to accommodate childcare and caring responsibilities. This lack of flexibility further removed women from the wider employment market and limited many to dependence on part time work or having to forego the opportunity to take up employment at all.

"Don't kid yourself. They will not employ a woman with young children."

They believed more should be done by Government to persuade employers to provide a wage that reflects the cost of living.

"Employers think the minimum wage is a liveable wage, it isn't, it is what is says on the tin - a minimum wage. Employers should try living on it. It's impossible. It hardly motivates you to work when you could be worse off by going to work."

As participants discussed issues of low pay in the region the topic of the gender pay gap was also focused upon. The women said the type of work women predominate in is due to what Scottish culture and tradition has embedded as "gender norms" and they readily made the connection with the low pay within these sectors.

"If you don't have further education in Scotland and want a "career" they tell you go into hairdressing, childcare or an office. Why do they never offer electrician or plumber or something which actually might pay the same rate as men get."

"Apprenticeship schemes – are you joking. What girl gets offered them – oh except hairdressing eh?"

"Make no mistake Scotland is patriarchal."

Benefit provision and accessibility was also a topic which produced a fairly unanimous response from those who utilise welfare services or had assisted another in doing so.

"The most un-useful system."

The women said benefit provision was provided through a system which was difficult to access and understand and it was frequently administered by people who seemed to have little knowledge of the system outside the confines of their own speciality.

"If you make one phone call in a day you make fifty. You are told you have the wrong documents, you are in the wrong place, and you are asking for the wrong benefit from the wrong department it is a maze of bureaucracy."

"It is not constructive, it is obstructive."

Delegates said that concentration of a number of services to the Central Belt of Scotland has not improved ease of access.

"Moving Social Security Centres to Central Scotland has caused issues around people being able to claim benefits in Dumfries and Galloway."

"Job Centre Plus, New Deals, Careers Scotland, Department of Work and Pensions, Revenue and Customs, Modern Apprenticeships I have not got a clue where to start and find it all very confusing. Even listening to everyone here there are things I never knew about."

The SWC communicate with a diverse range of women throughout Scotland and the consistent message we are receiving is that welfare and employment information is not transparent or easily accessible for too many women who should be benefiting from their services.

Health

The women described how the conditions of exclusion they were variously exposed to can lead, arguably, to a type of societal “deprivation syndrome” whereby their self esteem and interpersonal skills suffered. This reduces capacity to cope or to seek the services which might provide support.

“I just felt I had lost my voice and my worth.”

“I just feel constantly cut off and weighed down with coping.”

“Having to think about how to live day to day causes you to lose your dreams and aspirations.”

The comments of several delegates identified higher instances of depression and stress amongst women who are income deprived. They said the efforts to remain resilient become difficult when there is a constant struggle to balance personal needs, societal judgments and family wants.

Small deprivations which multiply have a detrimental effect on women and contribute to feelings of inadequacy and isolation which clearly has a long term impact on their ability to socialise and find employment.

“You can’t buy new clothes or makeup or get your hair cut. It seems so little to mention but the impact this has on your appearance can lead to a lack of self esteem and confidence.”

It is an unremitting strain which has a substantial impact on women’s health and wellbeing.

“It is a mental pressure cooker. Completely saps my physical and mental health.”

Our participants felt that in Dumfries and Galloway local Health Services are stretched and are focused on dealing with symptoms and often the only help is medicinal responses such as pills etc. They would like to see a more interactive approach by support and community health services in improving women’s health, provided in a holistic medium where the focus is on the woman not on camouflaging the symptoms of deprivation in her life.

Household measurements of poverty, most commonly used by governments, assume equal distribution of resources within a household, masking women’s poverty. However poverty is suffered at an individual level. Research shows that women do not necessarily receive their fair share of household income, they are more likely to forgo their own consumption to boost that of their children and often have stress responsibility for handling tight budgets and debt. So women’s poverty is often hidden, both within those households living above the poverty line and their more dire positions within poor households (Rake & Jayatilaka2002)

<http://www.fawcettsoociety.org.uk/document/s/£££%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

Recent evidence suggests that the stresses of being a sole carer have a particular impact on health. Moreover, a move from living in poverty, on benefits - a situation already linked to increased levels of ill-health - to low paid work, may mean that a lone parent is no better off in socio-economic terms, and actually worse off in health terms

<http://www.opfs.org.uk/factfile/health.html#01>

The delegates identified public attitudes to diet, behaviour expectations and service access as being particularly disparaging towards them.

"I know what healthy food is – I am not daft, but it is expensive. I do try my best. I want the best for my family like everyone else."

"They keep going on in the papers about the amount of food thrown away in Scotland. I can tell you – not in my house everything gets used."

According to our participants society too often denigrates whole sections of society or residential areas as troublesome, degenerate or indolent and this has a further depreciative affect on people already struggling with issues of exclusion.

"I live in an area which has not got a great reputation. I don't choose to live there and I am at my wits end trying to ensure my kids are brought up ok. It is not easy but when so many just assume everyone is the same the kids think ok why not. They don't get a positive message so are influenced by that. Make them feel included - that is the problem".

The women felt this tendency in society to condemn without knowledge or understanding can translate into further assumptions and barriers when dealing with public service providers or indeed accessing the providers initially whether for medical, welfare or educational purposes.

"If you don't feel like a pariah when you go into some of these places you do when you come out."

Delegates would like to see more positive role models for young people, including robust support for parents to assist them in becoming confident role models themselves. Accessible and affordable recreational environments for women and their families are considered by our participants as being acutely required in the region to improve physical and mental stimulation and overall wellbeing.

"I would like our communities to be about empowerment not about feeling trapped."

EDUCATION

"Have you undergone any training/education programmes which will benefit you when looking for work?"

"Did you receive any career guidance when attending school?"

"What are the barriers women face when returning to education?"

Delegates attending the seminar in Dumfries and Galloway were representative of the diverse circumstances of women in Scotland. It was therefore not surprising the responses to the above questions also identified a range and variety of exposure to experiences relating to their education.

Younger delegates were in the majority when it came to confirming whether they had undertaken any further education/ training programmes which would benefit them when looking for work.

They offered praise for initiatives such as (BHC) Building Healthy Communities², and specifically the North West Resource Centre³ in Dumfries in providing access to mentoring, training and volunteering opportunities which can help a lot with future employment prospects.

Moreover, it is the sense of purpose, increased confidence and opportunities for social engagement the young women felt was another beneficial aspect of this initiative.

More than a 1/3 of girls - 36% said they definitely would consider non traditional work. 44% said they might but only 15% of girls and boys received any advice on work placements in areas dominated by the other sex.

After having a child, many more women move into low-paid and insecure work as cleaners, carers, temps and home-workers, which does not keep them above the poverty line.

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=658>

Gender segregation – the fact that some occupations are dominated by women and that the jobs tend to be lower paid is one of the foundations of the gender pay gap. The 2001 Kingsmill report noted that more than 60% of women worked in just 10 occupations (out of 77).

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-14435-f0.pdf> page 23

² Initiated in 2001 The BHC works with its partners in 4 areas of Dumfries and Galloway to provide a range of services and activities that impact on health improvement priorities and wider detriments of health contribution to broader development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

³ North West Resource Centre in Dumfries - 1 of the four project centres for BHC the others being in West Wigtownshire, The Machars and Upper Nithsdale

"Through Building Healthy Communities and Working for Families⁴ I have been able to do numerous training courses e.g. child protection, protective behaviours, mental health and domestic abuse and more."

"I know I want more for me and my children and our future. By starting to do life skills courses at Northwest Resource Centre I was introduced to " Working for Families" who helped me get back into education, get to university and provided childcare for me as I am single parent."

Responses clearly indicated the obvious benefits provided by these services are restricted by locality. Participants would like further resources made available to allow greater accessibility to these services throughout the region.

Voluntary work had been undertaken by number of delegates as a means of development and up-skilling. Whilst the opportunity this presented in terms of social interaction and confidence building was accepted by the volunteers, they did not believe reward either financially or by certification recognised personal efforts. They would like benefit provision and educational qualification boards to give greater consideration to this.

"I know it is voluntary but it would be much better to have some allowance and endorsement for the work undertaken it would be more motivational."

Several delegates with children also mentioned the **"The Wee Book"** as a helpful primary resource⁵. They were unsure if it was well enough advertised or still distributed in the area but definitely thought it should be as it can be useful for families to access information on numerous services including education sources. Participants however thought that it would have very limited use if you were not a teenager or a parent of young children.

Mature participants looked for more information to be provided in a dedicated format for them, especially in terms of re-skilling and educating. Several women indicated restrictive issues for them included the lack of regional transport infrastructure which would allow more integrated travel options. For others their employer showed little enthusiasm to support self development or training, this was more specifically the case in low wage employment.

⁴ The Working for Families Fund has been developed to address barriers that parents face whilst trying to obtain jobs or training by providing flexible and affordable childcare for parents in disadvantaged areas of Dumfries and Galloway.

⁵ A Directory of information for families about services and supports for children and young people in Dumfries and Galloway.

"I travel to Glasgow every day to study as I have parental help and am close to direct transport but it isn't that easy for others locally I know that."

"I don't think there is enough accessible training in the area. I did an HNC in childcare but found it hard to get access to further study locally."

"On job training is essential for women to develop skills but we don't get it. After they show you the mechanics of the job they just want you to get on with it and that is it."

Part time study came under particular criticism due to the complexity and tensions between benefits and student allowances. Unanimously our delegates thought that the fear of losing benefits or being incorrectly informed and consequently worse off financially is a strong disincentive to study.

Older women on the whole seemed very much less confident about undertaking education or skill training.

"At my age (mid fifties) I feel I've spent my life working for others (family care and lots of volunteering) and now I feel it is too late to work towards something for myself without letting others down. Help!"

Mature delegates felt much more guilt about focusing on themselves and had lower levels of confidence and knowledge about where to obtain information in the region. They agreed that focusing resources on youth was important, nevertheless, they expressed concern that a generation of women are not being provided with the equality of opportunities to achieve their potential or economical independence through improved education channels.

Experiences may have been variable depending on the generation or academic capacity of individuals but what was consistent was the sometime direct, but more often imperceptible messages, given via career advice or course direction to women through their education. They were dismayed it is still an issue women are forced to challenge in Scotland today.

"It has only been in the last thirty years or so that women have not had to leave jobs to get married." Things are better now. We were not educated for careers we were educated to get married."

"Unless you were very bright or had the encouragement of your parents neither schools or family seemed to give much thought to career guidance for girls. They seem to do a bit better now."

It was significant however that this same age group were robust in their belief that it was important that women should be provided with an educational curriculum and vocational choices which reflect the percentage of women in today's labour market and their potential contribution to economic growth.

"Young women must be encouraged to get qualifications and allowed opportunities in all careers otherwise another generation will be stuck in low paying jobs with no decent pension. They will be second class citizens"

"Girl's jobs / boy's jobs that is the career advice I got after been given a list of role types"

From the evidence provided by the participants work placement opportunities in Dumfries and Galloway reinforce gender stereotyping. No one could provide an example of taking up, or indeed being offered, a placement or training in a non traditional role.

We asked if any delegate had been provided with career information on apprenticeships in sectors such as engineering or plumbing. Disappointingly this was also a negative answer.

"No definitely not, but then by that time you have not even had the chance to do the subjects in school you might need."

"I think if you had asked you would have been told you were daft to be honest. That was the impression I got."

Professions such as engineering were still thought to be areas where women have to prove themselves above and beyond male counterparts to enjoy the same success.

"It's just confidence isn't it and having the grades and ability to go for what you want despite the difficulties."

Our participants unanimously supported the view that the career advice provided to women is gender stereotypical and in addition the present education system profoundly discriminates against women who disengage from education early or follow a vocational route into the labour market.

SEXUAL HEALTH

What types of services are available to women in Dumfries and Galloway dealing with issues of Sexual Health?

How can these services be improved?

Were you aware that four secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway had taken part in a new programme of health screening aimed at detecting Chlamydia – if known do you think this is a good idea and should it be rolled out to other areas?

Overall the delegates had a good general awareness of various sexual health services within the region. This was especially true of younger delegates through NHS programmes in the region referred to as C4U scheme and C2U Drop In.⁶

Participants over 25 years were more inclined to refer to GP's, Family Planning in Medical Centres or Well Women Clinics within the region.

Provision of services such as Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) at the Royal Infirmary Dumfries and Family Planning and Sexual Health Clinics at the Department of Sexual Health premises, Nithbank, Dumfries were acknowledged however predominantly by participants from Dumfries rather than the region as a whole.

Difficulties discussed relating to convenience highlighted problems for women caused by insufficient staffing levels, unacceptable time delays for appointments and a lack of flexibility in opening times and rural provision, illustrated by the following comments:

⁶ **The C4U-Card** provides free condoms to young people (age 14-19), using this as a vehicle to educate in sexual health, sign-post appropriately and where relevant explore related issues such as negotiating skills, peer pressure, self esteem, alcohol. Provision of C4U card is not limited to health professionals and aims to include statutory and voluntary youth workers, specifically those dealing with the most vulnerable.

C2U 'Drop Ins' are held for teenagers in Annan, Castle Douglas, Dumfries, Kirkcudbright, Langholm, Lockerbie, Moffat, Newton Stewart, Sanquhar, Stranraer and Thornhill. We offer a **free confidential drop-in service** for under 20's. A range of services are offered including counselling, advice and information on diet and exercise, sexual health, contraception, pregnancy testing and condoms.

The number of people diagnosed with Chlamydia in south west Scotland has risen by 60% in the space of a year. The Scottish Government figures for Dumfries and Galloway show 104 people were diagnosed with the sexually transmitted infection in 2007.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/south_of_scotland/7553764.stm

Nicola Sturgeon, Cabinet secretary for health and wellbeing, said the aim is to make sexual health services more accessible across the country.

Sunday Herald Aug 5 2007 – Judith Duffy Health Correspondent

Year-group testing programmes are underway in schools in the Dumfries & Galloway area to raise awareness and to find and treat cases of Chlamydia. Screening has been carried out in four schools with pupils ranging from S4 (15-year-old) to S6.

'We've found different rates of Chlamydia infection, ranging from nil to 12 per cent,' says Dr Maggie Gurney. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/06152307/4>

"C2U is good however very understaffed which reduces effectiveness."

"I waited 2 years for a family planning appointment."

"The GUM clinic drop in times only amount to 3 hours each week in total, 1.5 hours on Monday evening until 7pm and 1.5 hours on a Friday."

"The clinic in Sanquhar for example is only once a month and you need an appointment. There is not enough provision rurally."

The SWC have found that consultation with women in large urban areas suggests contact with dedicated Sexual Health Centres or Family Planning Centres is often the preferred method of support on Sexual Health matters rather than local GP's. This is often due to the fairly anonymous association women can have with these services in large cities.

The opposite relationship appears to be the case in small towns and rural areas. This is not a reflection of indiscretion on the part of service providers but due to the nature of community awareness.

"I went to pick up a prescription for my child at the time the Maternity Clinic was on. By the time I got home I had received several calls from people asking if I was pregnant. Everyone see everything."

"It is the whole confidentiality thing in small/rural communities. Providers need to work on how to get around this more if people are going to use Sexual Health Services."

"There is fear of stigma – people knowing what you are going in for."

There was strength of feeling amongst participants that for reasons of confidentiality they would prefer to discuss issues of sexual health or family planning in routine GP appointments despite a possible lack of awareness by GP's of the full availability of services or support.

Suitability of service provision was a point raised by delegates predominantly in age bands of over 35/40 years. It was felt NHS Dumfries and Galloway focuses the suitability of sexual health services on providing advice and support to young people. Our delegates thought this was being sourced at the expense of a wider service suited to the older population.

Delegates also pointed out what they saw as an unbalanced level of responsibility placed on women for sexual health awareness.

"Sexual Health and responsibility needs to be more aggressively promoted to men and boys."

Location and suitability were strongly linked for a number of our rural delegates.

"There is not enough C4U and C2U clinics.

"LGBT support and advice is restricted to large towns and the internet. More should be provided in the region."

"More should be done so that a variety of services are available locally. Sometimes you have to travel miles for access to services. Why can't they be more mobile- come to us"

The Chlamydia testing programme piloted in 4 secondary schools in the Dumfries and Galloway region took place in the latter part of 2007 to raise awareness of and to treat cases of the STI. Results published in January 2008 confirmed there was a 90% uptake of the testing by S4 – S6 pupils with a 0 -12% infection ratio detected.

A large majority of delegates were unaware of the programme.

Discussion of the topic confirmed that there was strong support of rolling out this testing facility throughout schools in Scotland.

"I think this is a great thing. Trouble is things are too often "piloted" then never seen again. I think politicians just do this to let you think something is happening."

"You lose track of what is available and what is not. Here one minute, gone the next."

The high incidence of Chlamydia infection in Dumfries and Galloway was however acknowledged by the participants and there was also a wider awareness of the "P Test"⁷

Testing was seen as a positive means of tackling the high rate of Chlamydia in Dumfries and Galloway however there were comments put forward about promotional material. Some said the cartoons for the STIs do not support the message of the seriousness of these infections; the one illustrated is Chlamydia⁸



"It looks positively sexy unfortunately."

⁷ The Department of Sexual Health offers a FREE Postal Testing Kit for Chlamydia for those living in Dumfries and Galloway. Results will be available within 7-10 days via a method of your choice. Log on to www.c4urself.org.uk to request a kit

⁸ <http://www.c4urself.org.uk/youth/sti.php>

Domestic abuse is physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse that an adult may be experiencing, or has been subjected to. Domestic abuse can be carried out by partners, ex-partners or other family members.

http://www.dumfriesandgalloway.police.uk/oi/class_cat/leaflets/domestic_abuse/domestic_abuse_get_help.pdf

There were 48,801 incidents of domestic abuse recorded in 2006-07 in Scotland, and 87% of these cases counted were of a female victim and male perpetrator.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2007/11/27132355>

Violence against women must not be tolerated in any form. We know the effects of domestic abuse can be devastating, including on children and young people, and we are determined to tackle it, wherever and whenever it occurs.

[Kenny MacAskill Justice Minister Scottish Government](#)

"Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world"

[Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General](#)

MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Are you aware of any support services in Dumfries and Galloway for women who find themselves victims of male violence?

Do you think Government's efforts to highlight issues of male violence is raising awareness of the issues and changing attitudes of the general public of Scotland?

Some of our delegates were very aware of the support services in Dumfries and Galloway for victims of male violence. This was due to the need to call for their assistance at some point in their lives.

Two services known to the majority of delegates were - The Rape Crisis Centre and Women's Aid.

Those women who had used the services provided by the above agencies highly commended their dedication and commitment to supporting victims of Rape and Domestic Violence.

"We need more of these services available in more places in the region they are stretched to the limit."

The women confirmed that they thought statistics for the area would confirm the pressure these services were under with some suggesting that the numbers of domestic abuse cases reported in Dumfries and Galloway had increased.

A number of delegates, especially in the more rural areas of the region, said they would presume that services such as a Health Visitor, GP or the local police would be where they would seek support in any situation where abuse or violence was an issue.

However, it became apparent from discussions that this was a far from ideal line of support for a number of reasons, more especially in an emergency.

"There is a lack of police officers. They cover too wide a rural area; we have 3 for a 60 mile radius which covers 50 communities. One car accident will deprive communities of all police support."

The issue of confidentiality and fear of community response to both the victim and the perpetrator within small communities is a big

deterrent when it comes to reporting domestic abuse or other forms of violence against women and children.

"I think a lot of it goes unreported. Some women would be more inclined to rely on friends or family to support or help sort. In some of these communities you can be the victim but end up being the one everyone shuns."

"A lot of women would not risk being ostricised. It is also the availability of refuge and perhaps moving from family or where the children go to school where there friends are. There are a lot of women who are afraid of what gets said."

The women argued that this fear of isolation or social judgment can be psychological as well as physical fear and it is not confined to any one social or economic age or ethnic group.

"You are exposed to such a wearing down of physical and or mental abuse that you just feel no one will believe you or somehow you think there will be a huge stigma about accessing services."

There was less awareness of services specifically supporting children however there was praise for the **Pathfinder Project** from those who had come into contact with it.

"It can take too long to get help dealing with the issues children face in this situation and the longer it takes the more likely it is that the effects will stay with them for life. One of mine is still having a hard time adjusting."

The profile of the Family Protection Unit (FPU) within Dumfries & Galloway Constabulary was generally a positive one.

"The Family Protection Unit can help by getting someone to you straight away in event of abuse. They are specially trained and know how best to deal with situation."

This was clearly a concern about reporting violence, rape or abuse amongst women who may have complex multiple problems such as substance abuse issues.

"Even some service providers are prejudice towards their clients which make people uncomfortable about going for help."

A number of our delegates who were in same sex relationships expressed concern at the lack of services in the region which are specifically able to support their needs. They say there although violence in same sex relationships is acknowledged specialist support is not provided locally and they often have to rely on distance helpline support or intranet advice.

"There is a need in the area to focus more on the wider aspects of domestic abuse. It does not just happen to those in heterosexual relationships."

The provision of support for BME women in the region was also clearly a concern. Our participants said that a focus of resources on this group of women was urgently required due to the complexity of support, cultural sensitivities and specialist refuge provision which may be required.

"There are no services for women from ethnic minorities. There is a need to address this urgently in Dumfries and Galloway."

The women attending the Roadshow were generally enthusiastic about Government efforts to raise awareness of male violence against women through recent advertising campaigns. They said it has a positive impact overall in heightening the issue and they felt it was very important to keep it high on the public agenda.

There were two adverts which they felt had the most impact.

- The dolls house where the child recreated the domestic tensions of her own home.
- The woman shopping or trying on a dress and the voice of the man undermining her choices.

They felt that the adverts showing the psychological violence or the "hidden" aspects of control were especially important as it is often this which is more prevalent at the start of an abusive relationship.

The women also strongly indicated the importance of getting the message out that so much of abusive behaviour is not visible to others and this becomes part of the control.

"He never hit me but for years he constantly made comments on my friends, my looks, my abilities and controlled what I spent. It took me so long to understand this was abuse. By that time my self worth was zero."

Participants would like to see more awareness and education provided which specifically targets men and encourages them to be active in changing attitudes to behaviours that too many of their gender do not accept as abusive.

They would also like to see more structured Relationship Education provided in schools to both genders which defines abuse with greater clarity.

THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

"Are you aware that the Scottish Government Ministers are touring Scotland this summer to meet the people of Scotland (A National Conversation) – this is discussing possible changes to the current constitutional settlement for Scotland?"

Why we asked the Question

The SWC are committed to ensuring that women throughout Scotland are given every opportunity to engage in public debate and democratic activity.

This segment of the seminar programme was to raise awareness amongst women in Dumfries and Galloway that the "conversation" was taking place throughout Scotland. It was not the intention or purpose of the SWC to influence or record individual preferences nor enter into dialogue about Scotland's constitutional future.

Women's enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies.

Women have different vision and concepts of politics owing to their sex and their gender roles as mothers. Therefore, it is assumed that women in politics will bring a special caring focus and female values to politics.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/enablin&-environment2005/docs/EGM-WPD-EE-2005-EP.12%20%20draft%20F.pdf>

I therefore propose that we have a national conversation on our future to allow the people of Scotland to debate, reflect and then decide on the type of government which best equips us for the future.

First Minister - Alex Salmond

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/13103747/1>

SWC Key Recommendations on Issues of Poverty

- ❖ The SWC recommend the Scottish Government use their position to encourage transport providers and local authorities to extend subsidy and fare reduction to those who need it most and integrate transport throughout Scotland so that provision is a truly affordable public service, available to all and offers transport conditions which encourage the population to use it as a realistic alternative to car travel.

- ❖ The SWC support the Scottish Government Manifesto recognition of the acute shortage of affordable homes in many areas of Scotland and look to the Government to deliver on their commitment to provide a safe, secure and warm home at an affordable cost for all. We would also like to see a measureable improvement in provision of adequate water and sewage capacity in rural areas to allow the building of affordable housing in these areas to become a reality.

- ❖ The SWC commend the Scottish Government Manifesto promise to make Scotland safer. We believe that has to be delivered by an increase in 24 hour community policing to support confidence and security for citizens and ensure that all environments provide safe, harmonious living for every age group.

- ❖ The SWC believe that more assistance and support should be provided to young people who are taking up tenancy for the first time. Dedicated courses providing advice on budgeting, financial awareness and tenure responsibility would support young people who are often underprepared for their role as a tenant and the demands of household budgeting.

- ❖ The SWC do not believe there is sufficient resources dedicated to providing the majority of mature women returning to employment with training and up-skilling assistance. Without this support there is insufficient incentive for employers to offer these women employment opportunities which will provide incomes above the minimum wage. The SWC calls upon the Scottish Government to improve opportunity for this age group of women.

- ❖ The SWC believes the Child Registration criteria must be changed to recognise the unpaid childcare undertaken by family members.

- ❖ Women fulfil the majority of familial caring and the unpaid nature of this role is a significant factor in the continuing poverty status of too many women. The SWC would like to see more innovative approaches undertaken by both the Scottish and Westminster Government to recognise the contribution made by these carers.

SWC Recommendations on Issues of Education

- ❖ The SWC commend the work carried out in Dumfries and Galloway by services such as the BHC and the NW Resource Centre.

- ❖ The SWC are committed to the eradication of the gender pay gap which exist in many workplaces and supports the need for direct action from the Scottish Government to encourage the roll out of the Gender Responsibility Duty to private enterprise.

- ❖ Women who choose a vocational route into a career should be given exposure to the full range of career opportunities, apprenticeship and training availability. The SWC suggests the Scottish Government ensure education and career advice is free of partiality and gender bias.

SWC Recommendations on Issues of Sexual Health

- ❖ There must be more innovation to make rural access to services fit needs. The SWC recommend less rigidity in the pattern of opening times. Provide a more flexible timetable altering opening times e.g. on alternate weeks or months for people working or with transport issues.

- ❖ The SWC believe more community hubs that provide comprehensive multi service advice and support would provide a degree of individual privacy in small communities.

- ❖ The SWC recommend the NHS initiate a dedicated programme of education and support for adults in the region which is also sensitive to the needs of the BME community.

- ❖ The SWC recommend extending Sexual Health Services in rural areas by linking into other agencies such as pharmacies, employers, sports clubs and libraries to increase access and awareness.
- ❖ The SWC support the development of improved service provision on Sexual Health issues for LGBT in Dumfries and Galloway.
- ❖ The SWC strongly recommend a review education provision and the focus of advertising to ensure the messages of responsibility and the consequences of unsafe sexual activity are reaching the male population.

SWC Recommendations on Issues of Male Violence against Women and Children

- ❖ The SWC welcome the Scottish Government pledge of £44 million to tackle violence against women over the next three years. The SWC recommend that organisations that support the victims of abuse must be able to deliver a full and effective service in both urban and rural regions and this will only be achieved through adequate multi agency partnership working and secure long term funding.
- ❖ The women who attended the seminar said The Pathfinder Project being piloted in Dumfries and Galloway has been a positive development in the region. The SWC call upon the Scottish Government to implement the 2nd and 3rd stages of the pilot at the earliest in order to assess the full potential of this project as a long term support for victims of abuse throughout Scotland.
- ❖ The SWC suggest that the availability of support for abuse victims who have complex multiple problems in the region should be revised and specific focus and resources applied to support their needs. The SWC are concerned that women who have multiple issues could find it difficult to access services in the region due to societal perceptions.
- ❖ Recognition of the specific needs of BME women and LGBT women when confronting violence and abuse must be addressed. The SWC recommend that access to dedicated service support in the region is given priority by the Scottish Government and Local Authority, especially provision in emergency situations.

- ❖ If Scotland is to tackle the unacceptable levels of Domestic Violence, patterns of behaviour within abusive relationships must be recognised and understood at an early age. The SWC call for a robust programme of youth education to eliminate the continuation of “learned behaviours” within Scottish society.

- ❖ The SWC welcome the “Awareness Campaign” on Domestic Violence which is being undertaken throughout the media and would urge the Scottish Government to continue its support of this initiative. However, SWC believe that to have a profound influence on societal attitudes and a direct impact in changing behaviours, men must be encouraged to actively support the ending of male violence against women and children. The SWC call on the Scottish Government to recognise that passive disapproval by too many of Scotland’s men will not end this blight on our society.

If you require further information or additional copies of this report please contact Isabelle Lannon, SWC Policy Officer on 0141 248 8186 or email isabelle.lannon@scottishwomensconvention.org



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