

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

SPRING
2020
DIGITAL
ROADSHOWS

REPORT

Glasgow

Tuesday 26th May





Introduction

The current circumstances during the Coronavirus pandemic have turned our lives upside down. The SWC recognises that each woman will have a unique experience of this time, due to where you live, your job, your health, the relationships you have, your family circumstances, and so much more. It is important that we continue to engage with women across Scotland - listening to your issues and concerns, and working with decision makers to ensure you are heard.

With all of this in mind, the SWC has undertaken a series of digital roadshows across Scotland – engaging with women and trying to understand the unique issues faced by different communities. Women, who have been unable to attend these meetings have contributed to the discussions via email and online survey. Their views are also reflected in this report.



Key Points

- Long term funding for services which support women.
- Support for vulnerable BAME women who have no access to benefits.
- Flexible working needs to be discussed with individuals.
- VAWG organisations will need increased resources following the easing of lockdown.
- Recognition for key workers where women are prominent and have been undervalued in the past.
- Support for small businesses, many managed by women, who strengthen Scotland's economy.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Women prefer face to face consultations or assistance rather than using email, phone or video facilities. Many do not have the 'headspace' to deal with issues, while others do not have private areas where they can discuss their problems.

All this makes it very difficult for services to engage with clients. Workers have found that, in some cases, as much as a third of their caseload has disappeared. They report that after lockdown there will be a dramatic increase in mental health issues and a need for services.

The mental health of clients has not fully been understood. They are currently being passed from one organisation to another as resources are either closed or there is a long wait time for support. What happens to these women meantime? Who do they turn to?

There are issues of domestic abuse and domestic violence but they are hidden. It is difficult to talk to women who do not come forward. They are frightened that privacy will be broken and that their partner will be told. There is no solution and no support for these women.

Funding

There is no long term funding available, so organisations cannot plan support, services or activities.

"The last event my project attended was the SWC's International Women's Day event in March. How can we go from such a great day of celebration and meeting so many women to this? We are going back the way with no planning for the future."

BAME Women

There are a number of projects throughout Glasgow which support BAME women. These facilities have had to close and workers have had to look at new ways of engaging with their community. Alternative activities include online exercise classes instead of swimming. Women, however, often do not have the time or space to join in. There are often a number of adults and children living in a confined space which results in many not having time to themselves.

Many asylum seeking women have been particularly hit by the crisis. Those who have no status cannot access benefits. They are having difficulties with finances, with many living in poverty. There are also huge mental health issues. Those with indefinite leave to remain are also vulnerable. Women attending the online classes support one another and provide reassurance to those in difficulty.

"Wealthier women in the community support those who are experiencing problems – it can be with finance, food or just someone to talk to."

Women in Business

Many small to medium businesses are run by women. They are currently only receiving 3 months financial support from the UK Government. There has been no indication that it will be extended. Many of these are service businesses and will be the last to be brought back from lockdown. Some of these women live in rural Scotland while others are single parents. They have built their business up over a number of years and supported the economy.

Employment

Business is working in a different way but does not benefit everyone. Women are having to balance work, their employers' expectations and their home lives. Some workplaces offer flexible working, but not all. Women are suffering from mental ill health because of this.

“My employer has made sure that safety measures are in place for all key workers. We are currently working our normal shifts. If there is a childcare issue, it is dealt with on a case by case basis. As a result, there appears to be no childcare issues.”

“Women should not be kept prisoner in their own house.”

As things move online, so is remote working. Women, however, cannot afford laptops, remote access or home broadband costs. Employers, trade unions and employees need to negotiate the best deal for workers – both financially and working practices. One size does not fit all. Women need flexibility, contact with others and a supportive environment to be part of an evolving business. Women who are working from home are currently socially isolated and this is not good for their mental health or their ongoing wellbeing.

“Women are having to use utilities which they might not have the money to afford.”

There is also a 'roll-on effect' of working from home. There is no travelling to / from work which involves using public transport. There is no buying the odd coffee or lunch. These activities involve people working to provide a service, many of them women. These jobs and amenities will be lost if home working becomes the norm.

Children and mental health issues

“We are telling our children not to touch things, not to hug their relatives etc. They are doing school work at home, all with different levels of parental support. What is the impact going to be in 20 years time?”

Parents are struggling to cope with children diagnosed with autism. Support services are stretched, there is no respite care and home schooling is normal. Many children are missing human contact.

Isolation

It is hard for women to stay at home – it is even harder for those who are shielding. Even with people in the house, women need social contact and interaction with others.

Some women do not feel safe in their communities during this time. There are reports of aggressive begging where they are approached by people wearing masks. This can be very intimidating. Being encouraged to exercise outside is leading many to feel harassed if approached by strangers. Local police are visible, *“but not there when you need them.”*

Moving forwards

Workers need to be encouraged to join a trade union. There are predicted to be huge job losses because of combined impacts of the pandemic and Brexit. There could also be changes to statutory employment rights. These could negatively impact women due to the current precarious nature of their employment.

“Back to school has been managed better in Scotland as the Government is working with unions.”

Priorities

- How to manage social distancing so that everyone feels safe.
- Investment in social housing for the homeless.
- Long term funding for women’s support services including VAWG and mental health.
- Support for the elderly and vulnerable people.
- Universal Basic Income, which women will be entitled to, rather than Universal Credit.
- Remember who is valued – supermarket workers, social care, etc. Services and amenities which, in the past, have been ‘women’s work’ but which have been invaluable during this crisis.

Thank You

Thank you to the women who joined our online discussions, as well as those who contributed to the discussion via our online survey and by email. The information contained in this report will be forwarded to local and national decision makers for their consideration.

Website - www.scottishwomensconvention.org

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