

THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION

SPRING  
2020  
DIGITAL  
ROADSHOWS

REPORT

Highlands  
& Western Isles

Thursday 28th 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

- The risk of health and social care resources becoming overwhelmed if infection rates increase.
- Isolation issues for older women, particularly if they have no online access.
- Concerns over women's mental health during the pandemic.
- Risks over unpaid carers having to self-isolate due to COVID-19.
- Challenges for women in accessing information about the pandemic when it is changing so quickly.
- A perception that island communities are less at risk of COVID-19 infections.

## Services

A coordinated approach between services has resulted in clients seeing a continuity of support. Whilst much has moved online, there are still workers in communities who are helping people. This includes pulling together Covid Response teams and putting workers in place so that services are not reliant on just one person.

- It is much easier to signpost someone to a specific service if they are all working together.
- Some organisations had to cut back on certain services which could not be moved online, particularly therapy.
- Concerns for those who need services now which were not required in the past. It is difficult for women to access help when it is only available online.
- Essential services which only occur face to face, such as respite services, have had to stop. These facilities are really needed and add extra pressure on carers.

*“There will be some service users at a loss who relied on areas such as counselling and being face to face. We are doing our best but there will be patches that will get missed.”*

## Digitalisation

Online forums are a great way to ensure practical advice and information is reaching as many people as possible. Some groups, however, do not have online accessibility. For those without this, local delivery of public health information leaflets has been extremely useful to keep up to date.

- Some people who need support are not computer literate.
- Women face barriers in accessing help and support where they are not allowed online. This is particularly the case for women experiencing domestic violence where a partner controls their movements.
- Island communities can have huge problems with isolation. Older people who do not use social media or online technology are very vulnerable.
- Social media has put *“huge pressure”* on women where they are seeing images of *“an endless array of wonderfully organised parents and diligent kids”*.
- Women do not have the time to constantly check online for updated guidance.

*“How do we know a woman is not in a situation where she can’t get online due to the person she is living with not wanting her to communicate with anyone?”*

## Mental Health

Those who had access to mental health services have been given personalised coping strategies. Many organisations are working overtime to provide the support which is required.

A main concern, however, is how a woman's mental health will be impacted when lockdown restrictions are eased. When there is a crisis, women cope. After the crisis there will be a huge need for support services. In rural locations, this will be a particular issue as appropriate help may be some distance away.

- Increased issues for women who have to stay at home, particularly those with previous mental health conditions.
- Women who have not accessed mental health services in the past find it difficult to look for support online.
- Capacity of services will be further strained when lockdown restrictions are eased.
- Key workers will have unidentified mental health issues due to the current situation.

### **Community**

Many communities, who already had a number of volunteers, saw a "*phenomenal*" response when additional support was needed.

- Due to a lack of home deliveries, many residents switched to using local shops rather than big supermarkets. These businesses had the capacity to supply and deliver to the community.
- Communities are coordinating activities to ensure that vulnerable people can access food packages.
- The community has good communication with local and key decision makers. This means that issues can be dealt with quickly.

### **Social Isolation**

Many local papers and community councils have published guidance that has been delivered to isolated households.

- There is an idea that if someone is isolated, they will automatically be on the shielding list. Women are missing out on support as this is not always the case.
- There is a high proportion of elderly women within the population. Local services are trying to care for them.
- Older women who are self-isolating are struggling with mental health issues.

### **COVID-19 Response**

There is a perception that there are fewer cases of COVID19 in the area compared to other areas of Scotland.

- A large proportion of unpaid carers are elderly. This is an extremely risky situation where they may have to isolate and the cared for person is left facing difficulties.
- A shortage of healthcare workers has meant many working long shifts. This will be difficult to manage if they go into self-isolation. There will not be staff available to cover the demands of the service.
- There are worries over second homeowners coming to stay and bringing infection.

*“If there was widespread self-isolation, that could cause huge strains. Much of these risks could continue post-Covid. Some of these problems are ones we have been grappling with for decades – depopulation, reliance on tourism for the economy.”*

## **Economy and Business**

Many of the businesses within the area, particularly those heavily reliant on tourism, are expecting to be closed over the summer months. Bigger businesses will face difficulties when social distancing takes place. This has the potential for local smaller businesses to provide jobs and bring income to the community.

- Support for local businesses is increasing 10-fold during this time. It is hoped this remains after restrictions ease.
- Residents need to discuss what kind of tourism they would like to see post lockdown.
- Concerns for women who have lost their jobs and who may be unable to find work.
- The benefit of residents holidaying on other parts of island communities where they live as a boost for the local economy rather than travelling abroad.
- Communities need to support local enterprise and businesses.
- Actions to address climate change and a green economy needs to be a priority in rebuilding communities and encouraging employment for women.

*“I’d like to see society and communities being rebooted. We need the chance to say what we want the tourism industry to look like.”*

*“We need to have that kind of debate about what is it we’re looking for rather than racing to start up the same ways of doing things in the economy that only thinks about money.”*

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## **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](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)  
 Facebook, Instagram, Twitter - @SWCwomen