

Fawcett Society – Written Evidence (LBC0182)

1. Introduction

- 1.1.** The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life. Our vision is of a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential: www.fawcettsociety.org.uk. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry on the long-term implications of the pandemic for our economy and our society.
- 1.2.** Since May 2020, in conjunction with Queen Mary University London, LSE, and the Women's Budget Group, Fawcett has commissioned survey data about the impacts of the pandemic, covering a nationally representative sample, with booster samples for people of colour, people living in poverty, and people with children aged under 11.
- 1.3.** In addition, the coalition of women's sector organisations described in section 3 aims to draw together an additional set of joint asks around the exit from lockdown, and then on the longer-term impact. This is likely to address:
- The longer-term pressure on VAWG organisations;
 - Redundancies after the furlough scheme, which may hit some groups of women e.g. pregnant women and new mothers, disproportionately
 - The value placed on women's work, in particular the precarious work done by care workers.
- 1.4.** We have also been inviting women to share their experiences of how coronavirus is impacting them through weekly diaries. A summary of these qualitative data can be found here: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/the-impacts-of-coronavirus-on-women>

2. Survey data findings

- 2.1. Impact on disabled women:** The COVID-19 pandemic is a unique combination of both an unprecedented health crisis and an economic crisis. Evidence from the global financial crash of 2008 showed us that disabled people are more likely to bear the brunt of economic crises.¹ Disabled people are less likely to have a financial

¹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2020), *The equality impacts of the current recession. Research report 47*

cushion to protect themselves and their families from impacts of job or earnings loss, and rely more on public services. Disabled women face specific issues during this time.² Women are more likely to be disabled than men, and disabled women were at heightened risk of poverty, insecure and low paid employment, and of domestic violence before the crisis compared to non-disabled people and men.³ Analysis of a survey of 3,280 individuals, including 678 disabled people (377 women and 301 men), conducted in April 2020 found that;

- **Disabled people were most likely to say that they will come out of the coronavirus outbreak in more debt.** 34.2% of disabled women said their household had already run out of money, compared to 24.4% of non-disabled women.
- **Women reported doing more of the housework and work to look after their children, and this was no different for disabled women.** 68.0% of disabled women reported doing the majority of the housework, and 72.8% reported doing the majority of work to look after their children.
- **A somewhat higher proportion of disabled people working from home, but particularly disabled women, reported spending more time working now** compared to before the crisis. These disabled women were also more likely to report that they are finding it more difficult to focus at work, and that they are finding work more stressful.
- **Over a third (37.7%) of disabled mothers said they were struggling to feed their children,** compared to 16.7% of non-disabled mothers.
- **39.7% of disabled mothers reported that their children did not have access to the equipment they needed to study at home,** compared to 24.2% of non-disabled mothers.
- **56.4% of disabled women reported finding social isolation difficult to cope with,** compared to 41.6% of non-disabled women.

https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-47_the-equality-impacts-of-the-current-recession_0.pdf

² Sisters of Frida (2020), *The Impact of COVID 19 on Disabled Women from Sisters of Frida*. <http://www.sisofrida.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-Disabled-women-from-Sisters-of-Frida.pdf>

³ Women's Budget Group (2018), *Disabled Women and Austerity* <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Disabled-women-October-2018-w-cover-2.pdf>

- Anxiety was highest among women overall, but particularly disabled women. **Over half of disabled women (53.1%) reported high anxiety.**

2.2. Impact on BAME women: The full extent of the negative economic impacts of these cumulative risks faced by BAME women are yet to be seen, but evidence from this April 2020 [survey](#) offer initial evidence of disproportionate impacts on BAME people and women overall, and particularly BAME women.

- **BAME women are slightly more worried about being in more debt as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.** 42.9% BAME women said they believed they would be in more debt, compared to 37.1% of white women, and 34.2% of white men.
- **Work-related anxiety for those working outside the home was highest among BAME people,** with 65.1% BAME women and 73.8% of BAME men reporting anxiety as a result of having to go out to work during the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Of those who were now working from home, a higher proportion of BAME people (41.0% of women and 39.8% of men) reported working more** than they did before the pandemic, compared to white people (29.2% of women and 28.5% of men).
- **Almost half (45.8%) of parents said they were struggling to balance paid work and caring for their children,** 47.1% that they were struggling with all the competing demands, and 42.7% that they were struggling to go to the shops or do other tasks because their children were home. For all of these questions, BAME women were most likely to report that they were struggling, and white men least likely.
- **Over twice as many BAME women and men reported that they had recently lost support from the government** (42.5% and 48.3%) than white women and men (12.7% and 20.6%).
- **BAME respondents were also more likely to say they had lost support from other people** (48.3% BAME women compared to 34.0% white women) and were less likely to say that there were people outside of their household who they could rely on for help (47.4% compared to 57.2%).
- **Life satisfaction and happiness were lowest for BAME women, and anxiety was highest for all women**

compared to men. Average life satisfaction before the coronavirus pandemic (July to September 2019) was 7.7, while average happiness was 7.5, and average anxiety was 2.9. Scores for BAME women in the current survey were 5.1, 5.3 and 5.4 respectively.

2.3. Parenting and Covid-19: This survey comprises analysis of data of 1,424 parents of under-11s conducted in mid-April, and qualitative data from weekly diaries shared with Fawcett by 70 to 100 women each week. Existing research shows that the overall unpaid childcare load on parents has significantly increased during the coronavirus crisis - with existing disparities between mothers and fathers increasing. From the data we have, mothers appear to be more likely to have lost work than fathers, and are more likely to have their time interrupted. Our research adds to this, finding that:

- **Mothers in couples were over one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to say that they were doing the majority of childcare during school and nurseries closures.** This disparity rises between parents who worked outside the home, suggesting that 'key worker' status does not alleviate women's childcare workload.
- **These inequalities also hold for other domestic work,** with three quarters of mothers in couple parents and nine out of 10 single mothers, compared with half of couple fathers, agreeing that they were doing the majority of tasks.
- **A third of low-income mothers said they did not have someone outside the household they could rely on for support during the outbreak,** compared with a quarter of women overall and 18% of men.
- **Anxiety levels are greater among mothers in our sample,** with 44% compared with 33% of fathers reporting high anxiety. 60% of single parents were worried for their child's mental health during lockdown.

2.4. Resolution Foundation analysis of a range of survey data, and based on job occupations and sectors, suggests that women are more likely to work in sectors which have been shut down with 23% of women and 16% of men in the workforce in this group.⁴ IFS analysis finds a similar effect.⁵ Work conducted by economists

⁴ <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf>

⁵ Robert Joyce and Xiaowei Xu (2020) 'Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?' IFS Briefing note
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

at Cambridge, drawing on waves of surveys conducted during the crisis, suggests a significant gender differential in the impact of the pandemic lockdown measures, with women 5% points more likely to lose their jobs than men.⁶

- 2.5.** Among parents, women are at greatest risk of job loss, so the impact the lockdown period has on gendered caring duties, and their effect on employment inequality, is a major concern. In terms of particular groups of parents, in the US data suggests that single parents are half as likely to be able to work remotely ('telework') as couple parents.⁷ The OECD has raised the prospect that current shifts toward online schooling could herald long-lasting changes in the way children are educated.⁸ The trends set in place now could have ramifications beyond the pandemic and lockdown period.⁹ Depending on how care work is distributed, not all of these trends will be negative for all people – if an increased openness to flexible remote work is an outcome, this may benefit some parents.¹⁰

3. Joint asks

- 3.1.** Since the Covid-19 outbreak the Fawcett Society has worked to draw together a set of shared asks with input from over 65 women's and charitable organisations, which we believe would help mitigate the devastating economic, social and wellbeing impacts of the virus and the lockdown on women. Full details of those asks can be found at <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/coronavirus-urgent-call-for-uk-government-to-support-women-and-girls>.
- 3.2.** Existing inequalities have been worsened by the Coronavirus outbreak. Women already do the majority of unpaid care,¹¹ and many are giving up work or reducing hours during the pandemic. Women are out on the frontline - 2.5 million of the 3.2 million workers employed in the highest risk roles are women.¹² Women

⁶ Adams-Prassl et. al. (2020) 'Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: evidence from real time surveys', Cambridge-INET Working Paper Series N: 2020/18 <https://www.inet.econ.cam.ac.uk/working-paperpdfs/wp2018.pdf>

⁷ Titan Alon et. al (2020) 'The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on gender equality', CEPR Covid Economics: Vetted and Real-Time Papers <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-coronavirus-pandemic-gender-equality>

⁸ 15 OECD (2020) 'A helping hand: Education responding to the coronavirus pandemic' <https://oecdeditoday.com/education-responding-coronavirus-pandemic/>

⁹ Alon, Ibid

¹⁰ 7 Claudia Goldin (2010), "How to achieve gender equality", The Milken Institute Review

¹¹ Working Families (2020), *Weathering the Storm: The COVID-19 pandemic and working parents* <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Weathering-the-Storm-the-COVID-19-pandemic-working-parents.pdf>

¹² Autonomy (2020) 'Low-paid workers, women and migrants will bear the brunt of this crisis', <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/lowpaidworkersbearbrunt/>

are the majority of adults in poverty and in insecure employment.¹³ Many women and children are now trapped in their homes, self-isolating with an abusive partner. However, women seem to be largely absent from the highest levels of decision-making in the UK.

- 3.3.** Gendered impacts intersect with other aspects of identity. Those already disadvantaged in society and by social security are being hardest hit - including women and families in poverty, disabled women, black, Asian and ethnic minority women, women in unsuitable or insecure housing and migrant women, particularly those with no recourse to public funds. Our initial recommendations for action by Government that takes these impacts into account can be found [here](#). In June 2020, Fawcett led a second [urgent call](#) to action on the gendered impacts of exiting lockdown. This urgent call highlights immediate and long-term concerns, some of which have been outlined below.
- 3.4. Childcare:** Women are at greatest risk of losing their jobs and income because they still hold the majority of childcare responsibilities. The situation will be particularly difficult for single mums, 90% of whom are women.¹⁴ We know that women, in normal times, spend far more time doing childcare work than men.¹⁵ The childcare sector outside of schools was already underfunded, and survey data during lockdown suggested that up to 10,000 providers might go out of business, with the loss of 150,000 places.¹⁶ We risk creating a two-tier workforce, with parents - and mothers in particular - facing being left behind as they are less or inconsistently available to work. Again, this is likely to be more of a risk for single parents. Formal flexible work requests will not be sufficient to cover this insecurity and loss of childcare support. This combination of factors risks women being pushed out of work and back into the home.
- 3.5. Social care:** The social care sector has suffered the worst fatal and financial consequences of the pandemic. There have been thousands of excess deaths and many care homes are now struggling with decreased demand and the increased cost of PPE. Women are the majority of those in need of care due to longer life

¹³ Women's Budget Group (2018), *The Female Face of Poverty*

¹⁴ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/single-parents-facts-figures/>

¹⁵ Dunatchik, Mayer, and Speight (2019) *Parents and time pressure: evidence from time use diaries*, NatCen <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1827637/Time-pressure-report.pdf>

¹⁶ Women's Budget Group (2020) 'Easing Lockdown: Potential problems for women' <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Easing-lockdown-.pdf>

expectancies, and the majority (83%) of these working in the care sector. BAME and migrant women are also overrepresented.¹⁷ As with childcare, shortages in social care will also mean that women are more likely to leave the paid workplace to undertake more unpaid care work for disabled or older people.

3.6. Redundancies and safeguarding women's incomes: Analysis by The Women's Budget Group shows that as we approach the end of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in October, women are most at risk of redundancies. Women are already four percentage points more likely to have been made redundant instead of furloughed. Looking ahead, many companies that are large employers of women may not recover from the crisis, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, retail, childcare and tourism. Women are the majority of low-earners (69%), those on zero-hours (54%) or part-time (74%) contracts, making them first in line to lose out on hours or contracts. This is of particular concern for BAME workers who are a third more likely than white workers to be in precarious work. There are also concerns that women who have requested furlough or taken unpaid leave because of childcare responsibilities may be more likely to be selected for redundancy.¹⁸ Data on pregnancy discrimination is sorely lacking but evidence suggests one in four pregnant women have faced workplace discrimination and this is bound to increase as the furlough scheme ends.¹⁹

3.7. Public health and protecting women from a second wave: Employers must be supported to carry out risk assessments that include ethnicity, and to take action to protect BAME employees. Six in ten health workers who have died are BAME,²⁰ and work-related anxiety for those working outside the home is highest amongst BAME people.²¹ The Government should proactively communicate to employers that if the risks facing a pregnant worker cannot be removed, and there is no alternative work available, pregnant women have the right to be suspended from work on full pay. The Health and Safety Executive should enforce the law through spot-checks and should encourage pregnant

¹⁷ Skills for care (2019) State of the adult social care sector
<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/State-of-Report-2019.pdf>

¹⁸ Women's Budget Group 2020, Easing Lockdown: Potential Problems for Women
<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Easing-lockdown-.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/PregMatCovid-19.pdf>

²⁰ The Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre (ICNARC) report published on 22 May found that Black and Asian patients were over-represented among those critically ill with confirmed COVID-19 receiving advanced respiratory support.

²¹ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/coronavirus-impact-on-bame-women>

women to raise concerns with them (anonymously if necessary). Employers who break the law should be subject to the full range of penalties, including fines.²²

- 3.8.** Social care workers are an at-risk group as the likelihood of a second wave increases. Eight out of ten social care workers are women, with many BAME and migrant women working in the sector.²³ The Government must commit to regular testing for care workers and care home residents as well as sufficient PPE. The social care sector is chronically underfunded at a time when we need it most and work done by women is still being undervalued. On average, care workers in the independent sector earn just £8.52 per hour, are often on zero hours contracts, and have no sick pay.
- 3.9.** The Government's new track and trace systems require people to self-isolate for up to 14 days if they are at risk of having contracted coronavirus. Women comprise 70% of individuals working in jobs which are not eligible for Statutory Sick Pay, with 1.2m women in this situation.²⁴ Government should abolish the lower earnings limit for Statutory Sick Pay, and lift it to the rate of the living wage, so all women who need to can afford to self-isolate.
- 3.10.** We fully support the calls of organisations working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants for the UK Government to grant a period of leave to remain during the outbreak, with recourse to public funds and access to the labour market, to all those with insecure immigration status.²⁵
- 3.11.** Women who are seriously destitute or struggling as a result of not being able to access the government support and/or the right to work, are at an even greater risk of illness, domestic abuse and exploitation. Women who are destitute - who receive no state support at all - rely entirely on sofa surfing with community members or strangers, food parcels and on small hardship grants.²⁶

²² Pregnant and precarious: new and expectant mums' experiences of work during Covid-19, p.3. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/PregMatCovid-19.pdf>

²³ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/News/vast-majority-of-the-public-think-care-workers-are-underpaid>

²⁴ ONS (2020) 'Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) – Estimates of employee jobs earning below £118 per week, UK, 2019' <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/adhocs/11396annualsurveyofhoursandearningsasheestimatesofemployeejobsearningbelow118perweekuk2019>

²⁵ <https://www.jrsuk.net/news/jrs-leads-call-for-leave-to-remain-for-all-to-protect-public-health/>

3.12. Migrant women who have leave to remain with a 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition are barred from accessing mainstream welfare benefits, including Universal Credit. With the easing of lockdown measures, many NRPF women, including those with underlying health conditions, are feeling compelled to work, and therefore risk exposing themselves to coronavirus, as they are unable to fall back on state support. The Government should end NRPF, including restrictions on access to support for women without immigration status.

3.13. The disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and ethnic minority women: Initial research suggests that BAME women are being hardest hit by the economic impact of the virus. 43% of BAME women said they believed they would be in more debt after the crisis, compared to 37% of white women. BAME mothers in particular reported that they were most likely to be struggling to feed their children, 24%, compared to 19% of white mothers.²⁷ The Government should immediately end the two-child limit and scrap the benefits cap which disproportionately limits Black, Asian and ethnic minority families' financial support and make advance payments of Universal Credit grants instead of loans. As we approach the end of the furlough scheme, large employers should be required to report the numbers of people they make redundant with breakdowns by protected characteristics which includes ethnicity and gender.

3.14. Making women safe from violence and abuse: Services supporting BAME women and those supporting D/deaf and disabled survivors are particularly concerned about the safety of their clients and staff. VAWG sector organisations are concerned about the welfare of staff and survivors, particularly BAME women, D/deaf and disabled women and those with long-term health issues, and the pressures they may face in returning to face-to-face service delivery. These pressures follow a backdrop of serious, continuous under-funding of the VAWG sector.²⁸ Emergency funding of £37m pledged by the Government is welcome – but it is only predicted to last until October.²⁹ The absence of the planned

²⁶ <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/not-safe/>

²⁷ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/coronavirus-impact-on-bame-women>

²⁸ Women's Aid data from before the crisis shows that 64% of refuge referrals were declined last year, and bed spaces are 30% below the level recommended by the Council of Europe. While a quarter of Imkaan's membership of specialist BME services are concerned they will not survive for six months.

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/emergency-funding-to-support-most-vulnerable-in-society-during-pandemic>

Comprehensive Spending Review to date means that many VAWG budgets, at national and local level, remain highly insecure.

- 3.15.** Insecure immigration status also makes women who have fled domestic and sexual violence even more vulnerable to experiencing abuse again during the pandemic. Women who are destitute are facing a daily struggle for survival even in ordinary times. No women should be denied help and the Domestic Abuse Bill should be amended to provide equal protection and access to support for migrant women regardless of migrant status or NRPF status
- 3.16. Women being left behind - disabled and older women, and self-isolating and shielding households:** The lifting of lockdown does not affect everyone equally. This message has sometimes been missed in the narrative but the very different situation faced by disabled women, those who are self-isolating or shielding, and their households must not be forgotten. Older people are also more likely to be shielding due to increased risk. Polling shows that disabled women have been struggling most with isolation - with 56% saying they have found it difficult to cope. While Government guidance for these groups is changing - with more contact allowed - for many vulnerable household's concerns and fears will remain and must be accounted for.³⁰
- 3.17. Women in prison and those affected by the criminal justice system:** The Government's 2018 strategy on this issue acknowledges that many women in prison are there as a result of trauma, abuse, poor mental health, substance misuse and poverty. Racial discrimination means that women from BAME communities are disproportionately affected by imprisonment. The Government committed to a programme of early release for pregnant prisoners, those nearing the end of their sentences and others for compassionate and health reasons, but progress has been painfully slow. As of 8 June, only 16 women on Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) and six pregnant women have been released from prison. There needs to be sufficient financial support and access to housing for all those released and sustainable funding for the charities supporting them, including community-based women's centres.
- 3.18. #MakeWomenVisible. Representation in crisis decision making and engagement with the equalities sector:** During

³⁰ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/disabled-women-and-covid-19>

lockdown, there were instances where it was clear that women were not involved in decision-making. This should not happen again. At the Liaison Committee on the 27th May the Prime Minister agreed that women should have been more visible in the Government's crisis decision making. In response to questioning from the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee, Caroline Nokes MP, the PM said "It's certainly true that I would have liked to have had more female representation at the press conferences so far" and acknowledged that women were being hardest hit economically by the crisis. Senior women politicians must be at the crisis decision making table to help ensure that, as lockdown is eased, years of progress on women's rights is not overturned.

28 August 2020