

**WOMEN'S
EQUALITY NOW:
THE POSITION
IN WALES
TODAY ON
UNPAID CARE**





FOREWORD

WEN Wales was founded in 2010 to represent and support the numerous organisations and individuals working to progress the rights of women and promote equality across Wales. Since then we have gained presence on both on a local and global platform, providing a united voice on the issues important to women and girls in Wales.

We both, as all women do, have faced adversity. We've found our personal voice and built the confidence to lead the way for the future of all women in Wales in our role as Co-Chairs. Our vision for women and girls in Wales is to have a voice on issues important to them. To make this a reality, we commissioned a series of research briefings highlighting issues where women feel they are most affected by inequality.

This research provides an opportunity for a direct dialogue between women and decision makers in Wales. It effectively highlights matters of inequality which still exist in Wales today, to bring them to the forefront of debate and enable change.

We envisage the series to continue as a staple part of WEN's work to continually address the most pertinent needs of women in Wales.

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INTRODUCTION

Unpaid care is one of the biggest issues facing women, and is a topic raised time and again by women from all backgrounds. No matter the level of education, culture or place we live, almost all women will be carers at some point in their lives. Our society is built upon an assumption that women will automatically assume this burden rather than men, and our members have told us how unpaid care has impacted on their ability to earn, their health and risks driving them into poverty.

Unpaid care crosses so many issues that matter to women; it's the reason we make up the majority of part-time workers (employment which is low paid and has little progression), spend extended times outside of the workforce and have difficulty saving for a pension. Women are bearing the brunt of huge inequalities whilst bolstering the economy; WEN Wales is eager to recognise the value women provide to Wales.

Our briefing on diversity highlights the likelihood that the population of older women in Wales could increase by 150% in the next 20 years.

The potential impact on care is huge: the cost of providing care will burden public spending, add pressure on the "sandwich generation" of women caring for grandchildren and older relatives, and increase demand on the health service.

Almost all women provide unpaid care at some point in their lives. The vast majority of women have at least one child for whom they are likely to take primary responsibility, and women have a 50:50 chance of having spent a substantial period caring for an adult by the time they are 59 years old.

Unpaid caring has a more profound impact on women's lives than any other factor.¹ It affects women's learning, employment, income and health, yet remarkably little is known about the impact of unpaid care on women's lives in Wales.

Either data and research is gender-blind, for example not distinguishing between male and female carers, or it is UK-wide. There is a particular lack of data on mothers, for both Wales and UK.

Unpaid caring is not valued or supported by society. This overview shows that women in Wales carry a heavy burden of care, sometimes willingly, sometimes not, and that they pay a high price for their caring role.



WHO CARES?

Care of children

About eight out of ten UK women born since the mid 1950s give birth during their lives. ² In 2011, nearly half (45%) of all women in Wales aged 16-64 lived in a household with a dependent child. ³ Just over a quarter of them (27%) lived in non-couple households.

Women remain primarily responsible for caring for children. 94% of UK child benefit claims are paid to women, ⁴ while **nearly half of mothers in Wales say they are solely or mainly responsible for child care (compared with just 4% of fathers).** ⁵ In the UK, women do 70% of household chores, ⁶ with the amount of housework done by women increasing when they have dependent children. ⁷

Women's caring roles continue when they become grandmothers. Two-thirds of grandmothers in Britain say they look after their grandchildren, with 19% providing at least 10 hours a week of care. ⁸ About 5,000 grandparents in Wales (mainly grandmothers) have their grandchild living with them (called kinship care). ⁹

Unpaid care of adults

A higher proportion of women in Wales provide unpaid care to an adult than in other parts of the UK. In 2011, 13.8% of women in Wales provided unpaid care to an adult relative, friend, neighbour or other person because of long-term physical or mental ill health or disability, or problems related to old age. ¹⁰ The proportion of women who provide unpaid care increases steadily with age, peaking in women's 50s and early 60s when more than a quarter of women (26%) provide unpaid care.

Unpaid care can be demanding – about **1 in 20 women in Wales provide 50 hours or more unpaid care a week** – more than a quarter of all carers – with women aged 50-64 being most likely to provide this amount of unpaid care. In the UK, women have a 50:50 chance of providing unpaid care by the age of 59 ¹¹ – with its greater prevalence of unpaid care the risk in Wales is even greater.





CARING & HEALTH

Women's caring roles can have a negative effect on their health. There is surprisingly little evidence on the health of mothers, other than on pregnancy-related conditions. During pregnancy and the first year after birth, 10-20% of women in the UK will develop a mental illness,¹² most commonly depression and anxiety, with the figures being much higher for young mothers.¹³

Providing unpaid care for adults has a significant effect on women's health.

In Wales, women who provide 50 or more hours a week of care are more than twice as likely as those who provide no unpaid care to say that their health was 'not good' (45.7% compared with 22.0%).¹⁴ The effect of unpaid caring is particularly great on Wales' 15,400 young female carers (aged under 24), who are more than four times more likely than young women who do not provide unpaid care to say that their health is poor.¹⁵ Carers in Wales of both sexes also report difficulty sleeping and high levels of anxiety and stress,¹⁶ and are more likely to smoke than non-carers.¹⁷

CARE & LEARNING

Having care responsibilities restricts women's participation in learning and can create real difficulties for women learners.

At school, UK-wide evidence shows that girls who become pregnant have lower attainment than other girls, reflecting both specific issues in respect of pregnancy and being a young mother as well as existing negative experiences of and attitudes to learning.¹⁸ Student mothers in UK further and higher education report financial difficulties and problems finding suitable childcare, as well as issues with changing identities, and nearly two-thirds consider leaving their course.¹⁹

Young carers, including girls, are more likely than their peers to experience difficulties at school associated with their caring role.²⁰ Young women carers, especially those providing 50 hours or more of unpaid care, are less likely to participate in further and higher education than non-carers.²¹ Two-thirds of student carers of both genders find balancing their commitments difficult, feel their caring role has a negative impact on their learning, and more than half consider leaving their course.²² **Amongst adults, unpaid carers are less likely to have participated in any learning than non-carers.**²³





CARE & PAID WORK

Caring for children has a huge impact on women's working lives. Despite dramatic increases in the employment rate of mothers, a substantial proportion leave paid work around the time that they have a child. In the UK, the proportion of mothers aged 16-24 in paid employment is about half that of fathers of the same age. The proportion of mothers aged 25-34 who are in employment is higher but still only around two-thirds of that of fathers.

Mothers' employment increases as their children get older, so that by the time their youngest child is 9 years old three-quarters of mothers are in work. Lone mothers are much less likely to work than women in couple households – **39% of lone mothers with a child under 3 years are in employment compared with 65% of mothers in couples**,²⁴ although the gap narrows as the age of the child increases.²⁵

The greatest effect on employment is on hours of work. In the UK as a whole, 37% of mothers work part-time and 30% work full-time, compared with 6% of fathers who work part-time and 82% who work full-time.²⁶ Mothers of young children are least likely to work part or full-time – only 22% of women with a child aged 1-3 work full-time.²⁷

Women with dependent children also find it takes longer to find paid employment than women without children – 59% of unemployed mothers in Wales have been out of work for more than 6 months compared with 45% of women without dependent children.

Unpaid care of an adult also has a massive impact on working lives. In Wales, just half of women carers manage to combine their caring role with a paid job.²⁸ **Women carers who do have a job are nearly three times more likely to work part-time than men carers (46% compared with 16%),**²⁹ and women carers who work provide more hours of unpaid care than working men carers. The prevalence of unpaid care is such that 1 in 20 (5%) of the total female workforce provides more than 50 hours of care a week.³⁰

Caring responsibilities also increase the likelihood of a woman leaving her job – in the UK 17% of unemployed women left their last job to care for someone compared to only 1% of men.³¹ In Wales, more than half (53%) of carers who'd left their jobs said it was because of the stress of juggling everything.³²



CARE & INCOME

Motherhood has a vast impact on women's employment and earnings. Even a short break from paid work means women lose earnings both short – and long-term as time out of the workforce reduces their experience and promotion prospects. Mothers who work part-time lose out as part-time jobs are typically lower-level and less well paid than full-time jobs. As a result, **in the UK women with dependent children earn just 66% of men's hourly earnings and 53% of their weekly earnings.**³³ Women's lifetime earnings also suffer, with the impact being greatest for women with no educational qualifications and more than one child – a woman with two children and no qualifications loses 58% of her lifetime earnings compared with a childless woman because of motherhood.³⁴

Providing unpaid care limits women carers' earning potential, as many stay in lower-level jobs than they might otherwise have sought, reduce their working hours or give up work and rely on benefits in order to care. In Wales, nearly 23,000 women aged 16-64 receive social security benefits because they are a carer providing more than 35 hours of care and earn less than £102 per week (after tax and deductions for care costs). Carer's Allowance is only £61.35 a week, and there is significant under-claiming.³⁵

Low incomes cause carers significant hardship. In Wales nearly two thirds (63%) of women and men carers say they are struggling to afford household bills and nearly one third cut back on heating and food.³⁶

Caring also has long-term financial consequences, as carers' low incomes mean they are unable to make provision for their future needs. **In Wales, more than a third of male and female carers (36%) who had left work to care said they would not be able to save for a pension.**³⁷ Carers unable to contribute to a pension through an employer's scheme or their own savings face older age reliant on a low state pension. In addition, nearly half of carers of both genders said they were unable to save for their own future care because of giving up their jobs.³⁸





WHAT NEXT?



How do we create a Wales that values the contribution of unpaid carers to society?



As women get older their caring responsibilities dramatically increase, what measures are we putting in place to support them?



Becoming an unpaid carer often pushes women into poverty, how can Wales ensure this isn't the case for future generations?

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