

Women



Covid-19 briefing note: August 2020

This series of briefings address significant issues that are emerging in the UK as a result of Covid-19 that impact on the work of community investment. In each one, we have brought together available evidence to help you think about and plan future strategies and how resources can be directed. This briefing covers women.

The current situation

Although men and women are equally likely to contract Covid-19¹, women are much less likely to suffer severe side effects or die from the disease.²

However, there are important indirect impacts of the pandemic that have disproportionately affected women, especially those on low incomes, migrants, the elderly, disabled or those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups.

Employment

Women have played a key role in the fight against Covid-19, and are more likely to be employed in roles such as social care, nursing and pharmacy. However, women are also more likely to have had their employment impacted.

Out of 3.2 million workers employed in roles deemed to be at 'highest risk' of exposure to Covid-19, about 2.5 million are women.³ 89% of nurses and 84% of care workers are women.⁴ Many of these jobs are low paid, with insecure contracts.⁵

Since March, 16% of mothers have permanently lost their jobs compared to 11% of fathers. Before the crisis, mothers were in paid work at 80% of the rate that fathers were. During the crisis, this dropped to 70%, indicating a longer term impact on women's careers.⁶

Childcare

School closures, reduced employment, furloughing, and remote working have made the provision of childcare and home-schooling challenging.

During lockdown, mothers were spending 10.3 hours a day home-schooling their children, over 2 hours more on average than fathers who were also working from home.⁷

Social housing and women

The effect the gender pay gap has on housing costs can be seen through women in the private rented sector spending an average of 55% of their income on rent, compared with 36% for men.

In terms of home ownership, a woman on median income would need to borrow over 15 times her salary to get a mortgage, which is over 50% more than the equivalent calculation for men.²²

This lack of access to affordable housing is a reason why women make up the majority of lead social housing tenants, and two in every three housing benefit claimants.²³

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Childcare in England for the youngest ages costs between 45% and 60% of women's salaries. Even with the free hours entitlement, childcare costs between a fifth and a quarter of women's salaries.⁸

In families where the father has lost his job while the mother kept hers, men and women still split housework and childcare responsibilities fairly equally. In all other types of households, mothers spend substantially more time on domestic responsibilities. For the quarter of UK families headed by a single parent (90 % are women), there are clearly no sharing of these duties.⁹

10,000 childcare providers in England are expected to be permanently closed within the next 12 months, which will result in fewer than 150,000 childcare places.

Domestic abuse

Before the pandemic, two thirds of the estimated 2.4million victims of domestic violence across England and Wales were women.¹⁰ As a result of lockdown in which households have been required to isolate together, rates of women suffering domestic violence have increased.

Almost a quarter of all domestic abuse support services have noted an increase in caseloads during Covid-19. A national domestic abuse helpline reported that calls to its service rose 25% from the start of lockdown.¹¹

Women subjected to domestic abuse are at almost twice the risk of experiencing poor mental health than women not exposed to domestic abuse.¹² Accessing support online can be a safer option than calling for support if domestic violence victims are not able to leave their households.¹³

More than two thirds of those suffering domestic abuse list housing concerns, such as ability to pay rent and deposits, fear of homelessness and lack of help from local authority housing teams as barriers to leaving their abusive partner.¹⁴

BAME women

Both women and people BAME backgrounds have been highlighted as particularly vulnerable to the economic and social impacts of the crisis.

The importance of understanding the social impacts on women

Key drivers of wellbeing for women are access to equal employment opportunities, access to free or subsidised childcare, access to safe and affordable housing and access to healthcare and sexual health services.

[The Social Value Bank](#)

reveals that providing women with employment services and/or training opportunities can:

- increase their confidence
- improve their employability skills
- reduce social isolation
- improve physical and mental health
- build and improve relationships with the wider community
- increase independence and skills
- gaining full or part time employment

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More than 4 in 10 BAME women said they would struggle to make ends meet over the first three months of lockdown, while BAME women reported high levels of anxiety about having to go out to work during the pandemic.¹⁵

Over half of disabled or retired BAME women said they were not sure where to turn to for help a result of the pandemic.¹⁶

Health

Evidence from past epidemics indicate that resources are often diverted from routine health services towards responding to the crisis¹⁷, further reducing the access many women have to sexual/reproductive health care.

Women reported to be suffering higher levels of anxiety during the Covid-19 crisis and are twice as likely as men to be accessing mental health services since lockdown began.¹⁸

Although evidence suggests pregnant women are no more at risk of contracting Covid-19, however services have been significantly reduced.¹⁹ Almost half of doctors report capacity to see patients in person has shrunk by more than 80%.²⁰

Contraceptive and sexual health clinics have either closed or offering reduced services, with 86% of clinics currently unable to offer the most effective long-lasting contraceptive options.²¹ A lack of support services, digital access, and income has left sex workers particularly vulnerable.²²

What does this mean for social housing?

Women in lower paid, less secure work, with other non-paid caring responsibilities have less ability to pay housing costs. Employability programmes that support new employment opportunities in light of Covid-19, as well as more opportunities for homeworking, will be required.

Welfare rights advice and signposting must be accessible in order to maximise household income and provide sustainable tenancies. Social housing providers should ensure that domestic violence victims have the right to leave their homes to seek help and accommodation when necessary, even if Covid-19 restrictions are being enforced.

Community Insight datasets

There are numerous datasets in [Community Insight](#) that can be used to inform strategies around women:

- Lone parent households with dependent children
- Provides 50+ hours of unpaid care a week
- Violent crimes and sexual offences
- Universal Credit

[Book a demo or find out more](#)

Further reading:

[Fawcett Society](#)

[Housing for Women](#)

[National Alliance of Women's Organisations](#)

[Refuge](#)

[Women's Budget Group](#)

[Women's Aid](#)