

Getting off Lightly or Feeling the Pinch?

A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Older Women in Coventry

A Joint Report by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice, University of Warwick and Coventry Women's Voices

Executive Summary

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1. Introduction

This is a summary of the key findings of the human rights and equality impact assessment (HREIA) carried out by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice at the University of Warwick (CHRIP) and Coventry Women's Voices (CWV). It analyses the impact of the current public sector spending cuts on older women in Coventry. It follows our earlier report, *Unravelling Equality? A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Women in Coventry*,¹ which was published in April 2011. The focus of this report is specifically older women – defined as those in their mid-50s and above.

The findings of this report challenge the myth that older people have 'got off lightly' from the public sector spending cuts because benefits for pensioners have not been reduced to the same extent as benefits for some other groups. This is flawed for two reasons:

- **Cuts to public services will have a disproportionate and significant impact on older people and older women in particular.** Cuts to public services including health, social care and transport will all have a significant impact on older women, as catalogued in chapters 2-4 of this report.²
- **Significant numbers of older women are already living in poverty.³ Therefore the overall effects of cuts upon them will be particularly severe.** The poorest older women are currently struggling to meet rising living costs particularly the costs of food and fuel which have risen faster than inflation. Cuts to their benefits (see chapter 5) and reduced support from public services (see chapters 2-4) and the voluntary sector (see chapter 7) will make their situation significantly harder.

The report concludes that taken together the combined impact of cuts to spending on health, social care, welfare benefits, transport and the voluntary sector will exacerbate existing inequalities between older women and other groups and pose a serious risk to some older women's human rights. Among older women, the poorest women as well as disabled women, carers and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women are likely to be particularly badly affected.

2. Health

Background: The Government has committed to increase spending on health by £12.5 billion in the next four years. At the same time the NHS has to save £20 billion from its budget.⁴ The Government argues that these savings can be made by increased efficiency but unions and campaigners have reported wide-spread cuts to health services and job losses.⁵

Nationally 45% of NHS expenditure is on older people,⁶ and women form the majority of this group, nationally and in Coventry.⁷

The cuts and changes include:

- University Hospital in Walsgrave and Rugby St Cross face having to make at least £28.8 million of cuts over the next financial year following cuts of £28 million last year.⁸ George Elliot Hospital faces cuts of £6.8 million on top of cuts made last year.⁹
- Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust, plans to cut its workforce by the equivalent of nearly 560 full-time posts - almost 20% of total staffing - between 2010 and 2013.¹⁰
- The number of hospital beds available in Coventry has fallen in the last year¹¹ and a ward in Rugby used by Coventry patients has been closed.¹²

Individuals and groups interviewed for this report reported that these cuts and changes have led to:

- Increased waiting times for patients¹³ and problems travelling to other hospitals.
- Increased cancellation of appointments.¹⁴
- Increased problems with discharges from hospitals without sufficient support for those requiring care or their carers.
- Increased pressure on staff and volunteers.
- Increased difficulty obtaining an appointment with a GP.

The impact: Older women will be disproportionately affected by cuts to spending on health because they are more frequent users of NHS services than other groups. Many of the distressing experiences of women interviewed for this report also raise human rights concerns including:

- **Delays in treatment** – This may mean patients suffering longer and may impact on eventual health outcomes.
- **Inadequate Care in hospital** - Staff shortages and increased pressures on staff as a result of cuts will risk the quality of care, which have already been raised as a concern nationally.
- **Inadequate discharge procedures** - Failure to properly assess care needs can lead to extreme distress, increased hospital re-admissions and worse health outcomes.

3. Social care

Background: The current cuts to social care are taking place in the context of a funding system that is described as 'not fit for purpose' and 'in urgent need of reform.'¹⁶ Older women are the majority of those needing care,¹⁷ and are the majority of carers.¹⁸

The cuts and changes:

In Coventry expenditure on residential care, nursing homes and home helps for adults fell by 2.7% between 2010 and 2011.¹⁹

Spending on residential care for people over 65 fell by 7.2% in the same period.²⁰

Coventry City Council provided more than five and a half thousand fewer weeks care in 2010/11 than in 2009/10.²¹ Under Coventry City Council's 'A Better Coventry' (ABC) review a further £1,500,000 in savings are expected in adult social care in 2012/13.²²

What will this mean? The agencies and organisations we spoke to compared Coventry favourably to a number of other local authorities. However they also highlighted current and potential future problems in social care including: increased charges for services; staff cuts and reductions in staff training; concerns about reduction in access to services; services contracted to the cheapest provider and potential future decline in overall standards of care. These cuts take place in the context of concerns about the quality of some of the care that is currently provided.

The Impact: If cuts to spending on adult social care lead to failings in the quality of care this will disproportionately affect older women and could have serious implications for their health, their dignity and even their life expectancy.

4. Transport

Background: Older women are particularly reliant on public transport compared with other groups. Among women aged over 75, 60% have no access to a car, and among those over 80, 75% have no access.²³

The cuts and changes: Public transport in the West Midlands is the responsibility of Centro, which brings together representatives of local authorities in the region.

- In 2011/12 Centro's budget was cut by £4 million (10%). In 2012/13 it was cut by a further £2.2 million.²⁴
- The Ring and Ride scheme in Coventry has had its budget cut from £12.4 million to £10 million in 2011/12 and has had to introduce fares for passengers. This has led to a drop in trip numbers of 14.5%.²⁵
- Centro, which funds Ring and Ride, is consulting on new criteria for accessing Ring and Ride, and concerns have been

Combined Impact Poses Serious Health Risks

Taken together the public spending cuts catalogued throughout the report pose a serious risk to the physical and mental health of some older women, particularly the poorest or otherwise disadvantaged.

- Cuts to some welfare benefits and the move to link others to the Consumer Prices Index, combined with the increased cost of food and fuel and additional costs because of cuts to transport and social care services will push more older people into poverty. There is a strong link between poverty and ill-health.
- Cuts to health and social care services risk reducing the level and quality of care available to older women. This, combined with the additional stress caused by cancellation of appointments, increased waiting times and additional caring responsibilities, risks damaging the physical and mental health of some older women.
- Cuts to public transport services will make it harder for women to access vital health services. They may also increase isolation among some older women with a subsequent negative impact on their mental health.
- Cuts to advice and support services will increase social isolation. In addition legal aid cuts will reduce the ability of women to secure the benefits and services they need in order to secure better health outcomes.

The cumulative impact of these cuts poses a threat to the right to private life, the right to health, and even the right to life of some older women.¹⁵

raised that it may exclude many people who currently rely on the service.²⁶

- There has also been a general review of bus services in Coventry. Some bus routes have changed and some routes terminated. New routes have also been added.

The impact: These cuts will have a disproportionate impact on older women since they are more likely to rely on public transport. The cuts are likely to have a potentially serious impact on the private lives, health, well-being and employment prospects of some older women.

5. Incomes and poverty

Background: Older women in Coventry, as in the rest of the country, are poorer than men.²⁷ Many poorer women over retirement age are already struggling to manage, as the costs of food and fuel rise above inflation.²⁸ Many women in their 50s and 60s already face having to work for longer because of inadequate pensions. There are particular concerns about those women who combine poorly paid work with caring responsibilities.

Cuts and changes: There are a wide range of changes to benefits and pensions that will affect older women, depending on what group they fall into:

- **Women in their fifties and early sixties:** Some of these women will be affected by cuts and changes to working age benefits including disability benefits, housing benefit, council tax credit and the introduction of universal credit. Women working in the public sector will be affected by changes to public sector pension contributions and an increase in the retirement age.
- **Older women pensioners:** Pensioners have been protected against many of the changes to housing and other benefits. Some benefits for pensioners such as free bus passes and winter fuel allowance have been preserved. However, pensions and benefits are being linked to the Consumer Price Index rather than the Retail Price Index. The CPI as a measure of inflation is between 1 and 2% lower than the RPI.²⁹ Some pensioners will also be impacted by changes to housing benefit.
- **Mixed age couples:** In addition to the cuts and changes faced by older women set out above, women in couples where one partner is over pension age and the other is of working age may lose significantly under proposals for the universal credit and changes to council tax benefit. They may also lose out as a result

Family carers

Family carers already experience negative impacts on their health, employment, relationships and social life as a result of caring.³⁰ The public spending cuts catalogued in this report are likely to exacerbate this situation in a number of ways:

- Cuts to disability benefits for the person they care for which will lead to increased poverty.
- Loss of flexible working opportunities which will make it harder to combine paid work and caring.
- Cuts to spending on health and social care, which will increase the pressure on family carers and may reduce the support available to them.
- Cuts to spending on transport which may increase pressure on carers who may have to provide, organise and/or pay for transport for the person they care for.
- Cuts to legal aid and advice services which will make it harder for family carers to challenge what is happening to them and those they care for.

Taken together these changes may increase poverty among family carers and have a negative impact on their health.

of restrictions on housing benefit for social housing.

The impact: These cuts and changes will increase existing inequalities between older women and older men. There are also concerns from a human rights perspective about how these cuts and changes will affect the poorest pensioners and women in their fifties and sixties. For some women, the combined impact of changes and cuts to benefits and services, particularly in the context of rising fuel and food prices, could lead to significant hardship and suffering, and increased levels of poverty.

6. Employment

Background: Women in Coventry are less likely than the national average to be in paid work and this is particularly true for older women in their 50s and 60s.³¹ Women are the majority of those working in the public sector.³²

The cuts

- Between October 2010 and June 2011, 924 public sector jobs were lost in Coventry.³³
- Between January and September 2011, 323 women and 134 men left Coventry City Council jobs through redundancy or early retirement.³⁴
- The City Council are predicting a loss of a further 500 jobs in 2012.³⁵
- Cuts to NHS staff in Coventry include a recruitment freeze at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS,³⁶ and an expected loss of up to 250 jobs at George Elliot Hospital.³⁷ 560 jobs are also expected to go at Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust.³⁸
- The continuing public sector pay freeze means that any public sector worker earning more than £21,000 has had their pay frozen for 2 years and any public sector worker earning less than £21,000 will receive a £250 annual pay increase.³⁹

The impact: If public sector cuts lead to disproportionate job losses among older women in Coventry it will increase overall inequality between women and men in Coventry. Public sector pay freezes and cuts in hours may also exacerbate this situation. At the same time, women face disproportionate impacts of cuts to social care, cuts to childcare and cuts to disability benefits. This will make it harder for women with caring responsibilities (including grandparents) and disabled women to stay in the workforce.

Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Older women

BAME older women are already more likely to be living in poverty than their white counter-parts. The public spending cuts catalogued in this report are likely to exacerbate this situation in a number of ways:

- Cuts to benefits, combined with the increased cost of living may push more BAME older women into poverty, which may have impacts on health outcomes.
- BAME women who are disabled or carers have been affected by the loss of specialist support services. This loss, combined with the negative impacts of cuts faced by all disabled women and carers, will increase isolation and may lead to increased mental health problems.
- BAME women are disproportionately more likely to be working for the NHS and so are more likely to be affected by cuts to health service jobs.
- Cuts to Legal Aid will disproportionately affect BAME women and will leave them unable to secure access to the benefits and services to which they are entitled.

Taken together these cuts may increase the number of older BAME women living in poverty and have negative impacts on their health.

7. Voluntary and advice services

Background: Voluntary organisations in Coventry provide information, advice, support and services for older women in Coventry that are vital for tackling discrimination and promoting women's human rights.

The cuts:

- A number of funding streams from central Government for voluntary organisations have ended.
- Reductions to health spending have led to the Primary Care Trust cutting grants to a number of voluntary organisations.
- There has been a drop in charitable giving from individuals.
- Many charitable and non-charitable organisations are receiving an increasing level of grant applications which means that the success rate for applications is falling.
- Coventry City Council is reviewing its funding of the voluntary sector and is forecasting a saving of £100,000 in 2012/13 and £200,000 in 2013/14. The Council reversed an earlier decision to top slice 3% off all voluntary sector grants but some grants have been reduced or stopped.⁴⁰
- Voluntary organisations that have local or national contracts to deliver public services are being affected by cuts to spending on public services.
- There have been significant cuts to Legal Aid which will affect organisations providing specialist legal advice services and organisations providing more general advice services that refer on to legal specialists.

The impact: As voluntary organisations are forced to cut services or in some cases close altogether there is a risk of:

- Increased loneliness and isolation particularly for older women living alone.
- Reduced levels of advice and support to enable women to claim the benefits and services to which they are entitled and to help protect them against discrimination.
- Difficulty in monitoring the on-going impacts of other public spending cuts on older women.

8. Action required

- **Public authorities** have legal obligations to promote equality and not to breach human rights. In order to do this effectively they need to consider the potential impact of all budget cuts on equality and human rights outcomes for older women and carefully monitor the actual impact.
- **Public authorities** should take account of the combined impact of different cuts on particularly vulnerable groups in their assessments and monitoring.

Disabled older women

Disabled older women will be affected by a combination of cuts and changes including:

- Cuts to disability benefits and new assessment processes for disability benefits that appear to be deeply flawed. This may lead to increased poverty and health problems.
- Cuts to spending on health and social care which will disproportionately affect disabled women and may have a serious impact on their health and human dignity.
- Cuts to transport services which may leave disabled women unable to access health services or shops and mean they are increasingly socially isolated.
- Cuts to legal aid and advice services will make it harder for disabled women to challenge what is happening to them.

Taken together the combined impact of the cuts may have a serious impact on some disabled women's human rights.

- **Public authorities** should ensure that they co-ordinate their policies and practices where multiple agencies have an impact on a particular issue.
- **Public authorities** should also pay due regard to the role played by women's organisations and voluntary organisations providing services to older women in tackling discrimination and in promoting older women's human rights.
- **Other actors** can play important roles in monitoring impacts, campaigning, and bringing cases to courts.

9. About us

This report was funded by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice, School of Law, University of Warwick.

The full report is available on-line at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/chrp/projectss/humanrightsimpactassessments/cwv/report/>

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Coventry Women's Voices is an independent group of women's organisations, organisations working with women and individuals that have come together to ensure women's voices in Coventry are heard and to improve the lives of women living in Coventry. For more information about our work see <http://coventrywomensvoices.wordpress.com/>

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