

MINUTES

Doubly Disadvantaged?

Women and Work APPG Meeting Tuesday 22 May 2018
4.00pm – 5.00pm Committee Room 17, House of Commons

Chair: Jess Phillips MP, Co-Chair of the Women and Work APPG

Parliamentarians in attendance:

- Jess Phillips MP
- Gillian Keegan MP
- Alison Thewliss MP
- Neil Gray MP
- Baroness Burt
- Lord Ramsbotham

Minutes

Co-Chair of Women and Work APPG, **Jess Phillips MP** introduced the topic, highlighting the importance of looking at how we combat the economic inactivity of women who are “doubly disadvantaged”. This is particularly problematic when it comes to recruitment. She referenced the recent Women and Equalities Select Committee report into the discrimination faced by Muslim women because of their names, as an example of entrenched bias in employment practices. She set out some of the groups of women who are “doubly disadvantaged”, which includes but is not limited to:

- NEET women
- Women with disabilities
- Older women
- Single parents
- BAME women

She also ran through some key facts and figures:

- A study by the Institute for Social and Economic Research in 2016 found that British ethnic minority graduates are between 5% and 15% less likely to be employed than their white British peers six months after graduation;
- Recent research by Gingerbread found that a third of children with a working single parent today living in poverty and around one in ten working single parents had taken last resort steps to get by such as using payday lenders, ‘doorstep’ lenders and foodbanks;
- Research by Baroness Altmann in 2015 found that women’s careers are being “cut off” at 45 due to ageism and gender discrimination. The UK has only 60% of people over 50 in work compared to 70% in other countries, and this number is likely to increase;

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) 2017 report found that the disability pay gap is 13.6%. On top of that, disabled people are significantly more likely to be unemployed, lose a job and be in low-waged work than non-disabled people.
- The proportion of 16-24 year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in the final quarter of 2017 was 11.2%.

The first speaker, **Clare Gray, Disability Advocacy Adviser, Shaw Trust** spoke about the experiences of disabled people in employment. She quoted figures showing that there are 3.5 million disabled people currently out of work. Although around 600,000 have moved into work over last few years, the employment rate remains below 50%. She pointed out that, if one million more disabled people were encouraged into work, the UK economy would get a £45 million boost.

Continuing, she said that the gap disabled people face sharpens when gender is added into equation. The pay gap is wider for disabled women as they are clearly doubly disadvantaged in accessing and staying in work, often unable to fulfil their professional potential as employers don't know where to start or are simply afraid to get things wrong. She said that myths about disabled people persist in the work place. People assume they are far more fragile. However, in reality disabled people take fewer days off sick and are less likely to have accidents. In fact, many disabled people have a wealth of experience in problem solving and a drive to succeed because of their experiences as disabled people. The average cost of providing support for disabled employee is just £30, with many measures such as designated parking spaces costing nothing at all. Clare stressed that employers must foster openness. The WHO has predicted that depression will be the leading cause of disability in the future yet, as Shaw Trust shows in its mental health awareness report on employer attitudes, mental health at work is still the last taboo.

On the question of how we can tackle double disadvantage, **Clare** emphasised that building a workforce that is representative of a company's customer base has a positive impact for businesses and workers alike. She said that we need to do more to encourage employers to recognise benefits of employing disabled women. Despite the Equality Act requiring adjustments, many employers are reluctant to make them and often schemes to widen the employment/representation of disabled people are simply box ticking exercises. She emphasised that these must become more robust in order to make a difference. Furthermore, as a large proportion of people become disabled while employed, more needs to be done to ensure that they are not simply written off but supported to help return to work.

She suggested that recruitment practices provide opportunities for applicants to request employment adjustments, that companies take measures to address unconscious bias, develop workplace mentoring programs and implement flexibility programs. Ensuring everyone has the chance to gain employment and progress at an equal level.

Jess Phillips pointed out that **Clare** certainly disproves the myths around disabled people and spoke about a constituent of hers who had recently suffered a stroke, yet was primarily concerned about getting back to work post recovery.

The second speaker, **Dalia Ben-Galim Director of Policy, Advice & Communications, Gingerbread** spoke about the importance of bringing together different organisations in this kind of context and thinking about the intersections of these groups. She said that single parents highlight challenges in the labour market surrounding caring responsibilities and though we see a different language around stigma, there is still little progress. For example, single parents are still at risk of being sanctioned under the current benefit system due to not being able to satisfy job centre requirements as a result of their caring responsibilities.

Dalia Ben-Galim shared analysis that Gingerbread published on their centenary which showed that single parents are far more likely to suffer increased pressure to take low paid work with any conditions attached. She said that this pressure is supported by a combination of factors which are largely down to the external environment in which the labour market operates, including welfare reforms such as Universal Credit, the high cost of childcare, maternal employment rates, and a lack of flexible and genuine part time work, that isn't precarious work.

The research also found that 47% children in single parent families are in poverty. She said that recruitment discussions need to consider the quality of recruitment. In the past few years, zero hours contracts have increased ten-fold. Yet, for the majority of single parents, self-employment is not the desired way to be sustainable as it is far too precarious. Currently, low paid insecure jobs are the norm for single parents and lack of childcare is common.

On the question of what can be done, **Dalia** recognised that there are very few opportunities to impact on the legislative agenda in wake of Brexit. A key recommendation of hers included suspending the Universal Credit job seeking requirements for parents with preschool age children to be in work. Under the policy, parents with children aged 3 and 4 are now required to look for work or risk benefit sanctions. She said that current legislation is unreasonable as a result of the lack of affordable childcare and flexible work. She also suggested tailoring job centres for single parents, embedding genuinely flexible work into employment practices and expanding promised childcare support.

Jess Phillops said that there is never anything more depressing than when single mothers want to work in politics yet find the reality to be too challenging and are therefore blocked from the system. She also emphasised that current benefit conditionality requirements are unfair and discriminatory.

The final speaker, **Chloé Chambrud, Gender Equality Director, Business in the Community (BITC)** said that BITC aims to work with but also to challenge employers. She outlined several BITC campaigns such as Same But Different, which tried to show to employers how different intersections come into play in women's lives.

Looking at age she said that older women are highly at risk of losing jobs as a result of automation but stressed that they also have a lot to bring to the table. The beauty of technology, she said, is that there is so much opportunity for new training, but often older women are discounted for training opportunities. She said that older women have been the fastest growing employment group over last 30 years, yet discrimination persists.

Women at 20 are five times more likely to be employed than women over 55. Often this is due to the fact that older women take on the majority of caring responsibilities.

Her recommendations for how to solve this include forcing companies to publish gender pay gap data by ethnicity or age; cutting the data to see where the divides really lie. For example, showing the numbers for white men vs BAME women. She also recommended setting targets and ensuring diverse hiring panels. Flexible working options should also be examined, looking at whether men want more caring responsibilities. She also advocated for 5-10 days carers leave, the introduction of a carer’s passport and a stronger move towards removing bias from job adverts.

Jess then opened the discussion up to the audience.

Lord Rambottom spoke about women prisoners who he described as trebly disadvantaged. He said that often they have extreme difficulty in finding employment when they come out, which is exacerbated by the rehabilitation of 1974 Offenders Act, which he is currently attempting to amend particularly where is concerns children with criminal records. He described this country as terribly punitive. **Jess** chimed in that this is especially problematic when abuse at the hands of men is a key reason many women fall into criminal activity. Thus, to continue to hold that disadvantage against them is particularly harsh. (**Jess** specified that women in the criminal justice system will be covered in the final APPG report)

One audience member spoke about how social media has changed the recruitment process. She said that she believes many people are put off by the current online processes. **Dalia** responded by talking about the importance of building networks for people who have been out of work for extended periods of time and therefore can’t sell themselves in the same way.

Lennie Rolls from the University of Sussex spoke about their equality diversity and inclusion strategy which has meant that no part of the campus is inaccessible. He also said that the university has tried to move toward all jobs being open to flexible working. **Clare** replied that the a Shaw Trust report has highlighted shocking findings such as that over 63% of employers only have disabled employees because of the law rather than because they believe it is the right thing to do. She concluded that there is still a long, long way to go. **Chloe** encouraged employers to make things accessible from day 1 in job adverts.

Jess closed the meeting by saying that everyone was in agreement over many recommendations but the main issues which have arisen are flexibility, understanding and training. She said that flexibility in the workplace is undeniably the best step for the UK yet progress is still “stuck in the 1950s”. She said that a continual push for flexibility is necessary and that has come across keenly today.

Non-Parliamentarian attendees:

Angharad Hopkinson	Age UK
Bola Fatimilehin	Royal Academy of Engineering
Charlie Garnett	Shaw Trust
Christine Townley	Construction Youth Trust

Cyrstal Lee	Recruitment and Employment Confederation
Felicity Oliver	UK Music
Imogen Farhan	IPSE
Jennifer Allerton	Young Women's Trust
Karen O'Reilly	Recruitment and Employment Confederation
Kath Moore	Women into Construction
Katherine Bowen	UK Space Agency
Keith Jones	Institution of Civil Engineers
Lenny Rolles	University of Sussex
Lydia Morgan	Young Women's Trust
Lydia Wakefield	IPSE
Mark Gale	Young Women's Trust
Mark Hoda	Shaw Trust
Michelle Lim	Creative Skillset
Nicki Seignot	The Parent Mentor
Philomena Cullen	Oxfam
Rosie Williamson	NatWest
Sandi Rhys Jones	Women in Property
Shirley Watson	Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
Sophie Stratton	Conservative Womens Organisation
Tracey South	CB Resourcing
Valerie Iriogbe	Manufacturing Technologies Association