

the  
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# A woman's world?

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# We're all losers without women

By Ryan Shorthouse

Women in Britain today have more opportunities than ever, thanks to the opening up of the education system and the labour market. The female employment rate has increased dramatically - from 59% in 1971 to 70% in 2008 - and the number of women going to university has rocketed, with a greater proportion attending, and getting better degrees, compared to men. At every stage in the education process, girls outperform boys.

In a range of spheres - politics, journalism, art, business - women are shaping the debate, changing lives for the better. And, if we could ever forget, one of the most successful Prime Minister's Britain has had, transforming our political and economic landscape, was a woman. Thank you Lady T.

Our culture has changed, for the better, thanks to the growing influence of women. Family life and children - which most people, studies have shown, derive the greatest happiness from - have become more central in our lives. The amount of time parents spend with their children has increased significantly over 30 years. Women have pushed for greater leave and flexible working arrangements, benefiting a wide array of people, allowing many of us to better balance our need to work with our need

to pursue leisure and community activities, and be with our families.

Women's push for equality generated greater tolerance and respect for female opinions and virtues. Policies have been generated and implemented to help resolve problems which largely affect women - the cost of childcare, domestic violence, sexual abuse.

Emotiveness, tolerance and expression seem to have become more common in social interaction - not just because of women, but certainly aided by the embracing of feminine virtues. Call this the feminisation of society if you like. And contemplate on how it has aided social capital, improved relationships and liberated personalities.

We should, undoubtedly, celebrate the improved status of women and welcome the influence women have had on our society. Take time to reflect also on the prosperity and freedoms the vast majority of women enjoy in this country compared to other areas of the world.

Problems persist, however. At the start of their lives, girls seem to have an advantage: their education results are better and the unemployment rate is lower for young women than men. But as we move up the life-cycle, we see a reversal

of fortune. Motherhood penalises women's employment prospects, career breaks and part-time work hurting hourly pay and promotion prospects, leading to the gender pay gap which is a third higher in the UK than the EU average. Later, partly because they live longer, partly because their pension provision tends to be poorer, women are more likely to live in poverty.

**"The real scandal was, despite representing over 50% of the population, women only accounted for a measly 9% of MPs in our party"**

It remains the case that senior positions in the most powerful organisations - FTSE 100 companies, the civil service, businesses - are dominated by men. Just look at British politics. The Cabinet has only four women, despite female talent abundant on the government benches.

Without the substantial representation of women in powerful positions, there is a real risk that decision-makers neglect - even forget - the unique needs of women. Unfortunately, the cuts announced in the Spending Review do affect women more, since they are more likely to be employed in the public sector and be the recipients of benefits


and tax credits. Bad choices were made, which will hamper the opportunities for women: the reduction in support for childcare costs, for instance, makes no sense at all.

Theresa May, who is Minister for Women alongside being Home Secretary, has done a remarkable job, as Harriet Harman did with Labour, of leading the fight in the party for ensuring policies better meet the needs of women. The Conservative Manifesto included bold pledges: compulsory pay audits for companies found to be guilty of gender pay discrimination, funding for 15 new rape crisis centres, more health visitors to support new mothers and the extension of flexible working. May, and our Party Chairman Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, now need more support at the top to advance policies that help women.

To his credit, David Cameron recognised that the serious lack of female Tory MPs - only 17 before the last General Election - affected voters perception of how in touch the party was with modern attitudes. The push for more female candidates was needed. Some, of course, cried that it was scandalous to consider candidates on anything other than merit. But the real scandal was, despite representing over 50% of the population, women only accounted for a measly 9% of MPs in our party, a party that supposedly pitches itself as repre-

senting the whole nation. Welcome indeed is that we have the highest number of female MPs ever in our party history. But as we still lag behind the number of female Labour MPs, the push for more women parliamentarians shouldn't stop now.

And we must not forget the problems women still face, despite massive advances in their rights and opportunities over the decades. Recent figures from the domestic violence charity Refuge show that two women die a week at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends. Teenage pregnancy remains high, with just over 40,000 girls becoming young mothers each year. Overseas, women are subjected to unimaginable crimes. These vulnerable women, here and abroad, need our support.

These are difficult times, with fiscal retrenchment causing unease and uncertainty, and civil unrest rising. It's certainly not my intention with this magazine to darken the mood any more - progress, by all political parties, has been made in better representing and catering for women. Rather, our contributors are highlighting the challenges women still face in today's society. With such dedicated and passionate campaigners - including those who have kindly written in this magazine - the future can be fairer and brighter for women in the UK, and overseas. 

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# Women, Islam and politics

*Diversity among politicians should be celebrated and encouraged argues the Chairman of the Conservative Party, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi*

Boosting the role of Muslim women is something which really matters to me. That's partly because I was so annoyed at the patronising way Labour talked about ethnic minorities. With Labour, the approach was all about separating people into social silos. There was a sense that diversity meant difference - and difference required special treatment. And that led to a situation which was tantamount to state-sponsored segregation.

So Britain desperately needed a new approach - one which focuses on integration, aspiration, choice and opportunity. Since we've been in office, that's what the coalition has been working full pelt to bring about. But we also need to be honest with ourselves and accept that one of the biggest problems is politics - because there are still far too few Muslim women in the three main parties.

## Women in politics

Now it's an honour to be the first Muslim woman in Cabinet. And I'm not surprised that it's taken the election of a Conservative Prime Minister for a Muslim woman to get there. But when you think about it, it is incredible that it has taken so long for Muslim women to get to the top of British politics. Indeed, it's only this year that the first Asian women were elected as MPs.

Why are things moving so slowly? It's partly tied to the wider problem of getting more women into politics.

David Cameron did fantastic work in changing the face of our party. He tried just about everything to bring in more women candidates. We changed the application process, using groups like Women2Win and more headhunting. We changed the selection process, with less of the big, macho speechmaking and more of the things like social work and social action which make for a good MP. And in the end, we tried everything short of all-women shortlists.

“Our mother told us that that while she did not go to university, it was our duty to go on her behalf and bring her back five university degrees. And that's exactly what we did”

And yes, we made progress, almost doubling the number of Conservative women MPs at the election. But the truth is we've still got so much further to go, both as a party and in our parliament. And that's especially true when it comes to Muslim women.

## Muslim women

So what do we need to do now? We've got to start by diagnosing the problem properly. I know that some say that Islam somehow promotes gender inequality. That's always been baffling to me. Not only did the Prophet Muhammad describe men and women as “mutual friends”, but he also said in his farewell speech that women are men's “partners and committed helpers”.

If you consider those words alongside the almost total absence of equality in the 7th century, then it's hard to escape the conclusion that the message of Islam is one of emancipation and equality.

To quote the late Benazir Bhutto: “in an age when no country, no system, no community gave women any rights, in a society where the birth of a baby girl was regarded as a curse, where women were considered chattel, Islam treated women as individuals.” Instead, the real barrier for Muslim women is cultural not devotional. Islam preaches a message of opportunity; but too often the opportunities given by our faith are denied by our culture.

To give just one example of what I mean: where I live in Yorkshire, some Muslim men are still arguing about whether women should be allowed to go to

university. But the Koran couldn't be clearer: "Education is obligatory on both Muslim men and women, even if they have to go to China to seek it" (which wasn't so easy in the camel-riding 7th century).

### Supportive families

So how can we overcome the cultural barriers which have been put in women's way? First, we need supportive families. Back in 2005, when I was standing as Dewsbury's Conservative candidate, a group of local elders came to see my father. They told him that his daughter was bringing shame on the family.

It wasn't the first time the elders had visited. In 1976, they said it was shameful my father was letting his wife learn to drive. In 1987, they said that it was shameful his daughter was going to university. Now in 2005, they were back. And each time, my father gave the same reply: no, it was not shameful.

In fact, he thought it was a pretty good thing. He said he wanted his daughter to go into politics, to stand up for what she believed in. Until more fathers want what their daughters want, we're not going to get anywhere.

### Education

Second, education is key. There is a saying in Islam that if you educate a girl you educate a family; if you educate a

man, you educate an individual. In my own experience, there's a lot to be said for that. I am the second of five girls, and when we were young, our mother told us that that while she did not go to university, it was our duty to go on her behalf and bring her back five university degrees. And that's exactly what we did.

Education is the door to opportunity - not just because it gives you skills and confidence. It also allows you to know your mind and reach your destiny - using our true Muslim values to tackle inequality.


### The media

Third, we need a responsible media. When I travel to Pakistan and other Muslim countries, I get complaints that the media are much more interested in women's dupatta and chador than in their policies. I sympathise. But here in Britain I think we've got bigger problems. I've said before that anti-Islamic sentiment is seen as fair game in certain parts of the media. If we want a more

mature debate about Muslim women's issues, that's got to change.

Above all, we need role models. Not long ago, I met a girl from Oldham, from a Pakistani background. She said to me: "Five years ago my father would have baulked at the idea I would even think about politics and now he wants me to stand at the local council elections because, he said: 'I want you to do what that Sayeeda Warsi has done.'"

I am not going to pretend that life as a British Muslim female politician has always been comfortable.

Of course, there are times when it seems that all these things - being British, Muslim, female and in politics - collide. But I passionately believe that it is possible to be a successful Muslim woman in British politics. And if we want a culture which promotes greater equality, we need more Muslim women shining a torch and leading the way. 



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# Where are the women?

*The Cabinet lacks women and the Spending Review, intentionally or not, hits women harder than men. By Mary Ann Sieghart*

I suppose we should have seen it coming. Four days of negotiations in May between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, and not a single woman in sight.

All eight negotiators were men, as were the two party leaders. So perhaps it's not surprising that neither the Coalition Agreement nor the subsequent Government has done anything to further the cause of women. If anything, the cause has gone into reverse.

The new Cabinet has more men who went to one Oxford College - Magdalen - than it has women. Of the four women, only one, Theresa May, has a senior job. The disproportion looks particularly bad compared with the 11 women in Labour's Shadow Cabinet. But then, the Tories and Lib Dems have a much smaller female talent pool from which to choose: just 12 per cent of the Lib Dem parliamentary party are women and 16 per cent of the Tories', compared with 31 per cent of Labour's.

As a result, perhaps, women's voices in this Government seem to have been muted. It took forensic opposition from Labour and women's lobby groups for the Coalition to drop the proposal for anonymity to be granted to men accused of rape. Opponents of the

measure argued persuasively that anonymity would prevent other victims of the same rapist coming forward. Why did no-one in the Government policy-making team think of that? And now the only official voice for women in the UK has now been silenced, with the abolition of the Women's National Commission.

When George Osborne came out with his emergency Budget in June, it transpired that nobody in power had bothered to fulfill a legal obligation to check its impact on women. As a result, the Fawcett Society is now taking the Treasury to court.

**"Cuts to other benefits hit women harder than men, as benefits typically make up a fifth of women's income, compared with a tenth of men's"**


As for the Comprehensive Spending Review, it comprehensively targets women, wittingly or not. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimates that 80 per cent of the nearly half a million public-sector workers likely to lose their jobs will be women.

The 10 per cent cut in childcare support through tax credits announced in the CSR will mean that work will no longer pay for many mothers. Meanwhile, cuts to other benefits hit women harder than men, as benefits typically make up a fifth of women's income, compared with a tenth of men's. A million more women than men claim housing benefit.

Women are also more dependent on public services, so they will feel the brunt of the cuts more harshly.

Yet, before the worst of the cuts have even taken place, we hear that women's unemployment is rising, while men's is falling. The number of women out of work is now at its highest since 1988 (though it is still lower than the number of men).

Perhaps the only good news for women to come out of the recession is that private-sector employers are now more willing to countenance flexible working as a way of saving money.

So women are now more likely to be allowed to work from home, reduce their hours, or fit their work around their children's school - unless, that is, they lose their job altogether. And that is a likelier prospect now than it was a year ago. 

# Feminisation and the Cameroonian Conservative party

*Thanks to the Cameroons, the Conservative party is more in touch with women's lives. But there's much more to do, say Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Paul Webb*

It was just two minutes into his leadership acceptance speech that David Cameron announced he would redress the 'scandalous under-representation of women' in his party; and in his first speech as leader he made it clear that 'transforming the face and the agenda' of the party 'go hand in hand'. These are the two dimensions of feminization - the integration of women and the integration of women's concerns.

In 2005 the Conservatives base line on both dimensions was very low. Its 2005 Manifesto had trailed in a poor third compared to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. In the Tory Manifesto the dominant representations of women were as the victims of crime - a series of photographs depicted a woman having her handbag snatched - and as the saviours of British hospitals, with 'Matrons' being brought back to 'deliver clean and infection-free wards'. At Westminster in 2005 the party had a paltry 17 women MPs, constituting just 9 percent of the parliamentary party. This was at a time when Labour's women MPs significantly outnumbered all the other parties: in 1997 they had returned 101 women; in 2005 they numbered 98 (24 and 28 percent of the PLP, respectively).

Jump forward 5 years, and a feminiza-

tion of the Conservative party is clearly observable. This is especially the case in terms of its policies for women, at least as outlined in the party's General Election Manifesto. The party's success in electing more women MPs, whilst welcome, is less profound. Despite the Daily Telegraph claiming huge strides have been made, the party fell short of its own expectations of some 60 women. And inter-party asymmetry remains very much in Labour's favour.

The raw figures are telling: on May 6th the Conservatives returned 48 Conservative women MPs, more than doubling their number. Another has since been elected. Yet Labour, who lost 90 odd seats, returned 81 women MPs, constituting more than 30 percent of the PLP. Tory women MPs constitute 16 percent.

And at an election that saw many more vacant party-held seats opened up by the Parliamentary expenses scandal, women candidates were selected in just 15 percent of Conservative held seats.

The percentage for Labour is 30; in Conservative retirement seats women candidates constituted just 26 percent, compared to Labour's 53 percent; and as a percentage of newly elected Conservative MPs, women constitute 22 percent. Just as in previous elections -

and despite the party's efforts to reform its selection - too many Conservative women candidates failed to be selected in the party's held and winnable seats.

The Conservative Party must, then, redouble its efforts if it is to make good on Cameron's 2005 commitment - increasing women's descriptive representation is not a one-off event. In so doing, the Party has to reconsider All Women Shortlists.

"Much Conservative policy was - and this was also true of the other two main parties - for women as mothers, a problematic approach that elides women with mothers, and ignores older women and the childless"

Cameron accepted them in principle in his deposition to the Speaker's Conference in 2009, even if none were adopted for the 2010 election. Of course, AWS offend and invite hostility from some party members, but they are the most efficient means to deliver significantly higher numbers of women MPs, as Labour's record attests. Moreover, given Cameron's plans for reducing the number of seats in the House, the Party

must ensure political reform does not come at the cost of women's political presence - the only way to achieve this is to devise mechanisms that will guarantee the selection of women. At the minimum, the Conservatives should aim to return equal numbers of women and men amongst the new intake of MPs at each general election. In policy terms, the Conservatives look to have more successfully played the politics of 'catch up' in advance of the general election.

There were a host of new policies for women detailed in its manifesto, even if these were largely absent from the campaign itself. Much Conservative policy was - and this was also true of the other two main parties - for women as mothers, a problematic approach that elides women with mothers, and ignores older women and the childless.

The key battleground was over women's work/life balance and other measures to help families. Conservative pledges were much more competitive in 2010: pay audits were to be voluntary (Labour); mandatory for companies found guilty of sex discrimination (Conservative); or limited to those larger than 100 employees (Liberal Democrat).

The transfer of maternity/paternity leave/pay was set at six months

(Labour); whenever parents choose (Liberal Democrat and, apparently, the Conservatives, who elsewhere state after 14 weeks); the right to request flexible working was for parents with children aged 16 (Labour), or 18 (Conservative), for older people, ie, grandparents (all three), for all those in the public sector and in time, and subject to business consultation, for all (Conservative).

Much of the success of the Tories' policy pledges at the 2010 election lies with Theresa May, who as shadow spokeswoman for Women and Equality produced a number of serious policy documents. One clear issue of policy difference between the parties at the election was the recognition of marriage in the tax system.

Championed by Cameron, it made for the uncomfortable questioning of David Willetts on Mumsnet, garnered critical comment in *The Spectator*, and saw Harriet Harman directly confront May over her support for the policy.

For some women, the policy is evidently perceived as old fashioned, doing little to keep families together, something that ignores single parents' poverty, discriminates against children of the unmarried, and is a tax on the abandoned wife and a 'golden hello' to


the new and younger wife. What of Government and the Coalition? That the lieutenants of the coalition talks were all men received critical comment in the newspapers; and only four women, all Conservative, sit in the Cabinet.

Sure, this is the same number as in Brown's last Cabinet, but it is only half that of the peak of Blair's.

Policy wise, commitments to flexible working, shared parental leave and the gender pay gap remain, and are complemented with commitments to promote gender equality on company boards.

However, and despite the Liberal Democrats' permission to abstain in a parliamentary vote, 'Cameron's baby' - marriage tax breaks - remains.

The Government's programme of spending cuts announced since the election also raise serious questions for inter-party competition on women's issues.

Not only did the Fawcett Society seek a Judicial Review of the government's emergency budget on the grounds that it failed to undertake a gender audit, Labour's Yvette Cooper contends that the Spending Review disproportionately and unfairly affects women, as the main users and employees of the public sector. 



# Working for women?

**Natalie Evans and Ed Holmes** *assess the impact of the Coalition Government's ambitious welfare reform agenda on women*

In last month's Spending Review, the Coalition set out plans to reduce budgets by amounts which, in the case of non-ringfenced departments, were typically in the region of 20-25%. Welfare spending for people of working age was reduced by a smaller proportion, despite the fact that this is the single largest item of government spending that the public would like to see reduced.

If greater savings could be found in welfare, it would be possible either to avoid some of the proposed cuts, or reduce the tax burden, or pay down debt faster. To put the scale of welfare spending into context, if the UK could halve the number of people on out of work benefits we could afford to abolish both corporation tax and inheritance tax altogether.

## A failed system

There is little doubt that the UK welfare system has failed in its objectives. Tax credits, the New Deal, and efforts to move lone mothers into work all formed part of Labour's efforts since 1997 to raise the incomes of the poor and cut benefit dependency. Yet working age benefits and tax credit spending have increased by 40% since 1997, while 1.4 million people have been on work of work benefits for at least nine of the last ten years. Two-thirds of the people on Jobseeker's Allowance are repeat claimants. This has to

change. The government's planned reforms rightly aim to simplify the current system, and reduce the disincentives to work. It should help make welfare - currently run by four different agencies - less fragmented, although it will take time as these reforms are being phased in over the next ten years. The Coalition also inherited plans set in train by Labour to transfer large numbers of people from Incapacity Benefit to Jobseeker's Allowance.

## The effect on women

Certainly, these reforms, the most ambitious since Beveridge, will have a significant impact - ranging from using funds saved from paying benefits to reward providers who get people back into work (the 'Del/Ame switch') to complete reassessment of the UK's 2.6 million Incapacity Benefits claimants. Many commentators have criticised the Coalition's welfare reforms as unfairly affecting women. However, for one thing, in unemployment terms women have suffered less during the recession - male joblessness has risen more steeply over the last two years (278,000 versus 385,000). Since some 40% of working women are in the public sector (against only 15% of working men), there is potential for gap to be closed once the 490,000 headcount reduction in the public sector begin in earnest. However women in the public



sector also tend to be disproportionately employed in front-line jobs (as teachers and nurses for instance) which are being protected despite the cuts so it may be that women find they are less badly impacted than might be anticipated.

Nonetheless, Office of Budget Responsibility figures indicate the reduction of public sector roles will more than made up by the creation of 1.8 million additional private sector jobs. Fewer job opportunities either for new recruits or job changers in the public sector is therefore likely to mean significant career changes for many and a potential reorien-

tation of women towards private sector employment. Since women make up 35% of the working population but 75% of part-time workers, this may also create issues around flexible and part-time work - more commonly accommodated in the public sector.

In addition, due to lower lifetime earnings and longevity women will undoubtedly be impacted by changes to benefit entitlement. Statistically, motherhood significantly reduces pay and employment prospects. The much criticised withdrawal of child benefit from 2013 for instance will disproportionately impact on stay-at-home mothers. Almost 1.3 million women are economically inactive but who would like to work - around 40% of them looking after a home or family.

Convenient, good quality affordable childcare is the key to getting this group back into work and has a disproportionate impact on improving their quality of life - especially for single mothers. Given that the majority of lone parents on benefits are female (95% of Income Support claimants, for example), the increase in conditionality that the Government intends to pilot will impact more on women than men.

The reduction of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit from 80% to 70%, as well as increasing the working hours requirement for couples with chil-

dren from 16 to 24 hours, may make it more difficult for women to afford childcare and indeed the availability and quality of childcare is certainly an area where further thinking is needed by the Coalition.

For the poorest families however, some of these changes should be offset by increases in the Child Tax Credit and the refocusing of Sure Start services towards disadvantaged children. This could help to reduce the gap in employment rates and reduce the gender pay gap as more mothers enter sustained work.

### Dynamic benefits

The key to understanding the distributional impact of these reforms across both men and women is their dynamic effects. Of course, if welfare claimants are assumed to remain dependent on the same benefits as before and not change their behaviour, it naturally follows that any reduction in benefits will make them worse off. This is an axiom many reputable institutions (most notably the Institute for Fiscal Studies) follow. But this is not how the real world works.


If welfare reform incentivises entry to the labour market, many women could find themselves materially better off despite lower state handouts - not to mention gaining from the physical and psychological benefits of work which are well rehearsed. Though women are less likely

than men to fall into long-term unemployment, helping many of them back into the workforce will not be easy. A particular focus will have to be ethnic minorities: women with poor language skills are rarely employed at all for instance.

Another group - women close to retirement - will be particularly affected by the raising of the State Pension Age for both men and women to 66 by 2020. This will particularly impact on women in their 50s - half a million of whom will have to work an extra two years before qualifying for their state pension.

**"If welfare reform incentivises entry to the labour market, many women could find themselves materially better off despite lower state handouts"**

Of course, tough decisions are necessary - and money we spend on the welfare system is money we can't spend on schools or hospitals. Reducing spending without undermining work incentives or anti-poverty efforts was never going to be easy. Many new proposals have little detail as yet and will be fleshed out over the coming years.

The debate on the future of welfare and its impact on women in Britain has just begun. 

# Men – a wasting resource

*The feminist drive for equality in the workplace is not what many women want.*

By Professor Geoff Dench

Even more than most other Western societies, Britain has come to adopt a conflict model of relations between men and women - conceptualising them as groups with similar interests and aims competing for domination. This is a pity.

I think that such a model turns its back on thousands of years of female experience of how to transform men into tolerably useful members of society. If we neglect this hard won experience, we are spurning a major natural resource.

The basic mistake of this model lies in regarding men as occupying the centre of society and monopolising the best positions. This is very hard to believe. Throughout creation, it is females who are central among those species with complex social organisations, because reproduction is the key collective activity around which society revolves. Adult males tend to hover on the edge of groups, available to take part in insemination, and constantly jockeying for position to do this, but not doing much else. What has been distinctive about the evolution of human society is that ways have been found for systematically bringing almost all these males into constructive group membership. This has been achieved by recognising

the potential value of sex differences, and giving men specific responsibilities in families for those tasks which women themselves have been least keen or able to carry out. It is much more about Durkheim, and the Division of Labour, than Marx and competition.

None of these systems have been without problems. Insofar as men take charge of particular activities, women may feel excluded. And if the family role of men includes representing families, then male values can come to occupy too influential a place. But, until recently, sexual balance and harmony appear to have prevailed. And I think that the fundamental rule underpinning this has been that the 'private realm' of family life and values, controlled by women, has been sovereign. Men and their 'public' realms have been answerable to the private.

But this compact is now unravelling in the West. The emergence of modern states has made the public realm ever more fascinating. Also, improvement of birth control technologies has freed up women to expand their own activities. So adjustments to the sexual division of labour were necessary. Unfortunately, advocates of sexual symmetry, who deny difference, have had the upper

"Men know they are more dispensable than women - hence chivalry and men's time-honoured role in risky occupations and war: but hence too their drift back to the margins and shadows when they no longer feel needed"



hand in this process. The resulting social policies adopted to help women, which prioritise work rather than family life, appear to be allowing men to revert to nature.

Those middle class men who are keenest to compete in the job market, because they have access to rewarding careers, seem increasingly to balk at the idea of being parents. Many other men just seem to be drifting into worklessness, as they feel they have little to offer families. For those men whose only possible work is menial or boring, family incentives are crucial.

A common response among them to the notion of feminisation of work, or the idea that women would prefer to do it for themselves, is just to stand back and let them get on with it.

This I think underlies the rising tide of male disorganised behaviour - of apathy, crime, drugs, even suicide. Men know they are more dispensable than women - hence chivalry and men's time-honoured role in risky occupations and war: but hence too their drift back to the margins and shadows when they no longer feel needed.

This is not really a problem for men - who are less of an entity than sometimes imagined. It does however mean

that men have become a problem for society, and blight the lives of communities where a few generations ago they would have been valued and made useful. The ballooning prison population, the large number of unskilled jobless, the high rate of male suicide - now five times as high as among women - all reduce the pool of young men suitable to be selected as husbands, and help to drive Broken Britain.

But not all is yet lost. My recent research suggests that this collapse of male morale is not actually what women want. Most ordinary women, those outside the political class, do not want to dispense with men. They want partners to live with and help bring up their children. They also want husbands who will be reliable breadwinners - giving them more time to be mothers and active in the community.

For modern women, especially those under 35, the private realm is still central; and male providers still have a place. There is no longer much appetite for competing with men as equals in the job market. Sexual interdependence is becoming valued again. The main obstacle to this, making it harder for boys to be aware of the actual situation, is our public commitment to gender symmetry. There are many activities that most women are content to leave

mainly for men - those dealing with things (obdurate matter) rather than people; those involving high risk and anxiety, or relentless (and narrow) concentration. Also most women are happiest working part time, and combining it with family life.

If only the Women and Work Commission could stop complaining about male monopolies, there would be plenty of work that British boys could be encouraged to see as waiting for them and needing them, including any number of 'menial' jobs (which women don't much like and so for which, under feminisation, we have become overly dependent on immigrants - most of whom are still propelled by a strong sense of family responsibility).

Over the last few decades what we have seen amounts to a redrawing rather than disappearance of the sexual division of labour.

Women have taken on many roles they did not play before. But there is still much that most prefer men mainly to do. Male labour is still necessary. If the state left this issue more to people's choices, and worried less about women's 'failure' to achieve formal parity, we would make better use of available human resources. ⑤

# The Love of Men

*The erosion of masculinity is damaging to young men and the rest of us, argues Graeme Archer*

I once found a cassette tape - remember them? - at the bottom of a drawer, left untouched over a few house moves, and curiosity about its contents led me to put it into the cassette recorder - remember them? - and press play. It turned out to be just a tape of pop music, pirate-assembled for a long-forgotten party, but somewhere along its length the tape had been distorted. A party-goer coming into the kitchen for a top-up must have pressed 'record' (inadvertently, I imagine), and taped the voices of the other people present. And so it was, ten years after he died, I heard the voice of my father speaking to me again.

If he didn't say anything very profound during the few moments of the recording, at least I had his voice, and at least the party wasn't 'long-forgotten' after all; was, in fact, returned to me in crystalline detail, and because it was a very happy party (which involved a swim in a lake while lightning streaked the sky, I suddenly recalled), and was one of those rare evenings of visible, tangible love among friends and family, I was very grateful for the happy accident, and moved to hear my father speak again, after too many years of silence. I'll come back to my own father later, but I want to discuss the role of fathers in general. The Editor of this magazine

asked me to write about the 'feminisation' of British society, and the role this has had in a greater acceptance of (male?) homosexuality. I think, in as far as this is a thesis at all, that it is almost entirely wrong (I don't think tolerance of male homosexuality has anything to do with the role of heterosexual women in the workplace).

"The next time you're sat next to a Polish builder on the bus, don't get sniffy about the can of beer in his hands... Ask yourself: why is he working so hard?"

Instead I'm going to take advantage of the spectator position which a gay man may adopt in the often baffling dialectic between heterosexual men and women, and offer some comments on the (in my opinion) grotesque and damaging denigration suffered by straight men in modern Britain, particularly in terms of their most important role, that of the fathers of their children. If it strikes you as ironic that a gay man should be an unalloyed champion of the virtues of straightforward masculine heterosexuality, I hope at least you'll take the time to wonder why I feel the need to be so. Generations of boys are being raised all

around us with no access to fathers, either by explicit design (it is a shibboleth of the Left, now, that it is 'homophobic' to dislike the provision to lesbians and single women of anonymous sperm, via the NHS, with which to produce fatherless children. I must be homophobic, then), or by implicit cultural driver (either as a result of the blatantly anti-male stance taken by the family divorce courts or because we don't dare judge those people who produce multiple children with multiple partners without intending to provide a semblance of two-parent stability for any of them).

Even boys with fathers are raised in a wider culture which blatantly derides the masculine (every single advert ever made appears to revolve around the entirely fictional claim that men can't do anything). The limit of this nonsense was listening to Harriet Harman's view that the financial crash would have been avoided were bankers mostly female; a New Labour update of the Seventies guff that all violence is male-ordered. (Try explaining that concept to the relatives of the gay man kicked to death in Trafalgar Square by a group containing an empowered, out-of-control female.)

What, it's fair to ask, are the consequences of this societal shift? It's not just the crime statistics or the exam pass


rates or the reams of evidence about what happens to children raised in fatherless households - a disgrace to any civilised society though all these are. The worst outcome is the swaggering, hopeless nihilism on the faces of the hooded gangs that haunt our estates. Don't tell me this has nothing to do with their lack of fathers. Don't even consider breathing life into such a ridiculous sentence.

Here are some of the lessons my own dad taught me. Don't rush to judge other people because they are different from yourself; and - to sublimate yourself into love for those close to you is a good thing; and I don't pass a day on the planet without thinking of him at some point. I look at those swaggering gangs

of kids, whose single 'achievement' is to frighten other people, who have almost certainly been denied access to that most basic of children's rights: the love of a mother and father, and I wonder, what would have happened to me without my father's love? Lots of me comes from both my parents, but the bits that make me a good man come from my dad. I doubt I'm unique.

Progress of women into positions of leadership in our institutions and workplaces is a good thing. Feminisation of society - the idea that masculine virtues are not required - is not. We have ended up in a situation where we actively reward and encourage people not to stay together in order to raise their children, which in turn means that children are

being raised without access to their dads. The policy architects who delivered such an outcome, far from being praised for our increasingly feminised state, should hang their heads in shame, as first boys and then the rest of us suffer the consequences.

The next time you're sat next to a Polish builder on the bus, don't get snuffy about the can of beer in his hands. Look into his lined, exhausted face. Consider spending a day carrying out the back-breaking labour he takes for granted as his lot. Ask yourself: why is he working so hard? I'll bet you anything you like it's to make some money to give his children a better life. Fathers aren't optional, middle-class extras. Children need their fathers. Our society needs them too. 



# Championing childcare

*The availability of high-quality pre-school education not only helps working women and parents but children too, argues Kate Groucutt*

Childcare remains one of the biggest issues facing families in the UK. What kind of childcare to choose, where to find it and how to pay for it are some of the toughest dilemmas facing parents, particularly when the mother decides to return to work. For most women this occurs before their child starts school, meaning that alternative care needs to be found - more than half of women (57 per cent) with a child aged under five are in employment, rising to 71 per cent of those with a child aged five to ten.

Evidence shows that the availability of childcare has a significant impact on mothers' decisions to return to work. Recent Department for Education research found that nearly one third (29 per cent) of mothers who had moved into work in the previous two years said it was because they had found a job that enabled them to combine work with their caring responsibilities. When asked about the childcare arrangements that helped them to go out to work, the factor most commonly reported - by 47% of mothers - was that reliable childcare was available to them.

These figures, and the regular calls that Daycare Trust receives to its helpline for parents, tell us that the choice for women to return to work is far from easy, even though the number of child-

care places available, and the support to pay for it, has improved rapidly in the last decade.

The fact remains that in Britain we make it pretty difficult for women to return to work. The idea that there is lots of affordable, high quality childcare available that women can just drop their children at in order to go to jobs that don't really need doing is fanciful. In fact, some of the mothers we work with have previously been very career-minded and keen to return to work full time, but when they sit down and do their sums, it can work out as a better financial deal for their family if they stay at home or work only part-time, particularly once they have more than one child.

For families on moderate incomes there is no free childcare until their child is three, unless family or friends can be relied upon to help. Once their child is three they get fifteen hours per week of nursery education, barely enough to sustain even the most part-time of jobs once travel time is included.

For low-income families support through tax credits may be available (although this will be cut back from April), but this requires them to negotiate a complex form and a bureaucratic system of re-

porting. Yet more than half of women with young children still take this decision. It takes a strong will for women to return to work, driven by a belief that work is right for them and their family.

Of course for many it is a financial imperative, due to a big mortgage requiring two incomes. But financial motivation alone does not account for the desire among mothers to work. They also want to regain their financial independence, pursue their careers, maintain social networks and ensure that they don't lose their skills with an extended period outside of the workplace.

There has already been some evidence of the Government's commitment to maintaining a strong childcare system, and its support for the principle of universal access established by Labour. In the Spending Review the Chancellor confirmed that the fifteen hours of nursery care for all three and four year olds would be retained, and free hours extended to the 25% most deprived 2 year olds.

This free entitlement was, and remains, the most important policy to arise from the previous Government's childcare strategy, as it meant that for the first time ever, all children can experience



Day Care Trust

some form of early learning, helping to reduce inequalities when they start school. It also provides a platform of

free childcare upon which parents can build by paying for additional hours if they want to work, without worrying that they will need to remove their child from a nursery if they lose their job.

But despite the retention of free nursery places, changes to tax credits will make it more difficult for low income parents to pay for childcare, and could have a negative impact on mothers' employment. We hope to see more from the Government in the coming months about

the role they see childcare playing in getting parents back to work, reducing child poverty and tackling the gender pay gap.

The new Universal Credit could play a valuable role here, but we've yet to see concrete proposals about how childcare costs will be met under the reformed system.

A holistic approach to encouraging people to return to work is needed and childcare, the biggest work-related cost for parents, must be considered within this.

Yet if the Government is to feel truly comfortable on this agenda, and bring the Conservative Party's grassroots with it, I believe the focus should be on improving quality and narrowing the gap between children from rich and poor backgrounds. In other words, childcare is a vital part of a children's education.


The large-scale Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project found a significant link between high quality childcare provision from age three and better intellectual, social and

behavioural outcomes when children enter school. Furthermore, the effects are long lasting and are most significant for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is this evidence that should guide future policy development through measures to drive up quality. This could be through a premium to providers who train their staff to a higher level and better information to parents about how to identify high quality services.

Likewise on narrowing the gap, the Government needs to follow what the research evidence tells us. Time and again experts who study this area recommend that early intervention is what makes a difference in reducing inequality.

From Professor Michael Marmot's review of health inequalities for the previous Government, to the current reviews being undertaken by Labour MPs Frank Field and Graham Allen, experts have found that it is only through significant further investment earlier in children's lives, when it is more likely to make a difference, that we will reduce inequalities in achievement at 16 and beyond into adulthood.

To deliver this - in other words to break the link between a child's background and their future prospects - could be this Government's greatest achievement. 

# The Power of Women

*Women around the world face injustice simply because of their gender. But they are fighting back, maintains Zohra Moosa, and the UK should support them*

Fifteen years ago, the international community met to decide what it would take to achieve equality for all women, all over the world. This World Conference on Women produced the Beijing Platform for Action - the most comprehensive roadmap to women's rights ever produced. It is designed to work with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a legally binding treaty which the UK ratified in 1986 that is now recognised as the International Bill of Rights for Women.

ActionAid's work with people at the grassroots in over forty developing countries shows that a decade and a half later, the fight for gender equality remains quite alive and in many places desperately urgent. Women everywhere are still struggling to secure their most basic rights and freedoms, with poor women in poor countries often facing some of the starkest challenges of all.

The UK is one of a handful of countries that could, with a series of bold decisions, transform the lives of millions of women living in developing countries - permanently. Will this UK Government be the one to do it?

## The dangers women are facing

ActionAid's work shows that women around the world are more likely to live

in poverty and to have fewer resources simply because they are women. Women's unequal status in society means they have less power, protection from violence, access to essential services such as education and health care, and in many places they even lack the right to life.

**"Only an approach that secures women's human rights and raises their status in society will ever succeed in changing outcomes for women's lives"**

The statistics on maternal mortality are illustrative. Ten years into the historic Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) project, where governments of the world promised to reduce maternal mortality by 75% by 2015, it remains the case that a woman dies from pregnancy-related causes every minute. 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries and almost all are entirely preventable.

Indeed, this year's official MDGs progress report confirms that, once again, the MDG on maternal health has seen the least progress of all the goals despite how highly most development agencies and donors have prioritised it. Why are we struggling to meet our targets? Because

high maternal mortality rates are not simply a product of technical challenges, such as a lack of trained health care workers. They are, rather, a product of a much more profound political challenge - the routine violation of women's rights. Gender inequality and discrimination against women are widespread, with violence against women affecting one in three women globally. Evidence shows that only an approach that secures women's human rights and raises their status in society will ever succeed in changing outcomes for women's lives.

## The changes women are making

Despite the many injustices that they face, women everywhere are standing up to claim their rights, challenge injustice and fight poverty. They often do this at immense personal risk.

Known as women human rights defenders (WHRDs), these women are community or political leaders, journalists, trade unionists, teachers, lawyers, nurses and doctors, private individuals and civil society organisers. Sometimes they are part of broader social movements, such as the women small-scale farmers that work with ActionAid's Hunger FREE campaign to secure people's right to food. Sometimes they specifically advocate for women's rights, such as the women activists involved in the Women Won't Wait campaign that works to end violence

against women in the struggle to address HIV and AIDS. Women who work on women's human rights are often at increased risk of attack compared to their male counterparts because they are seeking to challenge deeply engrained ideas about gender roles and the status of women in society. Sometimes women are specifically targeted for violence as they increase their participation in public life and politics including when they attend elections and run as candidates as happened in Malawi and Afghanistan last year.

**"Women who work on women's human rights are often at increased risk of attack compared to their male counterparts because they are seeking to challenge deeply engrained ideas"**

Yet most of the progress made on women's rights is a result of tireless campaigning by women at the grassroots. These include major international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action.

They also include changes at the national level such as the new Law on the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender-Based Violence that women MPs in Rwanda helped deliver. At the local level, women human rights defenders

make many life saving changes that are often untracked and unmeasured.

### **The future of women**

Women around the world are facing harsh realities and profound struggles - for their lives and their rights. Women in poor countries produce most of the world's food, yet own less than one percent of the land. Discrimination and violence against women prevents women from having choice and control over their bodies and lives, such as securing decent education or participating in public life. Women are responding to these realities by challenging the injustices that are undermining their status and working to change the structures that keep them

unequal and living in poverty. And they could use the UK's solidarity and support. As the UK takes steps to tighten its belt and focus on the most essential programmes, it should remember that politics matter.

It can be tempting to propose technocratic solutions that offer short-term and visible results in any austerity age. Especially when the benefits are supposedly only felt 'over there'. However sustainable change will come once we address the root causes of problems. For women, who make up 70% of the world's poor, gender inequality is the key obstacle. And the realization of their rights - as women - is the only sensible solution. **⑤**



Antonio Olmos/ActionAid





## A family-friendly future

*Despite the Government saying they wanted Britain to be a more family-friendly country, the cuts will hurt families. Families need a brighter future. By Dr Katherine Rake.*

In the run up to the General Election, David Cameron made a commitment to making the UK the most family friendly society in Europe.

But we also know what an immense task he has set himself. So do the UK public. In the spring of this year, shortly before the General Election, our organisation commissioned a Populus poll asking respondents to rate the UK's family friendly status. A mere six per cent agreed that the country was a 'very family friendly society.' Cameron therefore has to convince 94 per cent of the population that the UK has changed.

So the road is a long one - and last month's Comprehensive Spending Review announcements placed major new obstacles upon it. The CSR's cuts may well succeed in wiping away Britain's deficit. But the cost to UK family life could be dear.

A raft of cuts has been unveiled which, considered as a package, inflict real pain for families with children. They include the death of universal Child Benefit, the scrapping of Child Trust Funds, the scaling back of Working Tax Credits, the scrapping of the Health in Pregnancy Grant, and the Sure Start

Maternity Grant for low income parents being restricted to only first born children.

When family-based benefits are targeted, it is disproportionately women who take the hit to their personal incomes. This is partially because women head 90 per cent of lone parent households. Also, within couple relationships, Child Benefit is paid directly to the mother in the vast majority of cases. It is often their sole source of income.

If the Prime Minister is to convince us of his family friendly credentials against this backdrop, he needs to be seen as being on the side of mothers and families. He needs to show understanding on what they are feeling - which is both anxiety and confusion.

**"Pain must be followed by positivity for UK family life"**

Elements of the cuts programme have led to serious puzzlement as to what kind of family the Coalition supports. It plans tax breaks for married couples.

Yet following the end of Child Benefit for women with a breadwinner husband

earning more than £44,000, the Daily Mail featured stay-at-home mums claiming they would be 'better off divorced.'


Working mothers are also set to suffer. Many rise to the challenge of combining work and family life by working short hours around the school day.

But the announced increase in weekly working hours needed to claim the Working Tax Credit means these 'mini-jobs' could become a less well trodden path away from benefits.

The Coalition must give clearer messages on why certain cuts are being delivered, who will be affected and how pain will be mitigated. That way, even if the pain is considerable, families will not be left in the dark.

Cameron's way forward must be to articulate what family policy initiatives can be expected when the economic sky is bluer.

Families have made clear their wish for greater flexible working rights, for greater paternity leave rights, greater support of grandparents providing childcare, for public services to be truly family friendly, and for measures protecting childhood against commercialisation.

Pain must be followed by positivity for UK family life. 

## Interdependent women

*Current welfare arrangements encourage single parenthood and fatherlessness, says Dr Samantha Callan, to the detriment of women and children*

If we are looking across society, it is important to recognise that single parenthood is rarely a lifestyle choice. Few women voluntarily sign up for it, enjoy going it alone or want that lifestyle for their own children. Many non-resident (usually male) parents are frustrated at the lack of contact with their children - they too are single parents after all.

However, for the poorest twenty per cent of society, those who are of greatest concern to the Centre for Social Justice, it can be a somewhat different story. Many of the financial instruments in place to help single parents can, in this quintile, incentivise a relationship status that is associated with significant risk factors for women and children, such as poverty, vulnerability to domestic violence and depression.

A key aspect of welfare reform is the need to deal with the couple penalty in tax credits, which makes no financial allowance for the presence of an additional adult. The economist Marco Francesconi published a shocking truth about the effect of tax credits on couple relationships last year in the Economics Journal. Professor Francesconi found that among poor families Working Families Tax Credit had a high divorce effect on working mothers (although women with middle- and high-income partners

were unaffected by the reform.) Poorer women experienced a relative increase of 160% in the divorce rate because the way the credit was structured made it highly financially advantageous for them to ditch a low- or non-earning husband.

Whilst chairing the Family Breakdown Review for the Social Justice Policy Group, commissioned by David Cameron in 2005, I was visited by a social worker who had travelled down from Glasgow at her own expense because she was so concerned about fatherlessness on low-income and often benefit-dependent estates.

She was not unique in describing the way two-parent families had become 'almost deviant' and how young women were encouraged to 'go it alone' with children by family and social services. The young men involved were considered to be more hassle than they were worth - "You're better off without him."

If few or no efforts are made to help young dads-to-be prepare for their responsibilities then the best incentive for them to make the shift into dependable adulthood has gone to waste. The resultant lack of purpose continues the cycle of worklessness, addiction and crime which characterises our poorest estates. And are women really best-

served by that advice? Going it alone when children are small is exhausting but childcare and other support can make the challenges more surmountable.

Yet once children hit the teenage years, the lack of a father and, for boys, a good male role model becomes most pronounced.

Re-partnering happens but stepfamilies are notoriously hard to sustain over the long term, especially in communities facing the constant stress of making

ends meet, living in poor housing without adequate transportation, and where mental ill-health, alcoholism or drug abuse are commonplace.

The fatherhood lobby rightly argue that contact levels between children and fathers non-resident at time of birth are much higher than is usually assumed. According to the Equal Opportunities Commission, 64 per cent of non-resident fathers were still involved with their 9-10 month old child. However, non-resident fathers' interests in their child changed between the ages of 9-10 months and 3 years. Around a third of these fathers were described by the mothers as having little or no interest in the child by age 3 and fewer than half of them still saw their children daily.

A new government, a new opportunity, but many forget that at the 1995 Labour Party Conference Tony Blair said 'a strong society cannot be morally neutral about the family'. In 1996 he referred to the development of an underclass of people, cut off from society's mainstream, living in poverty, the black economy, crime and family instability.


That narrative was sacrificed to satisfy the implicit view that defamilialisation should be the measure of success of the welfare state. Defamilialisation, according to welfare state theorists, is the degree to which individual adults can

uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independent of family relationships.

This approach to welfare sounds attractive for the young woman who has fled from an abusive home context straight into the arms of a violent boyfriend and who ends up with no choice but to strike out on her own with children.

**"Many of the financial instruments in place to help single parents can incentivise a relationship status that is associated with significant risk factors for women and children"**

But to structure vast swathes of the welfare system around a dysfunctional norm cannot be right and is definitely not sustainable. Recognising that marriage is the aspiration of a very significant majority, whatever their social class, has to be the starting point. The cultural and fiscal bias against marriage, the further one goes down the social spectrum, makes it a social justice issue.

Interdependence doesn't need to be imposed or demanded so much as supported and enabled. It's better for children, mothers, fathers, the wider extended family - and ultimately for society. 





# The ignored women

*Feminism has ignored teenage mothers. Time to fight for them.*

By Simon Blake

Teenage pregnancy is an issue of reproduction, rights and choices, subjects usually close to the feminist heart, yet in the UK there is surprisingly little feminist theory on the subject.

Young women now have access to contraception, to abortion and the right to make choices about when and how they have a child. Many teenagers exercise these choices: more young women than 40 years ago choose not to have a child when they are a teenager. And the conception and birth rates have dropped as a result of the increased choices available to young people as it has in all age groups.

“As society has become more accepting of a woman’s right to work and to choose if and when to have children has been a corresponding increase in hand-wringing judgement on teenagers who become pregnant”

With greater choice comes an increased need for information, advice and skills to support decision making. Across the country, children and young people are being denied the education and support that would enable them to make bet-

ter-informed choices. We must at least put relationships and sex education on a statutory footing if we are to begin to reverse this injustice. Until this happens, feminism and society in general, has done only half a job in the empowerment and support of young women.


However, as society has become more accepting of a woman’s right to work and to choose if and when to have children - key achievements of feminism over the last 40 years - there has been a corresponding increase in hand-wringing judgement on teenagers who become pregnant based on the prevailing view that all conceptions to younger women are bad. But demonising young women who become pregnant and using them as an example of all that is wrong with British society is deeply unjust.

Perhaps this is a topic fraught with contradiction for a feminist. Decades of fighting for rights - to vote, to work, to control fertility - can make early motherhood counterintuitive to a feminist: “is this really what we fought for...?”. Some feminists find themselves in the tricky position of believing that because reproductive choices are good, teenage pregnancy must be bad. We often fail to recognise that teenagers are as individual as the rest of us. There is one



other area on which feminists remain squeamishly silent; teenagers, consent and sexual pleasure.

Discourse on pleasure remains a wholly adult preserve, as though young people must earn their spurs through unsatisfying, pressured sex that they are not ready to enjoy or take responsibility for, in order to blossom into fully satisfied sexual beings the minute they reach 30.

To suggest that young people should only have good sex is controversial, but it is where feminists must now take the fight. Three battles, then, for feminists to wage with and on behalf of young people: choice, education and pleasure. We are good at the first. We are forgetful, but well meaning, about the second. Who’s going to take up the mantle of the third? 



## A dark spot on modern society

*Violence against women is worryingly common in our society. The Government cannot turn its back on these victims, says Sally Gimson*

By far the most common form of violence afflicting women is in the home. These women are more likely than any other victims of crime to be attacked repeatedly, and so need considerable support, particularly if they are to leave home to escape the violence.

In 2008/09 the British Crime Survey reported 293,000 cases of domestic violence - though its own analysts estimate that the real figure may be five times higher, because men are often present when the survey's researchers gather evidence by face to face interview. At Victim Support we see around 165,000 domestic violence cases a year (about 13 per cent of our 1.2 million referrals). These cases are overwhelmingly women who have been to the police, who have had the crime officially registered and whom the police have classified as being subjected to domestic violence.

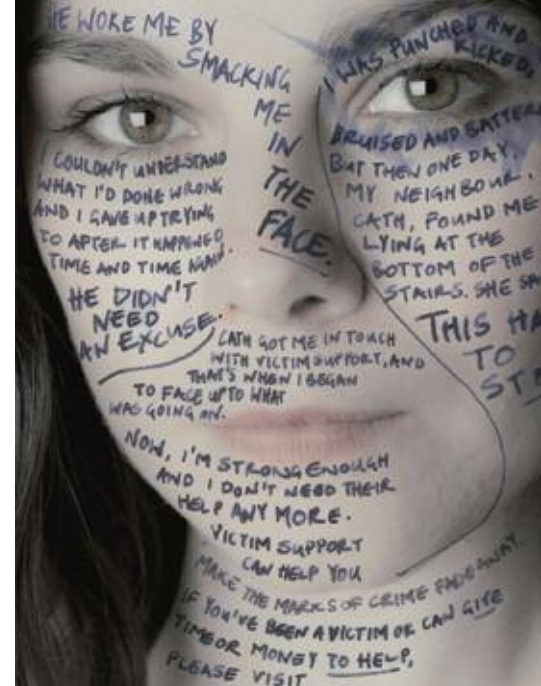
Police are recognising domestic violence more than they did in the past. In 2008/09 there were, in England and Wales, 63, 819 prosecutions for domestic violence. The introduction of specialist domestic violence courts and multi-agency risk assessment conferences has meant that the success rate of prosecutions is getting much higher - 68 per cent in 2008/09 compared to less than half in 2005. One of the biggest problems facing victims of domestic violence is the lack

of specialised support services, and aggressive prosecutions heighten rather than lessen that need. Cuts to local authority budgets, leading to deep cuts in community safety budgets, are also exacerbating the situation.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the End Violence Against Women Campaign established in a joint report in 2009 that a third of local authorities had no specialist support services of any kind for women who have experienced violence (including rape and serious sexual assault). They cited a case of a woman who had her children taken into care because there were no services in her area.

**"Domestic violence is so common, so diverse in its manifestations"**

At Victim Support we use our 6,000 volunteers to help victims of domestic violence every day: domestic violence victims are some of the people who need the most emotional support, but also practical help to protect them from the perpetrator. We also employ around 72 Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, specialists who deal with the most horrific cases. But there are still gaps in our service which we are taking steps to fill. Volunteers are not able to help the



more complicated cases where they might be threatened themselves, and these may also be households where the violence is not deemed quite serious enough for the very specialist services of an IDVA.

We are examining the scope for giving more specialist training to some of our volunteers, and are also exploring how victims can be helped better outside the home. Many domestic violence incidents may seem minor compared to murder or rape: average sentences for those prosecuted are for the most part light, the most common being bind-overs or fines. But when such violence is not tackled it often escalates. It can lead to rape and sometimes murder. Domestic violence is so common, so diverse in its manifestations and such a major part of many women's lives. 1



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**Susan Agondeze, aged six,  
Masindi, Uganda.**

Photo: Georgie Scott/ActionAid

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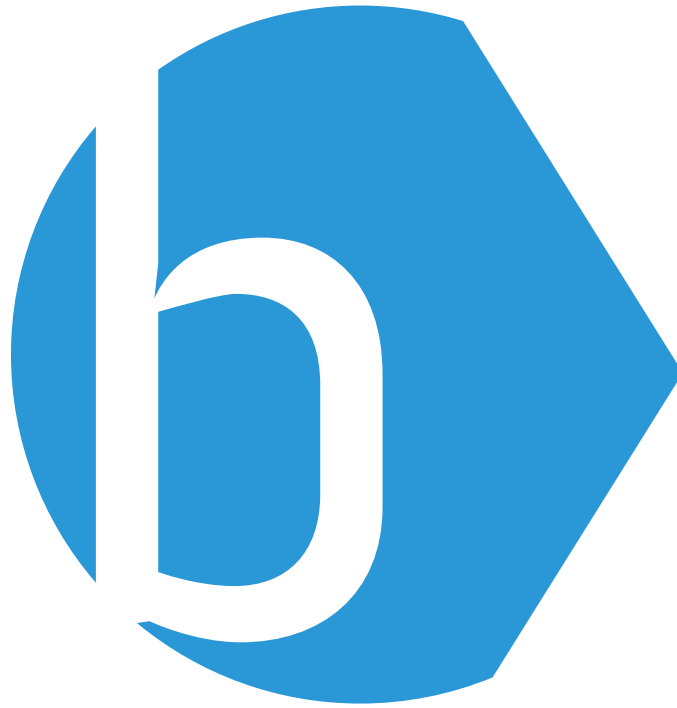
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