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Issue 2

Poverty of choice

Austerity, cuts, cost of living crisis, call it what you will but the impact of the current financial situation across the UK is restricting women and girls opportunities in a multitude of ways.

For women and girls who are experiencing violence and abuse not only does this create the social circumstances that can be used by abusers to exploit, but it also reduces the means of escape.

The Scottish Government, in their Equally Safe Strategy, recognised that “...gender stereotypes and norms continue to limit women’s access to opportunities in the labour market and economic resources, which affects levels of economic independence.”

This edition of the newsletter will explore the impact of the cost of living crisis on women’s lives and highlight some of the support services that are available.

Key findings of Scottish women’s Budget Group women’s Survey 2023

- 70% of women have not been putting heating on to reduce costs .
- Almost 20% of respondents are skipping meals entirely, which increases to almost 34% for disabled women and 46% for single parents .
- 68% are cutting back on food expenditure by limiting the type of food they buy.
- 65% of women said the cost-of-living crisis has impacted their mental health.
- Over half, 57%, note that concerns about rising costs has affected their sleep.

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Poverty and violence against women and girls

Kara Evans

Violence against women and girls, (VAWG), is at epidemic levels in Scotland. Of the 64,807 reported incidents of domestic abuse in Scotland between 2021-22, women were the victims and men the perpetrators in more than 80% of cases. In Scotland 1 out of 4 women have reported experiencing some form of abuse by the age of 18 years old. While much recorded crime has decreased in Scotland, reports of sexual crimes have increased since the mid-1970s.

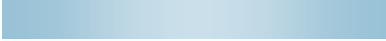
Shocking statistics made worse by the fact that only around 22% of survivors report the crime. Women who have a disability or come from black minority ethnic backgrounds or who are refugees are twice as likely to experience VAWG. Poverty exacerbates this situation. The Women's Budget Group recognised that "poverty has a female face." Women are on lower wages, make up 91% of lone parents in Scotland and experience poverty in older age due to pension poverty and living longer than men.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) states that VAWG must be understood in the context of society's different expectations of men and women and is a consequence of women's' unequal position in society.

Wise Women want change and will strive to challenge the views, stereotypes and policies that prop up this abuse of women's fundamental human rights.

Experiencing poverty limits a woman's educational opportunities, reinforcing the traditional gender roles and power imbalances in society. The stress of poverty impacts on the ability to prioritise and undertake learning. This is exacerbated by caring responsibilities; 61% of unpaid carers are women, this does not include child-care. Without education women and girls will lack the knowledge of their rights and ways to seek help. Making them more dependent and at risk of violence. Poverty and VAWG are inextricably linked, widening further the inequality of the sexes.

When women are not financially free and have to rely on partners, it leaves them vulnerable to the violence of coercion and financial abuse. The threat of destitution impacts on women's ability to leave or report abuse, particularly if she has children relying on her. This adds to the silence that already exists around VAWG.



In times of austerity, as in the current ‘cost of living crisis,’ the lack of job opportunities and unequal pay that women and girls face makes them more at risk of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). Men can coerce and target women to provide sex for services, as seen in the “sex for Rent” scandal or exploit women through prostitution. Women are on average paid 15% less per hour than men and are overrepresented in part time employment. When women are financially disempowered, they can be trapped in a cycle of violence, abuse, and exploitation. Add to these challenges of applying for low level benefits and women’s circumstances can make them even more vulnerable.

Reducing poverty is essential in the fight to eradicate VAWG. We need a holistic, multidimensional approach. We need to promote women's access to education and economic opportunities while challenging the discriminatory practices and stereotypes that reinforce VAWG.

Crucial to ending this cycle of poverty and abuse many women and girls face we need community based, adequately funded interventions and support systems. Access to learning and training equips women and girls with the skills and knowledge they need to become economically independent. Creating safe environments for women and girls to talk about and share their experiences is vital for women’s voices to be heard and change to be achieved.

Sources:

- Equally Safe: Scotland’s Strategy for Preventing & Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls.
- The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019 - 2020
- Zero Tolerance: Statistics Violence in Scotland.
- Nordic Model Now! Handbook for Universities.
- Action Aid: Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Improvement Service: The Gendered Nature of Poverty

A Moment's Peace — Yes please! Steph Morris

Kirstin McLean is the Glasgow born artistic director of A Moment's Peace Theatre Company. She has worked in theatre, TV and film for over 2 decades. For the last five years participatory arts has become a focus and passion. Kirstin has worked with school children, youth groups and multi-generational community groups all across Scotland. From 2010 to 2019 she worked as a counsellor and supervisor at Childline. Justice and equality have been common themes in her work. Kirstin has also joined a team of performance professionals in Scotland who have established a new, member-led, trade union for the industry in Scotland. She talks with Steph Morris, Wise Woman's Women's Training Worker, on the themes of Women, The Arts, Poverty, Participation, and Empowerment.

Q. Kirstin, what exactly is Participatory Art?

A. Participatory Art is art made by people who are not professional artists, people who are part of a community group. Sometimes it's called community art. In Glasgow, in the work that I do, it's about bringing people together so that they can make theatre together, and enjoy doing it. In my experience it's usually led or held by someone who is a professional, a community artist or participatory artist.


Q. Can you please share some of your experience of working with women's groups?

A. I'm currently working with the Women's Creative Company just now, a women only group. I first worked with them as a visiting director over 10 years ago and I was struck the minute I came into the room about there being something really special about the atmosphere of all women. There's something about that, that's very hard to describe but some of the women have said this themselves, "You can get a word in edgeways.". When it's a mixed sex group it's really easy to revert to the patriarchal structure, the ingrained way that society is where the men lead the conversations. So lots of things that women maybe want to say but don't feel able to, don't get said, because they feel they have to give space to the men. But when women work together in a group like that, they're very good at letting each other have their voice heard. For me, that's what the magic is. It's about women being able to have conversations that they don't get to have in their day to day life. And through the making of theatre, this offers a really free space and a safe space for women to share their experiences and talk about what is important to them.

Q. Do you think involvement in Participatory Art is important for women?

A. It's important for women to share experiences. I don't think that a lot of women realise that a lot of the oppression they face, is also experienced by other women. They can think

"It's just me.", and when you think it's just me, then you tend to think, "It must be something I've done, it must be my fault." It's coercive control on a grand scale, societal. So there is strength and value in us women saying, 'Oh it's happened to you? It's happened to me too! Right! Let's fight together!'. The solidarity is what gives birth to the movement and realising that you're not alone. It's easier to use your voice in a chorus of hundreds and thousands than when it's just you.



Q. Is it fair to say there are significant economic factors to consider if a woman wants to pursue a creative profession?

A. Yes of course. Even thinking about a career in theatre, if you want to apply to audition for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, you have to pay £50 before you've even begun learning your audition speech. And in the theatre there's a culture of, when you graduate, doing a lot of work for free and if you're coming into that world as a woman with a couple of children, maybe you're a single parent, you can't afford to do that, it's completely inaccessible. So maybe your only way in is through a community group. In the 3rd sector where Participatory Art sits, there's less funding there too now, funding is being cut, more organisations are seeking funding. There's less opportunity to pursue a creative profession.

Q. Statistics show that women living in poverty are more at risk from male violence. Have you been made aware of this through your own work with women?

A. When I first started at Women's Creative Company, we were actually creating a piece of theatre called My Fabulous Tartan Frock and it was about domestic violence. Some of the women in the group had personal experience of it. I remember what we talked about a lot, was that question of 'Why don't you just leave him?' and the answer that came back was, 'I can't afford to just leave him.' Aside from all the emotional cost of leaving when you have children, when you're living in poverty, guilt comes into it. 'How do I take my children out of this situation, yes we're poor now, but we'll be poorer if we leave!'. Often the only viable response is 'I'll just put up with it for the sake of my children'.

Q. At Wise Women we run community groups with women also in a safe space and some of the objectives for running these courses is for women to build confidence and empower themselves and to critique society.

A. es! Our women report this time and time again. We don't advertise our theatre workshops as 'Come and get involved and you'll develop confidence and take that into other areas of your life!', but that is what happens. They learn to use their voice and have their voice heard and acknowledged. And they find that maybe for the first times in their lives, they're speaking up for themselves.

Q. As a feminist organisation, Wise Women work to fight the oppression of all women and girls. Is it fair to suggest Participatory Art engages in a similar fight?

The feminist fight? Yes.100 percent! When we talked with our women about the importance of our workshops being a single sex space, the answer that came back from every single one of the group was, 'Yes, because I can speak!' I'd say there's another dimension to it as well. Feminism really has to rely on sisterhood, solidarity between us and realising that women are not the enemy to each other. That's one of the things I love about our group, is the sisterhood. The support of one another's lives and experiences.

Thanks Kirstin!



Financial Support Services in Glasgow

Bridgeton Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 554 0336

Address: 30 Main Street, Glasgow, G40 1HA

Castlemilk Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 634 0338

Address: 27 Dougrie Drive, Glasgow, G45 9AD

Central Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 552 5556

Address : 201 North Street, Glasgow, G3 7DN

Drumchapel Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 944 2612 (Leave message and we will call you back)

Address: 195C Drumry Road East, Glasgow, G15 8NS

Easterhouse Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 771 6654

Address: 46 Shandwick Square, Glasgow, G34 9DT

Glasgow North West Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 948 0204

Address: 2nd Floor, 1455 Maryhill Road, Glasgow, G20 9AA

Greater Pollok Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 881 2462

Address: 27 Cowglen Road, Glasgow, G53 6EW

Parkhead Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone: 0141 554 0004

Address : 1361 - 1363 Gallowgate , Glasgow, G31 4DN

**To find out about your local Welfare Rights Officer contact Health and Social Care Direct
Phone: 0141 287 0555**

Keep in touch

**Wise Women, Wellpark Centre, 120
Sydney Street, Glasgow, G31 1JF.
Tel: 0141 370 0739.**

**Email: info@wisewomen.org.uk
Web: www.wisewomen.org.uk**

Keep in touch on Social Media

Twitter: @WiseWomenTweet
Facebook: @Wise.Women.Glasgow
Instagram: @wisewomenglasgow

**Contact us to join our mailing list and
receive information direct to your
inbox or mail box!**

A word of thanks

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our wonderful funders, including;

- Glasgow City Council
- Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership
- National Lottery
- Robertson Trust
- Glasgow HSCP

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Our Vision

“Wise Women is a feminist organisation that continues to fight the oppression all women and girls experience in everyday life. We challenge society’s attitudes towards women by encouraging and supporting women to express themselves, recognise common experiences and take action for change.”