

**The Gendered Impact of Recession and Recovery:
Has Devolution Made A Difference for Women in
Scotland?**

A paper presented by Susanne Ross & Ailsa McKay
Department of Economic Studies & International Business, Glasgow
Caledonian University
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Abstract:

The global financial crisis and associated programmes of increased fiscal stimulus during the early stages of the recession has resulted in many governments now facing the problem of tackling growing budget deficits and constrained resources. Subsequent plans for fiscal consolidation have led some commentators to highlight the potential impact of *both* recession and recovery on women, in particular women's employment (see for example Smith, 2009; TUC, 2009)

At a UK level the preference has been for rapid fiscal consolidation via a range of measures including cuts to service provision, public sector job cuts and welfare reform. However in Scotland there has been a reluctance to follow a similar path.

Faced with the biggest budget cut since devolution, represented by a reduction of £1 billion in the block grant from Westminster, the Scottish Government announced spending plans for 2011/12 in November 2010 aimed at protecting frontline services, jobs and economic recovery. At a UK level, equality considerations are currently under threat as can be witnessed by the coalition governments Red Tape Challenge website. However, in Scotland there appears to be a marked difference in approach to budget setting process which has been influenced by a commitment to promote greater equality, as evidenced by the publication of an Equality Budget Statement to accompany 2010/11 and 2011/12 budgets.

This paper will highlight how considerations relating to an overall objective to promote gender equality have influenced / informed the budget setting process at a Scottish level. The emphasis of the paper will be to identify the potential impact of the nature and scale of public sector cuts, and impact devolution has had on women's experiences of work, recession and recovery within UK and Scotland.

1 Where are women within the Scottish Labour Market?

The demographic composition of the UK, and Scottish, labour market has changed dramatically over the last few decades. Female employment has increased substantially to levels around 65% currently, significantly changed from 1970's where only 42% of women worked outside the domestic realm (Hogarth et al, 2009). Increases in female participation have been supported by government reforms to enhance the flexibility of the labour market as well as economic restructuring in the movement toward service based economy which have seen huge increases in the use of non-standard forms of employment such as part-time, temporary and casual employment contracts. The availability of which has helped women enter the formal labour market by increasing the opportunities available to participate in the realm of paid employment, consequently increasing their economic independence, whilst still allowing them to balance their primary caring responsibilities. As a result, women are much more likely than men to work part-time (42%) or have some form of flexible working arrangement, whilst the majority of men still work in full-time positions (88%) (Rake, 2009). In addition to substantial increases in the levels of female participation within the formal labour market, the types of jobs undertaken by women are often different from that of men and are driven by an array of different social pressures and burdens influencing their employment opportunities and decisions. This has led to persistent levels of occupational segregation within the UK and Scottish labour markets. Female, and male, employment tends to be concentrated within occupations traditionally related to their gender, and views on their role within society, with female employment clustering around the 'softer' caring, teaching and cleaning sectors. These lower paid and lower status jobs tend to be viewed upon as feminine work and not suitable for the greater part of male employment and therefore devalued by the market economy (Perrons, 2005). The gender composition of sectors such as

manufacturing, construction and agricultural, forestry and fishing, on the other hand, is much more male dominated with male employment comprising 75%, 89% and 75% of workforces respectively (Breitenbach & Wasoff, 2007).

Women therefore remain concentrated in specific occupations and are also more likely to work within the public sector. As a whole, public sector employment accounts for just over a fifth of all employment within England and UK, however is significantly higher in Scotland at around a quarter, as indicated in the table below. It is evident that during the recessionary period from 2008 to 2010, Scotland enjoyed considerable growth in public sector employment; 2.4 percentage points in comparison with 1.5 and 1.6 percentage points in England and UK respectively.

Table 1: Public sector employment as a proportion of all employment: by region.

| Year | Scotland | England | UK |
|-----------|----------|---------|-------|
| 2008 | 22.7% | 18.8% | 19.6% |
| 2009 | 24.6% | 20.1% | 21.0% |
| 2010 (Q1) | 25.1% | 20.3% | 21.2% |

(Source: ONS, 2010; Matthews, 2010)

Historically, the Scottish public sector has been the biggest spender and biggest employer within the UK, making Scotland a largely state-dependent economy (Gourley, 2009). This can be explained by the fact that during the Thatcherite years, Scotland resisted following the path of their UK counterparts to outsource public services to the private sector in a bid for public service reform through compulsory competitive tendering. Increasingly, throughout that time public services were put out to tender as a means of “rolling back the state” and injecting much needed competition into public sector to make services more responsive to demand and adding value. Contrastingly, this move was heavily resisted by local authority

employees and trade unionists within Scotland. Public sector employment in Scotland, therefore, has remained fairly secure over the years, particularly for the majority of women employed within this sector.

In 2009, at UK level, only 16.5% of men worked within public sector in comparison to more than twice as many women at 35% as shown in table 2. This figure is higher in Scotland with around 40% of women currently working in the public sector, in comparison to only 20% of men. This proportion has been fairly consistent over the last decade for UK, and Scottish male public sector employment, whilst there has been a steady rise in representation of women within both public sector workforces throughout the previous decades. Growth, which has been boosted by the increased use, and availability of, flexible working arrangements.

Table 2: Proportion of men and women working within public and private sector

| UK | Per cent | | | | | | Scotland | Per cent | | | | | |
|------|----------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|----------|----------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Men | | Women | | All | | | Men | | Women | | All | |
| | Public | Private | Public | Private | Public | Private | | Public | Private | Public | Private | Public | Private |
| 2006 | 16.2 | 83.8 | 34.1 | 65.9 | 24.5 | 75.5 | 2006 | 20.6 | 79.4 | 38.4 | 61.6 | 29.1 | 70.9 |
| 2007 | 15.6 | 84.4 | 33.5 | 66.5 | 23.8 | 76.2 | 2007 | 19.5 | 80.5 | 38.5 | 61.5 | 28.5 | 71.5 |
| 2008 | 15.6 | 84.4 | 33.6 | 66.4 | 23.9 | 76.1 | 2008 | 18.8 | 81.2 | 37.5 | 62.5 | 27.6 | 72.4 |
| 2009 | 16.5 | 83.5 | 34.6 | 65.4 | 24.9 | 75.1 | 2009 | 20.4 | 79.6 | 38.9 | 61.1 | 29.2 | 70.8 |
| 2010 | 16.6 | 83.4 | 35 | 65 | 25.2 | 74.8 | 2010 | 20.1 | 79.9 | 38.5 | 61.5 | 29 | 71 |

(Source: ONS, 2011)

Delving deeper into specific areas of the public sector, patterns of occupational segregation become evident where women form an overwhelming majority of workers within primary education (98%); approximately 70% of educational workforce overall; four fifths of healthcare workers and two thirds of local authority workforces within Scotland (67%) and UK (65%). Not only are women over-represented in public sector, with regards horizontal

segregation, there are also patterns of vertical segregation occurring with women forming the majority of positions at a lower status and only a minority at senior levels.

Traditional undervaluation of women's jobs and concentration within particular sectors, in addition to the nature of women's jobs has seen a marked difference in remuneration received for their employment in contrast to men's. Comparisons of average earnings of men and women show women consistently average fewer earnings than men. The gender pay gap in Scotland is currently 12% when comparing male and female full time earnings. However, given that the majority of women have a tendency to work part-time, affecting their average annual earnings, a more realistic picture can be drawn by comparing men's full time to women's part-time earnings, which increases the gap to 34% (Close The Gap, 2010).

The gender pay gap within Scotland is much smaller than UK when comparing full time, part time or overall gender pay gap. However reductions in part time gender pay gap, since the ratification of Equal Pay Act in 1970, have been less striking at only 14% in comparison to a marked narrowing of full time pay gap of around 20% over the 40 year period (Perfect, 2011). When comparing the hourly pay across public and private sector in UK and Scotland a similar trend becomes apparent; for both median and mean earnings in public sector in UK and Scotland are higher than in private sector. UK gender pay gap is higher in the private sector than in public sector where it is nearly halved at 10% currently for full time employees. For those working part-time, the majority of who are likely to be women, the gender pay gap within the public sector is 20%. A quarter of public sector employees are low paid, earning less than £7 per hour, with this proportion rising to a third for those over 35 years, majority of whom are likely to be mothers and carers (Poverty Site, 2010).

Consequently women are more economically vulnerable than in previous recession, and fewer are immune to unemployment. Women's position within the labour market is more precarious primarily because they work flexibly, are in temporary or part-time employment,

or are segregated in low-pay sectors (Rake, 2009), slotted around their caring responsibilities. Women are also at an economic disadvantage in comparison with men as they are less likely to have built up any savings or financial safety nets, resulting in less resilience to weather the tough economic conditions and putting them, and their families, at greater risk of increased poverty (ibid; US Senate, 2008).

2 Recession & Recovery

First round impacts of the recession were felt in male-dominated productive industries, such as construction, production and finance sectors rather than female concentrated caring services. Headlines relating to the impact on jobs of the global financial crisis and the resulting economic downturn have frequently talked of a ‘mancession’, a phrase coined by US economists describing trends in unemployment during the early stages of the current recession. Initial headcount statistics indicated that the recession appeared to be hurting men more than women. Such headlines miss an essential point – all economic recessions tend to be ‘mancessions’ due to their cyclical nature. The reason which may be explained by the fact that the initial impact of any economic downturn, and subsequent fall in demand, tends to be borne by the male dominated construction and manufacturing industries, impacting negatively on the private sector. Other industries, particularly the public sector, such as health and education, which a large proportion of the female workforce tend to dominate, are not as vulnerable to the effects of the economic cycle and have been relatively sheltered from the recession seeing rises in employment over the same period due to government fiscal stimulus programmes. For example, as previously noted, from 2008 to 2009, public sector employment in Scotland grew by 1.9%, at a time where private sector employment fell by 1.1%.

In previous recessions, male dominated industries, such as manufacturing and construction, were hard hit by the fall in demand while service sectors, such as retail and hotels and catering industries performed reasonable well. This does not seem to be the case at present. This current recession, however, has hit sectors across the whole economy (TUC, 2009). One of the strikingly different features of this current recession is that there are now many more women in workplaces. As a result, more women are likely to be affected by the economic slump, which is a marked contrast to previous recessions experienced. Smith (2009) indicated, during the initial stages, that the impact of this recession is likely to be more evenly shared amongst men and women than it ever has previously. There are fear that it is now the recovery phase, and associated programmes of fiscal consolidation, which will have hugely disproportionate impacts upon women, making them, and their families worse off (Rake, 2009).

Government programmes of fiscal stimulus, during the early stages of the recession, sought to put into practice a much vaunted concept of Keynesianism through infrastructure programmes to create jobs and boost the economy. It has been commented that the government's fiscal stimulus was too masculine in its direction with its emphasis on helping male-dominated industries such as finance and auto manufacturing sectors, where there have been high profile job losses (Stratten and Adetunji, 2009) this at a time when many jobs were being lost in female-dominated sectors such as retail and catering where no similar lifeline packages were offered by the government.

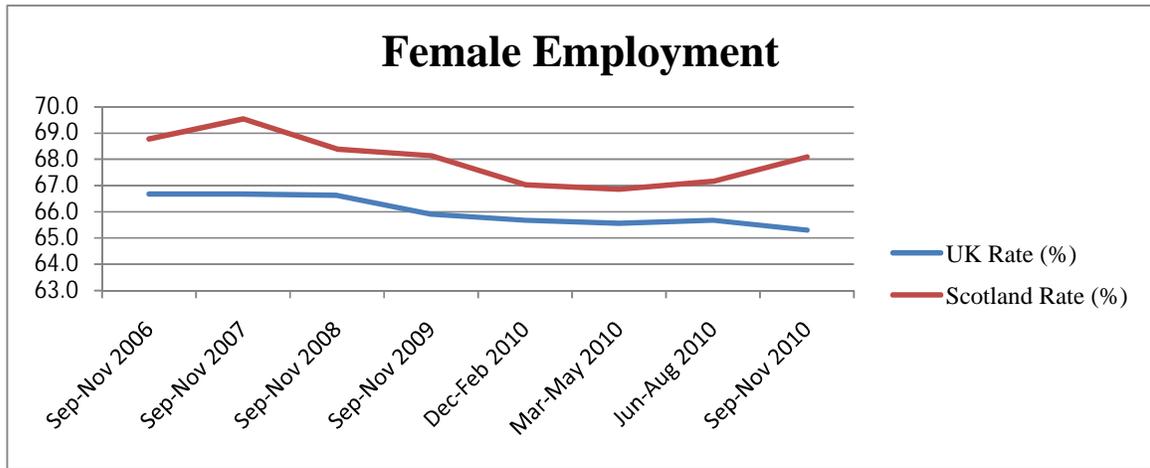
The extent of public spending committed to fiscal stimulus initiatives indicate that a period of social austerity will follow. Government borrowing levels increased due to fiscal stimulus measures coupled with the decline in economic activity and government revenue, leading to an overall sharp deterioration in public resources. The UK coalition government made their stance on tackling the public debt explicit. Accelerating the reduction of the public sector

deficit, within the first few months of taking up office was carried out through a series of constricting budgetary measures. The full effects of the recession are not yet known; however, what is clear is that the fiscal stimulus programmes and mounting government deficit are likely to have major ramifications for women's employment, economic independence and overall welfare, through the announcement of severe spending cuts. As a result of these budget cuts, public sector jobs are expected to be put at risk. The distinct feature of this recession, therefore, is that the *recovery process* in Scotland and UK and other EU countries will entail a significant cut in the level of public spending. As they seek to control levels of public spending the danger is that "mancession" headlines could quickly be replaced by a focus on the very negative impacts the cuts will have on women within Scotland, and UK's economy and quite possibly result for the first time ever in a 'womencession'.

3. **Labour Market Effects of Recession & Recovery**

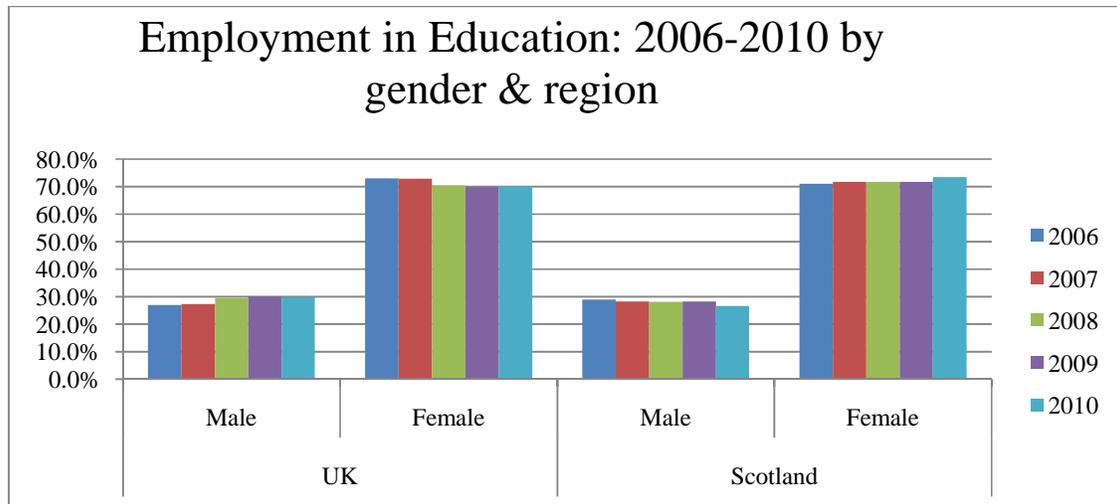
Overall Scottish employment rates for women are generally much higher than that of UK levels. Both experienced a decline in levels of employment following the start of the downturn in 2008; however by mid 2010 employment levels started to recover, with a divergence in pattern emerging in UK and Scottish female employment rates. Markedly, female employment rates began to increase, whilst UK levels fell. The difference in experience of women within these regions is a notable feature of the recovery phase of the figure shown and continues to be mirrored when comparing trends in female unemployment during recession and into the recovery phase.

Figure 1: Female Employment: by region



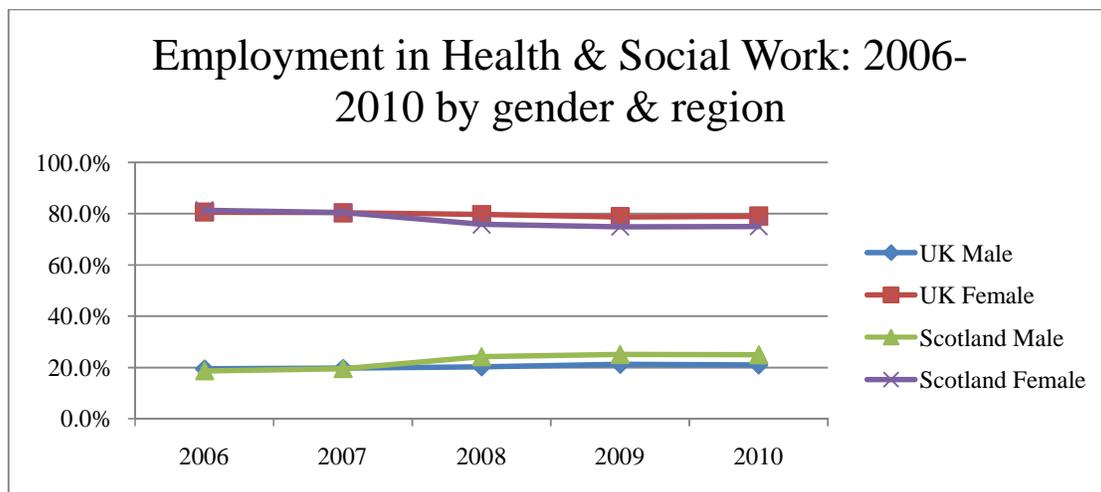
Looking specifically at employment within UK and Scotland’s public sector we can see that initial indications from the following charts show that prior to, and throughout the recession, the proportions of female employment within each of the public sector workforces have faced very differing trends across UK and Scotland with no obvious pattern emerging.

Figure 2: Employment in Education by gender & region



At UK level, male employment within educational workforces has seen an increasing trend in participation, whilst a falling representation of women from 2006 to 2010, as seen in chart above. Contrastingly in Scotland, this trend is not being emulated when comparing male and female employment levels, an incidence of growing occupational segregation is prevalent. Interestingly within health and social care workforce's occupational segregation appears to be narrowing, within UK and Scotland, with men taking up increasingly more positions within this field, whilst female participation is falling, with Scotland making more progress on closing the gap at a faster rate as evidenced in the chart below.

Figure 3: Employment in Health & Social Work by gender & region



With regards employment in public administration and defence a similar pattern is being mirrored within UK and Scotland of falling male and rising female participation showing a widening of gender imbalance.

Figure 4: Employment in Public Administration & Defence by gender & region

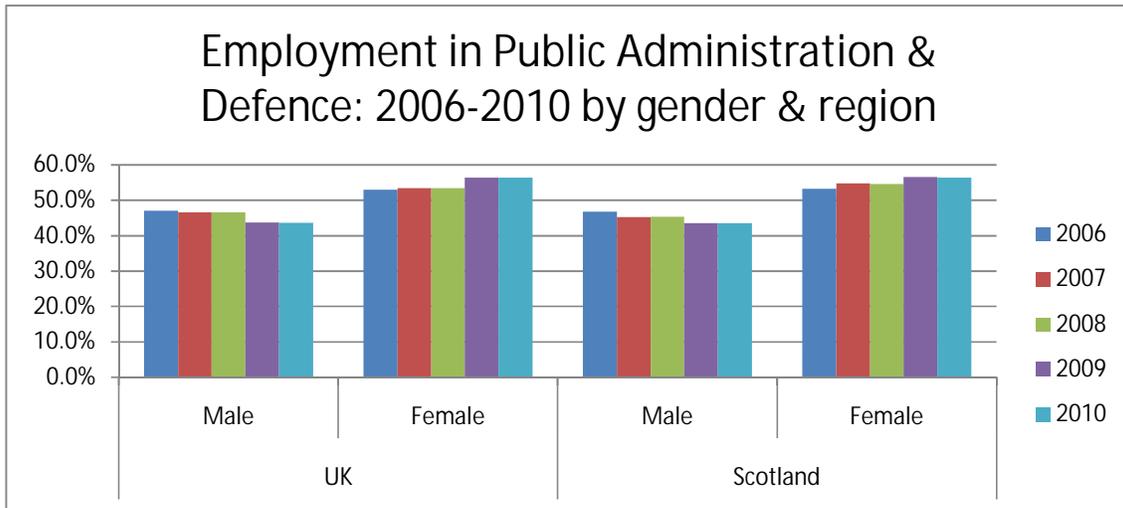
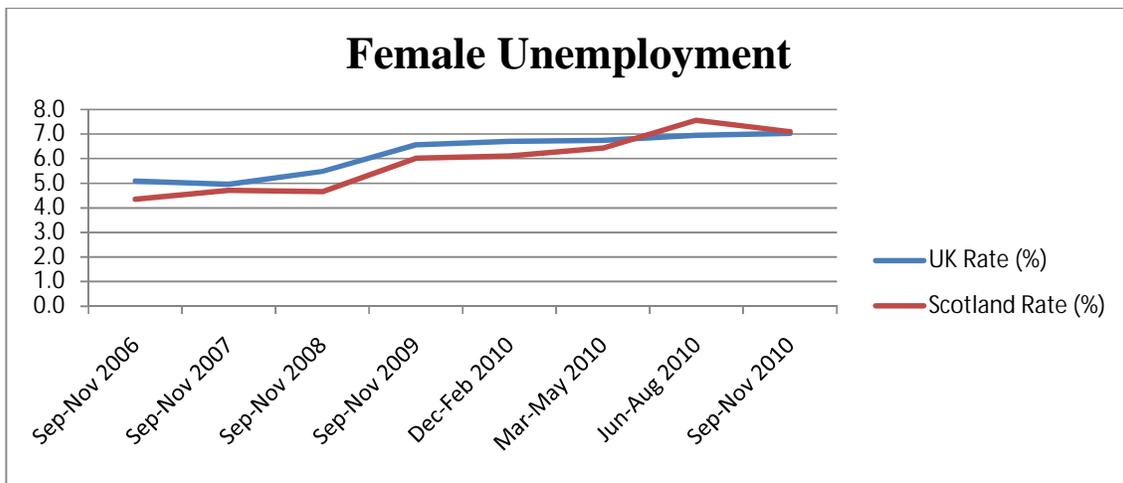


Figure 5: Female Unemployment: by region



Turning our attention back to headcount statistics of female unemployment, a similar trend persists when comparing UK and Scottish levels during the downturn of the recession; both show an increase in levels of unemployment, increase which is more marked in Scotland than in UK. The gap between UK and Scottish levels appears to narrow mid 2010 where female unemployment rates in UK and Scotland are on comparable levels. Recovery phase has seen

gradual slowing down of the rise in UK unemployment, whilst Scottish female unemployment has reduced swiftly.

Figure 6: Female Economic Activity: by region

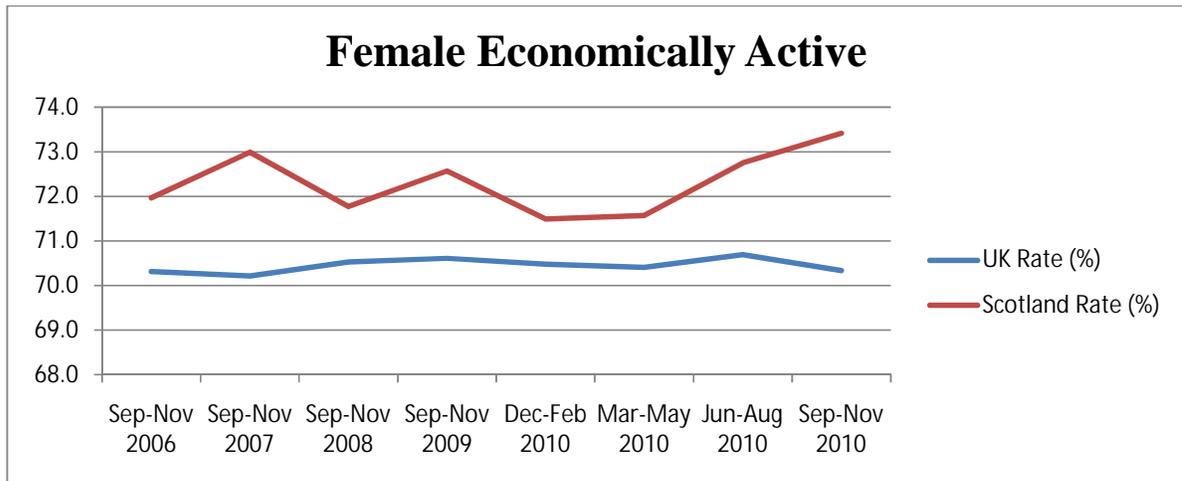
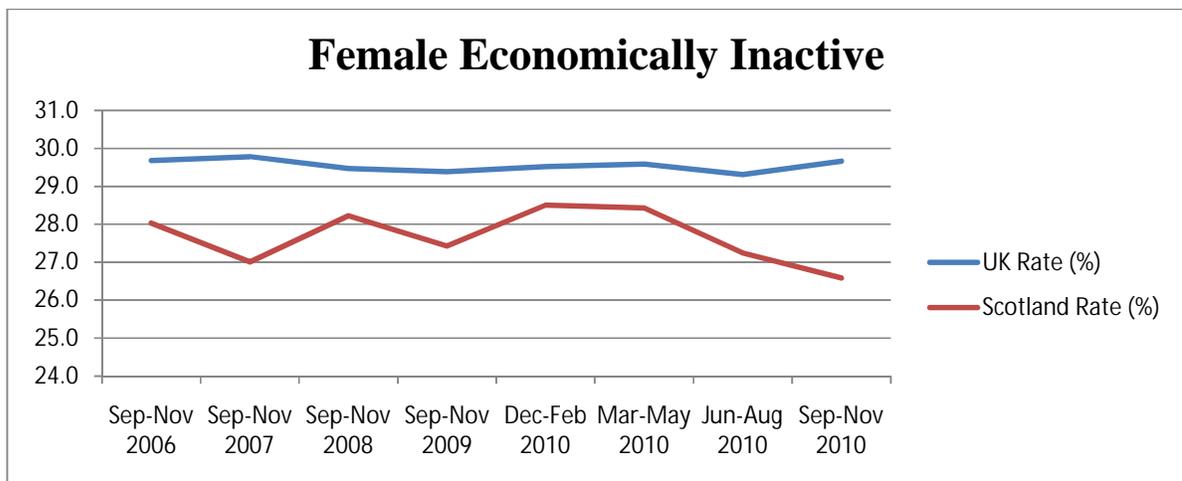


Figure 7: Female Economic Inactivity: by region



Graphically an emphatically different picture begins to emerge as to the experience of women in Scotland compared to their counterparts in UK during the recovery phase. Employment is rising in Scotland; unemployment is falling; number of women in Scotland who are

economically active is rising and number of women economically inactive is falling, in sharp contrast to that experienced within UK. A pattern which has emerged in the last two quarters of data analysed. Does this pattern therefore suggest that women within Scotland are faring slightly better than their UK sisters? It is, however, too early to predict what the future holds for women's employment, particularly against the backdrop of unprecedented public spending cuts, or to comment as to whether the increase in employment and economic activity for women in Scotland is the start of a persistent trend.

4. **UK & Scottish Budgets**

May 2010 marked the start of a shift in political rule within the UK, with the induction of a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government into power. The UK coalition government expressed a commitment to imposing a period of austerity on public finances through reducing borrowing and cuts to public spending as a means of addressing the deficit. Initial indications of the coalition governments' intentions were unveiled the following month through an emergency budget followed by Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) several months later. The June emergency budget contained a range of proposals, including most significantly an increase in indirect taxes, a public sector pay freeze and benefit cuts, all aimed at balancing Britain's books within five years.

Independent analysis of the emergency budget, carried out by the House of Commons library, found that women would bear a disproportionate burden of the spending cuts;

72 per cent of cuts will be met from women's income as opposed to 28 per cent from men's. This is because many of the cuts are to the benefits that more women than men rely on and the changes to the tax system will benefit far more men than women. (Fawcett Society, 2010).

As a result of these findings, the Fawcett Society, a leading UK based campaign group for equality between men and women, requested a judicial review on the basis of the UK governments' failure to recognise the gender impacts of the recession and subsequent recovery package based on stipulations set out within Equality Act of 2006. This concern was echoed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) who alerted the Treasury to their obligation, under gender equality legislation, to consider any resulting disproportionate impact of their budget decisions. Despite legal obligation, no attempt had been made by the coalition government to comply with this duty to conduct equality impact assessment of the measures outlined within their preliminary budget proposals.

The four-year public spending plans, set out in the CSR, October 2010, outlined the full extent and impact of those initial proposals with the aim of saving £81 billion. Most notable were changes to welfare payments such as housing benefit and working family tax credits, two year pay freeze and mass job losses within the public sector, in addition to accelerated increase in the retirement age for women.

Despite rising inflation and costs of living, severe reductions, restrictions and capping of many of the benefits of which many women have come to rely on for economic independence will further entrench economic inequality and exacerbate child poverty (CPAG, 2010; WNC, 2010). One fifth of women's income, on average, comes from top up welfare payments and tax credits in contrast to less than a tenth of men's income (Oxfam, 2010) therefore any reductions in such are likely to reduce the real income of women.

The implication of imminent spending cuts then is that the 'recession proof' sectors such as education, health and public administration which experienced a rise in employment during the current recession, will experience a decline in employment during the recovery phase as the government seeks to follow a path of fiscal consolidation. Female dominance within the public sector puts women in an increasingly vulnerable position following the announcement

of nearly a third of a million job losses over the next 4 years, by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) (OBR, 2010). For those fortunate to remain in employment within the public sector, increased pension contributions, two year pay freezes and changes in tax credits will see reductions in their overall take home pay (WNC, 2010). More concerning is the long term regressive impact on the gender pay gap which may result as a consequence of the shift of women's employment from public to private sector (TUC, 2010; WBG, 2010).

Women are more likely than men throughout their life to be major recipients of public services for maternity, child care and support with caring responsibilities. For example, cuts to education budget may result in reductions in the provision of early years and childcare services, which currently allows women the ability to increase their access to employment opportunities and earnings (NCVO, 2010; WNC, 2010).

In addition, government attacks on the 'red tape' of equality legislation, which is seen as unaffordable, threaten gender equality in a wider sense, through restrictions on flexible working arrangements that many women have grown to rely upon. The recent launch in April 2011 of the "Red Tape Challenge" website designed to invite public consultation on which of the statutory regulations in place currently need to be scrapped, better designed or incorporating into existing legislation in a bid to reduce 'costly, pointless and illiberal government red tape'. The Equality Act, a primary piece of legislation is a proactive approach to tackling many forms of discrimination. The onus is on public sector authorities to promote equality of opportunity to all and to reduce all forms of discrimination. The explicit underlying presumption of the challenge is that unless there is justification and a good case made for such legislation, many will go.

The government has emphasised that the proposals announced are progressive and the cuts are shared across all sections of society, however immediate reaction is that the brunt of austerity measures will be borne by the poorest sections of society (CPAG, 2010; IFS, 2010;

TUC, 2010; WBG, 2010). Analysis undertaken by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that many of the measures were regressive, hitting the poorest in society worse than the rich, and more significantly families with children were the biggest losers from welfare reforms (IFS, 2010). Extensive scrutiny of proposals by UK Women's Budget Group (WBG) also highlighted that expenditure cuts would hit women, especially lone mothers and female lone parents, harder than men (WBG, 2010). Moreover these findings were reinforced by analysis carried out by Tim Horton and Howard Reed of Landman Economics, on behalf of TUC, within their report *Where the Money Goes*. This distributional impact of the CSR showed that the scale of cuts purported were likely to have devastating consequences on living standards, in particular for poorer families, women and vulnerable sections of society. The poorest being hit fifteen times harder than the richest when considering changes to public spending as a proportion of their income, and unsurprisingly when cuts to benefits, social services and education are taken into account, families with children and single pensioners were the worst off (TUC, 2010).

Overall cuts and welfare reform outlined in the coalition budget programme implies serious damage to living standards of individuals, majority of whom are likely to be women. Adding to tax and welfare changes, the very real prospect of mass public sector redundancies, rising inflation and expectation of much weaker recovery, the pain of this budget is not evenly share. Furthermore measures contained within the proposals appear to reinforce the male breadwinner female caregiver economic model of household (WBG, 2010).

Following changes to housing benefits, the government once again face a legal challenge to their budget proposals. March 2011 saw CPAG serving legal proceedings on the government for a judicial review of cuts to housing benefit for failing to give due regard to equality duties as changes announced disproportionately impact upon minority groups and single parents (CPAG, 2011).

As planned spending cuts are implemented more women than men will experience the required job losses. However, equally important will be the associated loss of services that many women still in employment rely upon heavily. Any reduction in, or withdrawal of, a range of state supported care services that aid in the process of accessing the formal labour market will impact disproportionately on women workers, both as providers and as users of such services. The result will be a subsequent round of job losses amongst women.

As a consequence of UK CSR imposed budget cuts, the Scottish Government faces the tightest spending review of post war era with conditions of economic austerity reminiscent to those of wartime. Funding for devolved nations comes from Westminster, as a block grant, determined by Barnett Formula. As a result Scotland, in particular John Swinney in his role as Finance Minister, copes with the sharpest reduction in Barnett consequential since devolution and prolonged period of constrained public expenditure, as indicated in the chart below.

Given that £6 in every £10 is currently spent on public sector wage bill in Scotland, this places huge pressure in the public sector on employment and wages. The SNP have however expressed an explicit commitment to maintaining headcount within the public sector through no compulsory redundancies policy, to protect employment and services, as evidenced within the Finance Ministers opening statement delivering draft Scottish budget 2011-12 to parliament:

“This is a Budget that addresses a financial challenge without precedent since Devolution. Despite the biggest reduction in public spending imposed on Scotland by any UK Government, this is a budget that protects jobs, economic recovery and frontline services.”

(Scottish Government, 2011a)

In order for SNP to deliver on that objective, in acute financial times, they have imposed two year pay restraint within the public sector reducing the impact in terms of redundancies. Given the size of the public sector wage bill, any reduction in expenditure through block

grant would naturally have to be dealt with by some reduction in pay. Public sector pay restraint provided much of the narrative for the Scottish Spending Review 2011/12. The decision to switch from revenue (day to day running) to capital spending helped mitigate the massive cuts to capital spending imposed by Westminster. If capital spending in schools, hospitals and infrastructure is maintained, jobs will be safeguarded and long term economic growth will also be protected.

Initial impressions of the Scottish budget put it in stark contrast to that of the CSR produced by UK coalition government in their intended impacts on the most vulnerable in society. Scottish government have sought to identify, and alleviate the effects of Westminster imposed spending cuts on women as witnessed by the publication of an Equality Statement alongside Draft Budget of 2010/11 and 2011/12. Whilst the coverage is partial and the analysis limited, the publication of these documents indicates a useful starting point from which to build upon. Opening comments within the initial Equality Statement in 2009 affirms that:

“The [Scottish] government also recognises the importance of providing a public account of how our budget contributes to progressing equality.” (Scottish Government, 2009)

Within the current Equality Statement, 2010, a clear indication of the Scottish Governments focus on equalities is evidenced:

“We have shown leadership in facing the challenges and set a Scottish budget directed at economic recovery, protecting the frontline services that people rely on. [...] How Governments spend money has the potential to reduce or amplify inequalities. Our budget has been shaped by the evidence we have gathered including our equality analysis”

(Scottish Government, 2010b)

The direction of spending plans show a clear focus on women within decision making as further indicated below:

“.....if we consider the particular roles that women occupy in public service it is clear how essential they are to delivering a successful Scotland where all can flourish. [...] finally key elements of the UKCSR and proposed Welfare Reform programme threaten to limit women in Scotland’s access to paid work, reduce household income and impinge upon their financial independence. [...] women’s work and earnings are essential to the Scottish economy and to Scottish households. Although women do still tend to be concentrated in lower paid occupations, they fare better in the public sector. These have important consideration in arriving at the decision in this Budget to protect jobs and frontline services on which many women and families depend. [...] In addition, the pay proposals will contribute to the protection of women’s jobs and incomes” (ibid)

The Scottish Governments Economic Strategy has an overarching purpose of:

“...focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.”

(Scottish Government, 2007)

Scottish government are clearly at odds in terms of economic policy direction with Westminster as evidenced by their explicit commitment to maintain public sector headcount within their spending review 2011-12; publication of equality budget statement alongside spending plans; clear commitment to opportunity for all and their underlying vow to keep equality at the forefront of decision making.

Given the difference in employment experiences within UK, and Scotland, could this be due to different economic strategies pursued at Scottish and Westminster level? Has Scotland’s decision to delay their share of the £6 billion cuts and accelerate forward capital investment had a beneficial effect in the current year? Do we have evidence that the strategy of John Swinney is actually working in a time when economic growth has been fairly stagnant?

5. **Why Scottish women may fare better due to Scottish politics?**

Following a wave of optimism and referendum results in 1979 voting overwhelmingly in favour of Scottish devolution, the Scotland Act, 1978, heralded that the induction of a 'Scottish Parliament will usher in a new way of politics that is radically different from the rituals of Westminster', according to Scottish Constitutional Convention, 1978.

Scottish political process is very distinct from that of their Westminster counterparts. Devolution provided the opportunity to move away from the norm of confrontational, gladiatorial style of politics, where heckling and jeering are commonplace, and incorporate a much more democratic, consensual and consultative approach to governing (Jordan, 2003).

As a result of a singular debating chamber, the committee system, and involvement of pressure groups, within the Scottish Parliament system is hugely pivotal in influencing and scrutinising government policies and decisions, holding the government to account providing the checks and balances and seen as the driver of a new era of politics.

5th May 2011 will be known as a historic date which transformed the landscape of Scottish politics. Overnight, vast swathes of territory changed hands as the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) swept aside their political rivals to win the first ever majority at Holyrood Parliament with a landslide electoral victory. The electorate voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Nationalist party to competently take Scotland forward through challenging economic times, as a majority administration, in the hope of reshaping, and boosting, Scottish economy.

Scottish Parliament was originally set up with an electoral system making it extremely difficult for any one party to gain an overall majority. However the Nationalist party overcame this hurdle and is not only the majority within parliament, but in all committees, and also the majority in committee convenorships. With this new dominance of the Scottish

political space now comes a mandate for SNP to pursue policy objectives according to those stipulated within their manifestos and continued work on equalities.

Alex Salmond in his opening speech following his re-election as First Minister as head of a majority administration declared that “Modern Scotland is built on equality”. Clearly in Scotland coupled with the fact that given the evidence thus far there appears to be a marked difference in the feel of the Scottish to UK budget in their impact on equality groups, in particular women, Scottish women may fare better than their UK counterparts as the consequences of the recession unfold.

Westminster have shown that they are utterly divorced from the needs of the majority of individuals they serve, in the speed with which spending cuts have been undertaken; their attack on red tape legislation and their blatant failure to fulfil their legal obligation to provide gender impact assessments accompanying their draft budgets.

Scottish political framework, therefore, has provided an opportunity to make a difference, given the divergence in political landscape from that of Westminster. Only time will tell if the policies, budget decisions and processes will result in making a difference for women in Scotland. However this development is most definitely worth monitoring very closely.

Surmising then that given the marked difference for women in Scotland, than UK, due to their predominance within the public sector and also that there is a noticeable difference in political landscape for women in Scotland, as witnessed through the very different UK and Scottish budgets, the impact on women within Scotland and UK is therefore likely to be very distinct. It may mean then those women in Scotland fare slightly better than their counterparts in UK due to the visibility of gender within the policy process informing economic policy. The two coming together provides a real opportunity to make a difference. SNP have recognised this through publication of Equality Budget Statement and their overarching strategy to economic growth. Political landscape has formed or helped shape

economic strategy. UK seems to be following a gender blind approach in comparison to Scottish government who are much more gender aware, which have thus far seen differential impacts on women's experiences of recession and recovery in UK and Scotland. However only time will tell if this pattern will continue in the future.

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