

Men and Women at work: the more things
change the more they stay the same?
IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities

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Outline

- Introduction
- Labour market issues
- Gender inequalities within the household
- Implications for policy
- Conclusion

(From Gendered economic inequalities: a social policy perspective, commentary by Fran Bennett, 2021)

Introduction

- Social policy perspective on gendered economic inequalities in UK
- Gender analysis (Women's Budget Group membership) (men too):
 - centrality of both individual autonomy and interdependence/caring
 - not just household at point in time, but individual over life-course
 - implications of policies for roles, relationships, resources longer term
 - within-household resource distribution (often in 'too difficult' box)
- Focus on lower income and social security system in particular
- Relevant to Deaton Review of Inequalities as whole

Labour market issues

- Women more integrated in UK labour market today? But trade-offs:
 - more activation in 'flexible' labour market
 - no right to individual income in means-tested universal credit
 - enough obligations to shape labour market friendly to those caring?
- social protection for self-employed, good work agenda, public sector employment, caring as investment for all

- Motherhood penalty: loss of human capital/working below potential?
- Unpaid work (skills): 'no let-up' / time poverty / lack of income security in Universal Credit
- Care for disabled/elderly not given as much analytical or policy attention as care for children
- paid leave & right to flexibility for carers in employment

Gender inequalities within the household

- Income / time / assets – resources not always shared fairly in couples
- Money not neutral, or always completely fungible (source/owner etc.)
- Individual autonomy/agency - not free-floating individualism, & necessary for healthy relationships
- Economic dependence can be problematic (financial coercion: abuse)
 - policy assessment: include impact on intra-household inequalities
- Policy debates clouded by ‘workless households’, ‘in work poverty’
 - policies need to consider individuals within household context too

Implications for policy

- Joint means test for UC seen as unfair, esp. by young, in pandemic
- Non-means-tested benefits do not depend on partner's presence/resources/actions – but neglected recently
- Women caught in pincer movement, as dependants' additions in benefits abolished but contribution conditions tightened
 - improve individual non-means-tested benefits (conditions/amounts)
 - income for unpaid carers: should not depend on benefits for disabled/elderly person being cared for
- Helps tackle 'in-work poverty' (benefits for out-of-work partners)

- Improve incentives for '2nd earners' + more flexible conditionality
 - reforms in Universal Credit & abolition of transferable tax allowance
- Long gap in UK between well-paid leave for parents & access to free / affordable child care
 - high parental leave take-up by men: well-paid, & reserved for them
- Child care: complexity, high cost (not included in poverty measure)
 - more free provision + more supply side, less demand side, subsidy?
 - rebalancing to low-income families: not just other families to pay

Conclusion

- Pointers to needful change in direction, not comprehensive
- Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy (Women's Budget Group, 2020):
 - beyond gender pay gap to economy as a whole (including unpaid), beyond growth/breaking glass ceiling to better life for all
- Combination of focus on autonomy and agency for all with more awareness of interdependence as society and wider world
 - gender issues must be central to Deaton Review, not just for own sake but also in this broader context