



Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

EQUALITY & SEX (MALE AND FEMALE) FACTSHEET

Introduction

Sex is a 'protected characteristic' in the Equality Act 2010 and the law protects both men and women from sex discrimination. The 2011 census found that of the approximately 560,000 people aged 65 and over in Wales 55% were women and 45% were men.

The first category of classification of human beings is the split into male and female. Whilst the focus of anti sex discrimination legislation and work has primarily focussed on women, it is however important to remember that men are also covered by the law.

The issues

Attitudes to what is socially acceptable in terms of roles for men and women have changed radically. Thirty years ago many women agreed with the commonly held notion of men as the main wage earner and that 'a woman's place was in the home'. The current generation of older women has very different life experiences and expectations. All generations of women often balance employment with caring responsibilities for family members of all ages. However, older men are also often carers for older family members, particularly partners.

Equal pay for women and promotion to top jobs remains an issue. Despite the many advances in terms of the social status of women in society, there is still an expectation that women will perform the 'caring'

functions and the vast majority of routine 'domestic chores' within family units, in addition to any paid employment.

The UK Government's pension reforms mean that many older women will have to remain in employment longer than they anticipated. Older women can also experience problems associated with lower pension entitlement due to gaps in their employment that occurred when they were providing full time care for young families. This can have an impact on the income of retired women and leave them at significantly higher risk of pensioner poverty. Older women can suffer a 'double negative' as sexism and ageism converge and negatively impact on their lives. There are particular concerns that the current economic climate may have a disproportionate impact on older women. Unemployment in Wales fell in 2012 but the number of unemployed women aged 50-64 doubled.

Ageism also effects men and has a particular impact on some men's ability to obtain employment past the age of 50. Men tend to have fewer social connections than women and this can lead to loneliness and isolation in later life which can have a broader impact on their health and wellbeing. This can be an issue when trying to get health messages out to men, for example, about prostate cancer or depression.

Conclusion

The enduring societal pressure placed on women to assume primary responsibility for the provision of care tends to affect older women disproportionately and can prevent them from entering or remaining in full time employment. This can also affect men who are carers. The impact of this on the lives of older men and women must be addressed through more effective use of flexible working practices, support and encouragement. Women must be empowered and supported to make decisions about the balance between work and care on the basis of what makes economic sense for them and their families.

To see the evidence base for this factsheet and further resources visit www.olderpeoplewales.com