

Caring in a Time of Austerity: Unpaid Care, Paid Employment and Gender

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Abstract

The austerity agenda has been used by the UK's Coalition Government as justification for labour market deregulation alongside reductions in the welfare budget and cuts to public services. However, the way in which the agenda has been enacted through public policy is inherently gendered as the particular decision-making processes underpinning budget reduction have had a disproportionate impact on women who seek to balance unpaid care responsibilities with paid work. Pay freezes and the loss of jobs in the public sector have disproportionately affected women and employment law reforms have resulted in reduced protection for those engaged in low paid, precarious work. The reduction in availability of certain key public services also has a detrimental effect on female workers many of whom depend on finely-tuned arrangements in order to balance their family and professional commitments. This paper considers the impact of recent reforms on the reconciliation of paid employment and unpaid care and raises the possibility of challenging the underlying austerity rationale through legal means.