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WORK LIFE

SEMINARS

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

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Austerity and Policy Development

Disinvestment by the state

- Cuts to welfare budgets
- Reduction in public services
- Loss of public sector jobs

Deregulation of the labour market

- Changes to employment law
- A 'different approach' to equality
- Employment tribunal fees

Women's Lives, Carers' Lives

- Most women will provide unpaid care at some life stage
- Many move from one care commitment to another (child → elder/parent)
- Women's paid work experience is profoundly affected by this
- State involvement has been central in improving women's lives on their own terms

The Gendered Impact of Austerity Measures

- Women more likely to be reliant on the welfare state whether 'in work' or not
- Evidence from a range of sources shows that the cumulative impact of Coalition policies is detrimental to gender equality in terms of income, services and jobs.
- Certain groups of women are consistently and particularly harshly affected: those with high levels of care commitments; lone mothers; single female pensioners.

Data Sources

- The House of Commons' Library cumulative data sets (since 2010)
- The Women's Budget Group (2011)
- The Institute of Fiscal Studies (2014)

Unpaid Care and Austerity

- Movement from state dependency to the free market as provider
- Informal/unpaid care provision is based on notions of interconnectedness and solidarity
- Affective dimension – care is personal
- Task-centred dimension (‘body work’) - “women’s work”
- Care work is crucial but grossly undervalued

Labour Law and Care

- The traditional labour law framework has never accommodated unpaid care
- Paid workers who also provide informal care are viewed as ‘the other’
- Law has been slow to catch up with social changes, e.g. different family forms, women’s labour market participation
- Unpaid care sits outside the legal framework

Labour Law and Austerity

- Changes to employment law
 - Unfair dismissal qualification
- A 'different approach' to equality
 - Implementation of the Equality Act 2010
- Employment tribunal fees
 - Disproportionate impact?

Using the Law to Challenge Austerity

- *Fawcett Society v HM Treasury* (2010} EWHC 3522
- *Bracking and Others v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2013] EWCA Civ 1345
- *R (Aspinall, Pepper and formerly Bracking) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2014] EWHC 4134

Conclusions

- Austerity has a disproportionate impact on those who provide paid work and high levels of unpaid care
- Is 'austerity' inevitable?
- Could deficit reduction be achieved by other (less gendered) means?
- How can labour law better protect carers?