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Gender, Ageing and Covid-19

MICRA Webinar:

The Impact of Covid-19 on Health and Social Inequalities in Older People

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Ageing, the lifecourse, material resources, pensions and care – and Covid-19

- A lifecourse approach to ageing means that to understand inequalities in later life we need to understand how life trajectories lead to accumulations of advantage and disadvantage
 - Most evident in accumulations of material resources, pensions and income in later life
 - Income disadvantage in later life linked to other disadvantages – participation in society, housing, morbidities, health
 - Due to care (especially motherhood), work and partnership histories, which have cumulative effects
- Need to understand: **how Covid-19 will disrupt the lifecourse**, potentially reverse gains made towards gender quality, impact care, impact divorce
- Need to understand: **how Covid-19 will affect older women now** with their accumulated lifecourse disadvantages

Covid-19 and men

- An especially complex issue to debate because Covid-19 seems to be making men sicker and leading to greater male mortality at all ages
- Focus so far in the public domain has been very much on men
 - Including some discussion of exaggerated masculine behaviours in the face of catastrophic threats e.g. less hand washing, less social distancing (war metaphors = a real man can fight and defeat the virus)
- Potentially marginalises the substantial disproportionate impact of the virus on women's current lives, and especially the potential long-term scarring effects on their life-course trajectories
- Masks important gendered issues arising for older women

Gender issues in Covid-19: lifecourse factors I

The paid workforce: pay, sickness, mortality, risks of unemployment

- Health workforce: 77% of healthcare workforce are women
- Social care workforce: 83% of social care workforce are women, 2x more likely to die, remain unprotected, very low paid, very poor working conditions
- Industries hardest hit, most redundancies expected
 - Early study suggests 17% of women made unemployed wk of 9 – 14 April vs 13% men;
 - Companies that may not recover are feminised – hospitality, non-food retail, childcare, tourism
 - Worst yet to come
- Gig economy, insecure economy: women are c. 70% of low earners, 54% of zhc workers, 74% of PT workers
 - Lifetime low pay severely impacts on later life welfare, even if long term work
 - NEF estimates of 1.6million at high risk of losing jobs and not qualifying for any government support, women's risk is 30% higher
- Gender pay gaps likely to increase
- Ongoing issues with social care

Gender issues in Covid-19: lifecourse factors II

The black box of the household

- Gendered roles at home esp. childcare with school closures, depressing productivity, fear for jobs; if children remain at home, likely it will be mothers who sacrifice jobs and careers
 - Penalised in selection for redundancy or dismissed if jobs are not legally protected
 - Impact on the child care market may be long term
- Lone parents poverty c.45% (90% women) under great stress//mothers' and children's poverty likely to substantially increase (half of parents of young children report that they are running out of money)
 - 18% of children in the UK live in a single parent household
- Domestic abuse
- Increased risk of divorce – catapults women into low income and poverty, long term scarring effects on resources

How important are lifetime histories of paid work for income in later life?

i.e. how worried should we be about substantial disruptions to women's work patterns from Covid-19 for these outcomes?

Answer: very

- ***substantial differences in women's pension accumulation by time out of the workforce and periods not working full time, exacerbated by gender and motherhood pay gaps***
- ***substantial differences in participation in paid work in the ten years surrounding State Pension Age by prior paid labour force participation***

Gender issues in Covid-19: older women

- **Care home deaths are a gendered issue**
 - We know far too little about pathways to care homes, but likely to be disproportionately poorer women without partners or adult children
- Living alone: needing help, becoming ill, especially with morbidities
 - About a third of men aged 80 and over are single, divorced or widowed, **but this is the case for 70 per cent of women over 80**
- Domestic abuse [virtually undocumented in later life]
- Caring for adult children with disabilities, caring for partners: little help, services cut or stopped (anecdotal evidence is very distressing)
 - Long term care consequences of partners surviving Covid-19//caring for survivors
- Widowhood – severe financial consequences and grief
- Grandparenting disrupted
- Lack of exercise will likely have long term health consequences

Conclusions

- Serious concerns about disruptions to women's paid work, disproportionate impacts of job losses and recession, divorce, increases in women's and children's poverty: ramifications will be felt in later life for these cohorts, and potentially their children
 - Material resources, pensions, health
- Serious issues accruing now for older women behind closed doors: living alone, morbidity and dying from Covid-19, carers (including possibility of increasing complexity of carer roles for partnered women), domestic abuse
- Deaths and other issues in care homes are gendered issues

Data issues

- Critical that sex-disaggregated data is collected on all workforce impacts including gig economy (v. poor data), redundancies, pay and pay gaps and analysed close to real time
- Collect national data on characteristics of carers and those cared for, morbidity and mortality **including in care homes**
- Individual income series data to understand risks of divorce, risks of widowhood, poverty behind closed doors (especially with rise in Universal Credit claims)