

Policy Watch



Produced by the Faith & Policy Unit of Mothers' Union and Sue Burridge from the Mission and Public Affairs Division at the Church of England

Welcome to online monthly Policy Watch, available on Mothers' Union website at the beginning of each month at <http://www.themothersunion.org/policy.aspx>

Tracking issues in Social Policy September 2009

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Equality Bill: amendments at Committee Stage

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The Equality Bill reached the end of Committee Stage on 7th July 2009. Following our report in July's Policy Watch, we are pleased to announce that a clause that could have weakened the protection of pregnant workers and women on maternity leave did **not** go through. The Committee removed: *"a reference to a woman being treated less favourably [if pregnant or on maternity leave] is a reference to her being treated less favourably than is reasonable"*. The section now clarifies that a woman cannot be discriminated against or treated less favourably because she is pregnant, has given birth, is breastfeeding or is on maternity leave with no reference to 'reasonability'.



The concept of 'dual discrimination' has also been introduced into the Bill. For example, this would mean that where a person felt that they had been discriminated against because of both their age and their gender, they could take legal action on the basis of both these characteristics. Progress of the Bill will resume during the new Parliamentary session.

Parliamentary opening dates: 2009-2010 Session



Scottish Parliament
30th August



Northern Ireland Assembly
6th September



Houses of the Oireachtas (Rep. Ireland)
16 September



Welsh Assembly
20th September



Houses of Parliament
12th October

Real Women: Liberal Democrat's Policy Paper

In March this year the Liberal Democrat Party launched a consultation on women. The Working Group on Women's Policy, chaired by Jo Swinson MP, has produced its final report, *Real Women*. If the paper is approved by Conference (19th – 23rd September) it will be formally adopted as Liberal Democrat party policy.



The paper made proposals on a number of areas affecting the lives of women – money, family, image and body, and confidence and safety. Detailed proposals include:

Money:

- Tackling the gender pay gap, including through compulsory pay audits
- Ensuring girls have good careers advice
- Scrapping compulsory retirement ages

Family

- Training and recruiting more midwives and health visitors
- Providing 20 hours of free childcare per week for all children from 18 months to school age
- Replacing maternity and paternity leave with 19 months parental leave to be shared between the mother and father as they see fit
- Encouraging divorcing couples to attend at least one mediation session at the start of proceedings
- Extending the right to request flexible working to **all** employees

'Real' women – image and body

- Protecting children from body image pressure, by changing advertising rules on altered and enhanced images
- Promoting physical activity to girls
- Requiring OFCOM and the Advertising Standards Agency to add gender equality as a strand in their role as media regulators

Confidence and safety

- Providing funding and resources for rape and sexual assault support services
- Improving services for victims of domestic violence
- Supporting women wishing to leave prostitution

Comments of the paper are welcomed by the Working Group and Mothers' Union will be responding. The full paper can be found at:

<http://www.libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/Real%20Women1.pdf>

Impact of family breakdown on children's wellbeing: DCSF review

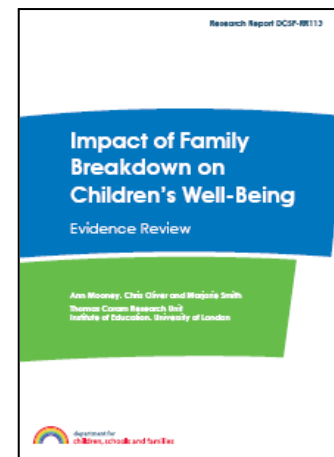
In June 2009 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published an evidence review on family breakdown. The report, written in conjunction with the University of London, drew on existing research into the effects of family breakdown on children with the aim of informing policy development. The report asserts that:

- Family breakdown can adversely affect children's health and wellbeing.
- Although negative outcomes from family breakdown can persist into adulthood most children will not be adversely affected in the long term.
- Family 'type' or 'structure' is not the significant determinant of a child's wellbeing; rather it is 'family functioning'. Family breakdown can result from a number of inter-related factors such as parental conflict, mothers' mental health and financial hardship.
- Family breakdown does not directly cause negative outcomes for children; rather the factors involved in family breakdown, such as parental conflict and financial hardship, may increase the likelihood of negative outcomes (e.g. behavioural problems).

None of these findings are new and some are questionable. It is also unclear whether the opinions and experiences of children experiencing family breakdown have been represented. Finally, the report recommends that in order to alleviate the potentially negative effects of family breakdown, Government policies need to focus on facilitating cooperative parenting, supporting mothers' mental health, encouraging good parent-child relationships and reducing poverty and financial hardship.

To read the report, go to:

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RB113.pdf>



Party Conferences Autumn 2009

This year Mothers' Union will be attending the annual autumn conferences of all three main political parties. The conferences provide party members with the opportunity to get together, vote on party policy and get inspired before the start of the parliamentary session. The conferences are also open to observers from charities, public sector and commercial organisations and the media. These representatives are permitted to observe party speeches and debates, mingle with the party members, run an exhibition stand and host a wide array of side events. The side events provide organisations with the opportunity to raise awareness of their issue through presentations and debates, usually with a panel of politicians, 'experts' and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives. Keep a **(Policy) Watch** on November's issue for Mothers' Union's report.

19th – 23rd September 2009



27th September – 1st October 2009



5th – 8th October 2009



United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 2010

“Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realisation of the Millennium Development Goals”

Mothers’ Union has sent an official, independent delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) each year since 2001. However, Mothers’ Union members have been attending CSW since before then and some members were present at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing, where the ‘Beijing Declaration’ and ‘Beijing Platform for Action’ were born. 2010 marks the 15th anniversary of Beijing, known as Beijing+15, and this will be the theme addressed by CSW next year.

The **Beijing Declaration** lays out the commitments of governments across the world to advance the equal rights and empowerment of women, including through working to eliminate violence against women, increasing women’s participation in education, decision making and leadership; eradicating poverty and furthering sustainable development. The **Platform for Action (BPfA)** sets out a plan for the realisation of the Declaration, through the actions of women, society, governments, inter-governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations; and through the implementation of national and international laws, norms and agreements. The **twenty-third special session of the General Assembly**, held in 2000, reviewed the Beijing Declaration and BPfA, also known as **Beijing +5**; and the **Millennium Development Goals** are the set of 8 targets agreed at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit which commit governments to addressing the world’s most serious challenges by 2015.

The UN and our Christian UN values

We see in societies today that the interdependence of people and nations is not matched by ethical interaction of consciences that would enable integral human development to flourish. As a Christian worldwide organization we have a responsibility to pursue progress that offers humanity, fundamental dignity and equality wherever human beings live in the world. We regularly witness the disparity of values across our world. On the one hand we assert ethical values and conditions of a person’s basic need for justice, while on the other, we tolerate a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated especially where it is weak and marginalized. It is precisely this disparity that Mothers’ Union is working to eradicate in both its UK and worldwide policy work.

So this is our call – to reclaim the centrality of the human person through integral human development. This requires intergenerational justice in cultural, religious, political, economic, ecological and juridical fields. The Mothers’ Union is unique in addressing this call because it is a grassroots organization. All integral human development can only be effective if it is rooted in the very people it seeks to transform. Thus our UN work has to be seen in this framework if it is to demonstrate both our Christian credentials and to continue to provide a voice for our worldwide membership.

The Faith & Policy Unit will be saying goodbye to Jen Coton, Social Policy Researcher, as she moves on to a new job in September. We thank her for all her hard work on Policy Watch and wish her the very best for the future!