**Austerity hitting region’s women hardest of all**

Women are disadvantaged in the labour market; rising levels of female unemployment in the UK are even worse for women in the North East.

Nationally, women’s unemployment has been over one million since 2010. In September 2011, the North East female unemployment rate hit double figures for the first time since comparable records began in 1992. It stands at 10.2%, the highest of any region. More women signing on than ever before – partly due to changes in the way single mothers are treated by the welfare system. Single mothers must now be actively seeking work once their youngest child is 5 years old.

Women’s unemployment is currently higher in the North East (10.2 %) than nationally (6.7 %).  In Newcastle the average gross full-time weekly earnings in 2013 were £529.3 for men and £414.9 for women. This compares to £421.9 for women nationally.

Women are more likely to be low paid. The TUC estimates that 29% of women compared to 16% of men are in low paid work. Minimum wage jobs such as cleaning, hospitality and hairdressing are mostly done by women.

Analysis of ONS figures show that there has been an 11,000 increase of the number of women out of work in the North East and represents an increase of 23% during the time of the coalition government in the region.

Evidence also shows an 85,000 increase in the number of women out of work across England during the same time and a 10% increase in the number. All increases in female unemployment are worrying however this shows that the number of unemployed women in the North East has increased at faster than twice the rate of the English average for women during the time of the coalition government.

Women are a majority of underemployed workers; the number of underemployed women workers has risen by 40 per cent since 2008.

Over the past 40 years there has been a rise in the percentage of women aged 16 to 64 in employment and a fall in the percentage of men. Huge part of this is the raising of the State Pension Age. More women have to work for longer. It’s also to do with demographics. There simply are more women in the population than there were 40 years ago.

Another factor is declining wages in relation to the cost of living which means it is not longer possible for many families to rely on just one income – women’s work is a necessity.

The changing economic landscape is another factor with the rise of the service sector and decline of the manufacturing sector beginning in the 1960s. Traditionally a higher proportion of women than men have worked in services, with a higher proportion of men working in manufacturing. However, an employment gap still remains, 77% of men are employed compared to 67% of women.

Women are bearing the brunt of government austerity measures through reduced pay, job losses and cutbacks in the services they run and use. In local government for example workers have felt the greatest pain of redundancies, three in four staff are female. We know that three in 10 working families have at least one parent in the public sector, the chancellor will pay a heavy political price for ignoring the affects of austerity on women.

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