# Women and Multiple Disadvantage in Wales Survey (2014 – 15)

## Summary of Key Findings

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## 1. Introduction

The WEN Wales *Women and Multiple Disadvantage Survey* aimed to gather data from organisations about the causes and impacts of the multiple disadvantages experienced by the women they work with.

We used the term "multiple disadvantage" to refer to the issues that arise "when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown".[1]

The survey included fourteen questions which asked respondents about the work they do, the kinds of multiple disadvantage experienced by the women they work with, and whether they think the situation is getting better or worse. The final question asked for their views on the main effects that multiple disadvantage has on their service users and members. Most of the questions included quantitative and qualitative elements, using predefined multiple choice questions to capture quantitative data and open-ended questions to allow respondents to elaborate on their answers in more depth.

The resulting data should not be interpreted as a measure of multiple disadvantage in Wales, but rather as a useful snapshot which captures the views and concerns of organisations that work closely with women and encounter the problems caused by multiple disadvantage.

## 2. The Respondents

The survey received 47 responses from 35 organisations in Wales[2]. The organisational data can be broken down as follows:

81% third sector organisations
11% public sector organisations
4% private businesses
2% social enterprises
2% registered social landlords.

The data should therefore be understood as heavily weighted towards the issues and concerns of the third sector in Wales. However, this group of responses included a wide range of organisations working on diverse issues. These organisations also

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[1] Social Inclusion Unit (SEU) 1997. For a literature review and in-depth discussion about terminology, see Mark Duncan and Judith Corner, *Severe and Multiple Disadvantage: A Review of Key Texts*, Lankelly Chase Foundation http://www.lankellychase.org.uk/assets/0000/1402/CHF_Lit_Review.pdf

[2] We have included all the data because where multiple responses were received from organisations, it was usually the case that they came from different offices and/or projects within the same organisation.

work with some of the most disadvantaged women in Wales and can therefore be considered to have a high level of knowledge and experience in this area.

The top five issues which organisations reported working on were "Education and/or training" (76.6%), "Signposting and access to services" (57.4% each), "Benefits and welfare" (53.1%) and "Health related issues" (48.9%).

**Table 1: What are the main issues your organisation works on?**
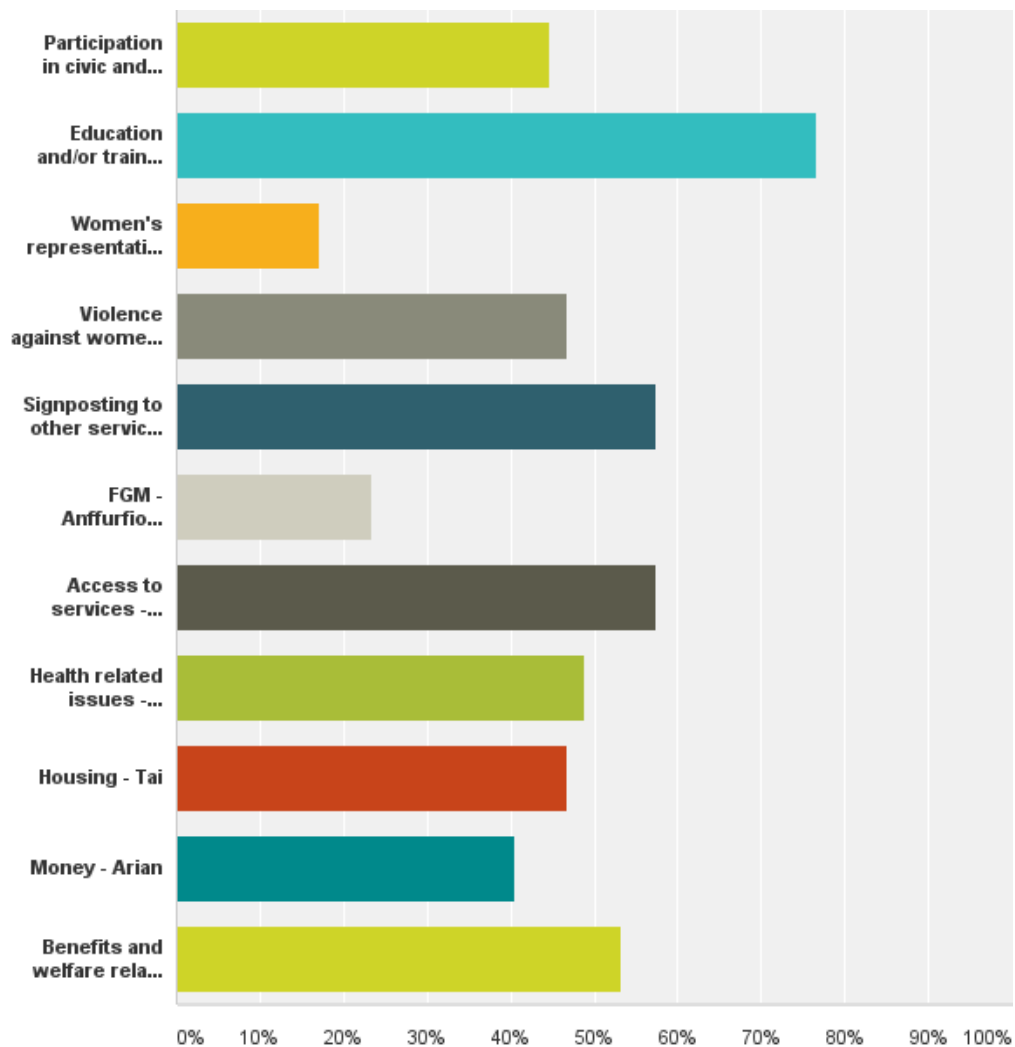


The majority of respondents (almost 60%) said that their organisation had an all-Wales geographical remit. The survey captured responses from organisations working in most of the regions listed on the predefined multiple choice question. Almost 20% of organisations said they worked in 'Other' areas, usually listing specific local authorities or cities/towns. There were no responses from organisations working specifically in "East Wales and the Marches" or "Coastal Mid Wales".

The main types of work undertaken by respondents were "Service delivery" (just over 80%), "Campaigning" (50%) and "Advice provision" (just over 40%)

**Table 2: What type of work does your organisation do?**
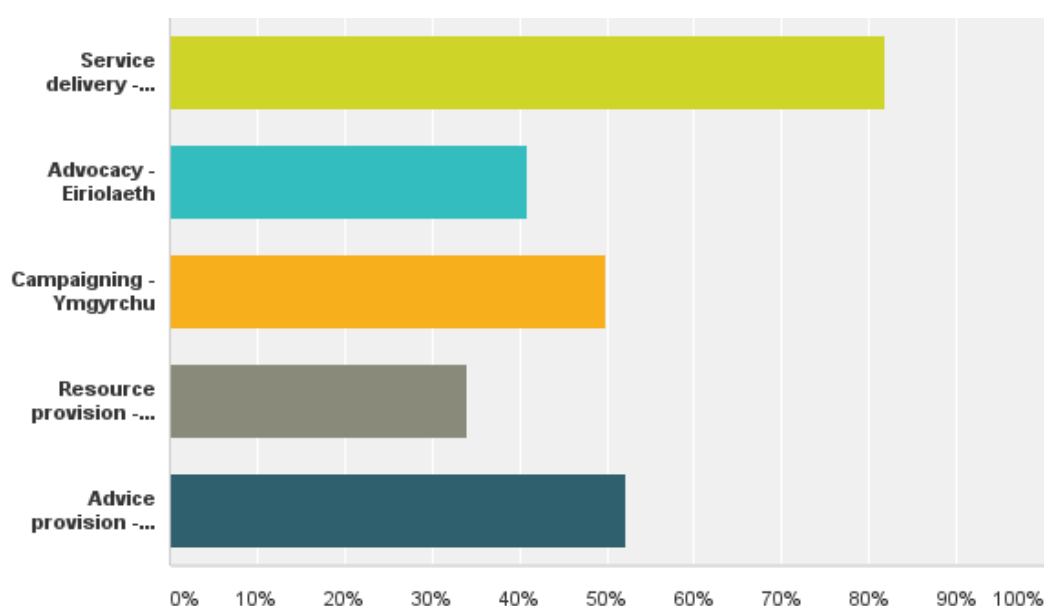


## 3. Summary of Key Findings

**3.1.** When asked to identify the main causes of multiple disadvantage in relation to their members/service users' own lives (individual factors), economic and educational issues emerged as leading causes reported by respondents. Just over 82% of respondents cited "Level of education/skills" as a cause of multiple disadvantage. "Income level" was cited by 80% of respondents, followed by "employment status" (64%) and "level of spoken and written English" (60%).

**3.2.** Issues of identity and having protected characteristics were also cited strongly as a cause of multiple disadvantage for women. "Gender" was cited by 80% of respondents as a cause of multiple disadvantage for women. Disability (55%) and membership of BME (51%) and LGBT communities (40%) were also listed as leading to experiences of multiple disadvantage.

## Table 3: What aspects of their own lives do you think leads your members or service users to experience multiple disadvantage?
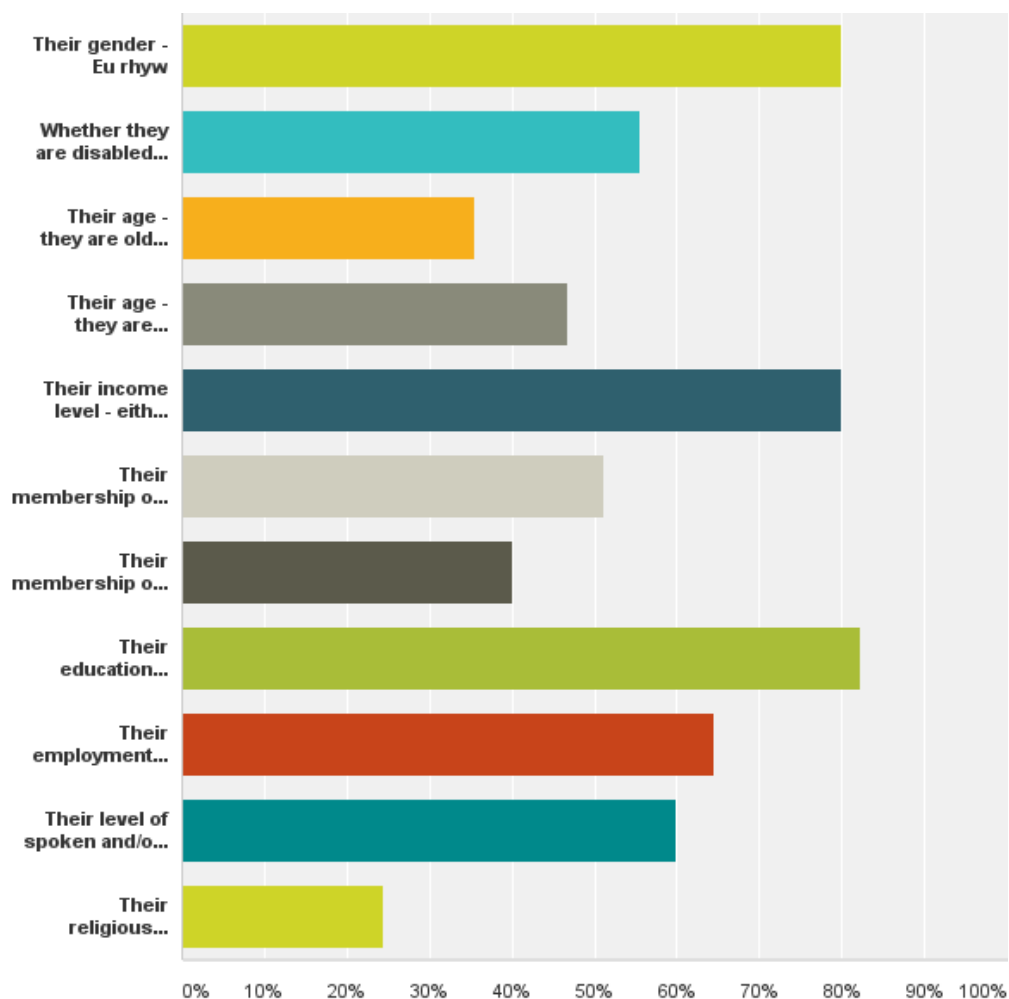


| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Their gender - Eu rhyw | 80.00% | 36 |
| Whether they are disabled or have a chronic illness - P'un ai a ydynt yn anabl neu mae ganddynt salwch difrifol | 55.56% | 25 |
| Their age - they are older (70+) - Eu hoedran — maent yn hŷn (70+ oed) | 35.56% | 16 |
| Their age - they are younger (20-) - Eu hoedran - maent yn iau (20- oed) | 46.67% | 21 |
| Their income level - either from work or benefits - Lefel eu hincwm — naill ai o'r gwaith neu fudd-daliadau | 80.00% | 36 |
| Their membership of the BME community - Eu bod yn aelodau o'r gymuned Du a Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig | 51.11% | 23 |
| Their membership of the LGBQT community - Eu bod yn aelodau o'r gymuned Lesbiaidd, Hoyw, Deurywiol a Thrawsrywiol | 40.00% | 18 |
| Their education and/or skill level - Lefel eu haddysg a/neu eu sgiliau | 82.22% | 37 |
| Their employment status - Statws eu cyflogaeth | 64.44% | 29 |
| Their level of spoken and/or written English - Lefel eu Saesneg lafar a/neu ysgrifenedig | 60.00% | 27 |
| Their religious belief - Eu crefydd | 24.44% | 11 |
| **Total Respondents: 45** | | |

**3.3.** The qualitative responses listed other causes of multiple disadvantage as follows: domestic abuse (4 responses), health issues (3 responses); economic issues (3 responses), immigration issues (1 response) and rurality, (1 response).

**3.4.** When asked to identify causes of multiple disadvantage in relation to external factors, "Access to information", "Indirect discrimination" and "Economic issues" emerged as key factors. Almost 90% of respondents cited "Lack of awareness about options" as a factor, and 74% cited "Lack of information and access to information". Interestingly, "Indirect discrimination" (74.4%) emerged more strongly than direct discrimination (48.9%) as a factor. Cuts in service provision (76.6%) and welfare reform (70.2%) were also cited by large numbers of respondents.

**Table 4: What external factors do you think leads your members or services users to experience multiple disadvantage?**
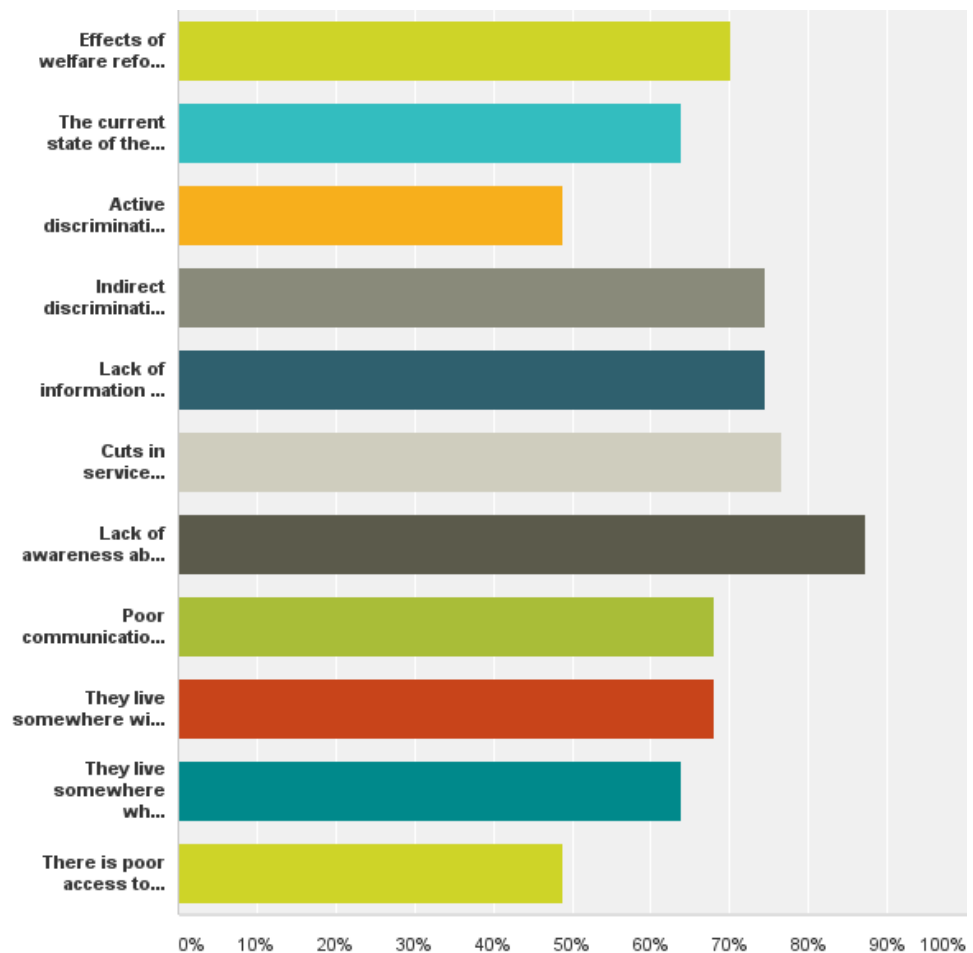
| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Effects of welfare reform - Effeithiau'r diwygiad lles | 70.21% | 33 |
| The current state of the economy - Cyflwr yr economi ar hyn o bryd | 63.83% | 30 |
| Active discrimination by groups, individuals or organisations - Gwahaniaethu uniongyrchol gan grwpiau, unigolion neu sefydliadau | 48.94% | 23 |
| Indirect discrimination by groups, individuals or organisations - Gwahaniaethu anuniongyrchol gan grwpiau, unigolion neu sefydliadau | 74.47% | 35 |
| Lack of information or lack of access to information - Diffyg gwybodaeth neu fynediad i wybodaeth | 74.47% | 35 |
| Cuts in service provision - Toriadau mewn darpariaeth gwasanaeth | 76.60% | 36 |
| Lack of awareness about options - Diffyg ymwybyddiaeth o opsiynau | 87.23% | 41 |
| Poor communication by organisations, services, agencies and institutions - Cyfathrebu gwael gan sefydliadaum gwasanaethau, asiantaethau a sefydliadau | 68.09% | 32 |
| They live somewhere with a high deprivation index - Maent yn byw rhywle â mynegai amddifadedd uchel | 68.09% | 32 |
| They live somewhere where there is high local unemployment - Maent yn byw rhywle lle mae lefel ddiweithdra uchel | 63.83% | 30 |
| There is poor access to transport - Mae diffyg mynediad i gludiant | 48.94% | 23 |
| **Total Respondents: 47** | | |

*"By indirect discrimination, we're thinking about the assumptions behind the practical welfare reforms which have a disproportionately negative effect on women"*

**3.5.** When asked to tell us whether they think the situation is improving or getting worse, the overall response was pessimistic. Over 50% of respondents said that the experience of their service users has got worse over the last twelve months, while over 30% saw no change. Around 15% said that things have got better. Concerns about the economy and economic policy emerged extremely strongly in the qualitative responses, with numerous comments citing austerity, public sector cuts, decreased funding and welfare reform as factors that have worsened the situation for their service users and members.

**Table 5: As an organisation has the experience of your service users or members changed over the last 12 months?**
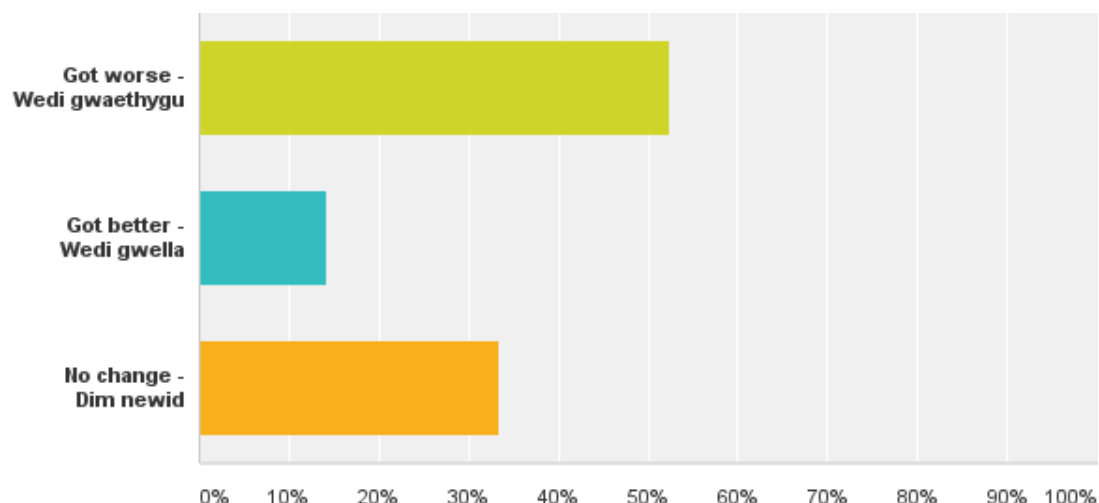


**3.6.** Factors that were cited as improving the situation over the last twelve months included increased access to support services located closer to people's homes (e.g., refuge spaces, health services), legislative changes in relation to LGBT people, improved communication and provision of information, the VAW Bill and increased awareness around issues of violence against women.

**3.7.** When asked to comment on the factors that have influenced this perception of a worsening situation, economic factors emerged as the main driver. The overall theme can be summed up, as one respondent put it:

*"Cuts, cuts and more cuts, both direct financial and cuts in services."*

There were eighteen comments about the general economic climate, citing austerity, funding cuts and welfare reform as factors that contribute to a worsening situation for already-disadvantaged women in Wales. Specific economic issues that were mentioned included low-paid jobs and the lack of affordable housing. Other factors mentioned were lack of drug and alcohol services, lack of preventative work in relation to domestic abuse, attitudes in the media, the stigmatization of poor people and a "xenophobic political agenda". A selection of quotes is included below.

*"Government cuts in service, less people delivering the service, less experienced staff dealing with more demanding adults"*

*"Changes to welfare system. More service users are approaching us for support following suspension of benefits. There are also more people requiring food donations."*

*"We have had an anecdotal increase in the need for 'crisis' support (due to accommodation, domestic violence, benefits delay) and have started to record these instances on a quarterly basis. On a practical level, the requirement to use online services, such as Universal Job Match have featured frequently as an issue women need help with during our Job Club sessions. Often this is because the website doesn't work properly/ won't upload! Fairly frequent requests for food parcels. We are also having to manage the reduced support available through Legal Aid, although we do work closely with a local solicitor firm that is very helpful."*

*"For some service users they either don't engage for long or they disengage with support. This may be because of chaotic lifestyles or maybe other issues such as mental health, drugs and alcohol misuse or maybe money or motivation may be a barrier. Many people do not want to face the issues around debt especially if they are not really literate or have been abused financially by a perpetrator as they cannot take responsibility unless they are taught to."*

*"Economic climate, local cuts in services by council to nursery education, support for children with learning disabilities, cuts to library opening hours, cuts to school transport. Most cuts seemed to affect children and mothers first then older people".*

*"Changes to welfare reform and bureaucracy means that service users struggle to survive while payments are set up or delayed by administration, resulting in homelessness, increased use of local foods banks and crisis funds."*

**3.8.**   When asked whether they expected the situation to improve or get worse over the next twelve months, the majority of respondents (60%) said they expected the situation to get worse, while 30% said they expected it to stay the same. Only 10% anticipated improvement.

**Table 6: As an organisation how do you think the situation will change for your service users or members over the next twelve months?**
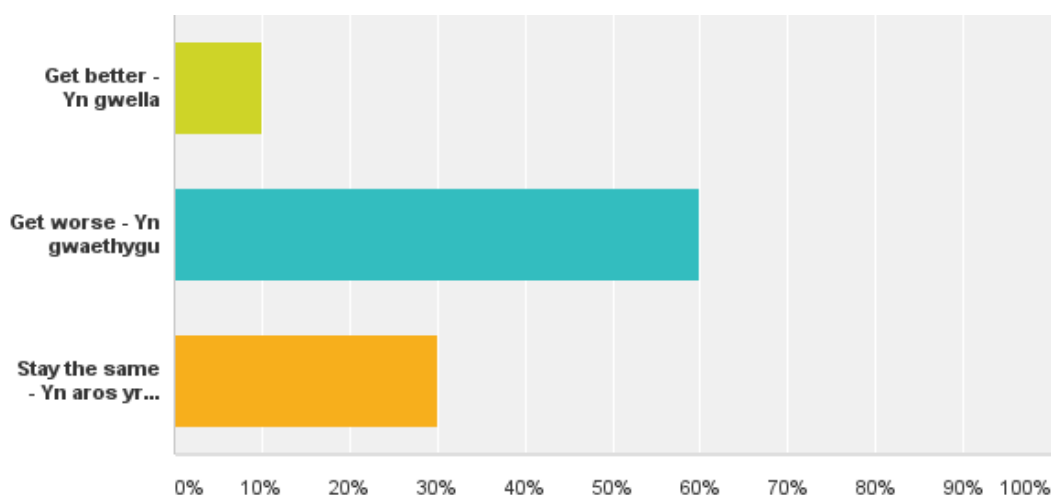


**3.9.** When asked to elaborate on what they thought would make the situation worse, all twenty six responses to this open-ended question were again concerned with the economy, citing austerity, public sector cuts to services, decreased funding, welfare reform and low-paid jobs as factors that would be likely to make the situation worse for their members and service users.

*"Powys is an area where the wages are low, many are working multiple part-time roles to make ends meet. As public sector cuts continue the availability of work and of transport will get less. For anyone with multiple disadvantages such as welfare constraints, illness, low wage, disabilities, old age, the instability of services exacerbates the vulnerability of people already at a disadvantage."*

*"Further cuts to statutory services. Also, the atmosphere isn't right for partnership working. Organisations are ever more concerned about continuing with their services, us included, but this can sometimes hamper partnership working. As local government cuts continue, this can only get worse in terms of communication between govt services and voluntary sector-whether that be strategic or on a case-by-case basis."*

*"Unemployment and lack of good education or apprenticeships can impact on service users. People are frightened of being*

*forced into the work place and not being prepared especially if there is a family history of never being in the work place before. People need to be taught and trained extensively to climb out of the poverty trap and what can only be described as a disadvantaged lifestyle for years and they have had little or no life chances so far. They all need to have some access to education etc."*

**3.10.** When asked what external factor would have the biggest impact on members/service users, the leading responses were "the General Election" (10 responses), "Welfare reform" (9 responses), and "Public sector cuts/reduced services" (6 responses). Other factors mentioned included the Assembly Election, the VAW Bill and the likely increase in anti-immigration rhetoric

*"Definitely the General Election- the political context is about framing vulnerable people as 'unworthy' of support and, combined with the politics of hate around immigration issues, does not bode well for election manifestos to be based around creating a society based on social justice and truly fair resource distribution. Assuming that we are a positive factor in women's lives, the increasingly fraught funding landscape (commissioning that favours larger organisations and consortia- which take a long time to develop, plus payment by results) is likely to make delivering in line with our mission statement (as opposed to just hard targets) more difficult- this may impact on the women who access the Centre."*

*"Further Welfare Benefits cuts- intro of Universal Credit, outcomes of General Election if austerity measures are to be continued, reduced services due to cuts in funding - could mean less provision, provision only to targeted geographical areas or certain client groups, could lead to crisis only".*

**3.11.** The final question in the survey asked respondents to identify the main effects that multiple disadvantage has on their service users/members. "Low levels of personal confidence and sense of autonomy" received the largest share of responses (95.7%). The "Experience of being socially excluded, isolated or marginalised" followed, with 80.8%

responses. "Lack of options and choices" received 76.6% of responses, while "Lack of access to services/resources" and "Increased vulnerability to exploitation, violence or marginalisation" received 72.3% each.

**Table 7: What are the main effects that multiple disadvantage has on your service users or members?**
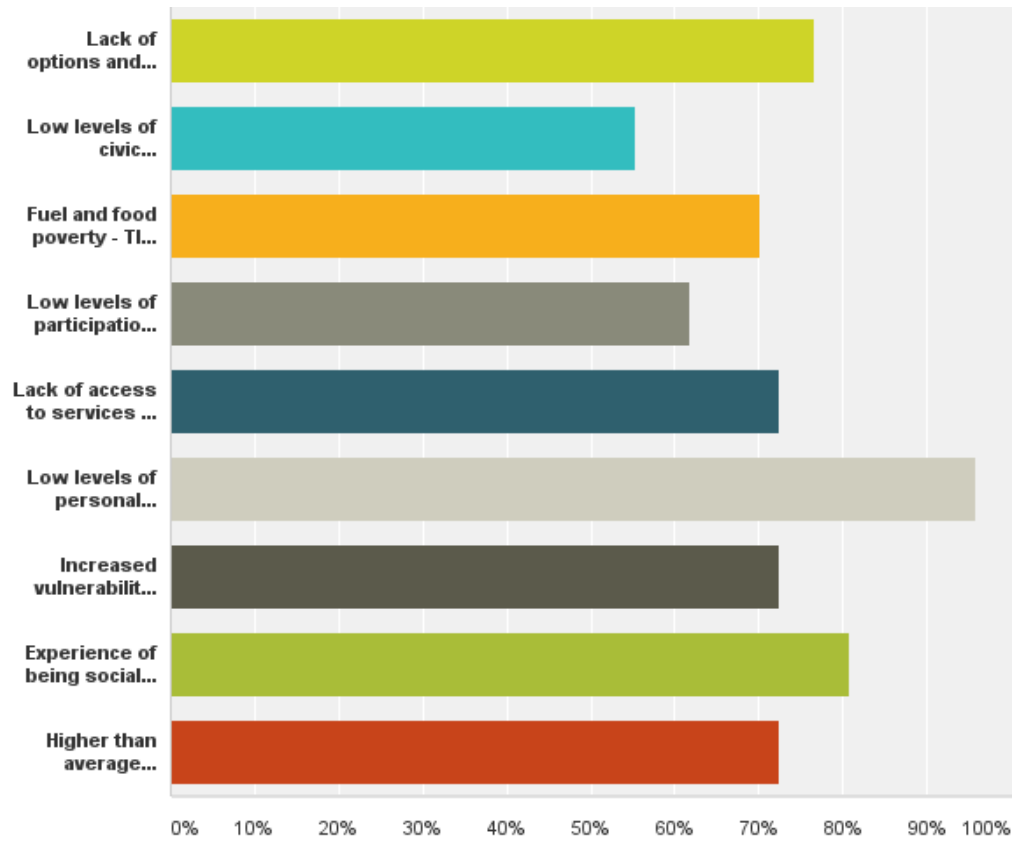
| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of options and choices - Diffyg opsiynau a dewisiadau | 76.60% | 36 |
| Low levels of civic participation - Lefelau isel o gyfranogiad dinesig | 55.32% | 26 |
| Fuel and food poverty - Tlodi tanwydd a bwyd | 70.21% | 33 |
| Low levels of participation in the paid labour market - Lefelau uchel o gyfranogiad yn y farchnad lafur daledig | 61.70% | 29 |
| Lack of access to services and resources - Diffyg mynediad i wasanaethau ac adnoddau | 72.34% | 34 |
| Low levels of personal confidence and sense of autonomy - Lefelau isel o hyder personol a synnwyr ymreolaeth | 95.74% | 45 |
| Increased vulnerability to exploitation, violence, or manipulation - Yn fwy agored i ecsbloetiaeth, trais neu driniaeth ddeheuig | 72.34% | 34 |
| Experience of being socially excluded, isolated or marginalised - Profiad o fod wedi'u heithrio'n gymdeithasol, yn ynysig neu ar ymylon y gymdeithas | 80.85% | 38 |
| Higher than average instances of depression, anxiety or other mental health issues - Mwy o achosion o iselder, pryderu neu faterion iechyd meddwl eraill | 72.34% | 34 |
| **Total Respondents: 47** | | |

The qualitative responses mainly concerned the ways in which the experience of multiple disadvantage makes women more vulnerable to negative impacts, (e.g., domestic abuse, mental health problems, drug and alcohol issues), and therefore more likely to need access to support services.

*"I'm not sure that we've got the figures to claim that the women who access our Centre have higher than average instances of depression etc., but what we can say is that our counselling service is always in high demand. Current funding means that we can offer around 6 sessions of support, which, for the women who access the Centre is in most cases enough to put in place strategies for containment and management of their situation. Many will have suffered childhood, sexual or domestic abuse and with this level of provision we cannot hope to work with women to properly 'resolve' their issues."*

*"All of our service users, both men and women who have experienced domestic abuse, suffer with some form of mental health issue or health issue. They need intensive support in an egalitarian way to learn to share skills and raise self-esteem before they can take that step forward to an independent life of their own. Many have never experienced nurturing of any kind and so they need to learn it and be taught it for themselves."*

*"Drug and alcohol excessive use, more police involvement, sofa surfing due to lack of adequate housing and ruthless landlords"*

*"I fear there will be a sharp rise in the numbers of women being killed & harmed by their current or former partners"*

## 4. Conclusion

The findings from WEN Wales's *Women and Multiple Disadvantage Survey* provide a useful "steer" for our future work in this area.

The respondents, many of whom are involved in delivering services to highly disadvantaged women, point to lack of education and skills, poverty, and having protected characteristics as causing multiple disadvantage in women's lives. These personal factors are then compounded by external, or structural factors, such as lack of information, indirect discrimination and the general economic climate. Respondents report that the effects of multiple disadvantage include low confidence, lack of autonomy, isolation, social exclusion and increased vulnerability. It can also result in a lack of access to services and resources.

Respondents paint a bleak picture of a worsening situation in which the cumulative effects of austerity, decreased funding, public sector cuts and welfare reform are contributing to disadvantage and making their work more challenging. The responses also send the message that improvements can be made through increased information, better local services and legislative change. However, it is clear that the economy is a matter of great concern, especially for our third sector members.

## 5. Next Steps

i. Present the findings from the Multiple Disadvantage survey at Welsh Government's BAGE (Budget Advisory Group on Equality) and SEP (Strategy Equality Plan) meetings.

ii. Work with WEN's Women and the Economy Subgroup (WESG) to ensure that the findings inform the work of the group in relation to the group's two priority areas: 'Poverty/welfare' and 'Public cuts – service and jobs'.

iii. Include a consideration of multiple disadvantage in the development of WEN Wales's Gender Budgeting training package.

iv. Work with WEN Wales's regional groups and networks in North, South, West and Mid Wales to identify specific regional factors contributing to multiple disadvantage in Wales.

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