

Mothers forced to stay at home as costs of childcare outweigh benefits of work ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Calls have been made for 'radical proposals' to make childcare more affordable for mothers, as it was revealed Scottish childcare costs are 'amongst the highest in the UK'.

Nearly a quarter of mothers have had to give up work because of changes to benefits, according to the Youth Employment Minister.

The UK Government's welfare reform agenda has made it harder for mothers to stay in work, gain new skills and pay for childcare, Angela Constance told MSPs at Holyrood.

Unemployment amongst females aged 18 to 24 has risen by around a third in the last year, Labour finance spokesman Ken Macintosh said.

He called on the Scottish Government to bring forward more "radical proposals" to make childcare more affordable.

Ms Constance said: "Welfare reform is clearly having a significant impact on women and their aspirations.

"This year's report by the Fawcett Society, *The Impact of Austerity on Women*, concludes that the changes in welfare reform combined with high costs of childcare are forcing women to give up their jobs, as the costs of childcare outweigh the benefits of work.

"A survey conducted by working mums found that 24% of mothers have had to give up work as a result of these changes. And for those looking for work, the requirement to claim jobseeker's allowance means many of them are finding it harder to access skills and provisions.

"Although the Scottish Government offers up to £1,215 in lone-parent childcare grants to help lone-parents attend further or higher education, the changes to benefit legislation means that fewer lone parents can now attend college without losing benefits."

Mr Macintosh said female unemployment has risen at "an alarming rate" since the start of the recession.

"In the past year alone, amongst working-age women it has increased by 16%. For women aged 18 to 24, that figure is almost twice as high," he said.

"So the current level of women's unemployment is almost double what it was prior to the recession.

"Rising female unemployment clearly has an acute impact on families and the economy but it also has a much more profound and far less talked about impact on levels of child poverty."

He cited research that found a relationship between rising female employment and falling child poverty, and complained that Scottish childcare costs "are amongst the highest in the UK".

He said: "We must do more to bring these costs down. It must also be flexible and accessible to all women to allow them to gain access to all sectors of the economy.

"Women continue to find that the majority of unpaid care in the UK economy is provided by other family members, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that women opt for part-time work to do just that."

Labour would support "radical proposals" to address the high cost of childcare, he said.

Conservative MSP Mary Scanlon said support for women in engineering and science is welcome.

The oil and gas sector has a skills shortage, she told MSPs.

Ms Scanlon also highlighted childcare, saying: "The nursery education workforce is mainly female and I question if they are fully valued for the excellent work that they do in identifying development issues, working closely with parents, adhering to standards and care.

"I think this workforce deserves more recognition than it gets."

-re[rinted from the Daily Record

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