

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C23 Sociology

Title of case study: The gender impact of economic and social policy

1. Summary of the impact

Open University research has shaped how considerations of gender are factored into economic and social policy nationally and internationally by contributing to the case for Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) of policy on both efficiency and equality grounds. Many governments, international bodies, and civil society organisations now carry out GIAs, and many use, or aspire to use, methodologies developed by OU researchers. OU researchers regularly work on GIAs of UK policy, which has influenced policy making on welfare reform and on care policy. They also contribute to capacity building for GIA in the UK and abroad, and were leading members of an international project that led the World Bank, the IMF, and OECD to address the issue of gender and taxation.

2. Underpinning research

In the early 2000s, Himmelweit wrote a series of papers proposing GIA of all economic and social policy and developed a distinctive methodology for doing such analysis [3.1 and 3.2]. These papers argued that there is both an efficiency and an equality case for GIA, and therefore that all policies – not only those designed to reduce gender inequalities – could reach their goals more effectively by assessing their potential gender impact. Himmelweit argued that assessment is needed of the effects of policy on the unpaid care economy as well as on the paid economy; that GIA should encompass taxation as well as expenditure; and that gender equality should be assessed both between households and within them. OU researchers have subsequently worked mainly on the last three of these themes.

Himmelweit combined feminist and economic analysis to develop a theoretical understanding of the care economy and draw out implications for developing policy on care [3.3]. In this and some later more policy-oriented applications, the case was made for seeing care as part of the social infrastructure of society, whose evolution is shaped by gendered norms and behaviour. This research showed that the public costs of funding care would rise, not only because of well-recognised demographic changes, but also because of changing gender norms and inherent characteristics of care that limit productivity increases. Failing to recognise these tendencies would lead, among other things, to unsustainable pressures on the unpaid economy, worsening conditions in the care industry, and a decline in unacceptable standards of care quality.

In 2006, the Ford Foundation, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) jointly funded an international research project on gender and taxation, to which Himmelweit became a technical advisor. In 2008, it was decided that this project, although focused mainly on developing countries, would benefit from a developed, country comparator, so Himmelweit, De Henau and Santos conducted a UK study. The project's findings uncovered some hidden gender implications of apparently gender neutral tax systems by showing that practices, such as joint income tax filing, disadvantage women in particular.

One hurdle in GIA is assessing how inequalities work within households. Recognition of this problem led to a cross-university collaborative research project on 'Within household inequalities and public policy' - (part of the ESRC-funded Gender (in) equality network (GeNet)) - and a subsequent cross-national project 'Gender and Intra-Household Entitlements. A Cross-National Longitudinal Analysis (GenIX)'. These projects revealed that how money is managed varies greatly within couples and that while gender roles affect men's and women's relative benefit from joint household income, the extent to which this is the case varies across policy regimes (De Henau and Himmelweit, Sections 3:5 and 3:6).

3. References to the research

1. Himmelweit, S. (2002) 'Making visible the hidden economy: the case for gender-impact

- analysis of economic policy', *Feminist Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1, March, 2002, pp. 49–70.
2. Himmelweit, S. (2002a) 'Tools for budget impact analysis: taxes and benefits' in Judd, K. (ed.) *Gender Budget Initiatives: Strategies, Concepts and experiences*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), pp. 62–69.
 3. Himmelweit, S. (2007) 'The prospects for caring: economic theory and policy analysis', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 581–599.
 4. De Henau, J., Himmelweit, S. and Santos C. (2009) 'Gender equality and taxation: a UK case study', in Grown, C. and Valodia, I. (eds), *Taxation and Gender Equity: a Comparative Analysis of Direct and Indirect Taxes in Developing and Developed Countries*, IDRC.
 5. De Henau, J. and Himmelweit, S. (2013a) 'Comparing welfare regimes by their effects on intra-household inequalities', in Ferri, M. and Monsonis-Paya, I. (eds) *Sustainability and Transformation in European Social Policy*, Peter Lang.
 6. De Henau, J. and Himmelweit, S. (2013b) 'Unpacking within household gender differences in partners' subjective benefits from household income'. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 75, no. 3, pp. 611–624.

Key grants

Grants from funding organisations

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| 2008–11 | 'Gender and Intra-household Entitlements: A cross-national longitudinal analysis': (PIs: Jérôme de Henau, Susan Himmelweit and Cristina Santos) ESRC standard grant FEC £307,483.44 |
| 2008 | 'Gender effects of taxation in the UK' (PIs: Susan Himmelweit and Cristina Santos) : UNDP funded, £5,089.00, part of International Gender and Tax project coordinated by Levy Institute, NY and the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal |
| 2007 | British Academy Visiting Fellowship (Susan Himmelweit for Dr. Patricia Hill) £5,625 to work on 'Within household inequalities and time use' |
| 2004-09 | 'Intra-household inequality and public policy': (PIs: Susan Himmelweit, Fran Bennett, Oxford University and Holly Sutherland, Essex University) £102,493.00 part of the ESRC's Gender priority network GeNet |

Commissioned research

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| 2013 | 'A Child's Rights Impact Assessment of Budget Decisions' (Diane Elson, Susan Himmelweit and Howard Reed) commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England. |
| 2009 | 'Personalisation in social care services in the UK' (Susan Himmelweit and Hilary Land, Bristol University) commissioned by the trade union Unison. |
| 2008 | 'Reducing gender inequalities to create a sustainable care system' (Susan Himmelweit and Hilary Land, Bristol University) commissioned by Joseph Rowntree Foundation. |
| 2006/7 | 'A Strategy for Parents and Carers' (Susan Himmelweit and Hilary Land, Bristol University) commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission. |

4. Details of the impact

Himmelweit's arguments were used, among others, by the developing international 'gender budgeting' movement to persuade international bodies, governments and civil society organisations to adopt GIA to improve their policy making. Many countries have now adopted some form of gender budgeting and many Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have been monitoring the gender impact of their government's policies. The importance of OU research to this process can be seen by the wide citation of Himmelweit's papers in policy documents (e.g. International Monetary Fund (IMF) working papers, Unifem, and the UNDP), invitations to speak at high level conferences at the United Nations (UN), the European Union, regional and national

governmental bodies, and contributions to the Commonwealth Secretariat's gender budgeting programme. More recently, she has helped build capacity in GIA for governments and NGOs, e.g. in Iceland and for the charity, Action Aid. Internationally, the Gender and Tax project has led to the annual joint tax dialogue conference, run jointly by the World Bank, the IMF and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and attended by finance ministers from around the world. This discussed gender issues in taxation for the first time in December 2011, and drew heavily on the project's results.

Himmelweit's argument that childcare should be seen as part of societal infrastructure is now accepted in Scotland, where the chief economist's office is developing an analysis of the economic benefits of public investment in childcare to present to the first minister. In the UK, the Labour Party has adopted this position and the shadow Financial Secretary proposed an amendment to the Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill to include childcare under its provisions:

(<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm121015/debtext/121015-0002.htm#12101531000001>).

The Women's Budget Group (WBG), a civil society think tank that Himmelweit initially chaired and whose Policy Advisory Group she now co-ordinates, regularly assesses the gender impact of UK budgets and spending reviews. WBG reports (http://www.wbg.org.uk/RRB_Reports.htm) have been widely cited as evidence of the adverse impact of the UK coalition's government's austerity measures on women, thought to be responsible for a divergence in women's and men's voting intentions. OU researchers (De Henau, Himmelweit and Santos) are leading contributors to these reports.

In the UK, the Equality Act (2010 amended 2011) now requires public sector bodies to pay attention to the gender impact of their activities. By demonstrating weaknesses in the Treasury's own GIA, OU researchers provided evidence for legal challenges (by the Fawcett Society) and investigations (by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)) into whether the Treasury had fulfilled its duties under the Acts. During the Fawcett case, the Treasury conceded that they had looked at the gender impact of only two of over 100 budget measures, expressed regret at not having met the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty, and pledged to take a different approach in future.

While this case was pending, Himmelweit, along with representatives of other 'protected groups', was invited by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to discuss how he could ensure that the Equality Act was adhered to in the forthcoming spending review. Nevertheless, after that spending review, the EHRC did decide to conduct a formal assessment of whether the Treasury had met its obligations under the Act. Himmelweit, through the WBG, was again asked to provide evidence, and was invited to a seminar to consider whether HM Treasury could have extended their distributional analysis in order to consider equality impacts. The Commission made various recommendations to assure better future compliance and practice (http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Inquiries/s31_final.pdf) including two that picked up directly on WBG practices, and invited Himmelweit to be a member of its expert advisory group, working with HM Treasury to implement these recommendations.

Himmelweit was invited, with Fran Bennett (Oxford University), to give a seminar at the Department for Work and Pensions to civil servants working on the Welfare Reform Bill, for which they drew on the results of their joint GeNet research. These results also informed presentations they made to peers as the Bill went through the House of Lords, advice given to individual peers, and briefing notes they provided on gender impact as particular amendments were discussed (http://wbg.org.uk/RRB_Briefings.htm). The work of the WBG on these issues was cited several times in debates in parliament, and some speakers quoted almost verbatim from these briefing notes (see e.g. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111123-gc0001.htm#11112397000150>). For example, so as to prevent reinforcing a male breadwinner model, Amendment 52 C provided for second earners to have an individual earnings disregard. Himmelweit used both GeNet and GenIX research findings in the presentation she gave to an all-party seminar and in the briefing notes she wrote on second earner issues for peers (http://wbg.org.uk/pdfs/Notes-on-second-earners_-final.pdf). Many of those who spoke in favour of the amendment had attended that seminar and Lady Howe, a cross-bencher and previous chair of

the EOC, decided to support and speak to the amendment only after receiving these briefing notes.

Baroness Lister, who moved the amendment, had asked Himmelweit to brief her on the issues and to comment on a draft of her speech. In it she said ‘... this is one of the most important issues in the Bill that affect women. I am grateful to members of the [WBG], of which I am a member, for helping me to think through some of these issues.’ She later withdrew the amendment after the minister responsible (Lord Freud) promised to revisit the issue and summing up said ‘... I now take it as the official departmental view that it will, in the fullness of time, consider improving incentives for second earners, either through a second disregard or through the taper, as and when resources permit.’ (Hansard, House of Lords, Grand Committee, Thursday, 3 November 2011 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111103-gc0001.htm#11110382000131>). Lord Freud, giving evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee on 10 July 2013, confirmed that a second earner disregard was one of the first potential alterations that he was planning to assess by a randomised control trial.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Chair of WBG, to confirm role of OU research and researchers in WBG
 That Himmelweit’s early research was influential in the developing gender budgeting movement in persuading international bodies, governments and civil society organisations to adopt gender impact analysis and that her work has continued to be influential in capacity building for gender budgeting.
 That OU researchers (Himmelweit, De Henau and Santos) have played a leading role in the Women’s Budget Group and contributed to nearly all its influential research reports.
 That OU and WBG analysis was used by the Fawcett Society and the EHRC in challenging the 2010 budgets and spending review, which in turn has led to the government promising to reform its practices to ensure future compliance with equality legislation.
2. Shadow minister for equalities to confirm influence of WBG and Himmelweit’s research on care on Labour Party policy.
3. Professor at Glasgow Caledonian University to confirm the role of Himmelweit’s research in shaping Scotland’s policies on gender budgeting and in viewing spending on childcare as infrastructural investment.
4. Articles in the press and radio interviews show that WBG’s Gender Budget analysis is being taken seriously (and that the government is getting worried by losing women’s support) see e.g. Women’s Hour 15/12/10` <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wlf00> and Observer: main editorial 12/2/12 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/feb/12/observer-editorial-women-equality-benefits?INTCMP=SRCH>
5. A Baroness in the House of Lords to confirm personal contributions to the preparation and support of amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill (evidence including a record of e-mail correspondence with her).
6. Hansard records of debates in the House of Lords that referred to the work of the Women’s Budget Group.
7. Professor at USAID and American University to confirm role of the International Gender and Taxation project in fostering gender awareness among international financial institutions with respect to taxation.