

Experiences of poverty in later life

Women

Women are more likely to experience poverty in later life than men, because of the inequalities they face throughout their lives.

Some 20% of women aged 65 and over are living in poverty, compared to 16% of men. These figures are worse for women who live alone, with 27% of single women in poverty.¹ Women are more likely to experience poverty in retirement than men, due to a combination of factors: lower earnings when they were working, a higher chance that they took time out of work because of caring responsibilities and structural inequalities in the pension system.

In our research exploring experiences of poverty in later life, many of the women we spoke to told us about factors throughout their lives that caused them to be in poverty after retirement. For some women, the caring responsibilities they had taken on – either for young children or older relatives – had meant they were absent from the labour market for periods of time or had to work part time. For others, the jobs they worked in had been low paid or precarious. These women were less likely to have a full State Pension and more likely to have a low private pension or no private pension at all.

Other women we spoke to told us about the structural inequalities they had faced in the pension system. Some women who had been married had unexpectedly low State Pensions, due to being signed up for a scheme where they paid reduced National Insurance contributions and received a lower State Pension based on a share of their husbands' contributions. Others were affected by the rapid change to the State Pension age for women, which threw the financial plans they had made into disarray and tipped them into poverty.

In all these stories there was one clear theme – a gender pension gap still exists in this country, and it pushes women in later life into poverty.



20% of women aged 65 and over are in poverty, compared to 16% of men.¹

27% of single women aged 65 and over are in poverty, compared to 23% of single men.¹

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I had hoped to retire at 60... but obviously, with [the women's State Pension age] all changing, and obviously, we didn't know until, actually, I think it was about 2014...so, we didn't have that in place... So, I'd have been in a much, much better financial situation.

Sue, 65

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It was only the fact that I was getting my husband's pension that I had a decent pension... When I worked, I paid the married women's pension and in reality, if my husband had not died, my pension would have been £2.39 a week.

Yvonne, 76

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Throughout my life...I've worked and obviously, when I was married, I worked part time, and you don't get a pension then, so it was only after the divorce and then I eventually went full time that I got a pension and it's a very small pension.

Rita, 73

Georgina's story

Georgina is 66 and has lived alone since the death of her husband four years ago. When she was younger, she took time away from work to care for their children, before returning to work part time in a precarious role. Because of this, she has no private pension and only a small State Pension.

When her husband was diagnosed with a terminal illness, she took early retirement to spend time with him before he died. She planned to live off her savings before she could draw her State Pension. But, after she retired, she found out that the age she could claim her State Pension at had increased by five years. This rapid change meant she used all her savings to survive until she reached State Pension age. She now lives off her small State Pension and has no savings to fall back on, in case of unexpected costs or expenses.

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Women didn't go back to work like they do now... I left in April and my daughter was born in July, and I didn't go back until she was four. So, I had about four years off... My pension was rubbish.

Georgina, 66

Policy recommendations



The role of an Older People's Commissioner should be established in both England and Scotland, to hold the government to account and make sure that provisions are made for the needs of all older people, including women.



The Department for Work and Pensions must develop a meaningful strategy to address poverty in the UK, which considers the diverse needs of all older people, including women.

This poster is part of the **Experiences of poverty in later life** series. It draws on research Independent Age conducted into the experiences of people aged 65+ living on a low income. You can find out more at independentage.org/experiences-poverty-in-later-life.

¹Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2020, Department for Work and Pensions, 25 March 2021, see gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2020.