

Paying 'due regard'? The impact of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) on service provision for single mothers

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Legal Context

The PSED (introduced under the Equality Act 2010) requires that public authorities pay 'due regard' to eliminating discrimination and advancing equality for people with 'protected' characteristics when delivering services. This Duty is seen by some to move from 'command and control' legal models towards 'reflexivity' ie adapting to local need.¹

Research Participants

As intensive users of public services due to pregnancy, maternity and caring responsibilities, lone mothers are a key group to consult when assessing the success of the Duty.^{2,3} As sex, maternity and pregnancy are protected under the PSED, 'due regard' is needed wherever there are changes to services, particularly against the backdrop of money-saving cuts. This research will show the impact that the PSED is having 'on the ground' for single mother service-users.

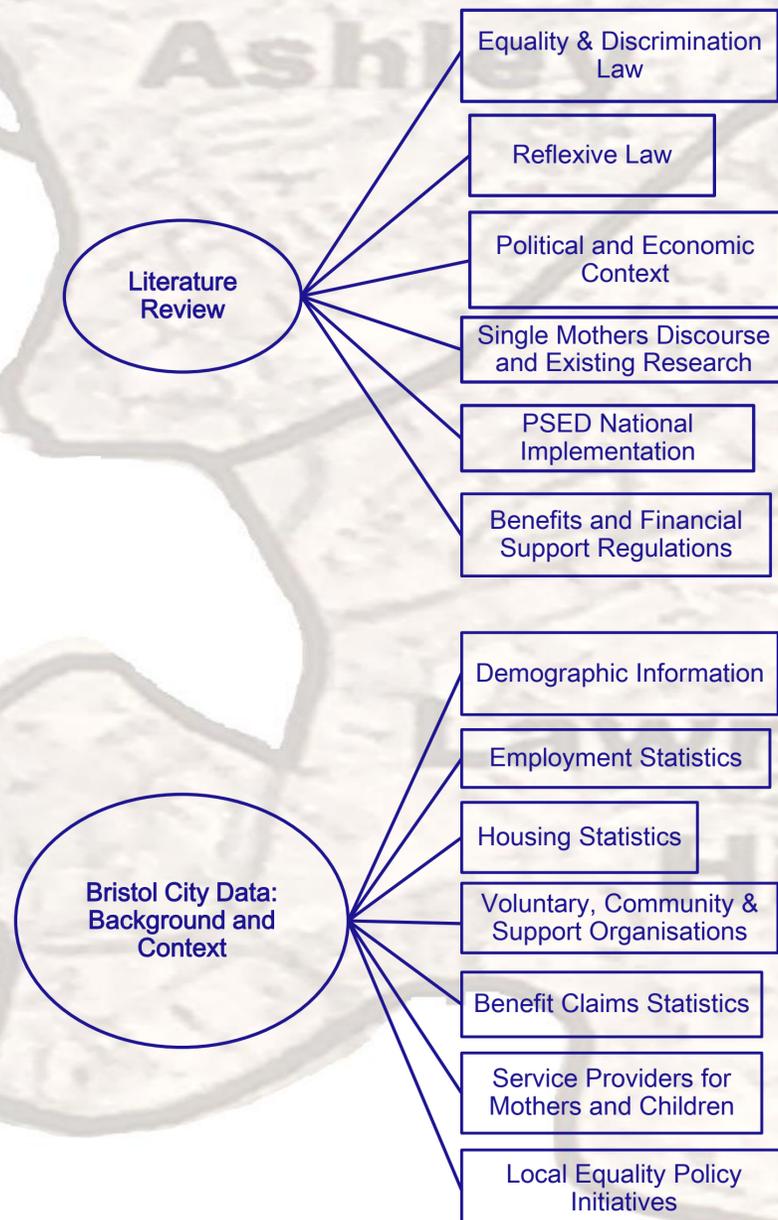
Desk-based Work

Context for the fieldwork and analysing how the Duty is implemented will be supported by extensive desk-based research.

A meta-analysis of existing evidence for the PSED has shown little qualitative work has been done assessing the Duty's impact on service-users. In addition, lone mothers as public service-users are under-researched.

Fieldwork

A qualitative, empirical legal study will assess how the PSED has influenced service provision for a group of single mothers in the Ashley, Easton and Lawrence Hill wards of east Bristol. This diverse area contains pockets of socio-economic deprivation alongside a thriving community of grass-roots support groups and voluntary organisations underpinning a network of public service provision.



Data Collection and Analysis

Research instruments will be developed via one-to-one interviews and/or focus groups with Bristol City Council, service providers and other stakeholders. Data collection, using focus groups and semi-structured interviews with single mothers, will collect narratives on their experiences as service-users. The interview transcripts will be analysed systematically, using grounded theory principles, to identify common and recurring themes, comparing and contrasting with existing theoretical models and identifying gaps, tendencies and exceptions.^{4,5}

References

- 1 Fredman, S. (2011). The Public Sector Equality Duty. *Industrial Law Journal* 40 (4), p23
- 2 The Fawcett Society, (2011), *Single Mothers, Single Out*. London: The Fawcett Society
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- 4 Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. London: Thousand Oaks. Smith
- 5 J. A., Harré, R. and Langenhove, L. v. (1995). *Rethinking methods in psychology*. London: Sage.