

Government Fails Women After Nine Years



The National-led Government will have been in power for nine years by the time this year's election is held on 23 September.

But women are worse off now than we were in 2008. Why?

Violence against women

Aotearoa has a rape culture which makes women unsafe in every facet of our lives and yet the Government refuses to make healthy relationships and consent a compulsory part of the school curriculum.

Justice Minister Amy Adams has made tackling domestic violence the top priority in her justice portfolio, but the Government has not provided funding to put women's refuges and anti-domestic violence campaigners on a secure footing so they can focus on their work instead of having to constantly be concerned with fund-raising.

Reproductive rights

No action has been taken to treat abortion as a health issue by removing it from the Crimes Act, giving women the right to control our own bodies by choosing whether or not to have children.

Housing

Many women and children live in damp, unhealthy homes with little security of tenure, while the Government continues to deny there is a housing crisis.

Family Court

The Family Court's poor record on disregarding and diminishing domestic violence has worsened. In 2013 the Government abolished the clauses in the law which prioritised the safety of children over the father having care of his children. At the same time the Government favoured mediation as the main method of disputes resolution and failed to adequately protect women who have been abused from being further abused in the mediation process.

The Family Court judges still use the concept of parental alienation, despite the fact that it has been thoroughly discredited internationally.

Gender gap and equal pay

Women make up only a third of MPs, and Aotearoa is 28th out of 36 countries for women in senior business roles.

The gender pay gap continues to fluctuate between 11 and 14 per cent. For Māori, Pasifika and disabled women, the statistics are even worse. Māori women earn only 76 per cent of the amount paid to Pākehā men, and for Pasifika women the figure is 69 per cent. Kiwi women on average earn \$600,000 less in our lifetimes than our male counterparts.

Although the Government has endorsed equal pay principles and recently settled the caregiver, Kristine Bartlett's claim, the Equal Pay Bill they recently released would prevent many claims from succeeding (see article Equal Pay Bill Deeply Flawed).

Women on benefits

Benefit levels are still set so low it is not possible for beneficiaries to actually live on what they are paid. This particularly affects single mothers and their children, who often suffer from the toxic stress caused by extreme economic hardship. Single mothers on benefits are hounded by WINZ to enter paid work regardless of the impact that might have on their children. The Government has also refused to eliminate sanctions which punish mothers unable to name in law the fathers of their children by taking between \$22 and \$28 a week out of their already meagre benefits.

Women losing out

Women are over represented among the poor. Since people on lower incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on essentials, the skyrocketing cost of housing in places like Auckland has hit low income women hard. A failure to address the housing crisis, gender pay gap, rape culture, low wages and chronic underfunding of social services makes many women even more vulnerable today than in 2008.

Photo above: Take Back the Night demonstration August 2015. Photo by Leah Foxcroft