

# **Proposal for PhD thesis**

## **Area of work**

**Social Enterprise models of funding for  
Voluntary and Community Sector  
organisations**

## **Title**

**Feminism and social enterprise: Surviving and  
thriving for women's services and  
organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – a study of  
social enterprise income generation models in  
feminist community organisations in the  
United Kingdom**

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## **Introduction**

Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are arguably better off than they have ever been – or are they? (Martinson, 2013) Violence against women remains a significant social problem and additional forms of violence are coming to the fore – for example female genital mutilation.

In the cycle of feminist activism (Rupp and Taylor 2013), there has been a recent resurgence in activity, notably manifested by the recent establishment of the Women's Equality Party in March 2015. Underneath this visible wave of prominence there have been a proliferation of women's services and organisations in the voluntary and community sector which have been working continuously to maintain gains made during the seventies and eighties and to forge ahead with rights for women and women only spaces delivering services to women and children.

## **Context and problems**

Since the credit crunch of 2008 and the subsequent recession, the impact of central government deficit reduction measures has been widespread in relation to plans for public expenditure and reduction in particular of local authority commissioning and service delivery (NCVO 2015).

This reduction has had variable consequences for organisations operating in the voluntary and community sector - some local authorities have specifically targeted this area of their expenditure in order to maintain in house services and delivery.

In addition to this, pressures on women-only organisations and services in the sector has heightened, not only as a result of generic local authority spending cuts, but as a result of misinterpretation of the Equality Act 2010. (Hirst and Rinne, 2012) This consists of commissioning organisations wrongly assuming that all services need to be non-gender specific in order to comply with legislation, when in fact that is not the case – gender sensitivity and gender specific charities have protection under the Equality Act 2010 (section 193) as they are constituted to tackle disadvantage experienced by groups with protected characteristics.

The outcome of these influences has been that women-only services and organisations have reduced or demised and continue to struggle to fund and deliver

support to vulnerable groups of women, for example women fleeing domestic violence and abuse or women affected by sexual violence (James and Patiniotis, 2013).

One of the measures to address this reduction in service is that the Big Lottery Fund established a dedicated programme in 2015 to address deficits in revenue funding for services and organisations on the brink of closure (Big Lottery Fund, 2015).

### **Background literature**

Commentary on the impact of the recession, austerity measures and subsequent funding reductions on the Voluntary and Community sector proliferates (Randeep, 2011, ACEVO, 2012, NCVO 2015). The simultaneous disproportionate impact of the recession and the slow economic recovery on women is well documented (Fawcett Society, 2014, Unison 2015) however the narrower focus of impact on community based women's services and organisations has thus far not generated the same level of interest.

Reliance on statutory sector contracts and grants prevails in the VCS and was long lauded as a means of financial sustainability for the sector (Davies, 2011). This direction of travel will be tested by the proposed research and the impact of continued reliance on statutory sector funding sources will be explored.

Organisational culture and trustee risk aversion have often been cited as barriers to take up of social investment and loan sources of funds (CAF 2008, IVAR 2013). This proposal will seek to examine these elements of reticence through the lens of feminist organisational constructs and governance mechanisms as well as exploring additional barriers to accessing this type of finance.

The extent to which reliance of feminist organisations on paternalistic, hierarchical funding streams delivered within a patriarchal societal infrastructure is relevant to their current financial position will be examined by this research, as a means to interpret reluctance to move forward on self-reliant, self-financing approaches such as social enterprise.

Contemporary women-only organisations have a history emanating from significant activism in the 1970s which in turn was based on earlier waves of activism such as

the women's suffrage movement. One of the legacies of this history is the strong emphasis on collective ways of working and collaborative decision making processes, reflected in relevant governing instruments and practices in women-only organisations.

The leadership models and strategic decision making approaches in such organisations reflect the functions they perform and often emanate from philosophical commitments (Brown, 1992). This tends to direct them towards focussing on operational considerations rather than accepted medium to long term strategic approaches (Bailey and Johnson, 2000) to developing services and income streams which will support the services into the future.

The sorts of leadership and management approaches associated with hierarchical organisational constructs - command and control – create dissonance with feminist approaches to collective working (Ashcraft, 2001), leading to creation of hybrid models of governance and decision making (Sawer and Andrew, 2014)

### **The Research question**

What is the scope and scale to which women's organisations in the voluntary and community sector have adopted models of social enterprise income generation to sustain and grow their services to women and children?

What are the supporting factors and barriers to adoption and diffusion of this model of income generation?

Factors to be considered will include:

- Leadership capacity and capability
  - ❖ How is leadership defined in your organisation?
  - ❖ Is the leadership in your organisation from paid workers, Trustees/Directors or both?
  - ❖ What proportion of your time is devoted to leadership as opposed to operational delivery of services?
  - ❖ To what extent are the leaders in your organisation suited to the role? (by qualification or experience)
- Organisational background and culture

- ❖ How/when was your organisation established?
- ❖ Would you characterise your organisation as feminist? In what ways is this reflected in its culture and operation?
- Organisational structure
  - ❖ Is your organisation a registered charity/company limited by guarantee/both/other?
  - ❖ What are the decision making channels in your organisation?
  - ❖ Would you characterise your organisation as hierarchical or collective?
- Misinterpretation of the Equality Act 2010
  - ❖ Has your organisation's funding been threatened by a commissioning requirement to be non-gender specific?
  - ❖ How have you responded to this?
- Available public sector income sources
  - ❖ Describe the make-up of your income sources – charitable grants, donations from the public, public sector contracts, social enterprise sources, other
- Appetite for adoption of loan financing options
  - ❖ Has your organisation accessed social investment?
  - ❖ Has your organisation accessed other loan sources of finance?
  - ❖ Is yes, what has been your experience of this? Were there any internal or external barriers you needed to overcome?
  - ❖ If No, what were the reasons for rejecting this as a source of finance?

## **Purpose of the research**

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the study is to discover to what extent social enterprise approaches have been adopted by women's organisations in the voluntary and community sector as a means of income generation and financial sustainability.

Subsequent objectives will include

- 1) to investigate the extent to which social enterprise is adopted by women's organisations

- 2) to ascertain factors that support or act as a barrier to the adoption of this approach
- 3) to see how factors such as leadership traits, organization culture and organization structure influence adoption
- 4) to highlight any other findings that are of interest and contribute towards the subject of social enterprise income generation approaches in feminist women's organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

### **Significance of the study**

Women's organisations and women's services provide support to vulnerable groups of women (notably those affected by domestic and sexual violence) and have been disproportionately affected by public sector funding cuts in recent years, to the extent that the Big Lottery Fund established a dedicated programme in 2015 to address deficits in revenue funding for organisations on the brink of closure.

This research will seek to synthesise thinking on feminist approaches to organisational design and operation with information gathered on prevalent environmental conditions for community based women's organisations facing significant threats to their survival as a result of public sector funding cuts.

It will also aim to uncover existing and proposed alternative sources and strategies of income generation for women's services and organisations to act as a blueprint for financial sustainability for those services to vulnerable groups of women.

### **Proposed research methodologies**

#### **Population for the study**

The population for the study will include women's organisation or women's services in England or Wales operating a women-only space and service offering.

These organisations will be identified through women's network organisations including but not limited to:

- Women's Resource Centre
- Rape Crisis England and Wales
- Rape Crisis Scotland

They will also be identified through national databases such as the charity commission register of charities.

## **Methodologies**

These will include:

- Online surveys distributed via network organisations
- Case studies of organisations/services utilising social enterprise approaches
- Semi-structured research interviews with women leading relevant organisations

Secondary data will be gathered from relevant legislation, research and seminar papers, charity commission and companies house annual reports, newspapers, journals and online articles.

Connections have already been made with the network organisations and agreement has been obtained to circulate surveys and canvass for potential interviewees via this mechanism.

## **Available exemplars**

Culture and environmental barriers notwithstanding, there have emerged some interesting exemplars of organisations which have adopted different approaches to funding their services to vulnerable women a theme of this PhD will be to examine the models developed and the circumstances prevalent to allow these developments to take place.

One notable example is operating in Hull – Winner, the Preston Road Women's Centre Ltd - which has adopted a range of approaches to generating income which supports the charity and provides consistency, reliability and a degree of certainty that services will be maintained beyond a three year revenue funding cycle. This exemplar will be examined and compared to other examples discovered through research with women's organisations nationwide, facilitated through networking organisations and databases as detailed above.

## **Organisation of the study**

### **Part One**

#### **Research background and methodology**

##### **Chapter 1: Introduction, Objective and Scope of the Study**

- Problem Statements
- Research Focus
- Objective, Scope and Significance of the Study

### **Part Two**

#### **Literature Review**

##### **Chapter 2: Impact of public sector funding cuts on community based women's organisations**

- Financial and capacity impacts on VCS organisations
- Compounded impact on women's organisations
- Reliance of feminist organisations on patriarchal funding streams

##### **Chapter 3: Impact of feminist leadership approaches in the voluntary and community sector**

- History of feminist-led organisations in the voluntary and community sector
- Feminist constructs of leadership
- Contemporary development of feminist organisations in the voluntary and community sector
- Strategic approaches to financial and service sustainability for feminist-led organisations

### **Part Three**

#### **Research Methodology**

##### **Chapter 4**

- Research Design



- The Population
- The Survey and Interview Techniques
- Data Analysis

## **Part Four**

### **Analysis, Findings and Conclusion**

#### **Suitability to personal situation and experience**

As a background to this study, I have a lifelong interest in feminist perspectives and approaches to public sector service delivery. I have been involved with feminist organisations for twenty years and have contributed to local service development and delivery for women-only services as both a paid worker and a volunteer/Trustee.

In my paid roles I have been both a direct support worker for women affected by violence and abuse and a manager and leader of a range of these services.

I am a Hull resident and graduate of the University of Hull (Jt B.A. Hons French and German 1993) and graduated with a MsC in Leadership in Health and Social Care in 2013.

I already have access to the exemplars indicated in this proposal through my capacity as Director/Trustee for Winner, the Preston Road Women's Centre and have background knowledge and experience of how women's organisations operate through more than 20 years' experience and involvement in a range of women's organisations.

I am also a Trustee for Bradford Rape Crisis Sexual Assault and Support Service and have professional links to the Women's Aid Federation.

In my current paid work I am a strategic commissioner for North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group (the only integrated commissioning organisation in the country) which provides me with a unique insight into commissioning approaches for health and local authority organisations and the constraints prevalent for public sector budgets and strategic direction. In particular this gives me opportunity for

insight into commissioning practice for women's organisations and services focussed on supporting women and children affected by violence and abuse.

In my volunteering capacity as Director/Treasurer for Winner, the Preston Road Women's Centre, I am responsible for the income generation for the charity, its trading arm and additional subsidiaries which provides me with an insight not only into those organisations' income sources, but those available to the sector in general. This includes income generation for charitable grants, tendering for public sector contracts and developing social enterprise based income models.

## **Conclusion**

The examination of the context, background and factors affecting women's organisations and services and their survival will provide insight into the problems they face and uncover some of the solutions available to them.

This proposal aims to add to the body of knowledge related to income sources available for women's organisations operating in the voluntary and community sector and provide a blueprint for financial sustainability which navigates some of the obstacles and barriers which currently exist for them, with the result that additional approaches will be made available to them through the diffusion of this work.

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