

## Poor Relief to Women in Scotland: The Western Lowlands, 1845–1914

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This paper examines the provision of poor relief for destitute women under the Scottish Poor Law between 1845 and 1914.

Recently, there has been increasing interest in the history of Scottish social welfare. This issue has grown in importance in light of ongoing debates over the distinctiveness of its tradition, which has added legitimacy to the Scottish National Party's pro-independence views.<sup>(1)</sup>

In fact, Scotland retained its own Poor Law system after the Union between England and Scotland in 1707. Moreover, even after the reform of the system through the Poor Law (Scotland) Amendment Act of 1845, considerable differences existed between Scottish and English Poor Laws in many aspects. In particular, it has been generally acknowledged in previous studies that the Scottish Poor Law after 1845 'continued to relieve a smaller proportion of its population and to spend less money on them' compared to the contemporary Poor Law in England and Wales.<sup>(2)</sup> Furthermore, a recent study by Bernard Harris has reconfirmed this 'comparative parsimony' of Scotland's Poor Law over the period from 1845 to 1914 by analysing poor law statistics for both Scotland and England and Wales.<sup>(3)</sup>

In addition, there was a distinctive rule of the Scottish Poor Law after 1845 associated with the 'parsimony' of the relief system: under the new Act, able-bodied persons were denied the statutory right to relief.<sup>(4)</sup> Also, with regard to the relief of able-bodied men, this strict policy toward able-bodied was advanced by later court judgements as follows:

1. As a result of the decision by the House of Lords in 1852, able-bodied men were denied the legal right to relief not only for themselves, but also for their children.
2. Yet, able-bodied men continued to be relieved, not as their right but through the discre-

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(1) B. Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism: Poor Relief in England, Scotland and Wales in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 39, 1 (2019), pp. 40–4, 74.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 40.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 40–74.

(4) 8 & 9 Vict. C. 83, Poor Law (Scotland) Act, section 68.

tionary power of the poor law authorities to give them relief. However, as a result of the judgement by the House of Lords in 1866, giving them relief became illegal.

Thus, only 'destitute' and 'disabled' poor were entitled to the relief.<sup>(5)</sup> By contrast, under the contemporary English Poor Law, the able-bodied poor was clearly the object of relief, and, according to Engländer, had a statutory right to relief.<sup>(6)</sup>

Nevertheless, focusing on the relief of women, a different picture of the Scottish Poor Law after 1845 might be revealed. Indeed, regarding the relief to destitute women, one of the primary reasons why Scottish Poor Law is perceived as parsimonious has already been challenged: it should be stressed that there existed an exception to the denial of the right to relief for the able-bodied poor.<sup>(7)</sup> As will be shown in the first section, destitute women supporting their children without a husband (e.g. widows, deserted wives, and mothers of illegitimate children) were, even if they were able-bodied, recognised as having legal rights to poor relief under certain conditions.<sup>(8)</sup>

This paper explores the actual scale of female pauperism beyond the legislative framework. Concerning this point, apart from the recent research by Harris, quantitative analysis of female pauperism in Scotland as a whole has not been provided anywhere in previous studies, and Harris shows statistically that the Poor Law in Scotland provided relief to a lower percentage of its adult female population between 1871 and 1910, when compared to the Poor Law in England and Wales (Table 1). However, his data ignores differences in the levels of female pauperism by age group and pauper category.

Considering this state of previous research, this paper attempts to demonstrate that, at least in the early twentieth century, the nature of the Scottish Poor Law cannot be regarded as merely parsimonious, if we look at the scale of its relief to young and middle-aged destitute women. Indeed, given that women constituted the majority of the total number of paupers,<sup>(9)</sup>

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(5) A. Paterson, 'The Poor Law in Nineteenth-Century Scotland', in D. Fraser ed., *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1976), pp. 175, 178, 185; I. Levitt, *Poverty and Welfare in Scotland, 1890–1948* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 10–11.

(6) D. Engländer, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834–1914* (London, 1998), p. 47.

(7) For example, Smyth stated that 'The Scottish Poor Law had a fearsome reputation for parsimony in the nineteenth century. Even after the Reform of 1845, the unemployed or able-bodied poor had no statutory right to relief ... A constant contrast was drawn between the frugal and independent poor of Scotland, and the spoiled and indolent poor of England'. (J. Smyth, 'Seems decent': Respectability and poor relief in Glasgow, c. 1861–1911', in A. Gestrich, S. King and L. Raphael eds., *Being Poor in Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2006), p. 251.)

(8) For detailed accounts on this point, see Kensei Tokuyama, 'Poor Relief to Women with Children in Victorian Scotland: The Role of Courts', *Studies in western history*, 44 (2022), pp. 17–30.

Table 1: Paupers as % of the population (rates of pauperism) among the adult female population aged 14 and over, shown by Harris (2019).

|           | <i>Scotland</i> | <i>England and Wales</i> |
|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1871–1880 | 4.00%           | 4.71%                    |
| 1881–1890 | 3.11%           | 3.80%                    |
| 1891–1900 | 2.78%           | 3.41%                    |
| 1901–1910 | 2.71%           | 2.99%                    |

Source: B. Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism: Poor Relief in England, Scotland and Wales in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 39, 1 (2019), p. 58.

the extent of relief to women has significant implications for the nature of Scottish poor relief. However, looking at the socio-economic circumstances surrounding contemporary Scottish women, the importance of exploring the relief to them becomes clearer: while experiencing rapid growth of male-dominated heavy industries (such as shipbuilding, engineering and metals), late nineteenth-century Scotland suffered a decline of the textile industry, which reduced employment opportunities for women. Then, how did the 'parsimonious' Scottish Poor Law authorities address female poverty arising from the socioeconomic structure surrounding women? This question bears considerable importance in interpreting the nature of the Scottish Poor Law after 1845.

The remaining part of this paper proceeds as follows: Section I of the paper provides an overview of the Scottish Poor Law system after 1845. It will then go on to show the age-specific levels of pauperism among Scottish women in 1906, and compares the data with those for England and Wales. It will be revealed that, in most of the younger and middle-aged groups, Scottish women were more likely to receive relief than English and Welsh women did. Section III attempts to explain the scale of female pauperism in younger and middle-aged groups by tracing the socioeconomic conditions surrounding women and the development of female pauperism in a particular region, namely the Western Lowlands (accounting for almost 46% of the entire Scottish population in 1911) over the period from 1845 to 1914.<sup>(10)</sup> Section III also looks at the Poor Law authorities' attitudes towards destitute women, especially towards widows with children.

(9) Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism', p. 58.

(10) M. Flinn ed., *Scottish Population History from the 17th Century to the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 306.

## I

Before dealing with the nature of the Scottish Poor Law since its reform in 1845, an overview of the relief system before 1845 (the Old Scottish Poor Law) is needed to clarify in what aspects the relief system was reformed. First, the administration of the Old Scottish Poor Law was in the hands of local church authorities (the Kirk Sessions of the Church of Scotland) and the heritors (landowners in each parish). What is significant regarding the nature of this poor relief system is the lack of central authority to supervise the local poor relief administrations throughout Scotland. As for the funding for the relief, voluntary contributions were the primary sources of income. However, amidst the escalating social issues associated with industrialisation, the need to reform the existing poor law system was voiced increasingly, resulting in the Poor Law (Scotland) Amendment Act of 1845.<sup>(11)</sup>

One of the most outstanding changes brought about by this Act was the creation of the Board of Supervision, which functioned as the central body to supervise poor relief practices throughout Scotland. As regards the local poor relief administration, parochial boards were set up in every parish, and they had a duty to appoint an Inspector of the Poor. As a rule, the Inspector was the first person to meet the individuals in need and determine whether they were eligible for relief. If deemed eligible, the Inspector would also decide on the amount of relief to be given.<sup>(12)</sup>

Turning to the source of relief, the local parochial boards had the power to choose between gathering the necessary funds through voluntary contributions or levying a compulsory poor rate. Yet, the percentage of parochial boards levying poor rates had already reached 85% (the corresponding figure in 1845 was about 25%), reaching 95% in 1894 (840 of 885 parochial boards).<sup>(13)</sup>

However, when exploring the nature of relief, it is crucial to consider to whom the relief system provided relief. In that respect, the new Act introduced another significant change: the Act gave the poor the right to appeal to the Sheriff Courts (local law courts) if they were

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(11) Paterson, 'The Poor Law', pp. 172–4; Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform*, pp. 47–9.

(12) Paterson, 'The Poor Law', pp. 173–185; J. G. Smith, *A Digest of the Law of Scotland relating to the Poor* (Edinburgh, 1867), pp. 44–5.

(13) Paterson, 'The Poor Law', p. 175; Parliamentary Papers [hereinafter PP] 1894 C.7515 xli, 287, *Forty-ninth Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor and of Public Health in Scotland 1893–94*, p. xvi; PP 1861 (2760) xxviii, 543, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor in Scotland*, p. v.

denied relief by the Inspectors (or by parochial boards). The appeal procedure was as follows<sup>(14)</sup>:

1. When a poor person 'is refused relief, he may apply to the Sheriff'<sup>(15)</sup> (the Sheriff is a judge in the Sheriff Court). At this stage, there was no need for the poor to employ a lawyer or pay other legal expenses. The application could be made verbally as well as in writing.
2. After hearing the statement by the poor person, 'the Sheriff ... may either (1) confirm the refusal, or (2) order the Inspector of Poor to grant interim relief and instruct him to lodge within a specified time a detailed statement in writing of his reasons for refusal. After the statement has been lodged, the case proceeds as an ordinary action at law .... If the Inspector of Poor does not lodge the statement, as directed, judgment is given against him in default, and the poor person becomes entitled to permanent relief'.<sup>(16)</sup>

In fact, because of this appeal system, a large number of such applications were made to the Sheriff Courts (for example, such applications by the poor could be seen on a daily basis in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen in the 1850s).<sup>(17)</sup> Thus, the parochial boards no longer had absolute discretion in determining who they provided assistance to.

However, the Court protected only those poor who were legally entitled to relief from unjust refusal of relief by parochial boards (Inspectors). Thus, turning now to the scope of the entitled poor, we have already seen that able-bodied persons were denied the right to relief under the Act of 1845. However, there was an exception to this rule: later decisions by the Court of Session (the supreme civil court of Scotland) confirmed that able-bodied women supporting their children without a partner (e.g. widows, deserted wives, mothers of illegitimate children) are legally entitled to relief under certain conditions.<sup>(18)</sup> However, regarding the condition for getting the relief, as a result of later Sheriff Courts' decisions, it became a prevailing understanding 'that a healthy active woman with one dependant, not at the breast, is not a per-

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(14) The description of the appeal procedure is based on the following sources: Smith, *A Digest of the Law of Scotland relating to the Poor*, pp. 55–60; A. Paterson, 'A study of poor relief administration in Edinburgh City parish, between 1845–1894' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 165–7; PP 1909 Cd. 4922 xxxviii, 95, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 84.

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) Kensei Tokuyama, 'Poor Relief to Women with Children in Victorian Scotland', pp. 20–1, 29.

(18) For detailed accounts on this point, see *Ibid.*, pp. 17–30. A seminal study by Paterson has already implied that parochial boards provided assistance to able-bodied women (with dependent children). However, it should be noted that she did not refer to the fact that they were recognised as having legal rights to such relief under certain conditions, let alone explain how these rights were guaranteed (and enforced) through the courts. (Paterson, 'The Poor Law', p. 185.)

son entitled to parochial relief'.<sup>(19)</sup> Nonetheless, one Inspector of poor stated the following:

Although there had been conflicting decisions in regard to the claims of a woman with one child, almost all Sheriffs hold that able-bodied women with two children require support.<sup>(20)</sup>

The crucial point of this rule was that it was applied equally to all categories of able-bodied mothers without husbands. For example, concerning the relief for mothers of illegitimate children (who were resented as being immoral by contemporaries), the chairman of the Select Committee on Poor Law (Scotland) asked:

is it not the fact ... that an able-bodied woman with one child is not admitted as an object of relief; but that, if she has two or more children, she gets proportionate relief, whether the children be legitimate or not?<sup>(21)</sup>

To that question, William Smythe, a member of the Board of Supervision replied:

That is rather a reason for women with illegitimate children having the restraint of the poor-house imposed upon them.<sup>(22)</sup>

## II

The previous section discussed the scope of the poor who were entitled to poor relief in Scotland after 1845. This section moves on to explore the actual level of pauperism, particularly among women. Regarding this point, a recent study by Harris shows statistically that Scottish women were less likely to receive relief than those in England and Wales between 1871 and 1910 by examining 'the rate of pauperism' (paupers as a percentage of the population; 'the rate of female pauperism' in the case of female paupers as a percentage of the female population).

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(19) *The Poor Law Magazine and Parochial Journal*, Vol. VI (1878), p. 283. For the courts' decisions associated with this point, see Kensei Tokuyama, 'Poor Relief to Women with Children in Victorian Scotland', pp. 21–3, 29.

(20) *The Poor Law Magazine for Scotland*, Vol. VII (1865), p. 92.

(21) PP 1868–69 (301) xi, 1, *Report from the Select Committee on Poor Law (Scotland); together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix, and index*, p. 9.

(22) *Ibid.* For a profile of William Smythe, see *Ibid.*, pp. xi, 1.

However, his data does not take into account variations in the rates of female pauperism across different age groups or categories of female paupers (see Table 1).

Yet, as far as the situation in the early twentieth century is concerned, we can obtain useful data from the *Census of Paupers, March 31st, 1906*. This is a statistical survey (complete enumeration) of people who were receiving relief on 31 March 1906, which was conducted by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress. This source is valuable because it provides detailed information on paupers, such as their sex, age, and marital status. Furthermore, the scope of the survey encompassed the whole area of the United Kingdom, and therefore, we can compare the results of the census for both Scotland and England and Wales.<sup>(23)</sup>

Indeed, using the data derived from this source, Harris has already exhibited the rates of pauperism for different age groups on 31 March 1906 for both Scotland and England and Wales (not broken down by gender; see Table 2). As we can see from Table 2, the rates of pauperism in Scotland were lower than those of England and Wales for almost all adult age groups.<sup>(24)</sup>

Table 2: Rates of pauperism at different ages in Scotland and England & Wales, 31 March 1906, shown by Harris (2019).

|             | Scotland | England and Wales |
|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| 0–13        | 2.69%    | 2.16%             |
| 14–24       | 0.24%    | 0.33%             |
| 25–34       | 0.58%    | 0.66%             |
| 35–44       | 1.45%    | 1.33%             |
| 45–54       | 1.66%    | 1.79%             |
| 55–59       | 2.25%    | 2.60%             |
| 60–64       | 3.91%    | 6.41%             |
| 65–74       | 9.65%    | 16.30%            |
| 75–85       | 15.79%   | 27.59%            |
| 85 and over | 19.82%   | 35.31%            |

Source: Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism', p. 59.

(23) PP 1910 Cd. 5077 liii, 1, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXV. Statistics relating to England and Wales*, pp. 49–50; PP 1910 Cd. 5440 liv, 595, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, p. 39.

(24) Harris also paid attention to the exceptional age group of 35–44 (in which the rate of pauperism in Scotland was higher than that of England and Wales), and noted that 'the Commissioners suggested that Scottish authorities adopted a much more liberal approach to the relief of widows with dependent children than their Anglo-Welsh counterparts'. However, he did not provide any detailed quantitative data to support this claim. (Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism', p. 59.)

Nevertheless, examining these age-specific rates of pauperism by gender, a different picture of the Scottish Poor Law after 1845 is revealed. Table 3 illustrates the age-specific rates of pauperism of both sexes on 31 March 1906 (scope limited to the four age groups between the ages of 20 and 55 years). As opposed to Table 2 by Harris, it clearly shows that Scottish women were more likely to receive assistance than those in England and Wales in most of the younger and middle-aged groups.

However, what types of young and middle-aged women were the primary recipients of this large-scale relief? Table 4 shows the percentage of widows among Scottish female paupers in each age group in 1906. It can be seen that widows accounted for 48.5–63.1% of the total female paupers in the younger and middle-aged groups (between the ages of 25 and 55 years). In addition, the Royal Commission examined the proportion of widows with children to the overall Scottish female paupers aged 20–60 in 1906, and compared it with the equivalent figure in England and Wales: the former was 43.5%, whereas the latter was 30.1%.<sup>(25)</sup> These data clearly show a stronger presence of widows (with children) among young and middle-aged female paupers in Scotland compared to England and Wales.

Table 3: Rates of pauperism of both sexes at different ages in Scotland and England & Wales, 31 March 1906.

|       | Scotland |        | England and Wales |        |
|-------|----------|--------|-------------------|--------|
|       | male     | female | male              | female |
| 20–24 | 0.11%    | 0.22%  | 0.24%             | 0.35%  |
| 25–34 | 0.26%    | 0.88%  | 0.47%             | 0.83%  |
| 35–44 | 0.64%    | 2.21%  | 0.90%             | 1.73%  |
| 45–54 | 1.06%    | 2.23%  | 1.54%             | 2.03%  |

Sources: Parliamentary Papers [hereinafter PP] 1910 Cd. 5440 liv, 595, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, p. 40; PP 1910 Cd. 5077 liii, 1, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXV. Statistics relating to England and Wales*, pp. 56–7.

Table 4: Percentage of widows among overall Scottish female paupers of each age group in 1906.

|       |       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 20–24 | 25–34 | 35–44 | 45–54 |
| 11.6% | 48.5% | 63.1% | 56.9% |

Sources: Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, pp. 40, 64–7.

(25) Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, p. 42.

### III

The previous section has shown that Scottish women were more likely to get assistance than those in England and Wales in most of the younger and middle-aged groups in 1906.

Admittedly, this is the outcome of various Poor Law practices implemented at the local level and the various local contexts of female poverty throughout Scotland. However, the situation in one specific region, namely the Western Lowlands, has particularly significant implications for the overall scale of female pauperism in Scotland for the following reasons:

1. The Western Lowlands (comprising four counties of Lanark, Renfrew, Ayr and Dunbarton)<sup>(26)</sup> increased its population size and experienced concomitant rapid urbanisation between 1861 and 1911. Consequently, this region constituted almost 46% of the overall Scottish population in 1911 and 55.5% of the overall Scottish urban population in 1891.<sup>(27)</sup> Therefore, exploring female pauperism in this region has considerable significance in quantitative terms.
2. While experiencing rapid growth of male-dominated heavy industries, late nineteenth-century Scotland suffered a decline in the textile industry, which reduced employment opportunities for women. As will be shown below, the Western Lowlands was the centre of this trend. Thus, examining female pauperism in this region can lead to an interpretation of the level of pauperism among Scottish women against the background of the changing socioeconomic structure surrounding women.<sup>(28)</sup>

This section begins by looking at the socio-economic circumstances of women in the Western Lowlands between 1845 and 1914. It then moves on to examine the actual scale of poor relief to destitute women in the Western Lowlands, and its broader implications for the overall scale of female pauperism in Scotland.

#### (1)

One phenomenon that affected contemporary women in most regions of Scotland was population outflow through out-migration and emigration. In particular, the outflow of the young male population was outstanding in scale, causing a significant imbalance in the sex ratio (males per 100 females), especially among younger age groups. In fact, the sex ratio of Scottish people

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(26) Based on the regional boundary employed by Flinn ed., *Scottish Population History*, p. xxiii.

(27) *Ibid.*, pp. 306, 314–5. The scope of the urban population is limited to those residing in towns with at least 5,000 inhabitants. (*Ibid.*, pp. 314–5.)

aged 25–29 years was 77 in 1861. In addition, this imbalance in sex distribution is almost certainly one of the main causes for the numerousness of women remaining single in Scotland compared with England and Wales (see Table 5).<sup>(29)</sup>

By contrast, the Western Lowlands, experiencing rapid growth of heavy industries (in which the workforce was mostly men), gained a male population through in-migration. Thus, the sex ratios of the younger ages were much more balanced in the Western Lowlands than in

Table 5: Percentage of women never married at ages 45–49 and 20–24, Scotland, England & Wales and the Western Lowlands, 1861 and 1911.

| At ages 45–49 |                 |                             |                          |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
|               | <i>Scotland</i> | <i>The Western Lowlands</i> | <i>England and Wales</i> |
| 1861          | 19.9%           | 14.2%                       | 12.2%                    |
| 1911          | 21.3%           | 16.4%                       | 16.5%                    |
| At ages 20–24 |                 |                             |                          |
|               | <i>Scotland</i> | <i>The Western Lowlands</i> | <i>England and Wales</i> |
| 1861          | 74.1%           | 67.7%                       | 66.4%                    |
| 1911          | 78.2%           | 75.5%                       | 75.7%                    |

Sources: PP 1864 (3275) li, 49, *Census of Scotland, 1861. Population Tables and Report, Vol. II*, pp. 60–5; PP 1913 Cd. 6896 lxxx, 45, *Census of Scotland, 1911. Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland. Volume II*, pp. 227–35; M. Anderson, *Scotland's Populations from the 1850s to Today* (Oxford, 2018), p. 207; M. Flinn ed., *Scottish Population History from the 17th Century to the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 326–7.

(28) In all of the four counties comprising the Western Lowlands, the percentages of occupied men engaged in miscellaneous heavy industries, mining and quarrying were well above the corresponding figure in Scotland in 1901. Moreover, in those counties, widows who were occupied made up relatively small proportions of the total number of widows aged 25–44. Although several other counties surrounding Lanarkshire such as Linlithgow, Bute and Argyll shared (either or both of) these two features, the four counties were distinct from those other counties in that they had well over 100,000 inhabitants in 1911. Therefore, studying female poverty and pauperism in the four counties has considerable significance in quantitative terms. Particularly, Lanarkshire had by far the largest population (1447,034 people in 1911; 30.4% of the entire Scottish population in 1911). In this county, Glasgow, the central city of the Western Lowlands, was located, which prospered by heavy industries (in fact, the population of Glasgow reached one million in 1912). Furthermore, in all of the remaining three counties, Lanarkshire was far more important as the source of migrant population than Edinburgh, unlike West Lothian. For the common features described above, I limit the area of the Western Lowlands to the four counties, as Flinn (1977) did. (The explanation concerning the characteristics of the four counties in this footnote is based on Table 8 in this paper; For the population size of Glasgow, see Charles Withers, 'The demographic history of the city, 1831–1911', in Irene Maver and W. H. Fraser eds., *Glasgow, Volume II: 1830–1912* (Manchester, 1996), p. 142.)

(29) M. Anderson and D. J. Morse, 'The People', in W. H. Fraser and R. J. Morris eds., *People and Society in Scotland, vol. II, 1830–1914* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 19–22, 31, 34.

Scotland as a whole between 1861 and 1911, which may be one of the primary reasons why women in this region tended to be married at younger ages. As a result, the proportion of never-married women among middle-aged women was much smaller in this region than the corresponding figure for the whole of Scotland (see Table 5).<sup>(30)</sup>

At the same time, because of this inclination towards early marriages, general fertility rates<sup>(31)</sup> among women in this region were much higher than those in other regions of Scotland.<sup>(32)</sup> To grasp the numerousness of the number of children they had, it should first be noted that Scottish married women consistently had higher marital fertility rates (number of legitimate births among 1,000 married females between the ages of 15 and 44) than those in England and Wales during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>(33)</sup> As a result, even in 1911, when the fertility decline was already well underway, the mean number of children born to married couples in Scotland was 5.8 (here, the scope of the analysis is limited to 'marriages where the wife was aged 22–26 at marriage and the marriages had lasted at least 15 years'<sup>(34)</sup>). In particular, women who were married to men working in heavy industries had over six children on average; the corresponding figure for miner families was about seven.<sup>(35)</sup> This tendency of families in heavy industries to have large family sizes contributed largely to the high fertility rates of the Western Lowlands, which was the centre of those heavy industries.<sup>(36)</sup>

Additionally, these women with numerous children were more likely to become widowed in the Western Lowlands than in Scotland as a whole (see Table 6).

Yet, what was even more crucial was that these women had to earn a living from an unstable source of income. Looking at the wage level, the mean wage earned by British women was 58% less than that earned by men at the turn of the century.<sup>(37)</sup> However, another important factor contributing to the instability of their earnings was the lack of employment opportunities. In fact, over the period from 1851 to 1911, while the proportion of Scotland's

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(30) Flinn ed., *Scottish Population History*, pp. 317–9, 326–8, 332–334, 337, 348. In 1901, the sex ratio among people aged 25–29 years in the Western Lowlands was 101. (*Ibid.*, p. 318.)

(31) Here, general fertility rates mean 'three-year averages around census years of live births per 1,000 women (married and unmarried) aged 15–49'. (*Ibid.*, p. 341.)

(32) *Ibid.*, pp. 340–2, 348.

(33) M. Anderson, *Scotland's Populations from the 1850s to Today* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 248–50, 53.

(34) Anderson and Morse, 'The People', p. 40.

(35) *Ibid.*

(36) Flinn ed., *Scottish Population History*, pp. 328, 348.

(37) E. Gordon 'Women's Sphere', in Fraser and Morris, *People and Society*, p. 214.

Table 6: Percentage of women widowed at ages 45 to 49, Scotland and the Western Lowlands, 1861 to 1911.

|                      | 1861  | 1881  | 1901  | 1911  |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Scotland             | 15.9% | 15.6% | 13.2% | 11.2% |
| The Western Lowlands | 19.6% | 18.8% | 14.7% | 12.3% |

Sources: Censuses of Scotland, 1861, 1881, 1901, 1911; M. Anderson, *Scotland's Populations from the 1850s to Today* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 209–10.

Table 7: Percentage of the occupied population engaged in selected occupations for the Strathclyde region and Scotland as a whole, 1861 and 1911.

|  | Strathclyde, 1861 | Scotland, 1861 | Strathclyde, 1911 | Scotland, 1911 |
|--|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Textile and clothing   | 30.8%             | 23.7%          | 13.8%             | 14.9%          |
| Metal manufacturing, shipbuilding, engineering, mining and quarrying | 15.7%             | 10%            | 27.5%             | 19.5%          |

Notes. In the Strathclyde region, all the counties in the Western Lowlands (Lanark, Renfrew, Ayr, Dumbarton) are included, as well as the counties of Bute and Argyll.

Source: C. H. Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics, 1841–1971* (Cambridge, 1979).

Table 8: Several features of the four counties comprising the Western Lowlands.

|                  | % of occupied men engaged in miscellaneous heavy industries, mining and quarrying in 1901 | % of widows (aged 25–44) occupied in 1911 | · Population in 1911<br>· ( ) = population as % of the overall Scottish population in 1911 | % of migrants from Lanarkshire and Edinburghshire among overall migrants in each county |
|------------------|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Lanark</b>    | <b>35.3%</b>  | <b>47.7%</b>                              | <b>1447034 (30.4%)</b>   |   |
| <b>Renfrew</b>   | <b>30.6%</b>  | <b>48.7%</b>                              | <b>314552 (6.6%)</b>   | <b>L : 33.3% E : 2.7%*</b>  |
| <b>Ayr</b>       | <b>31.3%</b>  | <b>43.4%</b>                              | <b>268337 (5.6%)</b>   | <b>L : 30.3% E : 3.0%</b>   |
| <b>Dumbarton</b> | <b>42.0%</b>  | <b>39.6%</b>                              | <b>139831 (2.9%)</b>   | <b>L : 36.0% E : 2.7%</b>   |
| West Lothian     | 45.0%   | 33.2%                                     | 80155 (1.7%)   | L : 22.4% E : 22.6%   |
| Argyll           | 10.1%   | 48.2%                                     | 70902 (1.5%)   | L : 26.8% E : 3.1%  |
| Bute             | 6.3%  | 38.8%                                     | 18186 (0.4%)   | L : 35.8% E : 2.5%  |
| <b>Scotland</b>  | <b>23.9%</b>  | <b>50.7%</b>                              | <b>4760904</b>   |   |

\*L = % of migrants from Lanarkshire; E = % of migrants from Edinburghshire.

Sources: PP 1904 Cd. 1798 cviii, 625, *Eleventh decennial census of the population of Scotland taken 31st March 1901, with report. Vol. III*, pp. 4–9; PP 1912–13 Cd. 6097 cxix, 1, Census of Scotland, 1911. *Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland. Volume I*, pp. 76, 308, 409, 546, 700, 1525, 1620, 1930; PP 1913 Cd. 6896 lxxx, 45, Census of Scotland, 1911. *Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland. Volume II*, pp. 3, 436, 502–23.

industrial labour force involved in heavy industries rose from 18% to 40%, the equivalent figures for workers in the textile industry (where a large number of females were employed) dropped from 44% to around 20%, reducing employment opportunities for women.<sup>(38)</sup> Furthermore, Table 7 clearly demonstrates that the Western Lowlands was the centre of this trend. Consequently, the percentage of widows (aged 25–44) who worked in 1911 was 46.86% in the Western Lowlands; the corresponding figure for Scotland as a whole was 50.7% and that for England and Wales was 63.3%.<sup>(39)</sup>

(2)

In short, the Western Lowlands contained a larger proportion of married or widowed women than Scotland as a whole. Furthermore, these women in this region tended to have more children than those in other regions. More importantly, they faced a paucity of job opportunities against the background of the decline of the textile industry, which was replaced by the rapidly growing male-dominated heavy industries.

The remainder of this section traces the actual scale of poor relief for these destitute women in the Western Lowlands between 1861 and 1911. Then, it explores its implications for the level of pauperism among young and middle-aged women in Scotland as a whole.

However, before the analysis, it is necessary to describe the nature of the source used here: annual reports published by the Board of Supervision and, from 1894 onwards, by the Local Government Board for Scotland (which replaced the Board of Supervision in 1894). The reports annually recorded the number of paupers in receipt of relief on 14 May (in 1896, the census day was changed to 15 May).<sup>(40)</sup> Regarding the recording method, the number of paupers and their 'dependants' were separately returned in the statistics, and the vast majority of the dependants were children. However, it should be noted that the wives of paupers were also categorised as dependants, which disrupts a comparison of levels of female pauperism between different regions with different proportions of married female paupers.<sup>(41)</sup> Thus, paupers and dependants are lumped together in the following analysis in order to make a comparison possi-

(38) E. Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland, 1850–1914* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 21, 24.

(39) PP 1912–13 Cd. 6097 cxix, 1, Census of Scotland, 1911. *Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland. Volume I*, pp. 76, 409, 700, 1525, 1930; PP 1913 Cd. 6896 lxxx, 45, Census of Scotland, 1911. *Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland. Volume II*, p. 436; PP 1914–16 Cd. 7929 lxxxi, 385, Census of England and Wales, 1911. *Summary tables*, p. 165.

(40) Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism', p. 45.

(41) Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, p. 45.

ble between the returns of the Western Lowlands and Scotland as a whole.

In addition, unlike the *Census of Paupers*, the reports do not contain information about the age and marital status of the paupers. Still, by tracing the records between 1861 and 1911, and combining the results with the data provided by the *Census of Paupers*, a broad trend of female pauperism in the Western Lowlands can be drawn.

Table 9 shows the percentage of female paupers in the Western Lowlands among the overall Scottish female paupers in 1861, 1871, and 1906. The Table also shows the percentage of this region's female population among the overall Scottish female population. It can be seen from the Table that the increase in the relative scale of this region's female pauperism was more dramatic than the increase in the relative size of this region's female population: this region's share of the overall Scottish female paupers increased from almost 31% in 1861 to 44.8% in 1906, whereas the region's share of the entire Scottish female population was 34.2% in 1861 and 43.1% in 1901 respectively.

Unfortunately, from 1875 onwards, the Board of Supervision no longer recorded gender breakdown of the number of poor on 14 May, making it impossible to calculate the level of female pauperism for the remaining years between 1871 and 1911. Still, it is useful to trace the rates of pauperism among the entire population of both the Western Lowlands and Scotland as a whole (see Table 10), given that women comprised the majority of the total number of paupers.<sup>(42)</sup> It is clear from the table that, until 1901, rates of pauperism in the Western Lowlands were consistently lower than those of Scotland as a whole. Still, the gap had narrowed by 1901. In the end, the rate of pauperism in the region had surpassed that of Scotland as a whole by 1911.

Indeed, as will be described below, this relatively high level of female pauperism in the Western Lowlands arose from several factors. However, it is not reasonable to consider that the shrinking employment opportunities for women described above did not play a considerable part in making this expanding trend of pauperism in this region.

However, it is still unclear how far the scale of female pauperism in the Western Lowlands contributed to the level of female pauperism in Scotland among the younger and middle-aged groups indicated in Table 3. On that point, we can analyse age-specific levels of female pauperism in the Western Lowlands in 1906 using the *Census of Paupers* (Table 11). From Table 11, we can see that female paupers in the Western Lowlands made up disproportionately large

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(42) Harris, 'Parsimony and Pauperism', p. 58.

Table 9:

- ① Percentage of female paupers in the Western Lowlands among overall Scottish female paupers in 1861, 1871, and 1906.
- ② Percentage of female population in the Western Lowlands among overall Scottish female population in 1861, 1871, 1901, 1911.

|      | ①     | ②     |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1861 | 30.9% | 34.2% |
| 1871 | 34.1% | 36.1% |
| 1906 | 44.8% |       |
| 1901 |       | 43.1% |
| 1911 |       | 44.7% |

Sources: *Annual Reports* of the Board of Supervision, 1861, 1871; Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, pp. 68–75; Censuses of Scotland, 1861, 1871, 1901, 1911.

Table 10: Rates of pauperism in Scotland and the Western Lowlands, 1861–1911.

|      | <i>The Western Lowlands</i> | <i>Scotland</i> |
|------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1861 | 3.7%                        | 4.1%            |
| 1871 | 3.6%                        | 3.8%            |
| 1881 | 2.6%                        | 2.7%            |
| 1891 | 2.0%                        | 2.3%            |
| 1901 | 2.1%                        | 2.2%            |
| 1911 | 2.4%                        | 2.2%            |

Sources: *Annual Reports* of the Board of Supervision, 1861, 1871, 1880–81, 1890–92; *Annual Reports* of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1901, 1911.

Table 11:

- ① Female paupers in the Western Lowlands as percentage of the overall Scottish female paupers in each of the younger and middle-aged groups, 31 March 1906.
- ② Female population in the Western Lowlands as percentage of the overall Scottish female population in each of the younger and middle-aged groups, 1901 and 1911.

|   | 20-24                        | 25-34                        | 35-44                        | 45-54                        |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ① | 52.4%                        | 51.0%                        | 48.0%                        | 41.1%                        |
| ② | 1901 : 45.3%<br>1911 : 46.7% | 1901 : 45.0%<br>1911 : 46.6% | 1901 : 42.4%<br>1911 : 44.5% | 1901 : 39.7%<br>1911 : 41.6% |

Sources: Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, pp. 68–75; PP 1903 Cd. 1481 lxxxvi, 205, *Eleventh decennial census of the population of Scotland taken 31st March 1901, with report. Vol. II*, pp. 34–43; PP 1913 Cd. 6896 lxxx, 45, *Census of Scotland, 1911. Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland. Volume II*, pp. 227–235.

share of the overall Scottish female paupers in most of the younger and middle-aged groups (between the ages of 20 and 55), when compared to the region's share of the overall Scottish female population in the respective age groups.

Moreover, we can see from the *Census of Paupers* proportion of widows with children to the overall female paupers aged 20–60 in the Western Lowlands. As might be expected, widows with children comprised a sizeable proportion of the overall female paupers aged 20–60 in the Western Lowlands at almost 45%<sup>(43)</sup> (As shown in section II, the corresponding figure in Scotland as a whole was 43.5%).

### (3)

In short, the Western Lowlands experienced an increase in the relative scale of female pauperism between 1861 and 1911. The backgrounds to this phenomenon were the decline of the textile industry and the decrease in employment opportunities for women, as well as the increased female population in this region. Moreover, women in the Western Lowlands tended to have more children than those in other regions. In addition, the possibility of these women becoming widowed was higher in the Western Lowlands than in Scotland as a whole, which means that there were numerous destitute women without husbands whose life circumstances met the requirements for getting relief (which I have described in section I).

Ultimately, the resultant large scale of female pauperism in the Western Lowlands disproportionately contributed to the high level of pauperism among young and middle-aged women in Scotland, which surpassed the level of female pauperism in England and Wales among the same age groups in 1906 (see Table 3).

At the same time, it should be emphasised that such a high level of female pauperism in the Western Lowlands (and Scotland as a whole) in 1906 did not merely reflect the scale of poverty among young and middle-aged women in the Western Lowlands; it is almost certain that the role the Poor Law authorities played in dealing with such a massive scale of poverty, especially its expansion in the direction of a more lenient policy from 1902, also expanded the scale of female pauperism.

The move towards a more generous policy was especially the case for the relief of widows with children: The Local Government Board for Scotland, encouraging the relief of 'worthy and

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(43) Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, pp. 68–75, 118.

diligent' widows with young children, issued the following circular to parishes:

Unless such cases are suitably alimented ... the mother has probably no alternative but to seek employment away from home—a course which necessitates the children being left, to their great disadvantage ... the Board would urge upon Parish Councils ... that they should aim at an aliment of such an amount as will enable worthy and diligent mothers so to devote themselves to the care of their families in childhood ....<sup>(44)</sup>

Moreover, according to John Thomas Maxwell, the Head of the Statistical and Audit, etc., Branch of the Local Government Board for Scotland, the Board's circular 'has to some extent been misinterpreted in the very large parishes ... The result is that they are inclined to give more liberally all over, and that they are taking a more lenient view'.<sup>(45)</sup>

The result of these attitudes towards widows having children can be illustrated briefly by comparing the amount of outdoor relief given to widows with children in Scotland and that in England and Wales in the late 1900s.

Looking at firstly the amount of aid in England and Wales, 'a common practice' was to give 1s. or 1s. 6d.<sup>(46)</sup> a week to widows for each child 'except one. It is assumed that the widow, if able-bodied, can maintain herself and one child'.<sup>(47)</sup>

By contrast, turning to the practice in Scotland<sup>(48)</sup>, the amount of relief was 'uniformly higher than that given in England. For the urban districts investigated ... the prevailing scale is 2s. to 2s. 6d. a child'.<sup>(49)</sup> Admittedly, sizeable variations existed in the amount of aliment given

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(44) PP 1903 Cd. 1521 xxvi, 1, *Eighth annual report of the Local Government Board for Scotland*, p. 15.

(45) PP 1910 Cd. 4978 xlvi, 1, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume VI. Minutes of Evidence (95 to 110th days and 139th and 149th days) with Appendix*, p. 114.

(46) The basic units of currency were as follows: one pound (£) = 20 shillings (s); one shilling = 12 pence (d).

(47) Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXV. Statistics relating to England and Wales*, p. 51.

(48) The following data are based on a survey by C. T. Parson on the amount of outdoor relief for families with children, which was commissioned to him by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress in the late 1900s. The survey was conducted in four different burghal parishes: Glasgow, Govan (located right next to Glasgow), Edinburgh, and Dundee (a situation in one rural parish of Lanarkshire was also investigated). Of all children whose parents received outdoor relief in those town parishes, about 16% of children (and their families) were surveyed. The subjects were selected from several districts with different scales of poverty within the respective town parishes. Importantly, 87% of the families investigated were headed by widows. PP 1910 Cd. 5075 lii, 609, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix volume XXIII. Report on the Condition of the Children who are in receipt of the various forms of Poor Law Relief in certain parishes in Scotland*, pp. 3, 6–9, 12.

in each of the towns investigated. Nonetheless, even in Edinburgh and Dundee (where relatively smaller amounts were given than the other towns investigated), 1s. 6d. to 2s. were commonly granted.<sup>(50)</sup> Moreover, in Glasgow, a 'special roll' was arranged, and at least 3s. a child was paid to the widows put on the roll.<sup>(51)</sup> In Govan, the amount of aid was 'sometimes 3s. a child, but more often 2s. 6d.'<sup>(52)</sup> (both Glasgow and Govan were located in Lanarkshire, one of the four counties comprising the Western Lowlands. See Table 8 and footnote 28).

Since as much as 89% of the widows receiving relief in 1906 were given the aid in the form of outdoor relief, and 'of those relieved in institutions, nearly all of them are without dependent children',<sup>(53)</sup> the meaning of this relatively generous policy on outdoor relief is substantial in terms of the relief for widows with children as a whole.

## Conclusion

The last part of the previous section highlighted the relatively generous amount of relief by the Scottish Poor Law authorities towards widows having children compared to the English and Welsh authorities. At the same time, this comparatively lenient attitude towards widows with children had a significant implication for the amount of poor relief to adult female paupers as a whole, since widows having children made up a considerable share (43.5%) of the overall Scottish female paupers aged 20–60, as described in section II.

Therefore, if we combine these findings with the statistics on the rates of pauperism among young and middle-aged Scottish women (and its comparison with the corresponding rates in England and Wales shown in Table 3), we can draw a broad conclusion: the relief of young and middle-aged impoverished women in Scotland was on a larger scale than that in England and Wales, at least in the early twentieth century.

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(49) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

(50) *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 26.

(51) *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16. According to C. T. Parson, 'In less than 50 per cent. of the cases this sum is given; in the remainder the amount is from 1s. to 3s. above this ... Outside the special roll, the amount of relief per child is usually quoted at 2s. or 2s. 6d'. (*Ibid.*, p. 16.) It should be noted that widows with children put on the special roll made up approximately 20 percent of the families receiving outdoor relief in Glasgow who were investigated by C. T. Parson. (*Ibid.*, pp. 9, 14.)

(52) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

(53) Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXX. Scotland*, p. 48.