



**Barriers to Women's Employment
Women and Recession Project**

Australian Women's Coalition

**Melbourne
consultation notes**



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INTRODUCTION

The Melbourne consultation was held on 23 November 2009 at RMIT University, and was organised by Dr Sara Charlesworth, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Social Research, and the Women's Information and Referral Service (WIRE) with support from the Victorian Government Office of Women's Policy. The invitation is at Attachment 2; a list of attendees is at Attachment 1.

BACKGROUND

Dr Charlesworth spoke to a circulated paper (edited version reproduced at Appendix 1), briefly outlining the structure of the labour market in metropolitan and Victorian regional areas and providing some results from a recent research study on life and work issues in regional centres.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

- Several issues with child-care and out of school hours care (OSHC) were identified. The current out of school hours care and vacation care system is rigid and often acts as a barrier to women's workforce participation. The system needs to be revised in context of being an effective enabler to work. Additionally the current system does not support adequate salaries or training for child-care workers, which in turn affects the quality of care provided.
- There are issues of access and affordability to out of school hours care and vacation care places for children aged 6–12 years. There is a need to recognise that child-care does not finish at five years of age. Many regions do not offer out of school hours care throughout the year. This is a particular problem for women who have to travel long distances to get to work. As a result, many women often cut down their hours of work, which in turn has a direct effect on their superannuation and retirement incomes.
- It is difficult for women to balance work and caring responsibilities. Many employers do not honour requests for flexible work practices. There is a need to enforce these rights and that ensure that employers receive training on equal pay rights and flexible work practices.
- As a result of the recession many women are now agreeing to work reduced hours in order to keep their positions. However, the workload has not been reduced to match the working hours and many women find themselves working longer unpaid hours.

- It is difficult to access the various government stimulus packages and there is concern that they are not being equitably distributed. There is a need for greater transparency of these programs and who is gaining access to them.
- Many women are not aware of the services they are eligible to receive. The eligibility criteria for the stimulus packages should also be reassessed in order to allow access to women who need them.
- Access and affordability to TAFE and vocational education and training (VET) programs are a key problem preventing women from re-entering the workforce. The current fees act as a disincentive to re-enter the workforce. The increase in course fees needs to be addressed as well as the possibility of introducing HECS loans to VET and TAFE courses. This has significant issues to women acquiring debt and many women who are not eligible for HECS will be left out of all training programs.
- The issue of social isolation, exclusion and connectedness for carers needs to be addressed. The value of workforce participation goes beyond the additional income; it is also a way for carers to connect to the community and build their confidence. Many carers feel that they do not have support or options to enter the workforce. There is a need to establish training programs specifically targeted at carers which provides them with caring support and a time allowance to attend the training, so they are prepared to enter the workforce when they are able to.
- Additionally many carers do not see themselves as unemployed, instead they see themselves as not working for the moment. There is a need to recognise the value of unpaid work such as carers and volunteer workers.
- There are several government training programs that support migrant and refugee women to enter the workforce; however there is concern on how these programs are implemented. Many women cannot access the training programs due to a lack of transport, caring responsibilities, and language barriers. These barriers are also reflected in their ability to take paid positions, and as a result affect their capacity to enter the workforce.
- All migrant and refugee women can access 500 hours of English courses, however many women do not benefit from these courses as they do not have bilingual tutors and find it difficult to learn English.

- There is also the need to assist migrant women to learn how to become financially independent from their partners. Training programs on how to manage their finances and generate income would be beneficial.
- Micro-finance might be a useful strategy to enable women to start up small businesses or to learn skills and understanding on how to become economically independent.
- There were discussions on the baby boomer generation falling through the gaps, as some do not qualify for the part-pension yet and need to supplement their superannuation for several years. Many retired women are now faced with the problem of accessing training programs to enable them to return to the workforce in order to generate income to supplement lost superannuation as a result of the recession. In the recession it is difficult for older women to make voluntary contributions to superannuation.
- Women with disabilities are employed less and work in sectors with lower incomes. This impacts on their saving potential and retirement income. Women with disabilities are often discriminated against in the workforce and are unable to find suitable jobs to match their qualifications. Employers need to make a commitment to enforce anti-discrimination laws, Women with disabilities are faced with the additional challenge of disability with age. Women over 65 years are no longer classified as having a disability and are only classified as aged. As a result, they lose their disability payments which have significant impacts on their saving potential and ability to cover expenses.
- The issue of housing was also raised, it is no longer affordable for many and there is a great shortage in supply.
- Mental Health is an issue that is often overlooked and not given proper attention to by government.

POLICY ISSUES

- There should be greater transparency in government stimulus packages – who is receiving them and who is eligible.
- Data on the outcomes of the stimulus packages needs to be disseminated. What jobs have been created?
- There is a need for improved information and data on employment:
 - what sectors of work need employees



- what jobs are available
- where the positions are located
- what is the pay?
- There is a need for more accurate data on OSHC, and data which looks at OSHC as an enabler for women to engage in the workforce.
- There is a need for improved gender disaggregated data and gender analysis across all sectors of government and policies.
- Micro-finance and micro credit programs should be available to women to assist them to become economically independent.
- The JET program should be reviewed.
- TAFE and VET course fees need to be reduced.,
- Current retirement and superannuation options for women need to be readdressed. Many women delay retirement due to a lack of security and fear that under the current system and the recession they will lose their savings.
- The issue of under-employment of women needs to be addressed. The impact of under-employment will not be seen as immediately on women as it is on men. The impact on women will be seen in their superannuation and savings.
- The issue of unpaid hours of women should be addressed. Employers should reduce the workload to suit the hours women work or they should be paid for the hours.
- The government should review job-sharing. The government should show that there is value in job-sharing and should provide incentives to employers to provide job-sharing positions.
- There should be bilingual teachers in all English courses for migrant and refugee women.
- The value of unpaid work should be recognised. Unpaid care work should be classified as unpaid employment after certain hours of care. Caring should be considered as a qualification when carers return to the workforce.
- There should be more support for respite care.

- The current system of OSHC and vacation care should be reviewed, OSHC should be more flexible, affordable and accessible.
- Child-care and OSHC should be shifted away from being a women's issue and should be seen as an equal responsibility between men and women.
- The \$450 superannuation threshold should be removed. This disadvantages many women who work on a casual basis or are secondary income earners, and impacts on their retirement income.
- The issue of pay inequity between men and women should be addressed.
- Employers should be encouraged and trained to support women with caring responsibilities, and offer flexible work practices.
- There need to be improved regulations to protect employees on maternity leave and guaranteed return to work rights for contract workers.

ATTACHMENT 1

Attendees:

Jennifer Strauss – Australian Federation of University Women (AFUW)

Kate Purnell – Business and Professional Women Australia (BWA) Centre for Research

Angela Dennis – RMIT Student Union

Brenda Gabe – Victorian Women With Disabilities Network (VWDN)

Jennifer O'Donnell-Prisi – Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC)

Judith van Unen – JERA International; National Federation of Women (NFAW); Rural Doctors Association of Australia; Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia (COSBOA)

Belinda Tkalcevic – Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)

Nejla Selbibeg – Multicultural Association of Russian Women (MARWO)

Rita Gelma – Multicultural Association of Russian Women (MARWO)

Joan Akula

Samiro Douglas – WIRE

INVITATION TO Melbourne consultation

23 November 2009

Impact of the Recession on Women

Under-Employment and Unemployment for Women

We would like to invite you to the Melbourne consultation on:

Date:	23 November 2009
Venue:	RMIT University Research Lounge, Bldg 28, Level 5, (Enter through Building 8 on Swanston Street) (http://mams.rmit.edu.au/ah5shsrpo0ky.pdf)
Time	10.00 – 12.00 pm



Consultation workshops are being held in each State & Territory across Australia to give you an opportunity to provide a local perspective on the issues raised in the TAI report titled 'Impact of the Recession on Women' which launched in August, 2009 by Sharan Burrow President of the ACTU.

These workshops are sponsored by the four national women's Alliances Security4Women, WomenSpeak, National Rural Women's Coalition, Australian Women's Coalition and the National Foundation of Australian Women.

The Victorian consultation is also supported by WIRE Women's Information, the Office of Women's Policy, and the Centre for Applied Social Research at RMIT University.

The report is available www.tai.org.au/research
The impact of the recession on women

Please RSVP to: wire@wire.org.au

S4W Lifelong
Economic
Wellbeing
for Women

WomenSpeak

NW

wire
women's information

NW **S4W** Lifelong
Economic
Wellbeing
for Women



**National Rural
Women's Coalition**

WomenSpeak

AWC
Australian Women's Coalition

APPENDIX 1

Background paper by Dr Sara Charlesworth

Key differences for women in regional Victoria that shape the impact of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC)¹

Narrower structure of labour market in Victorian regional areas especially for women

- Lower labour force participation of women
 - Metropolitan area (Metro): 59%
 - Regional: 53%
- Lower educational attainment of women
 - 40% of women in metro Melbourne had year 12 or equivalent
 - 27% of women achieved year 12 or equivalent in regional Victoria
- More employed women work part-time work
 - Metro: 44.2% (increased since May 2009 when it was 43.8%)
 - Regional: 55.3% (increased since May 2009 when it was 53.5%)
- Different employment structure:
 - Regional areas have a narrower range of industries. For women, employment in professional, scientific and technical services, financial and insurance services and manufacturing tends to be lower than in Melbourne. On the other hand, health care and social assistance and retail tend to assume greater prominence
 - In terms of major occupational groups in which women are employed, the major difference is the relative lack of professionals as well clerical and administrative workers in regional areas in comparison to Melbourne and a greater proportion of women employed in labourer occupations.

¹ Data derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2009. *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Aug 2009*, Cat. no. 6291.0.55.003, viewed 16 January 2010, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6291.0.55.003Aug%202009?OpenDocument>

Job opportunities

- Unemployment
 - Metro: 5.5%
 - Regional: 5.4%

In Victoria, compared to Australia²

- Underemployment for women is slightly higher
 - Victoria : 9.9% (cf 6.4%% for men)
 - Australia: 9.7 (cf 6.4% for men)
- Underutilisation (unemployment plus under-employment) for women is slightly higher
 - Victoria: 16.2% (cf 13% for men)
 - Australia: 15.3% (cf 12.3% for men)

RMIT Victorian work and life study:

The study involved 3007 respondents (all employed persons) across metro and regional Victoria.

Care responsibilities impact more on employed women

The results show that while those with care responsibilities (dependent care or other care responsibilities) are more likely to be almost always or often rushed and pressed for time than those without care responsibilities, women with those care responsibilities are more so:

- Women 67%
- Men 54%

This held true for both metro and regional women.

Impact of GFC

We asked survey respondents (in August 2009) if there had been any changes at their workplace they believed were due to the financial crisis.

- 47% of metro women said 'Yes'
- 36 % of regional women said 'Yes'

² Comparative data for regional and metro Vic not easily available from published ABS data.

Of those who said there had been changes, changes included shifts being reduced or cancelled, staff numbers being cut back and budget or other company cutbacks.