

Anu

It is wonderful to see so many women donating their time to help the women of Milton Keynes. (Explain wealthy women/clever women - Leading to Women supporting Women campaign)

We were invited by MK Council to provide a workshop on Gender last year and this led to us returning to one of Women & Work's original purposes, (unfortunately unfunded!) which is research and campaigning. This is in addition to the funded core activities providing Information, Advice, Guidance, training and Support to clients

I am going to explain the employment section of our research document with the addition of the UK/MK comparison. If you also wish to find out about the 'Education, Health and Crime' data for women from 1600 onwards, our research document is available for sale at the back. We are keen to distribute the research as widely as possible and would welcome any offers from people who feel they would be able to sell more copies within their organisations or networks.

Women & Work believe that fundamental and radical changes to employment and policies would lead to more opportunity for people to

- fill skills gaps and find employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications
- participate in their community and or education
- be more available to spend time with their children and families
- provide a positive role model to their children

1. Situation before the Economic Downturn

Whilst the unemployment figures show more women than men are unemployed:

- unemployment figures only show Job Seekers Allowance claimants
- many women don't claim (e.g. Lone Parents on income support or women who have not paid enough NIC)

Therefore many more women are unemployed than figures show.

More women work part-time than men. Women on average spend twice as long doing housework and childcare than men.

Men see Work/ Life Balance as relaxation time / Women as time to fulfil childcare/ domestic tasks) - *work/unpaid work balance*

(e.g. our clients are more often working class women and Black and minority ethnic women who do not find paid help as accessible as Middle class women do.)

There are fewer part-time jobs in Milton Keynes than the UK average. More Women therefore take jobs well below their skills/qualification level

For example, Nationally 70% of women with SET qualifications are not in related occupations. In fact between 1995 and 2005 the proportion of women graduates in low level jobs almost trebled.

- There are less women in Managerial or Senior Official roles in MK than UK.
- There are more women in administrative/ secretarial roles in MK than UK.
- There is a wider pay gap between men and women in Milton Keynes

Story - Woman with Science degree, Part-time blocked, later re-introduced but accepted that not progress very far if not full time

2. How does this affect the Skills Gaps

Skills shortages in the UK are matched to areas where there is difficulty recruiting women; e.g. construction and SET. More part-time jobs alleviate this problem

Government has recently announced (January) 35,000 new apprenticeships. Flexible hours would enable more women to access new training opportunities and therefore move into areas where there are skills shortages. For example less than 3% of those undertaking engineering apprenticeships are women.

3. Women are hit harder by the Recession

- Since the start of 2008 the female redundancy rate has increased almost double the rate of the male increase.
- As women more likely than men to be in low-paid work, they are less likely to have savings and therefore face greater risk of immediate poverty
- unemployed women are less likely than men to qualify for Job Seekers Allowance (NIC contributions)
- Women have additional barriers to finding new jobs;
 - balance paid/ unpaid work
 - restricted choice dependant on affordable childcare
- more women are in paid work than last recession - increase in single parent families
- 90% LPs are women and now make up ¼ of all families - more women than ever are supporting families on their wage.

4. Opportunities for change

Business

- Women in part-time roles are less likely to leave, even if the full-time job market picks up soon
 - There is direct correlation between increases in revenue and
 - Family friendly policies
 - Having more women in higher management
- For example, in Abbey, women now have strong presence (63%). Alison Brittain, Executive Director, Retail Distribution says: "We have a high proportion of women in our branches and the take up of flexible work options is high. I am sure that this approach has allowed significant numbers of women to become senior retail managers within Abbey."

My daughters A level sociology class last week were taught last week about 'The pressure from society on women to become wives and mother; women who prioritise careers are still seen as deviant. They are blamed for social problems and made to feel guilty for 'neglecting' their children.' However Women are being pulled in different directions as the latest government initiatives are taking lone women parents off income support and pushing them back into the workplace as soon as their youngest child reaches 12. The plan is to reduce this age to 7 by 2010.

Strengthening Community

If more women were in part-time employment there would be

- a greater contribution to the economic growth within local areas
- a reduction in child poverty - (working within school hours reduces the need to pay for childcare and so increases household income for many dual and single parent families)
- an increase in support and motivation of children and a corresponding decrease in anti-social behaviour.
- time for families to be involved with their local communities

Change brings wider benefits:

Changing the way work is organised would not only enable women to continue in their chosen career after having children, but also fulfil the aspirations of:

- Fathers to be active parents
- Enable Disabled people to have careers
- Enable Workers to combine education and work to gain new skills
- Allow Older workers to remain in work of their choice longer (Sex and Power, EHRC, 2008)

If this can then be the city that promotes the introduction of work life balance policies so men and women of all backgrounds can access employment commensurate with their skill/qualification level AND enjoy a life outside work?

We plan to progress this vision by asking employers to change systems and introduce work/life balance policies to enable all people, women and men to access wider employment opportunities.

Today, we welcome your input as to how we can achieve this as part of our Women Supporting Women campaign.