



Profile of women's employment in NSW: Trends and issues

Fact sheet

This fact sheet profiles current trends and issues in women's employment in NSW.

This fact sheet was prepared in partnership with the Workplace Research Centre and Women and Work Research Group, The University of Sydney.

How many women are employed in NSW?

NSW has seen a large increase in women's labour force participation over the last 30 years. However women's labour force participation rates (that is, people who were employed or looking for work) remains lower than men's:

- As of June 2010, women's labour force participation rate was 55.9%, compared to the male participation rate of 70.4%.¹
- 53.4% of women are employed, compared to 67.3% of men.
- Women's labour force participation rates have risen from 44% in 1980 to 56% in 2010.²
- Since 1980, women's participation rates have increased across all age groups, except for 15-19 and 20-24 years where they have dropped. This reflects increased participation in education, with more young people continuing onto Year 12 and undertaking post-school education.³

Traditionally, women exit from the labour force during the child bearing years and return once children have reached high school age or older. In NSW a different pattern is evident, with women participating in greater proportions until they reach their mid 50s. However care responsibilities are the main reason women are not in the labour force.

- As of November 2010, the unemployment rate for NSW women was 5.5%, the unemployment for NSW men was 5% whilst the overall NSW unemployment rate was 5.2%.⁴
- As of November 2010, NSW had the third equal lowest (shared with South Australia) women's unemployment rate. Tasmania had the lowest at 5.2%.⁵
- In August 2008, the NSW women's underemployment rate (those in work but looking for more hours) was 7.8% compared to 4.5% for men.⁶

What occupations do women work in?

Gender segregation (where women and men work in areas where their colleagues are predominantly of their own gender) in employment remains pronounced, despite the increased labour force participation of women.

- Industries with a high proportion of women employees include health care and social assistance (79% women), education and training (69%), accommodation and food services (58%) and retail trade (54%). Over half of all women in NSW are employed in these four industries.⁷
- Occupations with high proportions of women include sales workers (12% of all employed women), clerical and administrative workers (24%), community and personal service workers (13%) and professionals (28%).⁸

Women are overrepresented in professional occupations compared to men. Women accounted for over half of all professional employees in 2008, reflecting the increasing educational attainment of women. They are, however, largely employed in traditional female industries such as education, health and social, welfare.

Women are more likely to work part-time than men across almost all occupations, with many 'feminised' occupations characterised by part-time working arrangements.⁹

- Part-time working arrangements are most common for women employed as sales workers (72.0%), labourers (63.0%), and community/personal service workers (59.5%).
- Part-time arrangements are less common amongst professional (30.8%) and managerial (18.3%) occupations, particularly in areas such as engineering (18.5%) and information and communications technology (6.7%).

What is women's employment status?

Job security is an important aspect of job quality. Employment as a casual rather than a permanent employee deprives workers of secure employment and the benefits which go with it. Women are less likely to have job security compared to men.

- 70.4% of women are employed on a permanent basis compared to 79.8% of men.¹⁰
- 29.6% of employed women are employed casually compared to 19.3% of men, and of these, four in five are part-time casuals, compared to one in two men.¹¹
- Less than a quarter of women in casual employment in 2008 and/or 2009 moved into permanent employment by 2009.¹²
- The extensive casualisation of women's part-time employment can result in poor working conditions and job and job insecurity.¹³

Are women paid as much as men?

Women on average are paid less than men in NSW and at the national level. The difference in what men are paid compared to what women are paid is commonly referred to as the gender pay gap.

- As of August 2010, the average weekly ordinary full-time earnings¹⁴ of women in NSW is \$1,157.60, compared to \$1,352.10 for men in NSW. This translates into an annual pay rate of \$60,195.20 for women and \$70,309.20 for men.¹⁵
- As of August 2010, the gap in average full time ordinary time earnings was 14.4%.
- Nationally, between 2000 and 2010, men's average weekly ordinary full-time earnings remained around 18% higher than average weekly ordinary full-time earnings for women.

- Nationally, taken from average weekly ordinary full-time earnings, the gender pay gap has narrowed slightly between 1995 and 2010, from men earning 22% more in 1995 to 18% more in 2010. The gender pay gap was as high as 23% in 2000 and as low as 15% in 2004.
- Nationally, the gender pay gap increases over the life course, peaking at 25% for workers between the ages of 50-54 (for Australian full-time employees). For junior employees (15-19 years), the gender pay gap is less than 5%. This largely reflects the significant number of young workers employed in Award reliant sectors, such as retail and hospitality.¹⁶

The industrial instruments that set pay and conditions also have an effect on pay rates, and as a result many occupations dominated by women have attracted lower wages due to the historic undervaluation of women's labour.

- Women in NSW are overrepresented in low paying industries such as retail trade and accommodation/food services; there is also a more distinct gender pay gap in high paying industries such as financial services (men are paid 28.6% more), professional services (28.4%), and healthcare (24.1%). This may in part be explained by the different occupational profile of female and male workers in these industries.¹⁷
- Women whose wages are award reliant are likely to earn less than those whose wages are determined via collective or individual agreements. Critically, women in part-time or casual employment are more likely to be award reliant. Related to this, women in the accommodation/food services, retail trade and administrative services are likely to be award reliant.¹⁸
- Women whose pay is set by collective agreement receive better pay outcomes than those who are award reliant.

How many women in NSW have access to paid leave?

Access to paid leave is one important way to provide women with the flexibility they often seek in order to help them balance work with other responsibilities, especially caring.

- Across Australia, 62.3% of women employees have access to paid leave entitlements, (defined as having employer provided and paid sick leave, and/or holiday leave), compared to 60.6% of male employees). This may be related to the greater number of men who are self-employed.¹⁹
- 24.8% of women employees do not have access to paid leave entitlements (compared to 15.7% of men);²⁰
- The high proportion of women employees without paid leave entitlements is related to the high proportion of women employees (nearly one-third), who are employed as casuals. Casuals do not usually receive paid sick and carers' and/or paid holiday leave.

Entitlement to paid leave varies by occupation, however across all occupations greater percentages of men have access to paid leave entitlements compared to women.²¹

- For women employees in Australia, the occupation groups with the highest percentage of paid leave entitlements are managers (91.7%), professionals (87.8%) and clerical and administrative workers (82.6%).
- Australian women in the accommodation/food industry or working as labourers, sales workers or community/personal services workers are less likely to receive paid leave entitlements.

How do women balance work and care responsibilities?

Over the last 25 years, the proportion of women of childbearing age and women with dependent

children who are participating in the Australian labour force has risen markedly. The level of support available for combining paid work with childbearing and family influences women's labour force participation. Furthermore, the ageing of the population and increasing average lifespan is likely to heighten the future demand for women (and men) of working age to provide care and assistance to older relatives and friends who may be unwell, have a disability or who require support for daily living.

The care women provide differs markedly to that of men, with women providing a broader range of care than men, spending more time caring and being more likely to be the primary carer.²²

- In 2005, of all persons who cared for a child not their own, 65.9% were women.
- In 2005, of all persons who cared for a person with a long-term health condition or disability, 55.6% were women.
- In 2005, of all persons who cared for a person with a short-term sickness or injury, 57.8% were women.
- In 2005, of all persons who cared for a person aged 65 years or over, 64.6% were women.
- Women who provided care to a person with a disability, long-term health condition and an older person were more than twice as likely as men to take the role of primary carer for that individual.

Women's employment status is affected by child care responsibilities much more than it is for men. Parenting responsibilities are associated with contrasting workforce behaviour in men and women. Specifically, the presence of young children in the household tends to lead men to increase their involvement in the labour market and women to reduce theirs.

- Households with children under the age of 15 are likely to have a male full-time earner and a female part-time earner; in couple households with children under 15, 13.8% of working

women work part-time, compared to 2.2% of men, and 9.3% of women work full-time compared to 26.% of men.²³

- Some two-thirds (67%) of NSW parents cited work-related reasons as the main reason their children were in formal care, one in five (22%) cited benefit to the children and the remaining 9% said it was due to personal reasons.²⁴
- Of the 532,000 employees who used work arrangements to care, approximately 21% wanted to increase their use of work arrangements to help care for someone.²⁵
- Around one-fifth (19%) of women in the private sector compared to 25% of men wanted to do this.
- In the public sector around one-quarter (23%) of women and around 16% of men wanted to increase their use of work arrangements to care.
- This suggests that flexible work arrangements and other policies to facilitate work and care need to be extended so that a greater number of employees can access such arrangements when needed.
- Women and men in NSW most commonly used paid leave and flexible working hours to care for another person. The other most common work arrangements used by women, are part-time work, casual work, or unpaid leave. Men are most likely to use rostered days off.²⁶
- 31% of Australian women who are willing to work but not actively looking (hidden unemployment) cite care responsibilities as their main reason for not looking for work.

Paid parental leave has been a major social, industrial and political concern in Australia over the past few years. On 1 January 2011, the Commonwealth Government introduced Australia's first national paid parental scheme. The scheme provides eligible primary carers up to 18 weeks leave paid at the Federal Adult Minimum Wage.

Prior to the commencement of the national paid parental scheme not all Australian workers had access to paid maternity/parental leave.

- Australia wide, 49% of women had access to paid parental leave entitlements (compared to 42% of men).
- Women working full-time had much greater access to paid parental leave than part-time women employees (Australia-wide, 49.9% compared to 21.8%).
- Access to parental leave also varied considerably between industries.
- Access to parental leave entitlements was greater for high skilled workers in managerial (48%) and professional roles (58%).
- In contrast, around 15% of lower skilled labourers and sales workers had access to these entitlements. The limited entitlement to parental leave in these occupations was in part due to high levels of part-time work in these occupations, high turn-over and significant proportions of casual staff in these occupations.
- High proportions of public sector workers received paid parental leave entitlements with 66% of female and 50% of male public sector workers receiving parental leave entitlements. In the private sector 28% of female and 21% of male employees had paid parental leave entitlements.²⁷

How do different groups of women fare in the labour market?

There is wide variation in the labour market experiences of particular groups of women, including women with different educational attainment levels, women who live in regional or remote areas, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities.

Higher educational attainment is strongly linked with better employment prospects. In NSW, the gap in educational attainment between men and women is decreasing.²⁸

- The proportion of women in NSW with a non-school qualification has increased from 47.4% in 2001 to 56.8% in 2009, and is now almost equal to that of men at 57.7%.
- The proportion of women with tertiary qualifications has increased four-fold between 1991 and 2009 (from 6.9% to 26.6%), surpassing the level of men with tertiary qualifications (22.7%).

However the single largest group of workers in the labour force are those without post-school qualifications.²⁹

- Just over half (50.8%) of women hold a Year 12 or below qualification compared to slightly less than half of men (48%).
- Labour force participation for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is influenced by factors such as visa category, English language proficiency, education level, time since arrival in Australia and availability of appropriate employment services. Those in employment are more likely to be found in lower skilled and lower paid jobs than women in the broader population.³⁰
- Women who speak Southern Asian languages at home are the most likely to be employed full-time (35%) and the least likely to be not in the labour force (38%).
- Women who speak Southwest and Central Asian languages at home are the least likely to be employed either full-time (18%) or part-time (13%) and the most likely to not be in the labour force (62%) as a percentage within their own language group.

Arguably one of the groups of women with the greatest difficulties in gaining meaningful paid employment are those with disabilities.

- Women in NSW with a disability are less likely

than men to enter the labour force.

In 2003 47% of women with a disability participated in the labour force, compared to 72% of women without a disability and 59% of men with a disability.³¹

The social disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people is also evident in their experience in the labour market, with Aboriginal women, having a much lower participation rate than non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men. While large numbers of Aboriginal women are employed in low-skilled and low-paid occupations Aboriginal women do participate in some more highly skilled occupations in higher percentages than non-Aboriginal women.

- In 2008, 36.5% of Aboriginal women in NSW were employed and 9.9% were unemployed.³²
- Based on Census data, unemployment among Aboriginal women in NSW declined from 13.9% to 8.8% from 1991 and 2006.³³
- According to Census data, half of the Aboriginal women in NSW remained outside the labour force in 2006.³⁴
- Aboriginal women in NSW are far less likely than Aboriginal men to be employed on a full-time basis (in 2006 17.6%, compared to 31.2% of Aboriginal men).³⁵
- Approximately one-quarter (23.5%) Aboriginal women workers were employed as Community and personal services workers and a further one-fifth (20.7%) as Clerical and administrative workers.³⁶
- Aboriginal women are half as likely to be employed in managerial occupations as non-Aboriginal women (5.5% compared to 10.3%).³⁷
- Compared to non-Aboriginal women, greater proportions of Aboriginal women are employed in Public administration and safety (9.2% of Aboriginal women compared to 5.3% of non-Aboriginal women) and Accommodation and Food Services (10.1% of

Aboriginal women compared to 7.7% of non-Aboriginal women) and Education and Training (14.1% of Aboriginal women compared to 11.4% of non-Aboriginal women).³⁸

- Aboriginal women are half as likely to be

employed in managerial occupations as non-Aboriginal women (5.5% compared to 10.3%).³⁹

- Aboriginal women are also less likely than non-Aboriginal women to be employed in professional jobs (17.0% compared to 24.3%).

Glossary

Employed

All persons aged 15 years and over who, during the reference week:

- worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind in a job or business, or on a farm (comprising employees, employers and own account workers); or
- worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (i.e. contributing family workers); or
- were employees who had a job but were not at work and were:
 - away from work for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week;
 - or away from work for more than four weeks up to the end of the reference week and received pay for some or all of the four week period to the end of the reference week;
 - or away from work as a standard work or shift arrangement;
 - or on strike or locked out;
 - or on workers' compensation and expected to return to their job;
- or were employers or own account workers, who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.

The employment rate (or employment to

population ratio) is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the civilian population aged 15 years and over within the same group.

Full-time workers

Employed persons who usually worked 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs) and those who, although usually working less than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week (ABS, Cat. No. 6103.0, 2009a).

Labour force status

A classification of the civilian population aged 15 years and over into employed, unemployed or not in the labour force, as defined. The definitions conform closely to the international standard definitions adopted by the International Conferences of Labour Statisticians.

Participation rate

For any group, the labour force expressed as a percentage of the civilian population aged 15 years and over in the same group.

Part-time workers

Employed persons who usually worked less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs) and either did so during the reference week, or were not at work during the reference week (ABS, Cat. No. 6103.0, 2009a).

Pay setting method

This refers to how the main part of an employees'

pay was set. The ABS reports on three main methods of pay setting for employees:

- Award or pay scale only - employees who had their rate of pay specified in an award or pay scale and were not paid more than rate of pay.
- Collective agreement – employees who had the main part of their pay set by a registered or unregistered collective agreement or an enterprise award.
- Individual arrangement - employees who had the main part of their pay set by an individual contract, registered individual agreement (e.g. Australian Workplace Agreement), common law contract, or an agreement to receive over-award payments. Working proprietors of incorporated businesses are included within the individual arrangement category.

Underemployment rate

The number of underemployed workers expressed as a percentage of the labour force.

Underemployed workers

Employed persons aged 15 years and over who want, and are available for, more hours of work than they currently have. They comprise:

- persons employed part-time who want to work more hours and are available to start work with more hours, either in the reference week or in the four weeks subsequent to the survey; or
- persons employed full-time who worked part-time hours in the reference week for economic reasons (such as being stood down or insufficient work being available). It is assumed that these people wanted to work full-time in the reference week and would have been available to do so.

Unemployed

Persons aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the reference week, and:

- had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and were available for work in the reference week; or
- were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.

References

¹ABS 2010, *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0, June.

²ABS 2010, *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0, June.

³ABS 2010, *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0, June.

⁴ABS 2010, *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0, November.

⁵ABS 2010, *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0, November.

⁶ABS 2009, *Australian Labour Market Statistics*, 6105.0 July.

⁷ABS 2010, *Detailed Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6291.55. 003, May.

⁸ABS 2010, *Detailed Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6291.55. 003, May.

⁹ABS 2010, *Detailed Labour Force Survey* Cat. No. 6291.55. 003, May.

¹⁰ABS 2010, *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0, June.

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¹²Australia at Work Data, Waves 1, 2 & 3 (2007-2010) Workplace Research Centre, The University of Sydney.

¹³Watson, I. (2005) 'The earnings of casual employees: The problem of unobservables', presentation to the 2005 HILDA Survey Research conference at the University of Melbourne on the 29 September 2005, accessed on 10 October 2010 at: <http://www.ianwatson.com.au/pubs.html>.

¹⁴*Average weekly ordinary time earnings refer to one week's earnings of employees for the reference period, attributable to award, standard or agreed hours of work.*

¹⁵ABS 2010, *Average Weekly Earnings* Cat. No. 6302.0, August.

¹⁶Commonwealth of Australia (2010) Submission to the Fair Work Australia Annual Wage Review 2010, 19 March 2010.

¹⁷Commonwealth of Australia (2010) Submission to the Fair Work Australia Annual Wage Review 2010, 19 March 2010.

¹⁸ABS 2008 *Employee Earnings and Hours*, Cat. No. 6306.009 August.

¹⁹ABS 2010 *Forms of Employment* Cat. No. 6359.0 November.

²⁰*The remaining 12.9% include independent contractors and business operators.*

²¹ABS 2010 *Forms of Employment* Cat. No. 6359.0 November.

²²ABS 2006 *Managing Care and Work*, Cat. No. 4912.1.

²³ABS 2010 *Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 6202.0 June.

²⁴Whitehouse, G., M. Baird, C. Diamond and A. Hosking (2006) *The Parental Leave in Australia Survey: November 2006 Report* <http://www.uq.edu.au/polsis/parental-leave/level1-report.pdf>.

²⁵ABS 2006 *Managing Care and Work*, Cat. No. 4912.1.

²⁶ABS 2006 *Managing Care and Work*, Cat. No. 4912.1.

²⁷ABS 2009 *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia*, Cat. No. 6310.0

²⁸ABS 2009 *Education and Work* Cat. No. 6227.0, 2001-2009.

²⁹ABS 2009 *Education and Work* Cat. No. 6227.0, 2001-2009.

³⁰ABS 2007a *Census of Population and Housing*, Cat. No. 2068.0.

³¹ABS 2003, *Disability, Ageing and Carers*, Australia, p26; Cat. No. 4430.0.

³²ABS 2008, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008*, Cat. No. 4714.0; ABS 2010, *Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Estimates from the Labour Force Survey*, Cat. No. 62870D0001_2009.

³³ABS 1993 *Census of Population and Housing 1991*, 2101.0; ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.

³⁴ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.

³⁵ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.

³⁶ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.

³⁷ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.

³⁸ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.

³⁹ABS 2007a, *Census of Population and Housing 2006* Cat. No. 2068.0.