

WARWICK INSTITUTE *for*
EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



**Improving the participation of Women
in the Labour Market: Coventry
and Warwickshire**

Executive Summary

Jenny Bimrose, Anne Green, Sally-Anne Barnes and Michael Orton

Institute for Employment Research
University of Warwick
Coventry, CV4 7AL

Tel: 024 76 523977

Fax: 024 76 524241

Email: Michael.Orton@warwick.ac.uk

7th March, 2003



Learning+Skills Council



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

RESEARCH REPORT - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW AND KEY MESSAGES

After three decades of equal opportunities legislation and policy, the participation of women in the labour market remains different and unequal from that of men (Bimrose et al., 2003).¹

The Learning and Skills Council, Coventry and Warwickshire, with funding from the European Social Fund, commissioned the Warwick University Institute for Employment Research to undertake research on improving the participation of women in the sub-regional labour market. The research project has produced:

- a targeted review and analysis of research on gender discrimination in employment at a national (UK), regional (West Midlands) and sub-regional (Coventry and Warwickshire) level;
- a review of the dissemination of gender and employment related research relevant to the sub-region (presented in a separate report);
- an Action Plan (presented in a separate report).

This document is an Executive Summary of the main research report, namely the targeted review and analysis of research into gender discrimination in employment. This Executive Summary outlines the content of the report and identifies the main research findings, which are underpinned by the following **key points**:

- women's participation rates in the labour market are **increasing**;
- women do not constitute a homogeneous group: they have **diverse** labour market experiences; and
- women are slightly **outperforming** men in compulsory and post-compulsory education in the majority of subjects.

However:

- women dominate in **part-time work**, which tends to be low paid, has few promotional prospects and has limited training opportunities;
- the **gender pay gap** is persistent and even widening;
- gender segregation means women are **under-represented** in many occupational sectors, including manufacturing and construction – important to the sub-region;
- sexual **harassment** in the workplace is a strong and recurrent theme in women's employment, but is often regarded as not being a significant problem.
- educational subject choices are still influenced by **gender stereotypes** and there is significant gender segregation in government training schemes;
- a key issue is women's **caring responsibilities**, but employers in the sub-region appear to have limited awareness of Work-Life Balance policies;
- there are **structural explanations** of gender inequality in employment but women's participation in the labour market may also be affected by their **choices** about paid employment and caring responsibilities;
- women's employment experience is also affected by dimensions of **ethnicity, disability and age**.

The research report contains 12 sections, as follows.

¹ Bimrose, J. *et al.* (2003) *Improving the Participation of Women in the Labour Market: Coventry and Warwickshire*. Coventry: Warwick Institute for Employment Research.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH REPORT

Section 1 of the report sets out in detail the background to the research (section 1.1), the scope of the project (section 1.2) and the data sources examined. These include the Labour Force Survey, Regional and Local Employers' Surveys, the West Midlands Household Survey, Social Trends, the Census of Population and national and international academic studies (section 1.3).

2. EMPLOYMENT IN THE REGION: SETTING THE CONTEXT

Section 2 sets the overall context of the research project by focusing upon employment trends in the West Midlands region (section 2.1), the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region (2.2) and workplace equal opportunities policies in the sub-region (section 2.3). Key findings are:

- Employment rates for women are increasing, whereas for men they are decreasing
- The economic activity rates of the population of working age for both men and women in the West Midlands are similar to the UK rates and have remained relatively stable from 1996 to 2001
- Women are, on average, five times more likely to be in part-time employment than men
- Reflecting the ageing of the population and the rise in female participation rates, the potential supply of labour in Coventry and Warwickshire increasingly tends to be female and from the 50 plus age group
- In Coventry and Warwickshire, a markedly higher than the national average percentage of men are employed in production and this industrial sector employs the lowest average percentage of women
- In Coventry and Warwickshire, women are concentrated in small and medium sized organisations
- In Coventry and Warwickshire, 42 per cent of employers have a written equal opportunities policy.

3. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Section 3 examines trends in women's participation in the labour market at national level (sections 3.1 and 3.2), regional level (section 3.3) and sub-regional level (sections 3.4 to 3.6). Explanations of trends are discussed (section 3.7). It is demonstrated that:

- Women's participation in the labour market is increasing at a faster rate than that of men
- Women dominate in part-time work that is low paid, has few promotional prospects and has limited training opportunities
- In Coventry and Warwickshire the percentage of women in full-time and part-time employment is 49 per cent and 51 per cent respectively
- At national, regional and local levels women are less likely to be unemployed than men
- The presence and age of a dependant child continues to have a marked effect on the employment rates of women
- A new trend is the fact that there are larger numbers of women, particularly among the highly educated, who are postponing childbearing
- This is coupled with the trend among successive cohorts of women to take shorter periods out of work for childbearing and child rearing.

4. GENDER SEGREGATION

Section 4 focuses upon gender segregation in the labour market. It begins by defining segregation (section 4.1), examining trends (section 4.2) and considering segregation in relation to part-time work (section 4.3). Explanations of gender segregation are reviewed (section 4.4) and the extent of segregation in three sectors (construction, engineering and social care) is highlighted along with some initiatives introduced to combat gender stereotyping (section 4.5). Key findings are:

- Gender segregation is a recognised structural feature of the UK labour market
- This segregation impacts on the occupational opportunities and earnings of women and represents differences in the status and pay of men and women
- These divisions can be seen as intrinsically linked to the sexual division of labour
- One key explanation proposes that women are satisfied with or prefer jobs which fit with their childcare and domestic arrangements (*Human capital theory*)
- One other key explanation claims that gender segregation is an intrinsic part of organisational culture which constrains women's choices (*Social process theory*)
- Marked patterns of gender segregation across different occupational groupings (e.g. engineering is male dominated and hairdressing is female dominated) are reflected at a national, regional and sub-regional level
- The number of women registered with the Engineering Council has dramatically increased since 1984, but still only 6 per cent of engineers and technologists are women
- In 2002 only nine women were recruited in the West Midlands to the Modern Apprenticeship scheme in construction
- In sectors where women dominate (e.g. social care) there can still be vertical segregation whereby women are under-represented at senior levels
- Suggestions for addressing gender segregation in the labour market include the introduction of flexible working practices, on-the-job training for female part-time employees and the adoption of equal opportunities practices.

5. EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS AND COMMITMENT

Section 5 presents research evidence regarding women's commitment to employment. This includes a definition (section 5.1) and explanation of commitment (section 5.2) and an examination of employment commitment in terms of individual preference (section 5.3) and as a reflection of life-stage (section 5.4). Specific attention is given to evidence relevant to the region (section 5.4). Key findings are:

- It is important to avoid regarding women as an homogeneous group
- Definitions of commitment based on working long hours and sacrificing personal life for work are biased in favour of men because they ignore women's caring and domestic labour
- Women's commitment to employment has been viewed first in terms of individual preferences and secondly as a reflection of life stages:
 - the individual preference approach defines two distinct groups within the labour market: 'career orientated women' and 'domestically orientated women'
 - women's attitudes to employment can be argued to be a reflection of their life-stages: such as pre-marriage, family formation and the final phase of working life
- These theories suggest different policy responses for different groups of women.

6. GENDER PAY DIFFERENTIALS

Section 6 reviews current evidence of the pay gap between women and men. It begins with relevant legislation (section 6.1), evidence at the national level (section 6.2) and the issue of job evaluation (section 6.3). Regional evidence is then considered (section 6.4). Findings include:

- At national level there is a very large quantity of data showing the persistence of the gender pay gap
- Despite the fact that women's earnings have increased over the last two decades women continue to earn less than men and the most recent data show the pay gap growing
- Full-time employed women's hourly rates and weekly gross pay are significantly less than those of men working full-time
- Women working part-time also earn significantly less than men working part-time
- Women are less likely than men to receive other elements that constitute 'earnings', such as bonuses, pension schemes and medical insurance
- There are significant pay differentials between men and women working in the evening or at night - men are generally compensated for working unsociable hours but women are in most instances not
- The gender pay differential is slightly higher at regional than national level
- There are significant differences in earnings amongst women e.g. a woman graduate without children is estimated to earn twice as much over her lifetime as a woman with no qualifications and no children
- The amount of earnings forgone by mothers varies by number of children and the skill level of the woman
- Factors affecting the gender pay gap include:
 - discrimination
 - occupational segregation
 - women's predominance in part-time work
 - the unequal impact of women's caring responsibilities.

7. FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

The focus of section 7 is on flexible working practices. The starting point is the UK context (section 7.1), definitions (section 7.2) and employers' interest in flexible working (section 7.3). Levels of flexible working are reviewed (section 7.4) along with organisational steps towards flexible working (section 7.5), problems of implementation (section 7.6) and employers' perceptions of the business case for flexible working (section 7.7). The section concludes by considering actual costs and benefits (section 7.8), overcoming obstacles (section 7.9) and examples of good practice (section 7.10). Key findings include:

- Flexible working practices have been implemented in some instances as an attempt by employers to address skill shortages
- Flexible working practices are particularly prevalent in larger organisations, in public sector organisations, in firms which have strong equal opportunities policies and in organisations that have large proportions of female employees
- The implementation of flexible working practices can be viewed as problematic because:
 - employers may not understand the business case
 - traditional forms of working may be embedded in the organisational culture
 - the implementation of such practices may be constrained by the organisational structure

- Research has shown that the introduction of flexible working practices is not costly and the benefits (e.g. significant improvements in productivity, reduced absenteeism and increased retention) are often greater than expected
- There are many examples of good practice but there is evidence that employers in Coventry and Warwickshire have limited awareness of Work-Life Balance issues.

8. RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This section begins with a general introduction (section 8.1) and a discussion of recruitment in relation to gender (section 8.2). Consideration is then given to the spectrum of training and professional development (section 8.3), policy approaches (section 8.4), performance and experience (section 8.5) and regional trends (section 8.6). Findings include:

- Gender discrimination in recruitment is illegal, but still exists
- Practices such as word of mouth recruitment reflect and reinforce gender segregation in the labour market
- Although women have increased their levels of education and training, there are notable differences in the training of men and women, with men still receiving more training than women
- There are significant differences in the training received by women working full-time and part-time
- Women educated to degree level are more likely to receive training than those with fewer qualifications
- In educational settings women and men are now performing equally in most subject areas, but there are significant gender differences in the subject areas studied by men and women:
 - with the exception of biological sciences where women dominate, men dominate science subjects
 - women are over-represented in education and humanities, and men are over-represented in engineering and technology
 - at degree level, the subjects studied by men and women are similar to those chosen at A/AS
- Modern Apprenticeship schemes evidence prominent gender segregation
- At a regional level, women undertake more training related to their personal development than men, whereas men participate in more taught training courses related to their current or previous employment than women
- Consequently, women are more likely to undertake training within a college and pay for it themselves, whereas men are more likely to undertake training at work, which is funded by their employer
- Significantly more women than men are unable to participate in education and training courses because of their caring responsibilities.

9. SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Section 9 reviews national and international research evidence on sexual harassment in the workplace as one barrier to women's equal participation in the labour market. The review begins with defining sexual harassment (section 9.1), the national context (section 9.2), legislation (section 9.3) and identifying harassment (section 9.4). Frequency (section 9.5), consequences (section 9.6) and explanations (section 9.7) are then examined.

- It is estimated that 50 per cent of women experience harassment during their working lives

- Sexual harassment is rarely accepted as a significant problem
- Young women who have been employed for less than a year, or who are in a low paid job, are most likely to suffer sexual harassment
- Sexual harassment has a negative impact even if the frequency of the behaviour is low
- The two dominant responses to sexual harassment are denial and ignoring the event.

ETHNICITY, DISABILITY AND AGE

Sections 10, 11 and 12 of the report consider women's participation in the labour market in terms of the interaction with dimensions of ethnicity, disability and age respectively. Key points are:

Ethnicity

- The position of women from ethnic minority groups in the labour market is markedly different and unequal to that of men
- Some ethnic groups display distinctive patterns of segregation by occupation and industry – for example, the concentration of Asian women in the distribution sector
- Some Black women are strategically choosing careers such as nursing and social work that are considered to be gendered because these jobs offer a greater possibility of entry to courses, access to employment opportunities, qualification and promotion
- Young Asian from Muslim groups have a low participation rate in employment, education and training
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have a higher risk of being economically inactive and are the most disadvantaged.

Disability

- One in five of the working age population in the West Midlands is disabled
- Disabled people are more likely to have no qualifications, face unemployment, to work part-time and be under-represented in senior positions than the non-disabled
- There are significant differences in the economic activity rates of men and women with disabilities
- 45 per cent of disabled women are in employment
- Disabled women in the region are twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled women
- Employed disabled people have lower average hourly earnings than the non-disabled and this pay gap is increasing
- Research has shown that there is too much emphasis on disabled people changing to accommodate employers rather than employers changing to accommodate disabled people.

Age

- Compared to the UK age structure, Coventry has a higher number of young people, and Warwickshire has a higher number of people aged 35-64 years
- For both Coventry and Warwickshire there is a projected increase in the female population aged 50-69 years over the medium-term
- For the female 20-24 year and 25-34 year age groups economic activity rates and employment rates rise, and peak in the 35-49 year age group
- The economic activity and employment rates of the female 25-49 year age group in the Coventry and Warwickshire LSC area are higher than those recorded regionally or nationally

- In the 50-retirement age group economic activity rates and employment rates in Coventry and Warwickshire are similar to the regional and national averages
- Nationally, women's employment rates decline steeply after the age of 45 years
- Educational attainment is a key factor in underlying variations amongst women participating in the labour market within the same age group.

CONCLUSION

The research findings inform the development of an Action Plan for the Learning and Skills Council, Coventry and Warwickshire. Further issues have been identified in the review of the dissemination of gender and employment related research relevant to the sub-region, which is presented in a separate report. The key findings to inform the **Action Plan** are:

- 1) Significantly more women are in part-time employment than men, and women dominate in part-time work that is low paid, has few promotional prospects and has limited training opportunities.
- 2) Women are under-represented in manufacturing and construction. The gender pay gap is persistent - particularly in industries dominated by men. Educational subject choices are still influenced by gender stereotypes, and there is prominent gender segregation in government training schemes, reflecting gender stereotypes.
- 3) Local employers appear to have limited awareness of Work-Life Balance policies. However, even where a policy exists, it does not necessarily ensure good practice.
- 4) For women, a significant barrier to training is their caring responsibilities. Men undertake more training and more hours of training than women.
- 5) White women are more likely to be working part-time compared to their ethnic minority counterparts. Young Asian women have low participation rates in employment, education and training. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have a high risk of being economically inactive.
- 6) Disabled women are more likely to be unemployed and to work part-time, are more likely to have less qualifications, and less likely to have qualifications higher than NVQ level 4 and above.
- 7) Sexual harassment in the workplace is a strong theme in women's employment but is often not regarded as a significant problem; those affected are more likely to be young women who have been employed for less than a year.
- 8) The older female working population is increasing in importance; given the ageing of the population, a key challenge is to maintain higher economic activity and employment rates in the older age groups
- 9) There is a need for specific (primary) research within the sub-region. There is a need for effective sub-regional 'signposting' and dissemination of relevant research and evaluation findings. Evaluating the impact of work being undertaken within the sub-region as to the impact on women's participation in the labour market is of great importance.