Good Shepherd
Australia New Zealand

Submission to the Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
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About us

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand was established to address the critical, contemporary issues facing women, girls and families. We work to advance equity and social justice, and to support our communities to thrive. We aspire for all women, girls and families to be safe, well, strong and connected.

A central part of our purpose is to challenge the systems that entrench poverty, disadvantage and gender inequality. The Women's Research, Advocacy and Policy (WRAP) Centre does this through a range of research, policy development and advocacy activities.

Executive summary

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand welcomes the Victorian Parliament's Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. As an organisation which addresses critical issues for women, girls and families our submission is focused on the barriers faced by women in securing and retaining sustainable employment and the challenges for particular groups of women.

Women comprise 46.7 per cent of employed people in Victoria however they continue to be disadvantaged in relation to the nature their employment, types of employment and their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid caring work.

For many women, experiences of poor health, past or current experiences of violence and intensive caring duties mean that labour market participation is unrealistic. We therefore advocate for a definition of 'disadvantaged jobseeker' that emphasises structural barriers to attaining sustainable employment and the development of integrated, tailored supports. Cohorts of women who are more are 'disadvantaged' in seeking suitable and sustainable employment include women with disability, LGBTQI people, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women, women from Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and women on temporary visas.

The growth of the on-demand economy has had a disproportionate impact on women, including a trend to hire employees on a contract basis which strips many basic worker protections and instances of exploitative employment practices.

Women's more marginal position in the labour market matters not only for equity reasons but because increasing women's workforce participation would bring significant social and economic benefits. According to the Grattan Institute, removing disincentives for women to participate in employment would increase the size of the Australian economy by about $25 billion per year.

For women with caring responsibilities, sustainable employment must include a range of supports including leave entitlements, flexibility in working arrangements that meet employee needs and affordable quality child care. Better employment outcomes for women can also be achieved by encouraging men to undertake a greater share of unpaid care work. As a large employer, the Victorian Public Sector can play an important leadership role by demonstrating best practice in this area.

Several domestic and international programs have demonstrated positive results in relation to meaningful participation in employment for disadvantaged women. Common to these interventions are tailored education and employment placements, links to community networks and financial incentives.

Nine recommendations are made to inform the Committee's consideration of ways to increase secure and stable employment outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers.

We welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence in relation to any of the matters raised in this submission.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase men's share of unpaid caring work by:

- Incentivising men/partners within the public sector workforce to take parental leave by expanding paid parental leave policy to include an additional period of leave that can be taken by either caregiver in addition to an initial period of leave for the primary caregiver.
- Encouraging more men to take up flexible working arrangements.
- Promoting case studies of men using parental leave and flexible working arrangements in order to care for children or other dependents.
- Investing in campaigns to encourage men across the Victorian workforce to take up existing work and family reconciliation policies such as parental leave, carer's leave and flexible working arrangements.

Recommendation 2: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government for greater consideration the complex nature of women's workforce disadvantage, a lessoning of punitive welfare to work policy, and an increased level of financial support for vulnerable groups of women with marginal attachment to the workforce.

Recommendation 3: Include single mothers as a priority target group within the Jobs Victoria Employment Network and any future employment programs targeting disadvantaged jobseekers.

Recommendation 4: Improve rights for workers in the on-demand workforce and for those in other forms of precarious work by:

- Advocating for stronger federal workplace protections.
- Improving state-based regulatory oversight.
- Insuring workers aware of their rights and have avenues for lodging complaints.

Recommendation 5: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government to:

- Implement all of the federal recommendations contained in the *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce*, while also implementing those recommendations which apply to state legislation and practice.
- Provide a more generous social security safety net for recently-arrived migrants, including a shortening of the current 3-year waiting period to access income support payments.

Recommendation 6: That the Victorian Government embed the recommendations contained in the WEStjustice *Not just work: Ending the exploitation of refugee and migrant workers* report in programs targeting migrant communities.

Recommendation 7: Expand the Victorian Government's Disability Employment Strategy to include:

- Acknowledgement of the intersectional disadvantage that women with disabilities face in employment, and invest in tailored supports.
- Include measures to mitigate the negative impacts of Commonwealth Government policy on people with disability, including compulsion employment

policies embedded in the Welfare to Work framework and limited access to NDIS and other support mechanisms.

Recommendation 8: Employment programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should acknowledge their multiple barriers to sustainable employment, and new programs should be developed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community members.

Recommendation 9: Include features of successful programs such as tailored education and employment placements, links to community networks and financial incentives in the development of new initiatives for disadvantaged jobseekers.

1. Introduction – why gender matters

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand welcome the Victorian Parliament's Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. As an organisation which addresses critical issues for women, girls and families our submission is focused on the barriers faced by women in securing and retaining sustainable employment and the challenges for particular cohorts of women.

Women comprise 46.7 per cent of employed people in Victoria (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019c). Despite women's increasing labour market participation over recent decades, the workforce continues to be marked by a high level of occupational and industry segregation and a gender pay gap. Women are overrepresented in low paid, insecure part-time work and are underrepresented in leadership roles (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). With casualisation and the proliferation of the on-demand workforce the nature of employment is changing – for the first time less than half of employed Australians enjoy full time, secure employment with entitlements (Carney & Standford, 2018). There is evidence that policy responses to these changes are exacerbating the problems rather than addressing them effectively, resulting in women – and mothers in particular – facing even greater barriers to sustainable employment.

Increasing precarity in employment has occurred at the same time as income support policy has shifted away from an approach based on need and towards conditional approaches underscored by the concept of 'mutual obligation'. Our research into the impacts of welfare conditionality (McLaren, Maury & Squire, 2018) has found that policies which purportedly intend to encourage people into employment are particularly destructive for women, and single mothers in particular.

Women are more likely to have their time taken up with unpaid work – including parenting, other types of caring and housework – leaving less time available for paid work. Women are also much more likely to trade higher pay or career opportunities for the flexibility to accommodate unpaid caring work (Yerkes, Martin, Baxter & Rose, 2017). An understanding of these social and economic factors is critical when considering how to better support individuals into more stable and secure forms of employment.

These issues are explored in more detail below, along with examples of programs and a series of recommendations to better support women in participation in the workforce.

2. The economic benefits of increasing women's workforce participation

Women's more marginal position in the labour market matters not only for equity reasons but because increasing women's workforce participation would bring significant economic benefits.

Increasing the workforce participation of Australian women – particularly mothers – offers a significant opportunity to increase Australia's productivity. According to the

Grattan Institute, removing disincentives for women to participate in employment would increase the size of the Australian economy by about $25 billion per year (Daley, McGannon & Ginnivan, 2012).

Increasing women's workforce participation also leads to better living standards for individuals and families, improves the bottom line of businesses and is a significant driver of national economic growth (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019).

Any consideration of women's economic participation must include unpaid as well as paid work because the vast majority of women who do not undertake any paid work, or who work part-time, spend their time caring for children. Women's workforce participation can only change significantly if more mothers have jobs (Daley, McGannon & Ginnivan, 2012, p 38).

Unpaid work is also a critical component of the formal economy. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates conservatively that unpaid labour contributes nearly 34 per cent of the entire economy, totalling over $565 million (Thorpe, Tyson & Nielsen, 2017). This makes it the largest 'industry' in Australia – one that is overwhelmingly sustained by women's labour. Critical inputs in addition to child care include care of older people, adults who need care due to disability, chronic illness or injury, household tasks and volunteering (Thorpe, Tyson & Nielsen, 2017).

3. Defining jobseekers

There are various definitions of jobseekers. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' criteria for the classification of unemployment includes active job searching and availability to start work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018b). This definition is somewhat at odds with the Commonwealth Government's use of the term 'jobseeker' in relation to income support payments. In recent years millions of people have been categorised into 'jobseekers' who do not view themselves in this way. One example is the 100,000 single mothers who were moved off the Parenting Payment Single payment and onto the lower Newstart Allowance in 2012 (Sheen, 2012).

The Newstart Allowance is an unemployment benefit and as such has been deliberately kept low to provide an incentive for individuals to return to work as quickly as possible. The National Commission of Audit (2014) explains the rationale thus:

> [Newstart is] designed to be temporary and is less generous than pensions… The rate of unemployment benefit attempts to balance adequacy of support for people who are unemployed with the incentive for them to seek work and the cost to the Commonwealth (Appendix Vol. 1, section 9.11).

This logic may be applicable where individuals are genuinely between jobs and needing a bridging payment while they seek employment, however our research shows it is faulty when applied to many single mothers. In addition to the practical conflicts between employment and parenting when there is only one parent in the household, many of the single mothers we spoke to in our research experienced other barriers to engaging in employment. These included experiences of poor physical or mental health, past or

ongoing experiences of intimate partner violence, intensive caring duties (for example, for a child with a diagnosis or an elderly parent), disability, and/or chronic illness. For this group of women, entering the labour market is unrealistic and the pressure placed on them by the Welfare to Work policy is counterproductive.

For example, the case study below – 'Patti' – detailed a lack of understanding and appropriate assistance for single mothers with disability.[1] Other women shared similar stories, although their experiences varied. For example, 'Gloria' told us she needed highly flexible arrangements as she is carer to both her son and her elderly mother, both of whom suffer poor mental health. Her Jobactive provider offered her two 'volunteer' positions in factories located far from her home. 'Lauren' experienced ongoing abuse from her former partner and she must visit a doctor monthly to apply for a Centrelink exemption on these grounds. She told us her only other option was to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder which would provide a 12 week exemption; however, she feared such a diagnosis would enable her partner to remove her children from her care. 'Katie' has compromised physical and mental health, and her daughter also has special needs; she said these limits on her ability to engage in employment were not considered by her Jobactive provider.

Case study: Patti

Disability restrictions are not considered

Patti is a mother of two children aged six and seven, and she also has an adult daughter. She has a permanent disability from a car accident that means she is unable to do any work that requires lifting, twisting or bending. Patti has medical certificates which state that such work will require her to be pre-medicated, which in turn affects her ability to be fully alert. Her youngest child is on the autism spectrum, which presents in running away or violent outbursts, and Patti is often called to be school to either take him home or calm him down. She feels his difficulties at school could have been mitigated if she had been given more time to support him during his transition, but she was immediately placed on Welfare to Work. Patti has expressed interest in studying, but has been given a restricted list of approved courses – all of which are labour intensive, despite the agency being aware of her disability.

These examples demonstrate that it is critically important to understand whether a person outside of the labour market is a jobseeker. There are many individuals who, for valid reasons, feel unable to engage in employment. Applying pressure in these circumstances is likely to result in distress for individuals and their families without achieving sustainable employment outcomes.

[1] Patti's story is taken from the 26 case studies that were collected for Good Shepherd's research into single mothers and Welfare to Work, published here: https://goodshep.org.au/media/2188/outside-systems-control-my-life_single-mothers-stories-of-welfare-to-work.pdf

With that caveat, there are many people who experience barriers to employment who would welcome appropriate supports and opportunities. While our qualitative research sample was small, it is notable that those women who felt unable to engage in employment were a minority of 6 women (just under 25 per cent of the total). The remaining 20 women were attempting to start small businesses, were employed but not receiving income support, were working in quality part-time roles, were simply between jobs and actively looking for work, or were temporarily focussed on study in order to improve their employment prospects.

Regardless of their employment status it is notable that all of the women who shared their stories with us were financially insecure and suffering from high levels of anxiety as a result. A range of different factors combined for each woman to create financial insecurity, with parenting duties at the centre of each story. Sustaining both a full-time parenting role and employment with adequate remuneration is difficult in any circumstances, but experiences of family violence or ill health, for example, makes such a balance out of reach for many.

Our research made it clear that even well-paid permanent employment did not necessarily lead to economic security for women and their children. Factors such as safety (for example, an abusive former partner), inability to access child support, and punitive social security policies undermined their attempts to achieve financial security for their households. It is therefore important when considering state-funded programs and activities for disadvantaged jobseekers to understand the range of social and economic factors that shape women's attachment to the workforce.

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand therefore advocates for a definition of 'disadvantaged jobseeker' that emphasises structural barriers to attaining sustainable employment. Further, we advocate that individuals are given the opportunity to opt out of classification as a jobseeker – whether this is a temporary situation while attaining a qualification, looking after young children, or addressing family violence-related circumstances; or a permanent one due to physical or mental health conditions or intensive caring duties. While men can of course be considered disadvantaged jobseekers, we argue here that due to the many and complex barriers women face it is more likely that women will fall within this category.

We are pleased that the Victorian Government is planning to provide additional, intensive supports to disadvantaged jobseekers. However, we argue that such support must not expect individuals to singlehandedly overcome barriers that are structural in nature, or indeed that such individuals have a 'deficit' which precludes them from meaningful employment. Rather, true change will be possible only when structural barriers are onsidered in the context of individual job seeking. This includes taking a longer-term approach to addressing such barriers as family violence and poor mental health (for example), while also providing disadvantaged jobseekers with holistic wrap-around services that are tailored to their specific needs. A wide spectrum of supports, incentives and opportunities should be made available, ideally through cross-sectoral partnerships that address multi-faceted needs at the same time. Supports should be tailored to individual circumstances and capabilities; for example, women with business ideas such as those identified by our research should be able to access help to develop

micro-businesses. Barriers to meaningful employment including poverty and a lack of access to such necessary inputs as stable housing, quality education and transportation should also be considered when providing viable support.

4. Women face multiple barriers to sustainable employment

Women are vulnerable to economic insecurity due to gendered policy settings and social norms, such as ideas about 'women's work' and caring responsibilities. Single motherhood adds another layer of disadvantage within this context, and it has been demonstrated in other research studies that single mothers experience poorer economic outcomes across their life course (Baxter & Taylor, 2014; Goldberg, 2009). Gender inequalities and other systemic barriers include:

- **Higher levels of unpaid work**: Women are more likely than men to undertake unpaid care of children or relatives (Addati, Cattaneo, Esquivel & Valarino, 2018; Women's Health Victoria, 2018). By taking time out of the workforce to care for children, women are limited in their capacity to participate in employment, leading to greater financial disadvantage throughout the life course.
- **Lower levels of workforce participation**: Women participate in employment at a lower rate than men. As at May 2019, 61.1 per cent of Australian women were in the workforce, compared to 71.7 per cent of men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019a). Women are also much more likely to be working part-time; 68.7 per cent of all part-time employees in Australia are women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019a).
- **Higher levels of financial hardship**: Single parent families, 82 per cent of whom are headed by women, are one of the most disadvantaged demographics in Australia. Their median income of $974 per week is only slightly above half of the average for all household types in Australia, at $1,734 per week. Sole parent families have the highest poverty rate among family types at 32 per cent. Children in sole parent families are more than 3 times as likely to live in poverty than children in couple families (13 per cent of whom are in poverty) (Australian Council of Social Service & University of New South Wales, 2018, p. 13). Older women experience a gender gap in retirement income (Coates, 2018) and there is an increasing cohort of older women on low incomes who are experiencing housing precarity (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019).
- **Lower levels of pay**: The gender pay gap remains a significant issue in Australia. Currently the gender pay gap is at a record low of 14.1 per cent (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019) – with the State of Victoria having the lowest gender pay gap, at 9.3 per cent (Ibid.). However, there is evidence that the pay gap is closing at least in part because work is becoming more precarious and low-paid for men (Cassells, Duncan, Mavisakalyan, Phillimore & Tarverdi, 2018). Further, it is generally female workers who are both reliant on and who must also bear the burden of child care costs, eroding their already reduced pay. Despite government subsidies, out-of-pocket costs for child care have risen 48.7

per cent between 2011-2017, with a commensurate lack of availability for many parents (or at times with the lack of needed flexibility) (Joseph, 2018).

- **Discrimination and sexual harassment**: Discrimination at work during pregnancy, parental leave or return to work affects one in two mothers in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014), while 39 per cent of women report being sexually harassed at work in the preceding five years (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). Single mothers are more likely to experience discrimination during pregnancy compared to partnered mothers and experience greater financial impacts (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014, p. 37). These factors mean that women, despite their propensity to have higher educational qualifications compared to men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018a), are considered less competitive for the jobs that are available. According to an analysis of the government's publicly-available data, the ratio of jobseekers to job vacancies was 1 person to each 15.5 jobs in December 2018 (Australian Unemployed Workers' Union, 2018). This ratio is even worse for regional and rural areas, where 37 per cent of people are not engaged in work or study, compared to 28 per cent in metropolitan areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).
- **Experiences of family and sexual violence**: Women are more likely than men to experience all forms of intimate partner violence, with one in six women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner, compared to one in 16 men (Australia Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).
- **High incidence of precarious housing or homelessness**: Affordable housing is increasingly scarce in Australia, but these effects seem to impact women more when compared to their male counterparts. For example, of the 400,000+ of single people who continue to remain in housing stress *after* receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance, 62 per cent are women (National Foundation of Australian Women, 2019). The staggering rise of older women experiencing homelessness has been headline news, with an increase of 31 per cent of women over 55 experiencing homelessness between 2011-2016. This statistic is backed by a 97 per cent increase in the number of older women dependent on the private rental market (Ibid.), which is notably under-regulated (Curry, 2019). Further, of the 121,000 people who sought help from homelessness services in 2017/18, 75 per cent were female, many with children in their care (Mission Australia, 2019).

4.1 Unpaid work and precarious employment

There are multiple gender divides within employment, with the gender pay gap being just one of them (Maury, 2017). The ratio of paid to unpaid work is almost exactly inverse for women and men in Australia. While women work on average 56.4 hours per week, over 64 per cent of those hours are in unpaid work (caring work or household chores), with only 36 per cent of work time in paid employment for an average week. Overall work hours are fewer for men at 55.5 hours, reflecting 64 per cent of weekly work time in paid labour, with only 36 per cent spent in unpaid work; see Figure 1 (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016).

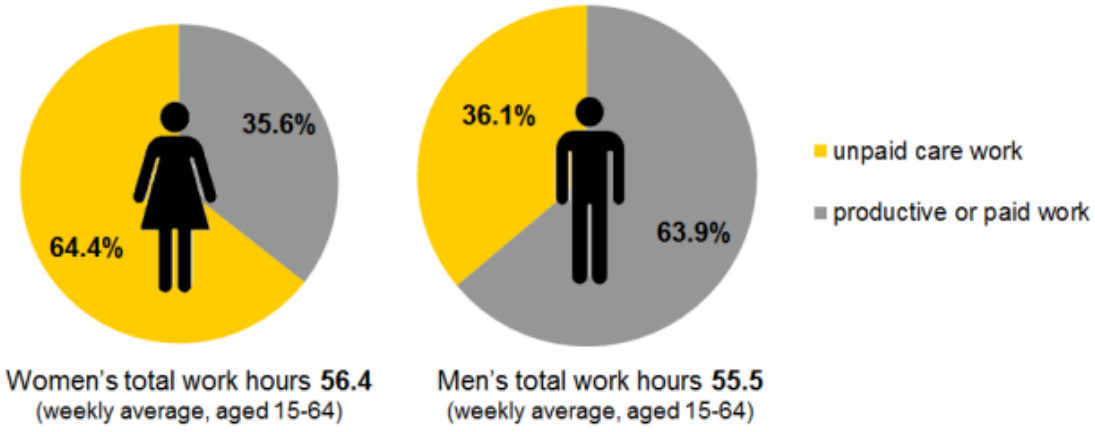

Figure 1: Paid and unpaid care work in Australia. Source: Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2016)

For women, paid work needs to fit around their 'full-time' unpaid commitments. The disproportionate burden of both care work and household duties that falls to women exists despite recent increases in women's employment. It should therefore be no surprise that women are far more likely to be in precarious employment – working in poor quality part-time, casual or contract work – often below their skill level and sacrificing career advancement (Ibid.). This is despite the significantly greater educational attainment that Australian women achieve compared to men; for example, 33 per cent of women aged 18-64 hold a bachelor's degree, while their male counterparts sit at 26 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018a).

Nearly 70 per cent of part-time workers in Australia are women (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016). This means women's experiences of employment are very different to men's, and their outcomes from employment also differ. For example, there is a toll on physical and mental health outcomes and wellbeing through overwork (when combined with unpaid work), conflicting commitments between work and family life, a lack of work-related autonomy, and the financial stress that can come from reduced remuneration (Maury, 2017).

Many women seek flexible work arrangements to accommodate their caring responsibilities. However, a significant proportion of flexible roles can be categorised as precarious – distinguished by lower income, few or no benefits, short-term contracts, and holding little power in the organisational context. Women from low socio-economic backgrounds or who are from ethnic minority groups are particularly likely to be employed in precarious, low-status jobs (Menendez, Benach, Muntaner, Amable & O'Campo, 2007).

These aspects of women's working lives point to the need for change to the trajectory of men's working lives. There is a 'flexibility gap' between women and men, where 46 per cent of women work part-time or in flexible arrangements while only 18 per cent of men do (Australian Bureau of Statistics, cited in Squire, 2018). Recent research indicates that men's employment patterns tends to remain unchanged at the birth of a child, while the same is seldom true for women; see Figure 2 below (Baxter, 2019). Encouraging men to work more flexibly and to take up entitlements such as parental and carer's leave would help shift the social norms that entrench women as primary carers over the long term (Squire, 2018). Promoting dual carer/earner identities for women and men would ease women's unpaid workload and provide greater opportunities for paid work across the life course. As an employer of 311,353 people – 9 per cent of Victoria's workforce (Victorian Public Sector Commission, 2019) – the Victorian Government has the opportunity to play a leadership role in improving workplace gender equality by encouraging a more equitable distribution of unpaid caring work among employees.

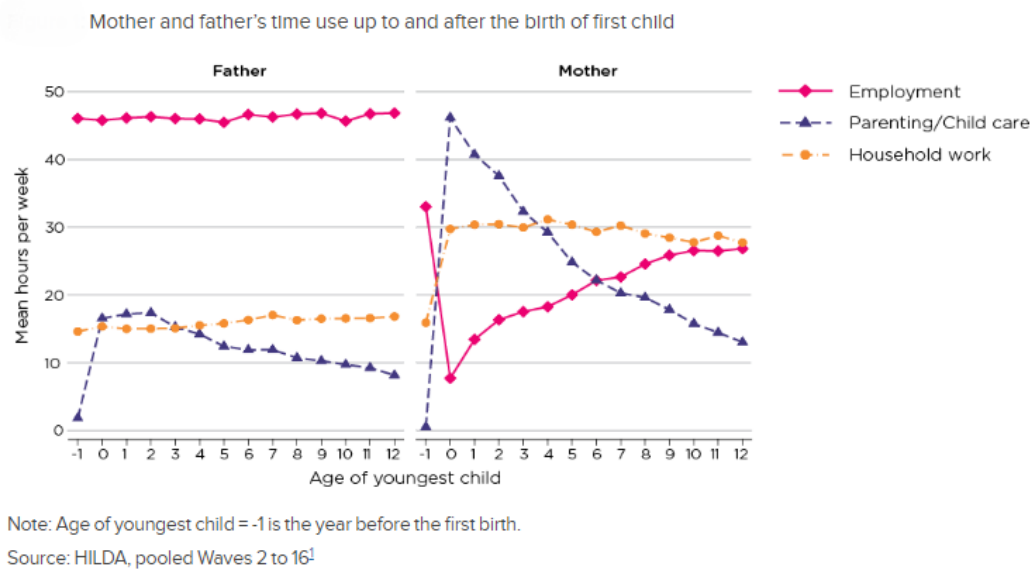

Figure 2: Changes in employment patterns for mothers and fathers. Source: Baxter (2019)

Parental leave policy is slowly evolving through the development of more gender-equal schemes.One example of progressive policy is that recently introduced by law firm Baker McKenzie, which has introduced gender-equal parental leave. Two significant points of difference include removing the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' carer – all parents are equally granted 18 weeks of paid leave. Second, the window to take the

leave has been extended to 2 years, which allows families to determine when it best suits them to have a parent at home with the newborn or toddler (White, 2019).

Recommendation 1: Increase men's share of unpaid caring work by:

- Incentivising men/partners within the public sector workforce to take parental leave by expanding paid parental leave policy to include an additional period of leave that can be taken by either caregiver in addition to an initial period of leave for the primary caregiver.
- Encouraging more men to take up flexible working arrangements.
- Promoting case studies of men using parental leave and flexible working arrangements in order to care for children or other dependents.
- Investing in campaigns to encourage men across the Victorian workforce to take up existing work and family reconciliation policies such as parental leave, carer's leave and flexible working arrangements.

Precarious employment is considered a social determinant of (poor) health because of the overwhelming evidence of its detrimental effects. Research has consistently demonstrated that job insecurity increases anxiety and depressive symptoms, while temporary employees are at a higher risk of exhaustion and use more antidepressants (Benach, Vives, Amable, Vanroelen, Tarafa, & Muntaner, 2014). However, rather than contributing to absenteeism, the nature of precarious work encourages 'presenteeism' - that is, being physically present despite poor health (Sanderson & Andrews, 2006). There are also indications that women are more susceptible to the negative health consequences associated with precarious work (Callea, Urbini & Bucknor, 2012).

Low status – or powerlessness – in the organisational context means women in precarious work often have little or no control over their work schedules, resulting in conflicts with family-related commitments. HILDA data indicates that work-family conflict is a significant contributor to overall poor mental health, for both women and men (Cooklin, Dinh, Strazdins, Westrupp, Leach & Nicholson, 2016).

Part-time and contract work is commonly remunerated at a lower hourly rate compared to full-time work; reduced work hours and (most often) no career pathway further undermine both short-term wages and long-term earnings for women. These factors contribute to the feminisation of poverty (Beer, Bentley, Baker, et al., 2015; Kim & Choi, 2013). Women's reduced socio-economic standing contributes to depression rates that are twice that of men's (Van de Valde, Bracke & Levecque, 2010; Squire & Maury, 2019) and lower overall health-related quality of life (Cherepanov, Palta, Fryback & Robert, 2010). The assumption that "the best form of welfare is a job" (Fletcher, 2018) often does not hold true for women; as Baker (2000) points out,

> Employability discourse assumes that paid employment is the best route out of welfare and will reduce individual and family poverty, but recent research [in Australia and 4 other OECD countries]… suggest that getting a job does not necessarily guarantee an escape or even a major alleviation from poverty. This is especially true for low-income mothers. Labor-market models that make this assumption contain a male bias…The assumption that paid work will reduce poverty ignores current trends in labor markets in which most new jobs are

> temporary or low-paid, and in which low-wage work does not necessarily lead to better jobs with higher wages. Both men and women are being encouraged to accept these positions (Armstrong 1996; Larner 1996; Boyd 1997). Employability schemes…can be negated by a 'revolving door labor market' in which employees are shuffled between temporary dead-end jobs and spells on government benefits (Baker & Tippin 1999:63). (pp. 48-49)

The subsequent growth of the poorly regulated on-demand economy has had a disproportionate impact on women around the world (Hunt & Samman, 2019). This includes a trend to hire employees on a contract basis which strips many of basic worker protections; see for example the reported working conditions at Amazon (Burin, 2019) or Uber (Ziffer & Malaish, 2019). While there are instances of employees receiving a measure of justice (Blakkarly, 2018), there are also instances of oppressive employment practices being upheld by the Fair Work Commission (Holtum & Marston, 2019) – a concerning outcome for employees who already have few if any protections.

A recent analysis indicates that the majority of employment growth is in casual employment, particularly for low-income earners (Jericho, 2019). The changing nature of employment is leading to lower rates of unemployment, but higher rates of underemployment – driven in part by job insecurity and few or no benefits – which is rising for everyone, but is demonstrably worse for women (see Figure 3).

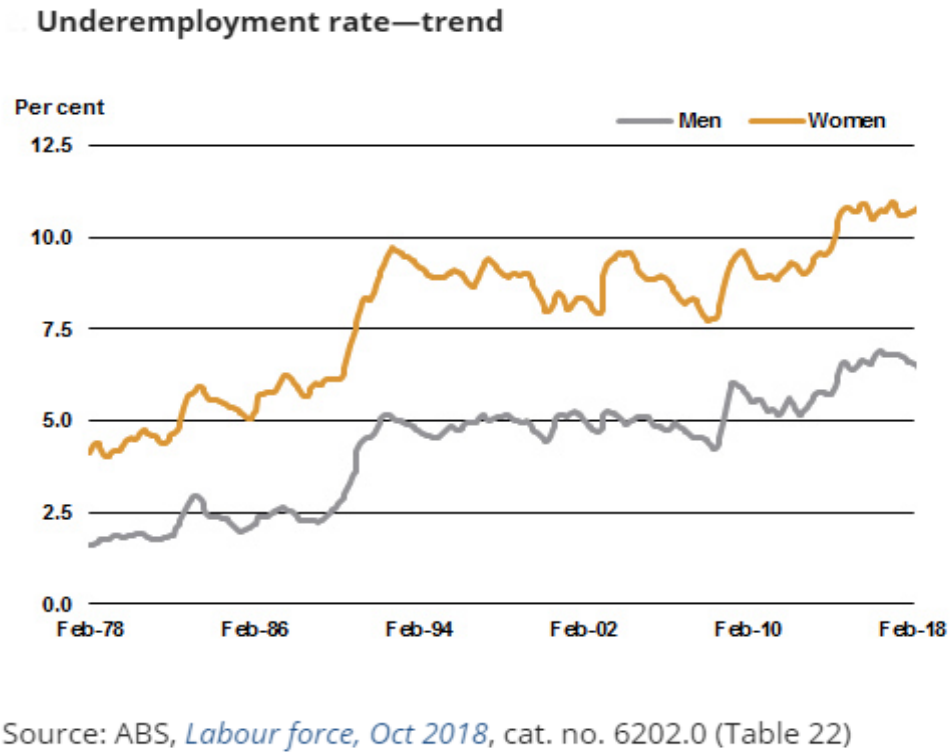

Figure 3: Underemployment trend as at October 2018. Source: Parliament of Australia (2018).

Impacts of underemployment are keenly felt by single mothers, who must patch together sporadic periods of employment with mutual obligation requirements (McLaren,

2019). For this cohort, the tax and transfer system (including payments such as Family Tax Benefit and Commonwealth Rent Assistance) are critical for making ends meet.

Recommendation 2: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government for greater consideration the complex nature of women's workforce disadvantage, a lessoning of punitive welfare to work policy, and an increased level of financial support for vulnerable groups of women with marginal attachment to the workforce.

Recommendation 3: Include single mothers as a priority target group within the Jobs Victoria Employment Network and any future employment programs targeting disadvantaged jobseekers.

Recommendation 4: Improve rights for workers in the on-demand workforce and for those in other forms of precarious work by:

- Advocating for stronger federal workplace protections.
- Improving state-based regulatory oversight.
- Insuring workers aware of their rights and have avenues for lodging complaints.

4.2 Demographics more vulnerable to employment barriers

When other identities and characteristics are overlaid – including disability, sexuality, identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, being from a Culturally or Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, or having temporary visa status – barriers to sustainable employment for women increase exponentially.

Young women are among the cohorts of women experiencing barriers to sustainable employment. In an extensive report published last year (Baird, Cooper, Hill, Probyn & Vromen, 2018), working women aged 16 to 40 reported that instances of workplace discrimination and harassment are still unacceptably high, with 10 per cent of the 2,000+ sample experiencing workplace harassment. This figure jumps to 16 per cent for women from CALD backgrounds, and 18 per cent for women with disability. Workplace flexibility was important to 90 per cent of women surveyed, but only 16 per cent indicated they had access to adequate flexible work arrangements. Further, only 40 per cent indicated that they could access affordable training for relevant skill development to further their careers. The researchers highlight the increasing insecurity of employment and the pay gap in skilled but low-paid feminised industries.

The Commonwealth Government recently released a report on an inquiry into exploitation of migrants in the workforce, with a focus on those with temporary visa status (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). This report was published following an investigation into the exploitative practices of the 7-Eleven franchise in Australia (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2018). The Inquiry found that exploiting migrants is a model for some businesses who may also engage in other unethical behaviours (for example, underpaying taxes, sham contracting, or phoenixing). Migrant workers are particularly susceptible to exploitation because of their tenuous visa status, poor knowledge of their

rights, inexperience, and/or poor English skills. The Inquiry produced a range of strong recommendations which are focussed on increasing government oversight and ensuring migrant workers are aware of their rights and how to exercise them. A key area that is not included in the report, however, is the interplay between an adequate safety net and the ability to exercise employer rights. Migrant workers are unlikely to lodge a complaint when they do not qualify for legal protections from deportation and/or cannot access social security.

Recommendation 5: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government to:

- Implement all of the federal recommendations contained in the *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce*, while also implementing those recommendations which apply to state legislation and practice.
- Provide a more generous social security safety net for recently-arrived migrants, including a shortening of the current 3-year waiting period to access income support payments.

The WEstjustice Community Legal Centre has conducted research with members of the migrant community in Victoria to hear directly about their experiences of exploitative labour (Hemingway, 2016). They found that wage withholding, unfair dismissal, unreported injuries stemming from unsafe working conditions, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment are all commonplace experiences in the workplace for migrants. The report sets out 10 steps to address migrant exploitation; in summary these are:

1. Migrant voices must be heard.
2. Diversity measures will limit discrimination.
3. Targeted education for migrant worker's rights.
4. Active and accessible agencies for viable advice and support.
5. Community-based employment law services.
6. Improve laws and processes to stop wage theft.
7. Increased accountability in labour hire, supply chains and franchises.
8. Laws and processes to eradicate sham contracting.
9. Reforms to stop discrimination, unfair and unsafe work.
10. Strategic measures to protect vulnerable sub-groups. (Hemingway, 2016)

Recommendation 6: That the Victorian Government embed the recommendations contained in the WEStjustice *Not just work: Ending the exploitation of refugee and migrant workers* report in programs targeting migrant communities.

Women with disability face a range of barriers and restrictions within public and private life, including higher incidences of all types of violence and other crimes (Women with Disabilities Australia, ND). While more women than men are classified as disabled, men are more likely to receive support (Ibid.), including through the NDIS (Malbon & Carey, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that women with disability are less likely to be in employment compared to their male counterparts – due to lack of tailored disability support, access to educational opportunities and layers of discrimination (Op. Cit.).

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand notes the Disability Employment Strategy of the Victorian Government (Victorian Government, 2018). We also advocate that the Strategy

should incorporate an acknowledgement of how income support and NDIS policies interact with employment experiences of women with a disability. Recent research (Cregan, Kulik & Bainbridge, 2017) found that wellbeing markers for women with a disability who are in employment have dropped since 1998. This is due in part to the double disadvantage experienced by women with disabilities – and particularly with more restrictive forms of disability – but may also reflect the negative impacts of Commonwealth Welfare to Work policy. The researchers provided a distinction between 'compulsion' policies, which force people into work, and 'activation' policies, which ensure people with disabilities are provided with the proper supports to actively engage in employment.

Recommendation 7: Expand the Victorian Government's Disability Employment Strategy to include:

- Acknowledgement of the intersectional disadvantage that women with disabilities face in employment, and invest in tailored supports.
- Include measures to mitigate the negative impacts of Commonwealth Government policy on people with disability, including compulsion employment policies embedded in the Welfare to Work framework and limited access to NDIS and other support mechanisms.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are less likely to be employed compared to their non-Indigenous female counterparts, although they are more likely to be in employment than Indigenous men; see Figure 4 (Howlett, Gray & Hunter, 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience multiple layers of complexity when navigating employment, including gender discrimination, higher levels of disability, greater caring responsibilities, and lower educational attainment (Dudgeon et al, 2014). Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand welcomes the Victorian Government's pursuit of Treaty with Aboriginal people in Victoria, and we support the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination. We therefore support Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-led educational and employment interventions, and the dismantling of punitive approaches to income support targeting Indigenous people, including the rollout of the Cashless Debit Card, the disempowering practices of the Community Development Program, and ParentsNext (for further detail see Squire & Maury, 2019).

Recommendation 8: Employment programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should acknowledge their multiple barriers to sustainable employment, and new programs should be developed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community members.

Labour force status, by gender and Indigenous status, 2011

	Male		Female	
Labour force status	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
HILDA data				
Employed FT (%)	68	45	35	19
Employed PT (%)	13	10	34	19
Unemployed (%)	4	13	4	14
NILF (%)	15	32	27	48
Total people	6,836	191	7,428	269
2011 Census data				
Employed FT (%)	62	38	35	23
Employed PT (%)	14	11	31	20
Unemployed (%)	5	12	4	9
NILF (%)	19	40	31	49
Total people	6,090,264	113,625	6,282,594	121,974

FT = full-time; NILF = not in the labour force; PT = part-time
Notes: Data include people aged 15–64 years. Census figures refer to people living in non-remote areas only. The HILDA estimates are weighted using the enumerated person weights (for more information, see Summerfield et al. 2012).
Source: HILDA, 2011; ABS (2011a).

Figure 4: Employment status by gender and Indigenous status, 2011. From Howlett, Gray & Hunter (2015).

5. Promising programs

As explored in the sections above, women's employment trajectories are typically more variable than men's employment trajectories, largely due to their caring responsibilities. When other identities overlap with gender, the result is often increased barriers to meaningful participation in employment. Effective programmatic interventions must recognise that disadvantage is often complex and that peoples' needs are likely to be multi-faceted and require a long term investment in order to see positive outcomes.

While there is evidence that maternal employment may not negatively impact on child development, these results appear to be mediated by many variables, including the mother's sense of wellbeing (Conway, Han, Brooks-Gunn & Waldfogel, 2017) and the stability of her employment (Pilkauskas, Brooks-Gunn & Waldfogel, 2018). The quality of employment therefore matters a great deal.

For women with caring responsibilities, sustainable employment must include a range of supports including leave entitlements, flexibility in working arrangements that meets employee needs and affordable quality child care.

Several domestic and international programs have demonstrated positive results in relation to meaningful participation in employment for disadvantaged women. Common to these interventions are tailored education and employment placements, links to community networks and financial incentives.

One model for effective and holistic intervention is the EMPath program, based in the United States.[2] The case study below provides detail on how this program works.

Australia also has promising practice models which can inform the design of programs and services to support women into sustainable employment. The now-defunct Community Development Employment Program, which ran from 1977 until it was slowly dismantled from 2004, was a far-reaching, community-invested and flexible program that operated in remote Indigenous communities. The model was successful at ensuring economic security, supporting productivity inclusive of but not limited to employment, and supporting cultural practice (Altman, Gray & Levitus, 2005).

Another effective employment program is the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program, which ran from 1989-2009 in various forms. This program was effective in supporting single parents back into employment – particularly in its earliest, voluntary phase. Key features of the program included: collaborative service delivery across departments to provide holistic support; financial assistance for child care costs; costs related to study (including transportation and textbooks); a one-off payment to assist with costs incurred for entering employment; links to community networks; and a considerable investment in administration and oversight. The evaluation of the first phase of JET showed that participants were 1.34 times more likely to earn income and twice as likely to be studying when compared with non-JET counterparts (Brotherhood of

[2] For full information, see their website: https://www.empathways.org/

St Laurence, 2019, p. 17). Savings from the Sole Parent Pension (the previous name for Parenting Payment Single) equalled total cumulative JET program expenditure, with a predicted increase in savings in future years.

Case study: EMPath – Economic Mobility Pathways

The EMPath program, located in Boston, USA, understands that single mothers have particularly poor outcomes in employment, and this is due to competing priorities and the highly complex nature of their everyday lives. The program is unique in that it incorporates psychological research into the effects of stress on cognitive bandwidth and decision-making capabilities, addressing these issues in a relational and holistic manner through one-on-one coaching and supportive small groups. Additionally, the program assists single mothers across several domains at once and across a longer stretch of time, using their trademarked 'Bridge to Self-Sufficiency' as a guide. This includes the domains of family stability (including housing); physical and mental health and positive social networks; financial management; education and training that is targeted at well-paid career options; and employment and career placement which provides sustainable positions with the potential for advancement.

Women are incentivised through the coaching model, peer groups, and also financial incentives that are paid when key milestones are met. More intensive supports are available on an as-needed basis. In 2017, participants increased their income by an average of 34 per cent.

Recommendation 9: Include features of successful programs such as tailored education and employment placements, links to community networks and financial incentives in the development of new initiatives for disadvantaged jobseekers.

6. Conclusion

Women face a wide range of barriers to sustainable employment, including their greater responsibility for unpaid caring work – resulting in interrupted employment trajectories, high levels of financial hardship, lower pay, poor mental health, discrimination and sexual harassment at work, and high levels of intimate partner violence.

Understanding of the highly complex nature of women's lives, particularly cohorts of women who experience greater levels of disadvantage, is critical to the designing effective programs and other supports. Most women want to work. However, work often simply does not pay for women, with the most disadvantaged women experiencing sporadic, precarious employment combined with highly conditional income support system. Navigating these systems is stressful for individual women – particularly single mothers, as our research has shown.

We welcome the Victorian Government's interest in assisting individuals who face multiple barriers to stable and secure employment. There is now an opportunity for Victoria to model best practice to other states and territories, and to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for changes in federal income support and jobseeker policies which impact negatively on Victorians. Best practice responses include:

- applying a gender lens on understanding the nature of disadvantage in general, and barriers to employment in particular;
- clearly defining who is a jobseeker and respecting those who are not able to engage in employment, whether temporarily or longer-term;
- ensuring a systems lens is used to assess barriers and consider ways to improve access to sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers, including across longer timeframes;
- providing holistic supports which address the complex forces that need to be addressed for many disadvantaged jobseekers; and
- promoting increased involvement from fathers and partners through changes to leave entitlements and normalising flexible work schedules.

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