

**Breakthrough: Researching Gendered Experiences of Education and Employment in Yorkshire and Humberside**

**Report 4: Women's Experiences of Work: Breaking Through the Barriers**

Other reports in the Breakthrough Series:

- Report 1: *Gender, Confidence and Mental Well-Being*
- Report 2: *Gender, Education, Training and Aspiration*
- Report 3: *Motherhood: Choices and Constraints*
- Report 5: *Transforming Women's lives: Women's Community and Voluntary Services in the Yorkshire & Humber Region*

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The *Breakthrough* series of five reports brings together the findings of one of the most extensive studies of women's lives in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Based on empirical research conducted in 2006 and 2007, the study draws on the knowledge, experience and histories of women from across generational, social, cultural and geographic backgrounds. This series arises from and is led by those women's voices. It is a testament not only to the richness and diversity of women's lives, but also the commonalities of their experiences. More specifically, the study identifies the key problems that women face in breaking through the barriers of both gender-based and other forms of social exclusion, and uses critical social science perspectives to help facilitate a clearer understanding of these complex issues. It also evaluates the contribution of public and voluntary sector organisations, including the work of individual women within those organisations, in meeting women's everyday needs, raising aspirations and providing the necessary support to enable women to achieve those ambitions. As a whole, the series provides the empirical detail and grounded analysis from which to address broader policy questions at the local, regional and national levels.



# BREAKTHROUGH

Researching Gendered Experiences of Education and Employment  
in Yorkshire and Humberside

## Women's Experiences of Work: Breaking Through the Barriers

Anne Fairbank, Suzanne Clisby,  
Julia Holdsworth, and Hannah Miles

For information on how to obtain copies of this report contact:  
Dr Suzanne Clisby, Social Sciences, University of Hull, HU6 7RX

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# **Breakthrough: Researching Gendered Experiences of Education and Employment in Yorkshire and Humberside**

**Report 4**

## **Women's experiences of work: Breaking through the barriers**

**Anne Fairbank, Suzanne Clisby,  
Julia, Holdsworth and Hannah Miles**

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# 1.0 Introduction to the ‘Breakthrough’ Series

The aim of the ‘Breakthrough’ study was to explore women’s life histories and experiences specifically in relation to education and employment trajectories throughout the Yorkshire and Humber Region<sup>1</sup>. Through a combination of extensive interviews, focus group discussions and an extended questionnaire survey in 2006 and 2007, we have generated a rich and unique dataset that draws on the knowledge, experience and histories of over 500 women from across generational, social, cultural and geographic backgrounds. This is one of the largest studies of its kind in the region.

The original remit of the project was to address current strategic objectives laid down by Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside and those set out by the Learning and Skills Council and Hull Women’s Network. Specifically, gathering information and evidence from women in Yorkshire and Humberside, we focused on capturing information about the gender related barriers women face in their attempts to access learning opportunities, employment, career development, and personal progression. This will inform planning for future delivery of accessible, gender-aware and socially inclusive learning opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Hull Women’s Network established a working partnership with the Gender Studies Department at the University of Hull in order to collaborate on research into issues of gender discrimination for women in the job market. This collaboration resulted in the development of the Breakthrough Research Project proposal which was subsequently funded by the European Social Fund, the Learning and Skills Council and Hull Women’s Network.

Along the way, however, a wide range of themes and issues were raised through women describing their educational and employment experiences. Hence, rather than a single report, the findings of this study have been produced as a series of five research reports which develop the themes of:

1. Gender, confidence and mental well-being
2. Gender, education, training and aspiration
3. Motherhood: choices and constraints
4. Women's experiences of work: breaking through the barriers
5. Transforming women's lives: women's voluntary and community services in the Yorkshire and Humber Region

Each of the reports in the 'Breakthrough' series are led by women's voices and give testament, not only to the richness and diversity of women's lives, but also the commonalities of their experiences. Using a gender analysis and critical social science perspectives to facilitate a clearer understanding of these complex issues, the research identifies the key problems that women face in breaking through the barriers of both gender-based and other forms of social exclusion.

The study also evaluates the contribution of public and voluntary sector organisations, including the work of individual women within those organisations, in meeting women's everyday needs, raising aspirations and providing the necessary support to enable women to achieve their ambitions. Working closely with women's groups and the voluntary and statutory sectors across the region, we have explored what women themselves think *would* help and what *has* helped them get to where they want to be.

## 1.1 Why a gender analysis of women's lives?

A gender analysis is essential in order to understand the ways in which women's lives both in the Yorkshire and Humber Region and in the UK as a whole are conditioned by socio-cultural and patriarchal structural frameworks. As succinctly explained by Nayak and Kehily (fc.2008);

'By examining gender practices, and in particular how they are produced, regulated, consumed and performed, we can gain a fuller insight into broader gender patterns and arrangements. This enables us to interpret the relationship between gender and power and to see how gender is institutionally organized, discursively constituted, embodied and transfigured in social life. It can begin to explain how gender relations are embedded within the social fabric of human societies and serve to shape the choices and possibilities open to us as gendered subjects. This suggests that gender is not simply a matter of choice, but a negotiation that occurs within a matrix of social and historical forces enshrined in the ideological arenas of law, religion, family, schooling, media, work and so forth' (Nayak and Kehily, fc.2008:5).

A gender analysis of women's lives continues to be of critical importance in today's society despite equalities legislation which might suggest otherwise. Women have come a long way since our grandmothers and great grandmothers fought for the right to vote.

We have made major advances in the kinds of work we are permitted to do, the institutions we are allowed to be members of, and the levels of political, educational and sporting attainment we have reached. From being excluded from education, over the course of the past hundred years women have entered educational institutions at every level to the extent that they are now out-performing boys and gaining better overall grades at primary, secondary and higher educational levels (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2006).

Women are now allowed to become doctors, lawyers, judges and ‘captains’ of industry. We see high profile women succeed in all walks of life and enter previously male-only domains. Indeed, the extent to which women have pushed at the glass ceilings, jumped off the sticky floors, and knocked down barriers to equality of opportunity can lead many younger women in Britain today to feel as if they have it all, to believe that they do not face discrimination on a daily basis. However, despite the real advances we have made as a result of women’s continued and extensive struggles over the course of the 20th century, the goal of gender equality has not yet been reached. Gender discrimination and segregation across public and private spheres continues to be a stark reality of women’s lives in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

### ***Politics is still a man’s world***

Formal politics is still largely a man’s world, and this in itself inhibits women’s entry and participation. Politics continues to be seen as a ‘male space’. The House of Commons, for example, has been likened to a gentlemen’s club, famous for having a shooting range but no crèche, a barbers but no hairdressers, and far too few women’s

toilets. Following 80 years of women's suffrage less than 20% of MPs in the UK Parliament are women (Women and Equality Unit, 2007), of these only two MPs are Black and there has never been an Asian women MP (Fawcett Society, 2007). At this rate it will be another 200 years before women achieve numerical equality of political representation, rising to 300 years for Black and Minority Ethnic women. These facts speak volumes about the status of women in positions of power and decision-making (EOC, 2007, Fawcett Society, 2007).

### ***Gender segregation in education continues***

Despite girls gaining higher grades than boys at every level of education, they continue to be faced with complex socio-cultural pressures that lead to extremes of segregation in education along traditional gender lines. At F.E. and H.E. levels, for example, the vast majority of students studying literature and languages are female, whilst the overwhelming majority of those studying sciences, engineering and computing are male (ONS, 2006). Vocational training is even more highly segregated: 97% of early years care and education and 90.1% of hairdressing apprentices are women, compared with men constituting 99.2% of apprentices in construction, 94.8% in engineering manufacture and 98.6% of apprentices in the motor industry (Fuller, Beck and Unwin, 2005).

### ***This in turn contributes to gender segregation in paid employment***

Women continue to be concentrated in low-paid, gender stereotyped (and often part-time) jobs, representing, for example, 79% of workers in the health and social care sector, 98% of childcare workers, 95% of receptionists, and 76% of cleaners. At the other end

of the scale, only 10% of senior police officers and 9% of the judiciary are female, whilst 83% of directors and chief executives and over 70% of private sector managers are male (EOC 2006). Women still face a stark gender pay gap, earning an average of 17% per hour less than men in full-time work, rising to a gender pay gap of 38% for part-time employees (EOC, 2007). Within individual employment sectors the gender pay gap can increase, for example, women earn 22.5% less per hour than men in full-time work in the private sector as a whole, rising to 41% in the banking and insurance sector (EOC, 2006).

### ***Gender discrimination at home***

Women clearly continue to experience gender discrimination in the public sphere, and despite women's place supposedly being 'in the home' discrimination also permeates the private sphere. Women perform, and take responsibility for, most of the reproductive and community management work in the household: cleaning, cooking, shopping for household provisions, managing household finances and maintaining extended family networks. Women also take most responsibility for caring: for children, for disabled or sick relatives and for elderly family members.

The feminist movement has been calling for greater recognition of this work for decades, including demanding wages for housework on the basis of its direct value to the national economy. A recent UK government report, through the Office of National Statistics, made an attempt to put a value on housework. They calculated that if the time spent on unpaid work was valued at the average rate for paid employment it would be worth over £700 billion a year - more than three quarters of the value of the paid economy (BBC, 2002). Data also shows that women spend an average of just over 3.5 hours per

day on unpaid domestic and child care tasks in addition to their regular paid work. That's almost twice as much time as the average man spends on similar tasks (Gershuny, Lader and Short, 2005).

### ***The home as a site of domestic violence***

Despite, and because of, all their hard work within it, women can find their homes a source of comfort and security, but all too often the home is a site of fear, abuse and violence. In the UK, one incidence of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute and one in four women experience domestic violence during their lifetime. On average two women are killed every week by a male partner or former partner, constituting over a third of all female murder victims (Home Office, 2007).

It is clear then, that gender inequalities continue to exist at both national and regional levels. However, in order to understand the experience behind such statistical representations, we have to speak to women about their lives and experiences inside the household, in local communities, in the work-place and in educational establishments. Empirical research such as that undertaken in this study is crucial as women themselves are best-placed to understand and communicate their own life experiences. However, this research not only documents the continuing social barriers and inequalities that women face: it also provides evidence of the struggle of women, both as groups and individuals, to challenge and break through those barriers and to ensure that other women find the help and support they need to do so.

## 2.0 Methodology

This research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, underpinned by a methodological approach grounded in feminist research and praxis as well as ethnographic understandings. The adoption of a mixed-methods approach, led by the collection of qualitative data, was chosen to best facilitate the capturing of broad gendered experiences of education and employment in this region. The employment of qualitative research strategies facilitated the collection and analysis of personal beliefs and experiences, commonalities and women's own understandings of their lives.

Initially in this section we present some of the epistemological and theoretical stances which underpinned the approach to data collection and analysis that was adopted. We then proceed to outline some of the main data collection methods employed.

### *Feminist research methods*

This research was informed by a feminist standpoint and research methodology. Ethical considerations were paramount in all aspects of carrying out this research, and were informed by the ethical guidelines produced by the British Sociological Association, as well as academic debates about ethical procedures in research.

Brayton (1997) suggests there are three methodological elements which make research feminist:

1. **Addressing power imbalances between research/researchers and research subjects**

This research was conceived in collaboration with Hull Women's Network (HWN), a strategic partnership of women's service providers in Hull. The design of the research activities was done with the needs of participants in mind. We adopted a reflexive approach throughout the research process, for example, early findings were fed back to participants and they were encouraged to comment on the appropriateness of the emerging themes and the researcher's depictions of women's lives.

The findings presented in these reports are presented as subjective understandings created through dialogues between people, each of whom brings to the topic a set of pre-conceived perspectives and positions. Such an approach facilitates the recognition and integration of different standpoints and experiences through allowing women's voices to speak for themselves.

## **2. Politically motivated and with the aim of promoting social change**

This research aims, through presenting women's understandings and experiences of the opportunities and barriers they face in their day to day lives, to promote better appreciation of gendered opportunities and constraints. Further, this research has developed practical and strategic recommendations for the improvement of gendered experiences in the Yorkshire and Humber Region.

On a strategic level, this project has, where possible sought to contribute to individual participants' empowerment. Taking part in a research project such as this can enable women to reflect on their lives and on the ways which individual, socio-cultural and structural

factors impact on their situation and the choices available to them. This facilitates women's understandings of their lives as situated knowers.

Practically, the researchers have sought to facilitate and support the self-development of participants where possible. Being involved in research of this nature, and re-telling life histories can call up all manner of emotional experiences for women. For many this is, ultimately, a positive experience and most women in this research commented, after the interview, on the fact that having someone to just sit and listen to them was, itself, a rewarding experience. Some women raised aspirations during interviews, such as wanting to get back into education, and, where appropriate, researchers sign-posted them to possible training or sources of information or, for other women, to other relevant support services.

Whilst such support is not the primary role of researchers, in a research project exploring gender inequalities, to ignore such possibilities of pointing women in the direction of potentially life-changing services would have been failing the participants and the wider goals of this research.

### **3. Begin with the experiences and standpoint of women**

This research has sought to understand and articulate women's perspectives and experiences as they are framed within the patriarchal context of today's UK society. The themes and issues which have become prominent during this research have been defined and refined by the participants themselves. Analysis was conducted in a grounded manner, developing the main themes and analytical

concepts from close scrutiny of the experiences of women in the Yorkshire and Humber Region.

### ***Research methodologies***

The methods employed in this research were all informed by the epistemological stance developed in the discussion above. A range of different techniques were employed, which are briefly outlined below.

### ***Interviews***

The main data collection strategy for this research was through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. A total of one hundred and ten separate interviews were conducted with women and key professionals across the Yorkshire and Humber Region. These were subdivided into two main types;

- **Life histories**

Life histories, lasting from around 1 to 4 hours in single or repeated sessions, were collected from women across the region. This strategy was adopted in order to capture the complex interrelations which exist between different parts of women's experience and to elucidate the ways in which gendered identity constructions impact on women's lives. Life histories were conducted using an interview guide, however, researchers were not constrained by the question areas in front of them and, instead, allowed women to focus on and develop particular issues as they arose.

- **Key Theme Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with key service providers in the arenas of education, vocational training, community and voluntary services,

employment, business, social and emotional support provision, local government and statutory services.

- **Focus Groups**

The team conducted a series of twelve discussion groups involving 69 people with a range of diverse groups:

- Women returners to education
- Women in 'traditional' gendered occupations
- Women making decisions around work/care after having a first child
- Young parents
- Women users of community and voluntary services
- Women service providers

Focus groups were employed for a number of reasons, particularly as they can encourage participation from people who may feel nervous about a one-to-one interview. Further, a major strength of focus groups is that they facilitate observation of group dynamics by promoting open discussion, questioning and interaction between group members. This means that the parameters are not set entirely by the researcher, but instead come to reflect what members of the group feel are important and relevant to the topic introduced.

Focus group discussions were designed, in each case, to cover topics relevant to the people comprising the group. Each of these discussion groups lasted between 1 and 2 hours, dependent upon the wishes of the group and were either recorded using a mixture of sound recording equipment and note-taking or solely through note-taking.

### ***Participant observation in a women's centre***

Part of the research team were based in a working Women's Centre in Hull for the duration of the project. This provided insight into the issues which women face on a daily basis as well as the major issues experienced by people working in the voluntary and community sector. Such close level involvement elicits insights and understandings which are difficult to gain from methods which do not take such a long-term approach.

### ***Questionnaire/Survey***

Following initial literature reviews and exploratory interviews with key informants a number of themes were identified as central to understanding gendered experiences of education and employment in the Yorkshire and Humber Region. A questionnaire was designed to cover these themes and was delivered through both electronic and paper media. This resulted in a total of 323 responses collected from across the Yorkshire and Humber Region. All questionnaires were anonymous and provided respondents with the opportunity to contact the project for more information.

Two main distribution methods were used for the questionnaire:

- The electronic version was designed and delivered using a web-based survey creation tool. Hyperlinks to this questionnaire were placed on the web-page of the Hull Women's Network (HWN) and on the project website as well as being distributed to relevant email lists and through personal networks. This way of distributing the questionnaire meant that respondents could click on the link and complete the questionnaire anonymously

- Paper copies of the questionnaire were targeted to parts of the population for whom computer skills or access to internet could be issues in preventing them completing the questionnaire

Finally in this brief section on methodology we return to the issue of ethics to address two areas directly.

### ***Confidentiality and informed consent***

All participants in this research project have confidentiality assured through being identified by pseudonyms, allocated in a random pattern using the letters of the alphabet in turn. In a small number of cases it has also been necessary to amend or omit certain other personal details to ensure anonymity.

Participants were informed, as far as possible, of the uses to which the information they provided will be put. They were also given the opportunity to withdraw part or all of the information they provided in interviews. Where contactable, participants were invited to the research dissemination events<sup>2</sup> and provided with copies of the executive summaries of the reports.

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<sup>2</sup> The dissemination of the research is also an example of feminist praxis in as much as a wide a range as possible of people were invited to the events, including the research participants, policy makers, academics and members of the public. The events were held in accessible locations, were free of charge, and bursaries were made available to pay for travel and child-care costs. Copies of the executive summaries were made freely available to everybody in attendance and complimentary copies of the final reports provided.

## 3.0 Executive Summaries

### 3.1 Report 1: Gender, Confidence and Mental Well-Being

Whilst not initially setting out to focus on women's mental well-being, it soon became clear in the course of the research that mental well-being was a recurrent issue for women, cutting across indices of difference such as socio-economic background, age, ethnicity, educational attainment, occupation and location. In addition to clinically significant experiences of depression, self-harming and other mental health issues, women repeatedly raised - both explicitly and implicitly - a range of broader well-being issues such as low self-confidence and low self-esteem as obstacles to their personal and professional development.

***Key findings:***

The impacts of reduced self-esteem and under-confidence can include:

- Impacts on employment, for example, loss of earnings for women and costs to employers through physical and mental ill-health
- Lower dynamism and initiative in the workplace. This can become reflected in economic disadvantage, for example, in terms of reduced earning potential

- Being less able to protect oneself from harm, for example, bullying or harassment at home, school and in the workplace
- Limiting educational and career aspirations, posing obstacles to reaching one's full potential. This can include women being self-limiting
- Negative affects on women's physical health, potentially contributing to chronic ill-health and the related impacts on those around them

We accept that there are aspects of self-esteem and mental well-being that can be especially gendered experiences for women *qua* women. We argue, however, that there must be a reconfiguration of the individuation of these connections and a recognition of the fundamental implication of socio-cultural structures in the creation of mental ill-health as a 'woman's problem'. In other words, whilst the ways in which women's gendered identity is constructed leave them more prone to mental ill-health, the flaw lies not with individual women but in the normative patriarchal constructions of their gendered beings: of femininity, women's roles, divisions of labour and their relative status in society.

Women are more likely than men to seek support, are more likely to be offered medical treatment, and to be 'labelled' as having mental health problems. It is crucial, however, to recognise that mental health issues impact on both women and men. Thus, whilst calling for greater resources and support for women and men with mental well-being issues, the cultural construction of mental health as a feminised arena *per se* should be resisted. Rather, we need greater

understanding and acknowledgement of the ways in which mental ill-health is a condition of human society which is fundamentally conditioned by the constructions of both men's and women's gendered identities into falsely immutable categories.

We focus in this report on three areas that are particularly gendered in terms of women's experiences and mental well-being: gender socialisation; motherhood; and domestic and sexual violence. Finally, we look briefly at the role of women's and women-oriented voluntary and community services, particularly in the context of women who have been supported through experiences of domestic and sexual violence. We argue that there is a need to employ a gender analysis to address both the causes and consequences of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and issues of mental well-being in the broadest sense.

***Recommendations:***

- Taking far more seriously the problematic gender stereotyping in social institutions such as the family, schooling and in the media and discourage negative gendered discourses
- Increase gender analysis training for educators, employers, civil servants, health specialists etc.
- There needs to be a renewed debate about the structural causes and consequences of domestic and sexual violence and a wider recognition of the long term impacts of such violence on millions of people's lives

- Undertake a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of providing greater levels of service provision and increased resources to tackle both the causes and consequences of domestic and sexual violence
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on social rather than individual models of mental well-being in approaches to mental health care provision
- Provision of more personal development training and the development and valorisation of ‘soft skills’
- Provide more individual, familial and institutionally-based support for mothers and women-returners to facilitate transitions from employment/education to motherhood, and for women returning to paid work or training after a break. This might include, for example, more systematic development and application of mentoring systems putting in place support strategies within work places or educational institutions.

## **Report 2: Gender, Education, Training and Aspiration**

This report explores the impact of gender on women’s aspirations and on their experiences of education and training. These research findings show that women’s experiences of education and training continue to be strongly influenced by gendered socio-cultural expectations which are also translated into structural gendered norms

and practices. By placing women's educational experiences within broad context this research also makes clear the ways in which gendered experiences of education have life-long implications in terms of the kinds of paid employment and other roles men and women do and the rewards they accrue for these.

During this research we talked to women about current experiences of, and future aspirations for, higher, further, and adult education and training. We also explored women's reflections on their schooling and other previous educational experiences. This report presents the various factors which constrain or enable women in imagining possible futures and attaining them for themselves.

***Key Findings:***

- Education continues to be experienced largely along gendered lines despite long-term efforts to equalise boys' and girls' education. When choice becomes available, girls and boys tend to choose different types of subjects due to a complex mix of factors including; peer pressure, ideas about 'suitable' subjects and imaginings of appropriate futures
- Subjects which are traditionally seen as 'boys' subjects continue to be valorised over those traditionally seen as 'girls' subjects
- Formal and hidden curricula structures 'stream' students into particular subject areas, often along gendered lines
- The careers advice which participants received was often directed along gendered lines, meaning that pupils may not be

provided with the full range of career options, limiting possibilities for both boys and girls

- The impact of educational choices is often life-long. Although girls outperform boys at almost every level, this does not translate into economic and social rewards due to the differential rewards which 'male' and 'female' occupations attract
- When women engage with education or training as adults they often feel that their multiple roles and responsibilities are not recognised or catered for. Women commonly experience problems such as finding childcare whilst in learning, or may struggle to juggle domestic responsibilities and learning commitments.
- Gendered Issues are often particularly marked for women undertaking education/training in areas traditionally thought of as 'male' areas
- Community-based education often provides a vital resource for women. Such organisations aim to offer a range of educational provision and do so in supportive environments in which holistic approaches are taken to understanding the needs of women learners

***Recommendations:***

- Continue to promote equality of opportunity and expectation in schools and work to further address the impact of the formal and hidden curricula constraints

- Through the promotion of gender awareness training, work towards provision of more broad-ranging careers advice in schools which provides equality of opportunity for both girls and boys
- Work to challenge gendered stereotypes of subject and occupational value, and encourage awareness of the consequences of valorisation of particular subject areas for women's life chances
- Exert pressure on providers of further, higher and adult education to recognise and support the multiple roles parents and carers occupy
- Address issues of gender disadvantage in areas of education and training which are not traditionally taken up by women
- Consult with, and provide support to, community based education and training programmes which work with women and recognise the value of a holistic approach to women's adult learning

### **3.3 Report 3: Motherhood: Choices and Constraints**

This report focuses on the impact of motherhood on women's choices, particularly as it relates to domestic roles, educational chances and employment. These research findings show that, although women's lives have changed significantly, and more women are combining work and motherhood, the ways in which they do this

are heavily constrained by cultural and institutional gendered identity constructions and expectations. This means that mothers continue to carry a heavy burden of domestic labour and, where they take on paid work outside the home, are concentrated in low-pay, low-status work with fewer chances for progression than either men or non-mothers. Utilising women's stories of motherhood and non-motherhood this report presents the various factors which constrain or enable women in developing successful roles for themselves.

***Key findings:***

- Women are increasingly seeking to combine motherhood and paid employment outside the home
- The impact of motherhood for women's choices and opportunities is much greater, and more detrimental, than that of fatherhood for men
- Experiences of direct discrimination amongst mothers and women who are pregnant are rare. Women can, however, feel that they are not fully supported when they make decisions about maternity leave or returning to work.
- Socio-cultural expectations and stereotypes mean mothers often struggle to negotiate satisfying and successful roles both in and out the home. This is worsened by the conflation of childcare responsibilities with other domestic labour, meaning mothers often also take greater responsibility for, and spend more time on, tasks in the home

- Time spent at home can result in loss of self-confidence and well-being, in underestimation of women's transferable skills and in women feeling ill-prepared to re-enter education/employment
- Opting for part-time work in order to achieve a work/family balance has serious implications for women's career progression chances and mothers continue to be concentrated in low-pay, low status employment
- Women generally welcome recent UK government work/family policies however these are not always flexible enough to meet the diverse situations of mothers
- Childcare remains a significant barrier to mothers' participation in paid work and in education. Concerns about childcare are not simply about levels of provision and affordability, but also quality, location and flexibility.
- Whilst motherhood is still the norm for women in the UK, and undoubtedly brings personal and emotional rewards, increasing numbers of women are delaying (or refusing) motherhood in order to concentrate on achievements in other areas of their lives

***Recommendations:***

- Take far more seriously the continuing gender stereotyping in social institutions such as the family which mean there is a

perception that women are responsible for caring and domestic labour

- Work to promote the understanding that there is no necessary link between caring for children and other domestic labour and encourage greater parity between men's and women's roles in the home
- Provide more individual and institutionally-based support for mothers and women-returners to assist in women's transitions both from employment/education to motherhood, and after a career break when women choose to return to paid work
- Promote recognition in institutional structures, families and policy that fathers also have responsibilities for childcare and work to increase parity of opportunity for mothers and fathers, for example through enhancing paternity leave provision
- Work to address the gender discrimination inherent in much UK work/family policy which continues to place women in the home to a greater extent than men
- Improve the flexibility and affordability of childcare for children of all ages, as well as increasing the numbers of places available overall

### **3.4 Report 4: Women's Experiences of Work: Breaking Through the Barriers**

This report focuses on the importance of gender in women's participation and progression in the work place. Here, we make visible the profoundly gendered nature of our everyday worlds. Women's experiences and practices, both at home and at work, are set within the social context in which they live and embedded in their individual biographies. The study shows that although the world of work is changing, for women there are many factors that continue to operate to their disadvantage. This report presents the issues that, in women's experience, have helped or hindered their participation and progression in the labour market.

#### ***Key findings:***

The key factors that women felt limited their participation and progression in the work place are:

- Processes of gender socialisation can negatively impact on women's levels of self belief which, in turn, can cause them to be self-limiting in their expectations and aspirations
- Gendered expectations of families, friends and peers mean that women are encouraged/discouraged to enter particular kinds of employment
- Women's triple burden of paid, reproductive and community management labour, for example, women retain the majority

of responsibility for caring roles, domestic work and community-based labour in addition to their paid labour

- Career breaks to raise children mean that women can experience occupational disadvantage upon returning to employment
- The difficulties of finding appropriate, flexible and affordable childcare continue to be a barrier to women's equal participation in the paid labour force
- Part-time work, frequently opted for by women, continues to be associated with the highest level pay differentials, is feminised, and attracts poorer working conditions and lower status.
- Part-time workers can be perceived as lacking commitment to their paid work and so are less likely to be considered for promotion or more responsible tasks
- Gender segregation in education combined with poor career advice can serve to limit career options
- The lack of role models in non-traditional female occupations and in high-level positions limits women's aspirations
- Women continue to experience gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work

***Recommendations:***

- Work to challenge gendered stereotypes of occupational value and promote equal value for 'traditional' female occupations
- Encourage equality in family and home life through wider debates around power relations in the home with the aim of closing the unequal division of domestic labour
- Exert pressure on Government and Local Authorities to provide more flexible, affordable, accessible, quality childcare
- Through the promotion of gender awareness training, provide better quality careers advice in schools which provide equality of opportunity for both girls and boys
- Develop links between schools, industry and commerce in order to broaden the range of possibilities which school pupils imagine for their futures
- Positively promote female role models in non-traditional occupations to help dispel the myths that work to limit women's aspirations
- Continue and formalise funding for first-rung interventions in women-oriented voluntary and community sector services
- Promote and enable women's self-development through proactive support programmes which encourage women to apply for promotion and through the increased development of mentoring programmes designed to meet the needs of women

- Recognise issues of diversity and difference and seek to promote organisational structures which are not predicated on hegemonic masculinity, where women's needs are seen as 'other'
- Promote campaigns to end gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the work place

The stories provided by many women in this research clearly show that gendered expectations affect their experiences of education, careers advice, work and home thus impacting upon women's careers. Policies need to be further developed which aim to widen women and girls' horizons. However, it takes more than policies to change deeply engrained cultural norms and values. What is needed is a genuine will and concerted action at all levels to create 'joined up thinking' in all areas of life. Mainstreaming gender, that is, bringing gender into discussions in families, schools, popular culture and the wider community is an important first step. We need to push the boundaries and encourage girls to 'think outside the gender box'.

### **3.5 Report 5: Transforming Women's Lives: Women's Voluntary and Community Services in the Yorkshire and Humber Region**

This report focuses on the role of women's voluntary and community sector organisations in the Yorkshire and Humber Region. Within this we develop a particular focus on the work of women-only and

women-oriented services. In particular, we examine the transformative power of engagement with women's voluntary and community services for both individual women and their local communities.

Despite there being thousands of such services in the UK and hundreds in the Yorkshire and Humber Region, there is little empirical data examining the work of women's organisations and the economic impact of their interventions. This report contributes to the debate about the value of voluntary and community service provision through using the voices of service users and providers to explore women's differing experiences of, and motivations for, engaging with women's services.

***Key findings:***

Throughout this research the participant's voices make explicit just how vital women-only services are in transforming women's lives. However, the continued existence of women's centres and women-only safe spaces is constantly under threat. Both the lack of understanding and suspicion of the services themselves, and the myth that gender equality has been achieved, result in under-appreciation of the work that women's organisations do. This can contribute to the problem that women's services exist in a state of perpetual insecurity, surviving largely on short-term, and increasingly declining, funding sources.

Women's and women-oriented voluntary and community services:

- Fill gaps in levels and areas of statutory service provision

- Offer women-only ‘safe spaces’ which provide an environment where women can be supported and encouraged to reach their full potential
- Adopt a holistic approach to engaging with women and provide a range of services in one space
- Provide ‘first-rung’ training in a range of different skills, through both accredited and non-accredited courses. These can be an effective first step for women seeking to re-enter education and employment
- Provide encouraging and supportive environments through a range of different means, including, providing positive role models and working to raise women’s aspirations and self-confidence
- Seek to engage with women who are socially excluded through outreach work

***Recommendations:***

- A fuller study needs to be undertaken to assess the social, cultural and economic impact of women’s organisations for society as a whole. This could include a cost-benefit analysis
- Further assistance could be provided to support organisations with funding applications and the application processes themselves could be simplified and made less time-consuming

- There should be greater recognition of, and financial provision for, the work that women's organisations do in 'filling the gap' and 'picking up' from statutory services
- Promotion of greater networking and knowledge-sharing between women's organisations, be they based on locality, religious or ethnic affiliation, or around particular gender issues such as domestic and sexual violence, education or employment. This would also encourage the recognition of diversity as a strength of the sector

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# Report 4: Women's experiences of work: Breaking through the barriers

## 1.0 Introduction

The primary objective of this report is to examine women's experiences of work in the Yorkshire and Humberside Region. Taking the women's experiences as evidence, we present the issues that they feel advance or hold back their participation and progression in the labour market. The report concludes by summarising the key findings and provides recommendations for future policy and provision.

Women's participation in the labour market has increased steadily from around 60% in 1975 to around 70% in 2005 (ONS Labour Market Statistics, 2005). During this period the numbers of women with dependent children working has increased from around 50% to around 66% (ONS, 2005). Women have made significant progress in the workplace since the Sex Discrimination Act came into force more than thirty years ago, but we still have a long way to go before we come close to equality of representation in key sectors (EOC, 2007). Figures show, for example, that in 1974 just 2% of managers were women compared with 33.1% in 2006; less than 1% of directors were women, rising to 14.4% in 2006 (EOC, 2006). Gender segregation in the work place remains strong, with only 2% of childcare workers being men and less than 1% of plumbers being women (EOC, 2006).

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) report 'The Gender Agenda: The Unfinished Revolution' (2007) warns that gender equality remains generations away and calls for urgent action across all aspects of life to close the 'stubborn gaps' within ten years. The 'power gap' remains despite the achievements of inspirational, pioneering women. Women represent just 10.3% of directors in FTSE 100 companies, barely 20% of Members of Parliament and only 15% of council leaders (UK Parliament, 2007, EOC, 2006). The gender pay gap exists in all occupational sectors with women, on average, earning 17% per hour less than men for full-time work (Lader et al., 2006, EOC, 2005). Some groups face an even bigger income gap, with women of Pakistani origin being paid on average less for full-time work than white British women (EOC, 2007). Black, Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women bear the additional factor of being more than twice as likely to be unemployed as white women (EOC, 2007).

For many women part-time work is viewed as the flexible alternative, however the gender pay gap for part-time workers is even larger; 38.4% per hour lower than equivalent full-time male earnings (ONS, 2007); about the same difference as when the Equal Pay Act was introduced over 30 years ago (Women and Work Commission, 2007). The areas of work that women 'traditionally' do are generally undervalued compared to work traditionally regarded as male (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007). Part-time work tends to be similarly feminised and as such often carries low status and in many cases offers limited opportunity for progression and development (Fagan and Burchell, 2002:81). At home the 'chores gap' means that women spend 78% more time than men doing housework (ONS, 2007). Lower

pay over their working life means that women also face a pension gap, to the extent that their retirement income is 40% less than men's (EOC, 2007).

Where people live also affects their experiences of work. The gender pay gap in the Yorkshire and Humber Region is slightly higher than national figures with 28.9% of women earning less than £250 per week compared to 12.1% of men<sup>3</sup>. Regionally, the latest figures of economic activity for adults are 68.6% for women and 76.8% for men; twice as many men are in full-time employment as women and almost four times as many women are in part-time employment as men (ONS, 2007).

The rural economy continues to undergo changes that impact on women's ability to participate in the economy<sup>4</sup>. Many factors influence the ability of women living in rural areas to participate in labour markets, such as a mismatch between skills and local opportunities, recruitment practices, restricted transport services, limited access to the labour market and problems accessing flexible childcare that fits with the times and location of the workplace.

## 1.1 Aims

This report explores women's experiences of work in a range of urban and rural locations across the region. Here we examine in detail the

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<sup>3</sup> This compares with national figures of 24.4% for women and 11.3% for men (EOC, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> The Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber Region reports some of the key trends in rural economic changes as: a decline in agriculture and other land-based employment; counter urbanisation and a growing rural population; increasing service employment; exposure to global markets; increased levels of mobility; and a decline of rural service provision (Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber Region, 2007).

complexity and diversity of women's experiences of work and, by doing so, bring clearly into focus some of the opportunities and barriers they face throughout their working lives. Led by the empirical data, we present the issues that women themselves feel hinder their participation and progression in the labour market and examine some of the practices that help them get ahead. The final section of this report summarises the key findings and provides recommendations for future policy and service provision.

## **1.2 Identifying the women**

The women interviewed are a diverse group between the ages of 16 and 93, from differing socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and from a mix of rural and urban areas across the Yorkshire and Humber region. They work in a wide range of sectors of employment, in both the public and private sectors, full-time and part-time, self-employed and voluntary work.

This report shows how the choices that women make and the meaning of work vary enormously and may change over the life-course. This data reveals the tightly interwoven pattern of individual women's lives, teasing out a range of structural and personal biographical factors that thread through their lives in different ways and influence their opportunities and choices in the labour market.

## 2.0 Women's career paths

Despite the introduction of the Equal Pay Act as far back as 1970 and, more recently, the Gender Equality Duty<sup>5</sup> expectations about what is appropriate female work and remuneration remain (Dale et al., 2005). Over time women's attitudes and expectations have changed with traditional gender lines being challenged and crossed. The majority of younger women now expect to work outside the home and return to work after having children (ONS, 2005). What limits or widens every woman's experience of work is, of course, the range of opportunities available to her, but equally important is whether she is in a position to take up these opportunities. Structural inequalities, gendered expectations and caring responsibilities continue to impact on women's ability to achieve what they aspire to in employment.

### 2.1 Social and cultural expectations: the socialisation of women into traditional roles

Women now comprise around 28% of full-time workers<sup>6</sup> and around 82% of part-time workers, however, gender segregation continues with the majority of women entering careers in what are recognised as 'traditional' gendered occupations, particularly caring and service

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<sup>5</sup> The Gender Equality Duty (GED) is a statutory duty which came into force in April 2007. All public authorities in England, Wales and Scotland must demonstrate that they are promoting equality for women and men and they are eliminating sexual discrimination and harassment. The requirements of the duty place the responsibility for putting in place gender equality policies and practices on organisations. Organisations have to show that they are not directly or indirectly discriminating against employees or customers/service users because of their gender.

<sup>6</sup> In March 2007 figures for people in full-time employment were 21.55 million (13.93 million men and 7.62 million women) this showed an increase of 12,000 in numbers of women and a decrease of 9,000 in the numbers of men (ONS, 2007).

industries (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007). The position of women in the contemporary labour market remains one of sharp disadvantage in terms of status, value and rewards, where women tend to be employed in the lower rungs of low status occupations. Although the 'qualification gap' which was often cited for women's relative position to men has been greatly reduced, and in many cases actually reversed with girls now doing better than boys at primary, secondary and higher educational levels (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2006) this has not yet 'paid off' for women in terms of equality in the labour market (EOC, 2007).

There are numerous deeply ingrained factors influencing gendered occupational segregation and women's relative position in the labour market. Historically, this difference is rooted in the development of modern industry which separated the workplace from the previous home-based family unit into mechanised factories. This led to a pattern of male employment away from the home, leaving women to work closer to home in order to care for children (Rowbotham, 1973, Andersen, 1993). Adding weight to the notion of women being 'home-based' were patriarchal Victorian values viewing women as fragile, dependent, nurturing creatures, 'a woman's place was in the home'. Working class women, however, weren't allowed the luxury of being 'fragile' and were expected to work both in the home and out (Rowbotham, 1973).

Women, as the bearers of children, are expected to be caring and nurturing and thus have been associated with jobs that are associated with such 'naturally' perceived female attributes (Elson and Pearson, 1981, McDowell and Pringle, 1992). The Beveridge Report of 1944 was built on the notion of 'the family wage' and supported the idea of

men as 'providers' and women as 'dependents'. Women's wages were seen as 'pin money' reinforcing the notion that they would be willing to work for less money (Barrett and McIntosh, 1990, Andersen, 1993).

Much research has concentrated on gender socialisation, the processes by which gendered behaviour is shaped through experience in social situations and through which normative constructions of femininity and masculinity are inculcated (Humm, 1992, Andersen, 1993, Alsop et al., 2002). Gender socialisation is a major factor leading to gender segregation in employment. Through socialisation in key sites such as the family, community, peer relationships, schools, the mass media and the world of work, the individual learns values, norms and beliefs which together create gendered expectations and assumptions about how males and females should behave. Powerful gendered expectations pervade all aspects of society influencing attitudes, expectations and the choices we make throughout our lives. Stepping outside expected gendered roles can bring disapproval, ridicule or feelings of isolation, thus the process of changing gendered norms tends to be long and difficult.

Thus, gender segregation plays a part in limiting opportunities for women in the work place and this is often rooted in early socialisation. Gendered family expectations and social class were felt by the women in this study to be influencing factors in their education and career choices. This comment is typical of many women's experiences;

*'In my family expectations about career paths were very much along traditional gender lines. I was expected to*

*train to be a secretary and get married and have children'*

(Women Returners' Focus Group, North Yorkshire).

Similarly, a lack of confidence in one's abilities can itself be a gendered phenomenon, an issue discussed in greater detail in Report 1 of this series (Clisby et al., 2007). This can lead to limited aspirations and serve to narrow perceived career options. Whilst Danielle, for example, has progressed well in her career and now works as a catering manager, when younger she had wanted to train in nursing or hairdressing. When asked if she had tried to pursue either of these careers she said;

*'No. Because I thought that catering was all I was capable of'* (Danielle, early 40s, manager, catering sector, North Yorkshire).

So for Danielle, catering was seen as a lower skilled, lower status option, but even the careers she initially aspired to are themselves feminised occupations. Indeed, many women spoke about a lack of self-confidence, which they felt was often associated with learned cultural and gendered ways of behaving, as negatively impacting on their careers. Heather, for example, spoke about gender differences in being able to 'sell yourself';

*'With men the norm is towards slightly over-selling yourself, being over-confident and, I think, with women it's the other way... It is that underestimation of your ability and that inability to sell yourself'* (Heather, late 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Familial relationships variously impact on women's position in the labour market. They can be both positive and encouraging or limiting and confining. For some women their relationships had a very negative impact on their ability to work. Tessa spoke about a violent, controlling relationship as a reason for her loss of confidence and a barrier to work;

*'As soon as I'd had my little boy he didn't want me to work. I could have gone back to work full-time, part-time. I said to him, 'you know, I'd really like to go back part-time', but he says, 'I don't want anybody else bringing our son up' and I said, 'Well you can work shifts with your job', you know, 'We could do it between us, you know' but, no, he didn't want me to go back to work' (Tessa, late 30s, part-time, clerical, mother, North Yorkshire).*

A recent EOC report (2007a) 'I want to fulfil my dream' reveals that career ambitions for some girls and women from ethnic minorities are limited by family, faith and culture, creating a gap between their own aspirations and reality. Girls generally are often socialised into being demure, modest and self-effacing, but for some ethnic groups such expectations can be more apparent. To be proud and confident as a girl can be interpreted as being arrogant, even aggressive. Zaima spoke about the ways in which cultural and 'feminine' constructions of behaviour intersect with class and ethnicity, which for her has meant that she finds networking and selling herself difficult;

*'I think it's a skill that you learn. I think the other thing is, and it's about women in general, we don't really - I mean, I don't know about you - but I wasn't brought up to*

*kind of say to everybody, 'I'm wonderful. Employ me'. It was always, 'you have to be modest... And I think it is a class issue because when I kind of look at sort of the people getting on, they know how to say the right things, they know who to talk to. Do you know what I mean? They know how to talk to people'* (Zaima, mid 30s, civil service, human resources, Humberside).

## 2.2 Peer Pressure

Peer pressure and the influence of friendship networks are also important factors that impact on, for example, subject choices at school, what are seen as gender/class appropriate careers and particular ways of behaving (Fuller et al., 2005). Indeed, family and friends are possibly the strongest influence on young people's occupational aspirations, as Heather's recollections of schooling illustrate;

*'I always remember... one of my teachers thinking I was really, really exceptional at metal work, but I refused to take it as an option because, for me, it was a boys' subject... I insisted I wasn't going to do it... I think I just didn't want to leave the group of girls I was with probably... they all planned to be hairdressers and to do other types of things like that really'* (Heather, late 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

## 2.3 The role of careers advice on occupational choice

Whilst school and peer pressure work together to reinforce gendered expectations<sup>7</sup>, a further issue that emerged through the research was the significance of careers advice on girl's aspirations. Whilst this might have been expected for older women, recent reports have highlighted the fact that many girls feel they get poor careers advice at school and are steered into stereotypical female jobs (Youth Work Now, 2007) and denied better job prospects because they lack all-round careers advice (Fuller et al., 2005). Similarly, many of the women in this research spoke about careers advice at school limiting their choices;

*'I think the expectations, when I look back, were stereotypical in terms of boys would be engineers, girls would be caring roles, hairdressers perhaps a teacher. But boys would be looking at going on to university to study engineering or study science or accounting or whatever, and the girls would be slotted off somewhere along the way for something nice and easy' (Pamela, mid 40s, manager, community sector, volunteer, Humberside).*

Moreover, many women recalled careers advice at school only being directed at those students who were 'expected' to achieve academically. The majority of girls were still directed into 'traditional' female jobs;

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<sup>7</sup> See Report 3 of this series for further exploration of these issues (Holdsworth et al., 2007).

*'Girls, maybe the bright ones, that were maybe going on to teach and girls that might go on to do medicine... but there wasn't the same for us, the thought was that you still went into secretarial work, nursing, teaching, you know, there weren't any other areas you were encouraged to go into then'* (Fern, mid 40s, manager, agricultural sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

This preferential treatment for academic achievers was noted in a focus group of young women who were lone parents, and who all felt that the education system had let them down. One young mother, who said that she had wanted to be a midwife, spoke about her careers advisor at school as someone who she could not relate to as she felt that his attitude towards her meant that;

*'He would totally have written me off'* (Lone Parents' Focus Group, East Yorkshire).

Rachel, who works to try and promote women entering careers in Science, Engineering and Technology, told us why she thought there are fewer women in certain areas of work, listing a number of factors including: lack of awareness among young women and girls of the opportunities available; poor careers advice; lack of parental encouragement; lack of self-confidence; and established organisational structures that preserve the status quo;

*'One of the sort of very first barriers is that actually young women don't know about these jobs, you know, that it's for them [...] It's really about expanding their*

*horizons'* (Rachel, early 40s, manager, educational sector, Humberside).

Similarly, Fay, who works for a 'Women into Building' Programme, said;

*'One of the biggest barriers was just that they never thought of doing it, so it wasn't on the radar, and certainly there is a lot of... a lot of people were saying that it was certainly never suggested in careers in schools'* (Fay, early 50s, manager, education sector, Humberside).

It would appear that taking careers advice more seriously in schools is a vital part of moving towards equality for women. As one nursery officer explained;

*'We need more choices at school and a wider range of subjects... more practical things that you're going to use in life, computer skills, and more work experience, you only get one chance to try one thing'* (nursery officer, Focus Group, East Yorkshire).

In sum, women want a careers advice service that meets their needs, one that:

- Provides careers staff with information on the full range of career opportunities
- Trains staff in gender awareness
- Promotes events and open discussion around equality of opportunity

- Encourages representatives from industry and commerce into schools to offer work experience opportunities
- Positively promotes female role models in non-traditional occupations

## 2.4 Caring work is ‘women’s work’

Further to the discussion of careers advice above, some of the women interviewed felt that schools encourage girls who are not seen as academically high achievers to enter caring professions<sup>8</sup>. Others felt that it was something they had ‘trained’ to do as part of family life since being young;

*‘I wanted to do it [childcare] since I was little, I looked after my siblings and cousins as children because my parents were working’* (Charlotte, early 40s, part-time, community sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

Caring is generally associated with women’s ‘nurturing’ abilities and often seen as ‘appropriate’ work for women. Pippa, who worked as a nanny stated;

*‘It was kind of safe and predictable and yes it’s a nice thing to do isn’t it?’* (Pippa, late 30s, caring sector, East Yorkshire).

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<sup>8</sup> The EOC Report (2007) *‘Labourers of Love?’* is calling for a challenge to society’s perceptions around women’s ‘natural’ propensity to care that somehow expects them to carry out this work for low pay.

However, women working in traditional caring work often said their work was accorded low status and that the very nature of their work was misunderstood and under valued<sup>9</sup>;

*'It has a very low status, rated poorly, low on the agenda. People think children come and just play and don't realise what we do in terms of learning and development and planning and training, and meeting all the government requirements. This is reflected in the low pay'* (Ashleigh, early 40s, manager, catering sector, East Yorkshire).

## 2.5 Emotional Labour

What has been described as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) has been adopted to describe paid employment such as in the case of flight attendants (ibid., 1983) where management of one's own emotions in providing care for others is key to the job. This management of emotion is a key feature of what many women are expected to be capable of, thus making them suitable for particular types of employment. As Morgan argues, '[p]aid emotional labour is gendered in that women tend to be found doing it more frequently than men and that, more profoundly, it is equated with common-sensical notions of femininity' (Morgan, 1996:105).

However, this kind of 'work' is something women can feel is expected of them regardless of whether they feel that they are capable of it or want to do it. Alice, working in a university setting, feels that the

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<sup>9</sup> The women's experience in this study reflects work carried out by the EOC 'Undervaluing women's work', which looks at the issue of undervaluation as an often ignored component part of the gender pay gap together with occupational segregation, discrimination and women unequal share of family responsibilities (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007).

association of her with a more caring role has a negative impact on her career progression;

*'Students tend to come to female members of staff more. You're seen almost certain to spend much more time with students Err, female [mothers], tend to spend more time doing administrative, um, work, and generally spend more time on their teaching and supervision, and the research goes out of the window'* (Alice, late 30s, manager, education sector, volunteer, mother, West Yorkshire).

Speaking about women in politics, Dawn also noted that women appeared to take on more caring aspects of the work;

*'A fairly high percentage of my [female] colleagues [...] are more interested in the more caring/sharing aspects, and when asked what committees they'd like to be on they sort of opt for Health and Social Care, and things like that'* (Dawn, late 50s, civil service, mother, Humberside).

It is clear that severe segregation in subject choices at school and traditional gendered expectations about feminine traits and abilities continues to lead to girls and boys following distinct career paths (Fuller et al., 2005). Moreover, even within the same organisations, some women feel they continue to face stereotypical gendered expectations based on naturalising discourses of women's nurturing and caring skills.

## **2.6 Women's careers given less importance**

Traditionally women were expected to take time out of work for pregnancy and childcare, which served to cast mothers into a dependency role. This more specifically tended to mean women were dependent on a man's income for a period of time. Although the majority of women now work, gendered expectations remain in relationships which are still based on traditional roles where the male was perceived as the primary 'breadwinner'. The result of this often outmoded scenario is that many women's careers come second to those of their partners;

*'I worked in a bank for far too long [laughter], erm basically thinking that was the probably the only thing I was capable of and also that my husband erm transferred around the country and it was easier to get a transfer - leave one job on Friday and start another on Monday'* (Gabriel, early 40s, part-time administrator, mother, Humberside).

Despite having a higher occupational status and higher earnings, Elaine gave up her career in the Police Force because the shift work it involved meant that she and her husband's work cycles clashed. When asked if her husband would have considered changing his job as she was the higher earner she said;

*'Oh, no, no. I don't think I would have considered asking him. Erm, it seemed the obvious thing [for me] to actually find another job and work, erm, normal hours. He was in a*

*factory environment... I had the better job'* (Elaine, late 40s, civil service, mother, North Yorkshire).

Asked about why she thought that this was the case;

*'I think it was just upbringing really, erm, what women were expected to do at that time really'* (Elaine, late 40s, civil service, mother, North Yorkshire).

So strong was Elaine's belief that her job was secondary to that of her husband, despite evidence to the contrary, she did not consider discussing with him the idea that he might adapt his working patterns to fit around her career. Whilst it remains relatively uncommon for men to move with a female partner's job, it is common for women to follow the employment patterns of their male partners, even when this involves significant geographical movement. A perhaps more extreme example of this is in the case of the armed services. Charlotte, as the wife of a member of the Forces, has spent years moving around the country following her partner's career needs. She feels this has affected both her confidence and the kinds of work she is able to do;

*'But then, erm, I mean, the life with him was a Navy life because I got, you know, I got married and moved with him... [the work I did] it was literally, it was jobs that I suppose anybody could have done. I was either in the kitchens in the restaurant, or as a waitress... it was all them sort of, sort of jobs. Cleaning jobs, anything like that'* (Charlotte, early 40s, part-time, community sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

## 3.0 Women in Traditional Occupations: What could be done differently?

### 3.1 Recognising skills and improving self-belief

Many women spoke about lacking the necessary self-belief to progress in the work place. This was particularly evident in those cases where women had spent some time out of the labour market to take care of children. Elaine spoke about skills coaching and helping women to recognise the transferable skills developed while working in the home which can be applied to work situations;

*'For instance, you know, the sort of juggling [...] children, school, home... husband's career... whatever... You are an organisational genius... because... you do have to sort of do all these things... it's just been in a different setting'* (Elaine, late 40s, civil service, mother, North Yorkshire).

Speaking about how realising she had valuable skills increased her self-esteem Charlotte said;

*'So when I went for the interview and I got it, I just couldn't believe it. I was doing this job, and it just felt so different, because everything else had been, you know, scrubber's jobs or menial jobs what anybody can do. And this just made me feel a bit more important. It wasn't, you know...'*

Q. It was making use of skills that you had?

*'That's what they said to me when I went for my interview. 'You've had all these skills, all these life skills''*

(Charlotte, early 40s, part-time community sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

### 3.2 The importance of role models and mentors

The significance of role models and mentors in positive career choices and professional development is increasingly acknowledged in a range of recent research and policy contexts (Dale et al., 2005). This also emerged as a crucial factor in the lives of those who participated in this study. Role models are an important way of influencing young people whether that is in traditional or non-traditional jobs or being exposed to positive role models in education (Dale et al., 2005). Bess spoke about a primary school teacher who was a role model for her and influenced her decision to become a teacher herself;

*'I had an excellent primary school teacher and she was very, very encouraging and very affirming, and also expected the moon from every one of us, she expected a lot and she got a lot, and I suppose she was a role model for going into primary school teaching'* (Bess, early 60s, retired, mother, North Yorkshire).

Encouragement and positive role models have been shown to be important factors for women in getting ahead (Moore et al., 2005). Deborah spoke about how this had become clear in research she had carried out in her work place;

*'But usually, an older woman who had inspired them and guided them, and had really helped them. Particularly when they were thinking, I can't do this, and they would*

say 'yes, of course you can, give it a go'' (Deborah, early 60s, manager, education sector, mother, Humberside).

The EOC (2007b) campaign 'Promote people not stereotypes', recognising the importance of role models, uncovered a particular lack of visible ethnic minority female role models working at a senior level<sup>10</sup>. Similarly in this study, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women spoke about 'race' and mentoring and lack of black role models and black women in senior positions. They stated that there was a need for women who understand their particular positions;

*'We had this discussion when they were developing mentoring. Um, who would I want to be mentored by? Do I want to be mentored by a black woman or a white woman? If I want to be mentored by a black woman - this will come as no shock to you - there isn't any women, black women, on senior management teams that can mentor me'* (Zaima, mid 30s, civil service, Humberside).

Erica, who became a high flyer in the clothing industry explained how important a female mentor had been in her career development;

*'I had a fantastic mentor to work with... she'd been working as a technical manager for, god, about thirty odd years, she was like a school mistress... but when you got beneath that, she was actually the most lovely lady and*

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<sup>10</sup> The EOC 'Promote people not stereotypes' (2007b) aims to destroy the myths surrounding Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women in the workplace. As part of the investigation they have created a campaign 'Moving on up?' and a website that provides inspirational real-life stories of ethnic minority women who have succeeded in high profile professions, such as engineering, the law and emergency services (EOC 2007b).

*she knew her stuff inside out and I wouldn't have got to where I got to in that industry before having children if I hadn't have had this lady to sort of give me the confidence to do it'* (Erica, mid 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Traditionally men have developed informal support networks that help them progress in work and their professional careers. For many men the pub or the golf-course have become extensions of the workplace, where business opportunities and ways of getting ahead are discussed. There has been a growing interest in the significance of mentoring in different contexts in recent years and it has become increasingly adopted as a popular way of formalising support at work<sup>11</sup>. Asked about his views on mentoring Edward, a careers advisor, said;

*'Again I started oh gosh nine years ago now as a mentor for young people and umm I really can't shout about it enough. It's... it's the ideal... it is the way to go on because it does give you the chance to build those relationships and, at the same time, measure how much good you're doing with people and it does work'* (Edward, early 40s, manager, education sector, father, North Yorkshire).

Mentoring is often seen as a way of improving self-confidence and self-esteem and enhancing personal development. The potential

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<sup>11</sup> A mentor can act as a role model; is interested in the mentee and their personal development and/or goals; is a good listener; acts as a signpost to guide the mentee to solutions to realize their own potential; is an independent form of support and advice. Mentoring can be formal or informal but focuses on the idea of the individual identifying personal goals and development (Kram, 1985, Headlam-Wells et al., 2004).

benefits of mentoring have been emphasised by successful projects such as JIVE Partners<sup>12</sup> where they found that ‘mentoring can be a highly effective way of providing support, inspiration and motivation, and sharing of ideas and knowledge. It can also help develop confidence and useful transferable skills’ (JIVE Partners, 2005:2).

There has been a great deal of interest in recent years in the impact of women-to-women mentoring. It has been argued that women have specific and additional needs to men in mentoring relations. This is because many women value the psycho-social elements of mentoring as much, if not more, than the direct work/professional factors. It is recognised that there is value in mentoring for both mentee and mentor alike;

*‘...one of the reasons we wanted to have women-only mentoring was that the literature shows us that mentors get as much out of the process as mentees’ (Deborah, early 60s, manager, education sector, mother, Humberside).*

Speaking about an e-mentoring project for women in professional contexts, Deborah said that when they asked successful women to what they attributed their success, they got remarkably similar answers;

*‘They had all said, this is from a fairly small sample, but 36, um, that they had had a mentor of some sort’*

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<sup>12</sup> JIVE Partners comprises thirteen organisations including Industry Training Boards and the EOC working in partnership to increase numbers of females in science, engineering, construction and technology by bringing about a ‘cultural change’ (2005).

(Deborah, early 60s, manager, education sector, mother, Humberside).

Professional women, however, often struggle to find an appropriate mentor as there are fewer women in the higher ranks of commercial and public professions from where mentors would be traditionally drawn;

*‘The company I was working for had a mentoring scheme, but it was internal, not gender specific and there were hardly any women - so it was very unlikely you would be mentored by another woman’* (Miranda, late 20s, non-traditional sector, mother, East Yorkshire).

### **3.3 Women’s social roles: influences of caring and mothering on employment**

Despite women’s increased involvement in paid employment changes in the way family life is conducted have not necessarily kept pace with the changes in attitudes and expectations outside of the home. Motherhood<sup>13</sup> continues to impact on women’s lives far more than men’s, and women continue to bear the major responsibilities for childcare regardless of their other working commitments (Dench et al., 2002). As Ina noted;

*‘I don’t think for one minute that my partner has considered sacrificing anything in terms of fitting around family life, I think he’s taking it as a given that he can go*

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<sup>13</sup> Report 3 in this series focuses on the impacts of motherhood on women’s life choices (Holdsworth et al., 2007).

*on and just do what he needs to do, and I'll be the one who shuffle around and fit in with everything, and that's not disrespect that he has for me, it's all down to your paradigm, it's preconceived ideas you don't even realise that you've got, and he doesn't even realise he's acting on them'* (Ina, mid 20s, student, mother, Humberside).

This situation has a marked bearing on women's career opportunities and choices (Cabinet Office, 2000, Fagan, 2001). Bess, who is now retired, recalled how she had to resign as a teacher once she became pregnant in the early 1970s;

*'I had to give up work at six months pregnant because that's when you had to resign and there was no maternity leave in those days, it was end of career [...] and then I realised there was one law for women and one law for men'* (Bess, early 60s, retired, mother, North Yorkshire).

Whilst legislation is now in place to ensure that women who are pregnant cannot be discriminated against, the experiences of several women show that becoming pregnant can still adversely affect women's careers. Women cannot legally be forced to leave professions, but employers can make employees so uncomfortable at work that they can feel 'forced out'.

This research confirms previous findings that an important barrier to career advancement for women can be employers' perceptions that balancing responsibilities of work and home equates with women being less productive or less committed their employment (Walby, 2007). Erica had been extremely committed, working long hours and

long stretches abroad for her employers. However things changed dramatically once she announced that she was pregnant;

*'I told them I was having a baby and wo, off you were, 'Off you go'. Yeah. It was like overnight, they just... yeah I told them I was pregnant and it was all of a sudden... and then it was you weren't invited to meetings as often' (Erica, mid 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).*

Erica felt that her employers thought their clients would view her as less capable and committed than before, and even asked her to disguise being pregnant for several months. The decision to have a child is not one that is generally taken lightly, particularly in the context of a woman's career development. That Erica's employers actually asked her to hide her pregnancy, rather than congratulating her and wishing her well, served to problematise and cast a negative light over what for Erica was a positive decision.

The impact of having a child does not just last during pregnancy, it impacts on women's careers in numerous ways:

- Taking career breaks means that women lose out on earnings. Figures show that the average women working full-time could lose £300,000 over the life course, which increases if she has time-out or returns to low paid part-time work (EOC, 2007, Cabinet Office, 2000)
- Women who have taken career breaks often receive wages below men of the same age and women in similar circumstances who have not had breaks (Cabinet Office, 2000)

- Women often choose to do part-time work after having children. The pay gap for part-time workers can be as much as 38% less than equivalent male full-time earnings (ONS, 2007)

An additional penalty which women can face for having children is that taking time out to have a child can result in their employment position being devalued, as both Patti and Erica found when they returned to work after maternity leave. Patti returned after a 12 month period of paid and unpaid maternity leave to find that her job had been downgraded in her absence. The work she was expected to do, her working conditions, and the status of her job had changed for the worse. She feels disillusioned and alienated from her employment to the extent that she is currently looking for alternative posts;

*'My new contract stated I was now holding an administrator's post, rather than the academic-related post I had applied for back in [date]. My job had been evaluated [...] whilst I was on leave. I had not been consulted. [I] feel increasingly dissatisfied with my working life. After 9 years experience working in H.E., after a degree and a doctorate, I am doing a job I could have done when I left school'* (Patti, late 30s, educational sector, mother, West Yorkshire).

Erica similarly felt undervalued and downgraded upon her return to work;

*'I think it's like what so many women go through when they go back to work, you know, you go back you've had a*

*baby and all of a sudden, you're no use to them'* (Erica, mid 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Such experiences can clearly have serious consequences for the career progression and self-esteem of the women involved. However, from an employer's perspective, such behaviour, whether that is actual or perceived on the part of the employee, has direct and negative implications for their business. By downgrading a woman's job, employing her at a lower scale than she is capable of, businesses are not using their human capital effectively and this also serves to limit a company's economic potential.

### **3.4 Childcare as a barrier**

For some time the government has recognised the need to develop a coherent policy to provide childcare places. Since 1997 the *National Childcare Strategy* has created over 700,000 new childcare places, benefiting over 1.2 million children (Woman and Work Commission, 2007). The introduction of the Supporting Families (1997) intervention and the introduction of Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits were all part of a government strategy to listen to the needs of families and encourage working families. However, finding appropriate, flexible and affordable childcare remains one of the most quoted barriers to employment for women.

The potential barriers to using formal childcare are: cost; lack of information; lack of availability; worries about safety; worries about children settling in; worries about the quality of childcare; and mothers wanting to stay at home with their children (Clegg et al., 2007). Childcare problems were quoted as a barrier to employment

by many women in this study, affecting mothers in all socio-economic groups in different ways. Both Imogen and Vivienne felt that childcare costs were a major obstacle to being able find employment or take up training in order to change direction;

*'How can you have a lone parent at home, you know, some of the youngsters that could have three, or even a family where they would be at work, you know, umm that want to achieve [...] why does it always come to damn childcare? It always seems to come back to this'* (Imogen, mid 40s, part-time administrator, mother, North Yorkshire).

*'Erm, I think the biggest barrier that prevents people is having children. If you didn't have children, then there would be no stopping people'* (Vivienne, mid 40s, community sector worker, mother, Humberside).

Imogen, again, spoke about how she feels that government policies such as tax credits, which aim to encourage more lone parents into training and work, tend to lack flexibility and can fail to address particular financial needs;

*'if I only needed a six week block in the summer holidays I can get 80% of that, but I would get that proportion spread out say from whenever I applied - July through to March... so how many lone parents can then afford to pay out £50, £60 a week for that time... you're getting it back over a period of that year'* (Imogen, mid 40s, part-time administrator, mother, North Yorkshire).

### 3.5 How women successfully combine caring roles and employment

Although this data shows that it is the norm for women to take the major responsibility for childcare and to put their own careers second there are some women who do things differently. From our research the women who did not have children or had access to wrap-around childcare tended to be higher up the career ladder. Speaking about how she managed her Civil Service career and childcare Jackie said;

*'Erm, I suppose mine's a bit of a different scenario. There's not many of us around, in that, erm, when we, me and my husband chose to have children, erm, I was in full time employment and he wasn't in full-time employment. So the circumstances sort of predicted my husband stayed at home and brought the children up. And I, I stayed in work full-time... and then I took over the childcare on an evening'* (Jackie, early 40s, civil servant, mother, North Yorkshire).

Frances, who had progressed rapidly to becoming the head of an educational institution, decided that in order to progress as she wanted in her career she needed to have full-time childcare;

*'I took two maternity leaves with my boys... but I never actually had a break from employment. I kept my job open all the time [...] After having my second we employed a nanny because we felt it was better for the boys... she*

*arrived at 07.45 on a morning and basically she went when we were all home and ready [in the evening] and I felt that that was the best provision for my children if I couldn't be there' (Frances, mid 40s, manager, education sector, mother, North Yorkshire).*

Having wrap-around childcare meant that if, for example, their children were ill or had dental appointments this did not require them to arrange time off work, something that many women mentioned as a major issue for some employers.

### **3.6 Women returners to employment**

For many women the route back into employment after a career break to care for children can be daunting. Women can feel they have lost confidence and skills and are initially unsure how they will manage to juggle both caring and work responsibilities effectively. Women's Centres and organisations such as Sure Start play a vital role in supporting women at this crucial stage in their lives. Speaking about how being involved with a Women's Centre helped her career development, Wendy said;

*'[coming to the centre] has been tremendous, and has enabled me to develop in so many ways, and it would be hard to conceive of anything else that could match that, but I also acknowledge that I have to continue to develop myself professionally and personally' (Wendy, late 30s, manager, community sector, volunteer, Humberside).*

For some women a way back into employment can be through voluntary or part-time work. Christine was a teacher and now runs her own successful business. She described how, after a maternity break, she initially felt under-confident about returning to full-time employment and so began again with a combination of voluntary and part-time work;

*'It's much harder to... immediately start working so I did voluntary work and some part-time teaching and I mean then you've got the huge problem of child care, so effectively while I was doing the voluntary work and some of the teaching I worked for nothing [after paying for childcare]'* (Christine, late 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Christine's career pattern of voluntary work leading to part-time work followed that of many other women. She taught part-time in a homeless refugee project, trained as an advice worker and eventually took over the project;

*'It was a very positive experience, except that it was exhausting because like all women you just spend your entire life running from one place to another and being late for collecting your children from the school, because I had it so that I only worked certain days to only 3.15, other days where the childminder would collect the children and I'd collect them at 6'* (Christine, late 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

What has emerged from this research is the need for support for women to regain lost confidence after spending time at home looking after children<sup>14</sup>. As discussed above, there is value in mentoring for women at all stages of their work careers but for women returning to work after taking time out for childcare it is particularly beneficial;

*'I think the main thing is... if you have a barrier, a self-confidence barrier, particularly for women who are returning to work, after being at home, for sometimes only a few years, but involved in childcare, only seeing other adults at the school gate, family members and so on. It was amazing how these high-powered, graduate women, did feel very nervous about returning to work. Giving them guidance from someone who's been there, who's managed to combine um, being in a partnership or marriage, children and career, and getting the balance right, presumably, if they've been successful' (Deborah, early 60s, manager, education sector, mother, Humberside).*

### **3.7 Women in flexible employment**

Flexible working manifests itself in various ways: interim work; temporary contracts; flexi-time arrangements for arriving and leaving work; three or four-day-weeks; or job sharing. It is important to recognise that different forms of flexibility impact differently upon equality of opportunity for workers. Thus, regarding the advancement of women in the field of employment, flexible working plays an ambivalent role, acting both as a constraint and as an opportunity.

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<sup>14</sup> Report 1 of this series explores the links between gender and confidence in greater detail (Clisby et al. 2007).

On the one hand, flexible working opens up opportunities to help highly-skilled professional female employees to resume and advance their career while also accommodating their family and childcare 'responsibilities'. On the other hand, it may deteriorate their pay, status and job satisfaction. Examples here are taken from different areas of employment, traditional and non-traditional, and women who have chosen to become self-employed. Women choose flexible working for varied reasons but the most common reason is the need to accommodate their childcare responsibilities and maintain a good work life balance;

*'If one of the kids is sick, I work at home or I can make up the hours. In the Easter holidays I'll probably change my days around according to when I can get some childcare. I'll take them to the office with me. It's all very, very flexible'* (Polly, early 40s, part-time, community sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

However, working from home does have some disadvantages. These can include the permeability of boundaries between domestic and paid work, social isolation and a lack of visibility and recognition for the work you do, as Gill, a self employed home worker, explained;

*'There was no demarcation then really between work and, and bringing up a family. It all happened all alongside each other. One of my daughters once said to me, 'Mum, why don't you do any work? All my friends' mothers go to work and you don't do any'. Oh dear me'* (Gill, early 60s, self-employed, agricultural sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

### 3.8 Part-time working and Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap shows the largest level of difference for women in part-time employment (ONS 2007; Women and Work Commission, 2007). Heather's experience echoes this. She had not had a pay rise since she returned to work after her child was born. Her comments reveal the tensions which many women live with, balancing career aspirations with domestic aspirations;

*'So I've taken a drop and I've maintained that drop. And I've always thought that was a price worth paying to be part-time and to say no to lots of work which, in the past, I always had to say yes to'* (Heather, late 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Although many women choose part-time or flexible work, research has highlighted the lack of good part-time opportunities. Part-time workers are often given less status than full-time workers (Women and Work commission, 2007). Moreover, many women working in part-time positions have previously worked in positions which were more highly qualified, skilled and required greater experience, expertise and responsibility (Yeandle et al., 2006). Heather, for example felt devalued when she returned to work on a part-time basis after maternity leave;

*'A lot of my interesting projects went to colleagues which, at the time... it was really hard. Um, so yeah, I did feel like I got sort of much less interesting work'* (Heather, late 30s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Heather's challenging response to her treatment at work has been to turn to self employment, developing her own management consultancy business. Returning to part-time working can also affect how one's level of involvement in decision making and one's visibility in the company. Comparing her experiences of part-time and full-time working Fern said;

*'In a way it was a bit of a status thing but often I was missed out of meetings because of being part-time and they had meetings when I wasn't there - I remember feeling annoyed that decisions that involved my future were being made without my being there just because of being part-time'* (Fern, early 40s, manager, agricultural sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

An additional danger when returning to or taking up part-time work is that the nature of the work itself may not really be part-time. In some cases employers may see the introduction of part-time posts as an opportunity to cut costs by trying to fit a full-time job into part-time hours. However, it may be that upon reduction to part-time hours the workload is not reduced accordingly because no one else is employed to take up those additional roles. This can mean that working 'part-time' can be more stressful.

Alice felt slightly anxious and under-confident when she was due to return to her professional employment after maternity leave. Having been a full-time career woman, she had never experienced parenting before and was unsure how it would impact on her working life. Initially she returned to full-time work within four months of giving birth. She soon felt this was too much too soon and for the first few

years of her child's life tried different combinations of part-time working. She explained how appreciative she was of her employer in permitting her this level of flexibility, however she did not feel that her workload had really been reduced in line with her contract;

*'I've gone up and down, and up and down, trying to get some kind of work life balance and never achieving it, but they've gone with it, they've just said, okay. I mean, the difference is I suppose that, you know, you've still got the same job [laughs], you just try... you have to do it in a shorter time'* (Alice, late 30s, manager, education sector, mother, West Yorkshire).

Alice found it difficult to maintain her 'days off' as time dedicated to her mothering role, especially when her line manager would ring her at home to discuss work, or even ask her if she could go in to work;

*'It's hard trying to have a work conversation with a screaming baby jiggling up and down on your hip, and why the hell should I have to? I chose to reduce my salary so I could be with my child'* (Alice, late 30s, manager, education sector, mother, West Yorkshire).

Alice went on to explain how she found having days with her child during the week also meant that she spent a lot of that time doing domestic work - cleaning, washing, shopping, managing the household finances and so on - rather than really enjoying time with her baby. Moreover, she felt that this made this important work less visible to her partner because she had done it whilst he was at the office rather than during the weekends when he was also at home.

In this situation women are doubly disadvantaged as they also often retain the 'full-time' job of childcare and housework in addition to their paid roles. As Becky discovered when her husband briefly considered swapping their working roles, taking on full responsibility for their child was something he had not considered;

*'He decided on Tuesday night that I should work full-time and he should work part-time when he comes out [of the forces]... So I went, 'Oh right.' A bit shocked, but okay, fine [...] So I said to him, 'Right, okay, if I'm going to work full-time and you're working part-time, you need to take responsibility for [daughter]. You need to set hours so that you're there for her. Um you need to make sure that you can leave work at a moment's notice. You're going to need to do all the cleaning and ironing and everything in the house because you can't honestly expect me to work full-time and then do that'* (Becky, late 30s, part-time administrator, mother, East Yorkshire).

However, many participants clearly stated that flexible working was their preferred option despite some of the above-noted negative effects. Flexible working is increasingly being recommended as a choice for everyone, not just for those with caring responsibilities. As part of the Gender Equality Duty, introduced in 2007, the option of flexible working for all those with caring responsibilities, including non-mothers, fathers and carers came into force. However, there are implications for employers in being seen to be fair to all employees;

*'I'm trying to push for everyone to have access to flexible working... if someone has children they want time off in school holidays so who gets priority, often it will be someone with children... and yes this creates tension... I have seen a lot of animosity between people with and without children, and particularly between women'* (Justine, late 20s, part-time, manager, civil service, Humberside).

## **4.0 Women in non-traditional female employment**

This section explores women's experiences of the barriers to working in non-traditional female employment and investigates what helps to overcome them. In particular, we highlight the factors that have enabled them to make different choices to the norm.

### **4.1 Barriers for women in non-traditional jobs**

The equality movement in the 1970s and the subsequent sex discrimination legislation theoretically opened up equal opportunities in education and work for all. However, as many critics have argued, the legislative change did not mean a cultural change and subsequently for many, traditional roles both at home, education and in the world of work were maintained (Madden, 2000). Gender segregation remains a factor with the majority of workers making stereotypical choices (EOC, 2005) Males are still opting for apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing, motor vehicle maintenance and construction whilst females opt for hairdressing, health and social care, childcare and travel (Fuller et al., 2005).

## 4.2 Social and cultural attitudes

Social and cultural attitudes inform gendered expectations, particularly influences of family and friends (Dale et al., 2005), which can affect career choices, creating barriers to certain areas of employment. Here, Fay is talking about women attempting to train in the construction industry;

*‘The other thing that they felt was there were [...] barriers with society as a whole, so the way that they would be looked on and that it wasn’t right that they should be doing that, particularly families wouldn’t want them to do it’* (Fay, early 50s, manager, education sector, mother, South Yorkshire).

Many women do not feel that they are given the information or encouraged to train in non-traditional female employment but, if they do take this first step, it can be the first of many barriers. Feelings of isolation, experiences of sexism, having to prove themselves, lack of female colleagues and role models are just some of the barriers reported (Dale et al., 2005). Overcoming feelings of isolation and staying the course in an all male environment takes courage. Rachel, who is involved in promoting women into science and engineering, explained that one of the problems they face is that women begin courses, and even gain qualifications, but then ‘disappear along the way’;

*‘How do you keep that interest alive because if a young person’s made a decision to [...] say to go on to an apprenticeship or to go to college, particularly if they’re*

*going to FE, when they get to the classroom door and they're the only female standing [...] in the queue to sign up, those first few weeks can be really daunting'* (Rachel, early 40s, manager, education sector, Humberside).

Finding an employer to train a woman in what is perceived a 'man's job' can also prove difficult;

*'I'm seeing a lot of women that are now looking at what have been predominantly been male dominated professions, like how do I become a plumber... the courses are there for them. They can do their NVQ Level 2 in plumbing but it's work based. They need to find an employer that will take them on... but no employer will take them on'* (Kate, late 40s, manager, business sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

To persist in a male-dominated environment can require a great deal of confidence and determination;

*'Like on building sites [...] I mean it's a huge thing to have confidence onto for example a building site or something where everybody else is a man and you're a woman, I mean that's hard I'm sure for any of us who are quite confident people'* (Fay, early 50s, manager, education sector, mother, East Yorkshire).

Miranda trained in a non-traditional technical occupation and studied part-time for her degree. There was only one other woman on the

course, she felt isolated and that she was given very little help or encouragement;

*'The boys were ok they just didn't speak to me much, there was no animosity or anything but they kind of all stuck together so for the most part I studied alone'* (Miranda, late 20s, non-traditional sector, mother, East Yorkshire).

She also spoke about the need to be assertive to avoid being placed into stereotypical tasks;

*'You have got to be careful not to fall into a particular role as they do try and guide you in to that, I mean making the tea or doing the canteen run and that type of thing... [you] have to give yourself a reputation that you won't take any stick, as you get older it gets better as you have more work history to rely on'* (Miranda, late 20s, non-traditional sector, mother, East Yorkshire).

### **4.3 Gender discrimination and sexual objectification**

Women in both traditional and non-traditional employment sectors reported experiencing gender discrimination. However, women entering into male-dominated or 'masculine' arenas reported additional issues of male resistance to their 'encroachment' into male domains. In a male-dominated profession, Miranda was targeted by her male colleagues as the object of sexualised remarks;

*'There were sexist jokes made at work - I was quite young then so I think that is why I tolerated it - now I'm older I think I would nip it in the bud a bit quicker - it was around the time of the Spice Girls so they used to call me Mel Double D' (Miranda, late 20s, non-traditional sector, mother, East Yorkshire).*

Bess retrained in later life as a Priest. Speaking about the kind of prejudice she encountered when she was first ordained she said;

*'Some of them were very, very anti women [...] What I encountered was a kind of 'well we've never had it before, so the sky will fall down because something's changing'... so the idea, the fact that I was born a female was actually a barrier' (Bess, early 60s, retired, mother, North Yorkshire).*

Lynne's story of working in the forces reveals how, even when male colleagues are welcoming, assumptions can undermine women;

*'They looked at me as if to say, 'Who are you?' And when I said to them, 'I'm the DI' and they just looked at me as if to say, 'Right, okay' and then they said, 'Sorry, we've been referring to you as a male, sorry we didn't know it was a woman' and that was just typical... God, we haven't really changed that much, have we, from where we were' (Lynne, late 30s, manager, civil service, East Yorkshire).*

## 4.4 Impacts of the ‘glass ceiling’ on mentoring and career development

As previously discussed, both this and other research evidences the significance of positive role models and mentoring for women in supporting, for example, those returning to work or climbing the career ladder. However, the relative paucity of women in the upper echelons of many occupational sectors means that such role models can be in short supply, particularly in non-traditional occupations. Miranda worked in a technical capacity in a male-dominated area and felt that more female role models, or a more senior female mentor, might have helped to ease her into or adapt to the strong masculine culture she found herself in;

*‘There was no older women to look up to, no women further up... any women that were there were only 3-4 years older than me... I think as a woman I had to work harder than the men, if I asked for help with lifting something like a box, it could go against me, they would think ‘typical’” (Miranda, late 20s, non-traditional sector, mother, East Yorkshire).*

Increasing numbers of women are entering ‘masculinised’ occupations, but women still find it difficult to get to the top. We know, for example, politics continues to be perceived as a masculine arena and this is reflected in the fact that in the UK fewer than 20% of members of parliament are female (Fawcett Society, 2007). In the business sector, only 10% of directors of leading FTSE 100 companies are female (EOC 2006). In the police force, there are now significant

numbers of women police officers at more junior levels. However, at the higher ranks the glass ceiling remains with only 10.2% of senior police officers being women (Home Office, 2005). Lynne, a senior manager in the forces herself, noted;

*‘And the other thing that really strikes me that’s gender-related, is some of our senior management team, most of our senior management team are men, there’s not many women, senior management team is chief inspector and above that... and when I worked at [...] the whole of the senior management team is male [...] you can feel the testosterone when you walk into the room’* (Lynne, late 30s, manager, civil service, East Yorkshire).

#### **4.5 Support and active encouragement**

The barriers that women in this project experienced reflect research findings which have shown repeatedly that gender equality is not yet a reality in the UK (EOC, 2007). It is clear that women need support and active encouragement from individuals to pursue careers in non-traditional skills areas (EOC 2005), especially in the early stages;

*‘Quite often when you ask why women have gone into careers there’s been somebody significant, they’ve either had a parent who’s been in that area, they’d had a really good physics teacher [...] Very rarely do they just get there by accident. There’s something, something that’s actually, actually triggered it off’* (Rachel, early 40s, manager, education sector, Humberside).

Having at least one key individual who believed in them could make the difference for women in their choices and decision-making;

*'When I was at secondary school I got positive reinforcement that I was able, no it even started at junior school, the teachers tell you that you're able to do something then you start to feel that you can and I think that's a very important thing'* (Christine, late 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Research shows that what women need is to be actively encouraged (Farren, 2006), and the data from this project confirms this;

*'Men seem to think, 'Oh well, I'll be okay and I'll learn the rest that I don't know when I get there' sort of thing, whereas women feel as though they've got to have 100% of the skills to go for it in the first place'* (Lynne, late 30s, manager, civil service, East Yorkshire).

Lynne had conducted research within her regional sector and found there are problems in getting more women to go for promotion in the police force despite the fact that when they do, they out perform men;

*'Hardly any women go for promotion in comparison with men. It was this year [...] that seven women and 57 men went for promotion from constable to sergeant... so although we've increased women at constable level, we haven't increased... the percentages aren't equal really. However, when they do go for promotion assessments,*

*100% of the women passed this year and only 54% of the men' (Lynne, late 30s, manager, civil service, East Yorkshire).*

Figures such as these could be interpreted to mean that women are less likely to want promotion and are satisfied to remain in positions of less authority and responsibility, but it would seem that women's lack of self belief is a bigger factor;

*'But about equally 80% of men and women said that they wanted promotion. But when you ask them the question, do they think they've got the skills to be promoted, a lot more men think that they've got the skills than women' (Lynne, late 30s, manager, civil service, East Yorkshire).*

#### **4.6 The importance of a positive mental attitude**

In order to succeed in the present climate women need to be particularly resilient and determined (Dale et al., 2005). It seems from our research too that motivation and determination are key to success. Many of the women who had climbed up their career ladder, managed to succeed in male-dominated sectors, or had started their own businesses talked about the importance of their self-belief and motivation;

*'I was always very strong willed [...] it also means that you are willing to go that bit further... and from my family as well [their attitude was] 'you should do as much as you can'' (Christine, late 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).*

Gill, who runs her own farming business, said that she had always felt in control of her own destiny she had always been ambitious and known what she wanted;

*'The gender thing? I don't know because I understand that some women really haven't had any power, but it's not happened to me. I've always... I've always done what I wanted [...] I've always been ambitious, I suppose, for what I wanted'* (Gill, early 60s, self-employed, agricultural sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

Norma trained in engineering and now manages her own team in a male-dominated arena. Asked what attributes she has that have contributed most to her success, she said;

*'Definitely ambition, I have bags of energy, drive and positive mental attitude, I think that's it, not even the ambition so much, I mean I knew I wanted to be successful and I know I'm good at things, and it's probably quite an arrogant attitude but always been, probably every job I've done, looked at the person above me and thought I can do yours standing on my head and then you just set out to prove you can actually do it or do it better'* (Norma, mid 30s, private sector manager, engineer, Humberside).

## 5.0 Self-employed business women

Encouraging women entrepreneurs is something that the government has realised could have huge economic value to the UK economy (Harding et al., 2005). However, female entrepreneurship in the UK is well below that of the rest of the international community, being ranked 26th out of a possible 29 in 2001 (ibid., 2005). Self-employment is an area of work that has traditionally been predominantly male. In 2005, 18% of male workers were self-employed compared with 7% of women (Walby, 2006). Entrepreneurship among women in rural communities is much higher than in urban communities (Harding et al., 2005) and this is linked to the lower availability of employment options generally in rural areas.

This British Chamber of Commerce report found that the main reasons cited by women for lower female entrepreneurship were:

- lack of belief in their own capabilities
- limited role models
- poor support
- lack of affordable childcare and
- difficulties in accessing finance

### 5.1 Choosing to become self-employed

The self-employed women who participated in this study cover a wide range of trades such as florist, painter and decorator, farmer, joiner, stained glass maker, personal and professional development coach, and telecommunications. The reasons why women had chosen to

become self-employed were varied. However the women in this study stated that making the choice to become self-employed had improved the quality of their lives, bringing them job satisfaction, empowering them to take control of their lives, providing flexibility of working to adapt to childcare needs and, for those living in rural areas, overcoming limited employment options locally. Rosalind made the change from teaching to joinery, painting and decorating after twenty years partly because the job had changed so much, but also for personal and health issues and the need to have control over her own life;

*'To some extent I've more jurisdiction over my own life. You know, as opposed to the institution of being in a... in a school environment... the buck stops with me then... And so I enjoy the freedom of the autonomy'* (Rosalind, early 50s, self-employed, non traditional sector, North Yorkshire).

Selina became self-employed to have more control over her life and achieve a better work/life balance enabling her to care for her son during the school holidays;

*'Initially, I blocked off all the holidays, I always had six weeks in the summer, and I always had the school holidays. And I had control'* (Selina, late 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Olive, as an artist, brought her experiences of being a woman into her work. She used feminist art to increase her self-esteem and challenge the norm;

*'I was shy and had low self esteem it was umm quite liberating [painting] and especially when I made the effort or the courage, plucked up the courage to use myself as a model... and it was very liberating, a big step for me and umm... and that well that's really helped my confidence'* (Olive, early 40s, self-employed, North Yorkshire).

Many self employed women talked about the importance of this as a lifestyle choice;

*'Um, but we're doing what we enjoy doing... I don't really class it as work'* (Olive, early 40s, self-employed, North Yorkshire).

*'It's lifestyle that's important. Sometimes we'd like a lot more money but we've just never had it so we've lived with what we've got'* (Gill, early 60s, self-employed, agricultural sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

Having to adapt or cope with a major life change was also stated as a reason for taking the step to becoming self-employed. Rosalind's experience of trying to break into work on building sites was not positive and was one of the reasons why she chose to become self-employed;

*'But I might as well say bye bye to working as part of a gang on site. They do not like having women, they feel like they've got to change their whole language structure and a couple of men have confided in me and, [the reason being] because they're expected to be so much better at doing*

*things. And so it puts more pressure on'* (Rosalind, early 50s, self-employed, non-traditional sector, North Yorkshire).

Also speaking about the difficulties of breaking into the closed shop network which tradesmen build up;

*'They were advertising in the Evening News and the Trader. They were wanting joiners and I rang three times and left details and when I'd heard nothing back... But I knew for a fact they were still after joiners because one of the other lads who was a joiner was working there and they were short... And now when I rang back and spoke to the foreman he told me oh no we've got all joiners we need love'* (Rosalind, early 50s, self-employed, non-traditional sector, North Yorkshire).

Divorce was the catalyst for Rowan, who now runs a successful telecommunications business;

*'I had a requirement to generate income quickly, because I did not want to put myself through a second divorce where I had to as I said, lose dignity, time, money and more emotional trauma [...] So I had the need. I had the opportunity because somebody had brought to my attention that since the telecoms industry had been deregulated there was an opportunity to go out there and sell alternative services to BT, and I had the motivation. I think those are the three things that you need - need,*

*opportunity and motivation'* (Rowan, mid 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

Rowan had accumulated a great deal of working capital through a long career as a linguist and a variety of management positions which developed her confidence. She started her business equipped only with a strong sense of self-belief, a file and a phone;

*'No training at all, no business plan, no, no going to see a bank, no going to, to, err, no research, nothing. Just a... just never really doubted that I could do it, just sat down one day with a file and phone and did it'* (Rowan, mid 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).

## **5.2 Getting ahead in a man's world**

A common theme amongst the self-employed women in this research was that they had developed a strong sense of self through previous careers, often in completely different areas. They had the energy, drive and confidence in their abilities to believe that they could make a success of their chosen enterprise. Some of those interviewed felt they had not been hindered by the attitudes of those around them and in some cases they believed that being a woman gave them certain occupational advantages, something born out by earlier research (Dale et al., 2005).

Illustrating the fluidity of women's working lives, Amelia started her working life as a teacher, married a farmer and helped him run the

farm and eventually re-trained as a stained glass designer and maker. Speaking about working in a traditionally male-dominated arena;

*'Err, I don't honestly think it's been an issue at all really. I don't think it's been a hindrance. I'm trying to think in what way it would be. Um, I think the novelty part of it has probably been a help to me in some ways [...] I think because I give lots of talks after dinner sort of thing, so people were always asking me to do it and I think it's because I was what they thought was a woman in a man's sort of job' (Amelia, late 50s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).*

Selina has also had a varied career working first in administration, followed by management in catering, and now is a self employed painter and decorator. She feels she has gained the respect of male colleagues by proving her worth through the quality of her work;

*'I thought the men would give me a hard time. Not a bit of it. They were fabulous, all of them, I've never come across anyone that was anything less than helpful. And in the trade paint places, and the decorators that I've worked with. All men, all great, and all the trades, you know with joiners and plumbers. And I think, I don't know this, but uh, somewhere in me I think they've seen how hard I worked, and the job that I've turned out helped me gained their respect' (Selina, late 40s, self-employed, mother, North Yorkshire).*

Gill has been a farmer all her life and now has achieved her dream of running an organic farm. Asked about whether she thought her gender had been a barrier she said that she felt she had been more fortunate than her husband who had to work in jobs that he did not particularly want to do to pay the family's bills;

*'Um, but I did what I wanted. I grew things. I had the children... but they could... they could be with me... they could help to hoe, they can sit and do whatever. Um, just because you're looking after children doesn't mean to say that you can't do what you want to do, if you're in your own surroundings'* (Gill, early 60s, self-employed, agricultural sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

Rosalind is a self-employed painter and joiner and feels that being a woman can have a positive impact on relations with customers;

*'Some customers can see a woman as an advantage... And I know it's a very sweeping statement to make but there's been a tendency with some of the men I've used to consider somebody's home a building site as opposed to them working in somebody's home'* (Rosalind, early 50s, self-employed, non-traditional sector, North Yorkshire).

## 6.0 The meaning of work: Change over the life course

Analysing the women's stories in this study clearly illustrates the fluidity of women's working lives. Women adapt and make changes throughout the life course as their priorities and circumstances change. Work can have many meanings. It can be the means to financial independence or to contribute to a pooled family income. It can be the major thing that defines a person or simply one part of many factors that make up an identity.

### 6.1 Social aspects of work

For many women work can be social and seen as an escape from the confines of home. When asked what she considered the most important aspect of her work Tessa stated;

*'[It is] the social... the social aspect... Yes, coming out and working with other people you know, like we have a lot of involvement in... like with families and with other agencies and stuff and I just love everybody that I work with. I just get on really well with everybody and stuff, so yes. Probably that. [Laughs] Yes, I really, you know, I know I work here but I really do think they are like a bit of a lifeline to me'* (Tessa, late 30s, part-time, clerical, mother, North Yorkshire).

Support from colleagues was another important factor in coming to work for Tessa. Speaking about her relationship with an older colleague she said;

*'She's a bit older... I mean I work with a few people that are a bit older than me and they've got like children my age, you know and I sort of like ask their advice as well, you know, because they're a bit older and they have more, because I don't... like I say I don't have my mum on tap... I mean I have got a really good support network here as well. You know, like my manager's fantastic. Any problems I can go and sit and talk to her, you know, and she does listen and if she can help she will, you know and she offers me as advice... you know, you know she... you know she's fantastic so... you know I think it helps the people that you work with if you've got people that you can sort of say look I'm having a really bad day'* (Tessa, late 30s, part-time, clerical, mother, North Yorkshire).

## **6.2 Making a difference**

Despite caring work being given less value and status in society than other types of employment, many women appear to value jobs that involve the 'softer skills' a 'social conscience' or jobs that 'make a difference'. Words like being 'passionate' about their work were often used. Hazel, who manages a Sure Start venue, spoke about how she felt about the work that she does;

*'I love my job, I'm passionate about my job. I don't think if you, I think that you need to be passionate about this*

*way of working to make it succeed'* (Hazel, early 40s, manager, community sector, mother, North Yorkshire).

Imogen, who also works for a Sure Start centre, spoke about her work giving her a sense of achievement and pride in knowing that she helps others;

*'So I'm proud of what I've achieved, absolutely proud of where I am today and knowing as well that I think that through that, you know, I can help others... others to reach their goals I think and, you know, aspire... sort of thing'* (Imogen, mid 40s, part-time administrator, mother, North Yorkshire).

Jackie, who is a lone parent advisor, spoke about how she felt that the job that she does makes a difference in peoples' lives and this is what she values most in her work;

*'Just to see somebody move on through the cycle of change and, and you know become themselves again... [...] We all have the same ethos, really about, you know, life and our jobs and we all care passionately about our customers'* (Jackie, early 40s, civil servant, mother, North Yorkshire).

### **6.3 Providing an identity**

Engaging in paid employment and developing a career can be important for people's mental well-being. The workplace and working role can provide people with an identity, a sense of belonging and

social status. For Danielle, her work has built her confidence and self-esteem;

*'The safety, stability, the fact that I'm known. Finally I think I've achieved respect through all the places that I've worked and that's taken a lot of years to get there and do that [...] I just feel part of it and I'm comfortable. I can come in here on my day off and be happy, so yes. I do enjoy my work yes. I'm happier here than anywhere'* (Danielle, early 40s, manager, catering sector, North Yorkshire).

Work can also be beneficial to women's mental well-being through broadening their social world beyond the domestic sphere and reducing isolation. In the words of one participant;

*'I'm a lot better when I'm at work. You know, I'm, I cope with things better than when I'm at home because I've got something else to think about. I'm not... I don't dwell on things when I'm working [laughs] so yes it keeps me sane'* (Tessa, late 30s, part-time, clerical, mother, North Yorkshire).

Women's working lives are diverse and the meaning of work for women is complex: no two stories are exactly the same. However, what our research does reveal is the importance of work for reasons other than, or in addition to, monetary gain. Women valued work for a whole host of reasons, key amongst these were: providing an identity; status; and social networks; and increasing self-esteem.

## **6.4 What constitutes success?**

What constitutes success in terms of work may change and, for many women, is more than just a pay cheque. For many women in this study what they get out of work cannot be measured purely in terms of monetary reward or career progression. Many of the jobs traditionally classed as female are not well paid, high status or valued by society. The 'value' of traditional 'women's work' is measured against labour market norms that are implicitly male. This situation means that the types of skills required in 'women's work' or displayed by women, are barely visible in a labour market constructed on skills based on male value systems (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007). This situation needs to change if women are to gain parity with men.

## **7.0 Conclusions: what women need to get ahead**

The barriers to employment women in this study identified are not surprising or new. They are factors that have been well established in previous research (EOC, 2007, Clegg et al., 2007, Moore et al., 2005, Dench et al., 2002, Madden, 2000, Farren, 2006). However, what is perhaps surprising is how firmly embedded in society the foundations of these barriers are. The women who participated in this study identified the following barriers to their progression in employment:

- Socially formed gendered expectations producing gender stereotypes

- Gender segregation in education
- Lack of gender neutral, informed careers advice thus limiting choices
- Limited relevant education or training to take up opportunities
- Gender segregation, discrimination and sexual objectification in the work place
- The double or triple burden: women still retaining the majority of responsibility for caring roles and domestic labour in households in addition to their paid work
- Despite significant improvement in recent years, women still felt they lacked flexible, affordable and accessible childcare
- Motherhood/pregnancy career breaks stalling careers
- Part-time work not given the same socio-economic status and value as full-time work
- Lack of inspirational role models and women in positions of authority
- Lack of confidence and belief in their skills acting as a barrier to seeking promotion and climbing the career ladder
- Lack of support systems, including mentoring and networking opportunities

## **8.0 Recommendations**

### **8.1 Promote ‘thinking outside the gender box’**

The stories provided by the women in this research clearly show that their experiences of education and careers advice did not provide them with the necessary tools to take up a full range of career opportunities. Although girls are outperforming boys in schools,

translating this into equality of opportunity remains some way off. Although women are making progress in narrowing the gaps in employment they are still more likely to be in the lowest level occupations and less likely to be represented at the highest levels. If the narrowing of the gap remained at the present 1% this would take another 50 years before there is equality (Walby, 2007).

What is needed is an education policy that mainstreams gender and aims to widen women and girls' horizons. This requires thinking that pushes the boundaries, encouraging girls to 'think outside the gender box'. Girls need informed careers advice and positive encouragement to explore what are perceived of as 'non-traditional' areas of employment, education and training. Mainstreaming gender includes encouraging discussions of the impact of gender socialisation and gendered hierarchies in families, schools, popular culture and the wider community as an important first step. Providing role models for girls outside the gender box can help to reduce peer pressure to conform. Taking gender equality seriously also means that 'women's work' is given equal value to traditionally 'male' occupations in terms of both social status and financial remuneration.

## **8.2 Improve the quality of careers education in schools**

Careers advice emerged as an area that many women felt had impacted negatively on their educational and occupational decisions for a variety of reasons. These ranged from the perception of the advice offered as limited or even absent, to it being influenced by

stereotyping, particularly on the basis of class and gender. It could be improved by:

- Mainstreaming gender giving better training for teachers and careers advisors
- Improving links with employers and increasing the range of work experience opportunities
- Promoting equal opportunities awareness and events in schools

Careers advisors need not only to understand gender issues and how these play out in terms of segregation in education and work, but they should also have the commitment to promote equality of opportunity and to overcome gender stereotyping that can limit people's aspirations and choices.

### **8.3 Provide positive role models for girls and women**

Seeing women who are working in non-traditional jobs and in aspirational positions helps to dispel the myths that act to limit women's aspirations. Creating a 'positive mental attitude', building up a 'can do' attitude and self-belief is vital if women are to take up the challenge and step outside existing gender boundaries.

### **8.4 Encourage equality in family and home life**

- Encourage wider debates around power relations in the home

- Continue to raise awareness of the prevalence and impacts of domestic violence, particularly on women and children's life and career trajectories
- Work to close the chores gap
- Encourage employers to adopt more genuinely flexible working to help both women and men achieve a better work life balance
- Take people's social and familial roles as carers and parents seriously. Place a high value on these roles rather than seeing them as 'natural', unskilled and less important than occupational roles
- Continue to work to provide more affordable, flexible, accessible childcare
- Work towards giving equal importance to women's careers

## **8.5 Equality in the work place**

What is needed to help promote equality in the work place is:

- To increase support and maintain stability of funding to first step interventions such as Women's Centres, Sure Start and other organisations that support women returners to work or education. They play a vital role in increasing confidence and basic skills as a first step back into employment
- Make wider use of mentoring services to encourage women to begin to value themselves more and raise aspirations. Personal development, future planning, direction and setting goals are central to a mentoring partnership and something that many women wanted. Women from black and minority ethnic (BME)

backgrounds may have particular cultural needs which need to be taken into consideration in organisations. This includes addressing the relative paucity of BME women in top levels of occupational hierarchies who could then act as mentors

- More proactive support programmes to encourage women to go for promotion need to be put in place
- Institutional and organisational campaigns to address gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace
- Campaigns to raise awareness and bring equality into the value of different areas of work i.e. in the status of caring work

## 8.6 Better work life balance

Juggling home life and caring roles with work is a difficult task. Many women choose to become mothers and have very positive experiences of being so. However, social pressures on women to be ‘good enough mothers’ is enormous<sup>15</sup>. Women are also expected to be ‘good enough citizens’ which requires them to be economically active. It is highly problematic that ‘citizen’ and ‘mother’ are constructed as separate categories, and with differing statuses, suggesting that women who are ‘just mothers’ are not equally ‘citizens’. This is especially ironic given that mothers produce the citizens. However, this tends to remain the experience of many women and, as such, getting the balance right between competing aspects of their identities is almost impossible. Many women end up feeling that they are not ‘good enough’ at either.

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<sup>15</sup> See Report 3 of this series which focuses on the impacts of mothering on women’s choices (Holdsworth et al., 2007).

Part-time work then appears to be the best option in order to try and gain a good work life balance, but, as discussed above, this can seriously disadvantage women's position relative to men in the labour market. Within this, the gender chores gap needs to be addressed, disentangling responsibility for caring and domestic work from gender (EOC, 2007). The issues of gender segregation, the gender pay gap, and sexism and discrimination in the work place require both education and employment policies, preferably using 'joined up thinking', to remove the enduring barriers that women experience throughout their working lives. However, as we know after over thirty years since the Equal Pay Act, it takes more than policies to create cultural transformations, it takes genuine will and action at all levels.

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