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# **WOMEN AND THE LABOUR MARKET: Two Decades of Change and Continuity**

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**WOMEN IN THE  
LABOUR MARKET:  
Two Decades Of  
Change And Continuity**

Gill Court

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A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-85184-221-7

Printed in Great Britain by Microgen UK Ltd

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# 1. Introduction

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This report outlines the main trends and issues in women's employment over the past two decades. The period has been one of particularly rapid change for women, both in terms of their level of participation in paid work and the quality of the labour market options available to them. In other respects, however, a good deal of continuity is evident. Occupational segregation has proved remarkably resilient, which is one of the reasons why, on average, women's earnings are still less than 80 per cent of those for men. In sum, the changed environment has by no means meant an end to substantial differences between women's and men's employment opportunities.

The report is divided into five main sections each of which deals with a particular aspect of women's experience of the labour market. It includes discussions of:

- changes in economic activity
- the pattern of women's employment
- the industries and occupations in which women work
- pay
- education and training issues.

The trends in women's employment discussed in this report have taken place within marked changes in the legislative environment. The rest of this chapter provides a context for the remainder of the report by summarising key changes in the legal and socio-economic environment that have influenced the situation of women in the labour market.

## 1.1 A changing legal context

The current legislative environment regarding women in the labour market is far removed from that which sanctioned an employer's right to require women to resign their post on marriage, a practice which persisted into the 1960s. In this section, we highlight three main legal landmarks and summarise the way in which they changed the legislative framework within which women's experience of the labour market has developed.



### **1.1.1 The Equal Pay Act**

The Equal Pay act was passed in 1970 and came into force in 1975. It provides for equal pay for men and women working for the same or an associated employer in the same or equivalent work. In order to comply with Article 119 of the EC Treaty (of Rome), the Act was amended in 1983 to provide for claims to equal pay for work of equal value from 1984 onwards (Employment Department Group, 1994b). This has had the effect of allowing a wider range of claims, including comparisons between totally dissimilar jobs, in different pay structures and across different collective bargaining groups (Suter, 1990; Gill and Ungerson, 1984).

Most recently, the Equal Pay Act has been used to ensure equality between women and men in the area of occupational pensions and survivors' benefits. These are now deemed 'pay' for the purposes of the Treaty of Rome, and since May 1990 the law requires women's and men's contributions to, and benefits received from, occupational pensions to be equal.

### **1.1.2 The Sex Discrimination Act**

The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 made discrimination on the basis of sex in employment, training, education, and other areas illegal. It also made discrimination on the basis of marital status illegal. Under the Act, individuals have redress to civil courts and industrial tribunals in the event of unlawful discrimination (Employment Department Group, 1994b). The 1975 Act also provided for the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission to monitor enforcement.

The Sex Discrimination Act allowed for a number of exceptions which have since been removed in two major revisions, one in 1986 and the second in 1989. In 1986 the impact of the UK's membership of the European Community became evident and the 1975 Act was revised to bring the UK legal context more into line with European Community law. The revisions extended the original Act to cover all employers, including those with five or fewer employees, and private households. The 1986 changes also made it unlawful to compel a woman to retire at a different age than a comparable male employee.

In 1989 further revisions were made under the Employment Act of 1989. This reduced the number of exceptions allowed in the Sex Discrimination Act, in particular those relating to women's hours of work. For example, the 1975 Act permitted employers to restrict women's hours of employment. Most of these restrictions were lifted by the 1989 Act (Employment Department Group, 1984b; Suter, 1990).

Restrictions on the amount of compensation for discrimination, previously set at a maximum of £11,000, recently have been ruled

as contrary to EC law. This has made successful claims potentially very expensive to employers (Clarke, 1994).

The UK Sex Discrimination legislation prohibits both *direct* and *indirect* discrimination. Indirect discrimination occurs when employers, or other persons, set requirements or conditions which apply equally to men and women but which members of one sex will be less likely to be able to comply with than others. Examples include setting a minimum height requirement or requiring certain educational qualifications. Where the practice has a business-related purpose, however, sex discrimination legislation allows it to continue.

Many recent legal cases claiming sex discrimination have been made on the grounds of indirect discrimination and this concept is increasingly recognised as a powerful tool for change. Arguments around indirect discrimination have been of particular importance, for example, in improving the employment rights of part time workers, the majority of whom are women.

### **1.1.3 Maternity rights**

The third main area of the legislative environment which has influenced women's participation in, and experience of, the labour market is that of maternity rights. The effect of progressive changes in the rights of pregnant workers has been to make it easier for women to continue working during and after pregnancy. The most recent legislation (the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 [TURER]), makes dismissal of a woman because she is pregnant, or for reasons connected with pregnancy, unfair. Women are also guaranteed the right to return to work after pregnancy. The same legislation enhances existing maternity rights by ensuring that all pregnant employees, regardless of length of service or hours of work will have the right to:

- 14 weeks statutory maternity leave during which all their non-wage contractual benefits must be continued
- be offered any suitable alternative work before being suspended due to a maternity-related health and safety restriction, and to receive full pay while on suspension if there is no such work available.

Additional entitlements are available for women with two years' continuous full time service or five years' continuous service working between eight and 16 hours a week (Employment Department Group, 1994b; Clarke, 1994).

The existence of an appropriate legal framework is, however, only part of the story. The length and expense of many sex discrimination and equal pay claims make it difficult for individuals to bring a claim without the backing of their union or the Equal Opportunities Commission. In addition, current

legislation is limited in its ability to deal with the more subtle forms of discrimination against women, such as those generated by a culturally hostile working environment where women are either collectively or individually belittled and undermined, denied access to informal networks *etc.* As highlighted later in the report, the cumulative impact of these pressures can have a substantial effect on women's ability to compete effectively with their male counterparts.

#### 1.1.4 The impetus for legislative change

A key feature of changes in UK legislation affecting women in the labour market is that the impetus for change has come from Europe (Earnshaw, 1994). Relevant European Community legislation includes Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome and a series of Council Directives. The European Court of Justice has consistently upheld the applicability of this legislation to member states. Individuals in the UK may bring legal claims on the basis of Article 119 where this gives them greater rights than those accorded by domestic laws. In addition, courts and tribunals are obliged to interpret ambiguous national legislation in such a way that it conforms to, rather than conflicts with, Council Directives (Earnshaw, 1994).

## 1.2 The UK industrial structure: labour demand factors

A second key influence on women's employment has been the shift in the UK economy from one based primarily on manufacturing and other non-tertiary activities, to the current dominance of the service sector. In 1954, service sector organisations accounted for less than half of UK employment.<sup>1</sup> By 1993, this proportion had risen to 72 per cent (Lindley and Wilson, 1994, Table 2.4).

In the absence of a similarly marked change in occupational and industrial sex segregation, this has meant that the expanding sectors of the economy have been those in which women are concentrated. That is, even if the pattern of employment by gender and by industry and occupation had remained unchanged over the last forty years, the shift in industrial structure would have led to increased demand for women employees. In addition, however, there is evidence to suggest that women's share of employment increased in these growing areas of the economy, due, in part, to the substitution of female employees for male employees in some services. To some extent, however, this substitution may be explained by the impact of the Sex Discrimination Act, which reduced the scope for pre-entry discrimination against women (Mallier and Rosser, 1987, p.485).

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<sup>1</sup> Non-marketed services, business and miscellaneous services, distribution, transport *etc.*

### 1.3 Male wages and household incomes: labour supply factors

A third trend which is likely to have influenced women's employment patterns relates to the effect of changes in male earnings. Since the mid-1970s, the earnings of the lowest paid men have declined slightly in real terms. In addition, the gap between the earnings of low paid men and those on median wages has increased: by 1992 the bottom ten per cent were earning only 56 per cent of median earnings, down from almost 70 per cent in 1976 (Gosling, Machin and Meghir, 1994). This relative (and absolute) decline in the earnings of the lowest paid men suggests that in order to maintain their standard of living, households containing individuals in this group will have had to seek other sources of income, including that from women's employment. Indeed, the biggest changes in women's labour force participation since the late 1970s have occurred among women with low earning partners. As a result, women's contribution to family incomes has risen (Harkness, Machin, Waldfogel, 1994).

## 2. Economic Activity

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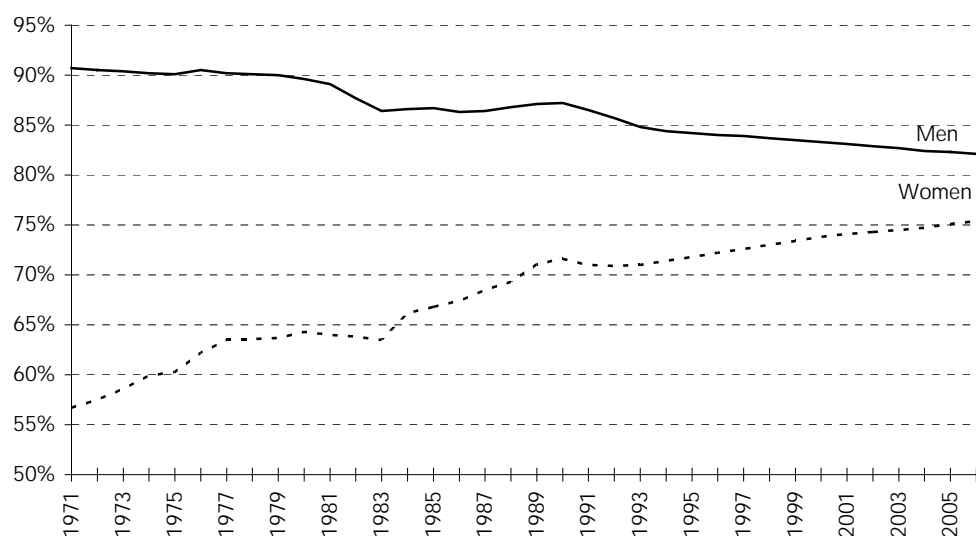
This chapter charts the rapid rise in women's economic activity rates in the 1970s and 1980s. It first outlines overall trends and then goes on to summarise more recent changes for specific groups of women including:

- women with dependent children
- lone parents
- ethnic minority women.

### 2.1 Economic activity by gender 1971 to 2006

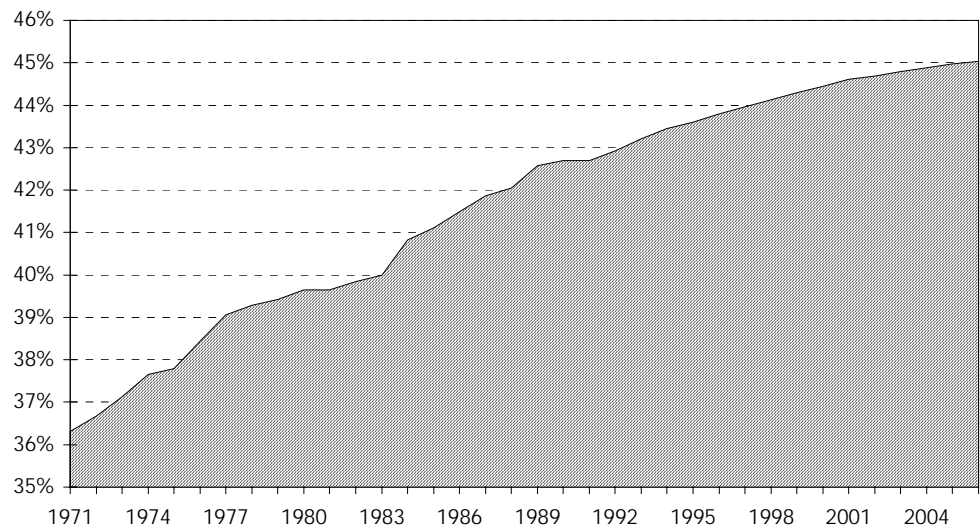
Over the past twenty years the proportion of adult women who are economically active has risen, while that for men has declined (Figure 2.1). In 1971, 57 per cent of women aged 16 to 59 were in paid work, a proportion which had increased to 71 per cent by 1994. Equivalent figures for men (aged 16 to 64) show a decline from 91 per cent to 84 per cent. These trends are expected to continue into the next century and by 2006 the economic activity rate for women is projected to have reached 75 per cent.

**Figure 2.1: Economic activity rates by gender: Great Britain 1971 to 2006 (per cent of working age in the civilian labour force — data for 1994 on are projected)**



Source: *Employment Gazette*, April 1994

**Figure 2.2: Women as a per cent of the total labour force of working age: Great Britain 1971 to 2006 (data for 1994 on are projected)**

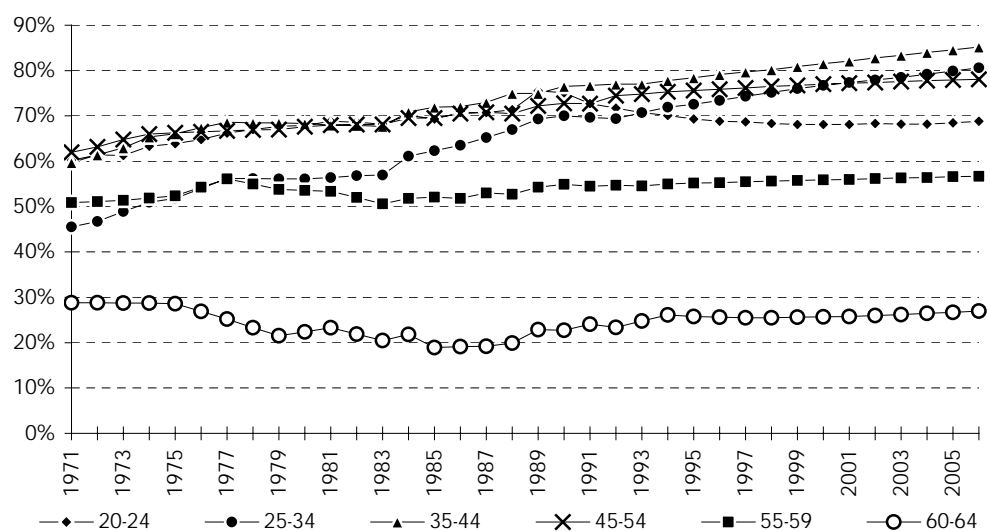


Source: *Employment Gazette*, April 1994

These changes mean that the number of women in the workforce has increased steadily over the past two decades, from about nine to 12 million between 1971 and 1994 (Ellison, 1994). Their share of total employment has also risen (Figure 2.2). In 1994, 44 per cent of all workers were women, up from 37 per cent in 1971.

The overall increase in economic activity by women masks considerable variation in the pattern by age (Figure 2.3). Younger women (aged 16 to 19) in particular are now less likely to be working than was the case in the early 1970s. This is mainly due to changing staying-on rates in school and a similar trend is evident among young men. The main increases in economic

**Figure 2.3: Women's economic activity rates by age group: Great Britain 1971 to 2006 (data for 1994 on are projected)**



Source: Ellison, 1994

activity have occurred in the 20 to 54 age range. Among women aged 25 to 34, for example, labour force participation grew from 46 per cent in 1971 to 72 per cent in 1994.

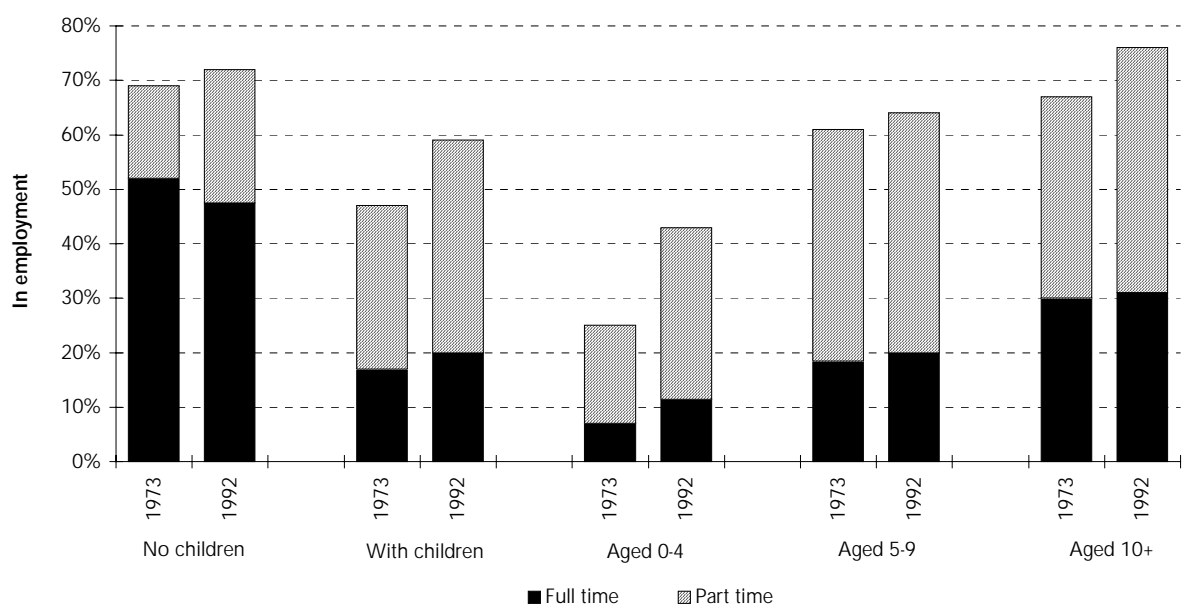
## 2.2 Working mothers

The changes outlined above have been driven by a transformation in the working patterns of women with children. In the early 1970s, there was a very marked difference between women with children and other women, in terms of their labour market behaviour. In 1973, for example, 47 per cent of women with children worked, compared to 69 per cent of women with no children (a difference of 22 percentage points). This gap has narrowed over the past twenty years and 59 per cent of women with children are in work alongside 72 per cent of women with no children (a difference of 13 percentage points) (Figure 2.4).

A recent study identified two main sources of this increase in employment by women with children:

- an increase in the rate at which mothers have been returning to paid work within a few months of having a baby (*ie* who resume work after a period of maternity leave) with a particularly high increase in the number of mothers returning to work full time.
- the increasing propensity among those who do leave the labour market to have children (*ie* those who do not resume employment after maternity leave) to both return to work between births, and to return sooner after childbearing is finished, than was previously the case (Brannen *et al.*, 1994, pp.4-5).

Figure 2.4: Employment rate of women by whether they have children, and age of youngest



Source: GHS 1992, Table 7.8

As a result of these trends, women with dependent children are now more likely to be working than not working. The most marked changes have occurred among women with children aged under five, 43 per cent of whom now work compared to only a quarter in 1973.<sup>1</sup> Part time employment accounts for much of this change, with the proportion of women with children under five working part time rising from 18 per cent in 1973 to 31 per cent in 1992. The number in full time work also increased, but to a lesser extent (from seven to 11 per cent).

Figure 2.4 also shows that women's propensity to enter paid employment increases with the age of their youngest child. As noted above, 43 per cent of women with children under five are in work. This proportion rises to 76 per cent for those with children aged ten to 15. In addition, while the difference between the two groups remains large, it has lessened over the past 20 years.

These changes mean that by early 1994, one in every six employed people was a woman with a child under the age of 16 (Sly, 1994). They have also had a profound impact on households. The proportion of dual-earner households has increased; by 1989 over a half (57 per cent) of all two-parent families were those in which both adults were in paid work, a figure which had increased from 44 per cent in 1981. That is, there has been a substantial decline in the number of families where the father is the sole breadwinner — from 46 per cent of all two-parent families in 1981 to 32 per cent in 1989 (Harrop and Moss, 1994, p.349).

## 2.3 Lone mothers

The data above describe the situation for all mothers. The experience of lone mothers is, however, very different from that of women with partners. While the employment rate of married or cohabiting mothers has increased, that for lone mothers has declined (Figure 2.5). In the early 1990s, 42 per cent of lone mothers were working, compared to 63 per cent of married mothers. In the late 1970s, these figures were 47 and 52 per cent respectively.

The lower employment rates for lone mothers are related to a number of factors, including:

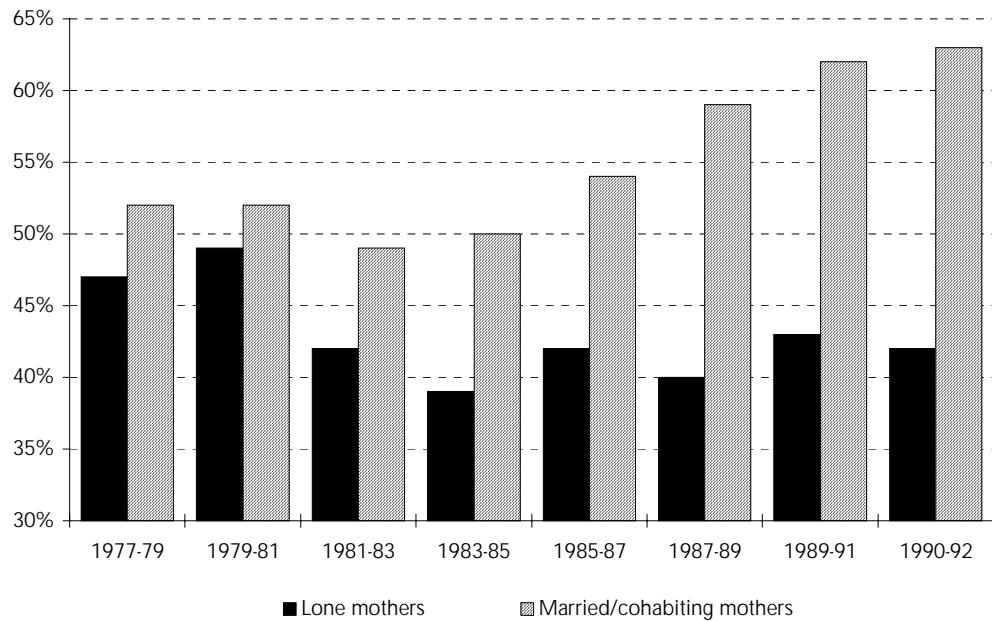
- the increasing proportion of lone mothers with three or more children or children under five (both of these characteristics are associated with lower economic activity rates)

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<sup>1</sup> More recent data show that this proportion has continued to increase, with the latest estimate being 47 per cent (derived from Sly, 1994, Table 3).



Figure 2.5: Lone mothers and married/cohabiting mothers working: 1977/9 to 1990/2



Source: GHS 1992, Table 7.10

- the lower educational levels of lone mothers (also associated with lower economic activity rates)
- the geographical concentration of lone mothers in areas of high unemployment
- the disincentive effect of the benefit system
- the lack of affordable childcare (Harrop and Moss, 1994; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991).

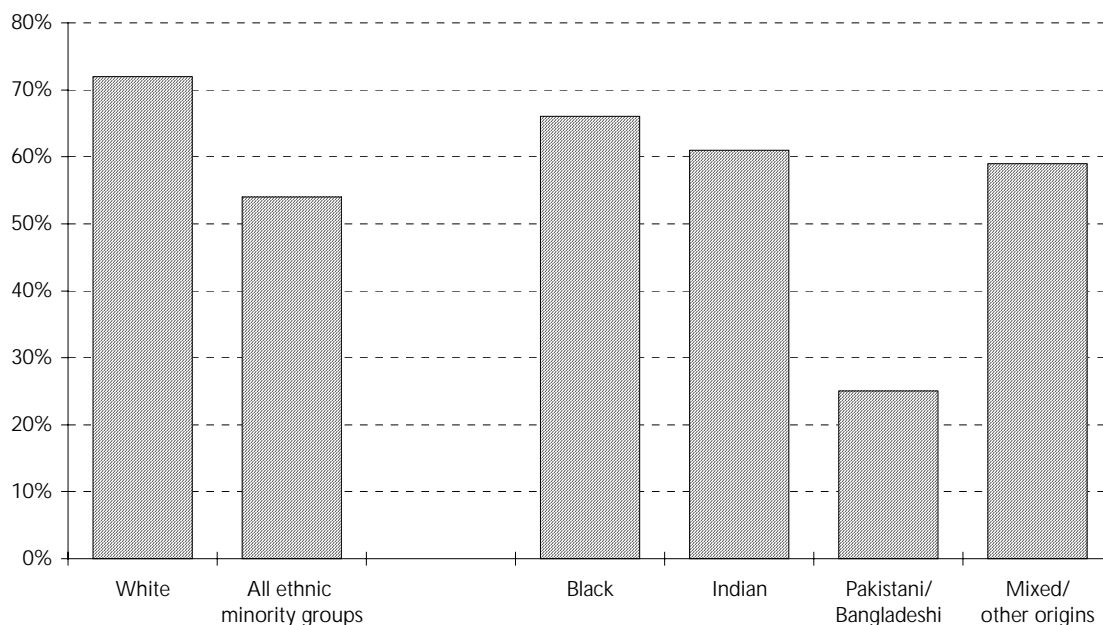
## 2.4 Ethnic minority women

A second set of women with distinctive labour market participation patterns are those from minority ethnic groups. Changes to the classification of individuals by ethnic group make analysis of changes over time difficult, but data for Spring 1993 show that white women of working age had the highest rates of economic activity of all ethnic groups (72 per cent compared to 54 per cent for minority ethnic groups) (Figure 2.6).

Within the ethnic minority groups, however, there are also substantial differences. More than a half of Black (66 per cent) and Indian (61 per cent) women were economically active in 1993. This proportion declines to 25 per cent for women in Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The rate for people of mixed or other origins was 59 per cent. This group includes people of Chinese and Asian origin, and of mixed origin (Sly, 1994b).

Figure 2.6: Economic activity of working age women by ethnic group: Spring 1993



Source: Sly, 1994b, Table 2, *Employment Gazette*, May 1994

One of the reasons for the lower economic activity rates among members of ethnic minority groups is their relatively young age profile. In the working age population as a whole, almost six per cent are from ethnic minority groups. This proportion rises to seven per cent among those aged 16 to 24. In addition, young women from non-white groups are more likely to be studying than their white counterparts (31 per cent of ethnic minority 16 to 24 year olds women were students in 1993 compared to 18 per cent of white women). A higher proportion of the latter were economically active (68 per cent compared to 48 per cent).

A second reason for lower rates of economic activity among ethnic minority women is that for some groups there is a high expectation that they will look after a family or home full time. This is particularly the case among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women of working age, 58 per cent of whom were looking after a family or home full time in 1993. This compares with 23 per cent of Indian women, and 16 per cent of Black women (derived from Sly, 1994b, Table 2).

Within the economically active group, there is also wide variation in unemployment rates.<sup>1</sup> White women are much less likely to be unemployed than ethnic minority women. Among

<sup>1</sup> Unemployment is defined using the ILO definition which includes those aged 16 and over without a paid job who said they were available to start work in the next two weeks and who either had looked for work at some time during the four weeks prior to the interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained (Sly, 1994b).

the latter, Pakistani/Bangladeshi women have the highest unemployment rate (29 per cent in 1993) and Indian women the lowest (11 per cent).

## 3. Employment Patterns

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This chapter looks at the employment patterns of women over the past twenty-five years, in particular the rise in self-employment and the expansion of part time working arrangements.

### 3.1 Self-employment

#### 3.1.1 Overall trends

The number of self-employed women has increased by 73 per cent since the late 1960s, from 423,000 in 1968 to 782,000 in 1993. This growth took place within a context of rising female economic activity and so the proportion of women in the labour force who are self-employed has only increased slightly (from five to seven per cent).<sup>1</sup>

As was the case with men, the number of self-employed women remained relatively static until the early 1980s, and then increased rapidly until the late 1980s, when the growth rate levelled off (Figure 3.1).

Part time self-employment has risen particularly rapidly among women (by 165 per cent between 1979 and 1993, compared to a 66 per cent increase for full time self-employment). This mirrors the trend among employees (see below) and has meant that the proportion of self-employed women who work part time has increased from 37 to 49 per cent.

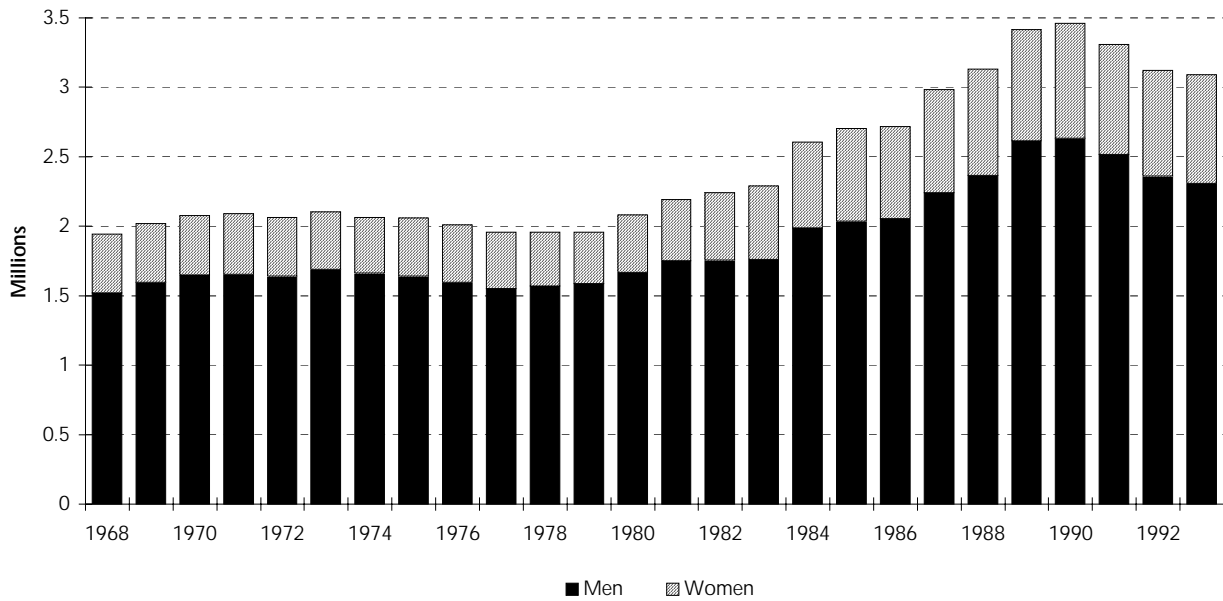
#### 3.1.2 Ethnic minority women

As is the case with men, women from ethnic minorities display a greater propensity to be self-employed than their white counterparts (almost nine per cent were self-employed in 1991 compared to seven per cent of whites). Again, there is substantial variation by ethnic group. The rate of self-employment is highest among Chinese women (20 per cent of whom were self-

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<sup>1</sup> Among men, on the other hand, self-employment accounted for a much higher proportion of the workforce in 1993 than in 1968 (18 compared to ten per cent).

**Figure 3.1: Self-employed by gender: UK 1968 to 1993 (adjusted for seasonal variation)**



Source: *Employment Gazette Historical Supplement, October 1994*

employed in 1991) and Pakistani and Indian women (with rates of 16 and 13 per cent respectively. At the other end of the scale, the self-employment rate for black women is much lower (three per cent) (Owen, 1994, Table 6.3, p.85).

In terms of numbers, South Asian women dominate the ranks of self-employed ethnic minority women, accounting for over a half of the total. Chinese and other groups make up an additional third (Owen, 1994).

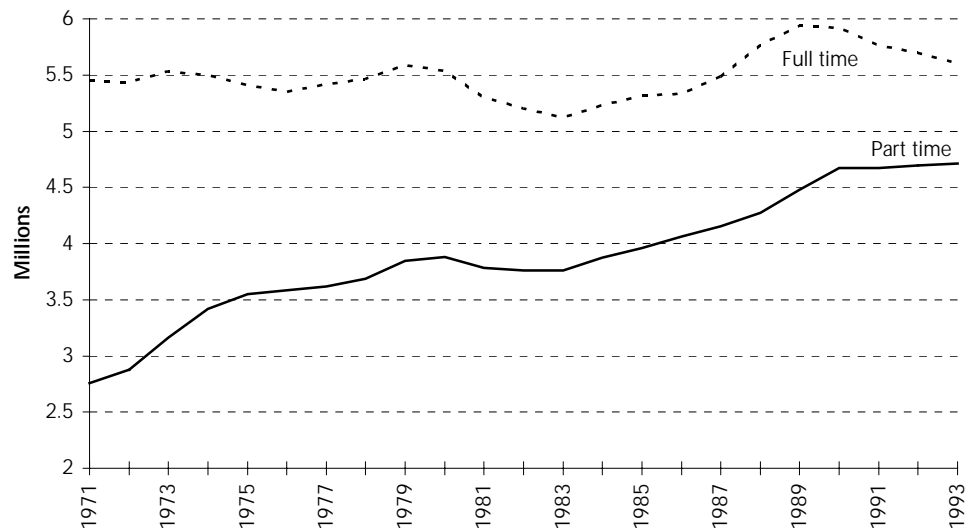
## 3.2 Employees

### 3.2.1 The rise of part time work

The vast majority (over 90 per cent) of women in paid work are employees. There were 10.3 million women employees in 1993, up from 8.2 million in 1968. During this period the growth in women's employment has counteracted a decline in male employment, and women now account for 49 per cent of all employees (up from 37 per cent in 1968).

Figure 3.2 shows that much of this increase has been accounted for by the rise in part time work (between 1971 and 1993, 93 per cent of the total increase in women's employment was in part time work). The proportion of all women employees who are employed part time has increased correspondingly and it now accounts for 46 per cent of the total, up from 34 per cent in 1971 (the first year for which data are available).

Figure 3.2: Women employees by employment status: Great Britain 1971 to 1993



Source: *Employment Gazette Historical Supplement*, October 1994

### 3.2.2 Reasons for working part time

The majority of women who work part time do so because they do not want a full time job (81 per cent). This is particularly the case if they have dependent children (among whom the proportion rises to 93 per cent) which suggests that family or domestic responsibilities are one of the main reasons for part time working (Sly, 1993, Table 4).

In recent years the number of young people working part time has increased. Among this group, the reasons for taking part time work are different. Two thirds of women aged 16 to 24 without dependent children who work part time do so because they are students while an additional quarter state that they can not find full time work (Sly, 1993, Table 4).

### 3.2.3 Ethnic minority women and part time work

Ethnic minority women are considerably less likely to work part time than white women. Data from the 1991 Census show that 40 per cent of white women employees work part time, a proportion which declines to 24 per cent among ethnic minority women. The proportion of women working part time is lowest among Black and Indian women and highest among Chinese and other ethnic groups, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women (Owen, 1994, Table 6.2). In Chapter 2 we noted that Black women had the highest economic activity rates and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women the lowest. These data on working hours show that in addition to being more likely to work, Black women work longer hours than other ethnic minority women. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women on the other hand, are less likely to be in paid work and, when they are employed, a relatively high proportion work part time.

## 4. Industry and Occupation

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This section looks at changes in women's employment by industry and occupation. It is divided into two main sections. The first looks at industrial employment patterns while the second addresses the issue of occupational trends. In both cases, the situation in 1993 is discussed before moving on to summarise trends over the past two decades.

### 4.1 Industry

#### 4.1.1 The situation in 1993

The striking feature of women's employment by industry is its concentration in a few sectors. Almost two-fifths of women employees work in the public (or non-marketed) services sector. Within this category, health and education are the dominant industries, employing 3.3 million women, or almost one third of all women employees (Table 4.1). Other industries accounting for a high proportion of women employees are:

- distribution, hotels and catering (24 per cent)
- banking and professional services (11 per cent)
- public administration and defence (six per cent).

By contrast, male employment is less concentrated with no single industry accounting for more than 20 per cent of the total. The two main industries in which men are employed are:

- distribution, hotel and catering (19 per cent)
- engineering (13 per cent).

In addition, transport and communication, public administration, health and education, and banking and business services each account for about nine per cent of male employment.

The most highly feminised industries (*ie* those in which women's share of total employment is highest) are:

- health and education (77 per cent of employees are women)
- textiles and clothing (60 per cent)
- banking and business services (56 per cent)
- distribution, hotels and catering (54 per cent).

**Table 4.1: Distribution of women and men, and women's share of total employment by industry: 1971 to 1993 (employees only)**

	Distribution of women (%)		Distribution of men (%)		Women's share of total employment		
	1971	1993	1971	1993	1971	1981	1993
Primary and utilities	2.2	1.4	7.4	4.4	15.0	16.9	23.3
Manufacturing	28.7	12.1	40.3	27.1	29.9	28.9	29.7
Construction	1.0	1.3	8.1	6.3	6.6	10.3	16.9
Distribution, hotels <i>etc.</i>	22.7	23.7	12.4	18.7	52.3	54.2	54.5
Transport & communication	3.0	2.9	9.2	8.8	16.4	19.5	23.4
Banking and business services	6.5	11.1	3.7	8.2	51.5	53.4	56.1
Professional services	2.6	4.6	2.2	4.6	41.6	43.5	48.5
Other (marketed) services	2.9	5.0	2.5	4.0	41.8	53.0	54.2
Public administration & defence	6.4	6.4	8.7	9.2	30.4	36.1	39.5
Health and education services	24.0	31.6	5.5	8.8	72.4	73.9	77.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>37.4</i>	<i>42.1</i>	<i>48.6</i>

*Source: derived from Lindley and Wilson, 1983; 1984*

#### 4.1.2 Trends to the 1990s

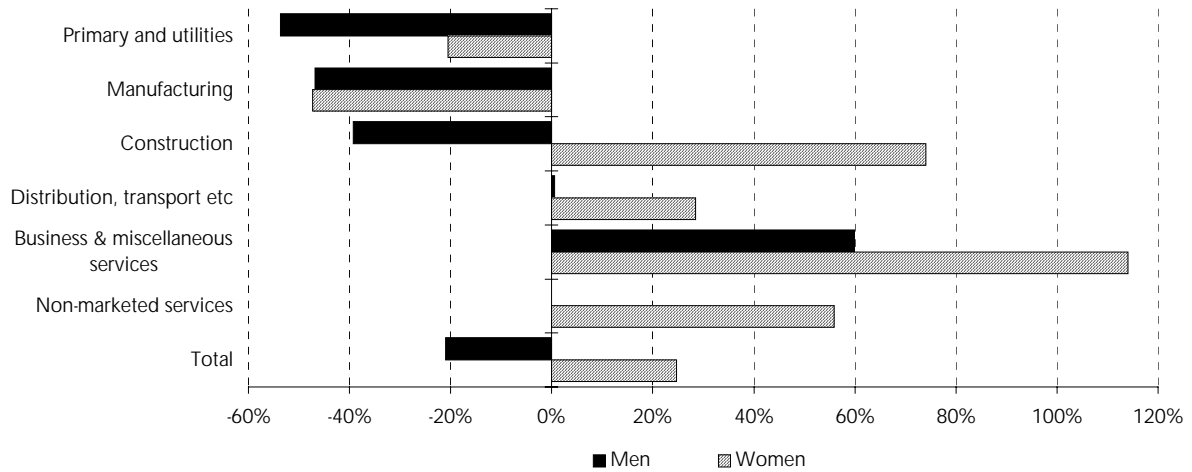
Over the past two decades the most marked change in women's employment by industry has been the decline in manufacturing and the rise of service sector employment (Figure 4.1). This has also been the case for men, but the trend among women has been slightly more marked. In 1971, manufacturing accounted for 29 per cent of women employees, a figure which had fallen to 12 per cent by 1993. Among men the equivalent figures are 40 and 27 per cent respectively (Table 4.1).

Women's share of total employment has increased in all industries except manufacturing over the past 20 years. Public (non-marketed) services have witnessed the most dramatic change, partly because men's employment in these sectors has remained static (Figure 4.1). In these industries women accounted for 67 per cent of total employment in 1993, up from 56 per cent in 1971. Table 4.1 shows that other industries to see a marked increase in feminisation include:

- business and miscellaneous service (from 46 to 54 per cent)
- distribution, transport *etc.* (from 42 to 48 per cent)
- construction (from seven to 17 per cent).



**Figure 4.1 Change in employment by industry and gender: 1971 to 1993**



Source: derived from Lindley and Wilson, 1994, Table 2.4

## 4.2 Occupations

### 4.2.1 The situation in 1993

As is the case in industry, women are concentrated in a small number of occupations. A half of employed women work in just three occupational categories: clerical and secretarial occupations (27 per cent), personal and protective services (14 per cent) and sales occupations (ten per cent). Together these three occupations account for just 17 per cent of men (Table 4.2). Women are particularly under-represented in manual occupations (craft and related occupations, industrial plant and machine operatives *etc.*) and managerial and administrative occupations. The latter account for 20 per cent of men in employment but just 12 per cent of women.

### 4.2.2 Trends to the 1990s

The occupational distribution of women and men shows that substantial differences remain in terms of the types of jobs they do. Over the past twenty years, however, one of the most marked changes in women's employment has been their entry into professional and managerial occupations (Table 4.2; Figure 4.2). In 1971, these occupations accounted for just 12 per cent of women (compared with the current 20 per cent). The improved representation of women in managerial occupations is, however, largely a result of changes in the industrial structure which have increased the number of managerial positions in areas such as distribution, health and education and other services. Women have not generally displaced men from existing positions but have taken advantage of new opportunities in expanding parts of the economy (Wilson, 1994).

**Table 4.2: Distribution of women and men and women's share of total employment by occupation: 1971 to 1993 (employees only)**

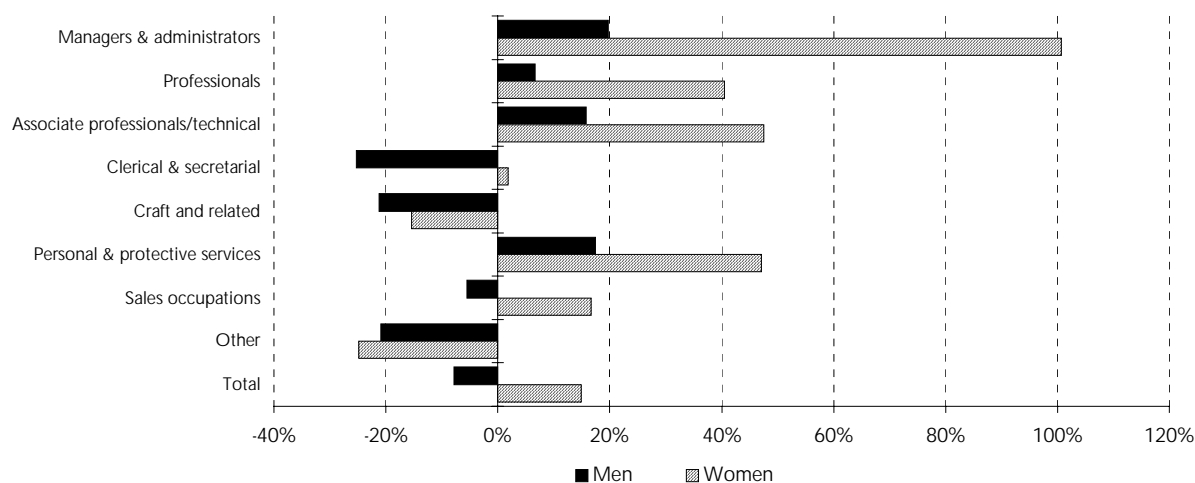
	Distribution of women (%)		Distribution of men (%)		Women's share of total employment		
	1971	1993	1971	1993	1971	1981	1993
Managers & administrators	6.3	12.4	13.7	20.2	20.8	23.7	34.3
Professionals	5.7	8.1	6.9	10.1	32.1	34.3	40.7
Associate professional/technical	7.0	10.4	5.9	8.3	40.6	45.5	51.5
Clerical & secretarial	29.9	27.4	8.7	6.7	66.4	72.0	77.8
Craft & related	6.7	3.5	26.6	22.4	12.7	11.0	11.7
Personal & protective service	10.0	13.7	3.5	5.5	62.0	62.9	68.0
Sales	9.8	10.4	4.9	4.6	53.5	60.7	65.6
Other	24.6	14.2	30.0	22.2	32.1	36.4	35.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>36.5</i>	<i>40.6</i>	<i>46.0</i>

*Note: Data for 1971 have been calculated on a different basis to those for subsequent years and are not directly comparable.*

*Source: derived from Lindley and Wilson, 1983; 1984*

At the same time as their entry into higher level jobs, women's employment in already feminised lower level jobs has also increased (eg clerical and secretarial and sales occupations). The net result is that aggregate measures of occupational segregation have remained relatively static in the 1980s despite evidence of polarisation within the female labour market (Rubery and Fagan, 1994). That is, women and men remain concentrated in different occupations but, among women as a group, there is a wider range of labour market experience, as measured by occupational distribution, than 20 years ago.

**Figure 4.2: Change in employment by occupation and gender: 1981 to 1993**



*Source: derived from Lindley and Wilson, 1994, Tables A.5 and A.6*

One of the main reasons for women's increased access to higher level occupations is their rising level of educational qualifications. A second important factor is, as already highlighted, their greater continuity of employment as they remain out of the labour market for shorter periods of time (Rubery and Fagan, 1994).

## 5. Pay

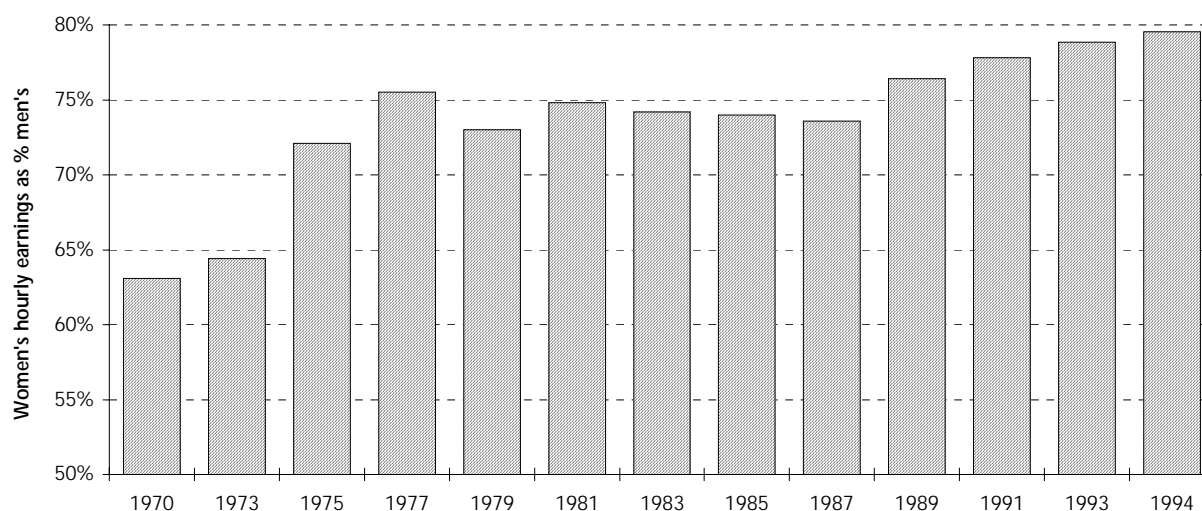
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The persistence of differences between women and men in terms of the types of jobs they do and the industries they work in is reflected in earnings. In 1994, women's average gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) were 79.5 per cent of men's. This is considerably higher than the figure in 1970 (63 per cent), but represents relatively little progress since the early 1980s when women earned about three-quarters that of men (EOC, 1988; Sefton, 1994).

Figure 5.1 shows women's hourly earnings as a percentage of the figures for men. There is a clear increase in relative earnings for women in the early 1970s, when the Sex Discrimination Act was introduced. This was followed by a period of relatively little change until the late 1980s, when the ratio began to rise again.

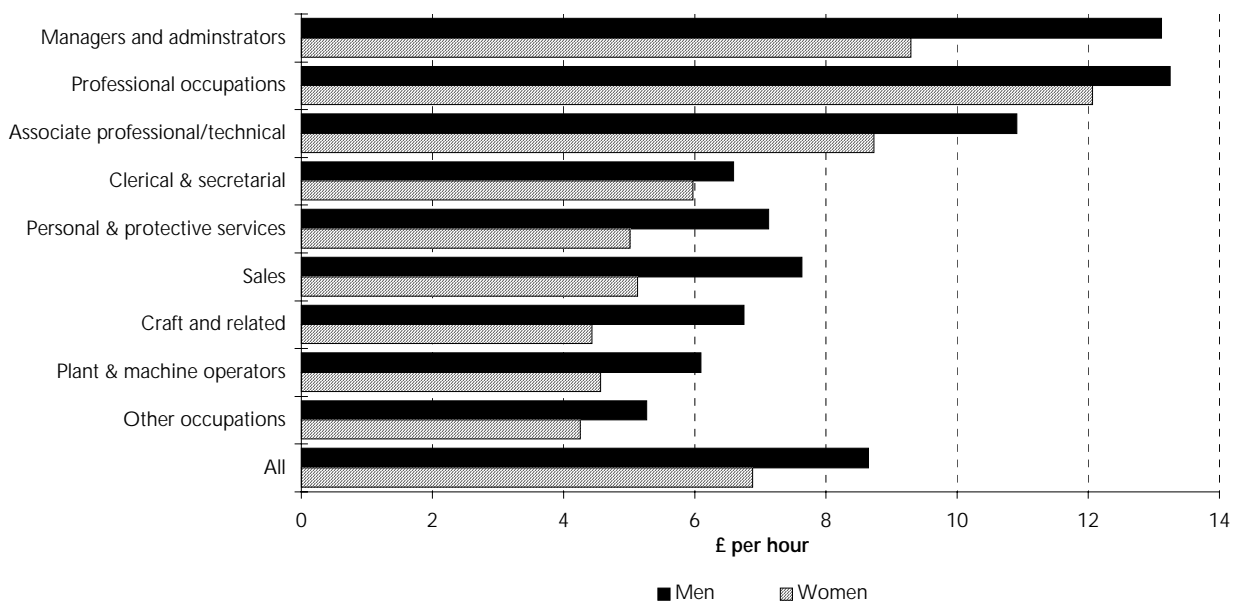
Data for the 1975 to 1990 period show that the pattern of change in relative earnings was not the same for all occupations. Despite their entry into managerial and administrative occupations, for example, women's earnings relative to men in these jobs did not improve over this period. Indeed, the ratio in these occupations, at consistently under 70 per cent, is markedly lower than the average. The most marked improvements occurred in protective services (mainly the police force), sales occupations, secretarial

**Figure 5.1: Women's average gross hourly earnings as a per cent of men's, selected years 1970 to 1994 (excluding overtime, full time employees on adult rates)**



Source: Equal Opportunities Commission 1988, Table 4.1; New Earnings Survey 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994

**Figure 5.2: Average hourly earnings of full time employees on adult rates (excluding overtime) by occupation and gender: 1994**



Source: *New Earnings Survey 1994, Part A, Table 8*

occupations, associate professional occupations (eg nursing) and education (Elias and Gregory, 1994).

More detailed data for 1994 show that in all occupations women earn on average less than men, both on a weekly and hourly basis (data for hourly earning are shown in Figure 5.2). As regards weekly earnings, this can be partly attributed to the lower number of hours they work, even when employed on a full time basis. For example, in 1994, women worked on average four hours a week less than men and just under one hour a week overtime compared with the average of 3.3 hours worked by men (Sefton, 1994).

## 6. Education and Training

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Women have substantially increased their level of qualifications over the past two decades. This has facilitated their entry into a range of professional and managerial occupations and contributed to the differentiation within the female labour market highlighted in Chapter 4. This chapter first looks at the increasing educational attainment of women at both the secondary and post-secondary level. It then goes on to highlight a series of issues on training.

### 6.1 Secondary level qualifications

There has been a general increase in the qualification levels of school leavers in the UK over the past 25 years, with the proportion leaving with two or more 'A' levels or their equivalent rising from 11 per cent in 1965/6 to 25 per cent in 1991/2 (Table 6.1). Within this general trend, however, women have shown a particularly rapid increase in attainment levels. In the mid 1960s just nine per cent of women school leavers left with two or more 'A' levels compared to 13 per cent of men. By the early 1990s, this position had been reversed and young women were more likely to leave with such qualifications than young men (26 per cent compared to 23 per cent).

**Table 6.1: School leavers qualified to enter higher education: UK 1963/3 to 1991/2**

	1963/4	1965/6	1975/6	1980/1	1985/6	1990/1	1991/2
Total school leavers	766	725	823	865	871	661	636
Men	394	373	423	466	444	338	324
Women	372	352	400	447	427	323	312
No. with 2+ 'A' levels	63.9	80.0	110.0	133.0	127.0	148.0	157.0
Men	39.1	48.0	61.0	69.0	66.0	72.0	75.0
Women	24.8	32.0	49.0	64.0	61.0	76.0	82.0
% with 2+ 'A' levels	8.3	11.0	13.4	14.1	14.6	22.4	24.7
Men	9.9	12.9	14.4	14.7	14.9	21.3	23.1
Women	6.7	9.1	12.3	13.5	14.3	23.5	26.3

*Source: Statistics of Education for the United Kingdom, various years*

The success of women at gaining 'A' level qualifications<sup>1</sup> is likely to continue in the near future, if only because of their achievements earlier in the secondary school system. The GCSE attainment of young women is now well above that for young men. In 1992/3, 46 per cent of girls aged 15 gained five or more GCSEs at grades A to C, a proportion which fell to 37 per cent among boys of the same age (*Statistical Bulletin*, 7/94).

In addition to gaining more GCSEs, young women also tend to reach a higher standard. This is particularly the case in modern languages and English, although even in areas where boys have traditionally done better, such as mathematics and sciences, girls are now achieving similar results to boys (*Statistical Bulletin* 7/94; Employment Department Group, 1994).

## 6.2 Higher education qualifications

The changes outlined above have been mirrored within the higher education system which has seen the number and proportion of women gaining qualifications increase rapidly over the past two decades. Women currently account for almost a half of all higher education enrolment, up from less than a quarter in the early 1960s and a third in 1970/1 (Court and Meager, 1994, Table 5).

In terms of degrees awarded, the proportion of university first degrees gained by women increased from 31 to 45 per cent in the two decades to 1990/1. An even more marked expansion was recorded for higher degrees, 36 per cent of which went to women in 1990/1 compared to just nine per cent in 1970/1 (Court and Meager, 1994, Table 5).

In overall terms, then, women are well represented in higher education. Marked differences by subject remain, however, with men continuing to dominate in science, technology and engineering subjects (Committee on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, 1994). The persistence of male domination of some subjects is indicated by the case of engineering: despite a decade-old campaign to increase the representation of women, they account for just 15 per cent of students on engineering courses (up from less than ten per cent in 1984).

Nevertheless, the potential for change in these patterns is indicated by past transformations in the gender balance within subjects. One of the clearest examples is that of medicine. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Despite similar attainment levels at 'A' level, young women and men still tend to study different subjects. In particular, young women are less likely than men to take 'A' levels in science subjects (ten per cent did so in 1991 compared to 14 per cent of their male counterparts (Employment Department Group, 1994).

UK, almost a half of medical degrees are awarded to women, up from just over a fifth in the late 1960s (University Grants Committee, 1973; Universities Statistical Record, 1994).

## 6.3 Professional qualifications

Another area in which the representation of women has increased over the past twenty years is among those gaining professional qualifications (Crompton, 1992; Crompton, Hantrais and Walters, 1990). The increasing share of medical degrees awarded to women is highlighted above, but similar trends are evident in a number of other key areas including:

- law, where about half of all new entrants are women, up from 19 per cent in 1975
- accountancy, where in the early 1970s only three per cent of new chartered accountants were women. Two decades later, this figure had increased to almost a half (48 per cent)
- banking, where women accounted for just two per cent of successful finalists in the Institute of Banking exams in 1970, a proportion which had increased to 27 per cent by the late 1980s.

## 6.4 Training

Recent trends suggest the proportion of women and men receiving job-related training has increased over the past decade and that there is little difference by gender in terms of access to training (13 per cent of both women and men in employment received training in 1994) [Gibbins, 1994]. Roughly 30 per cent of training takes place on the job, 60 per cent off the job and in ten per cent of cases it is some combination of the two. This pattern does not vary between men and women.

Women are not therefore markedly different from men in terms of the extent to which they receive training. Indeed, among employees, women are slightly more likely to have received training than their male counterparts. There is, however, evidence to suggest that training, in particular that aimed at young people, does little to counteract prevailing patterns of occupational segregation. Thus, in 1990, the largest occupational groups for women YTS (as it was then called) trainees were catering, cleaning and personal service work (37 per cent) and clerical and related work (ten per cent) (Courtenay and McAleese, 1994, Table 9.4; see also Clarke, 1991). In addition, young women generally are less likely to receive training and a much lower proportion gain vocational qualifications at NVQ Level 3 than is the case for men (Gibbins, 1994). These patterns suggest that young women's access to higher level and male dominated occupations are not being sufficiently addressed under current vocational training arrangements.



## 7. An End to Discrimination?

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The trends discussed in this paper raise the question of whether women remain at a disadvantage in the labour market. A wide body of evidence suggests that women's success in entering higher order occupations cannot be equated with an end to discrimination on the basis of gender within the labour market. In the first place, much of the change has occurred in occupations associated with a caring role (teaching, health, social work *etc*). These occupations tend to be less well paid and have lower status than more commercial activities (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of earnings inequality).

Second, increasing equality of access to managerial and professional occupations does not mean that women and men will progress within those occupations at a similar rate. In teaching, for example, women account for almost three quarters of full time employees and yet they represent just 44 per cent of all head teachers and 21 per cent of secondary school heads (DfE Statistics of Education: Teachers in Service England and Wales 1991). Likewise, while over a half of new entrants to the legal profession are women, they account for less than a fifth of partners in law firms and just seven per cent of High Court Judges (Mills, 1993; Rice, 1991; Employment Department Group, 1994, p.101).

A similar situation is evident in managerial and administrative posts. Women account for a disproportionate number of those in the lower levels of the occupational hierarchy. While overall more than 30 per cent of corporate managers and administrators are women, the proportion of women in senior management is much less (less than five per cent according to most estimates) (Hirsh and Jackson, 1990; Summers, 1991). One of the reasons for this discrepancy is indicated by a recent report which shows that women managers are far less likely than their male counterparts to be included on 'fast track' promotion programmes. Only 18 per cent of future leaders in the companies surveyed for the study were women (GHN, 1994).

To some extent these patterns can be attributed to women's relatively recent entry into higher level occupations. The persistence of inequality in areas such as teaching (where women have formed a majority of the workforce at least since 1950), however, suggests that considerable barriers to progress remain and are likely to do so for some time. There are a number of

potential reasons for this. They fall into two main categories: the practical difficulties of combining work and family responsibilities and cultural patterns or assumptions which militate against women's career progression (Hirsh and Jackson, 1990).

### **Practical barriers**

Taking the practical difficulties first, progress in many occupations remains dependent upon a full time continuous career path. As long as women continue to take primary responsibility for the demands of households (childcare, eldercare, household tasks *etc.*) their ability to demonstrate the required level of commitment will be limited. An increasing number of organisations do appear to be offering 'family friendly' arrangements, but issues around the actual extent of such policies (apart from part time work) and take up rates remain.

In the first place, a minority of all employers report offering family friendly arrangements and those that do often only grant them at managerial discretion (Brannen *et al.*, 1994, p.52-3). Second, even where flexible working policies are introduced, take-up remains low (Opportunity 2000, 1994). This may be partly due to workplace cultures. Even where part time and flexible work are available, these options are often not viewed as compatible with continued career progress, and women talk of 'putting their career on hold' or being 'sidelined' if they take advantage of them. As a result, women with family responsibilities tend to take longer to reach the senior positions than their male counterparts and women with no such responsibilities.

In many cases, particularly in managerial work, part time work is not even an option. Although some 11 per cent of all women in employment are managers or administrators, only five per cent of those working part time are in these occupations (Employment Department Group, 1994, p.56). In a recent study, the lack of part time work in management was invoked as a potential explanation for the particularly severe occupational downgrading experienced by women managers who left work to have children. After having children, they found it especially difficult to find suitable work at a level similar to that they had held prior to giving birth (McRae, 1991).

These patterns suggest that it is not sufficient simply to provide flexible working patterns, although these at least enable women to continue working. Issues concerning workplace and household cultures also need to be addressed. Women's continued responsibility for household management and the 'long hours' culture which prevails in many organisations make it very difficult for women with families to progress in their careers at the same rate as their male colleagues.

## **Cultural barriers**

The practical difficulties of combining a career with family life are not, however, the sole determinants of women's lack of career progress (Hirsh and Jackson, 1990). An increasing body of evidence suggests that broader cultural factors are involved. These include the persistence of informal networks and their influence on recruitment and promotion decisions; women's greater reticence about advertising their achievements to people in a position to influence their career progress; their lack of confidence in applying for positions and demanding career progression; and, in some cases, the influence of a generally hostile working environment, or one which does not expect or encourage women to succeed.

One of the results of these factors is that women are less likely than their male colleagues to be channelled into jobs which involve the exercise of direct control and/or authority. This is especially the case in a male dominated working environment (Devine, 1992; Savage, 1992; Crompton, 1994). Since experience in these jobs is frequently required for promotion to senior management, it is difficult to see how women will manage the progression to positions of organisational authority or control (Crompton, 1994).

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