



# **Reviewing gendered employment policies**

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## **Introduction**

The following article looks at the government's strategy of encouraging female employment, and identifies three problems with it. Firstly, policies to encourage female employment can have a perverse effect on gender equality. Secondly, women do not appear to want to increase their levels of employment. Finally, female employment may not contribute to the economy as much as the government assume. As the economic argument is the main driver of the policy its failure here is most significant.

There are a number of factors which need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, there has been no return on investment analysis of the family friendly employment strategies which lie at the heart of this policy. Secondly, the impact of female employment on male employment has not been considered. Further, the relative costs of female and male unemployment have not been explored. The complex relationship between male unemployment and single parenthood also needs to be taken into consideration. In addition to this male employment brings positive benefits both to family life and to female employment. Any proper analysis of the costs and benefits of gendered employment policies needs to build this into the equation.

When all these factors are taken into consideration the drive to increase female employment appears to be misguided. The paper concludes by making a number of recommendations designed to increase gender equality.

### **The drive to get women into the labour market**

Current fiscal policy and the benefits system are structured in a way which creates strong incentives for both parents in a couple to go out to work. Firstly we are almost alone amongst OECD countries in having a tax system which makes no provision for family responsibility. Instead it rests entirely on the individual and has no compensating provisions to allow for the care of either a spouse or children. In practice this means that if we take two households on the OECD mean average wage of £34,286 both with the same number of adults and children, the couple where one parent stays at home to look after the children will pay £2,161.13 more in tax. Turning to one earner families on £60,000, the level where child benefit is lost, the differences become even starker as the one earner couple now pays £5,182 more in tax. "Put another way, a one-earner family with two children and on an income of £60,000 already pays 59% more tax than a comparable two-earner couple, each earning £30,000. With the introduction of the HICBC [High Income Child Benefit Charge], the one-earner couple will pay 79 per cent more tax."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the couple are now entitled to £1,200 worth of childcare vouchers for each child unless between them they earn over £3000. The impact this has on women who would prefer to look after their children rather than go out to work has been outlined in detail elsewhere<sup>2</sup>.

As well as penalising families where the mother cares for the children (and often others) there has been a tendency by politicians to devalue their role. For example, Cameron described mothers who prioritised work as "aspirational and hardworking", as if those who looked after their children were not<sup>3</sup>. Despite the furore that this caused Osborne followed this up by describing those who chose to care for their children as making "a lifestyle choice"<sup>4</sup>. The most thorough research projects on the

effects of institutionalised child care for children have shown that it has negative consequences however the findings are invariably translated into a few far more palatable - but essentially dishonest - sound bites<sup>5,6</sup>. Women who 'choose' to look after their children have a painful awareness of the role which they play in their child's wellbeing and happiness and know where the buck stops should anything go wrong. To fully embrace parental responsibility, rather than deny it, is not just making a lifestyle choice.

In order to ensure that as women give up on their domestic responsibilities they have jobs to go to the government commissioned two reports, "Women in the Workplace" and the Women's Business Council report. These document rafts of measures - careers advice, female role models, vocational training, family friendly employment measures and rigorous 'equality' monitoring to facilitate women's access to employment<sup>7, 8</sup>. They appear to have been successful with the number of mothers staying at home to care for their children falling to a new record low<sup>9</sup>.

### **Equality of outcome – an elusive goal**

Equality of opportunity has been achieved. In fact if opportunities are assessed in terms of educational achievement women appear to have pulled ahead of men. This is witnessed every year in GCSE results but is found at all other levels of the education system as well<sup>10</sup>. Largely as a result of the Equal Pay Act in the 1970s the pay gap has narrowed from 29% in 1975 down to 10% today. Alison Wolf reports in her new book "The XX Factor" that:

"Statisticians in North America and Western Europe find no evidence of pay discrimination among young men and women in comparable jobs, and gaps in average and median pay, across the workforce, have been shrinking throughout the developed world. The median hourly pay of men and women in their twenties is now the same in the UK"<sup>11</sup>

However equality of outcome appears to be the real goal. For although "...like for like, women and men are paid and treated more or less equally in the workplaces of the developed world", they still tend to have lower average hourly wages than men as a direct result of their working patterns<sup>12</sup>. The problem for the policy makers is that policies which set out to achieve this goal appear to be counterproductive in effect.

A comprehensive cross-national comparative study of occupational sex segregation was carried out over ten years by the International Labour Office. The findings showed that the level of occupational segregation in Nordic countries was substantially higher than in other OECD countries, higher than in Egypt, and substantially higher than in Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong Japan, Malaysia and India. Only the predominantly Islamic Middle East, North African and certain developing countries had similar or higher levels of occupational segregation. Occupational segregation is also reflected in higher pay gaps between men and women.<sup>13</sup>

A number of processes are at work. Firstly in order to get women into the workplace, someone needs to take over the routine, less well paid, hidden types of work which women normally do - cleaning, food preparation, care of the elderly, household management and childcare. These people are usually women, who now take their place in the pecking order of the public realm doing the jobs which once might have commanded authority in the home. Where women are under pressure to work, employment, far from being the preserve of the most committed, public spirited, inspirational, imaginative or ambitious women becomes the burden of many less careerist women, who would

really rather be looking after their family, but feel compelled to work. Willingly bearing responsibility for the private realm, these women will choose to take the less demanding forms of work<sup>14,15</sup>.

The fact that these policies cannot be justified on the basis of equality would be compensated for if at least they supported what women want. However it seems they fail here as well.

### **What do women want?**

According to the Women's Business Council report there are currently 2.4 million women not working who would like to work, plus another 1.3 million women who want to increase the hours they work<sup>16</sup>. Catherine Hakim, with her experience at the coal face of the Labour Force Survey points out that these figures tell us nothing about their motivations - given the absence of political or financial pressure - nor do they tell us about sample selectivity or availability, offering instead a rather one eyed approach<sup>17</sup>.

Evidence to suggest that these figures are a very partial truth has been bubbling away for a number of years. Lorraine Candy, Editor of Elle, was surprised to find in 2009 that careers were not as important to her readers as they were to her:

"I am the editor of ELLE now, and we recently surveyed more than 1,000 women turning 30 to ask them what they wanted out of life, fully expecting that they would mirror my generation and put career as their main focus. They didn't. They said they wanted to be happy, married and have a family as much as they wanted career success. Actually, they wanted it more than success"<sup>18</sup>.

Another magazine Editor, Bobbie Malpass, was equally surprised by the findings emerging in a survey that her magazine carried out:

"I am so shocked to hear the majority of women would rather be housewives than go after a career. You hear so often about how we should embrace being strong independent women; I mean Destiny's Child sang about it enough!"<sup>19</sup>

Evidence comes from more rigorous sources as well. Netmums conducted a survey of 4000 mothers of young children. The objectives were to describe the current situation that parents find themselves in, in terms of work and whether they would prefer a different working pattern. They found that of the 18% of mothers working full time, 88% would rather be working part-time or be at home with their children. Only 12% of the full-timers were entirely happy with their situation. Of the 37% who worked part-time 62% were happy with their situation but a third of them would have chosen to spend all their time looking after their children if they could afford it<sup>20</sup>.

Netmums and the Resolution Foundation conducted a survey of 1,610 part-time working women with half being in the low to middle income group. Where women did want to work this appeared to be the result of financial pressure:

"Higher income mothers who work part-time are less likely to want to increase their hours given that they are financially more comfortable but continue to be dissatisfied with the availability of high quality part-time jobs. The financial pressure on low to middle income households makes part-time working mothers in this group more likely to want to increase their hours, with the high costs of childcare and the lack of flexible employment acting as major barriers"<sup>21</sup>.

That it was financial pressure which made women want to increase their working hours was reflected by the fact that low income women were much more likely to say that they were planning

to increase their working hours when their children got older. Eighty per cent of those in the benefit reliant group, 71% of those on low to middle income, and 56% in the higher income group said this.

Evidence from Alison Wolf suggests that part-time work is the preference of the majority. She finds that it is only the top 10-15% who really prioritise careers and even these women plan for reproduction more than their men. And although most women do value being able to work - part-time represents their preferred choice<sup>22</sup>. This is likely to be because it enables women to go on looking after their children, which mothers are very keen to do:

“It was also clear that mothers derived a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction themselves from mothering. Additionally it is a source of confidence for many, as it gave them their first real responsibility and chance to do a job relatively independently and well”<sup>23</sup>.

As Dench explains part-time work:

“...is a working arrangement which allows women to participate in both social realms. Through it, when women become mothers they can stay part of the community of work, which in contemporary society is where they may need to be in order to feel within the mainstream. But they can also keep one foot very firmly in the private realm”<sup>24</sup>.

He finds that women working part-time are happier in themselves than women working both full time or not at all. However in contradiction of the LFS findings it was the women who worked the fewest hours who were happiest of all<sup>25</sup>.

### **The contribution of women to the economy**

In justifying their policies the government cites documents which explicitly outline the economic benefits of getting women into the Labour market. Firstly the OECD suggested that the UK Labour force could expand by 16% if the gap in working hours and shares of labour force participation between men and women improved. Mothers with children under 12 who want or are actively seeking a return to work have the potential to add over £4 billion per year to the economy<sup>26</sup>. The Women’s Business Council report explains that “By equalising men’s and women’s economic participation rates we could add more than 10% to the size of the economy by 2030”. They state that their approach was governed by a focus on how to “maximise economic growth”<sup>27</sup>. The “Women in the Workplace” report also explains in the first paragraph that they are exploring issues “...primarily within the context of the economic benefits utilizing fully women’s contribution to the workplace”.

Firstly it should be pointed out that there is nothing to suggest that women, *as women*, (rather than fellow workers) contribute more to the profitability of a business. Hakim explains that although the studies on the British Workplace Employee Relations Survey do show links between workplace flexibility work-life balance schemes, equal opportunities policies, labour productivity, financial profitability and lower labour turnover in the private sector, but these are only correlations and associations rather than causal relations. It could be that those businesses which are doing well have more ‘fat’ to sustain and encourage flexible employment than those which do not<sup>28</sup>.

There is a similar story for claims about women on boards increasing profitability. On closer inspection both the Catalyst report which “Women in the Workplace” cites on closer inspection only claims correlation, and the same goes for the Credit Suisse report which the Fawcett Society uses to back their claims:

“But, is it having a woman at board level that makes the difference to the structure of the business or would that business have delivered the same result regardless? None of our analysis proves causality we are simply observing the facts”<sup>29</sup>.

However, to their credit neither report is actually claiming that women *qua* women add to the profitability of a business: “We have not attempted to establish whether a board with female representation adds or diminishes the corporate financial performance”. Instead they focus on “Whether a more equal and diverse board’s composition was a good objective in principle”<sup>30</sup>.

The patterns of a large section of our labour market were developed in a context where there was a wife at home. The role that she played in sustaining the male’s economic contribution was recognised through large settlements should the couple divorce. Even in the “Women in the Workplace” report one of the contributors complains that her own contribution is hampered by the fact that she doesn’t have a wife at home. Socialist Feminists recognised the vital but hidden contribution of this work behind the scenes – although they regarded it as totally unfair. Restructuring the labour market along lines which do not require this back up support requires some very significant changes to the way in which we do things. This is where measures such as flexi-time, working remotely, and a whole raft of ‘family friendly’ employment practices fit in. While these can bring significant benefits to business (work-place agility and the fact that homeworkers do significantly longer hours have been cited<sup>31</sup>) they can also be more expensive and inconvenient. We cannot make an assessment about how much women contribute directly to economic productivity until we have done an honest assessment of family friendly employment practices. Whilst the academic research has demonstrated increases in productivity the studies have no evidence on return on investment. Such research should not be used as basis for policy until they also have included an assessment of costs<sup>32</sup>.

**Women into the workforce; economic growth or labour replacement?**

Underlying the strategy that getting more mothers into the workplace will be an economic benefit is the assumption that they contribute to the sum total of employees. What nobody appears to be asking is: what impact does a strategy focussing solely on the employment of women have on the employment of men?

If we look at patterns in employment over the past 40 or 50 years the relentless rise in female employment is accompanied by a decline in male employment. However the assumption is that these are two independent processes responding to a single cause. We have moved from an economy based on industry which provided work for men to one based on services which provides more jobs for women. However we should recognise that even this move from industry to services is one in which the (Thatcher) government actively participated. It is possible that had it not been politically popular to create female employment more could have been done to shore up the jobs of men.

Year	Male Employment	Female Employment
1971	91.4	52.7
1981	81.5	55.6
1991	79	62.5
2001	79.2	66.1
2011	75.5	65.5

Summary of headline LFS1 employment, unemployment and economic inactivity series, United Kingdom (thousands), seasonally adjusted<sup>33</sup>

There do appear to be processes at work where a focus on women could have had an adverse impact on men. The public sector provides work for 19% of the population and this figure would be likely to go up significantly if one included all the work subcontracted by the public sector to the private sector<sup>34</sup>. The public sector is 65% female. This could simply reflect a number of choices made by individual women and men working themselves through the system – in much the same way as I would argue the smaller proportion of females in business reflects individual choices made here. However the public sector and all those who receive subcontracted work from it are bound by rigorous legislation designed to ensure equal opportunities are at work. The penalties for failing in this area have a significant impact on future funding. It is conceivable that in addition to the individual decisions which determine the gender profile of particular sectors, equal opportunities policies result in a favouring of women to avoid the penalties which inadvertent, unintentional discrimination could occur.

In traditional communities it was felt that in order to get men to make a useful contribution to society they needed to be given a little extra motivation, otherwise they might be inclined to go their own way<sup>35</sup>. This was done by encouraging male providing - or giving them extra status so they felt they had a useful role to play. By contrast we seem to be determined to prove that we can manage without them. Since the first quarter of 2008 the number of women in work has increased by more than a quarter of a million while the number of men in work has fallen by 70,000. The number of women aged 50 and over in employment is almost ½ a million higher than at the start of the recession in 2008. The equivalent is ¼ of a million for men. The net increase in the “want work” joblessness is also lower for women than for men (men 513,000, women 470,000)<sup>36</sup>. This increase in female employment is reflected across the occupational spectrum. In nearly all areas, women have either been increasing their share of jobs at a faster rate than men, or decreasing their participation in that sector at a slower rate than men.

	Managers and Senior officials		Professional occupations		Associate Professional and technical		Admin and secretarial		Skilled Trades	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Change by occupation 2012-2013	110	113	97	86	62	17	-40	-49	11	-4.5
Change as percentage	6.7	3.7	5.6	4.0	2.7	0.8	-1.6	-6.3	4.3	-1.6

In thousands

	Personal services		Sales and Customer services		Process plant and machine operatives		Elementary occupations		All (includes people who did not state their occupation)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Change by occupation 2012-2013	66	72	-47	-33	-31	-22	17	8	243	180
Change as percentage	3.1	16.9	-3.4	-4.4	-13.4	-1.3	1.2	0.5	1.8	1.2

All in employment by occupation – not seasonally adjusted Labour Force survey (EMP08)<sup>37</sup>

At the same time as this is happening there is there is an on-going drive to increase female representation in all areas. Measures include 'positive action' where an employer can encourage those who share a protected characteristic (for example being female) to apply for jobs. Setting targets for the number of female employees is another strategy to achieve the same end. There are special programmes which have produced a colossal rise in the number of girls taking physics. There have been special efforts made to promote women in the manual trades by introducing tradeswomen to young children. Girls are provided with female role models to encourage their interest in science. The Chartered Management Institute recommended that more businesses should work with schools in particular to help "develop young women's confidence, increase young women's understanding of the opportunities that exist in the world of work"<sup>38</sup>. A list of the measures taken to boost female employment could go on. As all this is happening while there is an inexorable rise in female employment, it seems quite possible that this could directly or indirectly be having a demotivating, demoralising effect in particular on less highly educated or skilled men. If the increase in female employment is impacting negatively on male employment, this could partially undermine the positive boost to the economy which the authors of the strategy claim.

### **The relative productivity of males and females not in work**

Evidence suggests that women who are not working are often productively engaged. By contrast unemployment can have a more detrimental effect on men.

For example the onslaught of women into the labour market has resulted in 50,000 fewer women staying at home to look after their children – women, who if they were not working would otherwise be productively engaged and who can only work at government cost<sup>39</sup>. And as Cristina Odone explains:

"These women invest also in social relationships. 68% of stay at home mothers help their local community for at least two hours a week and 58% work on a voluntary basis for ten hours a week. Mothers with young children carry out more than 173 million hours of community work each year. Researchers claim this unpaid labour saves the government almost £1 billion annually"<sup>40</sup>

Many of these women are campaigning against the government policies which they feel are forcing them out to work<sup>41</sup>.

Whilst unemployed men do also look after their children we do not hear men campaigning to be allowed to spend more time with their children in the same way. In fact it appears that 66% of new fathers fail to take up the meagre two weeks paternity leave offered to them in contrast to the 83% of mothers who move into a more family friendly role after returning to work<sup>42</sup>. Some might argue that men are simply the victims of cultural stereotyping and strategies to increase female employment enable men to discover their nurturing side. However it is also possible that men feel differently about childcare. Firstly, men's access to their children appears to be largely mediated by their partners<sup>43</sup>, therefore childcare may be experienced as putting them in a dependent and vulnerable position) which could explain why they prefer the security of a waged job. This becomes most conspicuous when couples divorce. And although the "Women in the Workplace" report give very short shrift to the idea that the differences between men and women are anything other than cultural – it is nonetheless conceivable that the biological differences which enable women to give birth also cause them to feel differently about the childcare role.

Whatever the reason, men who are not working appear less likely to be productively engaged. For example men commit significantly more crime than women – more than 1.2 million persons of known gender were convicted and sentenced at all courts in 2011. Of these 24% were female and 76% were male<sup>44</sup>. And some types of crime appear more likely to occur when men are unemployed<sup>45</sup>. There is also evidence which shows rates of crime go up directly in response to increases in female employment<sup>46</sup>. Men are also more likely to commit suicide. Male rates of suicide are at least three times higher than women's and have been so for the past 30 years. Although there has been much obtuse writing about the links between patriarchy and male psychology in order to explain this, the higher rates of suicide amongst lower socio-economic groups and between males of 30-44 suggest that more mundane factors like unemployment and its indirect consequences could also be to blame<sup>47</sup>. Evidence suggests that where women have the childcare role to turn to unemployment does not affect them in the same way<sup>48,49</sup>.

### **Male employment – a virtuous circle**

There are also significant social benefits to focussing on male employment, which bring economic advantage in their wake. Lone parenthood incurs significant social costs. 41% of children in single parent families are living in poverty compared to 23% in two parent families. Youngsters who do not grow up in a two-parent family are 75% more likely to fail at school, 70 per cent more likely to become drug addicts, 50% more likely to have an alcohol problem and 35 % more likely to be unemployed<sup>50</sup>. They also no doubt are a burden on the welfare state.

#### *The links between single parenthood and male unemployment*

Single parent households are in many ways the other, working class side of the feminist coin. For university educated women work is a means of fulfilment and a way in which women realise their potential just as the authors of the above reports assume. However for working class women work may be menial, repetitive and boring and although their jobs may give them a certain amount of responsibility and independence the rewards are considerably less. For these women having children is not an obstacle, it represents an *opportunity*, as research by Edin and Kefalas testifies: "They were also overwhelmingly positive about motherhood: 'It is wonderful', 'I'm excited when I get up in the morning', and 'It's like a *burst of energy*'"<sup>51</sup>.

Consequently single parents often have the most pro-domestic values:

"Relative both to women without children and mothers with partners single mothers show here a lesser belief in the importance of full time working, a relatively steady advocacy of *part-time* work and a much firmer attachment to the idea that mothers with pre-school children should not work at all outside the home...they show a drift from pro-work to domestic values over this period"<sup>52</sup>.

And as Dench later explains:

"These positions diverge considerably from those of other mothers. There is something distinctly traditional about them. They go against any notion that mothers should concern themselves with material providing".

Like the middle class they are not against the idea of marriage. In fact as the Edin and Kefalas study suggested they love the idea of marriage but not on the whole to 'their' men<sup>53</sup>. As Dench explains from his research on single mother's attitudes "If their views are looked at carefully most of the differences can be seen to reflect doubts over whether marriage is currently a realistic option, more

than a fundamental rejection of marriage as an ideal”<sup>54</sup>. And as a recent American study has shown, most working class people conclude marriage is not a realistic option for them:

“As a result, marriage is increasingly a “distinctive social institution” that marks out middle-class status.... [the working class] found it difficult to imagine providing for others and could feel that the emotional and psychological commitment of marriage was too great on top of the other challenges in their lives”<sup>55</sup>

In this country, not only do the mothers not get married, they don’t even live with their men:

“...there are many mothers these days who, for a variety of reasons including the need to maximise welfare benefits have more-or-less steady male partners with whom they do not actually live. It falls within the concept of LAT – living apart while ‘together’”<sup>56</sup>.

Laura Perrins explains why this occurs:

“If you are a mother lower down the income scale and move in with a partner, the extra income they bring into your household means you stand to lose most or all of the £3,270 you otherwise receive in child tax credits. Harry Benson of The Marriage Foundation estimates that there are at least 300,000 families that pretend they live separately, but in reality are together”<sup>57</sup>.

These are women who clearly value their childcare role, have a tenuous connection to the workplace, often have partners and would be happy to be supported. However they cannot afford to live with their partners or marry them as this would make them dependent on a fluctuating and insecure income, rather than an income which has proved resilient and dependable, if somewhat paltry, i.e., - the welfare state.

Rowthorn and Webster have shown how there is a direct relationship between male unemployment and single parenthood. Using geographical comparisons based on census data they show that the resulting fall in male employment explains between 38% and 59% of the 1.16m increase in lone parent families over the period 1971-2001. They show that the impact was greatest in the area which suffered most from industrial decline. They argue that higher male employment would help to contain and maybe reverse the growth of lone parenthood, by reducing inflows into lone parenthood and increasing outflows through re-partnering and consequent stepfamily formation. They point out that female employment has no consistent net effect on lone parenthood<sup>58</sup>.

Rowthorn and Webster were not the first to find a direct relationship between male unemployment and single parenthood. William Julius Wilson first outlined the process in 1987 in *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. His findings were confirmed by Testa et al., who exploring data from the Urban Poverty and Family Structure survey of inner city residents in Chicago found that employed fathers were twice as likely to marry the mother of their first child as unemployed fathers<sup>59</sup>.

#### *Male employment is beneficial for relationships*

Not only might a focus on male employment reduce rates of single parenthood and the huge social and economic costs which this occurs. Male employment has a positive effect on partnership maintenance, and co-parenting, which in turn feeds back into men working harder and being more likely to remain in employment.

A Finnish study explored whether socioeconomic resources affected the stability and maintenance of cohabitations and marriages in the same way. They found that the unemployment and low

income of the male in particular increased rates of dissolution in both types of union. The employment and income of the male had a particularly positive affect on marriage<sup>60</sup>.

Kanji and Schober 2012 found that married couples in which the mother is the only earner face more than twice the risk of divorce faced by other couples in the early years of a child's life<sup>61</sup>. Other research finds that employment has a positive effect on union formation for both men and women and has a positive effect on union dissolution for women, but not for men. Sayer et al found that not only would a wife be more likely to initiate divorce if her husband were not employed, but it was also more likely that he would be the one who would choose to leave. Even men who are reasonably happy in their marriages are more likely to leave if they are not employed<sup>62</sup>. Harknett and Kuperberg also found that labour market conditions explained the positive relationship between educational attainment and marriage. If less educated parents enjoyed the same labour market conditions as their more educated counterparts this would greatly reduce the differences in rates of marriage between them. And while labour market conditions were positively related to marriage for fathers at all educational levels, they were only positively related to marriage for women who had less education<sup>63</sup>.

Factors which contribute to union formation and maintenance will invariably have a direct benefit on the children of those unions. However other research has found that male employment contributes to father involvement even where he is not living with the mother. Mincy et al. found that pre-birth employment tends to increase all forms of father involvement: non-residential visitation, non-marital cohabitation, and marriage<sup>64</sup>.

Male employment contributes to union maintenance indirectly as well by having a positive impact on satisfaction with household income. Hema and Himmelweit analysed data from 2,396 male female couples in the British Household Panel survey. They found that full-time employment was much more likely to bring satisfaction with household income than any other type of employment and this full time employment was mainly done by men. They also found that the positive effect of this contribution was greater when it was contributed by a man. Put simply full-time male employment produces more satisfaction with household income for couples than full time female employment<sup>65</sup>.

#### *Participating in family life increases male employment*

Not only does male employment appear to contribute to the maintenance of two parent families; evidence also suggests that families help to contribute to male employment as well. In this way focussing on male employment can help to set up a virtuous circle which benefits both families and the economy. For example Dench found that having a partner had a positive effect on male employment:

“Table 2.22 shows that men with partners are much more likely to be working than those without. This is arguably not simply a matter of women choosing partners who work – and indeed *expecting* men to do so. It is also that men who do not get the experience of living with and providing at least some support for a female partner may not develop the necessary motivations to hold down a job”<sup>66</sup>.

It would also appear that being a *married* father encourages economic productivity among men:

“After the arrival of a baby, new fathers tend to work more hours and pull down more money, according to research by the late sociologist Steven Nock. But these findings only apply to married fathers. By contrast, men who have children outside of wedlock, Nock found, are less

likely to be employed, earn less, and have higher rates of poverty compared to their peers who did not father children outside of wedlock.”<sup>67</sup>

### *Male employment increases female employment*

Finally Dench shows how having a partner encourages economic participation among women as well. Whilst the rates of economic activity have climbed amongst mothers this is much more true amongst mothers with partners than among lone mothers. Having a partner and no children under 13 offer the best conditions for having a job while having children under 13 and no partner are the worst conditions. Whilst for partnered mothers the number of those with younger children who are working has shot up – this has not happened for single parents<sup>68</sup>.

### **Paying the price of feminism**

Women assume equal access to the workplace, were disadvantaged without it and benefit from being able to work. Those nearer the top of society can discover new potentials and talents and develop responsibilities. At the other end at least we gain some security, confidence and self-esteem. We now have a pivotal place in the labour market, our position is secure – the clock will not go back.

However women do have a different relationship to the workplace from men, this is reflected for example in their preference for part-time work. However this difference is often obscured because it is elite women – the top 15 or 20% who make our policies and who have the dominant voice. They also, as Alison Wolf elucidates in “The XX Factor” have lifestyles which are very different from the majority of women while being very similar to elite men.

These women have access to the resources which their education and qualifications bring. And although they could buy themselves independence from males this is not what they choose. Rates of marriage are higher, divorce is lower and their children benefit from the advantages which a stable family and financial resources bring.

It is so different for women who leave school with few qualifications. Not only do they have far more limited access to rewarding jobs. They also don’t have access to the benefits reaped by middle class men. Unlike the middle class women who are likely to be better off if they get married these women are better off if they keep their distance from the problems which afflict their potential mates i.e. less qualified men.

The problems which are statistically more likely to affect men will be concentrated in this group. From developmental delays and learning problems in childhood, they will be more likely to drop out of school or get poor qualifications, be less likely to earn a degree, more likely to work longer hours, have less job satisfaction, end up homeless or in prison, develop heart disease and die earlier. It is no wonder that working class women choose to be on their own<sup>69</sup>.

Feminism has for too long distracted us from the problems facing the other half of the human race. Women and men are thoroughly interdependent, but middle class women can, if they want to, buy themselves independence, whereas amongst the less well-off this interdependence makes itself much more strongly felt. If we want to resolve problems of child poverty, fractured families, social

inequalities and boost the economy to boot, we should urgently turn our attention to the problems facing boys and men.

## **Recommendations**

### *Research and innovation into boys' education*

Research needs to be conducted to try to understand why males are doing so much worse than females in the education system and solutions need to be found to remedy this. A range of areas need to be explored to find out what is going on including learning methods, motivational factors and value systems.

Research we conducted at *Men for Tomorrow* provides an example of innovation in this area. We explored boys' level of interest in school work and their attitudes and values. We found a relationship between boys anticipating a provider role for themselves in the future and taking an interest in school work. The sample size was too small to identify causal relationship or even to arrive at any firm conclusions however it provided an example of the type of research which can be done<sup>70</sup>.

### *Strengthening male access to and participation in apprenticeships*

The "Women in the Workplace" report advocates setting specific targets for increasing the number of women into apprenticeship sectors where they are currently underrepresented and finding the funding to do this. This is despite the fact that according to the report there are currently more female than male apprentices (276,200 females to 244,400 males) particularly at the higher levels (110,700 females to 80,800 males). In view of this disparity of numbers it would make more sense to encourage male apprenticeships in areas where they are currently under-represented for example accountancy, business administration, customer service, health and social care, dental nursing, teaching assistants and so on. This would have a much needed positive effect both on male employment and gender segregation.

Other measures should also be taken to boost and strengthen the apprenticeship system which could have a particular role to play for males who are currently doing less well academically than females. Some measures could include loans while doing apprenticeships and a National Apprenticeship Scheme.

### *Increasing male presence in areas of employment where they are under-represented*

There are attempts to increase female employment in areas where they are under-represented. This needs to be complemented by attempts to increase male employment in areas where they are under-represented such as the public sector, the teaching profession and medicine.

### *Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two parent families*

It does not pay less well-off mothers to stay with their partners. The Marriage Tax allowance is being introduced and should be increased to a rate where it can make a real difference to a couple's choice to stay together through marriage. This has been covered in more detail elsewhere. A marriage allowance would allow the male income to go much further by enabling married men to pay less in tax if they were supporting a wife as well (and also of course the other way around). By

enabling earnings to go further it could help make marriage a realistic choice. Frank Fields “Second parent premium” should also be examined more closely for its potential to support two parent families.

### *Maintaining gender equality*

We need to make it easier for women to have children earlier without feeling that their opportunities will be compromised. This could involve recognising that women will have different career trajectories from men, achieving more highly rewarded positions perhaps slightly later than men, and reaching the pinnacle of their careers as men are thinking of retiring. This would include women having a later retirement age than they currently do. A number of advantages flow from women having children earlier

- Where women have children younger there is more potential for relations of reciprocity to develop between mothers and children, grandparents and grandchildren which will be maintained throughout the lives of all involved.
- The costs of women taking maternity leave earlier in their careers will be significantly less to the individual women and also to their place of work than where women in senior positions take maternity leave.
- There are well known fertility benefits.

We need to give far more attention, recognition and status to those women who, for whatever reason, choose not to have children. These are the women who are making the biggest contribution to female achievement through their careers and range of pursuits and thereby to gender equality<sup>71</sup>.

Belinda Brown 27/08/2013, Przemysl

(Edited 05/09/2014)

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