Barriers to Women's Employment and Progression in the Labour Market in the North East of England

RESEARCH REPORT

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1. Introduction

The 'Barriers to Women's Employment and Progression in the Workplace' research project was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) under Objective 3. This Objective was aimed primarily at tackling barriers to labour market participation. The overall purpose of the project was to explore the barriers faced by women in the North East of England, in finding employment and their progression in the labour market. The research was carried out between November 2002 and December 2003.

Gender segregation remains a predominant feature of European society, affecting both paid and unpaid work. Women continue to bear the primary domestic responsibility, irrespective of work commitments (Fagan and Burchell, 2002: 81). Consequently, women tend to work in occupations with more structured and reliable hours of work and this often means the work is part-time and low paid. Low pay, however, is not purely a feature of part-time work. The gender pay gap exists in all occupational sectors across the UK. Often part-time work is viewed as the flexible alternative for women with various domestic responsibilities, which implies a certain degree of autonomy. However, in most instances, other structural barriers limit this autonomy i.e. availability of childcare, and start/finish times of schools etc. Autonomy is also restricted for women who progress to the highest occupational levels due to the traditional masculinist model of the management role. Part-time work remains categorised as low-status and offering limited opportunity for progression and development (2002: 82).

Women's participation and progression in the labour market is increasing although some barriers still remain, including the more insidious and ingrained organisational culture, which maintains workplace inequalities through institutional practices. This type of barrier operates both internally, in the form of the 'glass ceiling' making it harder for women to progress to the highest levels and externally, as a deterrent that prevents women from entering male-dominated, higher paid, and higher status occupations (2002: 81).

Fagan and Burchell found that connections between gender and occupation (and the worker's position within that occupation) are integral to the understanding of how gender relates to working conditions (2002: 81). They argue that some working conditions are actually more related to the occupation than to gender but that the effect of that relationship impacts differently because of gender.

Dench et al identified key indicators for mapping women's position relative to that of men, including: economic activity and employment; participation in public life; work-life balance; health; education and training; crime; financial resources and transport (Dench et al., 2002b). Whilst being indicators of women's position relative to men's, these issues also highlight areas of women's lives affected not just by structural or institutional barriers but the additional influence of individual agency and attitudes.

Gender inequality is particularly evident in the North East region, as shown in the Regional Development Plan 2000-2006. Any solutions to the problems faced by women in the region would benefit from a wider understanding of their experiences of work within a range of different sectors and their own identification of the barriers to their employment and progression (Northern TUC, 2002: 9). The North East region has the highest level of economic inactivity of any English Region with 32% of women and 21% of men being economically inactive (Northern TUC, 2002; Government Office for the North East, 2002). Nationally in 2002, 70% of women were economically active compared to 84% of men. Regionally, the gap between men and women's economic activity is similar (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003). Nationally, 4% of women are registered as unemployed (5% of men). Regionally, the figures are higher – 6% of women and 9% of men (Northern TUC, 2002). The traditional highly skilled, male dominated industries in the North East, such as the shipyards, mines and steelworks have been replaced by service industries reflecting a change in the skills base. These new industries, such as Call Centres and Retail Parks are more likely to employ women (Government Office for the North East, 2002). In all sectors of employment across the region there is a gender gap in pay, with women's full-time weekly rate of pay being on average 77% of men's (Northern TUC, 2002). Nationally, women's gross individual income, including income from employment, pensions, benefits, investments etc. is on average 51% less than men's (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003). Although more women are now in full-time employment, the numbers are still lower than men. More women than men work part-time. In the North East in 2001, 240,000 women (27%) and 52,000 men (31%) were working part-time (Northern TUC, 2002). North East mothers predominantly have primary responsibility for organising childcare and women overall spend more time on domestic tasks, regardless of their working status. This double burden means that many mothers have to, or may choose to, work part-time in order to facilitate these needs (Government Office for the North East, 2002; Northern TUC, 2002). A similar number of women and men in the North East are qualified to NVQ4 but only 43% of

women are qualified to NVQ2 or above in contrast to 60% of men. This is contrary to the national trend where more women hold NVQ/GNVQ qualifications than men (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003; Government Office for the North East, 2002). The lack of women in higher management positions across the region, as well as few women entering well-paid professional occupations such as IT and engineering, reflect the persistence of the 'glass ceiling' as a barrier to women (Northern TUC, 2002; Opportunity Now, 2000).

In order to establish the barriers that women face when trying to enter the workforce or to progress within existing employment, this study aimed to collect data from case study companies and contrasting communities. This was to reflect the different barriers that may exist for women due to the locality of job and home, while also considering women across all categories of 'employment'. Seven case study companies agreed to take part in the research, reflecting a broad range of locations across the region and a variety of employment sectors. Three 'communities' were also targeted, again reflecting both urban and rural locations.

The Government Office for the North East reported that some of the major labour market disadvantages faced by people living in rural areas include limited opportunities locally, as a consequence of a narrow rural economy base, and lower incomes resulting from the concentration of lower-paid employment sectors in rural areas. They also highlight the limited access to training and/or job opportunities as a consequence of location, together with problems associated with rural public transport and its inflexibility (2002:14-15). Consequently, living in rural areas may constitute a barrier to employment for women. Many factors influence people's ability to participate in rural labour markets, such as a mismatch between skills and opportunities, recruitment practices, accessibility to the labour market, and the related costs of participation and housing (2002: 457).

Aims of the Research

◆ To document the existing barriers to women's employment in the North East.

◆ To explore and compare women's experiences of employment entry and progression.

◆ To examine the influence of a variety of personal, social and structural factors in the decision-making process, especially where related to employment attainment and progression.

◆ To identify the role of social networks and the meaning of place.

◆ To collate 'best practice' guidelines for employers as to methods of countering barriers.

◆ To collate useful information for women entering the labour market or progressing in the workplace.

2. Methodology

The research project adopted a mixed methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. A range of data sources were used. This included a questionnaire administered to employees across the seven case studies; semi-structured interviews and life-grids held with female employees and women from communities in the region. This range of methods provided both an overview of barriers and experiences across the region from the questionnaires, as well as an in-depth exploration of women's particular experience across the seven case studies, using interviews.

Case Studies

The case studies were carefully selected in order to represent the diverse employment sectors in the North East, where women were in both the minority and majority. Additionally, workplace location was also considered and again a range of locations were desired, so as to facilitate urban and rural comparisons and cover a reasonably wide area within the region. The case study companies are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Case Study Companies

Case study	Response rate
1. Manufacturing Firm	4% (n = 32)
2. Civil Service Organisation	31% (n = 94)
3. Primary Care Trust	23% (n = 113)
4. Newspaper Group	25% (n = 108)
5. Utilities Company	21% (n = 88)
6. County Emergency Service Organisation	36% (n = 100)
7. Local Council	27% (n = 113)

Questionnaire Sample

A comprehensive questionnaire was designed to examine employment history, experience of barriers, expectations, views on pensions and attitudes. In order to provide some comparative data for men, the questionnaire was distributed to both men and women employees. However, only the results for women are discussed in this report. Questionnaires were completed by 648 staff across the seven case studies. In order to achieve this 20% response, a total of 3218 questionnaires were distributed to a carefully stratified sample of staff. The questionnaires were carefully distributed to staff, working alongside company HR managers to ensure both full participation and to avoid disrupting working patterns too much. Participants were informed of the rights as to anonymity and confidentiality via the use of a front sheet, which also contained a unique identifier number should they wish to withdraw their data.

Of the 648 employees surveyed, 58% were female (N= 371). The average age of women respondents was 39, the youngest respondent was 16 and the oldest was 65. The majority of respondents, 86%, owned their own house or flat. Over half of women (55%) were married. 18% lived with a partner. The majority of women respondents stated that their ethnic origin was White-British (93%). 54% had children. 13% had caring responsibilities for an ill, elderly or disabled person. (Further demographic details on the questionnaire respondents can be found in Appendix A).

Case Study Interviews

A total of 35 female employees took part in semi-structured interviews. (The interview schedule can be found in Appendix B). A random sample of volunteers from each of the case studies was generated to minimise any bias in their selection. 12 first completed a life-grid (see Appendix C for an example), which is a way of structuring an interview around lifetime experiences, often used in conjunction with the life history interview (See for example: Berney and Blane, 1997; Blane, 1996; Parry et al., 1999; Parry et al., 2001).

Community Interviews

An additional 23 women from targeted communities were interviewed. They were accessed through community groups in 6 different locations. Of the 23, 16 took part in a life-grid prior to their interview. A variety of communities were chosen, again to cover both rural and urban locations and to attempt to access women who were registered as unemployed. But as highlighted earlier, the percentage of women in the North East who define themselves as such is small at 6%. The women to whom we spoke were more likely to be inactive and looking after children rather than registered as unemployed. The youngest interviewee was 19 and the oldest was 67. The vast majority (88%) stated that their ethnic origin was White-British. Half the women (50%) were married, with the remainder equally distributed between those who stated that they were single, divorced and living with a partner. All but one of the women had children. Almost half of the women were working part-time (48%); 7 women (30%) were out of the workforce, 4 looking after children and 3 through ill health. Almost half of the women owned their own accommodation (48%), with the majority of the remainder renting from the council.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Putting the Current Research in Context: What's new?

The current study provides a comprehensive snapshot of women's working lives in the North East. By using a mixed approach of statistics and qualitative material, this report offers a fresh look at familiar issues. Over the last thirty years, research has identified barriers to women's employment. Such research has included; inequalities of pay and employment opportunities, gender segmented labour markets and, gendered orientations to work, but as Walsh pointed out, most studies of the latter assume that women's work orientations are relatively fixed or static (Walsh, 1999: 184). Our findings suggest that women's attitudes to employment and the meaning that it has in their lives is complex and multifaceted and varies in relation to family relationships, and in particular the experience of motherhood. In the last decade, women's employment research has been more comprehensive in its profile of the North East. Studies by the University of Northumbria (Cunningham et al., 2002; Cunningham et al., 2003) have provided an overview of working practices. More general research on the situation for women in the North East has also been produced (see for example: Northern TUC, 2002; Government Office for the North East, 2002). Other studies by Fairplay North East have explored particular issues for women such as transport (Fairplay North East Ltd, 1999b); the Regional Economic Strategy (Fairplay North East Ltd, 1999a) and Equal Opportunities (Fairplay North East Ltd and C.U.R.D.S, 2000).

The topic of this research is not new but the approach and focus is. Studies of the barriers affecting women in employment have tended to be quantitative in nature, focusing on the broad sweep of women's experience and attitudes, as well as perceptions of women's role in the workplace. Less prevalent is research that explores women's subjective understanding of employment and their views on what constitutes a barrier to their employment and progression. This study places women's experience as central by using in-depth interviews and life-grids. In addition, this study takes the long view of women's working lives, exploring key decisions and events not just at the moment of the research but in the past and expected future. This acknowledges that employment forms part of the fabric of women's lives and is woven in with family, friends and other responsibilities. Although constrained by working opportunities, women make choices that fit in with the context

of their lives as a whole. It therefore makes little sense to examine work in isolation. This research probes beneath the surface issues, to explore some of the personal, social and psychological motivations, expectations and difficulties that women face in relation to work.

3.2 The Current Study

The study produced a rich complex data set from 394 women across the region. The interviews were transcribed and the text was analysed using software (NVivo), which helps to organise the material into themes. The focus of the analysis addressed the aims of the research; the barriers to employment, women's employment experience and the context of their working lives; social networks, place and community as well as exploring their decision-making. Key themes identified from the interviews are presented in this section. In addition, the questionnaire data was analysed to produce frequencies and further statistics. These are used to complement the interview material.

3.3 Varieties and Complexities of Women's Working Lives

Meanings of Work

In exploring the barriers to women's employment and progression it soon became clear that there would be no simple set of barriers that all women experienced. In the same way, the role of work in women's lives is not straightforward. Most importantly, work means different things to women. Through the interviews, the research identified at least five significant meanings that work has for women. Some women mentioned all five, but most mentioned more than one. These tended to reflect the different areas of women's lives, such as social (see for example: Andrew and Montague, 1998 and their discussion of the importance of friendship), financial, caring for others etc (see Fagan, 2001 for a discussion of differences in work orientations and their relationship to working time preferences). Furthermore some reported a change in meanings over time, as their priorities changed over their life course, for example, from being young adults to having a family. Crompton and Harris also stressed the fluidity of women's employment orientations (1998: 129).

More than 80% of women in the questionnaire sample felt that their earnings were essential for the household and over half thought their dependents would suffer if they lost their income. The majority of women worked full-time. In this way the role of work in women's lives is clearly financial, but this isn't always the driving force behind their working lives. Being financially independent was one important meaning for many women.

'I've always had a wage up until three years ago – a full-time wage I mean … I've always been completely independent, always paid my own way. And it was difficult to swallow for a while. I felt as if it had been taken away from me – it made me feel really awkward.' (Kathleen, aged 32)

For others, most frequently mentioned was the social aspect of work and the support they received from colleagues.

'I kind of class my colleagues as a family. I think because I enjoy what I do, I don't find it a hardship coming to work. It's like I say, it's my social time with my friends.' (Davina, aged 34)

For some women, a key function that work filled was an escape from their home lives.

> *'I just like being away from home – it's a release from being at home. I can forget my pressures at home a little while I'm at work and vice versa, I forget about work when I'm at home (laughs) – try to!'* (Sharon, aged 44)

More fundamentally, women saw work as part of their identity and helped to shape their sense of who they were.

> *'I suppose I still feel like that really, you get such a lot from work. You get an identity; you get a reason to get up in the morning and all the rest of it.'* (Sheila, aged 36)

For some women, the meanings changed as they got older and their priorities shifted.

> *'Probably when I was younger and bringing up the family it was the salary, it was the means to support my family and it was very secure at that time. At that time you probably thought it was a job for life. **Now** that the daughter's left home…. work is a big part of my life. It's mixing with my equals and, you know, my peers…. So probably now with an empty house at home, you know, work is a big part really.'* (Elizabeth, aged 45)

Fagan (2001: 249) found that having children is related to change in employment commitment for both sexes, and the presence of a child under school age is associated with the sharpest decline in commitment, but this is especially marked for women. However, despite such an impact, the demands of parenthood upon working lives vary over time and in relation to the age and situation of any children. Martin and Roberts' (1994) classic study which explored women's attitudes to work, found that social and domestic circumstances had a considerable influence on the meaning of work for women. Our study suggests that this finding is still pertinent, despite three decades of equal opportunities legislation. Although parents' attitudes towards employment has also become a focus, women still report the closest identification with caring responsibilities and they impact more heavily upon women's career opportunities and choices.

Multiple Identities

Women have complex relationships with work, it is not simply a means to an end: a source of money. Many women reported multiple identities in their lives, with work, family, and caring for others, part of their daily roles. This has an impact on women's employment choices, with some women restricting their working opportunities due to

these other roles and responsibilities. With over half the questionnaire sample of women having children, and 13% caring for other relatives, these are obvious factors to be taken into account.

> *'It changes you as a person because you're no longer the centre of your world, your children are. You have bigger responsibilities, you have more stability. Previously I moved to wherever there was a job that I wanted to go and do, and now I wouldn't do that.'* (Simone, aged 36)

Home and Work: Sense of Community

Where women live and how they feel about where they live can play an important role in their working lives. This was evident both from the questionnaire data and the interviews. On average the women across the case studies had lived in the same place for more than 17 years and most felt at home there.

> *'I can take my dogs out in my pyjamas and no one even looks at you. Daft things. Aye makes me feel at home.'* (Kathleen, aged 32)

Most said they felt at home in their current accommodation either to some extent or very much. Those from case study number 2 (a civil service organisation), were the least likely to say they felt at home to some extent, or very much (combined percentage=89.3), whereas those from case study 7 (a local council) were the most likely (proportionally) to say this, (combined percentage=97.3).

Those women who had lived longer in their current place also considered it important to live and work in the same area. In this way, for these women, their work choices had to be linked in with their choice of community. Just over forty-one per cent of women reported that they lived and worked in the same community.

> *'I feel that I belong to a community. I have a real sense of erm belonging to Newcastle and the North East. So I can't really ever see myself moving now. Part of that is to do with responsibilities to my mum and my grandmother but even if that wasn't there I still don't think I would move.'* (Carol, aged 35)

Others felt that working near where they lived was a way of contributing to local regeneration.

> *'I feel as if I'm part of the community because I work in it and I feel like I've got something to offer the community.'* (Pippa, aged 50)

There was some variation across the case studies in the level of home and belonging, but this can be partly explained by the variation in lengths of residence, as the case study company whose employees had the lowest average length of residence also showed the lowest sense of home and community.

At Home in Work

The importance of feeling at home also stretches to work, and indeed these are related. The more women felt at home in their local community, the more likely they were to feel part of a community at work. In broad terms, most women felt at home in their current workplace, knew their workmates well or to some extent and felt part of a community there. Interestingly this varied across the case studies, giving a sense of contrasting working cultures but did not seem to be gendered. Some felt that this sense of community at work was vital.

> *'I think that sort of social interaction erm while it doesn't take much, it doesn't take a lot of time, actually has huge benefits in terms of helping people to feel that they are part of a community within an organisation I suppose.'* (Kathleen, aged 32)

For all case studies, the majority of participants felt that they knew their workmates very well or to some extent. Employees of case study 2 (a civil service organisation) were however less likely than any other case study, but still a high figure, to say they knew their workmates very well or to some extent (80.9%).

3.4 Work & Home

A Balancing Act?

Many women talked about the way they have to juggle work and family life and the impact of family responsibilities on women's careers and progression in the labour market has been well documented (Cabinet Office, 2001; Dench et al., 2002a; EMPLOYMENT Support Unit, 2000; Fagan and Burchell, 2002; Fawcett Society, 2002; Hochschild, 1983; Hogarth et al., 2001; Huws et al., 1996; Kodz et al., 2002; National Joint Council for Local Government Services, 2001; Northern TUC, 2002; Opportunity Now, 2000; Walby and Olsen, 2002). Others mentioned the balance they were seeking between the right job and progression, their children and childcare, and having time as a family. Women generally did not view work in isolation, but made employment choices in the context of wider roles and responsibilities.

> *'We have this argument regularly. [Men] say, "Oh, I've been here since 7 o'clock" and I'll say, "Oh yes, and you've gone home and your lass will have made your tea and your ironing will be done." When we go home, we make the tea and do the bloody ironing. It **is** easier for a man, I'm sure.'* (Elizabeth, aged 45)

Women often mentioned the need to consider the needs of their children and partners in relation to their working lives.

> *'To be honest, if I had the choice, I'd work full-time but it's not practical through the holidays. So I'm quite happy with the 2 days so we have to juggle it like that. But what happened one week – my partner hadn't realised there was a meeting so we had to call somebody up to get them to look after the kids. I still wanted to come in no matter what. I thought **this** is my 2 days away, just a bit of sanity.'* (Kathleen, aged 32)

For others, such as single parents, it is a considerable challenge to balance the different responsibilities.

> *'My biggest issue was that I was a single parent. I came back to work when the little boy was very tiny. I had to get up at 5.30 or 6am until I got myself into a routine…. The bigger problems I had were when they started school and the gap between me starting work at 8.30 and them starting school at 9am. Them finishing school at 3pm and me finishing work at 5pm.'* (Elizabeth, aged 45)

Women talked about feeling guilty when they were at work and how home can be a barrier to work and getting the balance right appeared to be difficult for some.

'Having children can restrict or if you've got a disabled partner. If they're poorly, you're restricted, you feel guilty if you're having to go to work and they're ill. If someone would phone you and ask you to change a shift and you're thinking, "But is it alright with my home life?" You've got to think of that as well. So your home is a barrier to your work.' (Sharon, aged 44)

Desire for Change

Juggling work and home was something many women were finding a challenge. A third of women wanted to change their working hours. This was even higher, 42%, for the sample as a whole 42.8% of who were male and 53.7% of whom were female. Participants who wanted to change their hours were asked to specify the type of change they would like. The most common change cited was to work more flexible hours (9.7% of women). The majority of females desiring more flexibility in their working time, worked on average between 31-40 hours per week (12% females). The second most common change reported was to work less hours, this was particularly the case for those working 41-60 hours on average per week (17.1% desiring change, wanted to work less hours). Fagan found that childcare and domestic responsibilities featured more strongly in women's accounts of their working time preferences than in men's and that for both, the most popular change would be greater control over the organisation of their work schedules (2001: 239). Some women talked about the benefits of flexible working:

'I think flexi time's great for people with young children, especially here where you can get away at three and pick a child up [but] when you're in a retail situation, you're there till well after the shop actually locks its doors.' (Fiona, aged 50)

Women's Working Lives

The picture painted of women's working lives is obviously shaped by the sample of employers and employees we accessed. This was a fairly young sample, most of whom worked full-time and many of whom did not have children. The average age of the sample of women was relatively young at 38, with nearly 60% aged 40 or under. Over half the women had children and 45% did not. Women tended to have worked for an average 8 years at their current employer. The majority worked 31-40 hours per week. Twenty-two per cent of females worked 30 hours or under. Only twelve percent worked 41 hours per week or over.

Participant earnings

The majority of women earn £500-£999 per month (39%). Table 2 shows the distribution of earnings for female employees.

Table 2: Female employees earnings (after tax and NI) per month

Earnings (monthly)	n	%
Up to £299	4	1.5%
£300-499	10	3.8%
£500-999	103	39%
£1000-1499	86	32.6%
£1500-1999	42	15.9%
£2000-2499	11	4.2%
£2500-2999	5	1.9%
£3000-3499	2	.8%
Over £3500	1	.4%

The gender pay gap has been well documented (see for example: Anderson et al., 2001; Myck and Paull, 2001; Warren et al., 2001) as has its influence on women's post retirement earnings (Gough, 2001). Only 37.7% of women said that they were the main provider. Women are more likely to report being the main financial provider as the number of hours they work per week increases.

3.5 Main barriers to employment and progression

Although the economic activity rate of women of working age has increased to 72% in 2001 from 71% in 1990 (Dench et al., 2002a) and women have moved into some areas previously populated by men, gender segregation remains. It operates both horizontally (across jobs) and vertically (across levels of organizations) and is an enduring feature of most employment contexts (see for example: Blackburn et al., 1993; Blackburn et al., 2001; Brown and Ridge, 2002; Chan, 1999; Cross and Bagilhole, 2002; EMPLOYMENT Support Unit, 2000; Maume Jr., 1999; Scott, 1994). Our findings confirm that women's experiences of barriers to employment and progression are complex and often interconnected. The following represents some of the main barriers identified by women from the questionnaire and interview data.

Childcare/caring for others

Childcare and caring for others featured strongly in the lives of women and their perceptions of these issues as barriers to their employment or progression were multifaceted and influenced decisions regarding work. This was evident both from the questionnaire data and interviews with women. This finding reflects the well established fact that caring commitments, including living with children, impact more heavily upon women's career decisions and 'choices', than upon those of men and women who take time out of the labour market to take care of pre-school children, return to the labour market to wages below men of the same age, and also below women in similar circumstances who have not had a break in their careers (Duncan et al., 2001: 3). Within this study, the cost of childcare had been a barrier to over half of women (51.3%) across the case studies and therefore perpetuates their economic position.

> *'They're normally on the outskirts of where you need to work, they're not in a town centre or anywhere. So that means that you've got to get the baby ready on the morning, you've got to go through the paraphernalia, you've got to have transport! Which is another cost incurred. If you haven't got transport how on earth do you get a baby up at that time on a morning, put him on a bus, go down there, drop the baby off to get back in time for work and do the same thing again on a night?'* (Linda, aged 42)

Over a third of women (39.1%) said that they felt that their commitments to care for others had prevented them from getting work or progressing in work. Hogarth et al.,

Work-Life Balance Baseline Study showed that 15% of female employees had some form of caring responsibility compared to 11% of men and that around 12% of women and 10% of men had taken time off work to look after people other than children (2001: 71).

> *'A couple of times. Especially if I've been working loads of hours and my partner's been ill and in hospital, if I've had my two days off. I've got to spend my two days at the hospital. And there's been courses around but they've been on my two days – do I either go to the hospital or do my course? So I've really had to focus on what's most important. And it's hard finding a balance with that because I want to do both, but time doesn't allow both.'* (Sharon, aged 44)

Lack of quality childcare was also considered to be a barrier to 35.7% of women across the seven case studies. Family and friends were the preferred form of childcare, especially for children under school age. Others did not have access to such networks.

> *'I think there's got to be a reliable type of childcare. I wouldn't dream of, if my son was three or four years old, leaving him with somebody who I didn't trust, which is why I left it until he'd started integrating more at school before I went to work.'* (Linda, aged 42)

Key issues identified by women included their concerns about the quality of provision and the people and places in which it was provided. Often women said that they needed to be comfortable with their childcare arrangements, otherwise they would be worrying whilst at work. Some women were so concerned about the lack of good quality childcare, that they had stopped working in order to provide that care themselves. Government initiatives such as the childcare costs support scheme do not extend to informal family networks, which are often used and sometimes preferred by many working women. Despite childcare costs in the North East being quite low in absolute terms compared to the national average, the relatively low wage rates of many of the women in the study meant that childcare ate up a sizeable portion of their weekly income. Working mothers on low incomes frequently use an extended childcare network to access free childcare. A recent survey by the Childcare Trust showed that average childcare costs for a two year old were over £110 a week in England (Northern TUC, 2002: 21). North East mothers who do not have access to networks of free childcare would be unable to work unless they could find a sufficiently well paid job to cover the costs of childcare.

'I think kids should be brought up by their own parents. I think it's better for them. I have friends that have put children in crèche from the day they've been born until they've started school and they just don't come on as well. When they're your own children you have more time for them.' (Olwen, aged 32)

Another area of concern mentioned by women was the *location* of childcare. This had influenced a number of women's decisions about work and often led to decisions to stay in a particular job as a consequence of these factors.

'When I did make an application to another authority for a promotion, when I sat down and thought how convenient here was to us, how my childcare was all here, how the extra travelling would affect my childcare, I ended up withdrawing and I just thought I'd stay where I am. It's totally the convenience of the place, it's a seven minute drive from home.' (Elizabeth, aged 45)

In the UK, the practice of long working hours in full-time jobs combined with negligible public subsidies for childcare encourages mothers to seek part-time, flexible working hours (Hakim, 1997; Rubery et al., 1999). This of course, provides solutions at an individual level, but confirms the stereotype that mothers are less motivated by employment.

More generally, women recognised that having children changed their lives and the decision to have children affected their working choices.

'The idea of having children affects yer work choices because you have to plan. You've gotta plan well in advance before you know before you start even thinking about falling pregnant, before you even start trying you know you have to think erm there's financial implications, of you know childcare. Childcare's a major issue. Erm just what will happen to your career if you want to leave, will you be able to come back into the same place, your time management. It's just everything is turned upside down when you think about having children.' (Claudia, aged 31).

Flexible hours and time

 A recent study on work-life balance (Kodz et al., 2002) revealed that employees valued the ability to vary their working hours to accommodate non-work activities, the flexibility to work from home when necessary instead of having to take leave if a tradesperson was visiting, or being able to come into work later or leave earlier after working long hours. 22% of women worked on average 30 hours or under per week, the majority worked between 31 and 40 hours. The remainder 12% worked 41 hours

a week or more. Almost a quarter (23.5%) felt that lack of flexible working hours had been a barrier to their employment or progression. Almost a third (32%) wanted to change their working hours. The most common change, cited by 10%, was to work more flexible hours, particularly those women who worked between 31-40 hours per week.

> *'I think since we moved, what they have actually done is they've allowed people start or finish at different times. So up until March, managers needed to be present 8.30am until 5pm minimum. But I think because some people have issues over the relocation, they said "no we'll give you some more flexibility over that". But we don't get flexitime here as managers.'* (Jane, aged 51)

Almost a quarter of women agreed that lack of relevant part-time work had prevented them from accessing work or getting on in work, and often the need to work part-time was related to their domestic responsibilities, and commitments to care for others.

> *'Because of the other domestic commitments I have, I'd be working all hours of the night and all weekend on domestic issues if I was working full time. I just, I can't commit more than well, it was fifty per cent, now its seventy per cent of my time to outside employment. And I feel that's the maximum. I need the days off I have to keep track of things at home and get the children what they need for school and where they need to be.'* (Peggy, aged 49)

Lack of support/encouragement

When asked if they had been encouraged to develop new skills with their current employer, 63% of women agreed with the statement. Training opportunities are also related to women's position in the labour market, and according to the DfEE (1997) report those who are the most disadvantaged and have the least access to job related training include women with children, women returners, women part-timers, women with no or low level qualifications, women at the lower levels of the occupational hierarchy, and women in low paid jobs. Over a quarter of women (28%) agreed that they lacked encouragement from their superiors and just 9% of women felt that they lacked social support from the people that they worked with. Some women raised particular concerns regarding opportunities for further training, and being allowed time during work to do this, because due to their commitments outside of work they would be unable or find it difficult to develop their skills otherwise. These commitments were related to caring for children and family which indicates the extent to which being prime carers impacts upon employment progression and deepens gender inequalities.

> *'It was getting experience to get into the type of work I wanted, which I found very hard because I've got responsibilities of home and everything. And of course while you're training or going on courses and things you've still got to work as well, so you're putting more hours in still. I was doing a course and the last three months we've had such high hours that I haven't had time to sit with it... And then we just got a letter saying that you haven't finished within the time scale, we're taking you off the scheme.'* (Sharon, aged 44)

For other women further training opportunities were also limited by lack of funding, availability of places on courses and the location of courses.

> *'They said they couldn't afford to put me through because I wanted to do [name of course] and they put that down to a lack of funding. We did try with another part of the organisation and go centrally to see if there were any funds and there wasn't at that time. And limited places on courses, when I was trying to get into [name of occupation] they only used to put one forward for a place every year and of course the year I applied there was eight and myself. But there was no sort of flexibility, they were only going to put one through, didn't matter whether there was eight, eighteen or whatever.'* (Gail, aged 39)

Almost a quarter of women (24%) felt that their qualifications/training had been a barrier to their employment or progression.

> *'As I say education, because I didn't really have an education. I mean Friday, I had to have Friday afternoon off [school] to go for my dad's wages, wait for him being paid so I could bring the money home to my mother, because she paid her bills and things. And then Thursday my granddad worked for years on the railway and he used to get a pension, so I used to go to the railway station to pick his pension up, so I never went to school on a Thursday afternoon.'* (Beryl, aged 67)

> *'I think you need a lot more qualifications these days as well, erm I mean I remember when I was at school it wasn't, there were a lot of people who quit without doing A-Levels and yet now that's practically unheard of. It's unheard of not to do A-Levels and a degree, whereas then it was catching on that everyone went to University, but there were still plenty of people that didn't and still managed to get into places so.'* (Claudia, aged 31)

> *'You need more qualifications now; to do things that years ago if you'd been in the job for twenty years, you were an expert at. Whereas now they're bringing in more people that have qualified, in that field so those, unskilled, unqualified people, are being pushed out of work in one place, but because they haven't got the qualifications to go into another place, they're out of work.'* (Linda, aged 42)

Dench et al., (2002a: 89) reported that women tend to cite family and domestic commitments as the main barriers to learning, and that women were also more likely than men to report reasons relating to a lack of confidence in their ability to learn.

Also, given the well-established connection between self-esteem, self-confidence and applications for promotion (Davidson and Cooper, 1992), this is likely to have a big impact upon women's career progression.

Expectations for progression – self-esteem, confidence and self-efficacy

Almost a third of women (29%) said that they lacked confidence to apply for promotion. A recent report from Opportunity Now (2002) highlighted that the most significant variable affecting confidence was age, with women between the ages of 40-49 being most likely to see confidence as a barrier, with women under the age of 30 being the least likely to consider confidence a barrier. This may be because women in the older age group have recently returned from a break in service to look after children. Issues around confidence, self-efficacy, and expectations were also raised during the interviews, with some women feeling that they had held themselves back through their own lack of confidence, low expectations and inability to see progression for themselves.

'When you're used to doing so many part-time jobs over the years then you just automatically put yourself into that category. Very few women ever get out. Because they don't see that they're worth anything more than that because people say oh you're only a cleaner, oh you're only a barmaid, so they begin to think, oh I'm only that why should I go up. I'm terrible for it, I totally undermine myself, and I can't blow my own trumpet. And going for that job, I know for a fact I wouldn't get it because I don't sell myself. When I look for jobs now, I know I should be looking in that price bracket, why shouldn't I look in that price bracket, because I know I can do the job. But then I think well what's the point because I'm not going to get the job, so my confidence has already gone down anyway.' (Linda, aged 42)

*'I've never looked further afield, predominantly because this was **so convenient** for my home situation. So I've never really aspired to the onwards and upwards elsewhere, and I think that you maybe get to a certain point where you've been somewhere such a long time, and you think "oh bloody hell, I couldn't even think about starting somewhere else now", they've probably been self-imposed barriers, I probably could have gone and done if I'd felt strong enough. But I obviously haven't felt strong enough at the time, and been quite happy where I was.'* (Elizabeth, aged 45)

There's been times when I've looked on the board and thought "oh I'd never get that" whereas maybe the guys just have a little bit more confidence about themselves.' (Claudia, aged 31)

'I think it's because I've been out of it for a little while, it's the confidence thing and things change and re-training that kind of thing.' (Frances, aged 29)

Humphrey and Pinkney (2003) revealed that lower aspirations and expectations also featured in their interviews with a variety of women. They found that their interviewees felt that women often *expect* to work in certain occupations – which are afforded less status and reward. They also found that women assume that men are more likely to be in positions of authority, with little questioning of their ability to be in such roles. Gendered occupational cultures which privilege men can lead to women having lower aspirations and expectations, which in turn leads to lower self-esteem, with women being more likely than men to question their own ability. Such low aspirations can also influence women's expectations of progressing or being visible, and reinforce perceptions of particular sectors as a 'man's world'. Such cultural stereotypes can dissuade women from considering entry into such sectors and also make it difficult for those women employed in such sectors to be taken as seriously as their male colleagues (Humphrey and Pinkney, 2003: 13).

In terms of planning for the future some women in the study had very firm plans in place and knew exactly what they wanted to do and how they were going to do it. Others had not planned as thoroughly, and felt they had just been lucky, perhaps demonstrating an external locus of control with regard to work and progression, which some women felt had in fact held them back.

'Only by not giving it as much thought, as I should do, by literally just sailing along merrily and just being guided by whatever happens around me. I don't actively seek out a career path or change of job.' (Claudia, aged 31)

'There's obviously something in my life that just shoves me in the right direction at the right time and that's all happened rather than going up like that I've branched off a bit.' (Linda, aged 42)

'I've always had a job since I left university, but I'm not particularly career centred – not one of those people who've got a ten year career plan. Just have a job, I don't have a career I've got a job I think… that's how I ended up here, and since then I've just been promoted because somebody else has left, so I didn't really have to look for another job, it just kind of happened.' (Pat, aged 29)

Suitable employment opportunities and training

The desire to remain in an area with which they felt a sense of community and/or the decision to work part-time, led to a lack of suitable job opportunities for some women.

Almost a third of women (31.8%) identified lack of available work locally as a barrier to their employment or progression.

> *'There aren't really very many jobs round here, because I think there used to be a pit and a steel works and stuff which is closed down. But they're aren't really any; there isn't anywhere else to work. So you have to look for a job in Newcastle or Gateshead.'* (Pat, aged 29)

> *'The lack of jobs, really in this area you've got to travel, there's nothing.'* (Olwen, aged 32)

> *'In some cases its because the jobs aren't available in what they've trained for or aren't the jobs available locally.'* (Simone, aged 36)

> *'Well, I choose to stop work; I mean I could afford to; I was probably lucky that I could stop work when I had children. And I stayed off work until the youngest went to primary school. So then I was limited then to, to trying to find something within a location that I could work to. And only part-time, and I still feel that I can only go part-time. So that is very limiting. I don't feel that I can move anywhere else because there just isn't the work available part-time.'* (Peggy, aged 49)

Lack of relevant information about local jobs was also an issue for 28.8% of women. The Regional Development Plan for the North East of England identified a serious shortfall in the number of jobs regarding the working age population in the region, some 102,000 additional jobs would be needed to bring the area in line with the national average (Government Office for the North East, 2002: 3). This general scarcity of jobs was also something, which women identified as a barrier during interviews.

> *'I think probably just lack of jobs available. I mean, I had a years full-time at college when I left school, but there was jobs when I left school, there was jobs advertised, there was jobs to go for.'* (Elizabeth, aged 45)

> *'I don't know if it's in particular areas where the market is flooded with more **men** than women, or whether the sort of higher management have a different **culture** as to who should do what and why.'* (Davina, aged 34)

> *'I mean there's not the same movement, not so many people move out of, and really the career ladder in [name of profession] is quite poor. It's one of the issues we have as a profession. As well as locally, it's a national thing, we're limited to where we can go.'* (Pippa, aged 50)

3.6 When is a Barrier not a Barrier?

Pervasive gender lines: Gender as a barrier

Despite the weight of evidence citing their gender as implicated in their lack of employment mobility, when asked in the questionnaire whether or not they considered their gender had been a barrier to employment or progression, 77% of female respondents across all case studies *disagreed*. But as Halford and Leonard (2001: 4) claimed 'many men and women working in today's organisations deny that gender plays a significant part in their experience or career development'. However, the fact that the gendered cultures in organisations may be perceived as 'normal' or 'natural' does not invalidate their impact. When other identified barriers were examined, such as the need for flexible working arrangements or childcare concerns, a major underlying theme throughout was gendered time and attitudes. Gender issues were evident when women talked about their working lives, or their understanding of how work and home life were necessarily interconnected by the juggling of time, family, domestic tasks, and work responsibilities.

Gender is therefore still a major issue in the work place because of the impact that gender stereotypes have on the attitudes and decision-making of employers and employees alike. 'Hard evidence' of gendered practices in specific workplaces is often difficult to come by (Hearn and Parkin, 1987) but this does not necessarily reduce their impact. As was discovered from the questionnaire data, particular beliefs about gender and gendered characteristics still prevail: the 'normal' manager is male and more likely to be promoted than an equally well-qualified woman. Dench et al., reported on the proportion of female directors in the FTSE 100 companies, the proportion of companies with no female directors in 2000 was 42, this had risen to 43 in 2001, there had however been an increase in the 10 to 19 per cent group from 22% in 2000 to 27% in 2001 (Dench et al., 2002a: 54).

- 34% of women agreed with the statement that 'a woman needs to be twice as good as a man to get half as far'.
- 47% of women agreed that 'men do not like to be supervised by women'.
- 37% of women agreed that 'male workers get promoted more rapidly than equally qualified female workers'.

A sizeable number of women also believe that they have to work harder than male colleagues to prove themselves but feel that their hard work may not be rewarded.

'I think being a woman as well because it seems like you have to really do more than anybody else. Really prove yourself, and you had to do it right first time. Everything has to be just right' (Kathleen, aged 32).

For women who do progress, many believe that their job is made harder because male members of staff do not like to be supervised by a woman. Underlying these beliefs are stereotypical attitudes about women and men, and their place in the labour market, and their role in the home.

'Although it's a female oriented profession, there's more men get to the top, and interestingly enough, it's often the men who are poorer students, with poorer qualifications, and they don't do as well erm as the females are much you know, so it is a wee bit skewered isn't it?' (Pippa, aged 50)

Gender segregated/dominated jobs still prevail. The majority of nurses or workers in the caring professions are female, yet the majority of the managers in the highest posts in these professions are male. Male nurses are perceived to progress faster than female nurses. In male dominated occupations, such as heavy industry, manufacturing and the construction industry, women employees, however, tend to be in lower paid administrative roles (Greed, 2000).

The Womb Syndrome

Although the majority of women in the North East are now employed, they also still have the main responsibility for the domestic sphere, including the organisation of childcare. Likewise, when children are sick many women said that the presumption that the mother would be the one to have to leave work rather than the father, was what categorised mothers as 'problematic' employees. Even when women did not have children or had decided not to have a family, women were assessed as though they would be mothers at some point in the future. A recent report from Opportunity Now (2002) revealed the second most important barrier to advancement identified by women in their study was the perception of colleagues and managers that because of the difficulty of balancing responsibilities of work and home, women are less committed to work.

'In general, there's always this suspicion isn't there that women are going to run off and have children and then want days off when the kids are sick' (Pat, aged 29).

'I think it's a lot harder for women because – especially if a man is recruiting – I think they think, "Well, look at their age, look at their marital status, they could be going off soon. They'll want a career break; am I going to get my money's worth; what am I going to do when they're not here? If people have got children – what are they going to do if the kid's off sick?" And I think all women get assessed like that whether or not they have children, or whether they are going to have children or not. It's just the way of the world, because men continually stay at work unless they have paternity leave of course. And I think that's so, it really annoys me. It really does. Because I've chosen that I'm not having a family. But you can't actually sit in an interview and say, "I'm not having a family, love, so you'll be all right, I'll be here for the rest of my days" (Tanya, aged 34).

Whether or not they have children, women are still reporting that they do the bulk of the domestic chores. The majority of women across all the case studies reported having the main responsibility for household tasks, such as cleaning, ironing and shopping.

'But he never hoovered and I mean we have a great relationship but I just saw how lazy he was, and I just thought because his Mum had always done it for him, and I just thought 'well I'm not your mum' I like you a lot, but I'm not going to do all this for you.' (Angela, aged 22).

Where women were married or living with partners, household tasks were also divided up along gendered lines. 67% of the women surveyed took primary

responsibility for the ironing. 18% surveyed were responsible for doing the DIY around the house. This has more impact on women's working lives than on men's. The household tasks that women perform are those that are done regularly, sometimes two to three times daily, such as cooking, rather than irregular tasks such as decorating. When children enter the equation, men and women are perceived to have different responsibilities as parents.

'It's the woman who's expected to be the one to stay at home and raise them' (Claudia, aged 31)*.*

'I think perceptions of a woman's role and a man's role, although they don't directly affect the way I'm treated at work. I still think there are perceptions in people that if a child is ill it's the woman that goes home and picks up the child. It does happen sometimes that one of the male members of staff is off because their child's ill, but I get the impression that if a man is called because their child's ill and they go home, in people's heads they might be thinking, "Well, where's the mum?"' (Simone, aged 36).

'Managers tend to work from eight in a morning 'til seven o'clock at night. How many women with a family can work them hours – they can't. There's not many women that can turn round and say, "Oh yeah, my husband's at home, he's looking after the kids. I don't have to worry about him; I can be out, I can go overnight, I can go on a residential training course." Women can't because they have the responsibility, it's been drummed into them for bloody years, to stay at home and look after the kids' (Linda, aged 42).

These extracts from the women's interviews demonstrate how firmly established women's primary role as carers still is in the 21st century. This has an impact on the labour market, in that many more women enter part-time working arrangements than men in order to balance such commitments. Women are more likely to require flexibility in their working hours, and most women with families will be less likely to progress than male colleagues who are parents. Gender, therefore, despite not being perceived as a barrier by many, is still an issue which impacts upon labour market recruitment and progression and must be taken on board by employers.

Gender roles and stereotypes

The questionnaire examined particular attitudes concerning work. Table 3 shows the average level of agreement with statements regarding work in general by gender.

Table 3: Attitudes to work in general by gender
(1= strongly disagree → 5 =strongly agree)

Average Level of Agreement	Female
1. Part-time staff should have a more clearly defined career structure	3.4
2. Part-time staff never get promoted	2.72
3. A woman needs to be twice as good as a man to get half as far	2.81
4. The only women who get to the top are those who lack feminine qualities	2.14
5. Women are better than men in dealing with people	3.01
6. Men do not like to be supervised by women	3.23
7. Male workers get promoted more rapidly that equally qualified female workers	3.02
8. Job sharing works well	3.41
9. Women fail to get promotion because they have a child	2.62
10. Men make better managers than women	2.07
11. Women who return to work after maternity are never as good as they were	1.96
12. Men and women doing the same job/job of equal worth should receive the same pay	4.63
13. Older people find it hard to learn new skills	2.67
14. The state should provide an adequate old age pension	4.42
15. Older people make more reliable employees	3.30
16. It should be the individual that makes financial provision for retirement	3.25

The table reveals that women had high levels of agreement with statements about women's abilities and roles in the workplace. Women agreed most strongly with statements concerning clearly defined structures for part-time workers; job sharing works well and the state should provide an adequate old age pension. Most strongly disagreed were statements concerning the performance of those returning from maternity; lack of promotion for part-time staff and lack of promotion for having children.

Many of the women we interviewed felt the weight of powerful gendered stereotypes. The reasons given for these were varied but included the role of the family and the wider culture in gender socialisation.

'I do feel that in the North we are more sort of backward. I think that we, you know here, you are sort of trained to look after the kitchen sink.' (Kay, aged 36)

'Unfortunately the way erm women are educated, I think it is still that way inclined. I mean it has changed a lot, and it had nowt to do with girl power and the Spice Girls, we started a long time ago. I've been drinking pints for twenty years, so it has bugger all to do with Geri Halliwell, but it does come to that socialisation from yer mother and extended family and community.' (Gail, aged 39)

Ambitions: mapping out women's choices and decisions

When asked, women often identified key moments in their lives when they made decisions that affected their employment. These included having children, going to university, deciding to pursue a goal, or recognising they had never made a conscious choice, about careers in particular or life in general.

'I wanted to be a marine biologist….I remember saying to this Careers Officer, and he just laughed and said, 'well have you thought about Marks and Spencer's?" (Sheila, aged 36).

'I suppose before that I had honestly had not considered it as a possibility, going to university.' (Sheila, aged 36)

'Sometimes I can look back and think now, did I choose him for that reason you know, did he fit in with what I wanted at that time? Cos at that time, I'd moved about a lot, and I was sick of living out of a backpack, so maybe it wasn't the fact that you know he swept me off me feet, it's more the fact that he happened to be there, at the right time, which isn't very romantic at all.' (Gail, aged 39)

'At the moment I think I'm guided by finances, and living in a pub culture, as my parents would say, which will, that I will outgrow all this I know I will. Erm, it's just down to my age you know being thirty one and wanting to act twenty odd as well. I'm just in a position that I'm happy with now, but yeah I do know that I will have to think more about it in the future.' (Simone, aged 36)

Some felt that women didn't push themselves enough, and were often encouraged to drift from one low paid job to another because family commitments were more important.

'But it's always been expected that, women, stay down there. They've had to take part-time cleaners, part-time barmaid jobs, anything that's part-time that doesn't earn a lot of money right, women should be grateful for because they've got a family to look after, or a house, or a husband to look after, even anything like that, so they're expected not do anything whereas the men, are the breadwinners or were the breadwinners years ago, so they had to strive, they had to make the money, they had to push themselves forward all the time, whereas women don't, women don't push themselves.' (Linda, aged 42)

'By not giving it much thought, as I should do. By literally just sailing along merrily, and just by being guided, whatever happens around me erm you know what people say, I don't actively seek out erm a career path, or you know change of job, erm so by just being a bit mind numb.' (Claudia, aged 31).

Overcoming other barriers

A major finding was the complexity of barriers to women's progression. Something that acted as a barrier for one woman might not be for another. Issues such as affordable childcare, or the location of a job, affect women differently, depending upon their income level, support networks, access to transport, and their partner's involvement or work status. Barriers to employment and progression cannot therefore be looked at in isolation, as many are interconnected. For example, many women talked about the importance of work and how their desire to work helped to motivate them to overcome considerable obstacles.

'When I worked in [name of place] there was a bus once an hour 'cos I don't drive. If I was starting work at say half seven in the morning, I would need to go down on the first bus, and be down there longer than I needed to be. When I finished at eight, if I just missed a bus I had to wait for another one. It was very expensive travelling down there on a bus, I mean, a third of my wages went on travel, but you just do that 'cos you've got a job, and it's better than being on the dole, isn't it really?' (Olwen, aged 32).

Reliable public transport was also an issue for another woman who worked part-time and studied part-time.

*'I don't drive so I'm always travelling by public transport, unless I'm given a lift. Since moving here, [transport] has become as issue, because the bus doesn't run frequently, so I could come **in** on the bus, that would be fine, but then I'd finish and there's no buses, so I'd have to personally pay for a taxi to take me back into town, which is more than an hour's pay'* (Angela, aged 22).

In conclusion, key barriers which are clearly gender related are not always perceived as such, but undoubtedly affect women's options for employment and progression in the workplace. How women deal with these perceived barriers is influenced by a number of factors including income, support networks, socialisation, working status, parental status, and available time. A key finding of the research is that the importance and meaning that women ascribed to employment was influential in how they dealt with any perceived barriers. They were much more likely to find ways of coping and overcoming barriers and problems if they were highly invested in paid work.

3.7 Case Studies

In addition to the research findings presented so far concerning the entire sample of women across the 7 case studies, this section presents some of these by case study.

Barriers to Employment by case study

The following represents an analysis of these statistics by case study. For the purposes of this report those participants who said that the statement did not apply to them have been removed from the analysis, figures relate to those remaining.

Working time

Table 4 shows female participant's views concerning *lack of flexible working hours as a barrier to employment and progression* by case study. The least likely to disagree or strongly disagree that this has been a barrier to them work for the manufacturing firm (case study 1), in fact none disagreed with the statement. In addition, half agreed this was a barrier. Over three-quarters of those working for case study 2 (civil service organisation) disagreed that lack of flexible working hours had been a barrier to them.

Table 4: Lack of flexible working hours as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	16.7	50	33.3	0	0
2.	4.8	19	9.5	38.1	28.6
3.	6.1	19.7	15.2	50	9.1
4.	10.6	29.8	27.7	21.3	10.6
5.	2.8	8.3	8.3	52.8	27.8
6.	0	11.1	5.6	77.8	5.6
7.	0	9.8	14.6	43.9	31.7

Table 5 shows the level of agreement of females by case study for the view *that lack of relevant part-time work has been a barrier to employment and progression.* The largest percentage that agreed with the statement worked for case study 1 (a

manufacturing firm). More generally, most women tended to disagree with this statement.

Table 5: Lack of relevant part-time work as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	0	42.9	14.3	28.6	14.3
2.	2.8	27.8	27.8	33.3	8.3
3.	2.9	19.1	10.3	54.4	13.2
4.	7.9	23.7	18.4	44.7	5.3
5.	0	8.3	25	54.2	12.5
6.	0	15.8	5.3	73.7	5.3
7.	7.1	21.4	17.9	46.4	7.1

Skills, qualifications and training

Participants were also asked how far they agreed *the lack of work suitable for their skills had been a barrier to them getting in and getting on in work.* Table 6 on the next page illustrates this by case study. Over half of those working for the manufacturing firm (case study 1) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Only 9.3% working for case study 5 (a regional utilities company) agreed or strongly agreed that this has been an issue for them, with the vast majority (76.7%) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement.

Table 6: Lack of work suitable for skills as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	33.3	22.2	22.2	22.2	0
2.	3.8	32.7	11.5	32.7	19.2
3.	3.8	17.5	10	48.8	20
4.	8.9	30.4	14.3	37.5	8.9
5.	0	9.3	14	58.1	18.6
6.	0	28	8	60	4
7.	2.4	12.2	19.5	43.9	22

Table 7 indicates how far women across the seven case studies agreed that *their qualifications/training had been a barrier to them getting in or getting on in work.*

Table 7: Qualifications/training as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	22.2	22.2	11.1	33.3	11.1
2.	3.8	17	7.5	49.1	22.6
3.	3.8	12.5	8.8	56.3	18.8
4.	1.5	30.8	9.2	41.5	16.9
5.	2.3	13.6	4.5	61.4	18.2
6.	0	28	4	56	12
7.	2.2	26.7	6.7	46.7	17.8

The table reveals that for female employees of case study 1 (a manufacturing firm) there is an even split between the percentage of people agreeing or strongly agreeing and those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, a trend not shown for any other employer or for either gender. At all other case study sites women were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the view that their qualifications/training have been a barrier to them.

Transport to work and locality

Participants were also asked how far they agreed that *transport had been a barrier to their employment and progression.* Table 8 on the next page shows the level of agreement by case study.

Table 8: Transport to work as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	10	40	20	30	0
2.	6.7	13.3	11.1	55.6	13.3
3.	1.4	9.7	8.3	58.3	22.2
4.	10.7	25	3.6	41.1	19.6
5.	5.1	10.3	10.3	56.4	17.9
6.	0	13.6	9.1	72.7	4.5
7.	2.6	15.4	5.1	46.2	30.8

The table shows that 50% of the women working for case study 1 (a manufacturing firm) agree or strongly agree that transport to work has been an issue for them. Women working for case study number 4 (a newspaper group) are also in higher proportional agreement than employees of other case studies, with 35.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that transport to work has stopped them getting in or getting on in work. This level of agreement is not shown at any other case study. The largest proportional percentage of disagreement with this statement was shown by women working for case study number 3 (a civil service organisation) with 80.5% of female employees expressing their views similarly.

Employees from the seven case studies were also asked if *lack of available work in their local area had been a barrier to them,* levels of agreement by gender are shown in Table 9 on the next page.

Table 9: Lack of available work locally as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	22.2	22.2	22.2	33.3	0
2.	13.5	25	9.6	36.5	15.4
3.	2.7	23	8.1	50	16.2
4.	203	28.8	6.8	35.6	8.5
5.	2.3	18.2	9.1	50	20.5
6.	4.5	27.3	0	63.6	4.5
7.	0	19	14.3	54.8	11.9

The largest proportional level of agreement was for those working for case study number 4 (a newspaper group) with almost half of female employees agreeing or strongly agreeing that this had been an issue for them. The majority of women employed by case study number 5 (a regional utilities company), almost seventy-one per cent, disagreed or strongly disagreed that this had prevented them from getting in or getting on in work.

Childcare issues and care commitments

Table 10 explores the views of female employees across case study concerning *lack of quality childcare as a barrier to employment and progression.*

Table 10: Lack of quality childcare as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	25	25	50	0	0
2.	12.9	35.5	6.5	32.3	12.9
3.	8.2	28.6	20.4	36.7	6.1
4.	13	21.7	34.8	17.4	13
5.	8	16	8	52	16
6.	12.5	18.8	12.5	50	6.3
7.	15	15	30	30	10

In most cases women's levels of disagreement that a lack of quality childcare had been a barrier to their employment and progression outweigh their levels of agreement. Notable exceptions are case study 1 and 4 (a manufacturing firm and a newspaper group) with fifty per cent of women agreeing or strongly agreeing. No women disagreed or strongly disagreed at case study 1. The largest proportional level of disagreement for women is for employees of case study 5 (a regional utilities company) where almost seventy per cent of female members of staff disagree or strongly disagree that lack of quality childcare has been a barrier to their employment and progression.

Table 11 again examines female participants' views concerning *the cost of childcare as a barrier to employment and progression.*

Table 11: Cost of childcare as a barrier by case study (percentage levels of agreement)

Case study	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	25	25	25	25	0
2.	26.5	29.4	17.6	20.6	5.9
3.	15.9	43.2	18.2	20.5	2.3
4.	25	20.8	16.7	20.8	16.7
5.	19	23.8	4.8	33.3	19
6.	23.1	38.5	15.4	23.1	0
7.	10	25	20	40	5

In four of the seven case studies, women in agreement or strong agreement with the view that the cost of childcare has been a barrier to them are in the majority (50% of female employees at the manufacturing firm, 55.9% of female employees at the civil service organisation, 59.1% of female employees at the primary care trust and 61.8% of female employees at the county emergence service organisation). Over half of female staff employed by case study 5 (a regional utilities company) disagree or strongly disagree with this statement; this is proportionally the highest level of female disagreement.

Policy Vs Practice: Equal Opportunities Policies and Employee Perceptions

As part of the questionnaire survey, participants were asked if their employer had an Equal Opportunities Policy and to explain what they understood the policy to mean. Over a third of women (39%) failed to answer the question.

Of the remainder:

- Under half had some understanding (49%).
- .3% thought it meant positive discrimination.
- .3% had a comprehensive understanding
- The rest of the respondents either:
    - Did not know
    - Did not think it applied to their workplace
    - Were not specific in their response.

All case study companies were requested to provide a copy of their Staff Handbook and any Equal Opportunities Policy Statements that they would normally issue to employees. HR personnel were also interviewed to ascertain what methods of distribution were used to keep staff apprised of their rights and responsibilities under the relevant laws and what, if any, training was provided, and to whom.

All the companies included in their documentation some reference to the following:

- Gender
- Race, ethnic origin, nationality or colour of skin
- Disability or impairment
- Marital status
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious or political beliefs

Some companies had made efforts to widen the remit of their equal opportunities policies to be more concerned with diversity, rather than purely the legal requirements.

Some of the considerations that had been adopted included statements on:

- Diversity
- Respect & Dignity
- Anti-bullying & harassment
- Consideration of poverty & social exclusion
- A wider definition of marital status e.g. life status

Most companies used a combination of means to disseminate information to their staff. Most issued a Staff Handbook to new employees in hard copy, which was then updated by sending round amendments on the internal email system. One company had a HR web site on the company Intranet that was kept up to date by HR personnel, and provided the main source of information as to facilities and benefits for the staff. Across all the case studies, training for staff in equality issues was rarely provided. Managers were more likely than non-managers were to receive training, but often they were already in post by the time they received it. Employees involved with Trades Unions as representatives were also more likely than ordinary members, or non-members, to have received training from their Union in equality and diversity issues.

Equal opportunities issues appeared to be high priority in some companies, and of less importance in others. This was demonstrated by the willingness of the HR department to engage with the topic, and address the difficult issues for their company, region, and occupation groups. For example, one company openly acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting women into skilled jobs, such as electricians, plumbers, and carpenters, and yet their expectation was that all applications for cleaning jobs would be from women. They are addressing this issue by teaming up with the local schools in the area, to talk to the children about all the jobs on offer, and why they would be open to both men and women. Encouraging young girls and women to consider jobs previously considered to be 'men's jobs' breaks down the stereotyping of employment categories, as well as offering women opportunities to enter skilled, well-paid occupations, thereby enhancing their earnings potential and future financial stability.

Does Policy Equal Practice?

In the interviews, the participants were asked whether they thought women and men *were* treated equally in their workplace, and what impact they thought the equal opportunities policies had in reality. While most employees acknowledged the existence of such a policy, they raised some concerns about its value, in practice. Some of the main themes that emerged from these:

➡ Work place equal opportunities policies are little more than a 'legal requirement':

'They've always had this equal opportunities and policies and protocols, and they make lovely reading, but that's all they do' (Gail, aged 39)

➡ Equal opportunities may not always work in practice. Many thought that men were privileged in the work place despite equal opportunities policies:

'I think on paper they do, but I think…when you come to making that decision and looking at the choice, if you've got a fella that's not going to be going anywhere and you know it, I think they would go for that first. You know they're not going to have PMT once a month, they're not going to be disappearing to get their kid from school 'cos it's got spots, so yeah I think that is still behind the choices' (Gail, aged 39).

➡ Sometimes equal opportunity policies clash with existing company policies, such as the right to return:

'It was decided to set up a new group which coincided with the arrival of an employee who had been working abroad. He took on the role of head of the group [because] he had the right of return; it was a question of what to do with him' (Jane, aged 51).

Awareness of benefits/facilities on offer in the workplace

All questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate from a list provided, which facilities and benefits were available in their workplace. There was also space available to add any that were not mentioned. The response from each case study was then compared to the actual benefits and facilities available, confirmed by the HR representative. This was to highlight where communication of information had been successful, or where the level of awareness was poor. Listing the facilities and benefits on offer in each particular workplace helps to identify where workplace

policies, or the organisational culture of the organisation, may contribute to the lack of women's progression.

Although most companies offered various methods of flexible working arrangements such as flexi-time, or part-time hours, several restricted these benefits in some way. For example in one company, flexi-time and job share were not available to managers; in another, certain jobs (not necessarily managerial) within the company, were not considered appropriate for part-time work or job share. Across all case studies except one (Local Council), there was a trend of high earners working very long hours. The higher women's salaries were, the more likely they were to perceive themselves as the main provider in their household. Women tend to be under-represented at the highest levels in most organisations, and some of the issues raised by the research participants help to explain why.

In some companies, senior managers jobs are only available on a full-time basis, part-time or job share options are not offered. In addition,

➡ Many managers are required to work minimum core hours on-site. This appears to be as much about the visibility of the manager to the other team members or employees, as it is about the necessity to carry out the work in that place (rather than work at home).

➡ The complexity of the work is often related to the perceived need for longer hours. There is also a perception that long hours must be worked to do the job 'properly'. Work commitment is still measured by time spent at a desk (Opportunity Now, 2002: 37).

➡ Meetings are frequently scheduled with no regard for parental responsibilities around school hours. Most mothers take primary responsibility for organising childcare and picking up/dropping off children at school. Women, rather than inflexible work place practices, are often perceived as the problem.

All of these issues appear to impact disproportionately upon women employees, who may be discouraged from applying for promotion because of fears that they will find it extremely difficult to balance their home and work responsibilities. For many women, especially those who want to have families, the lack of flexibility and support in more senior jobs may result in them to leaving the organisation when they became mothers. Companies who have invested in a loyal and efficient female workforce will

then lose a valuable resource due to lack of attention to employees' care responsibilities.

Many women also talked about refusing opportunities, because they had their lives organised and finely balanced. To accept a new job might mean more money and a new challenge, but it also might mean less time with the family, or more time spent travelling to and from work, thereby affecting the routine for picking the children up from school. The search for balance in their lives was palpable.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Why gender is still an issue

There is still a marked gender disparity in employment, both nationally and regionally, which appears to be intractable. Despite the existence of equal opportunity policies in most organisations and some implementation, many companies need to 'go the extra mile' and ensure that opportunities are readily available to all employees. What often seems to be missing is investment in the *principles* of the policies, whereby companies become proactive rather than reactive. This is as true for staff recruitment as it is for retention. Furthermore, companies could further invest in the locality and region by designing their recruitment strategies to reach out to the wider local community, as women are often as much concerned with the location of the employer as the work itself.

Key Conclusions

- Work has a variety of meanings for women, which can change over time.

- Where women live and how they feel about where they live can play a vital role in their working lives.

- The more women felt at home in their local community, the more likely they were to feel part of a community at work.

- Many women talked about the way they have to juggle work and family life.

- Juggling work and home was something many women were finding a challenge. A third of women wanted to change their working hours.

- Key barriers were perceived as being childcare; lack of flexible work and time; lack of support and encouragement; self-esteem and confidence; lack of suitable opportunities and training.

- Gender issues were evident when women talked about their working lives but gender itself was not perceived as a barrier.

What employers can do:

➡ Get to know the workforce in order to more fully understand individual needs.

➡ Accept the responsibility to tackle barriers to employment for women. There are practical effective schemes and opportunities that can help women progress and maintain employment.

➡ Implement workplace policies that enable all staff to fulfil their potential, and not just managers or senior staff, so that employees across the company feel more able to balance work and other responsibilities.

➡ Think more strategically and long-term about employees' career development, and not just immediate training needs.

➡ Encourage more women to seek promotion in the workplace, implementing schemes such as mentoring and targeted training.

➡ Broaden equal opportunities policies, to respect diversity and difference. Viewing male and female employees as equal but different rather than treating people in the same way.

Women can also help themselves:

➡ Encourage employees to reflect on their own ideas and attitudes to see how these may limit their employment and progression.

➡ They can also take responsibility for their own learning and advancement by being proactive about seeking out opportunities and advice.

➡ Seeking out flexible working possibilities. Letting their employer know what options they would prefer.

➡ Being aware that lack of self-esteem can be a deterrent to progression rather than lack of training or suitability.

Thinking outside the box

It no longer makes sense for any employer or policy maker to view women as 'the problem' in an otherwise streamlined workforce. Clearly the issues that women have always faced, in terms of balancing work and family life, are increasingly part of the male workers' experience as well. A key message for employers is that current equal opportunity policies and benefits are not sufficiently publicised within most companies, nor are they routinely offered across the workforce. All the companies in our case studies are applying the letter of the law, and have put in place the legally required benefits and opportunities. However, some are going the extra mile and being creative in the way that these are disseminated and developed. Companies that have developed creative recruitment practices in an effort to retain their female workforce, have taken a broader, long-term view of their employees, offering a greater range of benefits and opportunities. In an increasingly competitive workplace, employees that feel supported develop loyalty towards their employers, which leads to them remaining and progressing within the company, regardless of full or part-time status.

More generally, the barriers that women face in the workplace need to be viewed as part of a wider issue of work-life balance that affects both sexes but weighs most heavily upon women.

Widening Horizons

The research on barriers to women's employment will continue until February 2005, under a project called 'Widening Horizons'. This study will enhance and develop the findings from the current project, revisiting key case study sites, and following up a sample of women, a year on in their employment. The primary focus of the new study will be on the implicit barriers women face, including the more personal ones to do with lack of self-esteem, motivation and confidence as well as those concerning social networks.

One practical initiative will be piloted which aims to encourage women to support each other through a mentoring scheme. This will include both face-to-face mentoring and e-mentoring and will be offered to both professional and low-paid women in the region. E-mentoring will operate using email and via the Internet as a way for women to support each other without face-to-face contact. Companies that took part in the current study will be approached in 2004 to discuss possible involvement in 'Widening Horizons'.

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Appendix A: Demographic information on female case study employees

Age and Ethnicity

The average age of female respondents was 39; Table 12 shows the distribution of age groups for female participants.

Table 12: Female employees age distribution

Age group	n	%
16-20	5	1.4
21-25	48	13
26-30	39	10.6
31-35	63	17.1
36-40	55	14.9
41-45	48	13
46-50	56	15.2
51-55	33	9
56-60	17	4.6
61-65	4	1.1

The vast majority of respondents (male and female) stated that their ethnic origin was White British. Table 13 shows the diversity of ethnic origin for female participants.

Table 13: Female employees ethnic origin

| Ethnicity	n	%
Indian	6	1.6
Pakistani	5	1.4
Any other Asian	0	0
African	0	0
Chinese	1	.3
Black Caribbean and White	1	.3
Black African and White	1	.3
Asian and White	2	.5
White British	344	93.2
White Irish	2	.5
Any other White	6	1.6
Chinese/English	1	.3
Asian British	0	0

Parental Status and Other Caring Responsibilities

Over half of female respondents (55%) have children and the remainder do not. Almost a quarter (22%) of women said they had plans to have more children or start a family. Participants were also asked if they had caring responsibilities for an ill, elderly or disabled person and 13% of female respondents reported that they did. Of those women who reported that they had caring responsibilities, almost forty-eight per cent stated that work had to fit around these commitments. Almost 6% of women have responsibilities for caring for children other than their own.

Marital Status and Home Life

Participants were required to report the number of adults living in their homes, for females the majority (68.6%) stated that they shared their home with one other adult. Figure 1 reveals the personal situation of female respondents.

Figure 1: Personal Situation

Personal situation
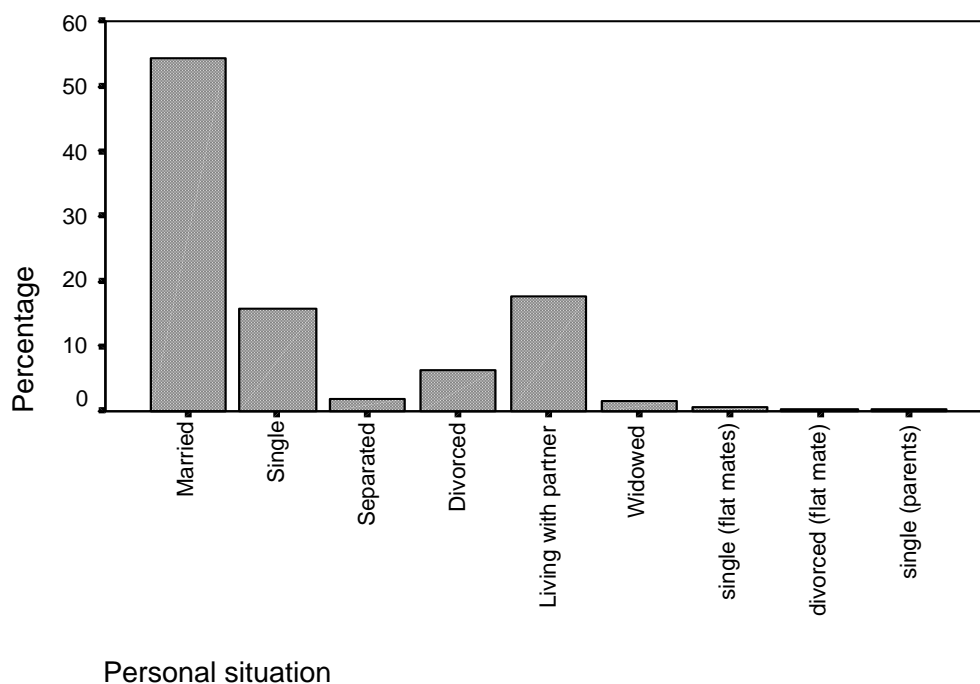
The vast majority of the sample reported that they owned their own house or flat – 86.1%. Explorations of housing tenure by personal situation reveal that the vast majority of married females own their own accommodation. 79.3% of single women

own their own accommodation and 77.3% of females living with a partner own their own accommodation.

Travel to Work

Table 14 illustrates the distance female participants have to travel to get to work.

**Table 14: Female employees distance travelled to work**

Distance	n	%
5 miles or less	127	39.4
6-10 miles	100	31.1
11-20 miles	78	24.2
21-30 miles	10	3.1
31-40 miles	2	.6
41-50 miles	1	.3
51-60 miles	1	.3
61-70 miles	1	.3
Over 71 miles	1	.3
Work from home	1	.3

The table indicates that the majority females live 5 miles or less away from their place of work. Almost all women (94.7%) live 20 miles or less away from work. The most popular mode of transport used to travel to work is by car – 77.5% of women. The second most popular means of getting to work is by public transport – 13.6% of women).

Computer Use at Work

The majority of female participants use a computer during their working day – 83.9%.
Figure 2 indicates that the majority of women use a computer for more than 6 hours
per day.

Figure 2: Time on computer

Number of hours on average day spent on a computer at work
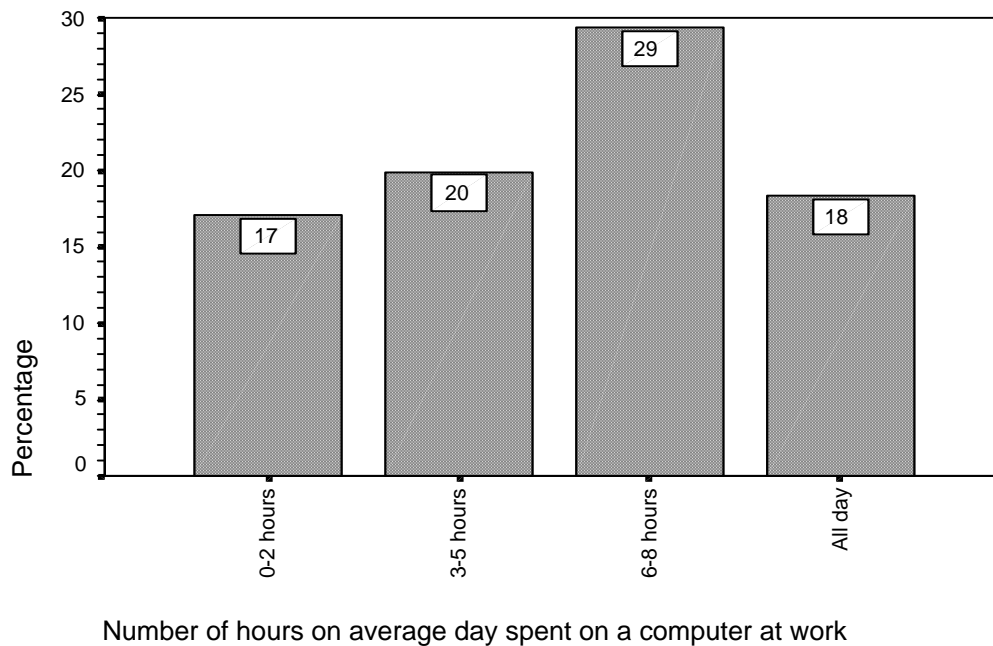
The majority of female respondents (7.3.%) who use a computer during their working
day said they were comfortable or very comfortable doing so. However, just over
twenty-two per cent of women who reported being uncomfortable using a computer
at work are required to do so all day.

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Barriers to Women in Employment: Interview Agenda

Introduction

- Self and Project – thank participant
- Explain interview/life grid process – reassure about confidentiality
- Obtain consent for recording of interview and explain withdrawal procedure
- Issue Identifier to participant

Establish Current Lifestyle

- Personal details – age, ethnicity, marital status, working status, housing tenure (show cards x 5)
- Age left school & qualifications obtained, any qualifications since, finish full-time education what did you really want to do, what did you expect to do, what did you end up doing,
- Children (+ages), do the children live with you, caring for others, who lives in house
- Total household income (use card with income brackets & then reduce to individual contribution, other income and/or benefits received)

Work History (presently employed) – some information already established from LG or Q or both

- What does work mean to you?
- What sort of work have you done in the past? Probe for details such as:
  - Job title, length of service, why left, basic duties, full-time/part-time
- How did you find these jobs – what methods did you use? (Establish use of formal/informal networks – pick up later in Social Networks section)
- What skills do you think you have to offer an employer?
- What kind of work are you doing at present? Job Satisfaction – why this job – likes/dislikes – working pattern – any desire to change work/working pattern – why?
- How do you get to work? Would you be willing to move? – Do you work and live in same community? How important is that to you? (sense of belonging (community/workplace))
- Conditions of Employment – skills/training offered - workplace policies (show card for both awareness and use) – anything missing that should be there
- Uniform – choice of clothing for work – identification with company – dress code – appropriate dress – what would you prefer to wear – should managers/workers dress differently – are expectations different as to how women/men dress for work – examples – why do you think that is

Work History (currently not working) - some information already established from LG or Q or both

- What does work mean to you?
- What sort of work have you done in the past? Probe for details such as:
  - Job title, length of service, why left, basic duties, full-time/part-time
- How did you find these jobs – what methods did you use? (Establish use of formal/informal networks – pick up later in Social Networks section)
- What skills do you think you have to offer an employer?
- Would you want to work and live in same community? How important is that to you? (sense of belonging (community/workplace)). Would you be willing to move away from your present location in order to get work?
- What are you doing at the moment? – e.g. student, economically inactive, unable to work (long term illness), seeking work, on a training course.
- Would you prefer to be working at the moment? Is there anything that stops you from working? Feelings regarding current situation – what would you change if anything?
- Uniform – choice of clothing for work – identification with company – dress code – appropriate dress – what would you prefer to wear – should managers/workers dress differently – are expectations different as to how women/men dress for work – examples – why do you think that is

Barriers

- What do you think stops people in general from [getting work or] getting the work they want? Is this the same for men and women? Why?
- Has anything held you back from accessing jobs in the past – in what ways – (remind of dreams when leaving full-time education)
- When in employment – has anything held you back from getting on in work? – In what ways? Can you give me some examples? [This is very important. Need to make sure we get at examples of these.]
- Thinking about your own situation, do you think you have in any way held yourself back? – Created own barriers – why? Examples.
- How did you overcome barriers (own identification)

Gender

- Can you tell me a little about your work colleagues? Do you work mainly with men or women? – Thinking of own direct line management and senior managers, were/are they: all men, all women, mixture (what % m/f)?
- Do you think it makes a difference? Why? Has this influenced decisions about applying for certain employment – why?
- Think men and women are treated differently in the workplace – Why
- Do opportunities exist for men and women equally in the workplace
- Think of own situation - has this affected you in any way
- Any ideas as to why the majority of your management are male/female
- What particular skills are needed in a manager – why
- Do men and women have different skills – do you think these skills are valued differently – why

Childcare

→ In what ways might having children affect women's work choices? (explore)

For women with children:
→ What childcare arrangements are necessary in household?
→ Different arrangements for different children
→ Different arrangements now than when you had first child
→ Is childcare necessary for you to go to work?
→ What difficulties have you experienced in the past and how did you cope with these difficulties
→ If you had the option to stay at home and/or provide childcare yourself, would you want to do that – why?

Transport

→ Has the distance between your home and workplace ever influenced your decision whether to apply for or accept a job? Why?
→ Do you have a driving licence? Do you own a car – use for work – necessary or optional (ownership & use) – who has priority use in household?
→ Impressions of public transport in area – any options other than car to get to work – used or not – if not why?

Technology

→ Do you have access to a computer?
→ Use computer for work – own computer at home – IT skills
→ If computer used at home – what used for – enjoy
→ View own IT skills as valuable
→ Would you like to use a computer?

Turning Points

→ What would you consider have been the main turning points in your life? Can you explain how that affected other areas of your life?

Work-Life Balance

→ How do you balance work and private life?
→ In an average week, how long spent on domestic tasks
→ Primary responsibility for carrying out these tasks
→ How spend leisure time – regular or occasional outings
→ What restricts leisure time?
→ Is family/friends supportive of role as worker?

Social Networks, Community & Home

➡ What does the term community mean to you – do you feel part of a community?

➡ What factors influenced decision to leave parental home – how difficult was the decision – move far away – influence sense of belonging

➡ Returned to parental home to live at any time – still associate sense of belonging with parental/original community (important for some people)

➡ Do you feel at home in your current accommodation and neighbourhood? If not here then where?

➡ Where living now – involved in any organisations within local neighbourhood/community, frequency of contact, feelings of belonging

➡ Different groups of people who you associate with different areas of your life – probe for details – **community** – contact with neighbours, frequency of contact; **work** – socialise with work colleagues, frequency of contact, attend work functions, attendance voluntary or compulsory; **family** – family locality, frequency of contact, importance of contact; **friends** (non-work, work, partner's etc.) – see below

➡ How important are the identified networks, how made up –demographics – gender, age, commonalities – across age groups & gender – common interests etc., location, same community – communication within networks

➡ Use of networks – to find work (this is key and needs to be carefully prompted- we don't want a lot of material on networks that is not related to working life), advice, social occasions, emotional support

➡ Friendship networks – perceive them as different to others – if so why – frequency of contact – added benefit if any

➡ Over time consider that networks have changed – if so how

Financial Planning

➡ Do you have any worries about future working life?

➡ What financial plans have you made for your retirement if any? What things have you had to consider when making these plans? What factors led to decisions regarding types of provision, if any?

➡ Occupational pension scheme and/or government scheme?

➡ What, if anything has prevented you from contributing to such a scheme?

➡ Who should be responsible for pension provision?

➡ (If living with partner) are you in a pension scheme? Are you provided for?

Aspirations for Future

➡ Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

➡ What steps taken already to achieve this?

➡ Dreams from past – how feel about them now

➡ What ambitions within current employment

➡ What factors could prevent achievement of goals

➡ What changes do you feel you would have to make to achieve goals?

➡ Find it difficult to adjust when things don't work out

➡ What would your ideal lifestyle be?

Appendix C: Life Grid Excerpt		
1979 – Moved to new house in Leicestershire	Carried on with this firm until Oct 1980	Gave up work shortly before birth of first child.
November 1980 – Daughter born	Took maternity leave – job held open for her.	Complications at birth meant health problems so decided not to return to work. Daughter had been planned – wanted to be a mother. Found it to be lonely at home with only her daughter as husband working away a lot – he worked 12 hour days and often was away 4 nights per week. New to area & neighbourhood – not many friends at first. Almost like being a single mother. Eventually settled into motherhood – joined in with toddler groups etc. – made friends.
1981-82 Mortgage rate very high – in danger of losing house. Struggling financially		Wanted desperately to keep house. Options limited (sell house, go back to work or go overseas with husband to new job). Husband wanted to take job in Scandinavian country for 18mths – 2 yrs – great money – to pay off the mortgage & rent out the house in UK. Felt forced into accepting – didn't want to go overseas – only agreed to 18 mths-2 yrs because of financial situation.
Easter 1982 - Moved to Scandinavian country 2nd daughter born there Living in company house.		Life in Scandinavian country very good materially – own car etc. Financially better off – were saving to pay off some of the mortgage in UK when returned at end of 2 yrs.
1982-90 Ended up staying in Scandinavia for 6 years Bought another house in there - now paying 2 mortgages	Work opportunities limited because of language. To get work in local sector, required to speak/write local language. Work within ex-pat community also limited – had to be something providing service to community – e.g. hairdressing and therefore unable to get paid work.	Part of ex-patriot community. Lived in integrated neighbourhood – part of wives' club for husband's firm. Children attended toddler groups – made friends. Health started to deteriorate after birth of 2nd daughter.

		When 2nd daughter 6 mths old – at 18mth point in Scandinavia – diagnosed with clinical depression – put on medication. At 2 yr point in Scandinavia – diagnosed with post-natal depression – more medication.
Easter 1988 Husband made redundant Offered job in Middle East		Relationship in difficulty – discovered husband had been having affair – felt betrayed by broken promise reference length of time in Scandinavia – just wanted to go back to UK but husband took job in Middle East.
Summer 1988 Bought flat in North East coastal town		Stayed in Scandinavia with children till end of school year (husband went to Middle East). Made compromise with husband that flat would be UK base for school holidays etc. Intention was that children would eventually attend boarding school in UK when older (didn't want to be parted from them but this was what ex-pat community families did – conditioned into thinking this was ok). During holidays, she could escape heat of Middle East back to North East with children.
September 1988 Moved to Middle East		Lost £35,000 on sale of houses in Scandinavia & UK. Lost £25,000 invested by husband in friend's business which subsequently collapsed. All savings made in Scandinavia wiped out. Family together in Middle East.
1988-92 – Middle East	More opportunities for work in Middle East – tried to get work as hotel receptionist but unsuccessful. Volunteers as Treasurer of ex-pat associations.	Health collapsed again due to financial worries (see above). Cost of paying maid to look after children so she could work too high – cheaper to do it herself. Whole life revolved around children, ferrying them about etc.

Acknowledgements

Research Outputs

Key outputs for this research have included:

�')' A seminar, 'Exploring the Barriers to Women's Employment and Progression in the Workplace' was held at the University of Teesside on the 21st November 2003. Papers from the current project were presented to a mixed audience of policy makers, employers, researchers and women's groups. Papers were also presented by a team from the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Northumbria.

http://www.tees.ac.uk/schools/socialsciences/sssresearch2.cfm

�')' A set of guidelines for employers distilled from our research, including a summary of key findings and areas of good practice in relation to equal opportunity policies and implementation.

�')' Each case study company received a tailor-made report on the findings pertinent to their employees

�')' A series of events have been organised which will present the findings to women who took part. They will receive copies of the main report.

Further information

For information about this publication, and/or for a copy of the full report or case study questionnaire, please contact

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Copies of the full report are available on The Barrier's to Women's Employment and Progression website, along with further information about the new project 'Widening Horizons: Improving the role of women in the workplace'.
http://www.tees.ac.uk/schools/socialsciences/sssresearch2.cfm