



Submission to the Inquiry into Insecure Employment in the ACT

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Introduction

The Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc. (WCHM) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into insecure employment in the ACT by the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs.

WCHM is a community-based organisation that works in the ACT and surrounding region to improve women's health and wellbeing. WCHM believes that health is determined not only by biological factors, but by a broad range of social, environmental and economic factors known as the 'social determinants of health'. We acknowledge that the environment and life circumstances that each woman experiences have a direct impact on her health, and in many cases, women's poor health is rooted in social disadvantage. For these reasons, WCHM is committed to taking a whole-of-life and social approach to women's health that is also firmly situated within a human rights framework.

WCHM focuses on groups of women who experience disadvantage, social isolation and marginalisation and uses social research, community development, advocacy and health promotion to:

- Provide women with access to reliable and broad ranging health-related information which allows informed choices to be made about each woman's own health and wellbeing; and
- Advocate to influence change in health-related services to ensure responsiveness to women's needs.

WCHM has chosen to focus on the gendered nature of specific types of employment, and their impact on women, in this submission. This addresses the first term of reference for the inquiry:

1. *The extent, nature and consequence of insecure work in the ACT, including but not limited to:*
 - vi. *The impact of insecure work on workers, their families and relationships, and on the local community, including financial and housing stress; and*
 - vii. *The impact of insecure work arrangements on vulnerable workers including young people, the unemployed and under-employed, migrants and short term visa holders.*

Further information on the extent and impacts of insecure employment on women in the ACT can be provided during hearings, if required.

Extent of insecure employment for ACT women

While women in the ACT have a relatively high engagement in the paid workforce compared to women in other parts of Australia, they still experience higher levels of unemployment and underemployment, or work in part time or casual employment.

Because women are expected to bear most of the burden of unpaid work, their ability to work longer hours or negotiate more suitable working arrangements is limited. This means they do not have as strong a negotiating position in the labour market, and are more vulnerable to exploitative work arrangements.

Understanding the gendered nature of unemployment and underemployment helps in understanding how so many women in the ACT may find themselves in a position where their work choices are between short term contracts or casual work, or no work at all. Security to negotiate reasonable work-life balance is key to women's economic participation. Without this, women may find that they are unable to keep their employment.

Unemployment, Underemployment, and Insecure Work

Labour force data released by the ABS in May 2017 shows that the unemployment rate for women in the ACT is 3.7%, compared to 3.4% for men in the ACT. Women in the ACT also have a higher underemployment rate than men, at 6.7% compared to 5.2%¹. For young women, we would expect the unemployment rate to be even higher, as the unemployment rate for people aged 15-24 in the ACT in May 2017 was 10.5%.

The table below shows the numbers of seasonal, contract and casual workers in Australia in the May 2017 Labour Force Quarterly release from the ABS:

	Employed full or part time	Full time	Part time
Men	73,300	50,700	22,600
Women	69,600	36,500	33,100
Total	142,900	87,200	55,700

There are almost as many women working part time in contract or casual employment as there are working full time, while only half as many men work part time in contract or casual employment as work full time. Of the casual or contract workforce in part time positions, 59.4% are women.

There is a common assumption that the majority of employment in the ACT is public sector. However, while 80,100 people work in the public sector in the ACT, there are 139,400 people working in the private sector. More private than public sector jobs are part time, at 35% in the private sector compared to 17% for the public sector².

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, May 2017*, cat. no. 6291.0.55.003, viewed 22 June 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6291.0.55.003>

² *ibid*

People with disabilities have additional barriers to negotiating with employers, as they may not feel able to disclose their disability status due to concerns about discrimination:

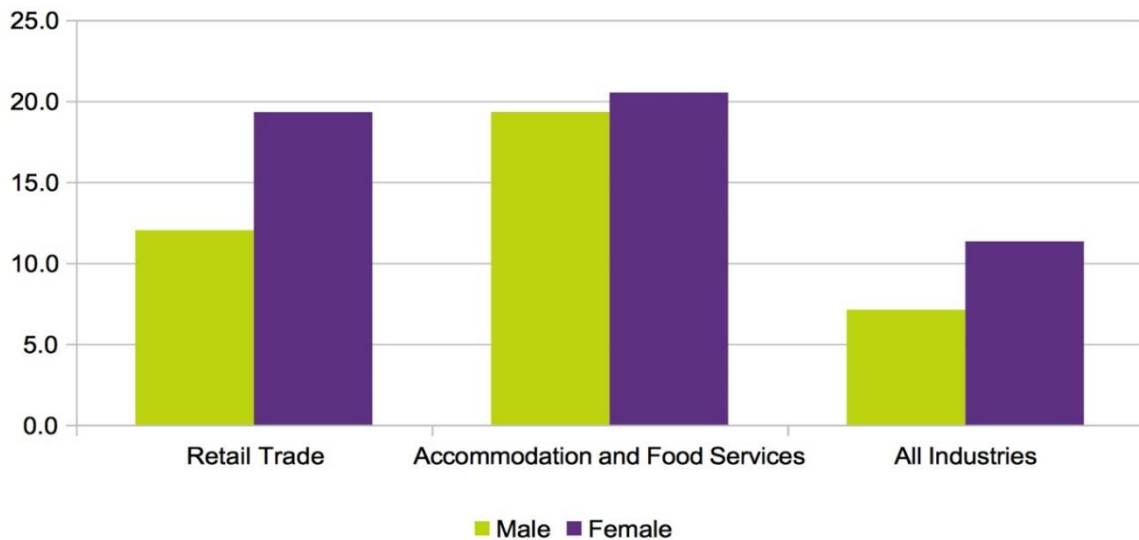
I've been out of work due to (disability) symptoms for about 5 years. No idea how to get back into the workplace or explain my absence without revealing my illness, which, I've learned, is the kiss of death when employers know about it³

Women with disabilities have to show people what they can do – prove themselves in the workplace before acceptance⁴

Advice provided by Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash in 2017 in response to a Question on Notice by Senator Rachel Siewert is that the industries employing the highest percentages of women with disabilities are health care and social assistance (29.1%), education and training (13.6%), retail trade (10.7%) and accommodation and food services (7.3%). Health care and social assistance would include childcare workers. Within the ACT, the unemployment rate for women with a disability in 2015 was 8.3%, while the unemployment rate for people with no reported disability was 5.1%. The 2015 data also shows that women with disabilities in the ACT who are employed are more likely to work part time (31.1%) than full time (29%)⁵.

Underemployment also affects women in greater numbers than men in the ACT. Two industries where casual employment is common are retail and hospitality. The percentage of underemployed retail workers in Australia who are women is 10.8%, while for men the rate is 5.3%⁶.

Women have a much higher ratio of underemployment than men across all industries, but the retail and hospitality industries are of particular concern due to the high number of casual contracts and low award pay rates:



Underemployment Ratio in Australia for Quarter ending May 2017

³ *Strong Women, Great City*, Women's Centre for Health Matters, May 2012, p.30

⁴ Gough J, "Contributing our voices!": A summary of feedback from the Have Your Say! Forum with women with disabilities in the ACT, Women's Centre for Health Matters, September 2015, p.20

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia 2017, *Senate Question on Notice Number 449*, viewed 30 June 2017, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Chamber_documents/Senate_chamber_documents/qon

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, May 2017*, cat. no. 6291.0.55.003, viewed 22 June 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6291.0.55.003>

Unpaid work

Factors affecting the ability of women to negotiate more or flexible working hours include the high number of hours of unpaid work performed by women.

In 2006, women in Australia spent an average of 5 hours and 13 minutes per day on unpaid work such as childcare and domestic work, compared to 2 hours and 52 minutes per day for men. The average number of total hours of unpaid and paid work by women was 7 hours and 34 minutes per day, compared to 7 hours and 25 minutes for men⁷.

A March 2017 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers⁸ shows that 72% of unpaid work in Australia is conducted by women, and that this does not improve as the household income level rises.

... as more advantaged areas may substitute unpaid work for paid domestic help, the remainder that is unpaid is still distributed at the same portion between men and women. An indicative illustration of this would be if a household that usually has 20 hours of unpaid work a week, a woman would conduct 15 hours of it and a man five hours. However, if they pay someone to take ten hours of that household work, although the woman would halve her hours to 7.5, the man would also reduce his to 2.5 hours.

The effect of this additional workload on women can be seen in stress levels. The ABS General Social Survey in 2014 showed that 45% of women felt they were always rushed or pressed for time, compared to 36% of men. Only 21% of women, compared to 28% of men, said they were rarely or never rushed or pressed for time⁹.

Recent research into the time constraints of paid and unpaid work and the impact on mental health shows that there is a distinct tipping point, where long work hours have a negative impact on mental health. Because women bear the burden of unpaid work, they have fewer hours available for paid work before it begins to negatively impact their mental health. If unpaid work were distributed equally across the genders, both men and women would be able to work approximately 34.5 hours per week in paid employment before negatively impacting their mental health¹⁰.

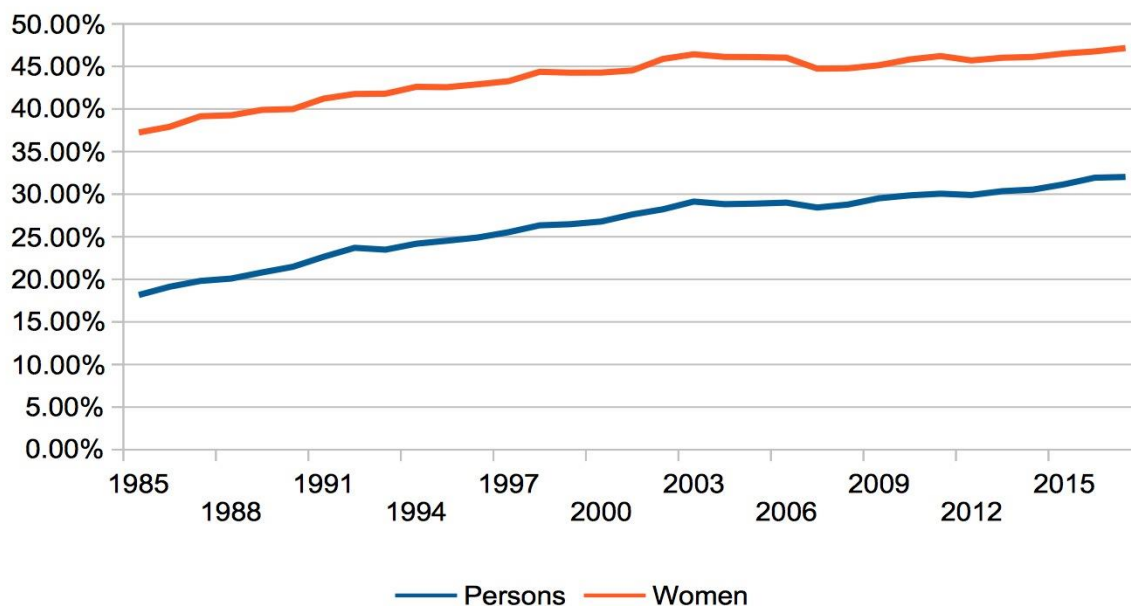
This additional workload for women may be why the percentage of women in paid employment who work part time continues to be so high, despite the total percentage of employed persons who work part time growing over time. What this reflects is the higher numbers of women in paid employment, but at part time hours.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, *Gender Indicators, Australia*, cat. no. 4125.0, viewed 13 June 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/E88D96DAE5F55E7ACA2578FD0017FB2D>

⁸ *Understanding the unpaid economy*, PricewaterhouseCoopers, March 2017, viewed 28 June 2017, <http://www.pwc.com/australia-in-transition/publications/understanding-the-unpaid-economy-mar17.pdf>

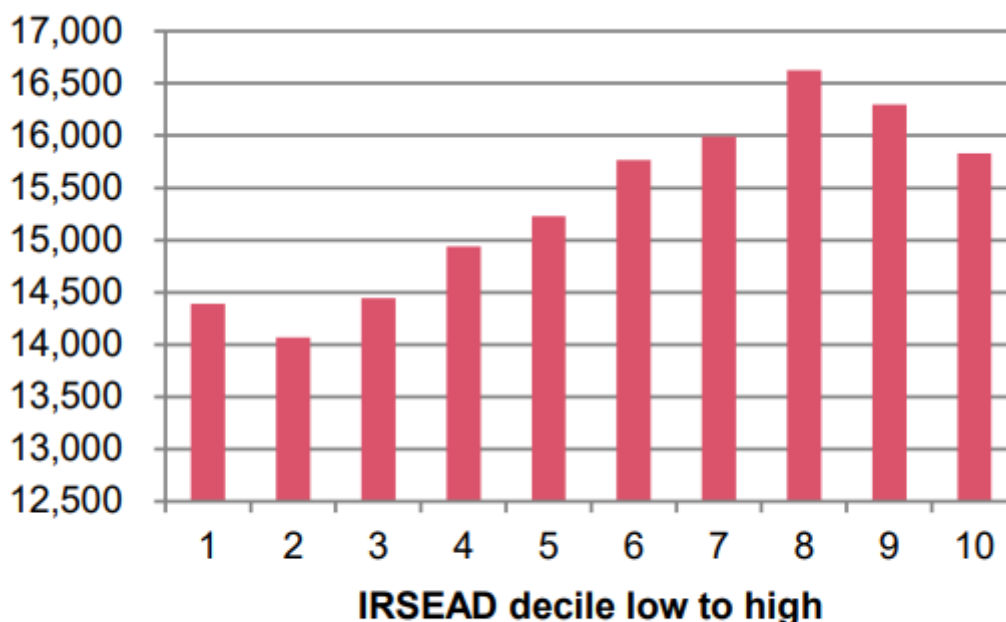
⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, *General Social Survey: Summary Results*, Australia, cat. no. 4159.0, viewed 13 June 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>

¹⁰ Houg D, Strazdins L, Welsh J, March 2017 *Hour Glass Ceilings: Work-Hour Thresholds, Gendered Health Inequities* Social Science and Medicine Vol 176



Women employed part time as a percentage of total employed women, and persons employed part time as a total of all employed persons¹¹

This impact of unpaid work on womens' availability for paid work is also discussed in the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. The chart below shows the per capita amount of unpaid childcare work performed by decile of index of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage (IRSEAD).



Source: ABS, PwC analysis.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, May 2017*, cat. no. 6291.0.55.003, viewed 22 June 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6291.0.55.003>

The assessment by PricewaterhouseCoopers is that people in the lowest decile have no option but to work long hours in order to earn a living wage, and therefore are not in a position to take on more hours of unpaid childcare work. People in the higher deciles are able to spend more hours on unpaid childcare as their hourly rate of paid work enables earning a living wage more easily. At the highest decile, people are able to spend more hours in paid work because “the costs of paying for childcare start being outweighed by potential income from paid work”.

In looking at the amounts of unpaid work (volunteer, domestic, care of adults, and childcare) by State and Territory, Canberra has the highest level of unpaid work per capita. It also has six of the top ten individual locations per capita for unpaid childcare work (Acton, Bonner, Civic, Crace, Namadgi, and Phillip). These six suburbs are also in the top three deciles of median incomes, with high education and socio-economic advantage levels, demonstrating the previous analysis that women in higher income households are in a better position to make the choice to spend more time on unpaid childcare than paid work.

However, while Canberra has higher average socio-economic levels than the Australian average, there are still large numbers of people living in Canberra who are on very low incomes. Data from the 2011 Census shows that 41% of women in Canberra earn less than the minimum weekly wage of about \$600 per week, compared to 29% of men. One in ten of all household in the ACT earn less than \$545 per week, and 20% earn less than \$702 per week¹². These households on low incomes are those most likely to reduce their availability for unpaid childcare in order to do more hours of paid work so that they can afford basic living costs, such as high private rent or mortgage repayments.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015, *Household Income and Wealth, Australia, 2013-14*, cat. no. 6523.0 viewed 13 June 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6523.0main+features12013-14>

Impact of insecure work on women and their families

For many women, insecure employment is not simply about permanent versus contract or casual employment. It is also about having flexibility to negotiate their working hours, and a living wage. Positions that do not offer enough hours to earn a living wage, or employment with a very low hourly pay rate, are not positions that women can treat as permanent, as they are not sustainable forms of employment long-term.

Many of the quotes in this section are from interviews conducted with 60 young women from Canberra, Melbourne, and Perth in 2009¹³. These young women worked in the retail, hospitality, and childcare sectors. These industries have high rates of casual and part time employment, and low hourly pay rates. Understanding the reasons why these young women chose to take these jobs, why they stay in the industry, can help in forming recommendations for ways to mitigate the impact of insecure work on young women.

Physical impact on workers

For many young women, the work itself has impacts on their stress levels and their health.

Women working in retail talked about the physical strain of working long shifts:

Being on your feet all the time, being on your feet from 8:30 until 5:45 at night isn't fun.

The fact that we only get a 45 minute break, like we get a rest break of 20 minutes, but an unpaid 45 minutes break and I don't think 45 minutes out of the day is very long at all, and I think it should be paid.

For women in hospitality, the long shifts also have physical impacts:

The hours, sometimes you don't finish up until 1am and then you start again at 7am.

The hours are really bad, because of split shifts.

I think that it is pretty hard on your body, so I think being a female anyway, lifting boxes and stuff like that (...) I want to do my job well (...) being on your feet all day, for like 8 hours, we get a small break but at the same time, it can take quite a bit of a toll on your body.

The health of women working in childcare is also impacted by exposure to young children with contagious illnesses:

There are not enough sick days because childcare workers get sick more often.

You can't help getting sick all the time.

¹³ *Young Women in Low Paid Employment: Issues and experiences within the context of the 'Fair Work' agenda*, WomenSpeak and the Women in Social & Economic Research (WiSER) at the Curtin University of Technology, March 2010.

Women working in childcare are not always working in centre-based care. For women working in family homes, there are additional physical pressures despite the same low rate of pay and lack of job security:

It is pretty demanding, time consuming and the hours are pretty long. Previously when I used to go to somebody's house to look after their kids for the whole day, the negative part is that you don't really get a break because it is only you and the kids.

Financial impact

Pay and working conditions for young women working in hospitality are very much dependent on the employer treating them fairly:

I would say it really depends on who you work for, there are some good employers and also some very unscrupulous employers who don't choose to maintain the correct standards.

The pay and the fact that I am not getting superannuation or anything like that at the moment so I don't feel very secured in that sense and maybe the repetitiveness of it, it is kind the same sort of thing every day.

I earn, I am going to put it out there, 570 a week for working nearly 40 hours and having all the management responsibility here right now because the company just won't hire another manager because they don't want to put the wrong person in so they rather let me do everything.

I am a qualified make-up artist, I have got two certificates and I am being paid a minimum wage.

I wasn't aware that we didn't get paid for staff meeting, like I sit through maybe 2, 3 hours of staff meeting, I don't think it is fair.

Flexibility and support for women with disabilities is important in managing their health condition, but requires an understanding employer:

For me with employment the issue is job flexibility because I have really good days and I have really bad days. So I need someone who's quite happy for me to say "look I'm going to work 10 hours a week and I'll work when I can"... I'm very lucky in that the community service at the moment is being that flexible.¹⁴

There is a whole lot of hidden cost when you do have a job though, because you've got the added cost of how you're going to get to work (or) do you need a support worker to help you¹⁵

Young women without awareness of the correct award pay rates or working conditions are in a difficult position when it comes to knowing whether their employer is meeting their obligations:

I don't really know cause I never had a proper full time job before. If I had had it, I would have something to compare it to.

I had to fight to get paid properly, to get treated properly.

¹⁴ Gough J, "Contributing our voices!": A summary of feedback from the Have Your Say! Forum with women with disabilities in the ACT, Women's Centre for Health Matters, September 2015

¹⁵ *ibid*

Some young women experience discrimination, humiliating, or sexist treatment in the workplace within the hospitality industry, and have few options:

I lost my job because there was a really really sexist guy there, and he said I couldn't use the cafe machine because I was a girl, and he kept saying really really inappropriate things and I had enough, so I left.

Maybe my boss had a bad day (...) my boss was like "well if you have a brain, remember to bring it next time".

Women working in retail also talked about experiencing unfair treatment from their employer:

I am a casual but they expect me to do things sometimes that no one thought me to do, no one asked me to learn how to do, if something goes wrong then it is blamed on me and I am like no one showed me how to do or told me that I had to do, it is just that sometimes they expect a bit more from you.

Young women working in childcare find that the low pay rate means it isn't possible for them to move out of their parental home, or that they are reliant on others financially:

I am still living home with my parents and I want to move out, but I can't afford it.

If I didn't have my boyfriends help for certain things, I would be on a difficult position (...) budgeting is very important when you work in this industry.

A 2015 report by the Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium, ACT found that the shortage of permanent employment opportunities in the ACT is a significant barrier to housing. This can result in difficulties securing a rental lease, increased housing stress as a greater percentage of income is required to pay for housing, and the risk of losing their bond if they lose their job and can't afford the rent anymore.

I think of all the casuals in hospitality, there's a lot of people who the first part of their working life looks like a series of casual, temporary jobs around the place. So I think that delays the ability for people to get their first rental property – not that their ambitions are so great, there's just not the permanent jobs out there that there were.

...the thing that stops them from actually moving to the next step whether that's a group house or paying rent is actually they can't commit to that. They'd lose their bond. If they could raise their bond, they would lose it at the time they lost their job. So that feels like a really big risk for them.

And they won't even be high school jobs. They not necessarily just entry-level jobs.¹⁶

The Consortium found that housing stress in the ACT was highest among workers in the retail (43%) and accommodation and food services (33%) industries¹⁷. This contributes to the modelled prediction that 55% of workers facing housing stress are women, and that 45% of workers in housing stress are aged 25-34 years. An additional 10% are predicted to be aged 18-24 years, but this figure would be higher if young people in this age group were not able to continue living with their parents.

¹⁶ *Housing affordability and the labour market in the ACT*, Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium, ACT, 2015, viewed 29 June 2017, <https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/2016-consortium-project-2-report-housing-affordability-and-the-labour-market-in-the-act.docx>

¹⁷ *ibid*

For people working in low paid industries, the high cost of housing increases the pressure to work long hours, and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation:

I'm working two jobs, actually, because I'm working in childcare and then on weekends I'm doing babysitting... My husband works seven days a week¹⁸.

Childcare workers felt that the pay rate did not reflect the level of responsibility in their work:

Considering that we are raising the future, setting them up for school, teaching them life skills, it is overlooked.

I don't think it is fair, I mean we are teaching children things that they are going to (need) later on in life, I mean how to speak, how to walk, how to crawl (...) the first years are the most important years of their lives.

For women working in retail, the low pay rate does not reflect the qualifications and training that the women are using to perform in their role:

Honestly with this particular retail job it is not necessary to be a qualified makeup artist to work at a cosmetic store, but since I am, and we do do make overs in the store, I do think it is a bit unfair that we don't get paid the industry standard make-up rates, because the work I am producing is because I am trained, and then I come in here and the training is not even acknowledged and I am paid retail wages so no, I don't really think it is fair.

Why women work in retail, hospitality, or childcare

Given the low pay rates and high levels of casual or part time work in these industries, it is helpful to understand why young women take these jobs in the first place. This can mean finding fulfilment through work, or it can simply mean earning enough to survive.

Work is really important for me because I can't really do anything without it, everyone needs money to live. I need to have a focus in my life.

Very important. Cause I have gone through being unemployed so it is really good to be working and busy and productive, not only financially but also for your mental health.

For young women working in childcare, working in this industry is often tied to an interest in early childhood education:

I've been wanting to be in child care ever since I was 5, and I told my mum that was what I wanted to do, and then I got out of year 12, I went to Uni, I did my Primary course there but I wasn't happy at Uni because I am hands on type of girl and so then I probably have been in child care for about two years now and I love it.

I've always had passion towards child education.

I have been doing it for over two years now and I love it (...) I am actually studying primary school teaching at Uni.

I think that the age range (0-3 year olds) is quite important to educate them because that's when they learn and they catch everything from adults and get

¹⁸ *Housing affordability and the labour market in the ACT*, Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium, ACT, 2015, viewed 29 June 2017, <https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/2016-consortium-project-2-report-housing-affordability-and-the-labour-market-in-the-act.docx>

examples from adults as well, so it is pretty important to teach them... I love their innocence and how they don't care about any subjects at all and they just tell you upfront.

... you come in the morning and they run to you, with hug and smiles and kisses and they want to spend time with you.

For many women in retail and hospitality, finding work in the industry was a matter of necessity to pay living costs rather than following a career path:

I am a make-up artist, I studied a diploma and I have my own business, and wedding make-up is really seasonal, and through the winter I needed more work and I wanted to keep it make-up related, and so I thought I would come into retail make-up.

I am at uni so it is just part-time and retail is the best one with my hours.

Retail was never a career path for me. It was just a change cause I had never done it through school or anything, and so which I left school I did hospitality and then I got into the public service and then decided that I would give retail a go and here I am, 2 and a half years later, still in retail.

I needed a job at age 15 and my mum knew the owner.

I was a (international) PhD student and I needed to pay tuition so I needed to find a job and the lady I am living with suggested a restaurant close to where I live so I went there and said "I need a job" and they said "OK we need people" and so that is how it started.

For women with other time commitments, working in hospitality was something that could be managed within the other things they needed to think about in their life:

You don't have to think about it too much. So because I am focused on other areas of my life, it doesn't take away from that because for me I find it a quite easy job to do.

For me it is just a really easy, accessible job, it is quite good you can go to work, do your job, go home and feel relatively stress-free about your life. It can be quite menial which can be a good thing and a negative thing.

Recommendations

For women in the ACT, secure employment means the ability to negotiate flexibility in the workplace, and a living wage, not just permanent versus temporary work. This situation could be improved through the following recommendations:

1. Given the prevalence of women working in low paid community sector jobs, the ACT Government should act to reduce the prevalence of insecure work within the community services sector as part of ACT Government procurement reform. This action should be taken in consultation with the community sector, and must be a central part of the implementation of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026.
2. Encourage ACT employers to adopt secure, flexible employment practices that support workers to manage family and caring responsibilities, study, and other life commitments.
 - a. This would include incorporating provisions into ACT Government procurement policy and practice.
 - b. ACT Government, as an employer, can adopt employment practices that enable all workers to balance their paid and unpaid work obligations, and ensure that all employees are aware of their flexible work options.
 - c. ACT Government can promote to employers that secure, flexible employment is important in supporting *all* workers, including men, to manage their paid work as well as their share of the unpaid work in our community.
3. Pursue equity in education in the ACT as a critical foundation for inclusive economic growth and diversification and to address barriers to gaining secure employment for those transitioning from education.
4. Further strengthen alignment between the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system and local employment opportunities, focusing on making the system inclusive and accessible for those experiencing barriers to gaining secure employment.
5. Access to secure employment and decent work that pays a living wage should be a central element of ACT Government's Business Development Strategy and other economic growth and diversification initiatives. These should focus on industries' potential to provide secure employment and decent work.
6. Expand social procurement for ACT Government contracts to create employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage and barriers to gaining secure employment.