FACT OR FICTION: FIVE ISSUES ABOUT WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN NEW ZEALAND

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* This is a revised version of research report by Rachel Bate, supervised by Stuart Birks, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a BA(Hons) majoring in Economics.

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to replicate a British study by Catherine Hakim, focusing on five areas within women's employment in New Zealand. Her hypothesis is that common claims about women in the labour market in the United Kingdom are inaccurate. Mixed results were found with New Zealand data. Female employment levels have been rising, however, it does seem that there are gender differentials in the workplace in terms of attitudes and work orientations. Childcare responsibilities were not found to be the only reason explaining part-time work patterns. Part-time workers are increasing as visible force and cannot be considered exploited. It appears that women have higher turnover rates than men, though this was not conclusive as no current data were available. Further research is needed in all five areas.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to compare the findings of Catherine Hakim on women's employment in Britain, with the situation for women in New Zealand. An attempt was made to answer the questions raised in her 1995 article, "Five feminist myths about women's employment".

Hakim believes that feminist sociology has had the effect of, "creating new feminist myths to replace the old patriarchal myths about women's attitudes and behaviours" (Hakim, 1995:429). She identifies five areas of women's employment where reality differs from supposed 'facts'. Myth is the term she uses to describe these issues which are categorised as:

1) The myth of rising female employment
2) The myth of no sex differential in work commitment and work orientations
3) The myth of childcare problems as the main barrier to women's employment
4) The myth of exploited part-time workers
5) The myth of employment stability among women and part-time workers

Hakim examined each of these areas in the British context, finding that the myths existed in many cases alongside evidence to the contrary. This research aimed to determine whether employment trends in New Zealand have differed from those of Britain and attempted to use comparable data to the Hakim study where possible. However, the two countries often differ in their statistical treatment and therefore observed trends may not be strictly comparable. A further complication was that some of the available data on women tended to be susceptible to political bias.

Each myth has been focused on individually, with a summary of Hakim's findings at the outset, followed by information on the state of affairs in New Zealand, with possible reasons for resulting similarities or differences discussed.

MYTH ONE: The Myth of Rising Female Employment

Hakim begins by examining the so called myth of rising female employment rates. She suggests that the pervasive belief that increasing numbers of women involved in paid work, especially since World War II, exists in the face of clear contrary evidence. This has implications for society's expectations of social and economic change in particular as the changes are held by most to have already occurred.

1.1 Evidence for Britain

- There was no change in female full-time work rates from 1841 until 1993, which remained at an almost unvarying level of one-third of women of working age.

- All change in the post-War period has consisted of the substitution of part-time for full-time jobs, and the substitution of married women for single women workers.

- There was absolutely no increase in the volume of female employment, measured in full-time equivalent numbers, from World War II up to 1987 in Britain. (Hakim, 1995:431)

  (NB. Full-time equivalent figures for the workforce count each part-time job as half a full-time job.)

According to Hakim, only in the late 1980s was there a genuine expansion in full-time equivalent numbers, and this may have been halted by the recession. Her research suggests that the increasing employment trend is also largely illusory in other countries.

The above three assertions make a strong statement against rising female employment in Britain. A 1993 Hakim article on this topic is the source of some, but possibly not all, of the data. The data in this earlier article, however, are inconsistent with the current conclusions reached by Hakim. While data on economic activity rates from 1841 - 1993 are given, but there is only information presented on full-time work rates among women from 1951-1991. Hakim considers that the census data for the early

years was an attempt to identify a person's main activity. On this basis, economically active is taken to mean in full-time paid work. Focusing on the 40 year period for which both full-time and part-time worker numbers are presented, there is a visible increasing trend in the 1980's such that 37.4% of women of working age in 1991 were working full-time compared to 31.6% in 1981. The period of 1951-1981 appeared to have constant rates (Hakim, 1993:102). In the earlier article it was stated that "Full-time work rates among remained constant from 1951 to 1981 at around 30 per cent of women of working age" (p.101). This statement was supported by Hakim's presented evidence and why she did not continue to use this line is unknown.

The second assertion maintains that all the post-War change has been part-time jobs substituting for full-time work. Again this conclusion does not follow from the data presented in the article. Table 3 of Hakim (1993:103) indicates that the growth in part-time employment has been greater than that which would have occurred if pure substitution of full-time jobs had taken place. Between 1951-1961 full-time employment for women fell by 343,000. Using the full-time equivalent (FTE) method stated by Hakim (where each part-time job counts as half a full-time job) if this decrease was fully substituted for, an increase of around 686,000 part-time jobs would be predicted. In fact, there was a much larger increase of 1,108,000. There was a similar result for the next decade, while between 1971-1981 and 1981-1991 full-time employment was itself experiencing growth.

Completing the triad of statements came the assertion that there had been no increase in female employment, expressed in full-time equivalent numbers (FTE), from 1945-1987. Given that in forty-something years there would usually be population growth at the least, this also appeared a surprising finding. Using the data presented in Table 3 of Hakim's 1993 report, and following the FTE formula, a trend emerges of a FTE workforce that has been increasing in number since the 1950s. While the initial three decades had admittedly lower increases than that of the 1980s, the fact that there were increases can be easily calculated. This brings into serious question why Hakim could confidently claim that there had been **absolutely** no increases in FTE numbers.

Hakim stated that increasing female employment was a pervasive myth. Her evidence does not support her claim.

1.2 New Zealand Situation

New Zealand labour force statistics data readily demonstrate that participation rates have increased overall for New Zealand women. However, it is not as clear what the nature of the composition of this rise in employment has been.

Growth in women's labour force participation rates has its origins in economic, political and social systems. Within the economic system, technological change has been identified as advancing the increase in labour productivity leading to higher wages for both sexes. These higher wages have changed the value of women's time, making it relatively too valuable to be spent entirely in the home (Bergmann, 1986). Advances in household technology have also seen the introduction of many labour saving devices making housework less productive at the margin. Falling birth rates and resulting smaller families have also had an influence.

Politically, New Zealand has been at the forefront of women's rights, being the first country to grant women the vote in 1893. Along with almost all other western countries there have been changing social beliefs and attitudes towards working women, attitudes that have greatly impacted on labour force participation. Davies and Jackson (1993) note that the classification of labour force participation is a technical term concerning a definition of work linked closely to financial reward. Women may be taking an active role in non-market activities that do not fit this definition of work, a point that has lead to some lobbying against conventional data collection systems.

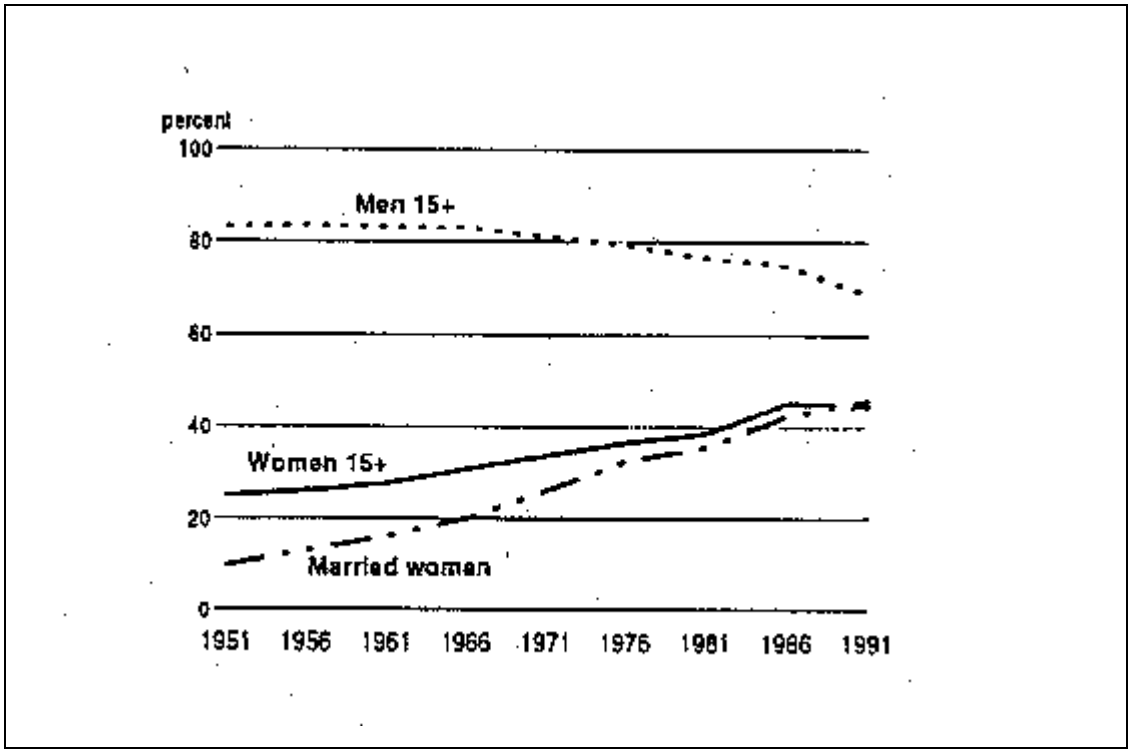
The size of the female labour force increased more than ten-fold in the hundred years from 1891 to 1991. The total, based on a narrow definition of involvement in full-time labour activity, grew from just under 43,000 in 1891 to 455,000 in 1991 (Davies & Jackson, 1993:63). This was not simply attributable to population growth, as female labour force participation also increased steadily. During the 1970's and 1980's the

labour force growth rate increased at nearly twice the rate of overall population growth (Dept. of Stats, 1989).

In 1891 labour force participation rates for the non-Maori population, aged 15-64 years, of New Zealand were at approximately 97% and 26%, for males and females respectively (Davies & Jackson,1993:66). Data from the pre-World War II period did not differentiate between full-time and part-time work, and included all workers regardless of the hours involved. If the UK approach was followed, then it may be that only the main activity was mentioned and may not have shown many forms of more casual work, as Hakim also suggests (1993, p.100). The 1945 Census introduced a "20 hours or more" criterion. Data before this time is therefore not strictly equivalent with modern data. The 1951 statistics on labour force participation showed rates of approximately 82% for men and women at 25% (Statistics New Zealand, 1993:81). In 1995 the figures for labour force participation for the population aged 15 and above were 73.9% for males and 55.1% for females. The overall labour force participation rate was 64.2% (Statistics New Zealand, 1996a:75).

While the trend has been for increased female participation rates, the levels for males have been declining gradually since the mid-1960's. This has been related to social factors such as the introduction of a minimum working age, earlier retirement, and higher rates of further education (Department of Statistics, 1989). The closing gap between participation rates for the two genders is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Labour force participation by gender, 1951-1991



Source: Statistics New Zealand (1993:81)

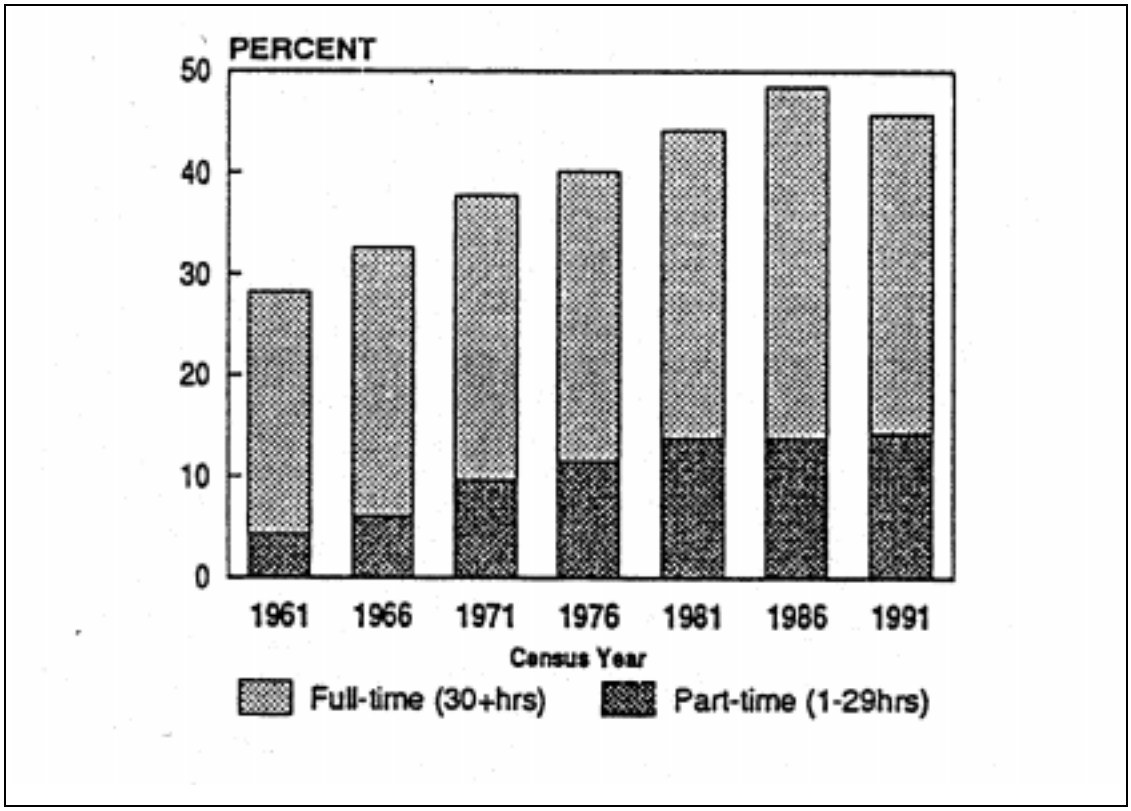
These figures, however, only address the entire female labour force without differentiating between full-time and part-time work. The New Zealand census technical measurement definitions for full-time and part-time work are explained in the following table.

Table 1.1: Changes to the criteria used to define full-time and part-time work

	Full-time work	***Part-time work***
Prior to 1945	No distinction between full-time and part-time	
1945 - 1981	20 hours or more per week	1-19 hours per week
1986 - 1991	30 hours or more per week	1-29 hours per week

(Source: Davies & Jackson, 1993:14)

Figure 1.2: Proportion of Women Employed By number of Hours Worked, 1961-1991



Source: Dept of Stats (1993:100)

Figure 1.2 displays the proportion of women employed by full-time or part-time job status. Again the progressive trend, until 1986, of increased work is revealed, this time with the portion of growth attributable to part-time work being visible. Between 1961 and 1981 the proportion of women in part-time work more than trebled, before reaching a level period in 1981. Over this time full-time work also increased. From 1981 - 1986 the percentage of women employed in full-time work increased from 30.4% to 34.7%. After 1986, however, there was a decline in full-time work. Household Labour Force Survey data indicate that the number of women in full-time employment fell from 431,000 in June 1986 to 411,000 in June 1991, and subsequently rose to 470,000 by June 1997. There was a steady upward trend in women in part-time work over this period, the figures being 207,000, 233,000 and 283,000 respectively.

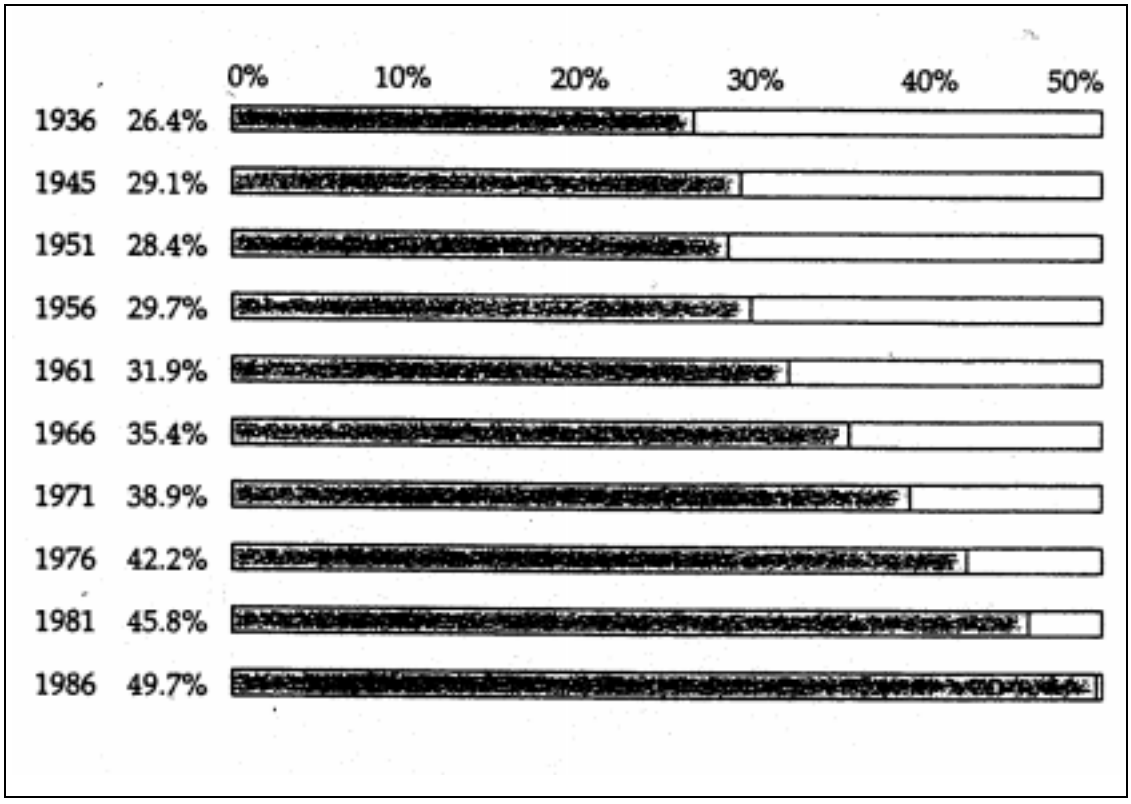
The female labour supply has been found to be related mainly to demographic characteristics. The proportion of the population under the age of five is negatively

correlated with female labour force participation rates (Brooks, 1990). Declining birth rate levels also bolstered female participation rates due to the fact that women are having fewer children, having shorter periods of non-participation after the birth of a child, as well as from increasing numbers of women who do not leave the labour force at all (Bergmann, 1986). Other influencing factors include age, family structure, unemployment rates, benefit eligibility criteria and tax liability (Horsfield, 1988).

The number of females attending tertiary institutions has a positive correlation with participation rates and is seen as an indicator of increased willingness to participate in the labour market. Brooks (1990) also found that rises in unemployment were correlated with decreases in the female labour supply, which was viewed as evidence of a 'discouraged worker effect'. Another historically influencing factor on increased participation rates has been the process of urbanisation, resulting in more work available for women within towns and cities. As a result of this there may be less unrecorded employment, (e.g. assisting on farms), as well as a lessening of the 'discouraged worker effect' due to greater job opportunities within cities.

While labour force participation by women has been increasing in New Zealand, the 'myth' that Hakim discusses may exist in the sense that there have been cases of overstating the amount of growth. Figure 1.3 shows a chart relating to workforce participation. The chart depicts approximately one half of the labour force being female in 1986. Given that labour force participation rates for women in March 1986 were 53.9% while for men they were at 79.3%, (Stats. NZ:1996b), this result appears dubious. Using female and male total labour force figures for March 1986 the lower, and more realistic, figure of women making up 41% of the labour force was obtained. While the proportion has been increasing slowly since then, it was still below 45% by June 1997, with disproportionate growth in and share of part-time workers. This suggests that there is still a distance to be gone before the labour force is composed equally of men and women! The figure appears to be wrong.

Figure 1.3: Women as a percentage of the paid labour force



Source: CEVEP, (1994:24)

New Zealand has experienced a rise in the level of female employment. While a greater proportion of the increase in employment has been in the form of part-time jobs, which may often be the entry point for women to return to the workforce while continuing to maintain unpaid family responsibilities, there has also been an increase over time in full-time participation rates that is not mythical. This contrasts to Hakim's questionable findings where participation rates were found to be very stable overtime.

In summary, New Zealand has experienced a rising female participation rate, but this has been disproportionately in part-time activity.

MYTH TWO: The Myth of No Sex Differential in Work Commitment and Work Orientations

"Criticisms of labour market discrimination as unfair and unjustified often rest on claims that men and women do not differ in work orientations and behaviour, that women workers are just as committed, dedicated, hard-working and productive as are men." (Hakim, 1995:432)

The myth that there are no gender differences in work orientation and behaviour has been a key point in criticisms of labour market discrimination. If sex differentials do exist then they might explain some of the differences experienced in the labour market by men and women. Nineties women are considered to be as motivated and committed as their male counterparts, and any evidence to the contrary may face the possibility of being viewed as politically incorrect. Hakim suggests that unfavourable survey results are "interpreted as evidence of how prejudiced employers are" (1995:432) rather than reflecting differences in worker behaviour.

Research (cited by Hakim) suggests that an attitudinal difference exists between non-working women, part-time working women, and women working full-time. The former two groups tend to hold attitudes more in line with traditional male views on women's roles. The latter group, however, exhibits greater commitment to market related careers.

2.1 Evidence for Britain

Hakim believes that the differing work orientations of males and females is most clearly visible in their levels of non-financial work commitment. This was defined as "the wish to continue with paid employment even if the purely financial motivation were eliminated" (1995:432) and the results from a 1992 survey were shown.

Table 2.1: The sex differential in work commitment

TABLE 1: *The sex differential in work commitment*

(a) If without having to work you had what you would regard as a reasonable living income, would you still prefer to have a paid job, or wouldn't you bother? Proportion (%) saying they would still prefer a paid job

		1981–5	1989
All employees		70	74
Women:	all	66	76
	full-time	71	77
	part-time	56	74
Men:	all	74	72
	full-time	75	72
	part-time	45	80

(b) *People still preferring a paid job as a per cent of population of working age (16–59/64) years*

	1984–5	1989
All persons	54	59
Women	44	54
Men	65	63

Source: Hakim (1992) Table 9.

Source: Hakim (1995: 433)

Looking at the responses to part (a) it appears that any earlier gap in commitment had closed. Hakim disputes this result on the basis that the commitment of a part-time worker to their job is not the equivalent of a full-time worker's commitment. And secondly female work commitment is heavily overstated due to the fact that only working women were surveyed. Common sense and previous research confirm that working women have above average level of work commitment compared with non-working women.

Part (b) of the table shows work commitment adjusted for non-working sections of the working age population, here the sex differential is still in evidence.

Hakim points out that the adult female population can be divided into two sectors with commitments to labour careers for one, and marriage careers for the other. Therefore it is inaccurate for feminist writers to assume that what they want is what is wanted by all women. However, while this "false depiction of a universal sisterhood which ignores differences between women…is now recognised by almost all feminists as

having been a mistake," (Hyman, 1994:3) it remains difficult to differentiate the groups for statistical purposes. Within the grouping of male workers there are bound to be differing work ethics and behaviours and such differences are clearly evidenced among women. This makes any claim that there are no differences in work orientation and work commitment between the two gender groups very dubious. The data on working women only, could be taken to show that women in the workforce have similar attitudes to men, and therefore accorded the same treatment.

2.2 New Zealand Situation

To examine the question of whether there exist sex differences in attitude and work orientation, results from a 1994 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) were used. The survey was entitled, 'The Roles of Men and Women in Society" and was conducted by the Department of Marketing at Massey University. Sections on *Women, Work and Families,* along with, *Attitudes to Mothers and Work,* were examined to see if New Zealand men and women displayed different work preferences. The divergence between respondent's answers to attitudinal questions, compared with their actual life experience proved interesting.

TABLE 2.2

All in all, family life suffers when the women has a full-time job. Do you agree or disagree...?

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Can't Choose
Men	8.7	36.9	19.3	27.2	6.7	1.2
Women	9.2	33.7	14.0	28.4	13.5	1.2

TABLE 2.3

Family life often suffers because men concentrate too much on their work.

Do you agree of disagree...?

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Can't Choose
Men	10.8	64.9	10.1	12.5	1.0	0.7
Women	10.6	58.6	16.6	11.8	1.2	1.3

The above two tables look at the question of whether family life suffers with working parents. There was 45.6% agreement among women with the statement that family life suffered when a woman has a full-time job, and 42.9% agreement among males. However, the acceptance of the statement that family life could suffer from the male concentrating too much on work was at 69.2% and 75.7% for women and men respectively. This indicates that the family is seen to be in a position where it can be detrimentally affected by either parent working too much. At the same time around 41.9% of women and 33.9% of men disagreed with the statement that women working leads to family suffering, while a much smaller 13% and 13.5% (women and men) disagreed with the relatively similar statement on male work patterns.

It is perhaps a reflection on bias within the survey that the question asked about men concentrating on work "too much" and women working "full-time". This suggests that there still exist preconceptions that the male of the family should be the one most likely to be in employment. While "full-time" for women is "too much", it is left unclear as to how much is "too much" for men.

TABLE 2.4

A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children. Do you agree or disagree...?

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Can't Choose
Men	5.8	19.2	24.8	33.4	11.3	5.5
Women	2.3	11.2	19.0	39.1	18.7	2.2

TABLE 2.5

Having a job is the best way for a women to be an independent person. Do you agree or disagree...?

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Can't Choose
Men	5.5	38.8	19.5	28.7	5.3	2.2
Women	9.4	34.1	17.1	32.8	5.0	1.5

The previous table of results (table 2.4) showed that there was general disagreement to the statement of "A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children". 57.8% of the surveyed women disagreed. However, when faced with a statement concerning the relationship between a job and independence for a women, there was less convergence with 43.5% expressing degrees of agreement and 37.8% disagreement. The males, came out more in favour than against the statement (at 44.3% for, with 34% disagreeing) suggesting that men view employment as more central to independence than do women. Hakim presents a similar result from a national British survey in 1991, where two-thirds of young women and only half of young men agreed that a satisfying life could be had without being employed (Hakim, 1995). While most of the surveyed women in New Zealand did not see the home environment as being the thing that most women really want, working as leading to

being an independent person was not strongly endorsed as an alternative. The split over, 'job is the best way for a women to be an independent person' may reflect the dual paths of women - that of the workforce or home-maker.

TABLE 2.6

Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time, or not at all under the following circumstances?

When there is a child under school age...

	Full-time	Part-time	Stay at Home	Can't Choose
Men	0.7	25.8	66.4	7.0
Women	3.7	27.6	60.7	8.0

TABLE 2.7

Did you, or your spouse, work at all when there was a child under school age?

(NB. This table records the responses from women, and responses by men about their female partners)

	Full-time	Part-time	Stay at Home	Can't Choose
Men	12.2	25.2	59.4	3.2
Women	8.0	29.3	59.9	2.8

Tables 2.6 and 2.7 look at the issue of women working with children under five years of age. When asked whether they ***thought*** women should work outside the home, under such circumstances only 2% of men and women agreed. However, in response to the question on whether they (in the case of women), or their female spouse (in the case of men), ***did*** work the result was a much higher 10%. This suggests that labour force participation under these circumstances may have been reluctant and may not have occurred if financial motivations were absent. This is the issue highlighted by

Hakim in her research, where she found gender differences towards work commitment. The impact of economic reality is again reflected in that while around 40% of respondents agreed with the statement, "having a job is the best way for a women to be an independent person," there was a 68% agreement to the assertion "Most women have to work these days to support their families" (Gendall & Russell, 1995:4). This again suggests financial necessity leading to workforce involvement rather than an intrinsic commitment.

Whether the gap between the genders is closing could be studied by looking at the responses by age group as well as gender. The New Zealand survey found that "older people's attitudes to the roles of men and women with respect to work and the family were more conservative than younger people's" (ibid: 4). The impact of age was particularly evident in the responses to the questions on women working when there were children in the family, with each successive age cohort having more liberal attitudes.

The results presented in tables 2.2-2.7 are not in any way conclusive about the nature, origin or implications of the gender differences in answers. They do, however, give an indication that different behaviours are expected to, or do indeed occur within families concerning the workforce. Women have non-work alternatives as well as more options with part-time work. Family, and especially the presence of young children, can be a factor (although many part-time women workers are also beyond child bearing age, as mentioned below). To suggest that there is no sex differential in work orientation or commitment is beneficial to neither party.

MYTH THREE: The Myth of Childcare Problems as the Main Barrier to Women's Employment

Traditional feminist theory holds that women are forced into part-time work as a consequence of childcare responsibilities. In contrast to this, Hakim proposes that part-time work is chosen voluntarily by women who have non-market activities as their priorities. The main problem with the feminist argument is that "the popularity of

part-time work, and of not working at all, extends well beyond women with childcare responsibilities" (Hakim, 1995:436).

Factors such as the status of national provision of childcare facilities and social beliefs are influences on whether women with children work or not. Hakim accepts that childcare responsibilities do limit female workforce participation, however, she claims that choice between part-time and full-time work is not dependent on whether or not a women has dependent children to care for.

3.1 British Evidence

In 1991, 45% of UK women in the 25 to 29 age bracket 'chose' to work part-time only.

However, there were also 30% of working wives with no childcare responsibilities who 'chose' part-time work voluntarily (ibid: 437). Women with dependent children have high rates of part-time work and greater likelihood of being out of the workforce. While their work patterns may be explained by childcare responsibilities, according to Hakim, the childcare thesis, "..does not provide a general explanation for patterns of work and non-work among women of working age." (p.436) The European Commission reported the most prevalent age for part-time work, among member countries (excluding Belgium) to be women aged 50 and over. An alternative hypothesis could be that women in this age bracket are unable to gain full-time employment, rather than that they desire to work part-time. Hakim also points out the rising trend for voluntary childlessness in Britain, such that for greater numbers of women childcare problems do not necessarily arise.

3.2 New Zealand Situation

One option for avoiding childcare responsibilities is to refrain from having children. The fact that this choice is becoming increasingly popular is reflected in the declining fertility levels of New Zealand women:

Table 3.1: Total Fertility Rates: New Zealand Females

Year	Crude birth rate*
1951	25.57
1971	22.51
1995	16.14

Source: Table 5.9 in *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1997*, Statistics New Zealand
* Per 1000 mean population

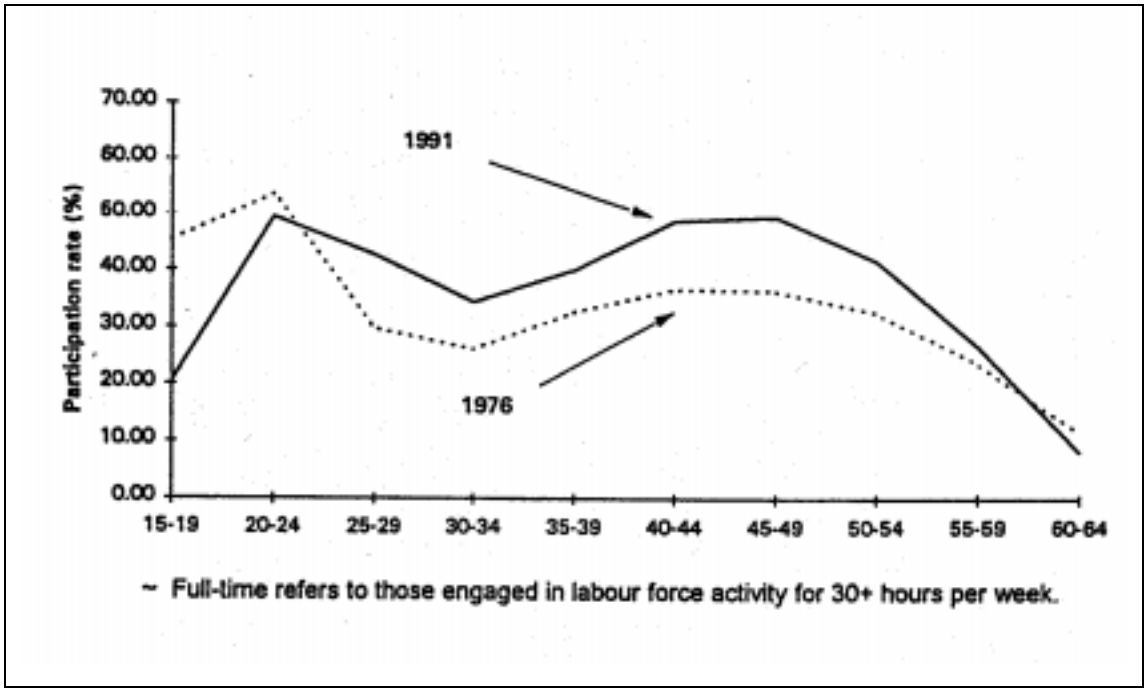
Birth rates have been lowered dramatically with improvements in the means and availability of contraception. Along with greater options due to the existence of birth control have come social developments resulting in children being more expensive to maintain, and also less likely to yield productive activity than in the rural days of old. There is also a group of women who do not withdraw from the labour force after having children. Davies and Jackson (1993) point out that this group has been given little research attention.

The 25-29 year age group continues to be the most common childbearing age group. However, since 1990 the 30-34 year age group has become the second most popular age for childbearing, replacing the 20-24 group (Stats. NZ, 1995b). In 1995, the three age categories of 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34 groups made up 8.0%, 7.3%, and 13.5% of the female part-time work force, respectively. Women aged over 45 made up 29.7% of the female part-time workforce (Stats. NZ, 1996a).

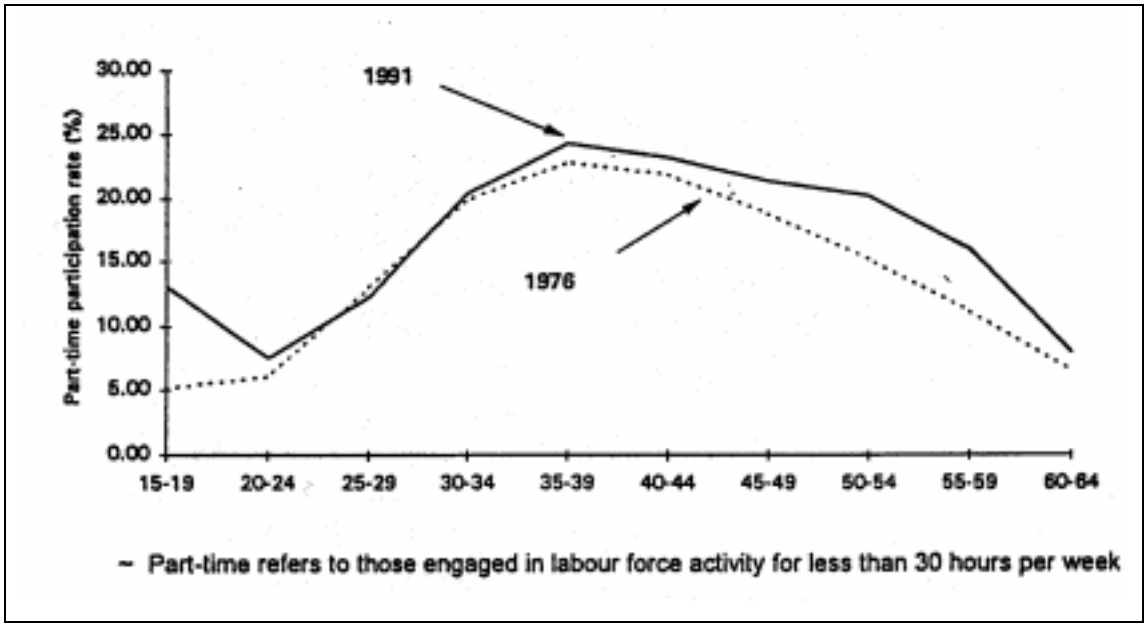
A comparison of female full-time and part-time participation rates by age show an interesting trend. Comparing 1976 and 1991.

Figure 3.1: Full-time and part-time labour force participation rates of women, 1976 and 1991.

a) Full-time labour force participation rates of women 1976 & 1991



b) Part-time labour force participation rates of women 1976 & 1991



(Source: Davies & Jackson, 1993, pp. 73 & 74)

The most notable change is perhaps in the 15-19 age bracket where there has been a substantial drop in full-time jobs which almost half was accounted for by increased part-time work. This is a reflection of the trend towards increased tertiary education and shows that most women in the nineties are not looking for full-time work until their early twenties. In the mean time, many women find it necessary to work part-time to support themselves while studying. This also reflects a pattern of voluntary withdrawal from the labour market, when faced by declining job opportunities (Davies & Jackson, 1993).

If we consider the main group of women considered to be of childbearing age from around 25 years to 34 years then there has actually been an increase in full-time participation rates among women in this bracket. Part-time rates for this group have remained steady for the last twenty years. The biggest change among part-time work involvement has come at the higher end of the scale with a big increase for the over 50 year olds. This suggests that childcare responsibilities are obviously not the only factor involved when choosing part-time work over full-time.

Figure 3.1a) shows the distinctive “m-shaped curve” which has been mentioned in recent literature. This indicates the two distinct phases of participation that are age specific, with a withdrawal from full-time work occurring in the 20-34 age period.

In general, women without dependent children have the highest participation rates. However, since 1976 mothers in all the categories of child age have increased their involvement in paid employment. Between the years of 1986 and 1991 employment levels continued to increase for the group of women whose youngest child was under one year of age (Dept. of Stats, 1993: 105). See Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Proportion of Mothers Employed in Paid Work by Age of Child 1976-86

(%)

	1976			1981			1986		
Age of child	**Full time**	**Part time**	**Total**	**Full time**	**Part time**	**Total**	**Full time**	**Part time**	**Total**
Under 1 year	5	7	12	6	10	16	9	12	21
1-4 years	9	13	22	10	18	28	14	20	34
5-9 years	16	22	38	19	26	45	27	24	51
10-14 years	26	23	49	30	27	57	35	28	63

Source: Social Monitoring Group 1989 (cited in Haines, 1989, p.68)

Amongst the women questioned in the previously mentioned ISSP survey, 21.3% had worked full-time while 28.1% had been involved in part-time work while there were dependent children living at home.

A New Zealand study, by Lloyd et al, on maternal participation in the full-time labour force found that the reasons given by mothers when entering the full-time labour force indicated they had a large degree of choice (Davies & Jackson, 1993). There is opposition to this view and the age of the youngest child is the strongest determinant of whether a woman is working or not. Families with an infant under a year old are the least likely to have a mother involved in paid work. Pressures of society are still such that, “irrespective of improved educational and work opportunities and small concessions towards equal rights, women will still have a hard job getting out the door while they have young children” (Cook cited in Davies & Jackson, 1993:139).

It would appear that the New Zealand situation matches the British evidence. Women who wish to be in the workforce, achieve this goal, regardless of whether they have children or not. While still **a** barrier, childcare responsibilities cannot be considered the **main** barrier to working. Moreover the choice between part-time and full-time work cannot be said to be based purely on childcare considerations. The strength of demand for factors such as flexibility and shorter working hours also needs to be examined.

MYTH FOUR: The Myth of Exploited Part-time Workers

As women have traditionally made up the majority of the part-time labour force, exploitation of this group is pertinent to the study of female employment. The idea of part-time workers receiving a worse deal than full-timers arose because historically part-time jobs had been a marginal element in the workforce. Exploitation was seen in the sense that part-time workers had less opportunity for such things as further training and promotion. They were also less likely to be given paid holidays or sick pay.

4.1 British Situation

Hakim suggests that, in recent times, Britain has experienced a change in the structure of the workforce, with a fall in the volume of so called 'standard' jobs, and decreased union membership. The current attitude is that part-time workers are no different from full-time workers.

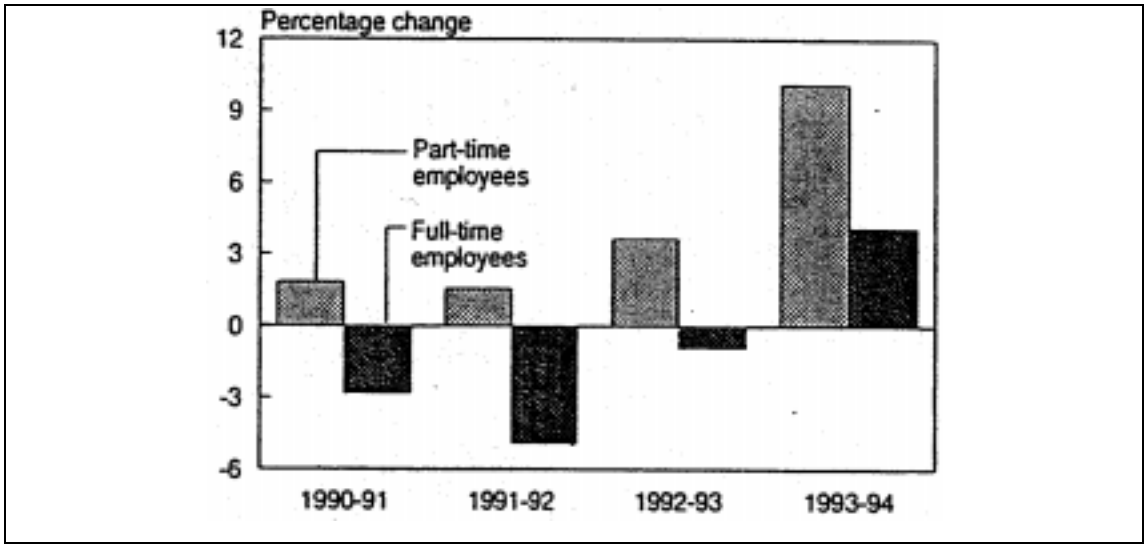
4.2 Evidence in New Zealand

The part-time workforce is currently growing at a faster rate than the full-time workforce. From 1990 to 1994 the ratio of full-time to part-time employees fell from 3.3 full-timers to every part-timer, to 2.7 full-timers (Stats NZ, 1995a:15). As in the British situation part-time workers are ceasing to be a marginal element in the workforce.

Figure 4.1 clearly demonstrates that the part-time labour market is where growth is occurring and indicates that the part-time workforce is not a group that can be sidelined.

In 1995 part-time employed made up 21.6% of all employed persons (Stats NZ, 1996a).

Figure 4.1: Change in Number of Part-time and Full-time Employees



Source: Business Activity Statistics (Stats NZ, 1995a:15)

The growing visibility of the part-time workforce may be partially related to its de-feminisation, as the proportion of males involved in part-time work increases. However, in 1991 women still represented three out of every four part-time workers. Women tend to become concentrated in particular occupations that are also predominantly female, and are often lower paid. It may simply be that the increased participation of women has occurred in areas where new jobs are being created, so some concentration is to be expected.

The New Zealand labour force environment changed dramatically with the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act 1989 (ECA) designed to promote a more efficient labour market. Theoretically, as all employees have more negotiating options, part-time workers are not discriminated against by lack of union power leverage. However, the reality may be that more negotiating options has resulted in less power, and the ability of women to bargain satisfactory contracts has not been demonstrably improved [1](Deeks et al, 1994).

In summary, as in the UK, part-time work is becoming a more substantial feature of the New Zealand labour market.

[1] This may also be the case for men.

MYTH FIVE: The Myth of Employment Stability Among Women and Part-time Workers

The final aspect of Hakim's paper looked at employment stability which she suggests is an area were feminist orthodoxy has replaced sociological research.

Traditionally, employers have held perceptions of gender behavioural differences in:

- Rates of absenteeism
- Labour turnover
- Stability with one employer

This type of argument has been used to justify lower rates of pay and less employer investment in training for female workers. Part of the feminist mythology concerning women workers has been to define these problems out of existence, as differences attributable to occupations rather than workers. However, "Men in female-dominated occupations have the same turnover rates as men generally, and women in male-dominated occupations have the same turnover rates as working women generally" (Hakim, 1995:448)

It is interesting to note that the 1993 Hakim article stated, "Job tenure does not differ greatly between full-time and part-time employees" (p.104), which contrasts with her title for this section.

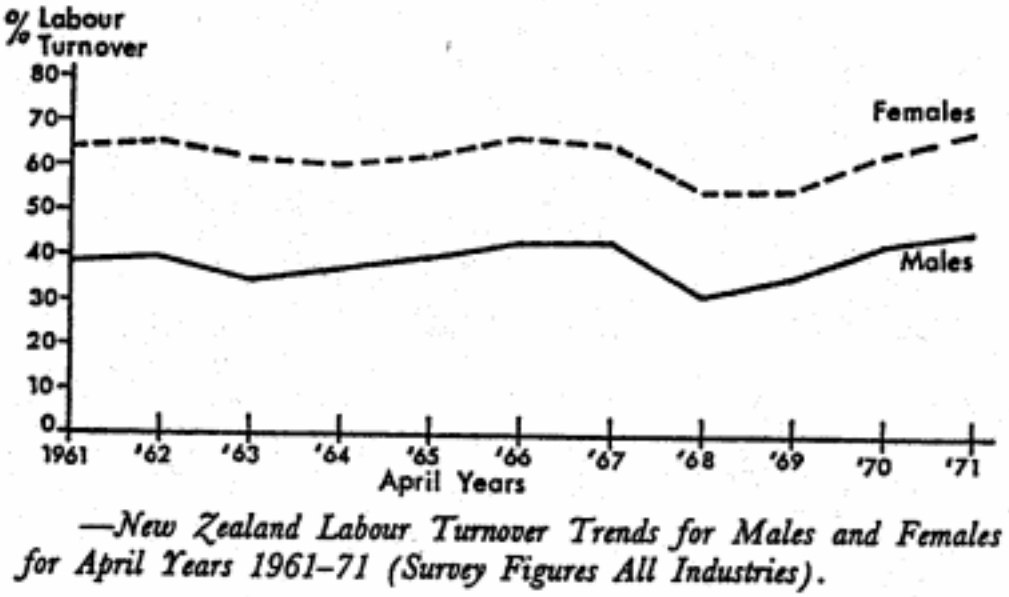
5.1 British Data

- Average male tenure 50-100% higher than females
- Average female turnover is at least 50% higher than for men
- Sex differential in tenure is not accounted for by absences from the labour market for childcare reasons

5.2 New Zealand Findings

Absence from work generally refers to a situation when an individual is employed, but does not work during the reference period (OECD, 1995). The areas of labour turnover, absences from work, and duration spent with one employer have been overlooked by New Zealand researchers in recent years. The main statistics gatherers on employment have focused on collective strike actions rather than on individual behaviours. There is a need for further research in this area to establish what the actual situation is in respect to these variables. As such it is difficult to compare the New Zealand findings with those of Hakim, but it appears that up to at least 15 years ago there were significant differences in labour turnover and absences across the genders. In particular women had a greater likelihood of intermittent labour force participation.

Figure 5.1: Labour Turnover Trends

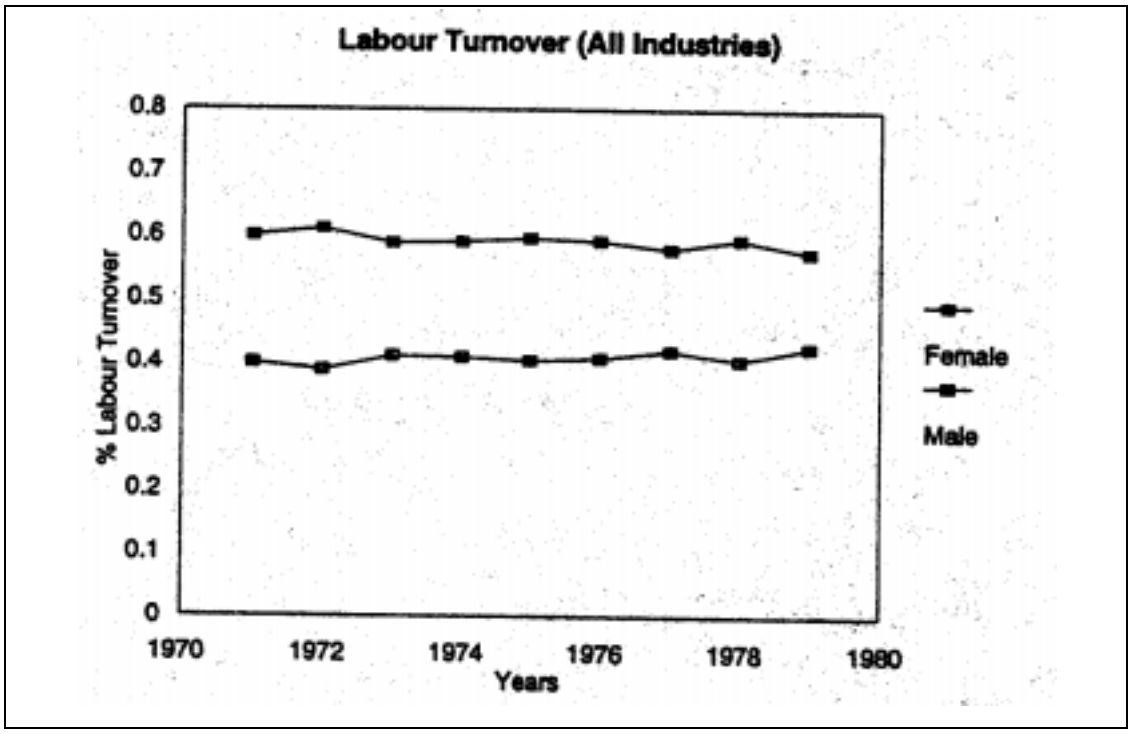


—New Zealand Labour Turnover Trends for Males and Females for April Years 1961–71 (Survey Figures All Industries).

Source: Dept. of Labour (1972:28)

Figure 5.1 shows that women's turnover rates remained consistently around 25% higher than those of men's during the decade of 1961-1971. There was no suggestion of a closing gap in this situation.

Figure 5.2: Labour Turnover Trends, 1971-1979



(Data Source: Dept. of Labour, 1980)

The same trend is continued in the following decade of the 1970's with signs of a possible slight narrowing of the gap towards the end of the period.

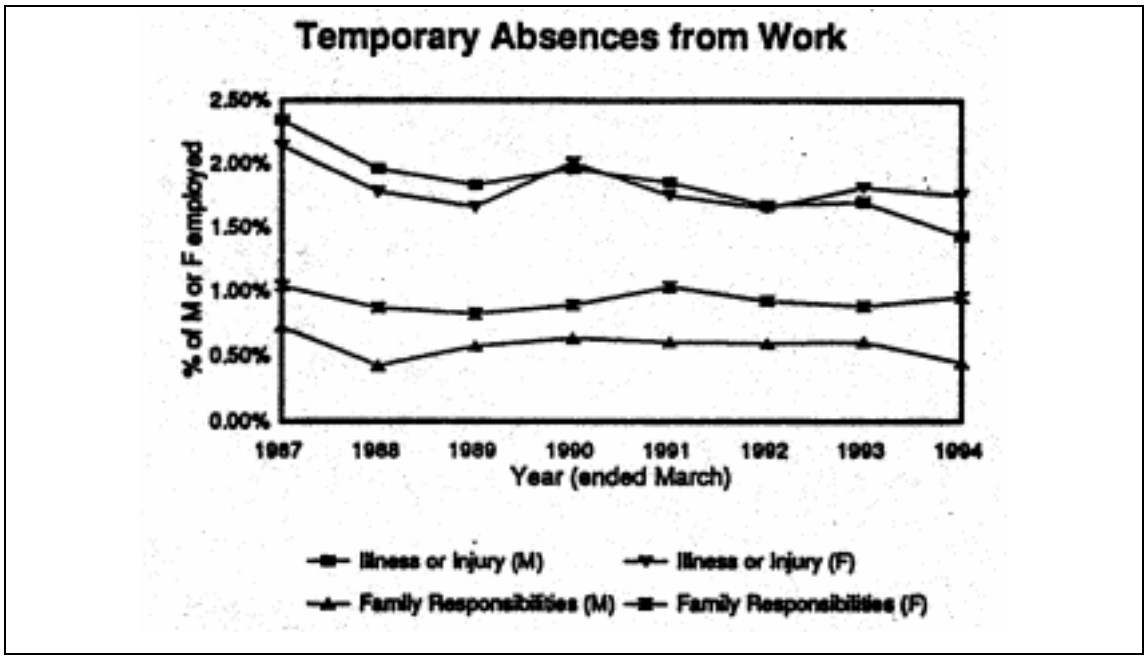
The external factor of skill level has been proposed as an explanation for this differential, as it has been demonstrated that high turnover rates regardless of gender are associated with jobs requiring less skill (Dept. of Labour, 1972). As women move into occupations considered more skilled, there may be a corresponding decline in the turnover differences. A Canadian study (cited in Sayers & Tremaine, 1994) found that less than 1% of all absences was explained by gender, with job satisfaction and true illness accounting for 4% and 33% respectively. It was also found that absenteeism was more related to economic status and role within the family than to gender.

The following figure (5.3) shows that women are around 1 1/2 - 2 times more likely to be absent due to family responsibility reasons. Rates for single women, however, may be closer to those of single men. The higher absence rates for female workers are largely caused by married women, subject to absences due to pregnancy or other family responsibilities.

The rates of absence for illness or injury, however, are fairly similar. The male rate is slightly higher, which reflects in part that tendency for them to perform more dangerous jobs. In this category males are mainly absent for injury while for women illness is a more dominant reason. It must also be noted that men are more likely to be absent than women for some reasons. They are more likely to suffer from alcoholism and have a criminal record than women (Bergmann, 1986). A 1976 Department of Labour survey found an average absence rate of 5.81% for males and 6.24% for females. However,

when this was categorised down into approved and unapproved absences the picture changed with 1.08% for females, and a rate of 1.35% for males (Dept. of Labour, 1976).

Figure 5.3: Persons Employed and Temporarily Absent from Work



(Source: Table 9.5, Labour Market Statistics 1994)

Statistics on length of time with one employer are not collected on a national level, and to survey businesses was beyond the scope of this study. However, Bowie (1983, cited in Horsfield, 1988) attempted to measure women's involvement in the peripheral

labour force which he defined as those employed for less than a year in paid work. This encompassed part-timers and people changing their labour force status. Using the 12 month period preceding the Censuses of 1966, 1971 and 1976, he found that women accounted for 45% of the peripheral labour force in 1965-66 and 50% in 1975-76. Grimmond (1993) found results which indicated that men were more likely than women to remain employed between quarters, however, this gap was narrowing.

The developments of increased labour force participation, and greater labour market attachment by women has resulted in the demand for increased flexibility of working arrangements. There is a move towards parental leave legislation among many countries which would promote gender equality by providing equal choice for mothers and fathers (OECD, 1995). Within the OECD nations gender remains the most distinctive feature of who will take parental leave, with mothers taking almost the entirety. Obviously all maternity leave is granted to mothers, with paternity leave usually being a shorter duration. The European Union has moved to make equal parental leave provision for mothers and fathers. There is likely to be a difference between provision and take-up, however.

The previous data clearly show that women and men have different behaviour patterns concerning turnover and absences. The following quote suggests that there are supply differences as well. *"The effect of high marginal tax rates on participation is exacerbated by greater labour supply elasticities for married women compared with men…Since women's labour supply is more elastic, women's should be taxed at a lower rate" (Hyman, 1994:183).* Hyman suggests that a positive substitution effect of work for leisure results in the greater elasticity for women.

There is a need for further research in this area at a national level to determine what the current situation on absences from work and labour turnover is. Turnover is a cost to business and any steps to reduce it would require more detailed information concerning reasons for, and levels of, occurrence.

CONCLUSION:

"women are not a homogenous group and for statistics to accurately reflect the lives of women they need to reflect the diversity of women's lives" - (McKinlay, cited in Davies & Jackson, 1993:4)

New Zealand has demonstrated the tendency to make ideological decisions concerning women, that take much a long time to fully implement. For example, although the much touted right to vote was achieved in 1893, it took another 26 years before the right to stand in a General Election was granted to women, and a further 14 years before a female Member of Parliament was elected. Similarly, though legislated for, pay equity may not be fully achieved at this time. Although women have now been involved in the labour force for over a century their experiences continue to be essentially different from those of men.

Hakim identified five 'myths': rising female employment; no sex differential in work commitment and work orientations; childcare problems as the main barrier to women's employment; exploited part-time workers; and employment stability among women and part-time workers. These 'myths' do also appear to apply to some extent for the New Zealand labour market with the exception that New Zealand's full-time work rates are rising. There remain sex differentials on attitudes toward work, though these are changing with each successive generation. Women with dependent children are less likely to be involved in full-time work, however, part-time work is not only chosen by women in this category. In addition it is popular among women over 50, which suggests factors such as flexibility are valued.

Part-time workers in general are a growing force in the labour market. Those involved in the part-time workforce may be responding to factors such as holding multiple jobs, or the desire to work fewer hours. They do not appear to be disadvantaged compared with full-timers. Finally, employment stability among women was less than for men around 15 years ago, but there are no recent data in this area with which to comment further.

The situation of women's employment in New Zealand is further complicated by concentrating on ethnic groupings, which has not been explored in this research. The participation levels for Maori women have changed differently from the overall grouping and unemployment rates also tend to be higher amongst Maori and Pacific Islanders. There had been little published on the history of female labour force participation in New Zealand until 1993 - the centenary of women's suffrage when attention became focused in this area.

In her conclusion Hakim stated that, "Academic social scientists' only claim to credibility and public attention for their research is that they offer a more disinterested approach than the reports published by pressure groups (etc)" (1995: 449). However, Hakim herself, appears to have fallen by the wayside of disinterest, at times reaching conclusions that are unsupported if not refuted by her data thus reducing her own credibility.

Rather than ignore contrary evidence, this research has attempted to uncover the source data for differing assertions. This has lead to surprising discoveries of discrepancy within the literature. Research into the situation of working women in New Zealand needs to be subject to the same rigorous analysis as any other field of study, neither ignored nor advantaged by the winds of popularity. If this is achieved then emergent trends in women's employment may prove "real" sooner and be subject to less dispute.

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FACT OR FICTION: FIVE ISSUES ABOUT WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN NEW ZEALAND

STUDENT PAPER NO. 1

RACHEL E. BATE AND STUART BIRKS

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