



Lifelong Economic Well-being for Women

What Women Want Survey

There is a lot of information written about women and women's lives, but did the writers ask the women what they thought? A consortium of women's organisations has gathered together women's opinions about what would make a difference to their financial security at various stages through their life. And what did they say?

The top three issues women identified as important for themselves and for women generally were:

- balancing work and family and other responsibilities
- affordable education and training for all ages
- equal pay for women and men doing the same job.

Also high on the agenda for the more than 3000 women who participated in the study were:

- equal access to secure well paid jobs
- quality childcare that is flexible and that families can afford
- information about financial planning and security early in life
- more women in management and leadership
- housing that is affordable.

Those surveyed thought work and family balance was the highest priority for women generally and also very high on a personal level. They indicated that although family friendly policies and programs may be in place, they aren't necessarily being implemented or taken up and families aren't experiencing the benefits. Women want and need a range of flexible programs that can address the different needs of individual families.

Participants identified education and training as their highest personal priority and recognised the importance of access to affordable courses as essential for gaining work or re-entering the workforce. Discussions with groups of women highlighted the particular problems faced by migrants, older women and sole parents.

Not surprisingly, given recent data that women earn 84.7% of men's wages, pay equity rated highly on both a personal and general level. Trends indicate that women will be waiting more than 100 years for equal pay. They continue to predominate in part time, casual and temporary employment, and women are segregated into jobs and industries where pay rates tend to be lower compared to those which are traditionally male areas of work. Despite legislation and equal opportunity requirements, the glass ceiling has proved very difficult to eliminate and discriminatory employment practices persist. And it isn't just the salary - over half of women's overtime is unpaid, whereas two thirds of men are paid for the additional work they do.

Clearly the women in the S4W What Women Want survey are saying that women still don't have a fair go. They don't want platitudes and policies. They want to see the situation fixed and they want to see action that makes a positive difference.