

MEDIA RELEASE

10 DECEMBER 2012

'Inclusive employment laws are needed for women to become full industrial citizens' - Associate Professor Sara Charlesworth speaks out at the Gender Pay and Workplace Equity forum held in Adelaide by economic Security4Women (eS4W).

Sara Charlesworth was speaking at a forum held by eS4W to discuss the impact of insecure work on women's participation in the workforce. The Adelaide forum was co-hosted by BPW South Australia (Business Professional Women) and the South Australian Working Women's Centre (WWC SA).

Associate Professor Charlesworth, a panel member of the ACTU Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia, stated 'that our current labour laws seem to be almost irrelevant for many Australian workers.

The current National Employment Standards do not provide inclusive entitlements for casual workers, of whom are 55% women. Nor do many of modern awards in female industries adequately protect workers on part-time contracts, who are overwhelmingly women.

'Insecure work is a mainstream societal issue that disproportionately impacts on women,' said Dr Jean Murray, a representative from BPW SA.

Professor Rhonda Sharpe concurred, suggesting that insecure work is not a women's problem therefore it should not be left to women to solve it; "It needs a broader societal response".

'Insecure life equals insecure work that exacerbates the insecure life,' Terese Edwards from the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children stated. Her concerns about the changes to the Parenting Payment were echoed throughout the forum. 'The changes will mean that single parents whose youngest child is at primary school will be transferred to Newstart payments from 1st January. They will then be required to look for work and have little ability to look for decent and secure work with the requirement to apply for and take whatever job is offered.'

Another speaker at the forum, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, was utterly disgusted that the change to the benefit was pushed through Federal Parliament, despite copious evidence that does not support the changes. Despite advocacy from the sector, increases to Newstart were not considered. 'An increase in Newstart would see an increase in productivity,' the Senator explained, 'however the push to deliver a surplus is now on the backs of the most vulnerable.'

Anne Gale, South Australian Equal Opportunity Commissioner, concluded the forum by facilitating an expert panel that identified areas that needed to be addressed such as adopting a national employment standard for all employees including casual employees; redefining and confining casual employment; and legislating the right to request flexible work.

eS4W will be holding more forums focussed on women's economic security next year in Brisbane and Sydney.

Media Contact

Kimberly James Executive Officer 0430051785