

Future Female - A 21st Century Gender Perspective



I am delighted to introduce this report on what women want for the future. At the close of the second millennium, women all over the UK began considering what changes they would like to see at the dawn of the third millennium.

This report is a window on women's lives over the next ten years. It has been compiled in a partnership between the Women's National Commission and the Future Foundation, one of the country's leading economic and social forecasting bodies.

Many organisations across the UK, and many individual women, helped us put this report together: giving their views on what they were happy with and where they would like to see progress.

The report represents an exciting mix of facts, trends and opinion on the dynamic agenda which is the future of women's lives. It sets the concerns and issues expressed by WNC partner organisations in the context of wider social and economic trends.

The report identifies the key drivers shaping women's lives now, and highlights how these are likely to change in the future, producing a compelling view of women's expectations over the next ten years.

It will come as no surprise that the three principal drivers of change are: the changing shape of the family; the changing shape of the workforce; and the changing shape of the population. The main aim of this report is to examine the case for the most important social and policy developments required against this backdrop of change.

I should like to thank all those who contributed their time and ideas so generously. As one woman said to us, "*Listen to us! Listen to what we are saying*". We all have a role to play in shaping the future. This report aims to give women their say.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Crawley".

Baroness Crawley of Edgbaston
Chair

The Women's National Commission

The Women's National Commission, based in the Cabinet Office, is the largest representative organisation of women's groups in the UK. Set up 30 years ago as the 'official, independent advisory body giving the views of women to Government', it is the only UK women's organisation that is fully funded by Government. It is independent in its views.

the **f u t u r e** foundation

The Future Foundation is a commercial think tank founded in 1996. It aims to bring a better understanding of the impact of social trends on business planning for the future; and, where possible, to promote increased corporate social responsibility through better understanding.

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A shared experience for all groups of women: they want their caring activities to be valued more highly

Throughout the various stages of consultation undertaken by the Women's National Commission and the Future Foundation, these issues surfaced as the most significant areas for change for the benefit of all women in the 21st century.

Whilst none of these points alone is either surprising or entirely original, taken together we feel they create a unique view, reflecting the breadth and diversity of the membership of the Women's National Commission - several million women who are members of voluntary organisations in the UK.

The emphasis on diversity and respect for difference is key to understanding the continuing challenge we face in presenting the interests and needs of 'all women' as if women, by virtue of their sex, are a homogeneous group in the population. Women, like any other part of the population in the increasingly complex and multifaceted society in which we live, are divided by age, wealth, race, education, family status, geography, health, disability and so on. There is, nevertheless, a common experience articulated by women with caring responsibilities that drives common needs, despite their differences. So visibility, valuing care and recognising the pivotal role played by women in creating and maintaining their communities were common themes to emerge from the consultation process, germane to all women.

The new focus placed on women's needs by the Government - a focus expressed in the Women's Unit of the Cabinet Office, the Treasury and other Government Departments, can be seen as a response to the pace and direction of change in women's lives. However, many of the women interviewed in the course of our research were clearly very impatient for even more quickly delivered improvements and commitments at the policy level.

In this decade, women's lives are clearly forming a dynamic agenda; and so, many of our public institutions will have to adjust accordingly.

The most important issues facing women

- Valuing women's caring activities
- Increased choice and control
- Increasing women's visibility and voice
- Improving women's representation
- Encouraging self-determination and enterprise
- Recognising diversity; working with and respecting difference
- Recognising voluntary contributions to community life

"I fear that my children and grandchildren will live in a society where all that matters is money and possession, to the exclusion of everything else."

Townswomen

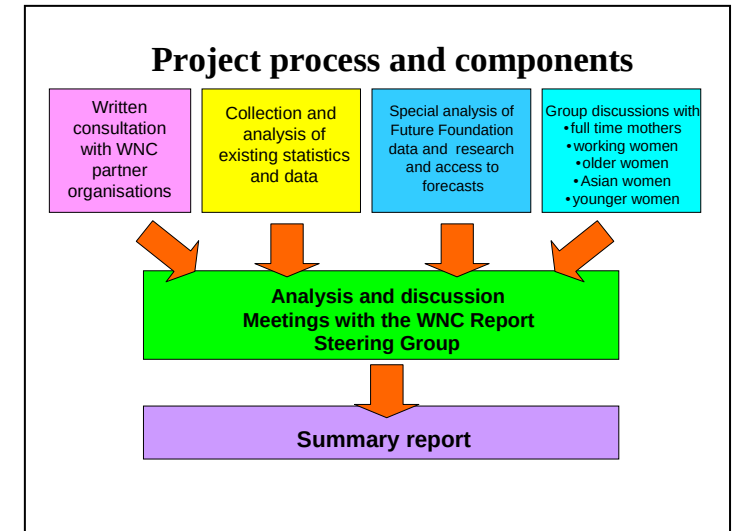
"There are far more opportunities for women to make headway with a career and certainly women are making themselves heard."

The Mother's Union

An extensive programme of research and analysis has been undertaken

This project has taken place over a period of around eighteen months, involving four separate elements of research and analysis:

- A written consultation of all the WNC's partner organisations
- An exhaustive review of statistics by the WNC, on the situation of women today and predictions for tomorrow
- The Future Foundation undertook a special analysis of its proprietary Changing Lives research to highlight quantitatively differences in attitudes between groups of women in the population
- Finally, we explored the perspectives of different groups in greater depth, through two-hour group discussions with members (but not spokespeople) and contacts of WNC partner organisations including the following:
 - full time mothers
 - working women
 - older women (55+)
 - Asian women
 - younger women
- At every key stage of the project, meetings were held to review findings and to discuss the results with a steering group of key women's organisations
- Finally this report has been produced to summarise and publicise the key findings from this process in order to promote the discussion of how women's needs can be better addressed in future policy



"There are women becoming involved in decision-making but it is a slow process and at times, you could consider it just a token to keep us quiet."

The Mother's Union

PART 1: FORECASTS AND FACTS ABOUT WOMEN'S LIVES

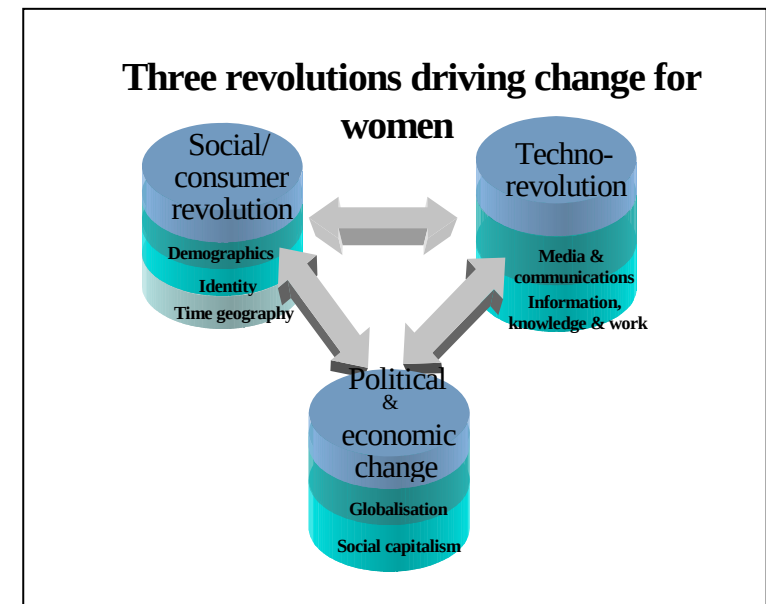
We shouldn't ignore the over-hang of history: women are differently affected by the emerging network society

This diagram, taken from the Future Foundation's central scenario for the future, describes the impact of the three interlocking, simultaneous revolutions creating the network society. This is a world in which the institutions of the past are evolving into more flexible social, family and economic groupings. They reflect new functions and activities rather than the old. They are created and maintained through existing and new communications links.

We know that change is a constant feature of modern life. But change can only be understood - and forecast - when we understand how all parts of society today fit together. It is these connections that shape the future.

This report explores the likely shape of social reality for women in the future. It is vital, despite the profound changes occurring, to recognise the impact of the historical over-hang of past inequalities between women and men. Whilst much policy is now aimed at creating equality of opportunity in the present, it often fails to deliver to women, because it doesn't deal with the continuing echoes of attitudinal, financial and social inequalities from the past.

These have to be properly analysed and dealt with for future policy to succeed.



"I think it's about fear of sharing power because... it's all about power, whether it's about male/female power or power between white and black."

Asian women's focus group

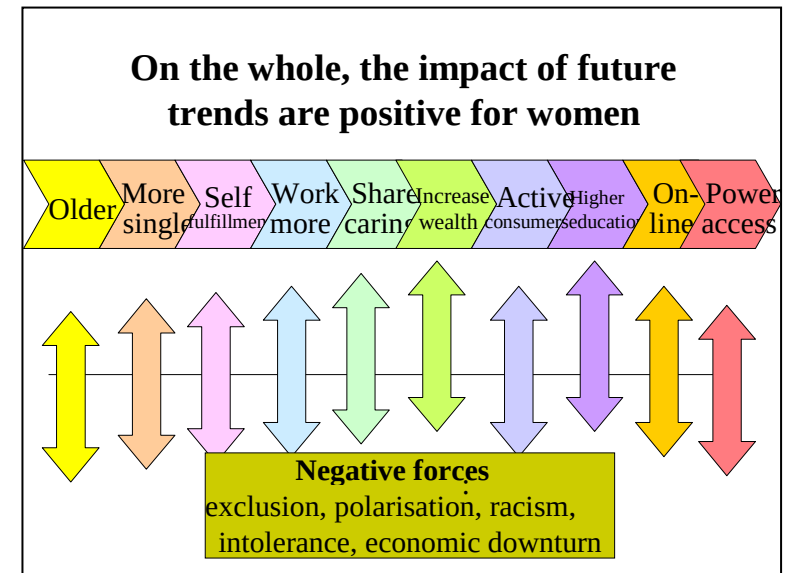
1.1 The forecast for women overall is good – but underlying disadvantages for some groups of women need special measures

In order to create a context for understanding the key challenges facing women in the future, the Future Foundation examined the differential impact of broad demographic, economic and social trends on women going forward. Here we summarise the overall effect of each of these on women over the next ten years.

The positioning of the arrows against the mid line represents whether or not we believe the overall impact of the trend is positive or negative. We can see that the biggest drivers to improved conditions and choice for women in the future may be higher levels of education and increased earnings. The least positive, unless there are dramatic shifts in attitudes and behaviour, will be ageing and a lack of effective representation of women in politics and decision-making positions.

Throughout we have been at pains to recognize how these trends will affect women according to their current and their historical disadvantage. Whilst the overall picture is positive in economic and social terms for the majority of women in the UK in the future (which is not to say that there aren't many issues that need to be addressed to improve the levels of choice and control experienced by most women) the negative forces highlighted in the box must be continually borne in mind. Women who are poor, lack education, or come from ethnic minority groups will continue to be relatively vulnerable and disadvantaged. As women already earn less than men and have less secure employment, a serious economic downturn could reduce their opportunities and spending power still further and reverse gains made in recent years amongst the less well paid.

In the following sections we explore each of these factors in greater depth.



Poverty was found to be by far the most important force linking childhood development with subsequent social and economic outcomes. Being brought up in a lone-parent family does not seem to matter in the absence of family poverty.

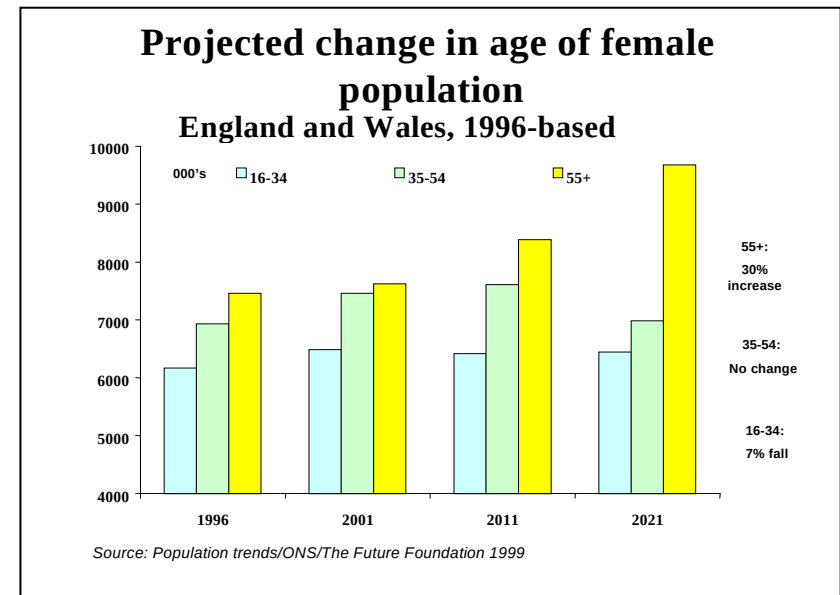
Child development and family income, P. Gregg, S. Harkness, S. Machin, YPS, 1999

1.2 Longevity and ageing: the single biggest challenge for women in the 21st century?

Longevity is *the* big demographic story for the 21st century. Given the greater longevity of women it will particularly affect women's lives in the future. Life expectancy for women virtually doubled in the 20th century and many medical experts, such as the Royal College of Physicians, are now forecasting that life expectancy could rise to 120 years or more over the course of the next century (although the average British baby born today can expect only 70 years of healthy life). There will already be a 30% increase in the proportion of women over 55 by 2021. This is also a reflection of the ageing of the post-war baby boomers, who form two specific 'bulges' in the population. As these women mature and retire, research suggests that they are holding to attitudes formed in the influential 1960s and 70s and will remain more liberal and interested in self-fulfillment than the current population of older women.

With improvements in medical science and understanding of the benefits of exercise and healthy eating, more women will be active for longer, creating a huge potential pool of energetic older women. As the statistics show, there are many risks that women face with increasing age:

- *Poverty* - whilst there is now a greater emphasis on helping women to save, many will continue to suffer the severe effects of lower wages, and the effects of career breaks and insufficient pension provision.
- *Caring deficit* - there is a danger of a severe caring deficit in the future both through under-funded state provision (as the proportion of the population in work versus those in retirement declines) and through the lack of relatives who are able to care for the elderly.



► *Age discrimination* - as a society we have a long way to go in accepting and transforming the widespread ageism that exists, and particularly affects the more numerous, less affluent older women. Elder abuse is another little charted but significant phenomenon that will need to be tackled.

If we can successfully monitor and prevent the more common age-related diseases, it's possible that trauma and road traffic accidents may become the major cause of death and morbidity. In 1998, around 50,000 older people suffered a hip fracture. By 2020 that figure is predicted to be around 120,000 a year. Trauma will probably affect more people than heart disease and come close to cancer in the league table of major health problems.

Physics and Foresight: Science in our lives, Institute of Physics, 1999

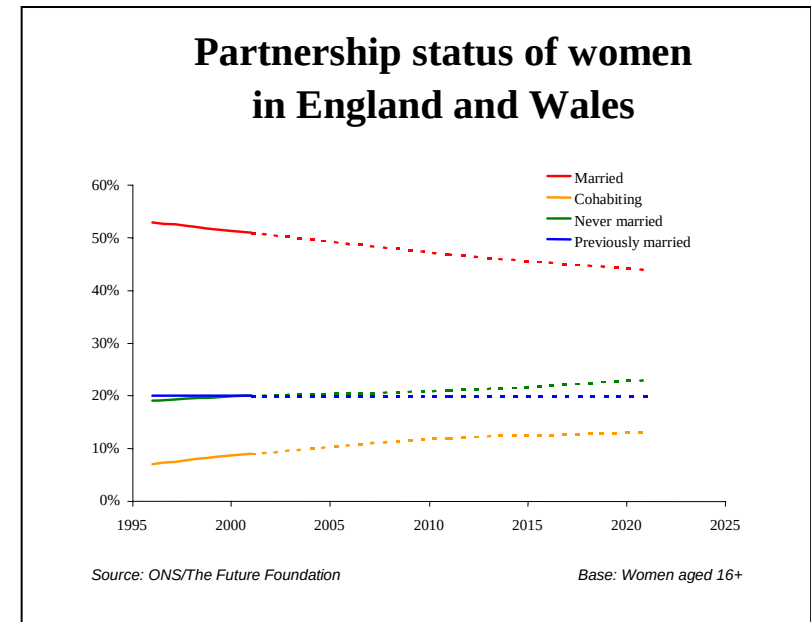
Ageing women – the facts and figures

- Between 1961 and 1997, the age group consisting of people aged 75 and over has increased by over 90%. (1)
- In 1997, almost two out of three people aged 75 and over were women and for those aged 85 and over, three out of four were women. (2)
- Of people over 65 years of age women are more likely than men to be unable to manage alone. Elderly women are more likely than men to be unable to go out of doors, getting up and down stairs and managing bathing or showering by themselves. (3)
- In 1961 there were almost four people of working age to support each pensioner. By 2040 there will be two. (4)
- Diseases of old age (other than Alzheimer's disease) currently cost the UK about £14bn a year to treat. By 2020, that figure will be £50bn and rising. (5)

1.3 Women's family lives will continue to transform but the emotional importance of family will remain central

Partly due to the impact of increased longevity, as we go forward a growing proportion of women at any time will be living outside the traditional female role of wife and mother. Already 14% of households are occupied by women living on their own compared to 10% in 1963. By 2005 less than half the female population will be married, as a result of later and lower rates of marriage (in part made up by higher cohabitation rates, which will increase by 13%), and continuing high levels of divorce and widowhood. ONS figures suggest that only a third of women aged 25 - 34 will be married in 2011. Women born in 1950 can expect to spend a quarter of their lives in the 'family stage' with young dependent children. For those born in the 21st century this will reduce to less than a fifth.

However, the bald demographic facts, which highlight societal change so effectively, don't communicate an underlying and enduring truth about the continuing emotional significance of 'family' to the vast majority of men and women throughout their lives. Recent Future Foundation research showed that 88% agree with the statement that 'family is the most important thing in their lives'. This is as true for people living on their own as with other people, emphasising the degree to which people invest in creating and maintaining strong family networks, through regular contact: face-to-face or by telephone, or through the Internet and other means. The make up of the 'family' is clearly becoming less uniform in a world where only a quarter of households conform to the nuclear family model, but in its wider form it remains a significant and overarching aspiration and emotional support for the majority.



Most people still see their closest relatives on a regular basis, often weekly. At least half of those with a living father, mother or child see them at least once a week.

Overall, children appeared to have an accepting, inclusive view of what counts as family and their definitions did not centre around biological relatedness or the 'nuclear' norm. Quote: "A family is a group of people which all care about each other. They can all cry together, laugh together, argue together and go through all the emotions together. Some live together as well. Families are for helping each other through life."

Understanding Families: Children's perspectives,
V.Morrow, National Children's Bureau in assoc. with the
Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1998

Changing families – the facts and figures

- Britain is not having enough babies to replace its population. In the UK, women are now having just 1.7 babies on average. One in four women are opting to have none at all. If today's fertility rates were to persist, the European population in 100 years would be less than half of what it is today. (8)
- In one generation the number of first marriages has halved and the number of divorces has trebled. (9)
- Single parents head a quarter of families with children. That is three times as many as in 1971. Almost all single parents are women. (10)
- Four in ten lone parents are on incomes below 40% of the average. (11)
- In 1996 there were 5.8 million households containing only one person. By 2011 there will be 7.9 million, that is one third of all households. (12)
- 70% of people think that family members should keep in touch with each other even though they don't have much in common. 46% try to keep in contact with all relatives, not just close family. (13)

1.4 Women will overtake men in the workplace, but economic equality is some way off

The increased participation of women in the workplace has been one of the most significant factors to change women's lives over the past thirty years and this will continue to play a major role in the future. It has created a move out of the home for women (the majority of mothers now continue to work at least part time). This has given women the opportunity to gain life-long financial independence - which given family instability and change, is a necessary guarantee against poverty in old age. We forecast that over 70% of mothers with children under five will remain in work by the year 2010, creating huge additional demand for high quality childcare provision.

In 1971, women's share of employment was 36%, but women are currently overtaking men as a proportion of employees and this shift will continue. By 2010 as much as 80% of UK employment will be in the service sector: a sector which already employs a majority of women. However, behind this figure are still many variations that will continue to affect the nature and value of women's employment and create considerable inequalities between women employees and between women and men: greater part-time working; more flexible working conditions; the sectors and types of work done by women which are less well paid; and the continuing pay gap between men and women - which stands at 20% some three decades after the Equal Pay Act.

Women have also been less likely to be self-employed, making up just one quarter of the total 3.2 million, although the latest figures indicate that almost one third of new businesses are started by women.

Facts and figures about women's paid work

- In 1971, women took around one in three available jobs: today it is just under half. (14)
- Part-time working now accounts for nearly a quarter of all jobs. Over half of all new jobs created in the last three years are part-time. (15) Of almost 7 million people in part-time employment, about 5.5 million are women. (16)
- The majority of employees in the lowest paid occupations are women. (17)
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are more likely to work part-time than other ethnic minority groups. (18) 60% of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are poor. That is four times the poverty rate found among white people. (19)
- 37% of disabled women of working age are in employment compared to 39% of men. (20)
- Women start 30% of all new businesses in the UK and 25% of all businesses are run by women. (21)

*1.2 million people hold down two waged jobs.
Two thirds of them are women.*

The Guardian 04/01/99

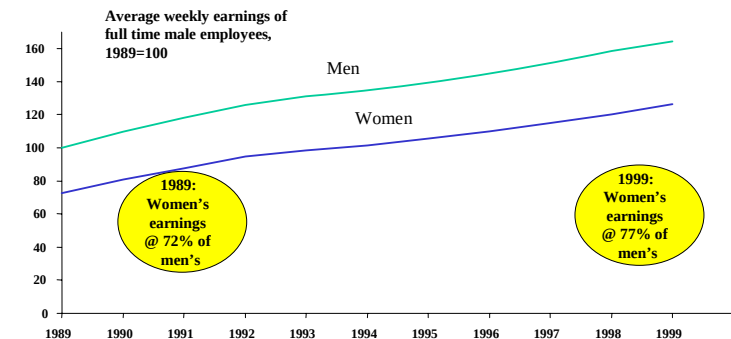
1.5 Women will get richer overall but will remain disadvantaged by their caring roles

It is worth noting that already nearly 20% of women earn more than their male partner. Women's earnings are increasing faster than men's. The pay gap is narrowing very slowly as noted above. If this rate of change continues, it will close around 2036. So, young women today can still look forward to working for less money than their male counterparts for most of their working lives. The minimum wage has already helped many women because of the nature of their work in lower paid employment in tourism, service, domestic and caring activities. Low pay in the female dominated caring professions is another vital issue for the future prosperity of women.

Our forecast is for increased levels of wealth for women, based on increased earnings as one of a number of factors. The question of how far income growth is translated into effective long-term savings, however, is still enormously important for the vast majority of less affluent women. The flexible Stakeholder Pension that has been launched by the Government is an important step forward in theory, although as yet untested.

Research for the Women's Unit indicated that a low-skilled mother of two is estimated to earn around half a million pounds less over a lifetime than her low-skilled husband. Women experience a double loss of earnings potential through childbearing and gender. It is this continuing disadvantage over the long term that needs to be addressed.

Women's earnings are catching up as a proportion of men's, but the gap is growing in absolute money terms



Source: Labour Force Survey, Foresight First

95% of the girls and 85% of the boys think they will be richer than their parents.

Views at Ten. Research project for First Direct by Fundango UK, 1999

1.6 The caring role will continue to weigh more heavily on women, but men will contribute more in the future

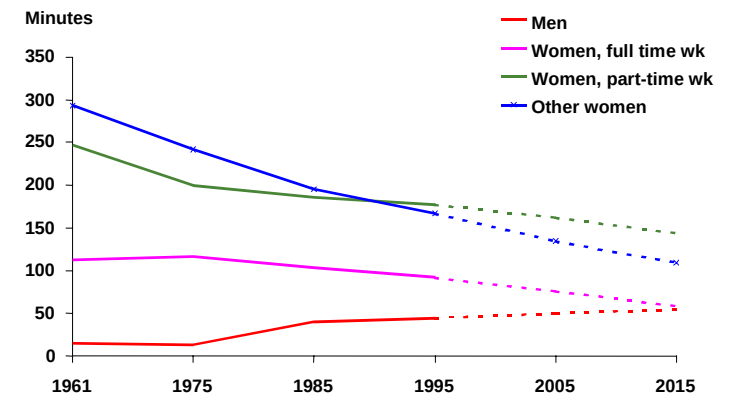
An examination of the research on caring and domestic responsibilities throws up some fascinating facts. The impact of women's greater participation in the workplace, and the effect of domestic appliances like the washing machine and the dishwasher, have resulted in women doing less cooking and housework over the years. This trend will continue. Meanwhile, men's participation in this area has been increasing slowly. We forecast an equal division of household labour between full-time working women and men by the year 2015.

Underlying these trends are a number of interesting components:

- ▶ We now spend more time with our children than in 1960. This is true of both men and women and may reflect a greater commitment to parenting. We may spend less time cleaning and cooking but we go out more with our children and spend more time with them than our parents spent with us, despite current concerns about “latch-key” children.
- ▶ Many domestic and childcare activities are outsourced by those women who can afford to do so. This has resulted in an often ‘black’ economy worth some £4 billion today - our estimates are that this will nearly triple by 2010 to £11 billion. The current fast growth in employment is largely in the personal services sector, much of which is plugging the domestic deficit created by women's increasing participation in the workplace.
- ▶ The results of qualitative research conducted by the Future Foundation show that one of the biggest determinants of how domestic tasks are allocated between partners is the earning power of the female partner. It is also affected by the value placed on these activities by each individual - on the whole, it seems, women value them more than men.

Cooking and housework in the UK

Minutes spent per day



Source: Jonathan Gershuny, BBC/ ESRC/ONS/The Future Foundation

- In 1995, it was estimated that unpaid carers save the country £30 billion a year. (22)
- 1.2 million women care for an elderly parent, double the number of men. (23)
- 62% of couples with dependent children are both in work. (24)

1.7 Education will be the biggest driver of greater social and economic equality for women

As noted above, the move towards greater educational achievements for women is a significant and positive factor. Education is essential for women to increase their earnings potential and is linked to later marriage, fewer children and thus greater affluence overall.

We mustn't forget, however, that these figures mask a continuing disparity between the majority and the excluded. Already 46% of women are gaining some form of further education or qualification and by 2010 we believe that over 40% will go into tertiary (degree level) education. The links between teenage pregnancy and educational disadvantage remain though, and they need to be specifically targeted to help young lone mothers escape the poverty trap.

Additionally we foresee that adult education will become even more popular as the knowledge economy takes hold and there is a growing understanding of the importance of continuing skills development throughout our working lives. Already 75% of those enrolling for adult education are women.

Gender segregation remains significant. Although women have now reached parity in medicine, law and business studies, there are still big imbalances in the intake for certain scientific, mathematics and engineering related courses.

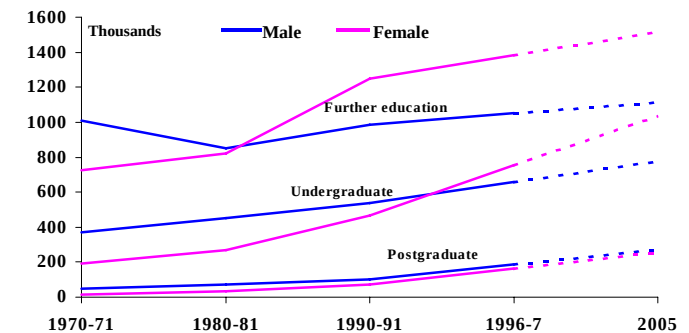
“Until behaviour and attitudes in schools no longer reinforce stereotyped gender roles, children will continue to grow up reinforcing discriminatory attitudes and practices.”

The Church of Scotland Guild

Students in further and higher education, 1970 to 2005

By type of course and gender

Nb: projection based on 1990-97 trend



Source: ONS / The Future Foundation, 1999

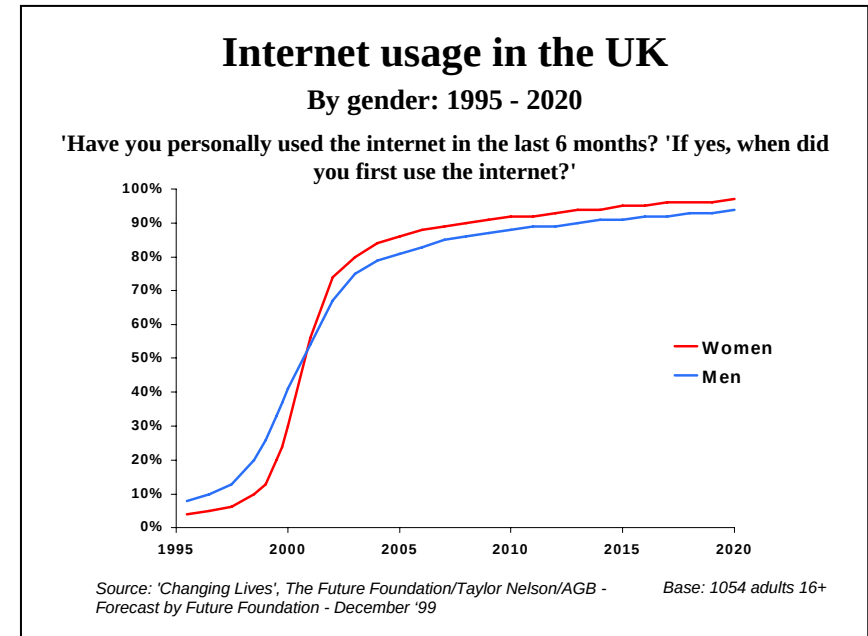
- Education is the single most important factor determining a woman's earnings over the lifetime. (25)
- Ethnic minority women as a group hold more qualifications than white women. Black African women are twice as likely as white women to have qualifications above A level standard. (26)
- In a 1997/98 survey, 15% of female employees had received job-related training in the previous four weeks. Learning which was connected to a current job was more likely to lead to a full qualification for men (39%) than for women (34%). (27)

1.8 Women will gain equal access to new technologies but will require targeted support in the on-line world

In the 1990s, possibly as a reflection of women's relative ease and dexterity in communicating via the telephone (or possibly because women were more willing to work for low wages) women quickly became the great majority of employees in the boom industry of that decade - telephone call centres. This was not immediately translated into equal access to other areas of new communications technology, however. The Internet, for example, gained greater currency with professional, younger men in its early years of development. Nevertheless, as these figures show, during the course of 2001 women are set to overtake men in terms of the proportion using the Internet. Students in particular are the most likely to use the Internet, and more students are now women. This, as well as the greater investment in computers by families with children, and ease of access via televisions, etc., is ensuring that more women are gaining access to the Internet than ever before.

The much heralded 'digital divide' does not solely concern gender, but specific groups of women are excluded from the new world of interactive technology. Older, poor and less educated women are far less likely to have access today, and whilst a significant proportion of households (over 70%) are forecast to have some form of access within five years, this encompasses wide variations in the type and frequency of use, and the levels of confidence of those using the technology.

Technology is a vital tool in the emerging network economy, but its use is proving to reflect existing divides and norms rather than transforming them. Thus in the dot.com world of big investments and rapid growth, the requirement that employees work long hours and sacrifice family demands to the 'faster business' culture once again puts women at a disadvantage.



"Training women in ICT should be considered as essential to the development of a balanced and creative workforce."

Women in Science, Engineering and Technology

- The proportion of women working in the IT sector fell from 29% in 1994 to 24% in 1998. (28)
- Numbers of women studying IT at Higher Education level have dropped and are now only 12%. (29)

1.9 Frustration with the political process will grow unless more effective female representation is achieved

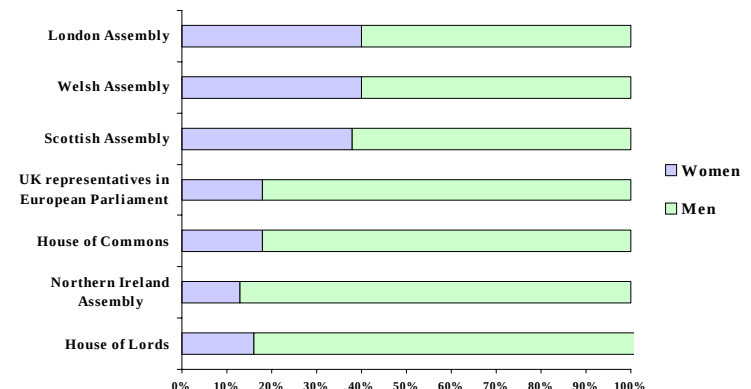
Future levels of female representation in existing institutional power structures was seen as critical by all the groups involved in the consultation process for this report.

The influx of women into Parliament in 1997 (taking the level to 18% of the total) and recent increases in the levels of women in the Welsh Assembly (40%) and Scotland (37%) should point to greater access and opportunity for women in the future. The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons was set up three years ago to consider how the practices and procedures of the House should be modernised, and has produced two sets of recommendations. There remains much to be done, however, on transforming the working practices in Westminster into family friendly options. Until these changes are made, women will find it more difficult than men to enter Parliament.

Progress in business has been no more rapid. Despite the best efforts of Opportunity Now and a small number of high achieving women, it is still the case that fewer than 20% of managers in business are women. This is an indication that the corporate world is a similarly archaic and male dominated culture. At very best, we can see this figure increasing only to some 35% over the next five years.

An important and unanswered question is what level of representation is required to make a difference to policy and business organisation. Women want to see more women in the important decision-making roles so that they can have equal influence over public and economic debate. But token representation of women cannot fundamentally challenge traditional schools of thought. Government must make a conscious effort not only to mainstream the women's perspective into policy-making, but to counterbalance the traditionally male work ethic with a new ethic of care that recognises the huge unpaid contribution that women make to the maintenance of civil society.

Women as a proportion of political representatives



Source: Women's Unit

"Equality of women can only be achieved if equality is achieved in key decision making positions."

UK Asian Women's Conference

- In 1999, one third of those serving on the board of public bodies were women. Ethnic minorities represented 4.7% of people on boards of public bodies. Of these 32% were women. (30)
- Women represent 8% of the board members of public bodies within the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food compared to 44% in the Department of Health. (31)

Part 2: ARTICULATING THE VOICE OF WNC MEMBERS: WHAT REALLY MATTER IS RESPECT, RECOGNITION AND EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION

The purpose of talking to small groups of women was to provide a depth and texture to our analysis and to gain insights into the 'real lives' and issues experienced by women in specific groups. This chart attempts to summarise the common themes and demands that emerged.

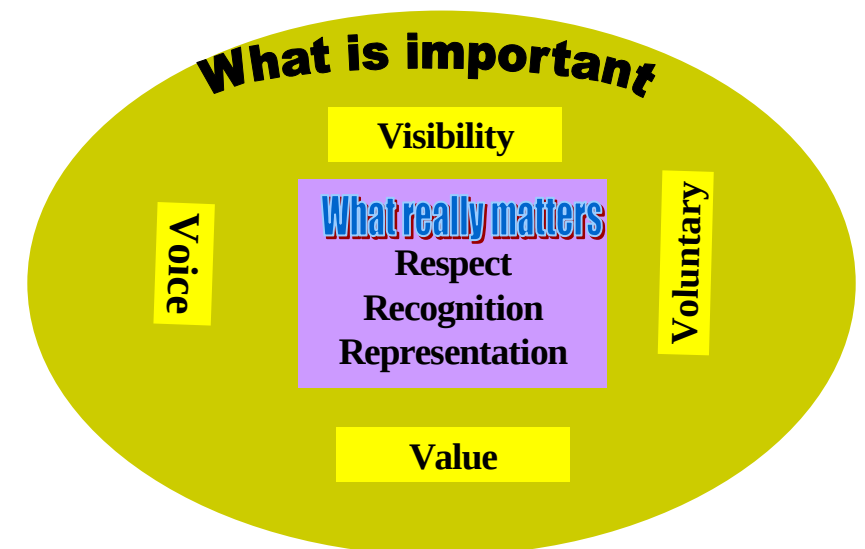
Women do not speak with one voice, and WNC organisations represent a wide variety of views. We brought together a number of groups which represent some of the most challenged and/or fast growing sectors in the female population:

- full time mothers
- working women
- older women
- Asian women
- younger women

This section of the report aims to convey a real sense of how the wider trends set out in Part I, actually affect women's daily lives and perceptions of their roles.

Here we are not attempting to interpret their comments or views, nor endorse them as WNC policy - we simply wish to convey them as clearly and directly as possible to give a real sense of what concerns and occupies these very diverse groups of women. On the whole the groups were comprised of members of WNC organisations, but were not their official spokeswomen. They were encouraged during the two hour sessions to speak for themselves as individuals as much as for their wider constituency.

Focus groups: The overarching themes



2.1 Full time mothers actively choose to prioritise parenting over earning money

Findings from the group discussions:

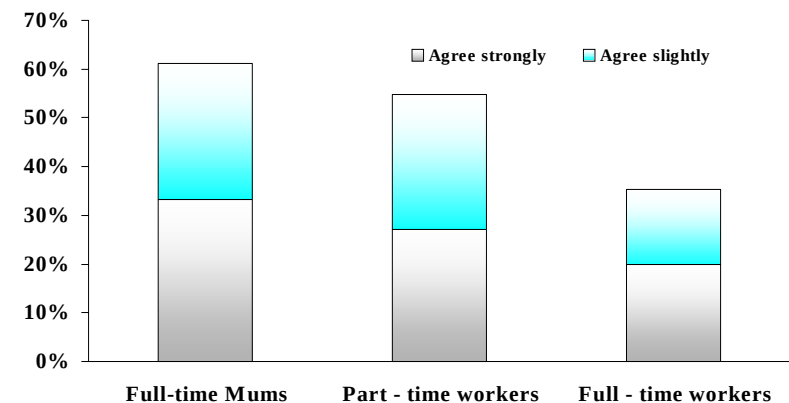
- Full time mothers feel very strongly that they deserve greater recognition of the contribution they are making to their children's future and to society as a whole. Prioritising the importance of hands-on mothering over other responsibilities, they have made an active and committed choice and don't want to be seen as dependent on either their partners or the state as a result.
- Many of them do participate in some form of freelance or part-time work in hours to suit their caring responsibilities. They resent the view that full time mothers are not fully occupied or lack ambition, since they form the bedrock of many local groups and communities around their children's activities.
- They want the value of caring and in particular mothering, to be raised in society as a counterbalance to what they see as the workaholic, materialistic culture that prevails. The women at this discussion group believe the best way to achieve this, given society's emphasis on measuring people's worth financially, would be through a 'mothering wage' or better tax and benefit provision for full time mothers.

“When you speak in terms of rights, e.g. the right to work and the right to childcare, it makes something desirable but that doesn't mean it is the best thing. You should also have the right to be a full time mother.”

“Parents need to be valued so that we can produce happy, confident children who are going to be a benefit to society.”

Mothers who stay at home are more traditional in their attitudes

Agreement with “I believe that the most important role that women play in western society is as mothers and wives”



Source: The Future Foundation, Media & Gender 1998

2.2 Working women want to achieve a better balance and need support to do so

Findings from the group discussions:

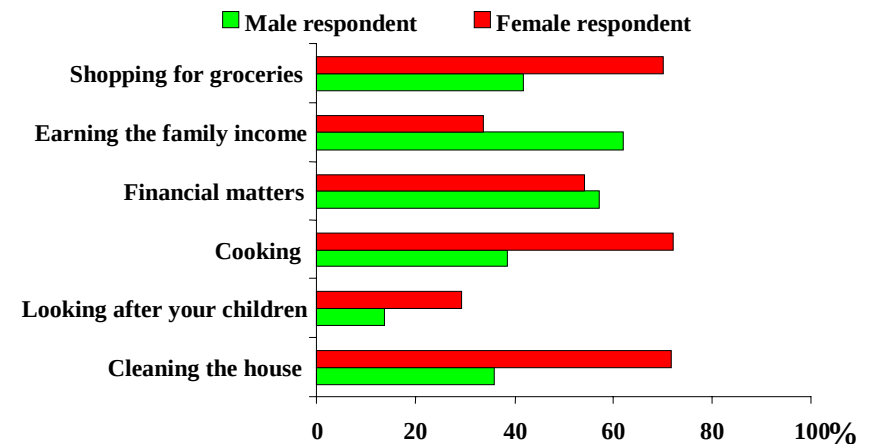
- They emphasise the problem with handling both paid work and caring/home responsibilities - these are two worlds in conflict.
- There is concern that childcare will increasingly be difficult to obtain for women shiftworkers in the 24-hour society.
- For those that want to run their own businesses, many experience problems with tax and other regulations around small businesses which need to be streamlined to help women successfully run their enterprises.
- They want more women in public appointments/service (i.e. magistrates, school governors, etc.) and better support from employers for women with public appointments
- They believe that more women in decision-making positions will create a more women-friendly society.
- There is a demand for working patterns to become more flexible, creating opportunities for better work-home balance; not just for those with children, but for all.
- They want young mothers to receive more encouragement and support to enter education and employment. There is a belief that investment at the grassroots can end the cycle of poverty that these young women often become a part of.

“Any policies that include the word ‘family’ or ‘children’ should have substantial increases in their budgets.”

“This Government just doesn’t understand business!”

Continuing evidence of the dual burden on women

Tasks carried out by respondent within household



Base: All respondents not living as only adult in household
Source: The Future Foundation/First Direct 1999

2.3 Asian women feel doubly disadvantaged by racism and sexism

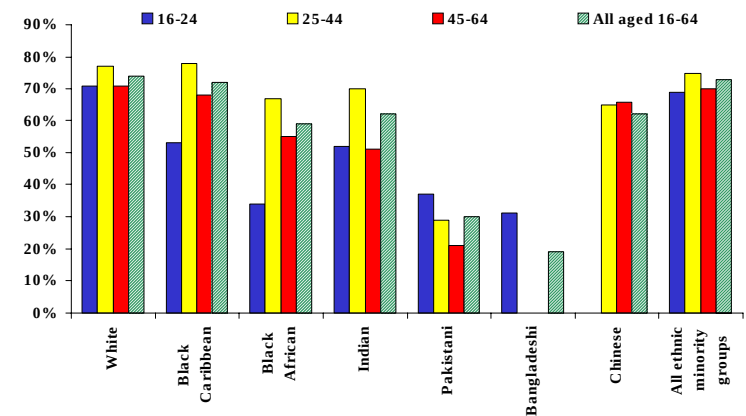
Findings from the group discussions:

- They highlighted the difficulties of being part of a generation of women who are expected to balance paid work, home and work in the community. They believe this has an impact on health. Women often don't take the time to care for themselves.
- They believe there is racism in schools – from staff and pupils. They find this particularly challenging as parents. They believe there is a direct link with the under-achievement of Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils.
- There is a perception of racism at work, that reinforces the glass ceiling. Asian women feel doubly disadvantaged. They also feel exploited by managers who expect Asian women to be more studious, conscientious and productive than their white counterparts, for no reward. Asian women can also feel oppressed by white women in the workplace. They do not expect this to improve in the foreseeable future. In a competitive marketplace Asian women are at the bottom of the recruitment heap. They see a widespread reluctance to share power.
- They discussed the oppression of women by men at home, at work and in the community (particularly within the Asian community) and believe it needs to end. They see young men increasingly using religion to control and inhibit women's freedom. The caste system, they believe, is another source of oppression. The Asian community in the UK clings to traditional values whereas in the home countries society has progressed and evolved far more.
- Violence against women and the harassment of women, in particular, disabled, lesbian and ethnic minority women, is a significant problem. These women perceive a lack of care in society. They think there is a lack of support and care from the Government. There is insufficient availability of affordable, accessible childcare. They want far more work-based crèches.
- Women need to be given access to positions of power, in order to steer changes. This is particularly true for Asian women.

Bangladeshi and Pakistani women least likely to work outside the home

Economic activity rates for women in the UK

Combined quarters: Spring 1998 to Winter 1998/99



Source: Labour Force Survey/ONS/The Future Foundation, 1999

“There’s a diversity (between ethnic minorities) that needs to be appreciated.”

“It feels like... we’re at the bottom of the pile and constantly struggling.”

“Why am I fighting for something that is already my right?”

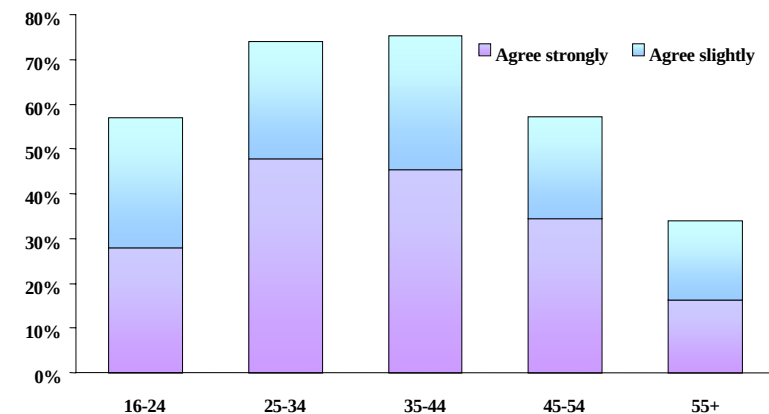
2.4 Older women believe they are sidelined and their energies wasted

Findings from the group discussions:

- One of the main concerns of this group is the invisibility of older (55+) women in society. They feel they have much to contribute, based on a lifetime's experience with family and work, but they are ignored and overlooked because they are seen as 'old' and no longer useful once they are over childbearing age.
- They are concerned about the current retirement regulations and ageism in the workplace which militate against working part-time around retirement age.
- They feel that their voluntary or community work is taken for granted and is not recognised or valued.
- Sandwiched between the caring needs of their children and elderly parents, they experience directly the consequences of the lack of support for carers in society.
- They are deeply concerned about the quality of care available for the elderly in this country, particularly for the disabled and infirm.
- They want to be listened to, included and allowed to contribute fully in the workplace and outside. They want to be recognised for their experience and vitality, not sidelined and stigmatised for their age.

Older women have more time and energy to spare

% Agreement with "I am often under time pressure in my everyday life"



Source: The Future Foundation, 1998

"Once you're retired you sort of disappear into the woodwork."

"Whatever is done it needs to be more than just cosmetic."

"Old age is an ageism thing and if you are fit you should do all the things you haven't done already." [Young woman]

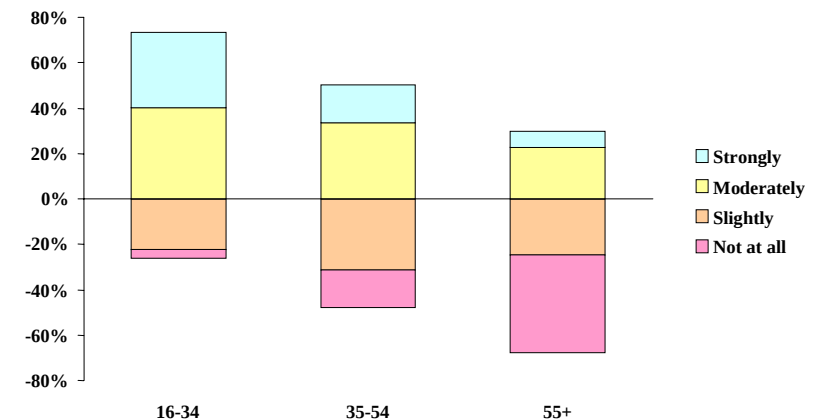
2.5 Young women see education and IT as the gateway to new opportunities but worry about alcohol, drugs and caring for the old

Findings from the group discussions:

- The young women in Scotland thought that drug taking should be decriminalised, as many people fall into the trap of drug taking simply because of peer pressure.
- Education is the best way of tackling the drugs problem; but young women at school would respond better to young people talking to them about the dangers of taking drugs, rather than politicians or the police.
- The young women from the North West were very conscious of the benefits of the age they live in, and the opportunities presented by IT and the “global village”.
- The young women in the North West worried about their alcohol consumption. They drank virtually daily, getting drunk often. They wanted to be able to get their drinking more under control.
- There was a great deal of dissatisfaction around employment. Students felt that employers exploited them. The unemployed thought that the jobs they were offered at unemployment centres didn't reflect their aspirations.
- The students felt under a great deal of pressure caused by exams. Those who had left school without qualifications regretted it and were considering going back into education.
- Young people can feel stigmatised both because of the school they attended and the district they grew up in.
- There was agreement that elderly people shouldn't have to sell their homes to pay for care, but the young women didn't want to have to look after their elderly relatives.

Young women are most sensation-seeking

“Tell me whether you feel the need for more excitement strongly, moderately, slightly, or not at all”, by age



Source: 'Changing Lives', The Future Foundation/Taylor Nelson/AGB

Base: 541 women, 1999

“[Today] women have more choice and want to do their own thing - strut their stuff - and don't think that marriage will offer them that freedom. They don't want to be tied down.”

“Life-balance means being happy, to be fulfilled, at one with yourself and the world around you.”

“What are women's issues?”

Part 3: Recommendations: a more radical approach to bringing women's perspectives and needs to the heart of policy making

Following extensive discussions we have selected a number of areas as key for the Government's future agenda on women:

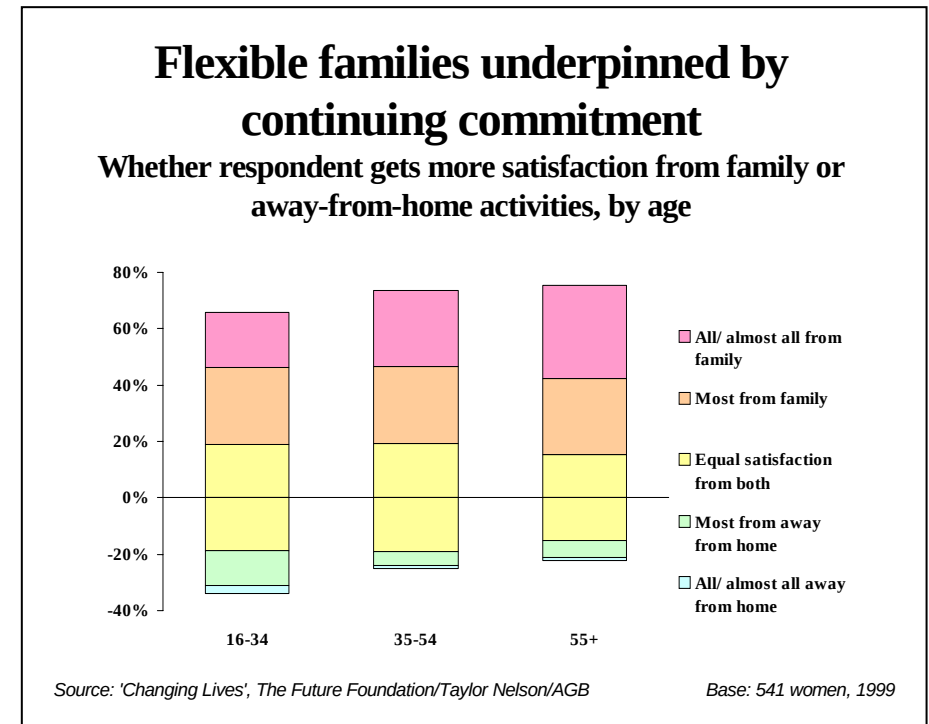
- **Policy planning for women must be based on more flexible and fluid definitions of family forms**
- **The central contribution made by women to a caring and cohesive society must be properly valued**
- **Work-life and family friendly policies should be made central to corporate governance**
- **Society needs to recognise and invest in the energies and experience of older women**

These key points are elaborated in more detail in the following sections.

3.1 Policy planning for women must be based on more flexible and fluid definitions of family forms

Since women's lives remain more intricately linked to their families, as they invest so much more time in caring relationships and unpaid support, they stand to be most affected by the dramatic changes in family form.

The WNC strongly recommends that future policy and planning is based on a more flexible and fluid view of what constitutes a family in the 21st century. Given our representation of women's groups as diverse as the Mother's Union to the Single Parents Action Network, we feel that a greater degree of tolerance and diversity is vital to recognising that most people are fully committed to the concept of family (as in intimate, mutually supportive relationships) whilst now only a minority live in a family that approximates to the norm of the nuclear family (married couple with dependent children). High levels of divorce, growing acceptance of sexual diversity and the spread of step families all point to the need to a broader and more inclusive definition of family. In this we are recognising the changes that have occurred both in demographic fact, in behaviour and in attitudes. In a tolerant and civilised society, policy needs to recognise these variations and provide support to help people maintain their all-important committed relationships whatever form they take.



3.2 The central contribution made by women to a caring and cohesive society must be properly valued

Women's contribution to the creation of cohesive and supportive communities is central. This chart confirms how important community remains to the majority of women. The WNC recommends that greater value is placed on the unpaid, often unseen contribution made to the community as a whole, by women's caring for family and friends. The most vulnerable members of society are particularly dependent on this work and women should be both facilitated and encouraged to carry on with their activities in this area. Clearly the existence of most WNC organisations is dependent on women's unpaid efforts.

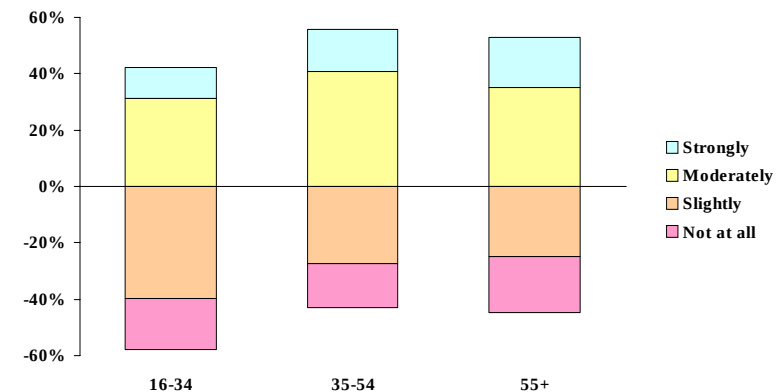
At the same time, we recognize the long-term importance of paid work to improving the material conditions of women throughout their lives and the necessity of encouraging financial independence in a world of flexible families, high divorce rates and insecure employment. Thus the WNC supports government initiatives to improve statutory provision to cover the vital caring responsibilities of women and men.

We would urge a greater recognition of the burden of care for the elderly and disabled as well as (and this is where current policy is focused) for children.

Additionally there needs to be a wider societal emphasis on the importance of parenting in creating a civilised and balanced society in the future, and whilst we recognize that many will not have children, this function needs to be valued throughout society and especially by employers.

Women feel that being involved in the community is important

“Do you feel the need to be involved in the community strongly, moderately, slightly, or not at all”, by age



Source: 'Changing Lives', The Future Foundation/Taylor Nelson/AGB

Base: 541 women, 1999

3.3 Work-life and family friendly policies should be made central to corporate governance

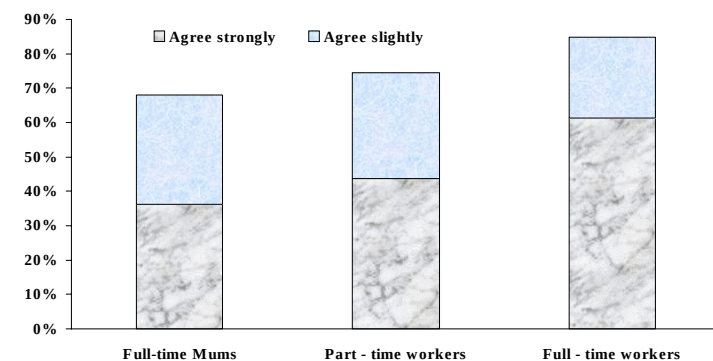
Central and so critical to self-fulfilment in a world where paid employment and caring responsibilities create conflicting demands on men and women, the issue of how best to create an effective work life balance is currently creating widespread interest and more media attention than ever before. The work of the National Work-Life Forum and Government initiatives such as the National Family and Parenting Institute are providing valuable research and ideas as to the best way forward in changing corporate culture and encouraging men as much as women to take this matter seriously.

The WNC fully supports and endorses these efforts but believes that more emphasis needs to be placed on changing male-dominated models of organisational behaviour. Thus it should become an issue for corporate governance - a central plank in how any business evaluates its performance and establishes longer-term sustainability. Women consumers in future may begin to consider this in the same way that many currently make decisions based on how environmentally friendly, for example, a business is.

The key requirements are to:

- create a climate in which part-time and flexible working is valued and not penalised (this would have a huge impact on older women)
- develop a workplace ethos in which outside activities and interests and particularly volunteering are encouraged and celebrated
- foster an attitude amongst management and workers that makes it unacceptable to have boards or representative bodies that do not reflect the wider composition of an organisation's stakeholders (women and minority groups) in order to articulate the widest concerns and interests in this area.

More full time working women agree that “I am often under time pressure in my everyday life”



Source: The Future Foundation, Media & Gender, 1998

Base: All mothers either not working and not looking for work, part-time, or full time

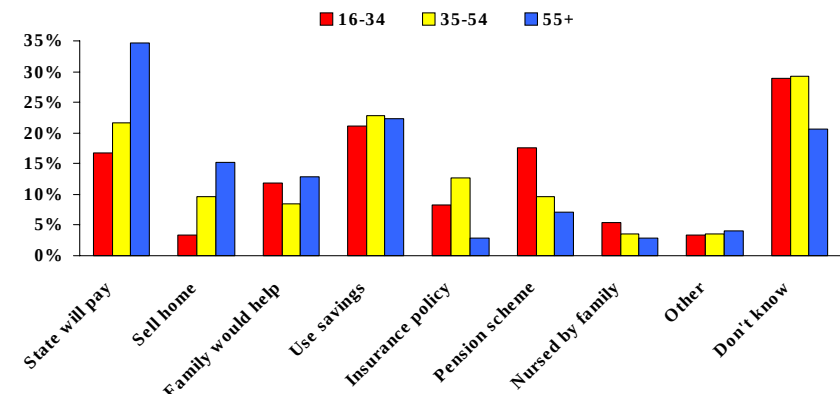
3.4 Society needs to recognise and invest in the energies and experience of older women

We have identified longevity and living in an ageing society as one of the biggest challenges for women in the future, and potentially one of the greatest problems, due to continued ageism and the widespread poverty of older retired women. This particularly concerns the WNC, many of whose members come from these older groups. We recognize the efforts of Government in encouraging the take up of the Minimum Income Guarantee. Whilst long term, the policy of Stakeholder Pensions and the second state pension should help lower paid women and those taking care breaks in the future, shorter term, special help should be made available to poor female pensioners who have, by virtue of their commitment to caring for family, not made additional provision for themselves.

The WNC view is that older women represent a huge untapped reservoir of experience, wisdom and energy that is currently being ignored and undervalued. Pension arrangements should be reviewed within companies to enable women to continue to work part time without suffering financially from doing so. Greater flexibility in working past retirement age is essential.

The role of women in caring for increasingly large numbers of elderly parents needs to be recognized and supported, as does their natural concern for the standards of provision by the state for the elderly and frail. They need to be involved in consultation processes, review boards and other mechanisms by which high quality care is delivered to the elderly population.

How women expect to pay for care in old age by age



Source: 'Changing Lives', The Future Foundation/Taylor Nelson/AGB

Base: 541 women, 1999

Summary

To create a complete picture of the challenges facing women in the 21st century we have attempted to combine the insights from our macro analysis with the expression of the subjective experience of the women in the selected discussion groups.

Whilst there are many trends creating greater opportunities for women to function as independent, economically self-sufficient members of society, there is clearly a considerable way to go before the effects of historic discrimination are played out. Policy making has to deal with the remaining absolute inequalities created in the past as much as ensuring a level playing field for women in terms of equality of opportunity in the future.

Positive forces may be counterbalanced by the disadvantages of poverty, age, race, illness and disability – reflecting the wider challenge of dealing with social exclusion. And as our discussion with Asian women highlights, gender is a further barrier to be surmounted in their struggle for greater equality: they feel doubly discriminated against. In many ways, the conditions of Asian women are a measure of the success of policies aimed at women as a whole.

Despite the differences between women, there was a powerful common plea from WNC member groups, which echoes the analysis of quantitative data: women want their caring responsibilities to be recognised and properly valued. They feel that they make an enormous “unseen” contribution to society as mothers, wives and community members which should be properly respected. Many believe that a re-balancing of public values would make the most significant difference to creating a more civilised and humane society.

In order to address the issues raised by this report and maximise women’s opportunity economically whilst valuing their commitment to caring and community we have outlined four priority areas in the policy agenda:

- Policy planning for women must be based on more flexible and fluid definitions of family forms
- The central contribution made by women to a caring and cohesive society must be properly valued
- Work-life and family friendly policies should be made central to corporate governance
- Society needs to recognise and invest in the energies and experience of older women

Finally, echoing the views of WNC members, we believe there is a continuing imperative to bring women’s views and perspectives even further into public life and the policy making and delivery machine: not as an adjustment but at the heart of every social policy ensuring that women of all groups are properly represented.

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