

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Bill 2005

Submission no: 54

Received: 8/11/2005

Submitter: Professor Alison Preston on behalf of
Women in Social and Economic Research

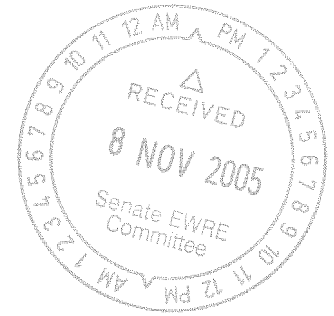
Organisation: Curtin University of Technology

Address: GPO Box U1987
PERTH WA 6845

Phone: 08 9266 7900

Fax: 08 9266 3368

Email: wiser@cbs.curtin.edu.au



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**Inquiry into the Workplace Relations
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November 2005

Prepared by

**Professor Alison Preston
Associate Professor Robert Guthrie
Therese Jefferson**

Contact:

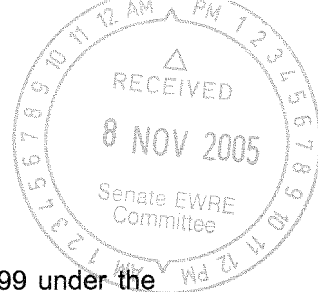
Professor Alison Preston
Co-Director of Women in Social
and Economic Research,
Graduate School of Business
Curtin University of Technology
PO Box U1987
Perth WA 6845

Phone 08 9266 7900

Fax 08 9266 3368

Email

Alison.preston@cbs.curtin.edu.au



ABOUT WISER

Women in Social and Economic Research ("WISER") was founded in April 1999 under the name Women's Economic Policy Unit. It was formed in response to a growing void - within Australia and internationally - in the gender analysis of economic and social policy issues that confront women. To most effectively address this void, the WISER unit was established as an inter-disciplinary research program, spanning two divisions of Curtin University, the Curtin Business School (CBS) and the Division of Humanities.

WISER is committed to producing high quality quantitative and qualitative feminist research on a broad range of issues that women identify as undermining their ability to achieve equity and autonomy in the current context. Meeting this commitment is enabled by the breadth of experience and expertise brought to WISER by an increasing range of researchers.

Through its academic and consultancy research into women's experiences of social and economic policies WISER provides a meaningful gender analysis of policy. An analysis strongly put forward via active contribution to government policy debates.

Our broad objectives include:

- Identifying the cases and causes of women's disadvantaged social and economic status and to contribute appropriate policy initiatives to address this disadvantage;
- Demonstrating the way in which social factors, particularly gender, influence the construction of economic theory and policy;
- Extending current theory and research by placing women and their social context at the centre of analysis;
- Contributing an interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of women's position in society. In turn, this should enable the unit to better reflect the interrelatedness of the social, economic and political discourses in policy and their consequent implications for women;
- Fostering feminist research both nationally and internationally;
- Expanding linkages with industry;
- Establishing and supporting a thriving Curtin University postgraduate research community with a common interest in feminist scholarship.

For further details see: www.cbs.curtin.edu/research/wepau

1. Introduction

“Women in Social and Economic Research” (WISER) is a multidisciplinary research unit at Curtin University of Technology in Perth, Western Australia. We welcome an opportunity to make a submission on the gendered implications of the proposed reforms to the Senate Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Bill 2005, although would express disappointment at the limited time available for comprehensive debate and discussion.

In our submission we focus, in particular, on the findings from available research that demonstrate links between workplace relations regulation, women’s experiences in the paid workforce and their capacity to meet unpaid responsibilities in the household sector. This research indicates that the costs and benefits of different forms of labour market regulation not only affect individual women but have implications for the productivity, efficiency and social capital at broader community and national levels.

2. Women are poorly represented in bargaining structures

In common with most economies, Australia’s labour market might be more accurately characterized as a number of co-existing, linked labour markets. The tendency for several, relatively discrete, labour markets to exist side-by-side is widely recognized in economic literature and has been variously described as dual labour or segmented labour theory. One way of illustrating this is by examining the coverage of different wage negotiation bargaining systems for employees in different sectors of the labour market, for example part-time workers compared with full-time workers or women compared with men, as discussed below.

At the end of the 1990s just under a quarter of the total workforce (23.2 per cent) were entirely reliant on awards and, thus, the determinations of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) for their wage outcomes and adjustments. A substantial proportion of employees (36.8 per cent) relied on collective bargaining (with outcomes detailed in collective agreements) for the fixation of their wages. Limited use was made of registered (i.e. formal) individual agreements with only 1.8 per cent of employees determining their wages under this instrument. Informal individual agreements, however, extended to 38.2 per cent of the workforce. Many (possibly the majority) of these agreements would have been common law contracts, in other words outside the bargaining system (Peetz 2001). A substantial proportion of the balance would have been over-award agreements. In other words, informal arrangements to pay over the minimum occupational rates as specified within the award, noting that awards specify the minimum wage rate for each level (unskilled to skilled) within an occupational hierarchy.

Table 1: Methods of Pay Setting, Australia, May 2000

	Awards Only	Collective Agreements ^(a)	Individual Agreements ^(b)
Males			
Full-time employees	11.2	39.0	49.8
Part-time employees	34.4	35.3	30.3
All employees	15.7	38.2	46.0
Females			
Full-time employees	14.8	45.6	39.6
Part-time employees	34.2	41.5	24.2
All employees	24.4	43.6	32.0
Persons			
Full-time employees	12.6	41.5	46.0
Part-time employees	34.3	39.7	26.0
All employees	20.0	40.9	39.1

Source: Table 13: ABS Cat. 6306.0. May 2004.

(a) includes registered and unregistered collective agreements; (b) includes registered and unregistered individual agreements and working proprietor of incorporated business.

There is a gender dimension to the patterns discussed above. As shown in Table 1, in May 2004 awards (and only awards) determined the pay for 24.4 per cent of all female employees and 15.7 per cent of all male employees. Awards are also more likely to be used to fix the wages of part-timers than full-timers. As shown in Table 1, 34.3 per cent of all part-timers (men and women) have their pay set by awards; the corresponding share amongst full-time workers is 12.6 per cent.

The significance of the gendered patterns of workforce participation is that wage adjustments under the various wage fixing instruments or streams have different effects, at an aggregate level, for populations of men and women. Through the 1990s adjustments in the award stream (as determined by the AIRC) saw growth rates of around 1.5 per cent (below the CPI) while average increases contained in collective agreements around the same time were in the 4 to 4.5 per cent range (Preston 2001b). In short, those dependent on minimum workplace conditions have experienced lower rates of earnings growth than those in a position to bargain, collectively, for above-minimum employment provisions. It could be expected that workplace relations reforms which allow for the erosion of minimum employment conditions will lead to a further deterioration in the pay position of those in relatively unfavourable bargaining positions, including women and part-time employees.

3.0 Women have limited capacity to bargain

The capacity for parties in an employment relationship to choose a form of agreement-making that best suits their needs is closely related to their ability

to genuinely bargain. That is, if an unequal bargaining relationship exists, the party with the greater capacity to bargain will have an advantage in ensuring that their favoured form of agreement will be pursued. To some extent therefore, the form of agreement making, together with specific conditions of employment, will both be linked to the relative bargaining position of each party.

The following discussion is based on the proposition that employees in relatively strong bargaining positions will experience relatively favourable rates of pay and other conditions of employment. If this rather uncontroversial statement is accepted, it is possible to demonstrate that women's rates of pay and conditions of employment reflect a relative lack of labour market bargaining power. Further, it is possible to link their labour market position with institutional arrangements that govern minimum conditions of employment. The experience of women in the Western Australian labour market over the past decade provides an important case study demonstrating the importance of wage fixing arrangements for women's labour market experiences.

A range of studies that have demonstrated an important link between the size of the gender pay gap and prevailing bargaining arrangements. In short centralized systems are typically associated with smaller gaps (Gregory and Ho 1985; Gregory and Daly 1990, 1992; Blau and Kahn 1992; Rubery 1992; Whitehouse 1992). An exception to this rule appears to occur when changes in institutional arrangements lead men's wages to decline and thus result in an apparent drop in gender earnings gaps (Preston 2003). Women hold fewer positions of power than men are lower paid than men and have fewer financial resources (Astor and Chinkin 1992). Women are also less unionised than men are and therefore are less likely to have access to an important source of support and advocacy (Lee 1994). There is evidence that the increasing trend in Australia towards individual employment contracts away from industry-based awards and collective agreements particularly disadvantages specific groups of women (Lee and Sheldon 1997).

In April 1999 Curtin University of Technology reported to DOPLAR on the extent of the earnings gap between men and women in the WA labour market¹. Using a one per cent sample file from the 1996 Population Census Crockett and Preston found a 26 percentage point gap in the earnings of WA women and men employed full-time. Subsequent decomposition of the gap revealed that one third of the gap could be accounted for by differences in the characteristics (eg. level of education, years of work experience, age, occupation and industry of employment) of men and women in WA. The balance – two-thirds of the gap – could not be explained by observed differences in the characteristics of women and men. Crockett and Preston attributed this resultant gap to treatment effects; i.e. differences in the way the

¹ See Crockett, G. & Preston, A. (1999) *Labour Market Deregulation and Gender Wage Equity: Evidence from WA*. Available from <http://www.cbs.curtin.edu.au/business/research/research-units/women's-economic-policy-analysis-unit/wepau-publications>

labour market treated men and women, with women receiving less favourable treatment than men.

Crockett and Preston also examined the pay gap of women in WA relative to women nationally. In 1996 WA women employed full-time earned, on average, 3.3 per cent less than Australian women employed full-time. In an effort to understand the source of this 3.3 percentage point gap they asked (and researched / modelled) the question: “if Western Australian women received equivalent national rates of pay (rates of return) for their characteristics (including education, age, experience, industry and occupation of employment) would there still be a pay gap?” In other words they sought to identify whether or not there was something ‘different’ (in terms of characteristics) between the women in WA and women nationally. The results of this analysis showed that women in WA possessed virtually identical characteristics to women nationally – suggesting that the presence of a pay differential in WA derived more from differences in the way characteristics were rewarded (paid for). In other words, the WA labour market ‘treats’ women differently. In relation to women nationally this ‘treatment’ effect is to the disadvantage of women in WA. In summary, Crockett and Preston found (1999: 46) that compared to their national female counterparts, women in WA:

- received a lower rate of return on their educational investments;
- earned less from working overtime;
- earned less from working in government and/or a metropolitan area;
- who had dependant children, earned less than working mothers nationally.

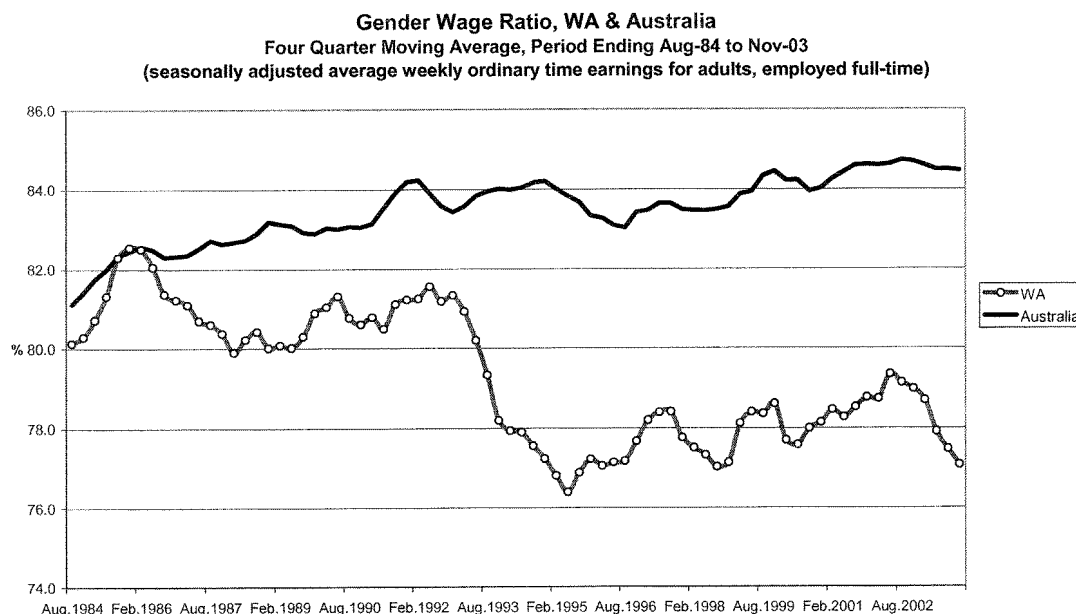
Crockett and Preston also used trend data to plot movements in the gender pay gap over the 1990s. Their chart, replicated below and extended to the 2003 November quarter, shows that the biggest decline in the gap occurred between November 1992 and May 1995. Over this period the relative pay gap between men and women in WA widened by 4.9 percentage points; from 81.3 per cent to 76.4 per cent (see Figure 1). (Comparisons are based on the average ordinary time earnings of men and women employed full-time (defined as 35 hours or more per week)). Sensitivity analysis conducted by Crockett and Preston discounted the hypothesis that the fall in the relative pay position of WA women over this period could be attributed to timing effects; i.e. occupational and industrial differences in the timing of actual wage movements (with the wages in female dominated industries and occupations not adjusting with the same frequency as those in male dominated industries and occupations).

In summary, even allowing for a substantial lag in the adjustment of male wages Crockett and Preston observed a strong downward trend in the relative pay position of women in 1993 and 1994. Industries where the gender gap widened most included Health Services, Education and Retail Trade. In Health Services and Education the gap widened by four percentage points. In Retail Trade the increase (widening) in the gender wage gap was three percentage points. Health Services, Education and Retail Trade are important female industries (accounting for 45.8 per cent of the WA female

workforce in 1996). The relative pay position of women in WA deteriorated most during the early part of the 1990s and has, so far, failed to recover. Industries where the gap widened the most included Health Services, Education and Retail Trade. Taken together these three industries account for around 46 per cent of all jobs held by women in WA.

At the end of 2003 the observed gender wage gap in the full-time WA labour market was equal to 22.9 per cent. The corresponding national pay gap was 15.5 per cent. In dollar terms the figures show that, as at the November quarter 2003, adult women employed full-time earned an average of \$784.80 (not including bonuses or overtime pay). The corresponding average earnings for men was \$1,104.40 – indicating a gender pay gap of \$229.60 per week or \$11,939.20 per annum.

Figure 1



Source: ABS 6302, Tables 2 & 12E

So what is it about the WA labour market that causes women in this state to be treated less favourably than women nationally and less favourably than men in the State.² The study suggests that institutional minimum wage provisions are particularly important for women and part-time workers in WA for four reasons:

- Part-time workers are significantly more likely to be found in the award stream rather than the bargaining stream. In other words part-time workers are dependant on industrial tribunals for cost-of-living adjustments in their wages.

² It should be noted that Crockett and Preston (1999) also examined whether or not men in WA were rewarded at similar rates to their national male counterparts. The analysis showed that the WA labour market in fact treated males *more* favourably than their national counterparts.

- Part-time workers (the majority of whom are women) are over-represented in particular sectors (eg. Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants) – sectors that in turn remain heavily dependent on the award system for the determination of pay and conditions. (In 2002 61.2 per cent of employees in this sector saw their wages determined by an Award only (see Table 1)).
- Small firms (i.e. less than 50 employees) are more likely to use the award system than larger firms. There is an over-representation of small firms in the WA labour market relative to the national average.
- Historically the WA labour market has been more dependent on the State industrial jurisdiction rather than the Federal. The closer alignment of the Minimum Conditions of Employment Act and the adult minimum wage in the Federal jurisdiction thus reduces or helps minimise any gap arising from this source.

In short, minimum conditions of employment appear to become, *de facto*, standard conditions of employment for many women and part time workers. In this context, the streamlining or reduction of minimum conditions of employment might be expected to result in large scale changes to standard employment conditions for specific sectors of the labour market that have limited bargaining power.

4. Community Standards

The close links between institutional wage fixing arrangements and gender pay gaps has been noted above. However, institutional factors have implications that extend far beyond short term gender gaps in rates of pay and entitlements such as annual leave and sick leave. Limited workforce bargaining power is also associated with restricted access to a range benefits that can have long term implications for career paths and into retirement. All of these have implications for the capacity of employees to balance their paid work and unpaid household responsibilities across their life course. Some of the more significant links between bargaining capacity, lifetime earnings and women's capacity to balance paid work with unpaid responsibilities are outlined briefly below.

(a) Maternity Leave

As with other employment-related benefits, access to paid maternity is closely associated with workforce status. Those in casual or part-time work have limited access to paid maternity leave and, instead, rely on mandated minimum provisions of unpaid maternity leave. Data from the Negotiating the Life Course Survey (McDonald et al) demonstrates the relatively limited access that part-time employees have to maternity leave provisions.

Table 2: Employees' Access to Paid and Unpaid Maternity Leave and Family or Carer's Leave

	Men Full- time %	Part- time %	Women Full- time %	Part- time %
Paid parental, maternity or paternity leave				
Don't know/NA/Skipped	19.0	18.3	11.9	6.4
Yes	42.3	28.3	48.6	21.4
No	38.3	53.3	39.5	72.3
Unpaid parental, maternity or paternity leave				
Don't know/NA/Skipped	25.2	30.0	14.6	12.3
Yes	51.4	31.7	65.5	51.2
No	23.5	38.3	19.9	36.5
Family or carer's leave (paid or unpaid)				
Don't know/NA/Skipped	16.3	11.7	15.4	7.1
Yes	46.4	38.3	51.6	29.5
No	37.3	50.0	33.0	63.5

Source: Preston and Jefferson 2003, using data from McDonald et al (2000).

Both quantitative and qualitative research reports (see Pocock, 1998; Strachan and Burgess, 2001; Lee and Strachan, 1999; CDIR, 1998³) suggest that existing maternity leave arrangements are not only failing to provide a coherent framework for addressing the needs of women who have or wish to have a child/ren but they are not designed to target "all those measures that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life by fostering both the extension of family resources and parental labour market attachment" (OECD's Working Party on Social Policy 2000).

(b) Workers' Compensation

Literature in the fields of occupational health and safety issues and workers' compensation and workplace injuries and diseases show that women's experiences in these areas may be affected by a range of gender specific issues (Bale 1989; Cameron 1994; Cooper & Faulks 1999; Quinlan 1996; and Shackelford, Farley, & Vines 1998). While provisions vary markedly between jurisdictions, limits to coverage defined in terms of income thresholds and eligible forms of injury and impairment. Again, institutional arrangements mandating minimum requirements appear to have important implications for women. Quinlan (1996) found that although women make up forty percent of

³ In the *Work and Family State of Play – 1998 Report* prepared by the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (1995), of the 2000 private organizations which reported to the Affirmative Action Agency in 1997, only 15% provided paid maternity leave and only 4% provided on-site (un-funded) childcare. Similarly, whilst the report notes an increase in the number of private organizations offering paid family/carers leave, the amount of leave time available is not mentioned. Additionally, despite the increase in organizations offering job-sharing and part-time opportunities, this is perhaps more related to the changes brought about by globalisation and the shifts in market activity rather than any benevolence on the part of the company.

the workforce they only represent twenty-seven percent of compensation claimants.

Research also indicates that women are less likely to return to work than men. Further, blue collar workers are less likely to return to work compared to white collar workers and age and receipt of workers' compensation affect return to work returns negatively and both appear to be deterrents for employers. (Camona, Faucett, Blac, and Yelin, 1998; Crook, Moldofsky, and Shannon, 1998; Gluck and Olieinick, 1988; and Kenny, 1994). In short, access to compensation for industrial accidents, appropriate rehabilitation, workforce re-entry and earnings maintenance are positively associated with bargaining power in the workforce. Women fair less well in this area of the labour market, with negative implications for their long-term earnings profiles.

(c) Broken career patterns and employment based training

Research indicates that relative bargaining power and workforce status is not only associated with gender gaps in pay, career paths but also with the provision of employer provided training (Chapman et al. 2001; Rimmer & Rimmer 1994; Miller & Mulvey 1994; Preston 2001; Preston 2003; Wooden 1999). Those with more limited access to favourable pay and conditions are also less likely to achieve the benefits of workplace training and development to improve their life-time earnings prospects.

(d) Superannuation and retirement incomes

The economic implications of Australia's ageing demographic profile have lead to an increasing policy focus on private asset accumulation as a source of retirement income. Private forms of retirement saving are expected to alleviate projected government spending on outlays such as the Age Pension (see for example: Department of Family and Community Services 2003:222; Australian Government Treasury 2003:42). One of the key approaches to encouraging private forms of retirement savings has been to provide a taxation framework that encourages savings through occupational superannuation. However, access to occupational superannuation is not gender neutral and projections of relatively low compulsory superannuation accumulations of women have been well documented (Jefferson & Preston 2003; Jefferson & Preston 2005; Kelly, Harding & Percival 2001; Preston 2003; Preston & Austen 2001). In addition, small scale qualitative research exploring women's approaches to retirement planning suggests that women favour residential and investment housing over other forms of asset accumulation (Jefferson, Austen & Preston 2005; Jefferson, Austen & Preston 2004; Jefferson 2004). Gendered patterns of retirement savings are significant because women currently comprise approximately 60 per cent of Age Pensioners, of whom 60 per cent receive the full pension (Department of Family and Community Services 2001). This appears to be caused by the cumulative effects of differences between men's and women's patterns of participation in paid work, women's longer life expectancies and women's lower levels of income and wealth.

Existing research about retirement planning is limited in its capacity to reflect women's and men's differing patterns of asset accumulation, workforce

participation and reliance on public and private transfers. This is partly the result of the use of households, rather than individuals, as a unit for analysis. However, the increasingly dynamic nature of household formation and dissolution, particularly increases in the rate of divorce, mean that individual asset accumulation is likely to become of increasing importance in determining women's access to retirement income (Whiteford & Bond 1998).

Changes in the institutional context of wage determination which negatively effect women's earnings can be expected to have long term implications for women's reliance on public and private transfers as sources of income in retirement.

In summary, a wide range of research into both wage rates and other employment-linked benefits shows the cumulative social and economic effects of women's reliance on minimum mandated employment conditions. Further, current research indicates that those on minimum provisions have limited bargaining capacity to improve these outcomes.

5. Conclusions

Women have traditionally been over-represented in those sections of the labour market that are heavily reliant on the centralised establishment of minimum employment provisions. Proposed changes to increase the role played by individual bargaining, including a restricted range of minimum provisions appear to have the potential to further erode women's relative positions in the labour market. This poses implications that extend beyond shorter term issues related to wages and working conditions. Relative bargaining capacity and part-time work are associated with disadvantage in a range of provisions that relate to women's paid and unpaid roles, including maternity leave, worker's compensation, career advancement and training and superannuation accumulations. These issues, in turn, have significant long term implications for women's patterns of workforce participation and their capacity to contribute to Australia's long term economic productivity.

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