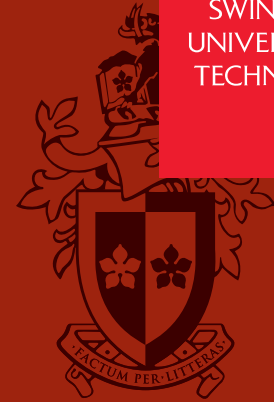




Overcoming obstacles? Women, public housing, and employment

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Introduction

- Project on Women, Public Housing, and Employment – AHURI funded- with Associate Professor Kath Hulse
- To what extent women in public housing and in employment have overcome obstacles to paid work faced by public housing tenants
- Built on earlier research on obstacles to economic participation
- Focus on women: majority of public housing tenants are women; some obstacles faced specifically by women



Methodology and Profile of Respondents

- Longitudinal qualitative study over twelve months with female public housing tenants in paid work
- 3 waves of interviews (40 at wave 1, 37 wave 2, 34 wave 3) – 111 interviews over 1 year – Metro and regional
- Out of 40, 38 had children, 14 of whom had children under 18; and 36 women were single or divorced
- Women with older children in paid work: 13 women between 36 and 45; 19 women between 46-55



Employment outcomes

- Majority in low-paid, part-time, insecure casual employment - between 10 and 30 hrs per week
- Typical unskilled `female jobs`
- 70% still in receipt of Centrelink payments (mostly PPS and DSP)
- Women in employment still constrained by obstacles to paid work for female public housing tenants
- However, enabling factors allowing them to partially overcome, over certain time period, some of these obstacles



Childcare

- Women had stopped working or had worked on and off basis to be there for young children;
- Older women in paid work when children are older, less caring responsibilities;
- Women with young children need employment with flexible work hours and practices;
- Affordable and accessible childcare or available family member
- Women with pre-school aged children wanting to be in paid work can only `filling in' jobs due to care responsibilities



Long Gaps outside Workforce

- Lack of confidence and low-self esteem
- Limited education: majority left school before Year 10 – Outdated skills
- Women found paid work after going back to studying
- Paid traineeships and work experience programmes
- Voluntary work in community first, gained confidence and lead to employment for several women
- However, limited work opportunities; age restriction



Health

- Women with health problems also needed flexibility
 - Be able to work a certain number of hours a week
 - Ability to change number of hours or type of work if required
 - Understanding employers; stress free environment



Location

- Need for local employment
 - Able to pick children up for school
 - Could not afford to travel long distances
 - Women with health problems could not travel far
 - Women without car, needed easy access to public transport
 - Wanting to feel part of local community
- Stigma of public housing



Difficulties in Making Work Pay

- Withdrawal of income support with increased rent (up to market rent) as income increases is an ongoing obstacle
- Majority was only marginally better off by being in paid work
- Preferred to be in paid work but always struggling financially
- Poverty Trap
- Dealing with multiple bureaucratic requirements - stressful

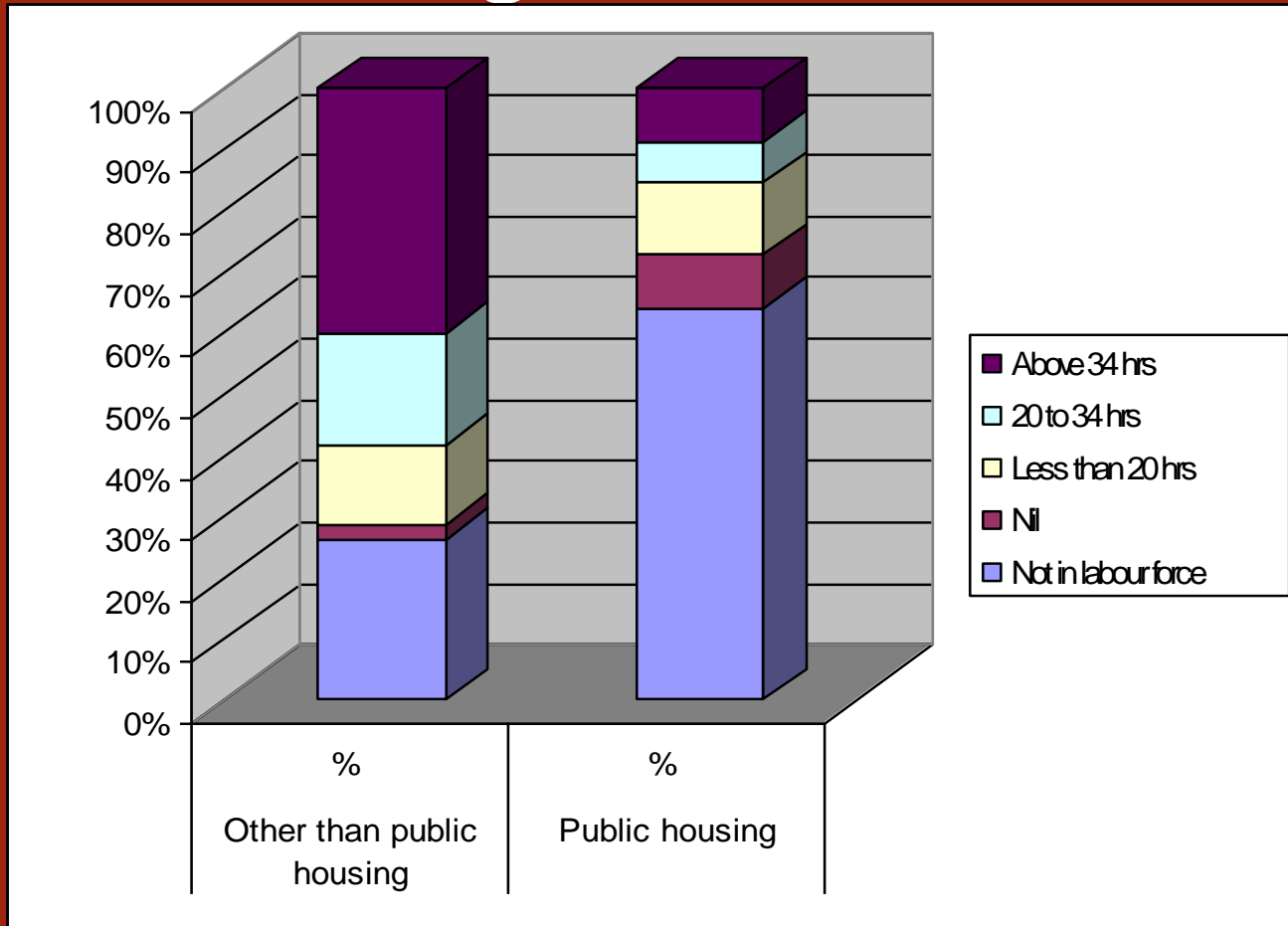


Conclusion

- Need for flexible work practices
- Employment in local community
- Supported by relevant training/education
- Local availability of childcare near or at workplace
- Public housing tenancies located with convenient access to employment opportunities
- Extending paid traineeship and work experience programmes
- Need for a different rent setting system to reduce financial obstacles to working



Minority of employed women in public housing



Maria, 26, single, 2 children, 11 months and 4 years old, 9 hours per week retail, casual (wave 1)

It suits me at the moment with the kids, so with their dad watching them whilst I work, and it's just pretty much until he goes back to work because he lost his job. . . . My daughter might be in kindergarten by the time hopefully when he gets a job. So my friend said she'll help as well, so, because childcare's too much.



Neya, 38, 1 child, Community Contact Officer, 30.4 hrs per week (wave 1)

There was two weeks holidays with school because my daughter's only 11. I had to put her in a holiday program ... it's right next to where I work. And I said, 'Look, I'm going to be 10, 15 minutes late . . . so my boss, he's really good, he said to me, 'Listen, don't worry about it. I'll fill in for you. You just go and drop your daughter off'. . . They accommodate for anything because their thing is families first. So even when I was training and they had half a day off school, I told them, this was the week before I started, I said, 'Look, I can't for one day'. And they said, 'Why?' I said, 'Well because of my daughter. There's no school for half a day, but after she starts at 1.00 I can come in'. They said, 'If you can't come in because of your child, we understand'.



Katie, 50, 4 adult children, single, admin support, 12hrs per week (Wave 1)

I: I know that you looked after your children, why do you think you hadn't started to look for paid work earlier?

R: . . . maybe it was easy, to use all the excuses, the age, the fact that I don't, 'Oh I'll never get a job', 'I could never do that' . . . I think starting out with seeing what was around. I mean you start to think, 'Hey, maybe we can do more than just manage', maybe I need more than that, maybe it was the right time for me . . . I never would have said I had a lot of confidence in my own abilities and volunteering has just been, has just changed all that.



Fay, 38, single, no children, working 6 hours per week, community work (wave 1)

I have chronic pain, so that's a daily thing to contend with . . . Then I also have chronic fatigue syndrome, which is more episodic and episodic depression as well. . . I have been getting very tired, but managing to keep going with the work that I find very interesting, the unpaid work. . . And I think so the work that I do, whether it be voluntary or paid actually does, is helpful for my depression I found. . . I grow to feel that my work and contribution is of a good quality and so that helps my self esteem. And I also feel that I'm helping my community and that's a good feeling as well. . .



Caroline, late 40s, working in age care, 30 hrs per week (waves 1 and 2)

The car blew up and that's why I didn't have a car when I started the job ... That's why I was stressing, because sometimes I do mornings as well, but there wasn't buses to get me there at 7 o'clock, and I'd be late and then—I mean only 15 minutes, but then sometimes people complain. And I said, 'What, you want me to spend \$20 to make you happy that I'm 15 minutes earlier?' And I thought, all right, I will, and that's where it ran into so much money. But then I got on some nights, but either way you're still paying for a taxi. I could get a bus home in the afternoon if I did a morning, and a bus in, but I'd still have to pay for one either way.



**Carla, Pacific Islander, 60, 2 children,
divorced, 16 hours + per week, Community
Contact Officer + Community worker (wave 1)**

My rent has just gone skyrocket, I almost pay the normal market rental on a three bedroom home . . . so now I'm about \$800 in arrears because my granddaughter was working in that period as well. So one it's good because I'm working and I'm earning a lot but the other is constraining on my economy and things like that. . . One way I like the job but in another way there's penalties in every area so I can understand now why people in these high-rises don't feel like working.



Thank You

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