

# **New Network Addresses Gender Pay Equality Questions**

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Why are changes in gender inequalities so much faster and more consistent in some spheres and social groups than in others? Why are new pay inequalities between women emerging and growing? Why, despite the many policy initiatives concerned with addressing inequality, has the gender 'wage gap' proved so stubborn? Why has the demise of the breadwinner family left women's primary responsibility for family care-taking unchanged? Why do corporations differ in their willingness to embrace gender equity goals?

These and related questions will be addressed by a new ESRC research priority network on Gender Inequalities in Production and Reproduction which runs from October 2004 for five years. A main objective of the Network is to move forward the theoretical understanding of changing forms of gender inequalities and to provide new substantive evidence of the dynamic inter-links between life processes, resource constraints, and policy contexts.

The Network's research programme is co-ordinated by Jacqueline Scott, a sociologist at Cambridge University. The Network brings together nine substantive projects spread across eight institutions and involves some twenty researchers from a wide range of disciplines. Three large-scale longitudinal projects, using state-of-the art analysis of quantitative survey data, are examining the gendered pathways to adult attainment. Picking up on concerns raised by Denise Kingsmill in her Employment Review about the wastage of talent in the British economy, Shirley Dex and Heather Joshi (Institute of Education) will examine how policy initiatives and employer practices affect the careers of men and women and mothers and fathers, and how career paths have changed across the generations. Ingrid Schoon, a psychologist (City University), will focus on young people's changing aspirations and attainments. Demographers, Wendy Sigle-Rushton (LSE), John Hobcraft and Kathleen Kiernan (York) will examine the distinctive gendered pathways that contribute to the different ways childhood (dis)advantages affect adult attainment.

A second theme, with four-inter-related projects concerns resource allocations and gender, ethnic and class inequalities. Jonathan Gershuny (Essex) will use cross-national time trend data to test further hypotheses concerning how household division of labour reproduces gender inequities across time and place. Holly Sutherland (Essex), Sue Himmelweit (OU) and Fran Bennett (Oxford) will look at the way the new tax credits help or limit families'

capacities to adapt to new opportunities for gender equality in paid and unpaid work. Geographers Linda McDowell (Oxford) and Sarah Radcliffe (Cambridge) will examine the gendered opportunities and disadvantages faced by new migrants and different ethnic groups in the service sector of London. Sociologist Rosemary Crompton (City) will extend and develop her ongoing study of how particular labour market sectors are changing as a result of a feminised or feminising work force.

All the projects are concerned to address policy, but two projects are explicitly concerned with policy response. One project based in Cambridge (Simon Deakin and Jude Browne) will investigate the role of corporate governance in the public and private sectors in promoting and blocking the employability of women and men across the life course. Another project on work and care in the UK and EU, with Jane Lewis (LSE) and Ceridwen Roberts (Oxford) will use a historical perspective to understand the turning points in the way problems are defined by policy makers and solutions proposed

The purpose of bringing distinctive projects together under the umbrella of a Network is to “add value” to what could be achieved by stand-alone projects. The Network as a whole has the critical mass, diverse expertise, time and resources to make an impact. Our common goal in examining changing lives and structures is both to understand the way these are changing and to identify how policy can intervene effectively to promote greater equality.

We will hold a variety of open events around the Network theme, including international workshops and conferences. A Network seminar series will be structured around theoretical questions, key concepts, and methodological challenges that confront the research of gender inequalities. The Network will also hold training workshops for researchers who wish to expand their methodological skills in areas directly applicable to dynamic analyses of gender inequalities.

The Network faces many challenges. How to prevent gender being interpreted as “women”? How to ensure reproduction and production are each given due weight in developing theoretical constructs and empirical analyses of inequalities? How to provide an effective evidence base for policy makers? We are optimistic that these challenges will help spur us on to achieve real progress in furthering gender equality, an important and timely task.

Further details of the Network’s activities can be found at [www.genet.ac.uk](http://www.genet.ac.uk) (currently under construction).