

Social exclusion among women with no children within employment: theory and evidence

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Introduction

Increasing numbers of women not having children

Social exclusion

Employment

- Compares women with and without children
 - Women with children disadvantaged
 - Negates discrimination experienced by all women
 - Silence, invalidate and homogenise women without children

Structures and discourses of gender influencing the employment experiences of women without children

- Patriarchal and capitalist configurations
 - Intersectionality
 - Power by men over women
 - Capitalists over workers
 - Hegemonic configurations of femininities, masculinities and workers

Societal-level configurations influencing the employment experiences of women without children

- Capitalism
 - Male workers versus unpaid full-time wives / mothers
- Citizen-worker
 - Gendered
 - Work-devotion versus family-devotion schema
- Pronatalist structures, ideologies and discourses
 - Promoting fertility by rewarding, removing obstacles to, or valorising motherhood, and configuring motherhood as feminine, natural and patriotic
 - Policing, silencing and subordination of femininities without children
 - Stereotypes – career women

Organisational contexts influencing employment experiences

- Abstract worker
 - Exists only for work, and most closely resembles a full-time male worker whose life revolves around his work
- Ideal worker
 - Long hours, visibility, availability, devotion, and no external commitments

Methods

Aim

- Describe and explore the social exclusion of Australian women aged 25 to 64 years who have no children

Approach

- Exploratory, mixed methods, cross-sectional study
- Online questionnaire

Sample

- 1070 women with no children



'Benefits' of conforming to the 'ideal worker' stereotype

A work colleague fell ill and someone was needed to fly to Brisbane for three days to cover a conference - not having kids/pets/partner meant I could immediately put up my hand for the opportunity (ID 224; Undecided about having children; 32 years).

Full-time employment

- 93% (women aged 25-44)
- 82% (women aged 45-64)

Income

- 17% of participants were paid low or lower-middle incomes



Mixed consequences of being 'ideal workers' and 'deviant' women: discrimination and stereotyping

Recruitment, retention, promotion and remuneration

Because I have a good job and a successful career people assume I made a choice not to have children because I was too career focused and driven (ID 416; involuntarily childless; 43 years).

- Prioritisation of the non-work needs of employees with children
- Work longer and unsocial hours, inconvenient shifts, weekends and holidays
- Failure to recognise the non-work responsibilities
- Undertake additional work



Negative consequences of being 'ideal workers' and 'deviant' women: work-life balance

I've worked full time hours in condensed days for a number of years ... The immediate response from managers, colleagues and clients has always been to think this odd as I don't have children. When I explain to them that there are other dimensions of my life that I pursue during my day off ... the response has sometimes been perplexed, sometimes understanding and sometimes quite negatively judgemental (ID 130; circumstantially childless; 44 years).

Negative consequences of being 'ideal workers' and 'deviant' women: access to employment benefits

Accessed fewer employment benefits than women with children

Report difficulties taking time off work for personal matters

Work-life policies targeted at or only available to employees with children

Negative consequences of being 'deviant' women: workplace social interactions

I cannot say at work that I feel tired if I have not had any sleep – I did this a few times and my colleagues with children made me feel bad – things said were 'at least you weren't up all night with a kid who was vomiting or crying' ... [It] is not socially acceptable to say that I was up all night in silence staring at the wall worrying (ID 089; circumstantially childless; 41 years).

Stressed, excluded, invisible, isolated, silenced and unable to contribute to conversations, and hyper-visibility

Mistreatment, unsafe, distressing



Promoting social inclusion of women without children in employment

Challenge configurations of ideal worker and deviant women

Strategies

- Equal prioritisation
- Recognition of non-work responsibilities
- Work-life balance