

Work bias hurting mothers [AU] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Up to 325,000 women are out of work but are not being counted as officially unemployed because of their caring responsibilities.

Research to be released today by the Australia Institute also shows women are likely to miss out on jobs created by the Federal Government's economic stimulus programs because of the focus on construction and infrastructure.

"Women have more precarious jobs and are overrepresented among the hidden unemployed who completely opt out of the labour market," the president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Sharan Burrow, said.

"They also have broken working patterns, which mean they retire with much smaller superannuation balances."

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The report, which was commissioned by the National Foundation for Australian Women, found women accounted for 63 per cent of the 516,100 people who are not counted in the official unemployment figures because they do not satisfy the definition.

To be counted as unemployed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics a person must have looked for work in the past month and be available to work in the month after the survey period.

The report found the definition of unemployment was too narrow and failed to take into account the time it took women to find care for children in order to work.

"Many of those defined as 'outside the workforce' would actually consider themselves to be unemployed and potentially part of the workforce," the report said.

Survey results collected by the Australia Institute found 58 per cent of women aged 25 to 44 who were outside the workforce said childcare was a factor that would affect their decision to accept a job.

"This suggests that these women could move back into the workforce if opportunities were to present themselves and/or they were able to make alternative childcare arrangements," the report said.

Marie Coleman, from the National Foundation for Australian Women, said childcare needed to be overhauled to make it more accessible.

"The Prime Minister should refer both early-childhood and after-school care to the Productivity Commission," Ms Coleman said.

The report found any employment bias towards men was "only mild".

"But issues like childcare and respite care are not addressed in the packages and, for this reason, the economic stimulus is likely to bypass many women who might have been assisted," it said.

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- reprinted from The Age

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