

# Childcare worker betrayal worsens gender gap <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Price, Jenna

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## EXCERPTS:

The Abbott government wants to entrench the gender pay gap.

That early symbolism of having just one woman in cabinet showed a complete disregard and disrespect for half the population. Now that disrespect has been underscored by the next despicable act of this government.

Childcare workers, mostly women, were set to be the beneficiaries of a tiny, tiny, pay rise next year, funded by \$300 million. That was approved by the Labor government in its dying days. The aim was to improve wages across the board, by \$3 an hour for certificate III workers and \$6 an hour for early childhood teachers. The childcare workers earn \$19 an hour to care for the next generation of young Australians.

And the federal government could barely wait to cruel the hopes of Australia's poorest paid workers.

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After the September ballot, it made the first of its many loathsome decisions. It revoked the conditional funding offers for this money (for those childcare centres that had not already done the necessary administrative work to set it up) and advised it would review the \$300 million Early Years Quality Fund. Inexplicable. Let's make this personal. Surely there are ministers who have some recognition and respect for the people who look after their children in childcare. Maybe all their children have nannies.

Louise Tarrant, the national secretary for Uniting Voice, the union that represents many of these childcare workers, is devastated.

"It is an odd thing to do when [the federal government has] conceded there is a problem in the sector - finding enough qualified people to do the work," she says.

"Everyone acknowledges that these positions are underpaid and undervalued."

Tarrant says it also diminishes the opportunities for workforce participation.

"How can you get women into the workforce if there are jobs that are too low paid to even cover the cost of work?" she says.

And it is a double whammy when those women, trying to get back into the workforce, must use childcare themselves. It's women, of course, who do this low-paid work. Always women.

Australia has a gender pay gap crisis. It is entrenched. It is nearly 20 per cent and it is not going anywhere.

A Council of Australian Governments Reform Council report, Tracking equity: comparing outcomes for women and girls across Australia, was released last week. It revealed that the gender pay gap - the chasmic distance between the money that men and women get for equal work - is still 17.5 per cent, which is no real change in 20 years.

More men than women participate in the workforce and that starts early, in the 18 to 24 age group.

Marian Baird, professor of employment relations at the University of Sydney, says we keep undervaluing women's work. And, until we change that, the gap won't change. That undervaluing explains away the reason we think it is OK to pay women who look after our children just \$19 an hour (and we have an out-of-control former chairman of the ABC, Maurice Newman, who wants to do away with the minimum wage).

But undervaluing is one thing. The actual gender pay gap when men and women do the exact same work is another thing altogether.

Yes, there is legislation that should prevent that from happening. And yes, it still happens. Baird describes this as "internal company issues".

"Within companies, there are policies and practices which have grown up over the years ... it is reasonably unusual in most big companies to find men and women doing exactly the same work being paid differently," she says.

But Baird says what happens is that men and women get evaluated differently. They might be doing more or less the same work - but it may get described differently. And there are other equally terrifying markers that delineate the pay gap.

We all accept - or at least recognise - that when women take time off to have children and care for them, they may have reasons to take jobs that are paid less. They certainly take time away from the promotion track, which decreases prospects and pay. Women who don't

have children earn more than women who do. And you would assume it would be the same for men.

Nope. Men who don't have children earn less than men who do, Baird says.

This kills me. Are employers somehow beholden to men who have families? Why not to women? Could someone explain that to me so it makes sense and is fair?

What criteria are being used to evaluate jobs? Is it just that we need to add a penis to get a pay rise? I want what they're having. I just don't want to have the genitals that go with it.

Nor do I want a government that agrees to devalue those who do one of our most important jobs -

-reprinted from the Sydney Morning Herald

**Region:** Australia and New Zealand <sup>[2]</sup>

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