

Gender Related Work-life Balance and Well-being in Scottish Food Retail Businesses

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Research Team Members -

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Members of the team are also Associate Researchers at the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships. Professor Kathryn Backett-Milburn is a Co-Director and Professor Linda McKie an Associate Director.

Work-life balance is a key issue on the current policy agenda. Businesses need to ensure that their employment practices comply with developments in UK and EU law.

This research project investigated work-life balance issues in nine Scottish food retail businesses. The research had three aims:

- To explore women's experiences of combining paid work with caring for family members and other dependants

- To examine employer's views on work-life balance policies and the links between these policies and economic competitiveness

- To develop best practice guidelines in collaboration with businesses

In the first stage of the project, 302 women workers from the 9 businesses shared their experiences of working and caring. The findings from semi-structured interviews and survey include:

- Most women have had to negotiate time off work at short notice to look after a dependant. In the first instance much of this is organised informally among women workers

- Approximately a quarter reported that they have skills which they are unable to use in their current job. Yet most do not envisage job or career progression in the sector

- Supervisors experience much greater pressure at work. They have to manage changes to shifts, many work unpaid overtime to ensure shops are adequately staffed and as a result they reported more stress and work-life imbalance than others

- In summary there seems to be a wide range of associated recruitment and retention issues that are factors in the economic and competitive health of companies

In the final months of the project we investigated employer's perspectives on these issues and also talked to professional associations and business groups. At the end of

the project we offered feedback to partner businesses and the women who participated. The resultant information leaflets can be accessed on the websites listed below.

Outputs Include -

Leaflets:

21st Century Retail: Work-life balance and your business

This output updated on how and why businesses should focus on work-life balance. Work-life balance opportunities and challenges as experienced by store owners, managers and women workers were thus highlighted with implications for employers and businesses.

**** *web link* ****

Working and Caring

This leaflet focused on outlining the experiences of working women combining paid work and care responsibilities of children and/or other family members. Implications for workers and businesses as to how they can improve work-life balance within this context were presented.

**** *web link* ****

Newsletter Article

Work-life balance in Scottish Food Retail Businesses

The briefing paper outlined key findings of the first stage of the project. This involved gathering evidence through interviews and a questionnaire. Experiences of women working within the food retail sector of work and care and employment and training were gathered.

*** *web link or PDF file – CRFR newsletter* ****

Journal Publications

Accepted

Airey, L., McKie, L., and Backett-Milburn, K. (2007) Women's experiences of combining eldercare and paid work in the Scottish food retail sector, *Health Sociology Review*, 16, 3, forthcoming

Under Review

Backett-Milburn, K., Airey, L., McKie, L., Rankine, L. and Hogg, G. (2007) Family comes first or open all hours?: The everyday management of webs of obligation at home and work by women working in food retailing. Submitted to *Sociological Review*, April.

McKie, L., Hogg, G., Airey, L., Rew, Z. and Backett-Milburn, K. (2007) Low paid women combining caring and working in the Scottish food retail sector. Submitted to *Work, Employment and Society*, May.

Further information on European work and bids can be obtained from Professor Linda McKie: l.mckie@gcal.ac.uk.