

Professional women's careers

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This paper reports the findings of research financed by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, which included extended unstructured interviews with thirty-six women, either qualified or in the process of qualifying in three professional occupations. It was found that in those circumstances where women were able to take advantage of the availability of flexible employment, some kind of labour force participation had been almost continuous (even when children were quite young), and no serious conflict was perceived between work and family life. This need for flexibility is well-known. However, the research also highlighted another factor affecting women's continued participation in, or return to, employment: the nature of the work itself. These well-educated women, it would appear, are as much concerned with the content of their employment as with the convenience of their working hours. In particular, they are concerned about possible occupational downgrading which, historically, has been the fate of many women who have returned to work following a childrearing break (Elias & Main, 1982; Martin & Roberts, 1984). Before the results of the research are summarised, the research background and methodology will be briefly outlined.

Research background

The fact that even after Equal Opportunities legislation, women are still paid less and are in lower-level jobs than men has often been explained with reference to the 'quality' of female labour. For example, Chiplin and Sloane (1982:131-2) argued that:

Discrimination is a demand-side phenomenon and the problem of evaluating and monitoring discrimination is to determine how much of the difference between the earnings ... of two or more groups of workers is due to differences in their supply characteristics and how much to pure discrimination by employers or members of other groups.

They conclude that supply-side differences are the major factor explaining variations in male and female wage rates, rather than discrimination as such. These kinds of arguments have been hotly contested (for example, Breughel, 1979; Owen, 1987), but cannot be rejected altogether. In the course of research carried out in the early 1980s, (Crompton & Jones, 1984) it became apparent that the level of formal qualifications amongst women (both academic and occupationally-linked) was rising quite rapidly. Would this improvement in the 'quality' of female labour be followed by an improvement in their location within the occupational structure?

An initial empirical investigation into qualification trends revealed that these impressions relating to women's qualifications were more than justified. Since the mid-seventies, there had been a very substantial increase in both the level of school leaving qualifications, as well as formal, work-related qualifications, amongst women (Crompton & Sanderson, 1986).

There were, however, variations within this generally rising trend. In the case of the 'financial' qualifications – accountancy, banking, and so on – the increase in the proportion of women qualifying was very marked from the mid-seventies onwards. However, in other occupations (notably medical and related) the increase in the proportion of women was more of a steadily rising trend than a sharp upward movement at a particular point in time. Pharmacy, for example, although not identified as a 'woman's occupation', has had a majority of women qualifying since the beginning of the 'seventies. Two possible explanations could be offered to explain this difference. The explanation could simply be one of 'late development' as far as women in the financial professions were concerned; alternatively, it might lie in characteristics peculiar to the individual professions themselves.

When we examined the pattern of employment amongst pharmacists, an interesting picture emerged. Relative to their representation in the population of pharmacists as a whole, more men than women work in community pharmacy (where the majority of

pharmacists are employed), and more women than men work in hospital pharmacy (where the pay is agreed to be low). There are also considerable differences in the proportions of male and female pharmacists who work part-time, although the gap appears to be narrowing.

Table 1 Employment in pharmacy, by gender and extent of occupation

	Men	Women	Total
1969 full-time	90	52	81
part-time	10	48	19
1972 full-time	90	51	81
part-time	10	49	19
1977 full-time	87	57	79
part-time	13	43	21
1981 full-time	85	59	76
part-time	15	41	24
1985 full-time	84	60	75
part-time	16	40	25

Pharmacy is an occupation which offers an extremely wide range of career options – both in types of employment (hospitals, community, industry, teaching) as well as hours of work. Within the occupation, we have seen that women predominate in the relatively less well-paid jobs, and in part-time employment. Although these women were equally as well qualified as men, the patterning of their employment suggested that, to an extent, segmentation by gender was occurring within the occupation. Women in pharmacy had jobs, not careers. This kind of evidence would certainly work against a straightforward explanation grounded in the nature of the ‘supply’ of female labour, as men and women pharmacists possess the same formal qualifications. On the positive side, the extent and flexibility of employment opportunities means that some kind of employment in pharmacy can usually be fitted around the requirements of a domestic ‘career’.

However, the example of pharmacy raised another set of questions relating to professions more generally. Pharmacy may be described as an ‘occupational’ qualification – that is, as associated with flexible

employment patterns both in and out of the labour market as well as between employers. It is a degree-level qualification, and those who possess it are recognised as 'professionals' by both the Registrar General and the public in general, even when in 'non-standard' – for example, part-time – employment.

Qualifications in banking and accountancy are also recognised as degree equivalent, professional, qualifications. However, they are more often, and sometimes invariably, linked with careers in organisations (such as banking), where frequent employer changes, and or non-standard employment, is not the norm for career staff. This occupational flexibility of pharmacy might explain why women have made inroads into this profession at an earlier stage than in the financial professions. That is, the observed differences in rates of 'feminisation' might be a consequence of persisting differences between the professions in question and the careers associated with them.

The initial strategy informing this research, therefore, was to pursue this contrast between 'occupational' and 'organisational' qualifications and their associated career structures. As more women gained organisational qualifications, would non-career niches develop for them to occupy – as had apparently been the case with female pharmacists? Or would women with organisational qualifications face the stark alternative of opting out altogether or pursuing continuous careers modelled on the same lines as those of men? Or would the changed climate of attitudes to women, together with the changing perceptions of the women themselves, result in pressures on organisations to accommodate a rather different kind of female employee; different, that is, from the formally underqualified women who returned to work from the 1960s onwards? It is as yet too early to give any conclusive answers to these questions. Careers take time to develop, and it is only just over a decade since the initial increase in the proportion of women qualifying for 'non-female' jobs was noted. However, the findings of this small-scale, qualitative study of professional women suggest that all three processes are in operation.

Methodology

The three professions selected for further investigation were pharmacy (13 interviews), accountancy (13 interviews) and banking (10 interviews). Pharmacy and banking were chosen because of the

contrast they offered between ‘occupational’ and ‘organisational’ careers. Accountancy was selected with the idea that it might prove to be something of a ‘half-way house’. A very high proportion of qualified accountants work in industry and commerce (it is the most frequently-occurring formal qualification amongst management in this country (Armstrong, 1984), but part-time work as a sole practitioner is also available. Given the very small numbers involved, the selection of a representative sample of women in each occupation was not attempted. However, steps were taken to achieve a reasonable spread across the age range amongst the respondents, and to interview women with and without children.

In the case of pharmacists, this proved to be no problem. Women have been established in this profession since the 1960s, and there were no difficulties in securing a mix of the older and younger, those with children and those without. However, there were considerable difficulties in locating older women bankers and accountants, as might have been expected given their relatively recent entry into these professions. NatWest Bank gave access to women participating in their returners scheme, so important insights into the attitudes of qualified women on career breaks were gained. A mix of types of employment was sought based upon aggregate level data describing the different industries and occupations. For example, both hospital and community pharmacists were interviewed, as well as accountants working in commerce as well as in public practice, and the employees of more than one bank.

Table 2 Summary of interviews

Age	Pharmacists	Accountants	Bankers
Over 40	6	2	3
30-39	3	4	4
Under 30	4	7	3
Total	13	13	10

The interviews were unstructured. Women who had agreed to be interviewed were provided with a brief outline of our research objectives, which stated that we were researching the social and career

consequences of the increase in professional qualifications amongst women. We simply asked interviewees to describe their educational and family background, their career choices and their work and domestic careers to date. In the case of some of the older interviewees, interviews could last for up to three hours. The shortest interview lasted three-quarters of an hour. Interviews were recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

The research findings

Although it was not unexpected, all of the women pharmacists interviewed were very much aware of the flexibility of employment in pharmacy. The earliest reference to this feature went back to the 1950s:

I didn't know then, but one of the very first woman pharmacists I met was somebody who would have been, I must have been about 14-15 ... and my mother had some cousins ... and I can remember going to visit them and they had a friend or a relative staying with them ... and this lady was a pharmacist. She said to me – I'd just decided; so I was 16 probably – it's an ideal career for a woman, she said, you can always pick up odd day's work, week's work, year's work, whatever you like or not, and she said, you get paid £20 a week for doing it! (Nina Bowyer, born 1941, married, 2 children now 19, 17)

The situation has changed little in thirty or so years, as this comment of Jennifer Payne (born 1962, married, no children) illustrates:

We were told in one of the lectures (i.e. whilst an undergraduate) that it was quite interesting actually for lecturers to see the proportion year by year because as years went on there were more and more women and our year probably had 60 per cent female and 40 per cent male. The year before us was about 50-50. (Int: Why did they think it was like that?) JP: Yes, because it was a very attractive career for a woman to go for because it's very flexible, you can leave it, have a family and go back into it because there are always plenty of jobs there to go back into.

This flexibility, therefore, makes pharmacy a good job for a woman', although pharmacy has not (yet?) been defined as a 'woman's job'. Their professional training, together with legal restrictions relating to the practice of pharmacy, means that although most women pharmacists have not had linear careers in pharmacy, nevertheless, the work they do is of professional status. It will be

argued that this fact is of some significance in understanding the 'pharmacy pattern'.

The ease with which women pharmacists can and could obtain professional employment is illustrated by two separate accounts of initial returns to work:

I took up locum work when he was ten weeks old, but on a limited scale, in that I would do Saturdays ... it was very good for my husband too because he then *had* to look after Anthony, because I was just not there ... and I remember that first summer, ... I had a couple of evenings a week ... from something like half past five to half past seven ... my sister was living with us ... so there was an additional benefit there... (Gina Smith, born 1949, 2 children, now 13, 11)

Similarly, Sheila Mackay (born 1946) whose children are now aged seventeen and fifteen recalled how:

I worked just a couple of sessions a week during one summer holiday period ... when my two children were quite small ... and I did odd days and so on in shops ... while they were still fairly small my husband used to have Monday afternoon off and I used to work on a Monday afternoon in a community pharmacy, and I used to work on a Wednesday morning as well, and I used to leave them both with a childminder just for the half day a week ... and I also used to work at the hospital occasionally during the summer months when they were short of staff and they would go to the hospital playscheme.

What also emerges from these accounts is that hours of work could be fitted around the childcare that was available. rather than the other way round. Indeed, none of the six pharmacists with children whom we interviewed gave the impression that childcare had been a particular problem, rather, they had worked when it was convenient for them. It had been possible to fit their working hours around the children, like Frances Law (born 1940) who had moved from two mornings a week to every morning – but during school terms only – when her youngest child went to school, and Jean Barclay (born 1938) who had an arrangement with a hospital pharmacy whereby she worked part-time during the day during the school term, but during evenings and weekends during the school holidays.

Another striking feature of our interviews with women pharmacists was the absence of complaints of overt discrimination. Indeed, the only complaint regarding unhelpful colleagues was actually of a woman, a District Pharmaceutical Officer, who Gina

Smith described as a 'very go-ahead, a whizz-kid type of spinster who didn't really have much time for the married ladies with children, she was, and still is, very much a queen bee'. However, in making these arguments relating to the ease with which women pharmacists were able to return to work, and the relative lack of gender discrimination they experienced, it should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the realities of this flexibility were that the women concerned ended up in the least prestigious, and most poorly paid, jobs in pharmacy. It has been suggested that the fact that such jobs were nevertheless of professional status was of some importance, and, in addition, unbroken professional contact has no doubt made it easier for some of them (Gina Smith, Sheila Mackay, Jean Barclay) to build full-time, linear careers once their children became less dependent. Women who have not made this transition may face some difficulties, as is suggested by the comments of Frances Law (born 1940, two children now 17, 18):

As I continued to work and as my children got older, the actual quality of the work I was doing became more important to me and, to begin with, I was honestly a spare pair of hands which they desperately needed but that suited me and I was very happy to go home at lunchtime and forget about them. It did suit me but, as time went on, what I was doing became very important and I was getting older and having to work under people that were very much younger. That's fine if you think alike but terrible if you don't.'

To summarise, therefore, we have in pharmacy an occupation of professional standing requiring a high level of scientific skills, where women have been a substantial and growing minority and within which many women have found it possible to maintain continuing employment as a professional whilst fulfilling stereotypically orthodox roles as wives and mothers. It may be suggested that the very ease with which these women were able to combine employment and domesticity would tend to reinforce, rather than undermine, conventional perceptions of gender roles. Alternatively, it could be suggested that the relatively conventional domestic/employment strategies of the female pharmacists was and is a consequence of the fact that the occupation began to be feminised at a time – the 1950s – when convention placed a very heavy emphasis on a woman's role as wife and mother. A factor which would tend to de-emphasise this broader cultural explanation is the fact that younger pharmacists appeared to be planning similar flexible strategies, although the

aggregate figures on part-time working suggest that the wider social context may also be having an impact.

In the case of the other two professions investigated, the pattern of non-standard and flexible working was quite different, and indeed, much less in evidence. As has already been noted, these are occupations which greater numbers of women have been entering since equality legislation in the 'seventies. It might be anticipated, therefore, that changing attitudes to women's employment might have smoothed the patch of these women as they began to make their way in what had been previously all-male preserves. In fact, this was not the case. It was true that the younger women in the finance sector had not experienced the grosser forms of pre-legislation discrimination, experienced by older women. These included a qualified accountant (born 1932) who was asked to leave her employment with a leading firm of accountants when, in 1958, her first pregnancy became obvious, or the university graduate (born 1943) who began work as a graduate trainee with the Bank of England at 90 per cent of the men's rate. It was, however, made quite clear to some of the younger women that they were distinctly out of place. Miriam Brown (accountant, born 1952 and married with one small child) recalled that:

I had the feeling that my boss in particular wasn't that struck on women – he made a typical comment once ... one of the girls was leaving to have a baby, and I actually took the card in. He said, I can't wait for the day when they bring yours in. I said, thank you very much, do you want to get rid of me? He said, oh no, no, but I just think that's where women are most fulfilled, at home having a family.

Similarly, Clare Cooper (banker, born 1946, married, no children) recalled:

The senior local director at the time, and who interviewed me when I came up for the job, told me quite clearly that, as far as he's concerned, a woman's place in the home and having children and housekeeping.

It has already been stressed that no attempt was made to draw a representative sample of women from the three occupations in question. Nevertheless, there were differences between the pharmacists on the one hand, and the accountants and bankers on the other, which appeared to be systematic even in the absence of rigorous sampling. With a single exception (an older woman who had pursued a continuous – and successful – 'linear' career in industry) – women

pharmacists had combined the demands of family life with flexible, intermittent working; and the younger women pharmacists were anticipating a similar pattern of work in combination with domestic life. For example:

I'd like to stay in Boots. Job security is very good, especially if I want to leave and have a family. I can just go, and come back to the same job. (Susan Green, born 1960, married, no children)

None of the bankers or accountants had experienced this easy pattern of flexible working. The difficulties in locating older, qualified women in these professions has already been noted. Two women accountants over forty had effectively dropped out of professional life, although one continued to work part-time from home. The three women in banking in the over-40 group were all 'late developers'; that is, they had decided to acquire qualifications whilst in their late 20s early 30s (two had had children and one was childless). The younger women in banking and accountancy, unlike the younger women in pharmacy, tended to regard the question of children and childrearing as highly problematic. Some stated a clear preference for childlessness:

As far as I was concerned, in my simple mind, it was one choice or another ... so we made a specific choice; do we now get going and have a family? Did we really want one? (Clare Cooper, banker, born 1946)

I don't want any children ... As soon as we started to get serious, I said to my husband, look, are you liable to want children because, if you are, we might as well call it off now. (Jane Fawcett, born 1955, accountant)

I don't want children. I've spent too long getting qualified, and I'm not that way orientated at all, and I think you have to be if you really want to make sacrifices which I'm not prepared to do. (Ruth Green, born 1962, banker)

In these professions, I would suggest the question of children was seen as problematic because childrearing would have to be combined with *full-time* work. It was not that part-time work was not available, rather, it was clearly perceived that part-time work was likely to be of lower status, and would in any case remove the individual from even the relatively modest career track in which motherhood would in any case locate her.

Both of the younger women in the finance professions who had had children (i.e. not the two 'late developers', or the two who had

dropped out) as well as those who were thinking about it, considered that they had no real alternative but to combine childrearing with full-time work. Miriam Brown (accountant) had a full-time nanny to look after her young daughter, and, although the arrangement worked well, often wished that she could spend more time with the child:

If I could, I would go part-time. Obviously here that's not acceptable. Anybody who does part-time work here is in lower grade jobs, and I would be just as bored doing that as probably I would be bored at home.

Lucy Smith (born 1961, accountant, married) had left previous employment with an international firm of accountants because she felt that, as a woman, there was little or no chance of promotion. At another firm:

There was a woman there who, she'd got a baby, she just worked three days a week, and really she would never get promoted ... that's probably what's happened in my experience of people. When they have children, that's it, they don't really get any higher.

About children she said that:

If I did have children, I probably would want to work as well. But then I wouldn't really want a boring job, I'd rather not work at all than do something like that ... what I think would be ideal is if I got to the position where I earned enough money to employ a nanny to live in...

A woman banker who had attempted to work part-time had not had a happy experience. She returned to work after statutory maternity leave but found difficulties in arranging a job at a suitable level on her return (no-one had been expecting her to go back to work). After her second child (her first child was handicapped):

I said I'd be prepared to forego the A2 (a promoted position) at this stage ... if you can find me a job where I can work 9 till 5 but they weren't prepared to do that ... so ... I said, can you get me part-time work at A1 level? No, because there is no such thing as a part-time appointed position...

She has now joined the career break scheme, but expresses considerable frustration at her lack of upward mobility:

I've made absolutely no progress whatsoever despite having worked full-time and part-time.

(It should be stressed that the career break scheme has subsequently been modified to facilitate part-time work at Appointed Officer level).

The having and rearing of children, therefore, was seen as a problem by women bankers and accountants in a way that it was not by pharmacists. Nicola Jones (accountant, born 1965, living with her fiancé) didn't...

...intend to have any family for quite a long time. I want to qualify and get established. I might not even have children, I don't know yet.

and Sarah Emerson (accounting trainee, born 1968):

I'd like to get married but children might be sacrificed for my career, if my job was a lot more interesting ... If it meant I'd have to give up ... there probably wouldn't be any.

Both Miriam Brown and Frances Hills (banker) had decided, against their original intentions, to limit their families to one child only given the difficulties they had experienced combining children and careers.

Although the number of women included in the research is clearly far too small to draw firm conclusions, the domestic/employment career combinations of the women we interviewed has been summarised in Table 3. Actual and anticipated career combinations have been grouped together. Four possible patterns emerged: No children, together with continuous employment (the old-style 'career woman' model); childrearing followed by the virtual end of professional employment; a childrearing break followed by part-time professional employment (this corresponds most nearly to the 'bimodal' pattern of women's employment (Hakim, 1979; Dex, 1984)); and finally, the combination of childrearing with full-time professional employment. It can be seen that amongst the pharmacists, three-quarters had either experienced or were anticipating the flexible, bimodal pattern. In contrast, only a fifth of the women finance professionals were in this category and nearly a half had or were anticipating continuous full-time employment.

The combination of a domestic and employment career, therefore, is apparently much more of a problem for women in the finance professions than for women in an 'occupational' profession such as pharmacy. One solution to these difficulties might be a career break scheme – that is, a system whereby women (and men) can take a break from employment for childrearing, returning to work (at the same level) when their children are of school age or thereabouts. Such schemes are modelled on the 'bimodal' women's work profile

(Hakim, 1979); a pattern established by the 1960s whereby women leave employment at the birth of their first child, and return when their youngest child is of a suitable age. Career break schemes, therefore, would seem to be an eminently sensible response to changing circumstances. The problem, however, is that women's employment patterns are themselves changing. More recent evidence (Dex, 1984) suggests an increase in the number of women returning to work between births as well as a decrease in the amount of time spent out of employment. However the data suggests that even a compressed bimodal career is a minority pattern amongst bankers and accountants. The problem with career break schemes is that they are 'inflexibly flexible' in that the domestic/employment combination they offer may not respond quickly enough to changing circumstances, and in any case may not be able to accommodate the needs of particular groups of women.

Table 3 Domestic/employment career patters

	Pharmacists	Bankers & Accountants
No children, continuous employment (actual and anticipated)	1	4
Children, end of professional employment (actual and anticipated)	0	2
Childbreak, followed by part-time employment (actual and anticipated)	9	5
Children, continuous full-time employment (actual and anticipated)	0	5
Other, undecided	3	7

Before these critical points are developed, however, it should be stressed that, nevertheless, career break schemes are much appreciated by the majority of women participating in them. Information was available from sixty-two NatWest re-entrants and reservists on a career break, 85 per cent of whom expressed generally positive feelings about the scheme. (More than a quarter, however, said that

they would have preferred the opportunity of part-time or job-share working).

The number of cases for which we have detailed information is clearly very small, but they do suggest that a straightforward career break arrangement might not be the most appropriate for highly-qualified women in organisational careers. Their problem is that breaks-of-career might all too easily become ends-of-career. Miriam Brown, explaining her decision to have only one child, put the situation very clearly:

I was 34 when I had to make the decision. Well, I've worked this far and got as far as I am, if I now leave for four or five years or whatever, it's going to be very difficult to get back in ... I can look back over the past five years and see how things have changed here and everything is speeding up all the while and in five years time I thought, well, if it's a choice between having a forty-year old woman who hasn't worked for four or five years as opposed to an up-and-coming newly qualified accountant, there isn't going to be much choice in it really.

One answer to this problem is to arrange a job-share with someone at a similar level of qualification and career development. Frances Law (pharmacist), whose problems with work below her level of competence have been reported earlier, has a job-share arrangement with another pharmacist, and together they work a promoted post in a hospital pharmacy (necessary consultations take place in their own time). However, the higher the position which has been reached in the occupational hierarchy, the fewer the suitable job-share equivalents available. It is likely, therefore, that this option will only be available to a small minority.

Summary and conclusions

Conventional attitudes to childcare in our society still assume that the mother will take the major responsibility for the care of her children. (As far as the present discussion is concerned, the pros and cons of this particular issue will not be raised.) As a consequence of this assumption, the debate about 'keeping women in' employment has tended to have a major focus on childcare, its difficulties, and alternatives to maternal childcare. The tone was set by the 'women's two roles' literature from the 1950s onwards (Myrdal & Klein, 1956). What has been emphasised in this discussion, however, is that the content of women's work may be as important as its convenience, or

the adequacy of childcare arrangements. Indeed, with the rising levels of qualification amongst female employees, expectations that work should be relatively fulfilling are likely to rise accordingly. It is suggested, in short, that some of the emphasis on the practicalities of combining work with family life should be shifted towards a focus upon the quality of working life itself.

These general conclusions have been drawn from an investigation of three rather different professional occupations. As far as the combination of work and family life is concerned, the discussion may be usefully summarised through a focus on three factors: first, flexible or other non-standard working arrangements; second, work content; and third, the upward mobility of the individual concerned. In the case of pharmacy, as we have seen, there are apparently unlimited opportunities for flexible, part-time working. However temporary, or part-time, this work will nevertheless be of professional status. Although, therefore, women pharmacists who undergo a phase (permanent or temporary) of flexible working will be sacrificing, or at least calling a temporary halt to, their careers, their professional job content is, to a certain extent, protected. In addition, the fact that women pharmacists are, through this flexible working, able to keep themselves professionally up-to-date means that the facility is there to construct a delayed linear career. None of the women pharmacists interviewed perceived any serious conflict between continuing paid employment (of this flexible kind) and family life. One should beware of being too complacent here, as the availability of such trained, flexible labour has probably been a cause both of underpayment and exploitation, but its very convenience is likely to reduce pressure to change the situation.

In banking and accountancy – indeed, in the finance sector in general – non-standard and flexible work practices are becoming increasingly available, with the introduction of career break schemes, increased part-time working, and so on. However, in the finance sector, in contrast to pharmacy, there is a lack of separation between work content at a professional level and an upwardly mobile, linear career. Thus alternative work patterns tend to be, and in some cases are only, associated with jobs of non-professional standing. Breaks in employment can seriously damage individual career trajectories, even when re-employment at the same level is offered. The situation is not completely inflexible. There is evidence, for example, that qualified

women accountants tend to specialise in taxation, where they are not required to be geographically mobile, and they also have the option of part-time working in public practice. Thus, to a limited extent, non-linear 'women's' niches might develop in the finance sector, as they have done in pharmacy. However, on the evidence of this research qualified women in the finance sector feel under pressure to pursue continuous careers, a pressure which might eventually result in the third of the possible outcomes sketched in the introduction to this paper, that is, pressures on organisations to respond to their needs. In summary, therefore, the most realistic strategies for keeping such women in the labour force would seem to be either making or encouraging arrangements for them to continue with full-time work, or exploring the possibility of developing career jobs associated with non-standard work arrangements. This latter solution, of course, might involve a fundamental challenge to the nature of the organisational hierarchy itself.

Discussion

Patricia Oakley

I recently read a series of studies where they looked at female undergraduate pharmacists and asked them why they had selected pharmacy and one student put forward the flexibility it would afford them in later life for a family. Now, we know that hospital pharmacies carry probably 80 per cent female staff, but we also know that 90 per cent of the managers are male. This has created quite a problem because in a lot of units females get to a certain level and no more. Then they take their career break and then return to community or industry, but not to the hospital sector which, although it has a lot of female workers, it doesn't have a part-time culture. In fact, the number of part-time jobs has actually been reduced over the last ten years or so. I think our more recent findings perhaps disagree with yours somewhat on the rosy picture painted for hospital pharmacists or pharmacists in general. We don't have a culture of part-time work; and quite a lot of female hospital pharmacists don't return to the

hospital sector because there's no flexibility, whereas there is complete flexibility in community.

Rosemary Crompton

When you say hospital pharmacy doesn't have a culture of part-time work, I think there must be some regional variations there.

Patricia Oakley

There is some part-time work, but overall the number of places has gone down. If we explore the attitudes which persist among men, they are all trying to get rid of part-time workers and upgrade the posts to full-time because that is what they feel is required by the hospital. Also, in the junior grades where women predominate, they are paid about five to seven thousand pounds less than they can get outside in the community and industrial sector and that's quite a major difference. But we've done quite a lot of attitude surveys amongst women hospital pharmacists in the junior grades of why they're in there, why aren't they earning more money elsewhere. It's because they actually like the job. The content is actually very important.

Rosemary Crompton

This is something that did come up which I didn't develop here, but the comment that you often get from pharmacists is that hospital pharmacy is more professional than community pharmacy. That selling plastic baby pants and talcum powder is not what a professional ought to be doing whereas in the hospital pharmacy you can actually use your skills and you've got patient contact and you are a real professional along with the medical team and so on. That is the way in which they are developing work in hospitals, the changes in dispensing in hospitals. I think there are also changes in community pharmacy where they are trying to build up a cultural professionalism: 'Go to your pharmacist, consult your professional pharmacist', so there is an emphasis on what you might call a diagnostic role as well as a dispensing role. Indeed, I think the name, the label – they changed the label from 'retail pharmacy' to 'community pharmacy' – could itself be seen as this desire to be seen as a professional. One of the things that I was stressing is that it's the status and the content of the work that seems particularly important.

Nigel Meager

I think the approach of separating, rather than treating professional occupations as one group, is important, but I wonder if we then need to say quite a bit more about the kinds of organisations into which people with these qualifications typically go. You pointed out the different employers pharmacists have, but I think you could make more distinction between the bankers and the accountants in this respect. If you want to have a career as a banker then to all intents and purposes, it's got to be within one of the large monolithic retail banking-type organisations. A much higher proportion of accountants, for example, are self-employed or working for small organisations, and so the options for a flexible career pattern would a priori be much greater. I think that the policy solutions for doing something about banking careers are obviously career breaks, part-time hours, part-time posts at senior level and so on because these are the kinds of organisations you have to be in to be a senior banker. But the policy solutions in other occupations might be very, very different.

Rosemary Crompton

We selected accountancy as a half-way house between pharmacy and banking for the very reasons that you suggest, because we thought that accountancy was an occupation where you could either go in an 'organisational' or an 'occupational' direction. However, the situation in accountancy is complicated by the way in which accountancy careers themselves develop. The information on employment location by age, for the chartered accountants, shows that, up until their mid-30s, a majority of people are working in public practice, ie as accountants. However, from the mid-30s onwards, a majority of accountants are working in industrial or commercial organisations. So when you ask why didn't I look at the organisation dimension, in the case of the accountants at any rate, the organisational dimension itself would appear to be transformed during the accountancy career. Certainly as far as chartered accountants are concerned. A very characteristic pattern seems to be that you get your articles, you qualify in public practice, then you move out of public practice and begin working in an organisational career.

What I would also suggest might happen is that the present segmentation of accounting, with a high proportion of young people

in public practice and a high proportion of older people in commerce and industry building organisational careers, may be replaced with a gender segmentation where you have the women in public practice and the men in the organisations. That might be one possible way in which it's working out. However, as women accountants only started qualifying in the 1970s, the age structure of female accountants is completely different from the age structure of men accountants, and so it is difficult to know for sure what is occurring. In 1986, for example, there were 157 female chartered accountants in the 46-55 year old age group and 4,482 female accountants aged under 36; in the same year there were only 62 female accountants in chartered accountancy in England and Wales aged over 55. So we're really talking about such a massive difference. I would suggest that, in this profession, we're actually talking about a new phenomenon, where in fact, past experience may be a less helpful than usual guide to what's going to happen in the future.

Susan Gompels

I agree, and in terms of the problems that I've experienced, I think that much of the discrimination is certainly not overt or direct at all, but it can come ... from females ... who are actually the most rigid against change sometimes as opposed to many of their male counterparts.

Liz Bargh

I think one of the most urgent needs that your paper has highlighted is that we really need to be working at encouraging organisations to create more flexible career patterns; that we don't see career break schemes or retainer schemes as the only answer, but that we look far more closely at how we can encourage and develop, for example, part-time management positions which are still on career ladders. Is there anybody here who has had any contact with organisations who are in fact developing that kind of approach?

Patricia Oakley

At North West Thames Regional Health Authority we are looking at both demand and supply side issues, and on the demand side, we've established a commission to see what tasks are actually done in a job, what skills are required for that job. This starts to break the institutional barrier of the nine-to-five framework, when you actually

look at jobs as bundles of tasks because then it is easier for managers to see that you can break them up into bundles and re-bundle them according to the manhours available from the market, rather than according to past practice, given especially that the demographic shift is downwards.

Andrea Spurling

Are there any statistics on the move from employment in organisations to self-employment? You can't be a self-employed banker?

Susan Gompels

Yes, there are, but there certainly is more attention being paid to things like career breaks or returner-type facilities than to the growth of self-employment. In fact, the Institute of Chartered Accountants itself, through the group that I'm working with, is actually looking at that particular problem to try and make sure that the courses for re-entry training are available. There's also one further thing that we do in relation to the smaller firms who tend to work in a very tight-trained consortia, many of them, and those trained consortia are offering courses to the firm anyway, and they can offer them also to women to re-train.

Sonja Gallofer

I'm working with three other colleagues on a project, Women in Accountancy, and I've been talking to women who have qualified as certified accountants and this seems to have been more flexible, because they could do it on a part-time basis. So we tried to find out if actually more women, women who have children or women who have decided at a later stage to go into certified accountancy, have done so because of this flexibility.

Dorothy Hatfield

I was very interested in your point because I see a lot of parallels with what we're finding broadly in the engineering industry. There we have a situation where the whole aspect of the industry that is associated with IT and computing, is producing this flexible approach, and a number of organisations are invoking all sorts of schemes to enable people to carry on in a very flexible manner. Whereas the

mainstream of the British engineering industry is rigid, and so a whole lot of the things that you were saying compare across occupations.

Julia Brannen

I think it would be useful to do some research on people's anticipated employment periods, and contrast them with what actually happens. I say that because, if you ask various people to try and project what their employment career is going to look like at equal points in time, I think you get rather different data from the experience of actually interviewing people in the process of taking, say, their first career break or maternity leave. There's a sense that women who take breaks don't have quite as high a status in these professional jobs and don't feel as confident of the kind of career that they're going to have. In fact, the important thing is the negotiation of part-time work – it's often negotiated in a very pragmatic way.

Rosemary Crompton

That's a very interesting point. I don't know any work that's actually being done about it at the moment but what I would point out is that, although we have very small numbers of women, the occupational differences between the anticipated and actual combination of domestic and employment careers of the women we studied were the same whether they were younger or older. I won't develop the point further, but suggest that the occupational dimension might be a useful angle to pursue in respect of the question.

Liz Bargh

I think that we've thrown up a lot that we need to be looking at, and certainly one of my roles at the Pepperell Unit will be to look with organisations at the question of how to increase the various options for flexibility that women have available, and not just focus on single solutions, such as the career break scheme, as the answer for all women.