

# Women, work and industrial relations in Australia in 2017

**Sarah Kaine and Martijn Boersma**

University of Technology Sydney, Australia

Journal of Industrial Relations  
2018, Vol. 60(3) 317–336  
© Australian Labour and  
Employment Relations Association  
(ALERA) 2018  
SAGE Publications Ltd,  
Los Angeles, London, New Delhi,  
Singapore and Washington DC  
DOI: 10.1177/0022185618764204  
[journals.sagepub.com/home/jir](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/jir)



## Abstract

Throughout 2017, public interest, parliamentary debate and academic research about women, work and industrial relations centred around a few key themes: pay and income inequality, health and well-being at work and the intersection of paid and unpaid work. These themes were identified in three related yet distinct mediums: the media, parliamentary debate and academic literature. Automated content analysis software was used to assist in the thematic analysis of media articles and the House of Representatives Hansard, supplemented by a manual analysis of relevant academic publications. A thematic overlap was evident across the three datasets, despite the time lag associated with academic research and publication. This is a significant finding, emphasising that the inequalities experienced by women in the labour market are long term and entrenched.

## Keywords

Industrial relations, Leximancer, pay equity, women, work

## Introduction

Determining issues of significance in the area of women, work and industrial relations in Australia is not straightforward. It is shaped by normative judgements about the relevance and impact of policy developments and labour market changes. The process is further complicated by implicit assumptions about the commonality of the experiences of women. While this assumption has been challenged (Ressia et al., 2017), an overview article cannot do justice to the diversity of experience (see Kaine, 2016). However, as in previous years, this review aims to capture the key strands of public, policy and academic debate concerning women, work and industrial relations.

---

### Corresponding author:

Sarah Kaine, University of Technology Sydney, Haymarket, Sydney NSW 2173, Australia.

Email: [Sarah.Kaine@uts.edu.au](mailto:Sarah.Kaine@uts.edu.au)

This article differs from previous reviews in that the identification of these issues is assisted, in part, by automated text analysis that highlights key themes and their relationships (Smith and Humphreys, 2006). This allows for a more systematic approach to the determination of significant issues related to women, work and industrial relations. However, our judgement and discretion still determine the search terms used to identify relevant media articles, search the Hansard and parliamentary inquiries and conduct a review of academic literature.

This article is divided into two main sections. The first section begins with a review of developments and an update of statistical trends in labour market participation and economic security for women. The second section identifies issues in the public discourse about women, work and industrial relations in Australia in 2017 through the thematic analysis of three datasets: media articles, Hansard and Senate inquiries, and academic journal articles. This leads to a thematic comparison and an assessment of overlap and gaps. While we anticipate a degree of overlap in the datasets, we expect journal articles to lag behind developments in the real world due to the time delay between academic research and publication.

## **Statistical trends**

### *Labour force participation*

Gender-based differences in labour market participation persisted in 2017, with female participation rates remaining static at 66% in the 20–74 age group and stable for men at 78% (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017a). The employment-to-population ratio for women increased slightly to 56.7%, but was still less than men at 66.9% (ABS, 2017b).

As in 2016, unemployment rates among 20–74-year-olds were similar for men and women at 4.8% and 5.1% respectively.<sup>1</sup> However, this figure obscures nuances in the manner in which women and men engage with the labour market. Aside from the 15–19 age group, men were more likely to be in work or looking for work (ABS, 2017a). Women experienced greater underemployment, with 9.7% of women aged 20–74 wanting more hours of work compared to 6.0% of men. In a continuing reflection of the gendered distribution of caring work, the underemployment rate was greater for women with dependent children, ranging from 9.1% to 12% (depending on the age of the children), but this was not replicated for men with dependents, of whom only 3.5% were underemployed in 2016–2017 (ABS, 2017a).

### *Gender pay gap*

The gender pay gap (GPG) has improved since 2016. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reports the GPG for average weekly ordinary full-time earnings as 15.3% in 2017 (WGEA, 2017: 1). Men's average weekly ordinary

full-time earnings were revealed to be \$251.20 higher than women's (\$1638.30 and \$1387.10 respectively) (ABS, 2017c). However, no improvement was evident in total remuneration (full base salary plus any cash and non-cash benefits) with that gap remaining constant at 23% (WGEA, 2017: 4). Geographical differentials in the GPG persist, reflecting local labour market characteristics. As per last year (Kaine, 2017), the GPG is most pronounced in Western Australia at 22.8%. In 2017, South Australia could claim the smallest gap at 9.8%, as compared with the Australian Capital Territory's 10.7% gap that was smallest in 2016 (WGEA, 2017: 4).

Sector differences reveal a more varied picture of gendered remuneration and expose areas of inequality. As in previous years (Kaine, 2016, 2017), the financial and insurance services industry maintains the largest GPG at 29.6%, with the gap in public administration and safety shrinking to 5.9% in 2017 (WGEA, 2017: 5). The GPG in the public sector is 10.8%, compared with 19.5% in the private sector (WGEA, 2017: 6), which is not unexpected given the smaller distribution of earnings in the public sector and the differences in wage-setting methods (Cai and Liu, 2011). There is a higher proportion of workers covered by collective agreements and awards in the public sector, due to the stronger union density (Cai and Liu, 2011) and a higher proportion of individual arrangements in the private sector (Taylor, 2005). This impacts the GPG with the gap increasing when collective instruments are lacking (WGEA, 2017: 6), one reason being the lower bargaining power of women (Kaine, 2012).

### *Superannuation and economic security*

Gender differentials in superannuation remained in 2017. The most recent ABS data (from 2013 to 2014) show that the differential peaks in the 55–64 age range, with the average balance for men being \$321,993 in stark contrast to the \$180,013 average for women in the same age group (ABS, 2017a). While the gap was smaller in other age cohorts, given the ongoing GPG the superannuation gap is likely to be an ongoing issue. Another factor impacting on superannuation – and consequently long-term economic security for women – is the continuing predominance of women as primary carers undertaking the majority of unpaid work, hence spending half the time that men do in employment-related activities but double the time that men do in unpaid work ('domestic activities' and childcare in particular) (ABS, 2017a). Unsurprisingly, then, women continue to be more likely to work part-time – particularly women with young children. In 2016–2017, only 16% of employed men worked part-time compared with 45% of women overall and 61% of women with a child under five (ABS, 2017a).

The statistical trends in 2017 did not differ markedly from 2015 and 2016. While there was a slight improvement in the GPG, women in general continue to experience inferior outcomes in terms of labour market participation and economic security across the life cycle.

## Thematic analysis of media articles, Hansard and academic journal articles

The data search and analysis consisted of three parts, resulting in separate datasets, which afford insights into related yet distinct areas: the media articles provide a snapshot of women and industrial relations in current affairs, and highlight themes and trends in Australian public debate. The parliamentary documents demonstrate how the theme of women and industrial relations is discussed within a public policy context. Finally, academic publications provide an overview of developments in scholarly literature and indicate the direction of academic debate. The exact search parameters and analysis are detailed in the following.

The date range for the searches is 1 January 2017 to 1 November 2017 for academic journals and media articles, and 1 September for the Hansard. The search for media articles was performed using Factiva, a global news database. An initial search in Australian sources using the keywords 'women', 'work' and 'Australia' resulted in 3810 results. As many results were irrelevant to this study, the search results were refined using the terms 'gender' and 'workplace', which yielded 1661 relevant results.

Given space restrictions, we decided to examine only the Hansard of the Federal House of Representatives, so the speeches of the leaders of the two major parties and the majority of ministers would be captured. Although not reviewing the Senate Hansard, we conducted a search of reports (on bills) by Senate committees to identify issues related to women and work that generated comment and recommendations.

Several academic databases were used to gather publications. 'Gender', 'women', 'work', 'workplace' and 'Australia' were used as search terms in Google Scholar, yielding 6420 results of varying relevance. An advanced search was performed requiring 'Australia' to be in the title, in addition to at least one of the following keywords: 'gender', 'women', 'work' or 'workplace'. This resulted in 183 publications, from which we selected the 21 most relevant to our study. We performed a supplementary search with Scopus, which facilitates more detailed exploration of search results, using the keywords 'women', 'work' and 'Australia' within the title, abstract and keywords of publications, rather than the title or the entire article. This search found 101 publications, which a manual assessment of relevance reduced to 30.

Finally, to obtain articles missed by the Google Scholar and Scopus searches, we manually reviewed academic journals from 2017 with a focus on work, gender and employment. These journals included the *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, *Australian Journal of Labour Law*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *Economic Labour Relations Review*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, *Labour and Industry* and *Labour History* – resulting in four additional articles. After removing duplicates, 46 publications were included for review. Upon further review, another 20 articles were excluded for the following reasons: they were not accessible to us in complete form through public search engines or university

catalogues; they did not relate to the overlapping themes of women and work, but focused on issues for women outside of the labour market or did not concern the work/family/care nexus; gender was not a meaningful aspect of the analysis or discussion, despite appearing as a variable in the data; it was an unpublished PhD thesis; or the article had an historical focus not specifically relatable to women, work and industrial relations in 2017. Given the smaller number of publications in this dataset, which reflects the specificity of the topic, we could manually assess the articles to determine key themes, allowing for a comparison with the themes revealed in the other datasets.

Combined, the three datasets shed a unique light on women and industrial relations in Australia in 2017. While all information contained in the datasets was gathered over the same time period, they are not contemporaneous. Media articles have a short turnaround time and a narrow window, meaning they cover current topics. Academic journal articles have a substantially longer turnaround time, and may report on longitudinal studies that are significant for the ongoing debates about women, work and industrial relations, but may not be related to specific events in 2017.

We used Leximancer to analyse the media articles, a software tool that automates analysis based on statistical algorithms and presents text analysis visually via concept maps, relational word clouds and concept word lists (Smith and Humphreys, 2006). While Leximancer is useful in analysing larger datasets, its automated features may deny skilled interpretation of primary data (Hansson et al., 2010). While the analysis is largely automated, the program does accommodate manual searches as well as the addition, removal and merging of terms. Moreover, Leximancer can produce relational insights through concepts and groups of higher-level themes (Shilbury, 2012) and can therefore be useful in approaching data where the researcher either lacks strong a priori assumptions or wants to approach a dataset with fresh eyes. The comparatively manageable amount of data from academic sources and from Hansard allowed us to employ manual content analysis, grouping topics and ordering them into higher-order themes.

### *Media articles*

We loaded the 1661 news articles and ran the program on default settings for an exploratory analysis. Initially, Leximancer generated a list of 105 concepts, some of which were similar (e.g. company and companies, woman and women, job and jobs). These concepts were merged. In addition, several concepts were irrelevant (e.g. 'Inc.', 'Pty'). These concepts were removed from the data, leaving 70 key concepts. The concept map (see Figure 1) comprised 13 dominant themes and the 70 concepts. 'Themes' are groups of concepts that display a degree of commonality or connectedness in the original data.

Themes are identifiable by circles, their size being immaterial as they are merely boundaries. Prevalence of themes is shown through colouring: hotter colours (red,



by their colour. Within the ‘women’ theme, the discussion about the difference in earnings of women compared to men features prominently. An example of the GPG debate is WGEA boss Elizabeth Lyons telling Parliament that ‘Australia is 50 years away from closing the pay gap’ (McIlroy, 2017). We did not compound the terms ‘pay’ and ‘gap’, believing that the superannuation gap would be a prominent theme. The concept map shows that this was not the case, demonstrating Leximancer’s power in bracketing a priori assumptions. While closer examination of the media sources shows that the superannuation gap is indeed mentioned, the automated text analysis shows that this issue is less topical in the media than we originally hypothesised.

*Women in leadership.* Leadership was an important element revealed by the concepts ‘leadership’, ‘senior’, ‘roles’ and ‘director’, found in the ‘women’ and ‘female’ themes. This finding is validated by the fact that ‘Board’ in itself also features as a theme in close proximity. The sources highlight that women are still under-represented in business leadership positions: ‘In the ASX200 there are more men named David running companies than there are females. So too Johns and Peters’ (Dent, 2017). While progress has been made in the number of women company directors, the number of women in executive leadership positions has not grown to the same extent, an issue that Australian companies have grappled with for some time (Klettner et al., 2014).

*Work–life balance.* The ‘work’ theme has a number of interesting concepts associated with it such as ‘career’, ‘young’, ‘leave’ and ‘time’. An exploration of the sources reveals elements that contrast with work and confirm that the role of women in the workplace is frequently placed in contrast to family life, health, and caring responsibilities. For example, research based on the 2017 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey revealed that ‘... it’s impossible for women to work long hours often expected by employers unless they compromise their health. That’s because normally women spend more time on childcare and doing unpaid housework’ (Sibthorpe, 2017). The prominence of these debates is validated by the fact that ‘family’ and ‘home’ are themes in themselves and feature in close proximity.

### *‘Colder’ themes*

The occurrence of themes such as ‘organisations’ and ‘business’ is unsurprising when analysing documents found using the search terms ‘gender’ and ‘workplace’, which is also true for the concepts that appear within these themes as seen in Figure 1. The themes ‘Market’ and ‘Law’ are relatively cold, and an inspection of the media articles reveals a generic discussion about markets and law in a business context, with women being mentioned in passing. Among the remaining themes that Leximancer generated, we regarded ‘issues’, ‘change’ and ‘people’ as being of interest.

*Health and well-being.* The ‘issues’, ‘change’ and ‘people’ themes and their related concepts provide insight into several matters associated with women in the context of work, some of which are problematic, such as health, violence and sexual harassment. A closer look at the articles reveals that health is predominantly discussed as the negative impact that work has on women’s health; violence is discussed in the context of domestic violence and associated leave; and the term sexual is linked to the sexual harassment of women in the workplace. Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) President Ged Kearney was quoted as saying that the government was ‘waging war’ with women on issues such as penalty rates, paid parental leave, domestic violence leave and childcare, and that ‘the Turnbull government has turned its back on women in the workplace’ (Lewis, 2017). In our assessment, domestic violence was a salient media topic in 2017, and it is no surprise that Leximancer singled this out.

*Diversity and change.* The thematic groupings also revealed that increasing workplace diversity was important in media reporting. In the words of Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins, gender inequality in the workplace is ‘not just a chief executive issue’ as every person within an organisation has a role to play in combating sex discrimination at work (Powell, 2017). This observation is validated by two concepts related to ‘Change’ shown in Figure 1: ‘Culture’ and ‘Social’. Examination of the media articles reveals that the concepts are frequently discussed in the context of the need for cultural and social change that addresses equality in the workplace as well as in society more broadly. An example is the 2017 establishment of the Women’s Australian Football League:

The women in the league — as with the men — are there for the love of the game. But footy is more than a sport. It has been a driver of social change, particularly in the most recent period of the full 120-year history of the game. (*Herald Sun*, 2017)

Overall, inequality features prominently in media articles about women and industrial relations in 2017, whether this concerns the GPG, lack of female representation in leadership or the disproportionate impact of careers on the work–life balance as well as on the health and well-being of women.

### **Parliamentary publications: Hansard of the Federal House of Representatives and Senate reports**

Several of the challenges that women in the workplace face were discussed in Parliament in 2017. A Hansard search was performed on the website of the Parliament of Australia using the following terms: ‘Women’, ‘Woman’, ‘Female’, ‘Gender’, ‘Parental Leave’ and ‘Gap’, the last term covering references to the superannuation gap, pay gap, wage gap, income gap and the gender gap. General search terms such as ‘Work’, ‘Trade Union’, ‘Industrial Relations’ and ‘Labour Force’ were excluded, as these only become relevant when they are

mentioned in the context of women and work. Hansard sections that discuss issues pertaining to women and work were copied to a separate document, including details such as the bill or topic being discussed and the name of the speaker. Due to the manageable size of the Hansard transcripts we decided to analyse the text manually, which afforded us the opportunity to compare the analyses.

The same search terms utilised for Hansard were used in the initial scanning of 2017 Senate reports (on bills) between January and September 2017. While there were 192 results, only 25 contained our search terms and, of those, only three concerned issues directly relevant to this review. These were comments on the Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill 2016 (Provisions), Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 and the report 'Gender Segregation in the Workplace and its Impact on Women's Economic Equality'. The first report contained no policy recommendations. The only recommendation in the second report (which covered a wide range of policy areas affecting women) was that 'the Bill be passed'. There was a dissenting report from Labor senators and, after failing to win cross-bench support, the bill was not passed (Australian Government, 2017). The Senate report on 'Gender segregation in the workplace' contained nine recommendations, including the development of a national policy framework to achieve gender pay equity in Australia and amendments to the Fair Work Act (FWA) 2009 to introduce gender pay equity as an overall objective of the Act. However, neither of these recommendations were supported by the government minority on the Senate Committee, making them unlikely to be implemented during the term of the current government, although the Labor Party signalled that it would be prepared to consider amendments to the FWA 2009.

### *Gender pay and superannuation gap*

Gender equality features prominently in Hansard, illustrated by the equal pay case of Lisa Wilkinson, who was commended by the Opposition leader for demanding pay equality from her employer (House of Representatives, 2017). The Hansard further details discussion around the GPG. The Member for Richmond noted that, as women are more likely to work in a part-time capacity, 'it is impossible to separate the impact of the pure GPG from the impact of women's concentration in part-time work' (House of Representatives, 2017), quoting research illustrating that when the number of women working part-time is taken into account, the pay gap increases to 33% (Stanford, 2017).

In addition to the GPG, Hansard details that many women in Australia are not able to accrue enough superannuation to see them through their retirement. This issue was raised during the debate around the Social Services Legislation Amendment: 'a woman's median superannuation total by retirement was \$80,000 [...] on average, women retire with less than three years' worth of modest retirement living' (House of Representatives, 2017).

The decision by the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to cut Sunday and public holiday rates in the hospitality, hotel, retail, fast food and pharmacy industries is

prominent in Hansard. It was argued that this ruling will exacerbate the pay and superannuation gap, as women are disproportionately represented in the retail and hospitality industries: 'Fifty-seven per cent of hospitality workers are women, and 57 per cent of takeaway food workers are women, as are 62 per cent of retail workers and 85 per cent of pharmacy workers' (House of Representatives, 2017). The FWC has left the door open for a review of the hair and beauty industry award where 87% of the workforce are women (House of Representatives, 2017).

The Minister for Employment, Michaelia Cash, also the Minister for Women, completed a submission to the FWC on the minimum wage, stating that: 'Increasing the national minimum wage is not an efficient way to address relative living standards. Low-paid employees are often found in high income households' (Gartrell and Patty, 2017). The Member for Sydney, Ms Plibersek, responded: 'As if my wage should depend on my parents' wage or on my husband's wage' (House of Representatives, 2017).

### *The gender impact of the federal budget*

Traditionally, the gender impact of the federal budget has been outlined in the Women's Budget Statement – a document introduced by the Hawke Government and produced by every succeeding government until it was scrapped by the Abbott Government (Kaine, 2017). A gendered analysis of the budget has since been taken on by Labor and the National Foundation for Australian Women, revealing that 'the beneficiaries of maintaining the deficit levy will overwhelmingly be men, and yet those who suffer the cost of cuts to income support are overwhelmingly women' (House of Representatives, 2017). The Opposition Whip argued that women will pay higher taxes under the Coalition: 'Data from the National Foundation for Australian Women [. . .] found that women on around \$50,000 could face an effective marginal tax rate of—believe this—100 per cent' (House of Representatives, 2017).

The budget also included \$30 million in cuts to community legal centres, as well as women's refuges, which provide services to victims of domestic violence and those who cannot access legal aid. These cuts have since been reversed (Belot and Yaxley, 2017). The Member for Grayndler noted that

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that around two-thirds of women who experience domestic violence are in the workforce. That means that more than 800,000 women, or around one in six women workers, are experiencing some form of violence in their home. (House of Representatives, 2017)

He added that

Economic insecurity is one of the most significant obstacles confronting women in their decision to leave a violent relationship. Introducing paid domestic violence leave into the National Employment Standards offers an important opportunity to reach people living with violence and to provide them with support. (House of Representatives, 2017)

The Minister for Employment has suggested that helping these women would actually stop employers from hiring them (Towell, 2016).

### *Workforce participation and access to higher education*

Hansard also details low workforce participation of women, with childcare cited as a key factor (House of Representatives, 2017). Labor argued against the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill on the basis that it would ‘cut paid parental leave to 70,000 new mums each year’ (Hunter, 2016). Labor also pointed out that paid parental leave is an entitlement that has been bargained for, and is not just another welfare payment. As 95% of those that receive the government parenting payment are women, the proposed cuts would disproportionately affect women (House of Representatives, 2017). The bill was not passed by the Senate.

It was also argued that the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment would affect female workforce participation. The Member for Macquarie observed:

It is no surprise that many mums now work from home, run their own businesses and are self-employed. That does not always equate to a steady, even income. Women choose to do that because it is the only way they can juggle family responsibilities. This legislation has a workforce participation test that is going to make things even harder for those people. (House of Representatives, 2017)

Labor has argued that the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment, which lowers the repayment threshold on student debt to \$42,000 per annum, will disproportionately impact women by creating a hurdle to accessing higher education, by discouraging female workplace participation and, subsequently, by increasing the GPG:

this reduction of the threshold is more likely to affect women. Women are more likely to be in part-time work or in low-paid work [ . . . ] This will have an effect on women’s ability to get a higher education. It will have an impact on their ability to manage the cost of living after they’ve got that higher education. (House of Representatives, 2017)

The analysis of Hansard and the Senate inquiries shows that working women in Australia remain at a substantial disadvantage: they earn less, retire with less and have lower workforce participation. In addition, several proposed and passed legislative amendments and budget cuts disproportionately affect women, not in the least the ruling by the FWC to cut penalty rates.

### *Journal articles*

Of the 26 articles, 15 (and 1 book chapter) focused on issues relating to women and work overall (rather than reporting on studies of specific groups of women),

including pay equity, gender wages gap and the valuation of 'women's work' (Cook et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2017; Smith and Stewart, 2017); care work (Anxo et al., 2017); superannuation and pensions (Sheen, 2017); women in leadership and on boards (Ahmed and Ali, 2017; Chandrakumara et al., 2017); intersectionality and diversity (Murray and Ali, 2017; Ressa et al., 2017); paid maternity leave (Hondralis, 2017); the impact of education on labour market outcomes for women (Wyn et al., 2017); health and well-being (Ambrey et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2017; Dinh et al., 2017; Hickey et al., 2017); work–family conflict (Abeysekera and Gahan, 2017); and precarity (Sheen, 2017). A further 11 articles reported on studies of particular occupations, industries or age cohorts (Crofts and Coffey, 2017; Dwyer et al., 2017; Gacka, 2017; Godwin et al., 2017; Gregory and Brigden, 2017; Majeed, 2017; Marks, 2017; McLoughlin, 2017; O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Ovseiko et al., 2017; Redmond et al., 2017). The themes evident in these specific studies largely reflected those identified in the more general papers. For example, Majeed et al. (2017) focus on workers over the age of 65 and find that unpartnered women over the age of 65 are more likely to continue paid work as a result of the lifetime earnings gap that has seen women accumulate less superannuation than men. Likewise, Gregory and Brigden (2017) consider how a particular cohort of precarious workers (performing artists) negotiate paid work and childcare – combining a number of themes evident in the more general articles.

Several academic articles provide much-needed nuance and detail to the statistical data reported above and about key characteristics of women's engagement with the labour market. Kennedy et al. (2017) conduct a longitudinal analysis (1986–2013) of the relationship between labour productivity and the gender wage gap in Australia. Their conclusion that reducing the gender wage gap by 10% would boost labour productivity by up to 3% underlines the broader economic rationale for the policy pursuit of wage equality. Likewise, the study by O'Loughlin et al. (2017) contributes to a deeper understanding of the changing care responsibilities of women and their impact on labour force participation. They observe the intergenerational nature of gendered care arrangements, specifically 'that grandmothers caring for their grandchildren are important for enabling daughters to remain in paid work' (p. 351). Dinh et al. (2017) explore the gendered nature of the regulation of working hours. They use data from the HILDA survey to examine the impact of inequality in non-paid time on labour market participation, pay gaps and health outcomes for women. Their findings show that the additional non-paid care work undertaken by women lowers the threshold for paid work 'beyond which mental health declines' (p. 42), leading us to argue that work-hour regulation cannot continue to be based on assumptions of a working life unencumbered by caring responsibilities. Furthermore, they conclude that current regulations do not acknowledge the combination of employment and caregiving and, as such, 'will not protect women's health or any adult who combines work with significant caring' (p. 49).

Health and well-being was one of the most common concerns in the academic literature. In addition to Dinh et al.'s (2017) analysis of gender and working hours, Hickey et al. (2017) investigated how the experience of menopause was managed at

work. They found that, while women did not generally feel that menopausal symptoms impacted their performance, there was a desire for more support at work through measures such as greater control over temperature and working hours. Clark et al. (2017) studied the sitting, sleep and physical activity patterns of working women in Australia and noted that women who are shift-workers, who work full-time or who are in clerical/sales or managerial roles were most likely at risk of sitting too much, not sleeping enough and not getting enough physical activity. Ambrey et al.'s (2017) article looked less specifically at health and rather used HILDA data to consider the 'interplay between time pressures at home and at work, social connectedness and well-being as reported by Australian women' (p. 1). Their analysis shows a small decrease in life satisfaction of women between 2001 and 2013 and highlights the 'importance of frequent and meaningful social connections' (p. 24). However, beyond calling for 'the need to refocus attention on well-being in public policy spheres' (p. 24), they make no specific policy recommendations. The research examined in these articles reflects the 'hotter' themes we described earlier, namely themes directly related to work identified through the analysis of media articles.

Also echoing 'hotter' themes in the media and Hansard was a focus shared by several journal articles on pay equity. Smith and Stewart (2017) contextualise developments in the Early Childhood Education Pay Equity Case (that continued throughout 2017) by investigating the use of a male comparator in such cases. Specifically, Smith and Stewart (2017) contrast the successful Social and Community Services (SACS) pay equity case of 2012 with the Early Childhood case. In the SACS case, the FWC determined that the nature of the care work was subject to gender undervaluation and that 'it was not a prerequisite for applicants to rely on a male comparator' (p. 129). In the Early Childhood case, however, the FWC determined that 'an applicant must identify a group of male employees, doing work of equal or comparable value, who were receiving higher remuneration' (Smith and Stewart, 2017: 131). This is significant, because it has forced the two union applicants (United Voice and the Australian Education Union) to submit to the FWC a male comparison (the FWC rejected the case in February 2018). It underscores the regulatory dilemma noted by Smith and Stewart (2017): namely that 'a woman is only recognised as being discriminated against, on the basis of sex, when she is assessed as being the same as a man' (p. 119), whereas a man is never required to 'demonstrate sameness with anyone in order to be entitled to benefits' (p. 119). Interestingly, the analysis of the media articles (above) reveals the pervasiveness of the 'male comparator' approach to the consideration of issues of import to women, including, but not limited to, pay equity.

Women on boards and in leadership was another 'hot' theme found in articles within the academic literature. Of the two papers captured by the parameters of our search, Chandrakumara et al. (2017) cover familiar ground in providing an overview of the profile of Australian boards, whereas Ahmed and Ali's (2017) research demonstrates a significant and positive association between gender diversity on boards and stock liquidity (which has become an increasingly desirable

characteristic following the global financial crisis). Diversity did appear in the thematic analysis of the other data sources. Aside from diversity in the boardroom, it appeared in relation to the experience of migrant workers, with both articles highlighting (in different ways) how gender analysis needs to consider intersections with other aspects of identity (Murray and Ali, 2017; Ressler et al., 2017).

Although not an academic article, we deemed it important to include 'The Women's Manifesto: A blueprint for how to get equality for women in Australia' by Summers (2017), given the status of Summers as a leading feminist and activist in Australia. To coincide with International Women's Day (8 March), Summers released the 'Manifesto' calling for greater action by 'every Australian women's group, every union, everyone who has ever expressed any interest in equality to demand change within five years' (Price, 2017). The 'Manifesto' listed four principles of equality for women: 'financial self-sufficiency, reproductive freedom, freedom from violence, and the right to participate fully and equally in all areas of public life' (p. 16). It also outlined policy demands related to those principles, framed as 'Equality Goals' to be achieved by 2022:

Legislated equal pay for all women in all jobs, decriminalisation of abortion in New South Wales and Queensland, specialist domestic violence courts in every state of Australia, gender quotas dictating that women make up 50 percent of all parliamentarians, all cabinets and other ministries and directors of all public companies and government boards. (p. 16)

While it is difficult to quantify the impact of the 'Manifesto', it did generate media coverage that would have contributed to our earlier identification of key themes in the public debate about women and work in 2017.

## **Summary of themes and connections**

There was commonality between themes across the three datasets, with gender income inequality being the most obvious example. The gendered disparity in superannuation and the GPG continued to be borne out in statistical trends. It also featured in the analysis of parliamentary documents, with the penalty rates decision being revealed by both the manual and automated text analysis as impacting women disproportionately. Relatedly, financial security and pay equity appeared in the academic articles, in part reflecting that the Early Childhood Pay Equity case being pursued by United Voice and the Independent Education Union had entered its fourth year without resolution.

Health and well-being were also common themes – albeit with different emphasis. In the academic articles, there was a greater focus on more traditional work, health and safety concerns (such as hours of work), whereas in the media and Hansard, well-being was often discussed in relation to the broader issue of economic security and the caring responsibilities of women. However, there was some overlap, with several academic articles noting the connection between the

workforce participation of caregivers and their health status (Dinh et al., 2017; O'Loughlin et al., 2017).

Ongoing interest in women in leadership, specifically 'women on boards', was captured in the analysis of the media and academic articles but was not reflected in the parliamentary documents. A plausible explanation for this is that the composition of boards (at least in the private sector where much of the debate is focused) is seen as the remit of business rather than a direct concern of the state.

The degree of overlap in the datasets was somewhat unexpected. We anticipated that the focus of journal articles might follow developments in the real world, as there is generally a time delay between academic research and publication. However, many issues relevant to the experience of women and work have remained the same over many years. For example, progress in remedying the GPG has been slow, meaning that academic research maintains its relevance despite the time lags associated with publication – with domestic violence as it relates to the workplace being a notable exception. In both the media and Hansard, domestic violence was featured but it was not captured in the academic literature. Previously, domestic violence (as it relates to work) appeared only in academic scholarship, and only recently has it assumed prominence in public debates. It could be argued that the rise of domestic violence leave as a public policy issue was provoked by academic research (e.g., Baird et al., 2014; McFerran, 2011).

## Conclusion

This research used a combination of novel and traditional research methods. Text analysis software provided us with a systematic method of identifying key themes in public debate. It provided a means to evaluate a large quantity of data and facilitated a comparison of themes across datasets. Furthermore, it facilitated an assessment of the accuracy of assumptions and predictions about the significance of specific issues. In the 2016 review article (Kaine, 2017), it was suggested that the ongoing modern award review, Early Childhood equal pay case, proposed changes to family tax benefits and the implications of the federal budget for women would be issues of importance in 2017. The data sampling and analysis methods used in this article largely confirmed those predictions: the modern award review (specifically the penalty rates decision) featured in the media articles and Hansard, the Early Childhood equal pay case (while not progressing much) was considered in an academic article, and changes to the federal budget and family assistance featured in Hansard.

While semantic analysis points to themes that have dominated over time, it does not identify the events or developments that triggered such trends. We acknowledge that our treatment of data in this review precluded a chronological description of key events in 2017 and that the meta-analysis of the media articles obscures specific events, such as the two childcare workers' strikes (in March and September) in support of the Early Childhood Pay Equity case (Stein, 2017). However, supplementing the automated content analysis with manual content analysis of House of

Representatives Hansard and academic journal articles provided some context and did highlight some specific examples.

Arguably, one of the purposes of academic inquiry in the social sciences is to understand the implications of policy debate and development in the longer term – to sort out interesting anomalies from longer-term trends. We anticipated that analysis of the three datasets in this review would reveal some differences – that the academic research might be differentiated following more in-depth interrogation of issues over time, in addition to the often lengthy process of publication. This was not the case. Academic scholarship kept pace with real-world developments in the area of women and work. This suggests that the issues associated with the inequalities experienced by women in the labour market are long term and entrenched, and that policy changes to address these are often incremental with impacts that may not be easily or quickly discernible.

### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Note**

1. The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the ‘proportion of a country’s working-age population that is employed’ (International Labour Organisation, n.d.).

### **References**

- Abeysekera L and Gahan P (2017) Work–family conflict among Australian dual-earner couples: Testing the effects of role salience crossover and gender. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 1–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1296015>.
- Ahmed A and Ali S (2017) Boardroom gender diversity and stock liquidity: Evidence from Australia. *Journal of Contemporary Accounting & Economics* 13(2): 148–165.
- Ambrey C, Ulichny J and Fleming C (2017) The social connectedness and life satisfaction nexus: A panel data analysis of women in Australia. *Feminist Economics* 23(2): 1–32.
- Anxo D, Baird M and Erhel C (2017) Work and care regimes and women’s employment outcomes: Australia, France and Sweden compared. In: Grimshaw D, Fagan C and Hebson G (eds) *Making Work More Equal: A New Labour Market Segmentation Approach*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 309–329.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2017a) *4125.0 – Gender Indicators, Australia*. Available at: [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202017~Main%20Features~Selected%20Highlights~2](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202017~Main%20Features~Selected%20Highlights~2) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2017b) *6202.0 – Labour Force, Australia*. Available at: [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Sep%202017?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Sep%202017?OpenDocument) (accessed 26 February 2018).

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2017c) *6302.0 – Average Weekly Earnings, Australia*. Available at: [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6302.0May%202017?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6302.0May%202017?OpenDocument) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Australian Government (2017) *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017*. Available at: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bId=r5798](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r5798) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Baird M, McFerran L and Wright I (2014) An equality bargaining breakthrough: Paid domestic violence leave. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 56(2): 190–207.
- Belot H and Yaxley L (2017) *Federal Government to Reverse Community Legal Funding Cuts*. ABC News. Available at: [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-24/federal-government-to-reverse-community-legal-funding-cuts/8465420](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-24/federal-government-to-reverse-community-legal-funding-cuts/8465420) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Cai L and Liu AY (2011) Public–private sector wage gap in Australia: Variation along the distribution. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 49(2): 362–390.
- Chandrakumara A, McCarthy G and Glynn J (2017) Exploring the board structures and member profiles of top ASX companies in Australia: An industry-level analysis. *Australian Accounting Review*, Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/auar.12177/full>. DOI: 10.1111/auar.12177.
- Clark BK, Kolbe-Alexander TL and Duncan MJ (2017) Sitting time, physical activity and sleep by work type and pattern – The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14(3): 1–15.
- Cook K, Corr L and Breitzkreuz R (2017) The framing of Australian childcare policy problems and their solutions. *Critical Social Policy* 37(1): 42–63.
- Crofts J and Coffey J (2017) Young women’s negotiations of gender, the body and the labour market in a post-feminist context. *Journal of Gender Studies* 26(5): 502–516.
- Dent G (2017) The path to parity for women executives. *Australian Financial Review*, 24 October. Available at: [www.afr.com/news/special-reports/women-in-leadership/the-path-to-parity-for-women-executives-20171022-gz5rwf](http://www.afr.com/news/special-reports/women-in-leadership/the-path-to-parity-for-women-executives-20171022-gz5rwf) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Dinh H, Strazdins L and Welsh J (2017) Hour-glass ceilings: Work-hour thresholds, gendered health inequities. *Social Science & Medicine* 176: 42–51.
- Dwyer KM, Clark CJ and MacDonald K (2017) Gender equity in transplantation: A report from the Women in Transplantation workshop of the Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand. *Transplantation* 101(10): 2266–2270.
- Gacka H (2017) Levelling the playing field: Discrimination against women in sport in Australia. *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity* 5(1): 189–219.
- Gartrell A and Patty A (2017) Turnbull government warns Fair Work Commission against ‘excessive’ minimum wage rise. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March. Available at: [www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/turnbull-government-warns-fair-work-commission-against-excessive-minimum-wage-rise-20170329-gv9azu.html](http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/turnbull-government-warns-fair-work-commission-against-excessive-minimum-wage-rise-20170329-gv9azu.html) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Godwin D, Blizzard L and Hoang H (2017) Evidence of the effect of rural background on rural practise in Australian dental practitioners: Does gender play a role? *Australian Dental Journal* 62(1): 30–38.
- Gregory S and Brigden C (2017) Gendered scenes: Conceptualising the negotiation of paid work and child-care among performers in film, television and theatre production. *Media International Australia* 163(1): 151–162.

- Hansson T, Carey G and Kjartansson R (2010) A multiple software approach to understanding values. *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 31(3): 283–298.
- Herald Sun (2017) Cynics hushed in AFLW glory. *Herald Sun*, 25 March. Available at: [www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/cynics-hushed-in-aflwglory/news-story/bf4d17239ddb7754bd704c913d259677](http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/cynics-hushed-in-aflwglory/news-story/bf4d17239ddb7754bd704c913d259677) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Hickey M, Riach K and Kachouie R (2017) No sweat: Managing menopausal symptoms at work. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology* 38(3): 202–209.
- Hondralis I (2017) Does maternity leave pay off? Evidence from a recent reform in Australia. *Social Politics* 24(1): 29–54.
- House of Representatives (2017) Hansard, Canberra. Available at [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Hansard/Hansreps\\_2011](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansreps_2011) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Hunter F (2016) Low paid workers \$10,000 worse off under Turnbull parental leave cuts: Research. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January. Available at: [www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/low-paid-workers-10000-worse-off-under-turnbull-parental-leave-cuts-research-20160113-gm51gg.html](http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/low-paid-workers-10000-worse-off-under-turnbull-parental-leave-cuts-research-20160113-gm51gg.html) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- International Labour Organisation (n.d.) Employment-to-population ratio. Available at: [www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/WCMS\\_422399/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/WCMS_422399/lang-en/index.htm) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Kaine S (2012) Collective regulation of wages and conditions in aged care: Beyond labour law. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 54(2): 204–220.
- Kaine S (2016) Women, work and industrial relations in Australia in 2015. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 58(3): 324–339.
- Kaine S (2017) Women, work and industrial relations in Australia in 2016. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 59(3): 271–287.
- Kennedy T, Rae M and Sheridan A (2017) Reducing gender wage inequality increases economic prosperity for all: Insights from Australia. *Economic Analysis and Policy* 55: 14–24.
- Klettner A, Clarke T and Boersma M (2014) Strategic and regulatory approaches to increasing women in leadership: Multilevel targets and mandatory quotas as levers for cultural change. *Journal of Business Ethics* 133(3): 395–419.
- Lewis R (2017) Shorten rant ‘not backed by data’. *The Australian*, 7 March. Available at: [www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/industrial-relations/penalty-rates-cut-a-further-threat-to-gender-pay-gap-say-shorten-actu/news-story/400e6f4ced6b9a91e4739d0524860d79](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/industrial-relations/penalty-rates-cut-a-further-threat-to-gender-pay-gap-say-shorten-actu/news-story/400e6f4ced6b9a91e4739d0524860d79) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- McFerran L (2011) Safe at home, safe at work? National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey (2011). Available at: [https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/FASSFile/Key\\_Findings\\_National\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_and\\_the\\_Workplace\\_Survey\\_2011.pdf](https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/media/FASSFile/Key_Findings_National_Domestic_Violence_and_the_Workplace_Survey_2011.pdf) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- McIlroy T (2017) Australia’s gender pay gap to last another 50 years. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 July. Available at: [www.smh.com.au/business/workplace-relations/australias-gender-pay-gap-to-last-another-for-50-years-20170727-gxjmay.html](http://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace-relations/australias-gender-pay-gap-to-last-another-for-50-years-20170727-gxjmay.html) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- McLoughlin K (2017) Feminism, women judges, judicial diversity and the High Court of Australia. *feminists@law* 7(2): 1–14.
- Majeed T, Forder PM and Tavener M (2017) Work after age 65: A prospective study of Australian men and women. *Australasian Journal on Ageing* 36(2): 158–164.
- Marks GN (2017) University and vocational education, and youth labour market outcomes in Australia. *Journal of Education and Work* 30(8): 868–880.

- Murray PA and Ali F (2017) Agency and coping strategies for ethnic and gendered minorities at work. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 28(8): 1236–1260.
- O’Loughlin K, Loh V and Kendig H (2017) Carer characteristics and health, wellbeing and employment outcomes of older Australian baby boomers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 32(3): 339–356.
- Ovseiko PV, Chapple A and Edmunds LD (2017) Advancing gender equality through the Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science: An exploratory study of women’s and men’s perceptions. *Health Research Policy and Systems* 15(12): 1–13.
- Powell D (2017) Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins: Gender inequality at work is ‘not just a chief executive issue’. Available at: <https://www.smartcompany.com.au/people-human-resources/sex-discrimination-commissioner-kate-jenkins-gender-inequality-at-work-is-not-just-a-chief-executive-issue/> (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Price J (2017) Anne Summers’ call to arms on International Women’s Day: Calling yourself a feminist not enough. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March. Available at: [www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/news-and-views/news-features/anne-summers-call-to-arms-on-international-womens-day-20170307-gusnip.html](http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/news-and-views/news-features/anne-summers-call-to-arms-on-international-womens-day-20170307-gusnip.html) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Redmond J, Walker EA and Hutchinson J (2017) Self-employment: Is it a long-term financial strategy for women? *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 36(4): 362–375.
- Ressia S, Strachan G and Bailey J (2017) Operationalizing intersectionality: An approach to uncovering the complexity of the migrant job search in Australia. *Gender, Work & Organization* 24(4): 376–397.
- Sheen V (2017) The implications of Australian women’s precarious employment for the later pension age. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 28(1): 3–19.
- Shilbury D (2012) Competition: The heart and soul of sport management. *Journal of Sport Management* 26(1): 1–10.
- Sibthorpe C (2017) People who work more than 39 hours a week put their health at risk, ANU study finds. *Canberra Times*, 2 February. Available at: [www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/people-who-work-more-than-39-hours-a-week-put-their-health-at-risk-anu-study-finds-20170202-gu3w25.html](http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/people-who-work-more-than-39-hours-a-week-put-their-health-at-risk-anu-study-finds-20170202-gu3w25.html) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Smith AE and Humphreys MS (2006) Evaluation of unsupervised semantic mapping of natural language with Leximancer concept mapping. *Behavior Research Methods* 38(2): 262–279.
- Smith M and Stewart A (2017) Shall I compare thee to a fitter and turner? The role of comparators in pay equity regulation. *Australian Journal of Labour Law* 30: 113–136.
- Stanford J (2017) Penalty rates and the gender pay gap. Available at: [www.futurework.org.au/penalty\\_rates\\_and\\_the\\_gender\\_pay\\_gap](http://www.futurework.org.au/penalty_rates_and_the_gender_pay_gap) (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Stein L (2017) Childcare strike: Why did workers walk off the job this week? 8 September. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-07/why-did-childcare-workers-strike-this-week/8880966>.
- Summers A (2017) The Women’s Manifesto: A blueprint for how to get equality for women in Australia. *Redress* 26(1): 16–23.
- Taylor J (2005) The next generation of workers in Australia: Their views on organizations, work and rewards. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 16(10): 1919–1933.
- Towell N (2016) Domestic violence leave would mean fewer jobs for women: Cash. *Canberra Times*, 27 May. Available at: [www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/domestic-violence-leave-would-mean-fewer-jobs-for-women-cash-20160527-gp5h1z.html](http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/domestic-violence-leave-would-mean-fewer-jobs-for-women-cash-20160527-gp5h1z.html) (accessed 26 February 2018).

- Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2017) Australia's latest gender equality scorecard released today. Available at: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/media-releases/australia%E2%80%99s-latest-gender-equality-scorecard-released-today-0> (accessed 26 February 2018).
- Wyn J, Cuervo H, Crofts J, et al. (2017) Gendered transitions from education to work: The mysterious relationship between the fields of education and work. *Journal of Sociology* 53(2): 492–506.

### **Biographical notes**

**Sarah Kaine** is an Associate Professor at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research investigates alternative means of regulating labour standards including the use of reflexive regulation and the integration of non-state actors. She has explored possibilities for regulatory alternatives in a number of industrial contexts, including publicly funded care service provision and privately controlled road transport. Her current research explores multi-stakeholder regulation of domestic and international supply chains and regulation, collectivism and voice in the digitally enabled 'sharing economy'.

**Martijn Boersma** is a Lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney. His areas of interest include corporate social responsibility and governance, business and human rights, and multistakeholder initiatives to overcome governance gaps in supply chains. His current research focuses on the legitimacy of initiatives by non-state actors to govern labour standards, and how new technologies such as blockchain can be used to improve ethical practices in global supply chains.