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Select Committee on Job Security

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a brief submission to the **Senate Select Committee on Job Security**. I have a number of concerns in relation to this Bill, however I will note just one here, which springs directly from my team's research on women, work and gender equality in working life at the University of Sydney. A large part of this story is the highly gendered nature of precarious work and job insecurity in Australia.

Women dominate in insecure jobs

Australian women's labour force participation rate reached a high of 61.2 per cent in 2019, up from 44.1 per cent forty years earlier, but women remain significantly more likely than men to work part-time. Indeed, the increased participation of women in paid labour has occurred as part-time work has become more available. Much of this work is highly precarious; for example, over half of all part-time workers are employed on casual contracts, a feature which is even more prevalent in very feminised sectors such as healthcare and social assistance (78.2 per cent), education and training (71.9 per cent), and retail trade (55 per cent). There has barely been a change in the portion of women working full-time since the late-1970s, especially for workers in their prime child-bearing ages. Moreover, jobs within feminised industries and occupations are paid less, on average, than jobs traditionally held by men.

Women want secure jobs

As published in our Australian Women's Working Futures report, a landmark study of national social attitudes regarding gender and the future of work, women, similar to men, seek security at work and see this as lacking in their current work environments. Results show that for the vast majority of working women, job security is an important aspect of employment and a key influence on women's choice of employment sector and occupation (96%). While security was the goal for most women, just under three in five (59%) said they were secure in their current job. In addition to having secure work, almost all women (91%) thought having a job with predictable and regular hours and a consistent wage mattered, and was particularly important for women managing caring responsibilities. Women are also frustrated about inadequate policy support for work and care, unequal gender relations in the home, as well as the negative impact this has on economic opportunity, job security and success at work.



COVID-19 and building back

The social and economic impact of COVID-19 has been hugely detrimental to women's labour force experience largely because they are more likely to be in insecure employment. Lack of adequate income protection, paid sick leave, and carers' leave further entrenched worker vulnerability. Those in regular employment with higher wages and paid leave were less exposed to the economic impact of the sudden lockdowns, although the rapid shift to working-from-home placed other significant stresses on workers. Women did not enter the pandemic on an equal economic footing with men, and they continue to receive lower average rates of pay, have lower average retirement savings, and carry a heavier burden than men in terms of unpaid domestic labour. The lost wages and work hours women experienced during 2020, combined with the early raiding of their already lower superannuation balances, will have a profound and lasting impact on women's economic security. In order to 'build back better' post-COVID-19 we must address women's inequalities at work by driving decent secure jobs for women.

As a Committee, I encourage you to consider the gendered impact of job security and precarious employment.

Yours sincerely,
Professor Rae Cooper on behalf of:

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