

Clerical Workers, Enterprise Bargaining and Preference
Theory: Choice & Constraint.

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Summary

This thesis is a case study about the choices and constraints faced by women clerical workers in a labour market where they have very little autonomy in negotiating their pay and conditions of employment. On the one hand, clerical work has developed as a feminised occupation with a history of being low in status and low paid. On the other hand, it is an ideal occupation for women wanting to combine work and family across their life cycle. How these two phenomena impact upon women clerical workers ability to negotiate enterprise agreements is the subject of this thesis.

From a theoretical perspective this thesis builds upon Catherine Hakim's preference theory which explores the choices women clerical workers' make in relation to their work and family lives. Where Hakim's preference theory focuses on the way in which women use their agency to determine their work and life style choices, this thesis gives equal weighting to the impact of agency and the constraints imposed by external structures such as the availability of part-time work and childcare, as well as the impact of organisational culture.

The research data presented was based on face-to-face interviews with forty female clerical workers. The clerical workers ranged in age from 21 to 59 years of age. The respondents were made up of single or partnered women without family responsibilities, women juggling work and family, and women who no longer had dependent children and were approaching retirement. This thesis contends that these clerical workers are ill placed to optimise their conditions of employment under the new industrial regime of enterprise bargaining and individual contracts. Very few of the women were union members and generally they were uninformed about their rights and entitlements.

For my father Barry Thomson 1938-1999.

“Just about any dream grows stronger
if you hold on a little longer.”

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Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis for any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in this thesis were approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Human Ethics Committee.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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