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'MUSIC WHILE YOU WORK': TEENAGE WOMEN IN THE AUSTRALIAN LABOUR MARKET, 1947 TO 1992

Ian Watson

Teenage women have been particularly disadvantaged by the collapse of the youth labour market over the last 20 years. This article outlines the dimension of that problem, comparing the position young women held in the teenage labour market in the late 1940s with their position today. While the 1950s and 1960s saw growth in some areas of paid work for teenage women, the 1970s marked a watershed. With the major exception of saleswork in the retail industry and clerical work in banking, teenage women saw their place in the labour market dramatically shrink during that decade. Nearly 30,000 full-time jobs disappeared during the 1970s, to be replaced by nearly the same number of part-time jobs. The 1980s has seen these developments reach crisis proportions. In the late 1980s, nearly 40,000 clerical jobs were lost to teenage women, and again the only significant employment growth was in casualised service sector jobs, such as cashiers and sales workers. This article concludes by exploring the structural reasons behind these dramatic long-term changes.

Betty Masters is one of the interviewees in an oral history study of the post-war youth labour market.¹ The daughter of a coalminer who became a music teacher, Betty is now approaching the end of her working life and casts her mind back to the days of her youth in the late 1940s. Her reflections on the situation for working class teenagers who stayed behind in her home town capture well the irony of their labour market options:

People were not well off. In 1949, when I did the Leaving, there were a lot of families who were just sort of struggling along. ... It was quite common for people to have four and five and more children, and they simply couldn't afford to send them to university. ... When they reached the age of fifteen, and did their Intermediate, those people simply had to leave school and find a job.

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There were plenty of jobs to be had. Mostly dead end jobs for sure, but the jobs were there.

For teenage women who left school early, the youth labour market in the late 1940s provided a definite economic niche. Labour shortages were so severe that employers competed strongly for teenage labour. Set against this, however, was the narrow range of occupational possibilities open to teenage women and the strong social pressures to leave paid work once married. Certainly for the generation that preceded Betty, the severance between marriage and paid work was very strong:

Married women didn't work at that time... it was just unheard of for a married woman to go on working at her job. It simply wasn't done. ... And my aunt ... she kept secret that she was married. She worked in Sydney in an office and she kept it a secret that she was married because if it were known that she was married, she would have lost her job.

Even into the 1950s, discrimination against married women in the workforce was rife. In *Bobbin Up*, Dorothy Hewett's novel depicting the lives of women textile mill workers during that period, the Jumbuck mill sacked all its married women during a downturn in the industry. Hewett, herself, had earlier met the same discrimination within the labour movement when she was denied a job on the miners' paper, *Common Cause*, because 'they didn't believe in employing married women' (1985, p. ix). While the situation began to improve during the 1960s, the struggle to disconnect marital status and livelihood was still an onerous one. As late as 1968, the New South Wales Public Service still applied the 'marriage bar', whereby women who married were reclassified as temporary workers and forfeited their rights to career progression (O'Donnell 1984).

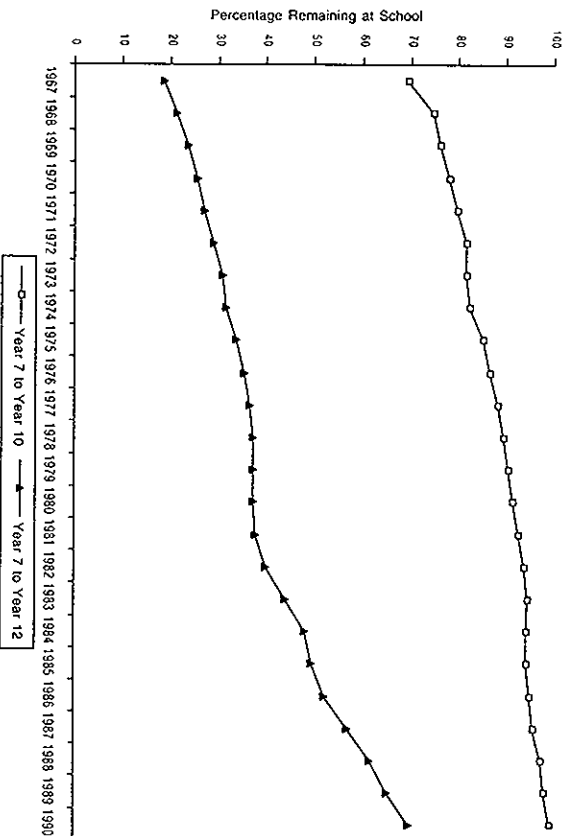
The 1970s was an important decade for women in the labour market. The equal pay decisions of 1969 and 1972, though they fell well short of providing real equality in incomes because of the highly sex-segregated labour market, marked a milestone (see Power 1975 and Mumford 1989 on segregation, and Gregory et al 1983 on equal pay). When coupled with other reforms during the 1980s, notably Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, there is little doubt that for young adult women with tertiary qualifications and access to the primary independent labour market,² these important changes provided them with a measure of economic independence unknown to their mothers' generation.

However, for young working class women leaving school without their Higher School Certificate (or its equivalent), their future lay

overwhelmingly in the secondary labour market.³ For these women, the question of economic independence had become highly problematic by the 1980s. As has been well documented, the 1970s was the decade in which the youth labour market collapsed (BLMR 1985; Sweet 1987; Baird et al 1981; Freeland 1991). Less well-known is the gender dimension of that tragedy: teenage women lost over one-quarter of the full-time jobs they had held at the start of that decade (compared with less than three per cent for males, Sweet 1983, pp. 18-19). Denied the opportunity of a livelihood in the labour market, teenage women stayed on at school in record numbers (see Figure 1), swelled the ranks of the unemployed, and disappeared into their parents' kitchens and other abodes of hidden unemployment (see Sheehan and Stricker 1981).

Wendy, one of the informants in Michele Turner's (1983, pp. 231-34) vivid account of unemployment, *Stuck*, recounted the bleak world facing the 1980s school leaver:

Figure 1: Female school retention rates for government and non-government schools, Australia



Source: DBET, 1991, Table A9.

When I first left school I did a receptionist diploma. It was a ten weeks' course. ... Then I was unemployed for ages, over a year. I thought, 'What is happening? I have a diploma and there is nothing.' ... Being out of work really upsets you. You sort of start thinking that there's something wrong with you because you can't get a job. One day I decided I would go out and go to every shop and ask them for a job. It took a lot to do that ... I got all dressed up and went out. I kept asking people and they kept saying 'No, I'm sorry we have enough staff.'

While the comparison between the late 1940s and the 1980s is both dramatic and illuminating, romanticising the past serves no purpose. Despite its buoyant labour market, the late 1940s was no paradise of young women's autonomy. While their place within the labour market may have been assured (at least until they married), teenage women faced wage levels so low that even a full-time job was insufficient to enable independent living. Not only did this oblige most young women to live in the parental home, but it also often meant living under repressive conditions of patriarchal authority. As many of the interviews in our oral history study make clear, the man did literally 'rule the roost' in that era. Only with marriage did the opportunity arise for young working class women to leave the parental home, though even that might take several years while the young couple searched for scarce rental accommodation or saved for a home deposit. With marriage, however, came strong social pressures to leave the paid work force and accept a new economic dependency on a man.

Ironically, it was the massive growth in part-time female employment from the 1960s onwards that opened the doors for this generation of married women to re-enter the labour force and win back a measure of their lost economic independence. Whereas in 1947 only 15.3 per cent of women in the female labour force had been married, by 1971 this figure had reached 56.8 per cent (Ryan and Conlon 1975). The irony lay in the fact that this explosion in part-time work was the other side of the coin to the collapse of full-time teenage employment.

This article analyses more closely the collapse of the youth labour market for young working class women, and particularly focuses on those areas where most jobs were lost and the reasons for this. While public perceptions of youth unemployment during the late 1970s overwhelmingly focused on the supposed deficits in the character of young people (being 'work shy' and so forth, see Windschuttle 1979, pp. 155-79), by the early 1990s it was becoming increasingly obvious that a

great many traditional 'youth jobs' had disappeared, never to return. In the wake of two recessions (1982 and 1991), important government inquiries produced reports calling for innovative strategies to tackle youth unemployment (Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs 1985; Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992). Both reports took it for granted that the traditional 'port-of-entry' career jobs for early school leavers had been lost for good.

The continuity in concern between the 1970s and the 1990s was, however, quite striking. As in the 1970s, the latest wave of anguish over youth unemployment has focused on the destructive effects of long-term unemployment on young people's character formation. Youth unemployment, drugs and crime have regularly featured in the media when they deal with youth issues (for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1986, p. 3; 1 February 1983, p. 2; see also White 1990). While compassion toward the young unemployed has been evident in some quarters (for example, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989), the public response has invariably been alarm over strains in the social fabric, expressed in fears of increased juvenile crime and a burgeoning population of street children. However, most of this community anxiety has dwelt almost exclusively on the young unemployed male. Teenage women have rarely featured in debates around youth unemployment, both in the academic literature (Alder 1986; Naffine and Gale 1989) and in the popular press. Instead, teenage women have usually appeared on an agenda dominated by issues of sexual morality: either they were drifting into prostitution (White 1990) or they were abusing the Supporting Parents' Benefit. As Donald Horne noted, 'In the 1980s the single mother became the exemplar of bludgers taking over from the unemployed' (cited in *Impact* 1989, p. 10).

In the analysis which follows I offer an overview of the period from 1947 through to 1992. In only a few cases do I make direct comparisons between absolute employment levels for these years,⁴ preferring instead to work with proportional figures. There are a number of reasons for this strategy. I do not want to suggest that a trend can be drawn between two widely disparate points in time, particularly when most of the significant trends date from the 1970s. Direct comparison is also difficult because of incompatibility in categories, particularly for occupations. While my analysis largely avoids aggregated data and works with both occupation and industry statistics at a relatively fine level of detail (see Mackay

1984b), it is still necessary to be cautious when making comparisons over a 45 year time span. For these reasons I have chosen in most cases to make comparisons using proportional figures, three of which are particularly useful. The 'age share percentage' reflects what proportion of women in a particular occupation or industry were teenagers, and is useful for highlighting the importance of their place in that particular area of the female labour market. The 'occupation or industry share percentage' indicates the degree of importance played by particular occupations or industries for young women's employment. Finally, the 'youth intensity ratio' (which is a measure of this teenage occupation or industry share percentage against the same percentage for mature adults) indicates the strength of age-segregation for particular occupations or industries (see Mackay 1984b). This ratio can be viewed both positively and negatively. On the one hand, if a particular occupation or industry has a high youth intensity ratio, then young people may be sheltered from competition with adults and thus may survive major employment losses occurring more generally in the economy. On the other hand, such a ratio can also indicate youth ghettos, areas where low wages and poor conditions proliferate and young people are exploited as cheap labour.

Major Trends: 1947 to 1981

In the aftermath of World War II, economic output in Australia increased dramatically, as pre-war patterns of production were resumed and service personnel were absorbed into the workforce. However, continuing economic expansion was hampered by grave shortages of labour, raw materials and capital equipment. Shortages of power and materials, and a growing pattern of industrial disputes, contributed to the problem of supplying capital goods. Importing capital goods was also constrained by overseas shortages and currency restrictions (Waterman 1972). The shortage of labour was largely due to demographic factors, particularly the abnormally low birth rates of the depression era.

Acute labour shortages were apparent in the female youth labour market during the post-war period. *Sydney Morning Herald* job advertisements during 1947, for example, highlighted the keen competition for young women across a broad range of occupations. Such job advertisements showed a bias towards clerical work since factory recruitment made greater use of word-of-mouth and vacancy notice boards. Nevertheless, it is clear from these job advertisements that factory

work faced steep competition from more desirable office jobs. This was reflected in the wording of many factory jobs, which sought to dispel the image of the dark satanic mills by stressing modernity: 'modern factory. Clean and pleasant working conditions' or 'Excellent working conditions in modern airy workroom'. Even more alluring was the offer, repeated in numerous jobs, of 'music while you work'. Other favourable working conditions, such as canteens, hot meals, morning and afternoon teas were regularly emphasised. In the case of one advertisement, it would be easy to overlook the point that the factory was also a workplace: 'Modern cafeteria, social and recreation club, tennis courts, and sports fields'; while another factory offered: 'Free Medical and Dental Services ... Tea supplied free'. For the more skilled areas, such as millinery and dressmaking, the offer of training was emphasised: 'Special tuition given and permanent positions assured'; while the distinction between this area of work and factory work was also highlighted: 'Apprentice for a dignified Remunerative Career, not factory'. In several job advertisements, parents were also invited to attend the interview, in part to assure themselves of the acceptable conditions under which their daughters would be working.

Of course, what an employer offers and what an employee finds may be worlds apart. Certainly, by the 1950s with labour shortages far less serious than in the late 1940s, factory work for young women was neither healthy nor rewarding. As the working class women in *Bobbin Up* made clear, the noise, dirt and danger of the textile factory was matched by arduous domestic labour in a climate of harsh poverty. The reputation of 'factory girls' was also an issue. In *Bobbin Up*, the spinning mill where the central characters worked was characterised by its toughness and by the 'coarse language' of its female workers, and in our oral history project, the informants commented on the 'toughness' of the factory women, a euphemism for both physical aggression and supposed sexual promiscuity.

It was through large-scale migration in the 1950s that labour shortages for factory work began to abate. By 1981, overseas-born women accounted for 58 per cent of all female jobs in factories and 54 per cent of female clothing workers. Pioneering studies of migrant factory work in the 1970s, such as *But I Wouldn't Want My Wife to Work Here*, showed that conditions for many women in the clothing industry had changed little from Hewett's cameo of the 1950s.

In 1947, the clothing industry was at the top of the list of industries for

teenage female employment, accounting for 5.7 per cent of all employment in that age group. By 1981, employment in that area of industry had dropped to thirteenth on the list, and accounted for less than one per cent. As Tables 1 and 2 show, the important clothing-related occupations suffered dramatic declines from the 1950s onwards, with the more highly skilled occupations virtually disappearing as niches for teenage women during the 1950s.

Table 1: Adult female employment levels in clothing occupations.

| Occupation (CLO) | 1947 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 |
|------------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Machinists, sewers etc | na | 32,024 | 32,470 | 11,021 |
| Dressmakers | 8,137 | 4,980 | 5,608 | 3,901 |
| Tailors | 4,540 | 2,400 | 1,483 | 683 |
| Milliners | 2,641 | 1,561 | 387 | 125 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1947, Census, 1961; Census, 1971 (Table SPO82); Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

Table 2: Teenage female employment levels in clothing occupations.

| Occupation (CLO) | 1947 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 |
|------------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| Machinists, sewers etc | na | 10,985 | 6,316 | 1,602 |
| Dressmakers | 5,307 | 1,579 | 915 | 197 |
| Tailors | 2,677 | 541 | 179 | 43 |
| Milliners | 1,442 | 667 | 36 | 12 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1947, Census, 1961; Census, 1971 (Table SPO82); Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

These figures are highly revealing. On the one hand, the figures for machinists and sewers in Table 2 illustrate the steady expulsion of teenage women from the clothing industry that was well underway during the 1960s and was largely the result of their displacement by a new source of cheap labour – migrant women. The adult employment figures in Table 1 held up until the disastrous collapse of the 1970s, when cheap Asian imports severely affected the textile, clothing and footwear industries (see below for more detail). On the other hand, in the more specialised, and more highly skilled, clothing occupations such as dressmaking, millinery and tailoring, both teenagers and adults suffered substantial declines from the 1950s onwards (though again teenagers suffered disproportionately). In a sense,

these occupations represented 'dying trades' and the steeper losses for teenagers during the 1970s highlighted their increasing exclusion from ground-level entry into these occupations.

It was in office work that teenage women had traditionally sought to escape the grime and 'reputation' of factory work. Within clerical work, the important areas for technical skill had always been typing and shorthand. In 1947, these were highly valued, with typing skills topping the list of attributes required by employers in the *Sydney Morning Herald* job advertisements for female school leavers. Whereas only 2.4 per cent of jobs required some form of schooling, and 5.4 per cent required prior experience, possession of typing and/or shorthand was mentioned in 9.4 per cent of jobs.

In 1947, typing and shorthand topped the list of occupations for teenage females and accounted for nearly 16 per cent of all their employment. By 1981, it had slipped to fifth on the list and only accounted for about 5.5 per cent. Significantly, the youth intensity ratio had dropped over that period from 2.1 to 1.4, whereas for general clerical work it had barely changed at all. In other words, the more technically skilled side of office work ceased to be the strong preserve of teenage women that it had been in the late 1940s, while their continued presence in the office of the 1980s was much more in a general clerical capacity. The teenage dominance of the female labour market in the post-war period is graphically demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4, which show their age share within selected occupations and industries. The equivalent percentages for 1981 are also included.

Table 3: Age share for female teenagers for selected occupations.

| Occupation (CLO) | 1947 | 1981 |
|--------------------|------|------|
| | % | % |
| Typists, shorthand | 44 | 16 |
| Clerks | 40 | 14 |
| Dressmakers | 39 | 5 |
| Machinists | 36 | 10 |
| Salesworkers* | 41 | 30 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1947; Census, 1981 (Table 118).
Note: 1947 Census figures for salesworkers included proprietors, the age share percentage has been adjusted to be comparable with subsequent Census figures.

Table 4: Age share for female teenagers for selected industries, 1947 and 1981.

| Industry | 1947 | 1981 |
|--------------------------|------|------|
| | % | % |
| Clothing making | 36 | 14 |
| Woollen & worsted mills | 30 | 11 |
| Private domestic service | 21 | 10 |
| Public hospital | 26 | 9 |
| Banking | 28 | 30 |
| Department, general | 35 | 28 |
| Groceries | 37 | 38 |
| Government | 23 | 10 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1947; Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

In essence, the female labour market in the late 1940s was overwhelmingly a youth labour market. Women aged 15 to 19 years constituted only 10.1 per cent of the total female population over 15 in 1947, yet they filled 26.8 per cent of the jobs held by women over 15 who were working. In some occupations (particularly office work) the proportions even climbed to above 40 per cent (Table 3). The 1981 figures reflect the collapse of the youth labour market which occurred during the 1970s, as well as the long-term increase in the proportion of adult women remaining (or re-entering) the workforce. While in some areas, such as banking and groceries, teenagers slightly increased their share of employment, the overwhelming pattern was one of decline. As well as the general movement away from factory work, the important skilled area of clerical work also contracted dramatically. In government administration, for example, the female teenage age share fell from just over 23 per cent to under 10 per cent.

The 1970s Collapse of the Youth Labour Market

The 1970s was a watershed for teenage women in the labour market. As mentioned earlier, by 1981 teenage women had lost nearly 25 per cent of all the full-time work they had held in 1971. If we draw up a 'balance sheet' which highlights the major occupational changes in that decade, the results are quite dramatic. Table 5 shows the debit side of the ledger; Table 6 the credit side.

It is significant that the most severe losses occurred in the most skilled

occupations. The reasons for these losses were varied but mainly related to occupational restructuring under the impact of technological change. While there was a massive expansion in office work for women during the 1970s (female employment in clerical occupations doubled in both the private sector and government sectors), the traditional technical skills of office work – typing, shorthand and machine operating – suffered dramatic falls. The widespread introduction of business computers and other technologies such as photocopiers, dictaphones and automatic telephone systems profoundly altered the traditional technical division of labour within the office. In one sense, teenagers shared with adults in the costs of occupational restructuring. However, they suffered a greater proportion of the losses: their age share in typing and stenography dropped from 23 per cent to 16 per cent, and in machine operating their age share dropped from 28 per cent to 12 per cent. Technological change also lay behind the loss of jobs in the communications industry. Telecom's automation of telephone exchanges during the 1970s, for example, accounted for about two-thirds of the losses in telephony for teenagers.

Table 5: 'Debit side' occupational losses for teenage women, 1971 to 1981.

| Occupation | Loss in jobs |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Stenographers and typists | 23,876 |
| Office machine operators | 7,743 |
| Machinists, sewers etc | 4,714 |
| Trainee nurses | 4,424 |
| Telephonists | 3,079 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1971 (Tape SBO82) and Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

The other major source of job loss was industrial restructuring and decline. The decimation of employment in the textile, clothing and footwear industries during the 1970s was vividly highlighted in Tables 1 and 2 earlier and its impact on teenagers working as machinists was evident in Table 5 above. While this decline was part of a long-term deterioration in manufacturing employment which began in the late 1960s, it was given added momentum by the 1973 tariff reduction and the world recession which followed soon after. The tariff reduction – a substantial 25 per cent – resulted in a major inflow of imports of clothing,

footwear and textiles from ASEAN countries. Local employers responded by shifting to importing rather than manufacturing, as well as moving offshore and relocating their production in Asia. The loss in jobs due to ASEAN imports in 1976-77 alone was over 20,000 (Catley and McFarlane 1983).

Table 6: 'Credit side' occupational gains for teenage women, 1971 to 1981.

| Occupation | Gain in jobs |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Salespersons and shop assistants | 23,063 |
| Book-keepers and cashiers | 4,963 |
| Government clerks | 3,369 |
| Receptionists | 2,801 |
| Waitresses | 1,962 |
| Catering and kitchen | 1,942 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1971 (Tape SPO82) and Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

Table 7: Percentage of teenage employees working full-time hours in 1981.

| Occupation | % FT |
|----------------------------------|------|
| <i>'Debit side'</i> | |
| Stenographers and typists | 91.4 |
| Office machine operators | 90.2 |
| Machinists, sewers etc | 89.5 |
| Trainee nurses | 93.3 |
| Telephonists | 76.1 |
| <i>'Credit side'</i> | |
| Salespersons and shop assistants | 58.8 |
| Book-keepers and cashiers | 48.8 |
| Government clerks | 88.5 |
| Receptionists | 85.8 |
| Waitresses | 27.1 |
| Catering and kitchen workers | 37.2 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

The decline in manufacturing employment in Australia during the 1970s was mirrored by a steady rise in employment in the tertiary sector of the economy. Indeed, over a 20 year period from the early 1960s to the

early 1980s manufacturing's share in output declined by three per cent while the service sector's share grew by three per cent (Caves and Krause 1984). But in terms of employment, the symmetry did not hold: the job losses in manufacturing were overwhelmingly full-time jobs while those gained in services were heavily biased toward part-time and casual work. For teenage women, in particular, this conversion of jobs was profound: between 1972 and 1978, their part-time employment increased by 28,000, while their full-time employment fell by 29,000 (Gregory and Duncan 1980). Not surprisingly, when we turn to the credit side of our ledger (Table 6), and examine the occupations where teenage women actually gained significant new jobs during the 1970s, we find them overwhelmingly in areas where casual and part-time work predominated (Table 7).

The retail industry was a major growth area for teenagers during the 1970s. The increases in retailing occupations were even greater than that suggested by the figures for sales workers because the great majority of bookkeepers and cashiers worked in the retail industry. (Indeed, over 50 per cent of teenage cashiers were working in grocery stores.) The significance of casual and part-time work in the retail industry will be explored in considerable detail below.

The growth in receptionist work for teenagers reflected the growing importance of business services during the 1970s. While the major area for work was still in doctors' and dentists' surgeries (and there was little change in employment levels here), significant growth in real estate and professional services such as lawyers and accountants was also evident. It is interesting to note that while the demand for the technical skills of teenage women working in white collar jobs (such as typing and stenography) were in significant decline, the demand for their social skills, such as interpersonal communication, seemed to be on the increase. It is, however, salutary to note that much receptionist work exploits young women's cheap labour and feminine appearance, as much as it values their human relations skills.

The 1980s and Beyond

Direct comparisons between the 1970s and 1980s are difficult to draw because the Australian Bureau of Statistics began using a different occupational coding system from the 1986 Census onwards. Nevertheless, by using the ASCO/CLO link file (ABS 1988) it is

possible to convert pre-1986 occupational data into estimates which can be used for comparison with 1986 Census data (1991 Census data are not yet available).⁶ These comparisons are for occupations at the minor group level. Another set of comparisons at the major group level are possible by using 1992 Labour Force Estimates (ABS 1992). Both these sets of comparisons are used for the following analysis. It is worth noting that the new occupational classification is based on skill, and is thus very useful for measuring changing skill compositions in the labour force.

During the early 1980s the trends which had emerged in the 1970s steadily worsened, with the absolute numbers of teenage women in the labour force actually declining for the first time since the 1960s. As in the 1970s, teenage women continued to lose jobs in all areas of skilled work while the only areas which showed significant growth were the unskilled and casualised jobs in retail sales. Table 8 summarises the main changes between 1981 and 1986 for teenage women. While the severe losses in skilled office work continued the long-term trend, the impact of the 1982 recession was also evident in the decline in manufacturing jobs, particularly the loss of over 11,000 jobs in the areas of labouring and factory work. Thus, the early 1980s saw a major collapse in those few

Table 8: Occupational gains and losses for teenage women, 1981 to 1986.

| Occupation (ASCO Minor Group) | Change in job Nos. |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Sales assistants | +5,772 |
| Tellers, cashiers etc | +11,310 |
| Miscellaneous tradespersons | +2,337 |
| Stenographers and typists | -10,887 |
| Trades assistants and factory hands | -5,066 |
| Numerical clerks | -4,351 |
| Miscellaneous labourers etc | -4,365 |
| Registered nurses | -4,044 |
| Machine operators | -2,631 |
| Personal service workers | -2,227 |
| Managing supervisors (sales etc) | -1,892 |
| Business professionals | -1,561 |
| Miscellaneous clerks | -1,192 |
| Data processing etc | -1,171 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1981 (Tape 118); Census, 1986 (ABS Cat. 2498.0).

areas of unskilled work which had offered full-time work to early school leavers. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, skilled work for teenagers continued to decline, with clerical occupations experiencing a massive drop of nearly 40,000 jobs and para-professionals dropping by nearly 6,000. Again, the major area for job growth was saleswork, though interestingly, labouring occupations recovered from the sharp decline they had shown in the early 1980s.

Table 9: Occupational changes for teenage women, 1986 to 1992.

| Occupation (ASCO for Major Group) | 1986 | 1992 | Change |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Managers and administrators | 2,047 | 910 | -1,137 |
| Professionals | 4,073 | 4,576 | +503 |
| Para-professionals | 7,300 | 1,602 | -5,698 |
| Tradespersons | 15,665 | 12,853 | -2,812 |
| Clerks | 82,412 | 44,055 | -38,357 |
| Salespersons and personal service etc | 113,185 | 165,174 | +51,989 |
| Plant & machine operators and drivers | 5,444 | 2,647 | -2,797 |
| Labourers and related workers | 24,634 | 29,825 | +5,191 |
| Total | 259,968 | 261,643 | +1,675 |

Source: Census, 1986 (ABS Cat. 2498.0) and Labour Force Estimates, May 1992 (microfiche Group 450 Table E19).

For the teenage labour market as a whole, the late 1980s saw a continuation of the underlying trends of the 1970s and early 1980s. As Russell Ross (1988) noted, despite the addition of one million new jobs to the economy in the years between 1983 and 1988, full-time employment among teenagers fell in absolute terms, while their part-time employment rose by about 60 per cent. While the teenage unemployment rate had dropped slightly, so too had their labour force participation rate, as more and more teenagers stayed on at school. Ross (1988, pp. 9-10) also found that underutilisation of teenage labour was widespread, and he produced figures which suggested that 'one-third of all potential teenage labour supply is underutilised' and concluded:

there is still a sizeable pool of underutilisation among people who are outside the formal labour force but who nevertheless are interested in paid employment (but do not meet the criteria for being classified as discouraged jobseekers). The implication is that there is a large pool of teenagers who would enter the labour market if jobs were available.

The Retail Industry: Casuals and Students

As mentioned above, the experience of teenage women in the retail industry appears to provide a glaring exception to the pattern of remorseless job loss. Not only did saleswork move to the top of the list of teenage occupations by 1981, but the industry classes of grocery shops, department stores and take-away stores dominated the list of teenage industries (in first, third and fifth position). Moreover, as Tables 2 and 3 also showed, these were the prime areas where the teenage share held up against the overall trend of dramatic decline. (And, as the previous section has just shown, strong growth continued unabated during the 1980s.) Indeed, measured in terms of youth intensity ratios, the changes over the period between 1947 and 1981 were quite startling.

Table 10: Female youth intensity ratios for salesworkers and for selected industries.

| Occupation/Industry | 1947 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Salesworkers | 1.47 | 1.79 | 1.79 | 3.12 |
| Grocery stores | 1.57 | 1.54 | 1.98 | 4.38 |
| Department and general stores | 1.46 | 1.58 | 1.81 | 2.86 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1947; Census, 1961, Census, 1971 (Tape SPO82); Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

Before we rush to conclude that saleswork rescued teenage women from the black hole left by the collapse of their labour market during the 1970s, we should pause to consider the nature of that work, of the kinds of jobs young women found themselves doing in the retail industry in the early 1980s. The picture which emerges is far from re-assuring. While the dominant position that saleswork within the retail industry came to hold for young women in the 1980s is beyond dispute, there are a number of important qualifications which must be considered. Whereas in the late 1940s youth jobs went to *school leavers*, by the 1980s *school students* had assumed a major presence in that market. Similarly, in the late 1940s youth jobs were overwhelmingly full-time jobs, whereas by the 1980s many youth jobs, particularly in retailing, had become part-time or casual.⁷ Table 11 highlights this characteristic of the 1980s, showing the sizeable reductions in employment in retailing when full-time students and part-time workers are removed from the teenage figures.

Table 11 shows dramatically that virtually half the jobs in these retailing areas for teenage women evaporate when full-time students and part-time workers are excluded. By comparison the loss of jobs in banking, which provides higher paid and more highly skilled work, is negligible. The major reason why teenage women survived the casualisation of their labour in the banking industry was trade union intervention, which prevented any part-time conversions until 1975, and then placed a ceiling of three per cent on such conversions until 1982 (Anne Junor, personal communication; see also Riches 1982).

Table 11: Female employment for all teenagers compared with employment which excludes part-time workers and full-time students (selected industries).

| Industry Class | All | Ex p/t & stud | Reduction % |
|-------------------|--------|---------------|-------------|
| Take away food | 7,832 | 2,827 | 64 |
| Grocery stores | 26,921 | 13,587 | 50 |
| Department stores | 13,170 | 7,033 | 47 |
| General stores | 4,241 | 2,391 | 44 |
| Savings banks | 6,049 | 5,398 | 11 |
| Hairstressing | 5,567 | 5,037 | 10 |
| Trading banks | 9,201 | 8,328 | 9 |

Source: Derived from Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

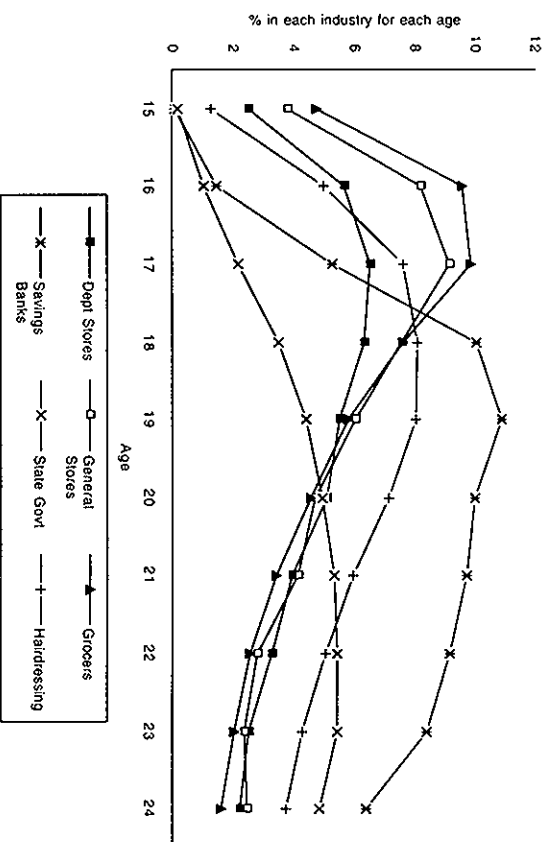
When the category 'youth' is broken down into individual years (when age profiles are constructed), the retailing areas are again shown to be quite distinctive in their employment of teenagers. As Figure 2 shows, the retailing examples have very high take-up rates of 15 and 16 year olds, and very dramatic declines for those over 18 years old. In his analysis of similar data, Mackay (1984b, p. 13) noted the 'close relationship between age and [award] wage rates in sales occupations' as well as 'the policy of some retailers to employ the cheapest type of labour possible'.

During the 1970s school students entered the part-time workforce in significant numbers, with a six-fold increase occurring between 1971 and 1981. This resulted in school students accounting for 60 per cent of the teenage part-time labour force (Carter 1990). In supermarkets, school students working casually appear to have played an important role in

sustaining extended trading hours. In the fast food section of the industry, employment of school students has become 'critical to the viability of many retailers' (Carter 1990, p. 40). For example, the American fast food chain, McDonalds, employed 12,000 staff in NSW in 1992 and 80 per cent of these were 15 to 19 year olds. Ninety-five percent of McDonalds' teenage workforce were casual workers, predominantly students (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1992).

Analyses by Rosewarne (1983; 1984), Game and Pringle (1983), O'Donnell (1984) and Carter (1986) have shown how employment practices within the large retail corporations were radically re-organised from the 1970s onwards. A much greater emphasis on self-service and increased use of computerised cash registers lead to job losses for shop assistants and the deskilling of remaining staff. Casualisation became an important feature of retailing during the 1970s. As Stuart Rosewarne (1984, p. 77) argued, 'the extension of the retail enterprises into the suburbs was overwhelmingly of a part-time and casual nature' and he produced figures to show that full-time positions in retailing fell by

Figure 2: Age effects on female employment in selected industries, 1981.



Source: Derived from Census, 1981 (Tape 118).

30,000 during the 1970s while casual and part-time workers grew by almost 100,000 over the same period. Women were particularly vulnerable to this process of casualisation, with their proportion of full-time work dropping by 25 percentage points during the 1960s and 1970s (Rosewarne 1984).

A study of casual employment in Australia (Dawkins and Norris 1990) highlighted why casualisation was such an important feature of the retail industry. It noted a number of the key characteristics of industries where casualisation is high: where there are strong fluctuations in demand; where training costs are low; where the industry is a high employer of women and where the industry is weakly unionised. The retail industry typifies all these features. Its variable pattern of demand, both during the week and during the day, makes flexibility in labour supply a critical issue for management. As noted earlier, the expansion of self-service shopping has led to much of the saleswork in retailing becoming increasingly deskilled over the last two decades, and this has reduced training costs considerably. A 1989 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey into training expenditure found that retailing was amongst the three lowest spending industries (Dawkins and Norris 1990). In terms of female employment, retailing has been steadily feminised during this period, rising from 56 per cent in 1969 to 64 per cent by 1980 (Rosewarne 1984). Finally, the retail and wholesale trade, along with recreation and personal services and agriculture, are the industries which have the lowest union intensity (Dawkins and Norris 1990).

Once casualised work becomes dominant in an industry, it is difficult to restore full-time conditions. In terms of labour supply, particular categories of people are attracted to that industry and people who require a full-time living wage (such as breadwinners and unemployed persons) cannot enter that market. This is one reason why married women returning to the labour market and students in their final years at school have provided a major source of labour in retailing. While women with a full-time working partner may be able to survive on casual wages, this does not mean that casualised labour is the optimum situation. An Australian Bureau of Statistics survey in 1986 found that 42 per cent of casuals would have preferred to be working on a permanent basis (Dawkins and Norris 1990).

When an attempt was made in the mid-1980s to decasualise retailing in NSW, employers complained that they had difficulties 'finding enough

unemployed people willing to work in these jobs and hours' (Carter 1990, p. 48). Clearly, with employment structured in this way, only students and married women could afford to enter the industry. As Justice Macken noted in a conference on the youth labour market in 1985:

I do not exaggerate when I say that in NSW alone there are tens of thousands of jobs available if only the service industries can be induced to employ children who have left school rather than those who are still at school (in Herrmann et al 1985, p. 31).

Explaining the Changes in the Youth Labour Market

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a number of political economists sought to explain the restructuring of the Australian economy in terms of de-industrialisation (Crough and Wheelwright 1982; Alford 1979; Crough, Wheelwright and Wilshire 1980; Catley and McFarlane 1983). The strongest proponents of this theme were writing in the context of the 'resources boom' of the early 1980s and were inclined to characterise the restructuring in a very unilinear a fashion, fastening on to metaphors of Australia becoming a 'quarry' or developing a 'milk bar' economy. Nevertheless, their insights into the unique characteristics of Australian capitalism were fruitful for explaining the nature of that shift. Catley and McFarlane (1983), for instance, explained the advanced development of the service sector in Australia in terms of its colonial history. Despite having developed a Third World exporter status in the world market, Australia's domestic social structure had remained metropolitan rather than colonial, thus creating an advanced service sector.

Other commentators, such as Gibson and Horvath (1983a; 1983b), suggested that the process of economic restructuring was far more uneven and needed to be seen in terms of three discrete processes: de-industrialisation, rationalisation, and industrialisation. For Gibson and Horvath (1983b), restructuring represented a transition between two distinct 'submodes of production', a long-term shift from a monopoly submode to a global submode. From outside a Marxist perspective, most commentators have acknowledged the world-wide trend toward manufacturing decline and service expansion, with Barry Jones, for example, noting that the 'post-industrial' stage is itself about to be superseded by a 'post-service' stage (Jones 1982).

These more overarching analyses of economic restructuring are useful for locating occupational and industry changes within a broader context, and they can thus be used to explain how particular groups of women

have been severely disadvantaged by industrial restructuring, particularly in manufacturing. However, they do not deal with a major anomaly for young women in the labour market, namely the areas of greatest decline in their full-time jobs has been in those sectors of the economy which have been expanding. Consequently, for a more complete account of these changes we need to focus on why particular groups of workers are affected by restructuring in such different ways. While the emphasis on capital's search for cheaper forms of labour is obviously accurate in a global sense, it overlooks the more localised needs of specific industries and firms, where flexibility in hours worked, a new mix of job skills, or employer strategies for controlling the labour process, may be more significant in determining the kinds of jobs which are created.

A number of explanations have been offered for why young people were disproportionately affected by the restructuring of the Australian economy. While most of these analyses have focused almost exclusively on the issue of youth unemployment, and its dramatic rise during the late 1970s, some of the studies have also explored the critical areas of teenage underemployment and industrial restructuring.

The most important supply-side analysis of teenage unemployment was Gregory and Duncan's 1980 paper exploring the 'atypical' increase in teenage labour supply during the 1970s. They explicitly rejected the emphasis other commentators had placed on the lack of employment demand induced by the recession of the mid-1970s. Instead, they argued, the massive increase in part-time teenage jobs, and the corresponding fall in full-time jobs, had distorted the traditional pattern of teenage labour force participation. Where once, increases in labour demand for teenagers would have led to a decline in their unemployment rate, new conditions in the 1970s changed this relationship. In particular, the phenomena of students working in casual jobs and unemployed teenagers not accepting part-time work because of the earnings test attached to unemployment benefits, meant that labour demand simply increased the labour force participation rate for teenagers (particularly students) and failed to reduce the unemployment pool (1980, p. 329).

While Gregory and Duncan's study emphasised labour supply, they did so in the context of industrial restructuring, particularly the casualisation of teenage jobs which this article highlighted earlier. The same perceptiveness was missing, however, in another supply-side study from the mid-1980s, the Bureau of Labour Market Research's (BLMR

1983) study on youth wages and employment. Using econometric techniques, and grounding their analysis in neo-classical economic theory, the BLMR researchers sought to establish the impact of increased youth wages during the 1970s on levels of youth employment, hoping to test the view that teenage unemployment was the result of their wages being too high. The results of the BLMR literature review were inconclusive, as was their own econometric analysis, and the BLMR researchers concluded that it was not possible to quantify the relationship between youth wages and the demand for youth labour. They did, however, draw upon their neo-classical theory to suggest that the direction of the relationship was more definite: if youth wages rose, youth employment fell.

In his analysis of the youth labour market, Richard Sweet effectively removed any empirical basis for this BLMR claim by highlighting the very short period of time in which youth wages ran ahead of adult wages (in the period 1972-74), a time period incommensurate with the long-term decline in youth employment. Sweet's own analysis emphasised the complex interaction between technological change (particularly in communications and electronics), industrial restructuring and competition with adults. The latter point is particularly significant for young women. The apprenticeship system – which is overwhelmingly dominated by males – restricts competition between junior workers and adults and in this way offers some protection to teenage males which is entirely absent for teenage females (Sweet 1987). As Sweet noted, the public sector was one area where such competition was very fierce. This was illustrated graphically in Kalisch and Stretton's 1984 study of recruitment into the public sector, which showed that during the 1970s teenagers lost 50,000 potential jobs in that area of employment. These were jobs which would have been gone to teenagers if they had retained their 1960s share of public sector employment. Kalisch and Stretton (1984) concluded that teenagers lost lower level clerical positions to adults who were better qualified, but that the higher qualifications were not actually needed in these jobs, they simply acted as screening devices to sift and sort the large pool of applicants.

In summing up the reasons why teenagers lost their place in the full-time labour market, Sweet (1987, p. 17) noted that most of the factors did not result from economic recession, but rather, were the product of rising productivity:

an increased sophistication of employers in matching labour supply to labour demand; the growth of subcontracting; technological innovation; a finer division of labour; higher entry qualifications in such areas as nursing; unregulated competition from more experienced and better educated labour force entrants; and the dynamics of a labour market which gives preference to skill and experience in both firing and hiring decisions.

This analysis, which sees economic growth as the major cause of young people's employment plight, bodes ill for the future. Any confidence that once the current recession passes, young people's job prospects will improve, is sorely misplaced. John Freeland's (1986, pp. 10-11) comments are as relevant today as when he wrote them:

by themselves, economic recovery and sustained growth would not solve the problems besetting the teenage full-time labour market. ... In short, it would appear that the teenage full-time labour market has undergone, or is undergoing, a long-term and permanent structural change which is progressively excluding 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds from the full-time labour market.

Conclusions

The picture outlined earlier of a heavily casualised teenage labour market has led some commentators to quite pessimistic conclusions. In terms of retailing for example, Carter (1986, p. 27) notes the absence of career opportunities for young people and their exploitation as 'the cheapest available labour'. In terms of the youth labour market as a whole, Sweet (1987, p. 21) decries the growth of 'dead-end, marginalised part-time jobs that are not linked to training or to career paths'. However, some commentators have rejected this pessimism, suggesting that the employment of school students has positive implications. Wilson and his colleagues (1987, p. 5), for instance, argue that respondents in their survey reported positive consequences from their involvement in part-time work: 'experiences gained here were seen ... as directly relevant to future employment. It was in this context that the skills, knowledge and other benefits derived from part-time employment were experienced'. However, what the more positive viewpoint overlooks is that the only growth areas in the teenage labour market are for part-time workers. As these become monopolised by students, the opportunities for full-time work for non-students evaporates. In other words, it is working class teenage women who are the major losers in this re-organisation of the labour market. Irrespective of the benefits to middle class youth who happen to be passing through on their way to tertiary studies (and thence,

into the primary independent labour market), the teenage labour market has overwhelmingly failed to provide a livelihood for working class teenagers, forcing them to stay longer at school.

By the early 1990s, debates around changes in the youth labour market had moved into a setting very different to that prevailing in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The impetus given to industry training through award restructuring and the Federal Government's training levy dovetailed with a virtual explosion in demand for post-secondary education. Secondary school retention rates reached an historic high, and unmet demand for TAFE and university places soared. These changes led some commentators to observe that full-time work for teenagers was largely a thing of the past, and that a better future for them lay in becoming more highly trained young adults (Gregory 1992). This logic underpinned the analysis of both the Finn review of post-compulsory schooling and the Carnichael report on vocational training. However, not all commentators have been swayed by this logic:

placing everyone in education and training does not solve the basic fact of unemployment. Unemployment will still be there when they graduate ... It is not enough to shovel everyone into education and training and say 'problem solved'. All this achieves is 'problem postponed' (Marginson 1992).

In the mid-1950s, Don Spearritt wrote a two volume account of the activities of Australian adolescents for the Australian Council for Educational Research. In the conclusion to volume two, which dealt with their occupational activities, Spearritt noted the worrying trend for adolescents to leave school too early. However, unlike commentators in the 1980s for whom early school leaving was equated with long-term unemployment, Spearritt's concerns were almost the opposite. The attractions of the labour market were so great, that too few adolescents were progressing to tertiary education. Raising the school leaving age, a controversial topic throughout the 1950s, was seen as one avenue for addressing this problem but it threatened to unleash new problems. Spearritt posed the inevitable question: 'Will the advantage to the community of providing more education for these adolescents offset the economic consequences of their withdrawal from the labour market?' (1958, p. 98). How things have changed! Thirty-five years later, the abiding concern for most commentators in this field has become youth unemployment. Far from being integral to the health of the economy, teenage labour has become an embarrassing surplus.

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Notes

1. This oral history project is a two-year study of the youth labour market from 1947 to 1981. When complete, some 80 life-histories will have been gathered. An analysis of these life-histories can be found in: Ian Watson (forthcoming) *Class Lives: Memory, Identity and Community in Post-war Australia*. The informant's name in this paper (Betty Masters) is fictional but the transcriptions are verbatim.
2. Following the usage of segmented labour market theory (Edwards 1979; Gordon et al 1982), I distinguish between the primary independent, primary subordinate and secondary labour markets. While the primary independent labour market is characterised by internal recruitment, it is also overwhelmingly a credentialled labour market when it comes to external recruitment. Thus tertiary qualifications become a critical factor in gaining entry to jobs in this labour market.
3. Unlike young working class men, the absence of a wide range of apprenticeships for young working class women meant that easy entry into the primary subordinate labour market was denied them.
4. Working with time series statistics is particularly difficult over long periods of time because of variations in methods of classification. In the case of occupation, for example, three different systems have been used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (or its predecessor, the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics) since the end of World War II. For the period 1961-81, the Classification and Classified List of Occupations (CCLCO) was used. Variations due to internal reclassifications within this system can be monitored using the linking method developed by Mackay (1984a). For the 1986 and 1991 censuses, the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) was used. While this is a system which is conceptually quite

- different to the CLO, linking methods have been developed (ABS 1988) and these have been used in this article for analysing the 1980s. For the period prior to 1961, no linking methods are available but by working at the unit level of occupational data, direct comparisons are still feasible. Even here, however, caution is required because different methods of classification can produce inconsistencies between censuses. For example, proprietors were included in the 1947 classification for salesworkers and had to be removed for comparability with the later figures.
5. The advertisements analysed come from the Saturday edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 June 1947. This date was chosen because of its proximity to the Census of that year, and also because it was a month with minimal seasonal variability.
 6. The sample population for teenage females used in the ASCO/CLO link file numbers 26,993, giving a relative standard error for the estimates of approximately 3.3 per cent.
 7. To some extent the terms 'part-time' and 'casual' are interchangeable, indicating hours of work which are not full-time. However, the strict definition of casual (used by the ABS) refers to workers with no entitlements to annual leave or sick leave, while the more general definition within labour economics refers to workers with no expectation of a continuing relationship with their employer (Dawkins and Norris 1990). Clearly, from the point of view of the worker there is an important difference between the 'permanency' attached to part-time work compared with casual. Similarly, from the point of view of income earned, there is an important difference between part-time work of less than 15 hours and work of over 25 hours. In the discussion of retailing in this article, the issue of casualisation is critical and the usage of the term here focuses on the 'marginality' of the work in terms of earning a livelihood.
 8. This is not to suggest that labour supply is responsible for initiating casualisation. I would agree with Carter (1986, p. 26) that 'the increasing proportion of casual employees is a deliberate labour market policy adopted by employers'. My point is that once such a market comes into existence, it influences the labour supply willing to enter that market.

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NOTE

Adolescent Suicide in the Australian Rural Recession

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The current rural recession has presented new challenges and complicated old ones for the rural populations of Australia. Unemployment, poverty, isolation, lack of education, health and welfare resources have all been identified to be contributing to the increase in adolescent suicide.

Along with homelessness, suicide, defined as self-inflicted death, has been identified as one of the most serious problems facing Australia (Beck, Rawlins and Williams 1988). An international analysis of suicide statistics found that Australian male youth suicide in Australia had risen 66 per cent between the years of 1973 to 1987 and that female youth suicide also had risen relative to their general rates (Pritchard 1992). Recent studies found that youth suicide in Australia had increased during the years from 1968 to 1988 from 7.3 per 100,000 to 21.0 for males and from 2.4 per 100,000 to 4.7 for females (Dudley and Waters 1991). In NSW the increase in suicide has been predominantly isolated to rural-remote communities. Rural city youth suicide increased from 5.1 to 12.5 and for rural shires and municipalities from 3.9 to 20.7 during the years 1964 to 1988 (Dudley, Waters, Kelk and Howard 1992). It is important to note that many researchers indicate that these figures are conservative due to the religious, social and cultural taboos placed on the act of suicide.

A study of suicide rates within the Orana and Far West Health Region (OPWR) in NSW found that 188 residents of this region committed suicide between the years 1981 and 1990 and rates of suicide for males lies between three and five per 100,000 for females (Phillips 1992). Of the 188 suicides, 57 were residents of the Far West Region. Sex distribution showed 52 were males and five females. The researcher stated that 'the rate of successful suicide in Broken Hill was double that of the rest of the region' (Phillips 1992). Firearm-related suicides were the most common method used.

The historical view that rural Australia represented health and freedom from stress is eroding. Research has identified a crucial link between changes occurring within rural industries and the welfare of those living in country towns (Lawrence and Williams 1990). It has been