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Women reconciling their lives inside and outside the home

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Reconciling Work and Family Life: a key policy concern in the 1990's and 2000s in the EU and its member states

Work = Employment

Family life = unpaid caring for dependent children

This focus reflects

- increased labour force participation of women with pre-school children
- policy objective to increase employment rate

Employment-Anchored Social Policy Framework

Employment as key to social inclusion reflected in

1. National Action Plan on Employment
2. National Action Plan on Social Inclusion

Policy options:

1. Child care
2. Parental leave
3. Flexibility in employment

People with caring responsibilities for whom the present policies do not work:

- Those who cannot access employment and/or can access only poor quality employment
- Those with extensive caring demands

→ Unpaid caring is not just an issue of child care

→ Quality of employment is as important as quantity of employment

Distribution of types of jobs European Union 2000

'Good quality' jobs characterised by (i) decent pay and productivity, (ii) relative job security and (iii) employer provided training and career prospects	38%
'Reasonable quality' jobs characterised by (i) decent pay and productivity, and <i>either</i> (ii) relative job security <i>or</i> (iii) employer provided training and career prospects	37%
'Low productivity' jobs characterised by (i) below 75% of country specific median pay and (ii) some job security <i>or</i> career prospects	17%
'Dead-end' jobs offer neither job security nor employer provided training and half of them have low pay and productivity	8%

Source: European Commission, 2001a:74-75

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Area Profiles

Area	Child Poverty	Community Infrastructure
Derry 1	91%	Women's group providing education and childcare
Derry 2	93%	Women's group – no childcare
Greater Belfast 1	84%	Women's Centre with purpose-built crèche and educational facilities
Greater Belfast 2	72%	No women's group, childcare or educational facilities

Personal Characteristics of Sample

- 3 out of 4 left school at 16 or younger
- 1 in 3 first child before 18 years of age
- 1 in 2 had first child at age 18 – 21
- Almost half have 4 or more children

Life Outside the Home

- Paid employment
- Community Involvement
- Leisure

Obstacles to Paid Employment 1

- Lack of job opportunities
- Quality of jobs available
- Costs associated with Tax Credits
- Stress of 'managing poverty'
- Transitions from benefits to work and back

Obstacles to Paid Employment II

- Scarcity and cost of childcare
- Lack of services for disabled & older people
- Need for good, cheap public transport
- Lack of after-schools clubs/youth facilities

Obstacles to Paid Employment III

- Low expectations
- View of 'good mother'
- No safe play areas
- Literacy / numeracy problems
- Informal employment – not 'real work'

Involvement in Community

- **Children's Activities** – Guides, Sunday School, bus runs, football, summer schemes (especially alternatives to bonfires etc)
- **Women's group**
- **Community-based study**

Obstacles to Leisure

- Depression, stress, anxiety
- High levels of disability/longterm illness
- Caring responsibilities exacerbated by poverty and lack of services

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