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## **Widening Horizons: Improving the role of women in the workplace**



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[www.wideninghorizons.org.uk](http://www.wideninghorizons.org.uk)

The full report can be downloaded from the 'Widening Horizons' website, as can other publications produced during the 'Barriers' and 'Widening Horizons' research projects.

# Section 1 – Overview of Research

## 1.1 Introduction to Research

This report presents the findings from a 15-month study of women's employment in the North East of England, 'Widening Horizons: Improving the role of women in the workplace', funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) under Objective 3. This objective focused on tackling barriers to women's labour market participation. The overall purpose of the project was to develop an understanding of the informal barriers and opportunities that shape women's employment decisions. This research, carried out between January 2004 and March 2005, is the second of two projects which examined women's working lives, the first being 'Barriers to Women's Employment & Progression In the Labour Market in the North East of England' (Green et al., 2004). While this report stands alone as a set of findings from 'Widening Horizons', it can also be read as a development of the 'Barriers' report<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.1.1 Why the need for 'Widening Horizons'?

#### Context and in-depth focus

Existing research has documented women's position in the labour market nationally (Dench et al., 2002) and in the North East (Buckner et al., 2004; Government Office for the North East, 2002; Northern TUC, 2002), as well as identifying barriers to employment and progression (Green et al., 2004), exploring the prevalence of family friendly policies (Cunningham et al., 2004) and the gender pay gap (Northern TUC, 2002; Anderson et al., 2001). For the most part, this has been quantitative in focus and has provided a valuable snapshot of gender and employment in the North East. 'Widening Horizons' aimed to complement this broad focus by providing an in-depth exploration of the context, diversity and the impact of change in women's working lives. It is now well known that women participate in the labour market in tandem with a multiplicity of other roles and responsibilities, and it is increasingly clear that understanding the impact of these wider personal and social contexts is a vital part of labour market studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from the 'Widening Horizons' website at <http://www.wideninghorizons.org.uk>

### **Longitudinal approach**

Few studies have explored women's working lives in the North East over time. Addressing this gap, 'Widening Horizons' focused a longitudinal lens on the working lives of a small sample of women in the North East, highlighting future plans and aspirations, adaptations and coping strategies that emerged, developed and changed over a year.

### **Complexity and variety of women's lives**

In the broad statistical view, women are sometimes represented as a homogeneous group, in relation to their working patterns and relationship with employment. However 'Widening Horizons' sought to critically analyse this representation of homogeneity by exploring the complexity and variety of women's working lives, through the use of in-depth and innovative research methodologies.

### **Practical Solutions and Strategies**

From the outset, 'Widening Horizons' sought to focus, not only on reporting and analysing women's experience of work, but also on potential solutions to tackling barriers and difficulties that they may face. Accordingly, this study had a practical element which underpinned the research. Strategies and solutions 'out there' which, in some cases, women were already putting into practice have been explored in this study. This approach will enable our findings to feed into regional and national policy guidelines that address the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace.

This report is aimed at a broad regional and national audience, including: policy makers; employers; women's organisations; employment support agencies; training organisations; researchers/academics and women across the region.

#### **1.1.2 Widening Horizons: Improving the role of women in the workplace**

The 'Widening Horizons' project adopted a qualitative approach that aimed to build on the key findings from the 'Barriers' project and to propose some practical solutions.

The original aims were:

- To establish the significance of barriers in the North East already identified under previous research.
- To examine women's perceptions of employment opportunities and career prospects.
- To explore the complex formal and informal barriers that prevent women from broadening employment horizons.
- To develop practical responses to gender discrimination.
- To disseminate findings to regional and national policy makers and to develop and disseminate best practice guidance for employers.
- To conduct a pilot mentoring scheme. This aim developed into gathering and critically evaluating available material on mentoring, with the intention of ascertaining if mentoring could provide a practical solution which could enhance women's employment prospects (see Chapter 3- Methodology).

Analysing the results of the Barriers study led us to:

- Explore women's working lives over time with a longitudinal approach focusing on informal personal and social barriers.
- Examine the role of social and information networks both real and virtual in accessing employment.
- Explore the ways in which local places and communities can act as both opportunities and constraints for work attainment and progression.

### **Who we targeted**

This study targeted groups of women under-represented in our previous study, such as women from Black and Ethnic Minority communities (BME), women living/working in rural communities, women classed as 'inactive' in employment statistics and women registered as unemployed and who were actively seeking work. We also carried out 're-visit' with 10 women from the Barriers project, in order to examine the impact of a year. This report also presents the findings from a series of interviews with 'New' women from within the target groups. The study used life-grids, interviews and specialist social network mapping software to explore the context of women's working lives in greater detail (see Chapter 3 - Methodology).



### **1.1.3 Barriers to Women's Employment and Progression in the Labour Market**

The 'Barriers' research (Green et al., 2004) took place in 2003 and aimed to document the existing barriers to women's employment in the North East by exploring diverse groups of women's experiences of employment entry and progression. It adopted a mixed methodological approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. A large amount of statistical data was gathered through a workplace survey with 648 male and female employees from 7 different case study companies covering topic areas such as employment issues, work/life balance, community and social networks. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 35 of the female case-study respondents, 12 of whom also took part in a life-grid interview. A further 23 semi-structured interviews were carried out with women from 3 geographical communities in the North East region, 16 of whom first took part in a life-grid interview.

The 'Barriers' report concluded that:

- Work has a variety of meanings for women, which can change over time.
- Where women live and how they feel about where they live can play a vital role in their working lives.
- The more women felt at home in their local community, the more likely they were to feel part of a community at work.
- Many women talked about the way they have to juggle work and family life.
- Juggling work and home was something many women were finding a challenge. A third of women wanted to change their working hours.
- Key barriers included lack of childcare; lack of flexible work and time; lack of support and encouragement; low self-esteem and confidence levels and lack of suitable opportunities and training.
- Gender issues were evident when women talked about their working lives but gender itself was not perceived by them as a barrier.

One key focus in the report detailed the fact that many women identified themselves as having resources and abilities that were not being sufficiently recognised and supported. The 'Barriers' report concluded that low self-esteem and confidence levels can be just as much of a deterrent to progression as lack of training or qualifications and that women could be encouraged to be more proactive about seeking out

opportunities and advice. 'Widening Horizons' took up this challenge by examining in more detail, the resources, both personal and social, that women already had but often were unaware of, with a view to tapping this potential to help improve their working lives.

#### **1.1.4 North East Context**

As the 'Barriers' report outlined, the North East region has the highest level of economic inactivity of any English Region with almost a third (32%) of women and 21% of men being economically inactive {(Buckner et al., 2004; Northern TUC, 2002; Government Office for the North East, 2002). Nationally, 4% of women are registered as unemployed (5% of men), but regionally, the figures are higher – 6% of women and 9% of men (Northern TUC, 2002). The traditional highly skilled, male dominated industries in the North East, such as the shipyards, mines and steelworks have been replaced by service industries reflecting a change in the skills base. These new industries, such as Call Centres and Retail Parks are more likely to employ women (Government Office for the North East, 2002). Although women in the region across all age groups have higher qualifications than men (Buckner et al., 2004: 22), there remains a gender gap in pay, with women's full-time weekly rate of pay being on average 77% of men's (Northern TUC, 2002).

Women in the North East have primary responsibility for organising child and elder care and also spend more time than men on domestic tasks, regardless of their working status (Cunningham et al., 2004; Green et al., 2004). This double burden means that many mothers need to, or may choose to, work part-time in order to facilitate these other commitments (Northern TUC, 2002; Government Office for the North East, 2002). Such jobs may have limited scope for development, fewer chances of career advancement and training and can lead to women feeling unfulfilled (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). The dearth of women in higher management positions nationally, as well as across the region, has also been well-documented (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005; Opportunity Now, 2000; Ross, 2000). Education and employment choices continue to be made along gender segregated lines and few women enter well-paid professional occupations such as IT and engineering, reflecting the persistence of the 'glass ceiling' as a barrier to women (Opportunity Now, 2002).

### 1.1.5 The Scope of this Report

The key points highlighted in this report and the 'Widening Horizons' study are presented within the context of a broader view of women's working lives. At the broadest level, our findings acknowledge the continuing impact of economic, occupational and practical barriers to women's employment, such as lack of affordable and appropriate childcare, narrow opportunities, restricted public transport etc. These have been well documented elsewhere (Cunningham et al., 2004; Green et al., 2004). However, the focus of 'Widening Horizons' is on a range of additional barriers, harder to identify and explore, which restrict women's opportunities in the labour market. The project has succeeded in exploring some of these barriers by adopting a holistic approach to interrogating women's lives, incorporating a methodological approach which takes as the starting point women's own experience.

1. Social and Personal Capital: Women themselves have various personal and social resources or 'social capital' that are not yet fully understood, but which can be effectively used to assist them to progress in the labour market, as well to achieve a more positive work-life balance. Edwards suggests that social capital 'concerns the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships' (Edwards, 2004:2). However, although social capital has been the focus of considerable research around employment (Stoloff et al., 1999; Calvó-Armengol and Jackson, 2002), the relationship between collective resources and social networks is insufficiently understood. Individuals may also draw upon their personal capital, which relates to an individual's basic personal qualities and reflects the quality of an individual's psychological and physical functioning (Tomer, 2001: 251). Personal capital can be reflected in women's confidence and self-esteem, as well as their aspirations towards employment and most women face what are perceived to be personal barriers at different points during their working lives, such as low self esteem, lack of confidence and low expectations. They may also exhibit complex motivations towards paid work, which often relate to broader responsibilities and personal ambitions. Although women themselves often have the personal resources to tackle such barriers, that may need additional support to facilitate identification and development of those resources. However, as (Edwards, 2004:84) argues, 'the concept of social capital is embedded in wider understandings of the nature of society.' She argues that gender and generation are fundamental axes of family life and need

to be addressed as part of the social capital debate. In other words, social capital is still gendered, and women's access to it needs a gendered lens.

Social capital may also be developed via the quality and diversity of women's social networks. The relationships and contacts many women develop routinely via social networks can play a vital role in their employment and career progression. 'Who you know' can have an impact on widening your working horizons (Mouw, 2003). The development of social capital is also fundamentally linked to location and community. The relationship that women develop within particular (local and regional) communities can positively impact on their working lives. However, location and attachment to specific communities can also have adverse effects upon mobility for employment, whilst enabling a good work/life balance.

2. Pulls and Pushes: Secondly, there are significant pulls and pushes between women and their paid employment, shaped by a mixture of personal, social and cultural contexts. Our findings demonstrate that these pulls and pushes are in constant tension, influenced by a blend of: family responsibilities, promotion opportunities, work-life balance concerns, community/geographical limitations and personal expectations and motivations. The key to developing a greater understanding of the broad context surrounding women's employment is to place paid work expectations and experiences within a broader life expectations/experience context, which includes the afore mentioned push/pull factors.

3. Practical Solutions: Finally, women themselves hold the key to the practical solutions which could widen their working horizons. By making better use of their (supportive) social networks, being proactive about their own personal development and accessing training and mentoring programmes, women can tackle their many of these personal and social barriers, thus enabling them to address more directly other organisational and economic barriers. Practical solutions to addressing what continue to be perceived as 'personal' barriers, despite their widespread occurrence, could be identified and initiated by employers and linked organisations involved with helping women progress in employment. Policy makers and others can also contribute e.g. by taking a wider view of what constitutes 'progress' for individual women. A key example of such 'practical solutions' explored in our study and presented in this report, is the potential of mentoring as a resource for working women.

## 1.2 Summary of Key Findings

### 1. Personal barriers heavily impact upon women's employment

**prospects.** Non-structural so called 'personal' barriers such as low confidence, self esteem and self-efficacy can have a big impact on women's employment opportunities and prospects.

a. **Most women find ways of managing such barriers to employment,** often adopting active coping strategies that include: broadening their social networks, enhancing their confidence and changing their working circumstances. However they underestimate both the value of those coping mechanisms and the necessary underpinning development of social capital and personal skills. This type of social capital and skills are very valuable assets in an employment context.

b. **Many women have high ambitions for career advancement,** especially our younger women; although ambition seemed to decline for those women with family responsibilities.

c. **Most women expect to achieve their employment goals,** but our working mothers appeared to have lowered their expectations.

d. **Motherhood impacts upon employment location.** Women without children were twice as likely as mothers to be willing to relocate for work. Women with children were less likely to think of moving for work.

d. **Women's plans for the future prioritized work/life balance.** Employment plans were often made with consideration for their existing and future family/community responsibilities and sometimes privileged the latter. Over the period of a year, many women changed their working hours and practices because of evolving domestic change. Most women sought to actively achieve their goals, and were proactive in adapting to change.

### 2. Local community organisations provide a resource for working

**women.** Most women valued their communities at home and at work and 50% prioritised living and working in the same community.

**3. Women's identities in relation to work shift across time and are shaped by work-life balance priorities.** The role and meaning that work had for women often changed over time and with circumstances. With responsibility for children, this can often have a significant impact.

### **Practical Solutions**

**4. Women's social networks are a valuable resource for employment support and progression.** The relationships which women have in their lives can play a key role in gaining, supporting and progressing in paid employment.

a. **Social networks are dynamic, fluid and often draw upon most recently made friends/colleagues.** Women's networks were influenced and shaped by their working contacts. In this way, women's working lives can be supported or unsupported by strengthening these contacts and friendships.

b. **Information Technology, e.g. email, mediates enables and frames women's networks in different ways.** Women maintain and support each other using a wide range of ICTs. This communication supports and enables their working lives as much as their personal relationships.

**5. Mentoring, women only training and social networks offer key practical solutions for improving women's position in the labour market and enhancing their working lives.** Practical solutions exist which can be effective in giving women the support they need to propel their own progress and development in paid employment.

## **1.3 Methodology**

### **1.3.1 Overview**

The key methods used in this project included:

- Secondary (additional) analysis of the workplace survey of 648 employees from 7 different case study companies gathered as part of the 'Barriers to Women's Employment' research in 2003.
- Secondary analysis of 58 semi-structured interviews and 28 life grids gathered as part of the 'Barriers to Women's Employment' research in 2003.
- Life grids and semi-structured interviews with 8 'New' women from under-represented groups.
- Semi-structured 'Revisit' interviews with 10 women previously interviewed as part of the 'Barriers' research. These women also took part in an 'Egonet' interview (see below).
- Interviews and discussion groups with:
  - Staff from various mentoring organisations
  - Organisations involved with providing employment advice
  - Individuals and organisations involved in providing personal development training
  - Staff from organisations, community groups and charities involved in women's health and well-being throughout the region.

### **1.3.2 Target Groups**

This study accessed groups of women under-represented in the previous study, such as women from Black and Ethnic Minority communities (BME), women living/working in rural communities, women classed as 'inactive' in employment statistics and women registered as unemployed and who were actively seeking work. We also wanted to explore women's working lives over time. We targeted three specific populations in order to access the information needed to meet all our objectives: a New sample of women; Revisits with women previously interviewed as part of the 'Barriers' project in 2003; and interviews with mentoring organisations, mentors and mentees.

### **'New' Interview Sample**

The first sample comprised of eight women from under-represented groups, such as rural, BME and unemployed categories. For ease of reference we have called them the '**New**' data-set. This group underwent a two-stage process, comprising a life-grid followed by a semi-structured interview, to gain a comprehensive understanding of:

- their working life to that point and the barriers they felt that they had encountered.
- the impact and influence of social networks on their employment choices and wider life decisions.
- their understanding of 'community' and how they felt it impacted on their job opportunities and their aspirations for the future.

### **'Revisit' Interview Sample**

The second sample comprised of ten women previously interviewed in the 'Barriers' study who, for ease of reference, we have named the '**Revisit**' data-set. These women first completed an Egonet<sup>2</sup> interview, a means of mapping their personal social network using a particular type of software, followed by a semi-structured interview. The Egonet process explored each woman's interaction with their personal network in some detail, while the interview reviewed the twelve months since the last meeting and traced the impact of any changes during that time. Previously identified plans for the future, both professional and personal, were followed up in this interview to ascertain what steps, if any, they had taken to fulfil them. Using this strategy, an insight was gained into how each woman followed through on aspirations and dealt with issues such as lack of confidence or low self-esteem.

### **Mentoring Sample**

The final sample comprised of representatives from mentoring organisations, many of whom were located in the north of England. Five organisations were selected to reflect the diversity of schemes and types of mentoring on offer. We particularly wanted to incorporate schemes which were specifically targeted at women as mentees or which had a high proportion of women involved as mentors. We also wanted to include both face-to-face and e-mentoring schemes. Ten structured interviews were carried out, five with facilitators of the projects and five with either

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<sup>2</sup> Egonet is a software programme used for mapping personal social networks, developed by the University of Florida. See <http://survey.bebr.ufl.edu/EgoNet/> for further information.



mentors or mentees from these schemes. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the type of scheme being operated and the disadvantages and advantages of each mentoring style. In addition, all the 'New' and 'Revisit' participants were asked about mentoring in their interview; whether they had any experience of mentoring, what they understood it to be about and what they thought the advantages/disadvantages to be.

### **1.3.3 Methods**

Adopting a multi-method approach to this research project '...creates the opportunity to put texts or people in contexts, thus providing a richer and far more accurate interpretation' (Reinharz, 1992: 213). The main methods used are explained in more detail below.

#### **Interviews**

A separate interview schedule was compiled for each of the target groups<sup>3</sup>. All the interviews were recorded using a Digital Dictaphone and transcribed in full according to a protocol agreed by the research team.

#### **Life Grid**

The life-grid interview method is a relatively new means of collecting structured but comprehensive retrospective data. First used by Gallie in the late 1980s (1988), it has been used most frequently within quantitative health research (Blane, 1996; Berney and Blane, 1997; Holland et al., 1999; Parry et al., 1999) to collect retrospective data from patients, not just about their health history but also regarding their housing and working environments. Potential benefits of this method include: increased accuracy of recall; building rapport between the interviewer and the participant through the joint compilation of the grid; and enabling the safe conveyance of sensitive or traumatic experiences by granting the participant more control over what they reveal (Parry et al., 1999).

This method was piloted in the 'Barriers' study, using a basic 3-column grid to record 'chronology and place', 'employment history' and 'comments'. An extra column was added for 'Widening Horizons', entitled 'Social Networks/Decision Making' and each woman was asked 'How did you find out about that job?' and 'Who did you turn to for advice about this job?' as they recalled each stage of their employment.

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<sup>3</sup> These can be obtained from the authors on request.

## **Egonet**

Egonet Personal Network Software, developed by Chris McCarty at the University of Florida was used to collect and analysis egocentric (personal) network data from individuals. One of the advantages of using Egonet was that the programme could be loaded on to a laptop computer and taken to the interview location.

In the initial pilot, respondents were asked to identify 20 people in their network. When analysing the data, it was recognised that this number was too small to include the 'looser' ties, such as work colleagues, that we hoped would be within the networks (McCarty, 2002). We increased the number to 30 'alters' after re-running the interview but this obviously increased the time required of the ten respondents. In most cases, the Egonet portion of the interview took more than one and a half hours to complete. In some cases it was carried out in two stages according to the time available by the participant. Each of the Egonet interviews has generated information on 435 alter pairs.

### **1.3.4 Research Ethics**

Each woman was informed in advance of the time commitment required and all meetings were arranged at a location convenient to them. Respondents within the 'New' and 'Revisits' cohorts were allocated a research identifier and a pseudonym and were informed at every meeting that any information given would be considered to be confidential. Participants were also told that they could withdraw from the process at any time and given a business card with their research identifier noted on it in case they wished to do so. These women were also given a nominal amount of £15 to cover any expenses incurred for which they acknowledged receipt by signing a form.

All methods were piloted to ensure they were appropriate and covered all the areas of interest. Permission was requested to record all the structured and semi-structured interviews, which was granted in every case. At the end of the project, a letter was sent to each participant to thank them for taking part in the research and copies of their individual transcripts were enclosed.

### **1.3.5 Data Collection**

Literature searches and an extensive web-review were carried out early in the research programme.

#### **'New' Participants**

We contacted various organisations in the area concerned with helping men and women get back into the workforce, specifically targeting offices which covered rural areas. Although ten women were originally recruited from all these sources and a life-grid interview completed for each, this number was reduced to eight due to a family bereavement affecting two of the group (see Appendix A – Demographics of Participants).

#### **'Revisit' Participants**

Of the original 58 women in the 'Barriers' project, 10 were selected who were in part-time or full-time employment; registered as unemployed and actively seeking work; or inactive but with plans to return to work in the near future. They also had to be available during the data collection period of July – September 2004. 23 women agreed to take part and 10 were subsequently selected from this group to include those with previously identified future plans, including work ambitions; identified social networks; and those who had lived and worked in the same community

The interview schedule covered only three areas: a review of the last twelve months; future plans and mentoring. Prior to the interview, the researcher reviewed the original data from the 'Barriers' study for each participant and made a note of what the woman's ambitions for work had been and any identified future plans. These were then read out to the interviewee to remind her of what she had said. Depending on the individual circumstances, these interviews lasted between forty minutes and an hour and a half.

#### **Mentoring**

Due to the wide range of existing mentoring projects and the difficulties involved in running one successfully, the team decided it would not pilot its own scheme. Instead, a report was prepared which documented the process of mentoring, what

each type of mentoring was about and the advantages and disadvantages of each type. We also wanted to highlight what was available in our region. Accordingly, we adapted our objective to gather, evaluate and critique available information about mentoring as a whole, with the intention of ascertaining if mentoring could be a specific practical solution which could help women in particular overcome personal barriers, such as low self-esteem or confidence issues.

From the literature we identified themes of best practice across different mentoring programmes and set up face-to-face meetings with 19 different organisations. Most of these were involved with running mentoring programmes or wanted to set one up in the near future. Other individuals or organisations were involved in some form of personal development training, such as the women-only 'Springboard' or 'Spring Forward' programmes, which have an element of mentoring within them but also address confidence, self-esteem and aspirations. Notes were taken during these meetings and used to establish the possible 'fit' between our research and the organisation.

Five structured interviews were set up with organisations involved in mentoring. These were:

- an e-mentoring programme aimed at women returning to work after a career break (Hull)
- a programme targeted at women in Science, Engineering, Technology and Construction (Bradford)
- a young offenders mentoring programme (South Shields)
- a schools programme where undergraduates mentor children (Middlesbrough)
- a civil service programme aimed at helping under-represented groups with their progression in the workplace (national).

We also wanted to speak to some women who had been involved with schemes as either mentors (the person doing the mentoring) or mentees (the person being mentored). Five women were interviewed, three mentors and two mentees from three different schemes. Again these interviews took place at a location convenient to the participant and a structured interview schedule was produced for both the mentors and the mentees.

The output from this section of the research, therefore, was a 'user-friendly' independent document on the process of mentoring (Heggie et al., 2005) which included information about the types of mentoring schemes that are available; the advantages and disadvantages of each type; how to set up a mentoring scheme; and 'best practice', culled from all the documentary sources and the interview transcripts

Although intended to be a general resource on mentoring, the handbook also contains a section on how mentoring might assist women in particular to overcome some of the personal barriers that have been identified during the research. The document is available in .pdf format<sup>4</sup> but hardcopies have also been printed and widely distributed. It was launched at our research dissemination seminar, 'Practical Solutions: Widening Women's Working Horizons' in February 2005, where mentoring was one of the main themes.

### **1.3.6 Analysing the Data**

Data collected were analysed in a variety of ways.

#### **Interviews**

NVivo software was used to analyse the interview data. The main categories used to code the data were those central to each of the research questions and these were developed throughout the analysis process. Regular team meetings considered the themes emerging from this process and decisions were made as to which to follow up.

#### **Life Grids**

Life grids were analysed in conjunction with the interview transcript and were mainly used to add context to the individual's life course. They were also useful in tracing key events, key employment decisions and patterns of behaviour, which aided the understanding of the interview data. Timelines were developed from 2 life grids and have been used in this report to demonstrate the importance of context on employment (see section 3.4 Case Studies).

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<sup>4</sup> Available from the 'Widening Horizons' website at <http://www.wideninghorizons.org.uk>

## **Egonet**

Data from the Egonet interviews were transferred into SPSS for analysis. This enabled the compilation of charts and graphs about the social networks of the whole group and of individual participants for comparison. Demographic data about the 10 participants, collected during the Egonet process, was also transferred into SPSS for analysis.

## **Secondary Analysis**

Secondary analysis using SPSS was carried out on the 'Barriers' data in four main areas of interest: future plans; ICT use; networks; and informal constraints. This data provided continuity between the two projects and helped to inform the interview questions for this research. Where appropriate, it has been incorporated into this report.

### **1.3.7 Limitations and Challenges**

Despite targeting organisations in rural areas, it proved difficult to recruit women from this target group as they did not volunteer to take part in large numbers. Difficulties were also encountered recruiting women from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. The two women from BME communities, who did take part in the 'New' sample, were unfortunately affected by bereavement and did not complete the second stage of the study. Despite these circumstances, the 'New' sample group reflects a good mix of the other categories under-represented in the 'Barriers' study (see Appendix A - Demographics of Participants).

One of the main challenges during this research project was to respond effectively to the need to change the mentoring objective. Rather than running a pilot scheme with no previous experience, the team responded positively by refocusing their objective to local needs and requests-to provide an overview of the mentoring process, pitfalls and strengths. Other challenges included developing the skills to successfully carry out new methods such as Egonet. The innovative nature of these methods required training and support, enriching the data gathered, but taking up time. The staff changes within the research team raised challenges, in that a valuable member of staff left and there was a gap before replacements could be found. However this was managed effectively through the dedication and ability of the senior researcher, Joan Heggie and support from the project managers. The resulting two part-time researchers contributed a great deal to the project.

## **Section 2 – Personal & Social Capital**

### **2.1 Overcoming Personal Barriers: Women's Strategies and Solutions**

Non-structural barriers, such as low confidence, self-esteem or low self-efficacy, would seem to have an impact on job search and progression within work. One of the main goals of this research was to explore these more personal barriers in considerable depth and consider the strategies women employed to cope with them. We were interested in finding out what caused some women to lose confidence in themselves and why some thought that specific employment options were not open to them. Initially in this section, we present data from the interviews with the 18 participants ('New' and 'Revisits') to illustrate how confidence can represent a barrier to employment opportunities. Later sections consider the different strategies women employed to cope with such barriers.

Personal capital includes an individual's resources for coping with everyday life, including paid work. Research on personal capital suggest that teenagers who have a sense of self, and are aware of their own skills and abilities, as well as those who experience challenges/new learning experiences are predicted to achieve happy adulthood (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). In other words, embracing change, new opportunities and challenges may be a key part of being happy, and this may have particular application to the workforce. The women we interviewed were not static in their employment or personal circumstances. Some, however, had fewer personal resources to help them sustain challenging times. Others, experienced low self esteem and low confidence, just at particular times in their lives.

#### **2.1.1 Confidence and Self Esteem**

Our participants identified particular issues which had an impact on their confidence. Analysis of these issues demonstrated that many of the barriers are inter-linked and affect not just the working life of particular individuals, but their personal and home lives also. We have selected four of the most-mentioned to explore in more detail in this section.

They are:

- Personal qualities
- Feeling undervalued
- Family
- Health

### **Personal Qualities**

Coping strategies generally refer to the efforts made by people to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events (MacArthur and MacArthur, 1999). It's useful to differentiate between active and avoidant strategies, the latter referring to ignoring or avoiding problems. In relation to employment, women in this sample were active in their coping strategies around work, home and personal changes.

Most women adopted active strategies to cope with change, although some found low confidence to be a problem. Planning something and making it happen was impacted upon by confidence issues. Both Claudia and Sheila had been forced to face up to how their confidence levels had been affected by circumstances at work. In her initial interview, Claudia had expressed a desire to change her career and go into teaching.

*That might have changed a bit because last year I had to give a critic's talk and I nearly papped myself. It was really nerve-racking. It was in front of 200 students and it was just so utterly nerve-wracking. So while I do have confidence in myself, I hate public speaking, I absolutely hate it and let's face it – to be a teacher you've gotta kind of overcome that. It's still on the back burner but I'm not so keen...that experience has kinda put the wind up me a little bit. [Claudia, age 32 - WH]*

Sheila felt that leaving her 'comfort zone' to try something new was challenging and sometimes she did not feel confident of her abilities.

*I'll have to see what happens. We'll have to see how good I am at it because it's all a steep learning curve, a very steep learning curve. And some days it's really good and some days I think, "What am I doing? What am I? I can't do this. Whatever made me think I could?" Then sometimes I just think, "Oh let me back to [original job]". [Sheila, age 37 - WH]*



## Feeling Undervalued

Although it is commonplace for women, particularly mothers, to report feeling undervalued in their place of work, research which explores the impact of this upon women's employment progression remains under developed. What is perceived as a 'personal' problem with low self esteem resulted from not being valued can also be located as a gendered experience tied to the privileging of a white, male workforce and the experience women have of being 'othered' in particular jobs and/or levels of organizations (Hearn et al., 1989). Our data supports this thesis.

*"I haven't changed the type of job but personally I have changed and the reason why I've changed is I felt as though the job that I was doing was very demanding and I needed to look for something else in my life to fulfil my self esteem , to build my self esteem because I felt I was gradually losing that. I felt I was losing control of my identity in the work place and I didn't know how I was going to be able to build myself back up again to be confident in the role I was carrying out." [Laura, aged 54] [WH]*

Reported feeling undervalued and marginalized. Similarly, motherhood and childcare issues continue to be represented as a problem for the individual rather than issues for the organization, a problem that needs to be tackled at that level.

## Family

When considering how family life affects women's employment choices, the most obvious barrier is childcare – availability, suitability, affordability and location. All of these issues were things that most women with children had considered or were still negotiating. What is often not so obvious is the effect that the juggling of roles as worker, spouse/partner and/or mother/carer has on women's confidence and self-esteem. Women often work flexible hours or in (lower-paid) part-time jobs to facilitate family commitments and the individual woman's needs get subsumed beneath the needs of others (Lane, 2000). Marian was the eldest of 8 children and was expected to look after her grandmother while still quite young. She has 6 children of her own who are now adults but she feels she has always been defined by her caring role.

Marian actively changed her role at home and at work through setting clearer boundaries for herself.

*It's always been this caring thing and I was just saying to my friend at work this morning "I'm really sick of it". I'm still a caring person but I don't care half as much as I used to and I'm really happy about that. I think "Bollocks to it! I'm doing something for me".* [Marian, age 55 - WH]

## Health

Several of the women interviewed were suffering from poor health which impacted not just on their feelings of well-being, but on their employability and their opportunities for employment. The particularities of their different conditions limited the sort of activities that are part of ordinary daily life for others and, by default, affected their ability to work. For example, some women had conditions such as agoraphobia, which restricted them geographically to those areas where they feel secure, often the immediate area around their home, or the familiar location of their town. Jobs may be available in a different location but getting to work can be difficult or even impossible.

*I've never drove – I mean I do drive locally but I've never drove to Sunderland yet, alone. My daughter...is in Washington [but] I haven't conquered Washington yet. I haven't gotten out of the [South] Shields area. I can go to Shields and I can go to Jarrow and that's about my limitations with driving alone.* [Madeline, aged 52 - WH]

*I've never driven to Low Fell before. I've been through with my husband in the car but I've never been on my own...but once I had directions and I've gone and I've done it...it's another step and I'm like "Okay, this is fine". It takes me about three months if not more to get into the swing of anything you know?* [Clare, aged 31 - WH]

The taken-for-granted ability to travel to work, either by car or public transport, causes real difficulties for women with 'unseen' conditions, such as mental health illness or agoraphobia. Poor health impacts upon levels of confidence and self esteem by restricting opportunities and contributing to feelings of not being able to plan for the future. Concern about other people's reaction to their condition was also a worry and some did not know whether being open about their illness would limit

their employment chances.

*I mean ideally it would be lovely to get back into a working role and mixing with other people. I think with the stigma, with the anxiety with the agoraphobia – there's such a lot of people that sort of, I don't know, do they employ mental health people? I wouldn't want anybody to know...there's a lot of people say I'm silly saying that but I have heard people talk about other people with mental health and they're so, "Oh, they're off their head". So I think to myself, "You really don't know".* **[Madeline, aged 52 - WH]**

For women who have been in good health and who view their job as fulfilling and part of their identity, the impact of long-term illness can be devastating.

*It makes me feel really frustrated...it's difficult in the sense of, you know, I'm not myself any more, you know? It was like a grief, like losing somebody, 'cos like I lost all the interaction with the children and staff and I do miss, really miss the working with the children and doing my job, you know?* **[Clare, aged 31 - WH]**

*I was working for 22 years in a job that I loved very much and I've had to leave. I've got a condition which prevents me from doing the job that I love. Since losing my job I've kind of lost direction in my life really because work was such a huge thing to me. I'm the kind of person who needs structure in my life so losing the job was quite a serious thing. I'm hoping, well I'm striving towards hopefully working again at some point in the not too distant future. The only thing that's stopping me is the health problem...which I have been told may clear up in the future, it may not. I may have to live with it so I'm kind of struggling with that at the moment. I am coming to terms with it and living with it, it's just whether I can live with it and work as well. That's what I've got to sort out. I'm sure there's got to be something where the two will go together.* **[Vicky, aged 48 - WH]**

When Lucy considers her future, she knows her employment chances will be curtailed by her need for surgery and she does not think an employer would want to offer her a job if they were aware of the situation.

*I might go for a job and then all of a sudden I've got to go into hospital and I'd be three, four months for the recovery time.* **[Lucy, aged 49 - WH]**

Poor health can have a variety of impacts on women's employment opportunities and choices. Mental illness and 'unseen' disabilities are perceived as 'stigma' and there may be a reluctance to make employers and co-workers aware of conditions. Feeling stigmatised may prevent open communication and limit potential for making friends at work, a source of great social and emotional support for many women (see section 3.3 Social Networks]. The ability to travel to work and hours of work may have to be considered and employers may need to be quite inventive in their means of support i.e. permit working from home on days when the individual feels unable to travel to work. The lack of awareness and inability by employers to demonstrate flexibility can have a negative effect on the confidence and self esteem of women who otherwise would like to return to work. Lack of confidence and self esteem can affect motivation when job-seeking or lead to women restricting their options.

### **2.1.2 Strategies for coping**

So how did women themselves overcome these barriers or what are they doing to try and overcome these hurdles? What practical solutions are they tapping into? Women themselves draw on their social networks, friends and families for support in coping with personal barriers. The interpersonal environment is important for understanding what contributes to change for individuals including social networks, social support, role models and mentoring. 'Behaviour change (such as improved confidence, increased motivation) is often better effected by focusing not just on the individual, but on their relationships with those around them – with parents, peers and so on' (Halpern and Bates, 2004:23)

Some women found membership of community organisations, courses, clubs very helpful in finding new areas of support. Others focused on making use of their networks to help them and facilitate those things they cannot do, trying to remain positive and getting new interests to substitute for those activities which they cannot do. These women largely adopted an active coping strategy to tackle personal barriers.

Halpern and Bates outline the ways in which self-efficacy, a person's confidence in their ability to take action and to persist with that action, can help with increased motivation in the face of obstacles (Halpern and Bates, 2004).

Applied to employment for women, there are ways to increase self-efficacy: (adapted from (Halpern and Bates, 2004):

1. Setting small, incremental goals, this can include job searches, or increased responsibilities, but taken in small steps.
2. Monitoring and reinforcement: Feedback from self-monitoring or record-keeping can reduce anxiety about a person's ability to achieve a change, thus increasing self-efficacy.
3. Social networks and support: The attitudes and resources within a person's network will strongly influence their behaviour –people will generally be far more influenced by the views of friends and family than employers or policy makers.

## 2.2 Future Plans

The next section focuses on future plans by first examining data from the 'Barriers' study as to ambitions for the future and the factors which might affect these being realised. Next, the plans for the future as expressed by the ten participants in 2003 are explored through the data collected in the 'Widening Horizons' research to illustrate not just what has happened but how each individual woman has contributed to the outcome.

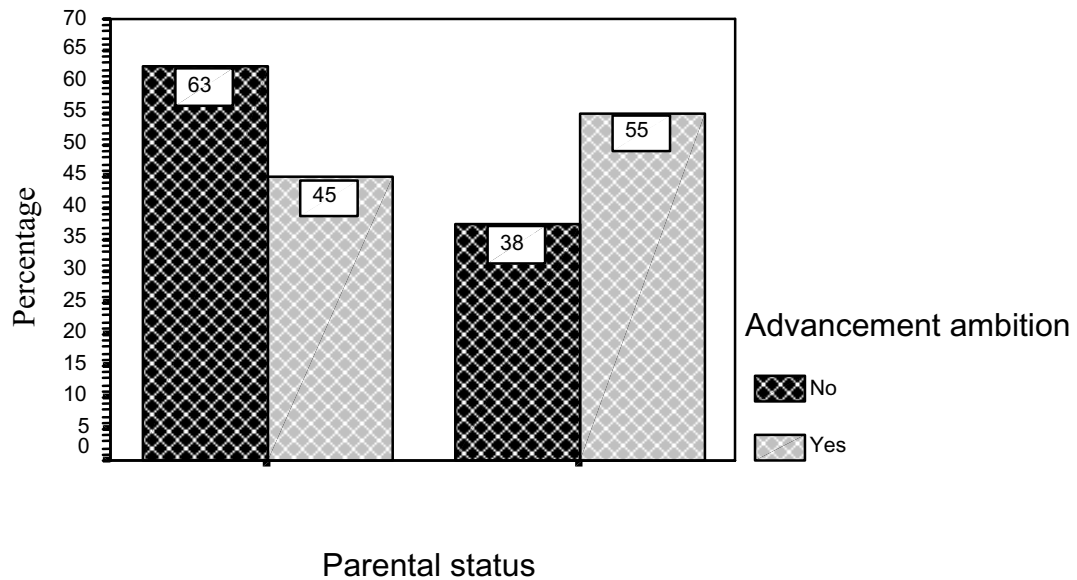
### 2.2.1 Future Plans – 'Barriers' study

Analysis of the questionnaire data from the 'Barriers' study<sup>5</sup> determined that both men and women had ambitions for advancement within their current employment and that the gender of the participant was not an issue. The most significant category to have an impact on future plans was that of **parental status**. When analysing data from female respondents, findings revealed a significant difference between parents and non-parents in terms of the numbers reporting that they have ambitions for advancement with their current employer ( $\chi^2 = 9.620$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ ). This relationship can be seen in Figure 1.

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<sup>5</sup> The data used in this section is based on 648 questionnaires (371 female; 277 male).

**Figure1: Parental Status and Ambition**



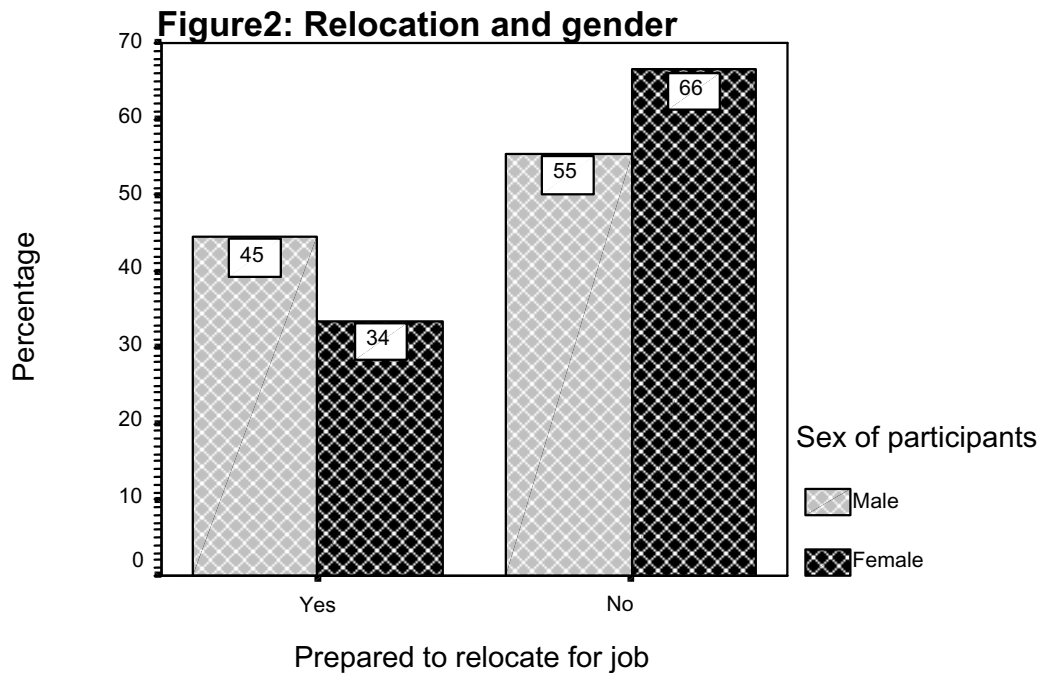
Analysis showed that most women who expressed the desire to advance wanted promotion or progression (42.4%), to advance into a specific area i.e. management (17.4%), or to develop their skills, qualifications or training in some way (11.8%). However, when these figures are analysed according to parental status, women with children are less likely than those with no children to have such ambitions. Regarding promotion or progression, the percentage for women with children is lower than for those without children (39.8% compared to 45.5%). With regard to advancing into management the trend remains the same – proportions are lower for women with children (10.3% compared to 25.8%).

A high percentage of both groups of women did not think that anything would prevent the realisation of their future plans, however, women without children were slightly more likely to hold this view (52% compared to 49.4%). For women with children, the most common factor thought to inhibit expectations was financial constraints (11.6%), while the most common factor for women without children was the lack of opportunity or experience or contacts (9.6%). Women with children were more likely than male parents to cite children/family as an inhibiting factor (5.7% compared to 0.9%).

#### **Factors influencing future ambitions**

Age was a significant predictor of ambition and data revealed that the odds of having ambitions for advancement decrease for every year of age by 0.946. In other words,

increasing age = decreasing ambition for job advancement. Gender differences are notable when considering the willingness to relocate to get a job. Findings revealed a significant difference between males and females in terms of the numbers reporting that they would be prepared to relocate to get the job that they want ( $\chi^2 = 7.516$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ ). This relationship can be seen in Figure 2 below.

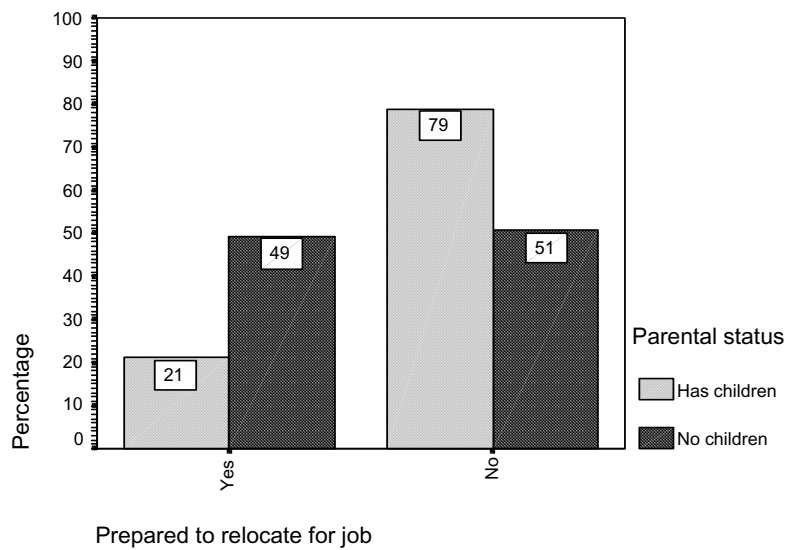


However, when the figures for female participants were analysed, the results again showed a significant difference between female parents and non-parents ( $\chi^2 = 30.081$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Figure 3 demonstrates that women with no children are more than twice as likely as women with children to be willing to relocate for a job. However, it is dangerous to presume that children alone are the cause of this. Statistically, women often earn less than male partners/husbands and lack of mobility



may be due to the location and income level of their partner's job.

Figure 3: Relocation and parental status



Data also showed that female parents were less likely to be thinking of moving home (16% compared to 29% non parents) or considering changing their job (19% compared to 31% of non parents) in the twelve months following the 'Barriers' study.

All this data demonstrates the pushes and pulls on women who work or who wish to work. Factors to be considered include the concerns that parents express about job security, the location of schools/childcare, the location of the employer's premises in relation to home (travelling time) and the needs of the family, such as the children's age and the need for continuity at certain times, i.e. when taking exams. In such circumstances, mothers often put their own ambitions on hold. Often these decisions are not made for one reason alone but reflect a combination of circumstances. Grace had two children and was in the process of separating from her husband. Although she did not really enjoy her job, she felt her options were limited by her age, her qualifications and because, ultimately, she needed to be able to support herself and her children financially.

*But I'm in this kind of, I don't know, it's a no-win situation but my age, the qualifications I've got, I can't sort of go anywhere else. I mean, I've often thought of sort of finishing the job and trying to do something else but I don't know how I would stand financially with two small children. It's like I need to work, I need the money [Grace, aged 41 - B].*

Isobel's choices for mobility were also restricted by changing circumstances and had an impact on the rest of her life. Now nearing retirement, she explains:

*Q: Would you be, or would you have ever been, willing to move for work? If there'd been a post come up somewhere, do you think you would have moved?*

*Isobel: I would now but when C was at school I wouldn't because we left her Dad when she was fifteen and then I wanted to move out of the area but she didn't want to do that and she was my prime concern, her stability, so we stayed in [name of town]. Her dad lived at one end and we lived at the other, but I would have once she got to adulthood. Yes I would have moved once she got to eighteen but the opportunities weren't there. You know, there are other concerns apart from me. My mother lived in [name of town] and she was quite elderly and I did put quite a bit of time in there. I have a sister but she lives in the South of England. For about ten years I needed to be there for Mum and as time got on she got dementia and in the early stages it's fine 'cos she just got forgetful but then as the stages developed, I needed to be there more often. The last three years I went four times a day, seven days a week and that was hard, that was hard doing a full time job, it really was, and I didn't realise how hard until I stopped doing it. The last three years of her life she went into a home just because she needed twenty-four-hour care and I couldn't look after her. I would have loved to have given up my job and looked after her 'cos she always dreaded going into a home but I had a mortgage to pay and responsibilities and my house is only a two bedroom semi and small and I just couldn't take it on. I bitterly regret that...I felt I did a role reversal in those last eighteen months 'cos I just sat next to her and cuddled her and it was as, it was as if I was the mother and she was the child...It was awful, I hated it, and I don't know whether things would have been any different if I could have looked after her twenty-four-hours a day. I could have stimulated her more perhaps and that sort of thing, but it wasn't meant to be. I couldn't do it,, circumstances prevented me from doing it. I do regret it meself absolutely bitterly. [Isobel, aged 60 - B]*

Women without children, however, were not necessarily mobile or willing to move for work either. As this report demonstrates, women's working lives are interwoven with their personal and family commitments, social networks of friends and colleagues and feelings of belonging in a particular community. Mobility is also affected, therefore by personal choices as well as personal circumstances.

*In the past I would have [moved house], but I wouldn't now. A few years ago, 3 years ago before I married I would, but I wouldn't now because we've just bought the house that we really want and my husband really wants it and we wouldn't just move to the other end of the country. I mean I'll put a bit with travelling to maybe Darlington, Teesside or wherever, but I wouldn't move house. [Pat, aged 30 – B]*

*I want to be based in the North East. That is something that I've decided and that stops me, that's holding me back, because I know that if I go down to the Midlands [Company HQ] I'd move on. [Gina, aged 27 – B]*

### 2.2.2 Future Plans – 'Widening Horizons' Study

As before, the main areas where women expressed plans for the future were: work, home/family and personal. Some plans were more long term than others. For example, in 2003 both Ellen and Kathleen expressed a desire to run their own business at some point in the future. Ellen had achieved her goal by the time of her second interview in 2004 but for Kathleen, it was still a dream for the future which she could work towards achieving by gaining experience in her occupational field.

*Kathleen: My long term dream is still the same. I'd still like to have my own [business]. It doesn't matter how long it takes me.*

*Interviewer: So what is it that keeps you hanging on to it - somewhere out there, somewhere in the future?*

*Kathleen: Because it's something I can - what it is you have to play ball. In [name of organisation] you have to play ball and do it their way. I have to do it their way for a long time and then once I've got that sewn up - because I have my own ideas. That's something that I know that I am going to be restricted with when I work for somebody else. Whereas, I can open things up slightly and do things a little bit more my way if I got my own business. So that is still there, that is still there, I still want to do that. [Kathleen, aged 32 – WH]*

In 2003, the organisations that Sheila and Laura worked for were going through a period of structural change. Job security was uncertain and redundancy was being mentioned. Laura, at 54 years of age, was hopeful of getting redundancy and was disappointed when it did not happen. Sheila, at 37 years, is hoping that redundancy is *not* in her immediate future because she wants to retire early and she can only

afford to do that if she continues to work in her present job with the security of her pension.

Both have developed strategies to cope with their current situations. Participating in further education and personal development courses have helped to develop skills which have been useful in coping in the changing environment of the workplace. Both have adopted a particular attitude to their situation which is about seeing something positive in a potentially negative situation. Sheila considers that her investment in further education has paid off in that she has been offered a temporary secondment which may lead to other opportunities within her organisation, thereby ensuring her security for the future.

*I'm kind of luckier than most because I did start studying so many years ago now. I have got one qualification outside the [name of organisation] so I do feel a bit more fortunate really than other people. [Sheila, aged 37 – WH]*

Laura's approach has been to invest more heavily in her personal life and regain some balance between work and home life.

*I think I've moved on to the fact that, "Okay, take what you can while you can". The salary that I'm getting – "appreciate that you are getting a salary". I could have worked day shifts, lost money, but I would have been doing exactly the same job. So now I think, "Right okay, still work shifts...encourage yourself to look at what you're doing outside, other goals that you've got whether it be financial, whether it be in the house, relationship-wise, family-wise...my priorities have moved away from the work. [Laura, aged 54 – WH]*

A few women had developed a strategy of 'waiting' in order to cope with their present situation. For Claudia, the main factor affecting her plans for her future in work was the lack of opportunities for advancement. The industry she worked in was quite static, with little turnover of staff and was not well paid. However, she was happy in her workplace and did not want to risk her job satisfaction by moving to try to get promotion or better money. She had tried that and hated it so waiting for an opportunity was her preferred strategy.

*I'm literally just waiting for fate really aren't I? I am happy where I am but at the same time I want those dudes out of the way so that we can move into those positions. I think it is something that will happen but it's just down to timing...we are such a small team that there's nowhere else to go to. So I'm in the best place really for things to happen but it's all down to money isn't it? I'm in a career now that a lot of women would give their right arm for but it's just the dosh isn't good enough quite frankly. So it's just having to, you know, put up with poor pay to be in a job you enjoy, which is a bit naff.*

**[Claudia, aged 32 – WH]**

Although, Frances viewed the deferment of her own ambitions as an investment in her children's well-being, she said that she had struggled with feelings of having let herself down. Her strategy of 'waiting' meant classifying work in the immediate future as a 'job' and her long-term plans to return to nursing as 'career'.

*Nursing's always at the front of my mind as a job to go back to 'cos I feel that otherwise I'll be letting myself down...but equally I'll look in the paper and see what sort of delivery jobs (laughs) and things like that are going, just for easy sort of work; just, you know, driving round type jobs while the children are very small. So I think I've always got work on my mind as in "What can I do? What do I want to do?" And sometime I'm looking at the sort of menial sort of jobs and then other times I'm looking at the proper sort of nursing, yeah...I feel sometimes that I'm letting myself down that I've not gone back to nursing and what have you but there'll be a time for me. I mean I know that I can go back to nursing and go and get a career but I'm stopping myself from doing that because of my children. We're fortunate that we don't need me to go back to work. But I do feel that it's ultimately my choice and I have made that choice and sometimes I think that I've made the wrong choice and that I should go back and, you know, that I've let myself down but other times and most of the time I think, "No actually I'm doing the right thing" because in a few years time, I've then got my time to do it when the kids are at school and they're happier. [Frances, aged 30 – WH]*

Looking to the future, Gemma also took into account the changing needs of her children and expressed how that might affect her work ambitions.

*I suppose it's how old the children will be. [Five years from now], [name of child] will be seventeen and [name of child] will be fourteen, so I don't know. I'd like to see myself probably with a different job but not working full-time.*

**[Gemma, aged 39 – WH]**

Pat's thoughts about how she would combine work and having a family had changed considerably from the year before, due mostly to her new-found job satisfaction in her new workplace. Pat's words emphasise how other factors influence decisions about work.

*I don't think I'd ever want to give up work which sounds mad because you wouldn't think this was me a year ago. But working here, I really enjoy it and if I had my own children I think I'd want to carry on working because it really is a great place to work, I really enjoy it. It's a lot more than just doing your work; it is a community, I do have a lot of friends her and maybe I'll cut down the hours a little bit I guess, but I think I'll still be carrying on.*

**[Pat, aged 30 – WH]**

### **Factors preventing achievement of goals**

All the 'Revisits' participants were asked about what would prevent the achievement of their stated ambitions. Some of these have been mentioned in the section above but others are worth mentioning here. The realisation by individual women that these factors may occur has helped them to frame a strategy for coping. Carrie, for example, had thought about how she would achieve her ambition of studying for a PhD.

*Money might be an issue because if I don't get a studentship I can't really afford to do a PhD at the moment 'cos I just don't have enough money. Not that I see it as preventing me but slowing the whole process down because I would probably have to then work for a length of time before I could do it...I still would hate for it to be about money but you know, you gotta get real and accept the fact that it could. I mean [I'd] get work, save some money and maybe do it at a later stage, but I will still do it. I mean it's still something I'm definitely gonna do, just whether it happens now or in a year's time, I'm not sure. [Carrie, aged 34 – WH]*

Laura felt that she needed to improve her time-management skills so that she could keep her work from overflowing into other areas of her life. However, she felt that the working culture encouraged this 'spill over' by allocating so much work to each individual that *'the 'to-do' lists never seem to get completed'* **[Laura, aged 54 – WH]**.

However, when asked about what support the company offered in this area, she was only able to give a limited example of where training in this area was offered. Although Laura felt that it was her responsibility to have better time management, she had not made the connection that it was her employer's responsibility to provide her with some training.

## **2.3 What difference does a year make?**

### **2.3.1 Revisiting women's lives**

Ten women were interviewed in the summer of 2003 and again in 2004. Revisiting a small number of participants in this way connects the 'Barriers' study with 'Widening Horizons' and provides an element of continuity, enabling women's lives to be viewed in their complexity over time. The Revisit interview was concerned with two areas of interest. First, to establish if anything had changed in the intervening twelve months and what impact (if any) these changes had made to participants' lives. Second, to establish what progress had been made to fulfil plans for the future which had been expressed by each participant in 2003. These questions were not restricted to the participants' working lives but incorporated home/family and personal ambitions as well, so as to demonstrate the interconnectedness of women's lives.

During the interview, the ten women looked back over the most recent period of twelve months and considered not just what changes had happened in their lives, but the impact of these changes and the ways in which they had been 'transformed' by them (Clausen, 1998). Likewise, revisiting their plans for the future demonstrated how active individuals were in 'making things happen' for themselves. In many cases, some elements of the plans were already in progress, while in others, the plans themselves had shifted in response to the changing circumstances of the past year.

### **2.3.2 Changes during the last 12 months - 'Widening Horizons' study**

These women were asked to identify changes that had happened to them during that period and also to note where there were none. Their answers broadly fell into three main areas – changes at work, at home and in their personal life. Individual changes cannot be looked at in isolation; they can only be fully understood by considering the impact of the change on the rest of the individual's life. The following sub-sections trace what impact the changes had on the women interviewed.

Three out of the ten women's work changed to some extent (is this higher); a further 3 found that changes in their family/home life had an impact on work as did personal life changes.

### **Impact of Changes - Work**

Three women had changed their hours of work but were still doing the same job. In Claudia's case [aged 32 – WH], staff shortages had resulted in extra hours and she was required to do night duty once a month. For Gemma [aged 39 – WH], the change in her working hours was enabled by the move of home of her husband's parents. By moving nearer to Gemma, they were able to take on childcare responsibilities previously carried out by a childminder, such as staying with the children after school until Gemma or her husband got home from work. A change to her childcare arrangements has enabled the difference to Gemma's working hours but has also contributed to her ability to make choices as to how to spend her time.

*It has made a difference, it's slightly easier, slightly more relaxing. I've changed my work day - from working nine to five, I now work half eight till half four...For the two of us [her husband and herself] going out or going away it's a bit easier because it's easier for them to have the children now and the children prefer going to stay with them where they are now than where they were before...but no, what seems to happen is because I'm not rushing home so much for a childminder to leave, you know, sometimes it means that I'm more relaxed and stay at work longer which really (laughs) isn't so good is it?*  
**[Gemma, aged 39 – WH]**

By far the most common change with regard to work was the taking on of different or additional work. Seven women talked about the changes to their working role and what that meant for them. One woman had changed her job [Pat] and now works for a different company within the same employment sector, while another [Ellen] decided to set up her own business. Two others had taken on paid employment as well as further education commitments [Kathleen and Carrie] and one woman [Sheila] had accepted an opportunity to do a secondment in a different department for six months. Frances had decided to supplement the family's income by working from home and Laura had taken on several specific projects at work to further her skills and demonstrate her capabilities.

The impact of these changes was quite mixed across the group and again, permeated into other areas of the women's lives. In Ellen's case, her whole life had changed. In the twelve months since her last interview, Ellen had moved in with her partner in a different city; moved away from the North East; had decided to let her house to provide an income; given up her job; and started a new business. In 2003, she had expressed her unhappiness with her job in the North East and her desire to



start her own business at some point in the future (see section on Future Plans below), but had never imagined that it would all happen so fast.

*There's been a wholesale change of life so it's been absolutely fantastic and it's unbelievable. When I look back 12 months ago, I wouldn't have thought that any of this could have been possible really. [Ellen, aged 34 – WH]*

Giving up a secure and well-paid job was not a decision she took lightly but she was feeling undervalued. As she explained:

*I was very unhappy in mine [job] even though it had been the highest status I had achieved work-wise...on paper it sounded fantastic and it looked amazing and you couldn't have thought that I would have wanted anything more than that, but the reality of it was abysmal. I was feeling quite down-trodden with my bosses and I was having quite a difficult time having no say over anything and being ordered to do things which I didn't necessarily agree with...just feeling quite squashed and down-trodden. At the same time I had these ambitions and things that I wanted to achieve and I wasn't anywhere near achieving them ...and I just said, "Well I've gotta change". [Ellen, aged 34 – WH]*

Ellen and her partner lived in different cities and getting together had always been difficult. Making the decision to look for another job, therefore, enabled her to consider moving home as well. It made sense to her to think about moving to where her partner lived because he was content in his job, however, the jobs she looked at were similar to what she was leaving behind. After several months of searching for work, she decided to move forward her plans for her own business and started looking for premises.

*None of them [the jobs] really, really excited me, you know, it was still going to be jumping to someone else's tune...so I thought, "I don't really want to be part of that" and I was really hankering after doing something of my own. And I remember having a few days off and just coming down to [name of city] and found myself...just pounding the streets looking for empty properties...I didn't know where I was going to get the money from, or how it was going to happen, but I just wanted to look at these buildings...and this is one of them. And it just kick-started a process of writing a business plan and researching into how I was actually going to do this operation. [Ellen, aged 34 – WH]*

Sheila wanted to continue with further education but felt the demands of her new job made that unlikely in the immediate future.

*I do feel like I can't say "no" to the work experience while I'm being offered it because having done the same job for fifteen years, I'm not qualified for anything else - it's such a specific job role... I still keep coming back to the fact that I'm gonna need the work experience because even if I went straight through onto a Masters now and got my Masters, I still don't have any relevant work experience and there's nothing saying I'll be able to get it from the [name of company] next year but I've got it now. I can do the Masters next year... The role I've been asked to do, the role I've been put into is to move things along and branch out so it's quite, it's very dynamic and it's very demanding and I really couldn't do this alongside any other work at the moment. [Sheila, aged 37 – WH]*

Pat felt that changing her job had been a positive move. Although she technically had the same job title, she was being paid a lot more and felt that she did more because there were fewer people in the new team. Over all, she expressed more job satisfaction.

*The job is definitely more varied; the day to day stuff is a lot more interesting. The team here is nicer as well. It's a nicer, more friendly place to work, which makes so much difference. If you are going to work somewhere and you don't really, you are not really great friends with everybody and there's an atmosphere and stuff, it just makes the day a bit of a nightmare. But here it's really good fun. It is a nice place to work and I'm happy to be here. [Pat, aged 30 – WH]*

For Laura, however, the impact of taking on additional work, although personally satisfying, did not have such a positive effect. The work was very demanding of her time and required a great deal of extra effort but the feedback she received at her annual review was disappointing and led to feelings of being undervalued.

*I've had my yearly review at work. I felt that went well and again, as I expected which is rather disappointing, "You are doing your job, averagely" - knowing fine well that I've put an awful lot of effort into other parts of the business which gives the company recognition... I have got recognition from education committees, em disability groups and that to me is important, but it's rather a shame that the management didn't understand the work that's involved in putting all these things into practice. [Laura, aged 54 – WH]*

She found that by becoming involved in activities and hobbies outside of work, she was able to cope better with the working environment. By putting her energies into enjoying both work and non-work life more, she has gained a new perspective.

*The things that I've achieved outside work have made me feel better within the working environment... I think measurement of progression is the individual. It would be nice to think I could get a role within the company to use all my new found skills as well as my established skills, but then I've, I've come to realise that we work in a very young business. I am now of the older market and redundancy might not come so what was the point of me pushing myself in an area that I wasn't going to be comfortable in? I'd rather just expand my own knowledge, my own skills to benefit the people that I'm working with now and who's to know what's going to happen? [Laura, aged 54 – WH]*

### **Impact of Changes – Home**

Four of the women, Claudia, Pat, Ellen and Sheila, had moved house in the period between the interviews, an event which has affected them differently. Claudia had to find a flatmate to share the cost of her new accommodation but having done so, is quite happy. Pat's house move had a direct impact on her desire to change jobs as her new house was further away and would have meant increased travelling time. For Sheila, moving house has been a very positive experience, especially in her personal and family life.

*I was living in [name of town] with my partner - I moved out there because that's where he was living - but my family, my Mam and my sister...were both living [here] in [name of town]. I work here [in same town as Mam and sister] and of course I'm from here originally. I've still got a lot of friends here so I wanted to move back... It was a bit of a shock for [name of partner] but he's done it because he could see a lot of the benefits for us in doing it. Whenever we had a social life it tended to be [here]...he works [here] as well so we made the move - just a month we've been [here] and it's lovely, it is lovely because me sister's back in the town now and I'm living on the same estate as me sister (laughing) and me Mam's only ten minutes away as well and that's great and of course I'm back with my friends and I have a great social life. [Sheila, aged 37 – WH]*

Ellen could have sold her house when she decided to move in with her partner but decided to hold on it for a variety of reasons.

*I wanted to keep my own house (laughs). How did I know whether our relationship was going to work out and also, I still have a lot of friends and relatives up there and I might want to move back to the North East and not have the whole problem of not being able to afford to live there anymore...So I thought, "I love this house and I could rent it and let someone else have the benefit of living in it" and that did work out. [Ellen, aged 34 – WH]*

There was an acknowledgement amongst those women who were parents or step-parents that childcare needs varied as other aspects of their lives changed. Pat's husband had taken on a new job which coincided with his son from a previous marriage coming to stay every weekend. With her husband working on a Saturday, Pat took on the responsibility of looking after her step-son and used the opportunity to develop a relationship with him. However, like other parents in the group, she viewed the growing-up process of her children as something that was constantly shifting the boundaries of what was needed in terms of childcare. Looking to the future, she saw that her time commitment to her stepson would change.

*We do a lot more together. We always got on well. He is a really pleasant child but we do a lot more together. But in 3 or 4 years time, things might be changing and he will be 16 then. He's not going to be wanting to spend every weekend and I'm not going to have to drag round his mates as well and take them bowling or whatever. [Pat, aged 30 – WH]*

Frances had two pre-school age children and provided care support for a young woman with learning disabilities. She took on some extra work from home which occasionally required selling products at local venues and meant that she and her husband had to juggle the childcare arrangements. Her husband had also been promoted and had extra responsibilities, including some weekend work or being 'on call'. This made it very difficult for Frances to plan anything but she remains positive about how they will work it out.

*I wouldn't be able to do evenings, you know, like if the stall's on at a school or something, Christmas fair, on a evening, I might not be able to do those if [name of husband] is 'on call'. He's going to be working further away for a time as well, which means that he's out earlier and in later, which also affects me. 'Cos it might actually affect me working with this girl with learning disabilities because I may have to take the children to my Mum's and he'll pick them up. It's been okay - he's come in and I've gone straight out - but there's gonna be possibly an overlap where I'll have to get childcare for and my parents are half an hour away so it just makes it a little bit more difficult. But I'm sure we'll get round it. [Frances, aged 30 – WH]*

### **Impact of Changes – Personal**

As mentioned above, Ellen had moved in with her partner. One woman's relationship had ended [Claudia] while another had met someone new [Carrie]. For Carrie this was an important change in her life as the new person in her life was also a woman.

Carrie realised that she may have held herself back because of her desire to keep her personal life private; she held back a part of herself from her colleagues and friends at work.

*I've met somebody new and I'm in a relationship now...I think because of that as well, that that's had an influence on my feelings about work and the way I deal with people at work because I've sort of, I've come out about my sexuality to some people but not many people at work. I think in a very strange way I've sort of held myself back in a lot of things because of the way I feel personally about things. [Carrie, aged 34 – WH]*

Another major change for Carrie was a long period of ill health which has had a direct impact on both her personal and work lives. She was studying for a degree and in paid work as well when she got ill. One of the most immediate effects was that she had to give up her paid work and one of her courses. This decision obviously had an impact on her income levels but also on her feelings of personal self esteem. She felt that she was not coping well and could not understand why.

*I got very ill and at the time I didn't know why I was feeling the way I was feeling 'cos it was just complete exhaustion and it was around the time that I was trying to do all my assignments for my degree...And I was a bit confused really as to what was wrong, whether it was because I felt I'd taken on too much or I was approaching everything in the wrong way - I'd set myself such high standards for every single thing I was doing that I just wasn't coping and that's what I thought was happening at the time. But later on found out that I had glandular fever and that has lasted for months and it's really been one of the biggest things that's going on in my life at the moment, in terms of everything's changed because of it, in what I can do. [Carrie, aged 34 – WH]*

Being ill led Carrie to rethink her priorities and make some hard decisions. However, the experience has also helped her realise some things about herself and the way that she has approached work in the past. Fear of failure has led to Carrie pushing herself to the limits and excluding much of the balance in her life.

*My social life has got to become as important as my academic life and it hasn't been for the last three and a bit years, it's been almost in the way. I've pushed it completely out the way as if, "Don't go there 'cos you'll fail if you do that". [Carrie, aged 34 – WH].*

She now feels that fostering a better work-life balance may be one of the ways forward for her as well as trying to change her way of dealing with work.

*I mean that [the illness] sounds quite negative but it's been a good year in other respects and, in a lot of ways, having to stop and take stock has in a way opened my eyes to the ways I approach things and the way I basically give myself a hard time (laughs) about things. I don't know how to explain it really. It's like I'm now looking to change the way I approach things in my work so that I don't burn out 'cos I think that's what happened basically...because of the intensity that I work, the sort of intense type of person that I am, I think I just burned out. That's why I'm looking to do things differently in the future. [Carrie, aged 34 – WH].*

### **Reflection**

For many women who took part, the reflection involved in the two interviews, life grids over the year had an impact on their lives. The grid in particular enabled the women to look back over their lives and recognise patterns of behaviour or make connections between dreams they had held and the reality of their lives. Whilst this could have been a depressing exercise, many expressed their surprise at how much they had achieved in their lives regardless of the barriers or hurdles that they had encountered. Many experienced unexpected benefits from completing the life-grid such as Vicky.

*...it's been a revelation to be honest, especially since we've done the life-grid and I've seen it written down. It's just kind of my life written down but the great thing about it is it's like a bit of a graph, it shows stages of my life that (pause) – I've been quite high, quite positive, doing everything, going for it, sailing along and dipped quite dramatically when things have gone wrong. But - and this is entirely to do with the life grid - reading it I can actually see an upward curve and that I'm moving forward. Now I didn't actually feel like that before we did this research; I just kind of felt I was getting by and doing the best I could with what had been flung at me. But doing this and talking about this as well I think saying it out loud has helped me realise that there is light at the end of the tunnel and I am still quite a positive person which I'd kind of lost track of a little bit and so it's helped me enormously and I'm so glad that I've done it [Vicky, aged 48; WH].*

## **Section 3 - The Wider Context of Women's Working Lives**

### **3.1 Communities at Home and at Work**

This study has examined the context of women's working lives as well as identifying practical solutions to support women's employment attainment and progression. Two key aspects have been identified: the role of community and the value of social networks. Social networks will be examined in the next chapter.

#### **3.1.1 The Role of Community**

Communities themselves can play a supporting or disabling role in helping women access and maintain employment (Mohan, 2000). Over recent years, there has been an expansion of the analysis of work and family to include community (Kagan, 1998; Voydanoff, 2001). The concept of community is itself, contested (Kagan, 1998) as for some, it is without a physical/territorial basis (Galston, 1998) and for others, this is central (Phillips, 1993).

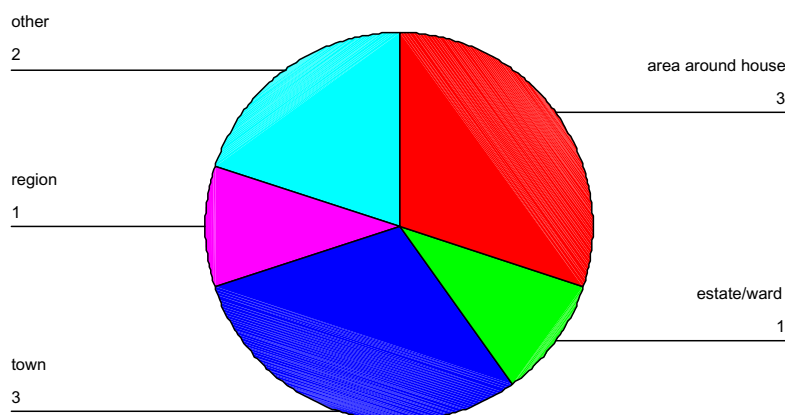
(Phillips, 1993:14) defines community as 'a group of people who live in a common territory have a common history and shared values, participate together in various activities and have a high degree of solidarity'. Others argue it is both. Community can be a physical area or a set of networks (Wilson Doenges, 2000). (Voydanoff, 2001) offers a conceptual model of community which includes sense of community, community satisfaction, social capital, social networks and informal helping. 'Feminist research has shown that gender differences in family responsibilities usually lead women to travel shorter distances than men within the city and to make a greater social investment in the locally-based community' (Strategic Workshop on Immigrant Women Making Place in Canadian Cities, 2002)

Communities are examined here as a potential resource for women in their working lives. For some this was most expressed outside their neighbourhoods and being part of a community that formed as being part of a centre. For some women, moving outside their usual circle of neighbours and friends can bring additional support. For most, the place they worked offered a source of community life.

### 3.1.2 What is community?

For the 'Revisits' women, community was only partially about the house/estate, with 6/10 mentioning wider areas such as the town, or organisations they belong to.

**Figure 4: What is community**



Community meant different things to the women in the Barriers project as well.

*Could be a whole village; could be your community, could be the youth community; and ethnic community a group of people, I suppose. However big or little you wanted to make it. [Elizabeth, aged 45 - B]*

*The area in which you live or the area in which you work. [Linda, aged 42 - B]*

*I think you've got lots of different types of community. ....lots of little different groups I see as being, you are linking in with different parts of your life. [Gina, aged 27 - B]*

*Community – the place where you feel comfortable, you know, quite a good variety of people. Community – you can go into a shop and they'll know who you are or you can walk down the street, you know, and you'll always see people that you know and you just feel at home. [Elspeth, aged 21 - B]*



### 3.1.3 Feeling part of a community

Most of the women in the Barriers Study felt part of their local community. The questionnaire survey found that 248 (74.9%) did feel part of their local community and 83 (25.1%) did not. Women's sense of community was multifaceted and a number of issues affecting this sense of community were raised, including the influence of motherhood, the influence of work, changes over time, the length of time living in a community, involvement in community organisations, how well neighbours are known, location, fear of crime and perception of safety.

Of the ten Revisit Interviews, 8/10 felt part of the local community to some extent, with 3 feeling very much part of it. One woman felt it was about the pace of life that supported a caring community.

*I'm not sure of the statistics, you know, the percentages of people but it's a nice balance. A lot of people work, but there are a lot of retired people as well. And I think a lot of people do look after each other we, I keep the front door locked. By habit. And people are surprised, a lot of people don't lock their front doors in S. and that is the difference between moving from big city to a smaller and little town really. I think here a lot of people they do a lot of good work, and look after each other as well. [Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]*

Another felt she really belonged there despite feeling it was a boring place.

*Interviewer: So do you feel part of the community?*

*Dorothy: Yes. I mean L. is boring don't get me wrong but I could never see myself leaving L. I belong to L. ....I'm just well known. Everybody knows me because I've grown up here all my life and people know me as M's daughter. I don't know, everybody's here that I bother with. [Dorothy, age 21 - B]*

Some women said there wasn't one community but lots of different ones.

*I think it's just everybody feeling like, you know, you belong where you are and a lot of it is knowing everybody...I suppose I do sort of think of the village as me home to an extent. But in terms of where I live, and the sort of area where I live, that is like a little community in itself...So maybe it is two separate little communities although there's not a big difference between the two, there may be two there. [Davina, aged 34 - B]*

### 3.1.4 Living and Working in the Same Community

From the 'Barriers' questionnaire data (of those women who responded to the question), 151 (41.4%) reported that they lived and worked in the same community and 214 (58.6%) reported that they did not live and work in the same community. In general terms, however, the majority of the women in the sample felt at home in their community.

Some of the women who took part in the interviews explained how it was necessary and important for them to live and work in the same community, which it is recognised may limit their options for employment. For some this was for a positive reason.

*I've always lived in [name of area] and I know the customers that come in, I love living in [name of place] cos I'm surrounded by my family. And yeah I have worked when I've been at University, I have worked away when I went to [name of University] and I enjoyed working there, but I like working at home, I feel more relaxed. [Elsbeth, aged 21 - B]*

*'... the problems we've had in this area with the coal mines closing down and the unemployment problems and all that and you kind of relate to it and at least it already feels like we are doing something to sort of you know regenerate the area, give people jobs, that type of thing and I think that helps the fact that you live here and you know all of the issues. [Davina, aged 34 - B]*

When asked about the importance of living and working in the community, many of the women spoke of the reasons why it was preferable for them to keep work and home separate. Living and working in separate communities thus increased their employment mobility and opportunities. Kathleen felt that she had to compromise and take her private life outside of her home area rather than her job, because she did not want to move as she and the children were happy and settled.

*... and I explained to her that I wouldn't feel comfortable with seeing people who I counsel. And she said, "Oh don't worry about that" and I said, "No, it's not right. It doesn't feel right - I'd have to go". "Oh you wouldn't have to go." I said, "I would, I'd have to get up and just go because I couldn't cope with it because that's my life and I don't want anybody, somebody that I'd counselled to see me having, not having a good time but that's part of my life that I don't want to share with them". [Kathleen, aged 32 - B]*

*... You'd meet people on the street and it got to the stage where I daren't go to the market on a Saturday cos I'd be three hours, you know, cos people would stop me and talk about things. And not that I didn't want to, but it's out of work time and there's the professional aspect and you know people milling around and confidentiality and that sort of thing. [Isobel, aged 60 - B]*

For others, there was a positive side to living and working in different places.

*I think it's nice to go somewhere different. I mean I can go into [name of home area] every other day that I'm at home but I don't always get the chance to go into [name of work area]. So from that aspect, to be able to out on my lunchtime and shop on my own, I find a bonus. I think I enjoy being somewhere different, being in different surroundings as well. [Megan, aged 29 - B]*

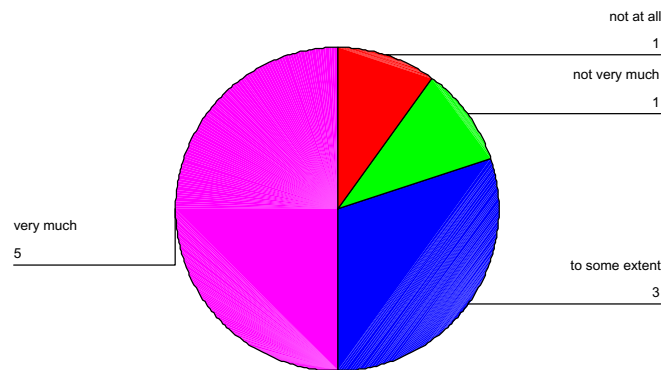
### **3.1.5 Work-based Communities**

Some believe that workplace communities are replacing other types of community such neighbourhoods, and reducing the time and commitment given to family life (Hochschild, 1997). Studies have found that job satisfaction is correlated with a sense of community at work ((Burroughs and Eby, 1998; Lambert, 1995)).

From the Barriers questionnaire survey of case study employees, many women had strong feelings about their workplaces. Of those women who responded to the question, the vast majority, 80% (297) reported that they did feel part of a community at work and only 49 (13.2%) reported that they did not feel part of a community at work. There was no difference in where the women worked, or their family status, or whether they were married or had children or not.

However, interviews with women in Widening Horizons found that work provided additional support. Many reported another community in their lives with 8/10 (80%) of the Revisit women feeling part of a community at work.

**Figure 5: Feeling part of a community at work**



80% also reported feeling at home in their current workplace to some extent.

*... It's quite nice to be a member of it [organisation] really...If you said you worked for [name of organisation] you could feel very proud of that...but yeah, I think most people think well of it, probably gives you a boost to be part of that. So yeah, it's a big community I would say. [Sheila, aged 36 - B]*

*I think the other thing that it gives me is, you know, I really enjoy the social contact that I get at work and if I didn't have my job I think I would feel quite lonely or I would have to look for that elsewhere in some other ways. [Jane, aged 51 - B]*

For some, the work community was more important than the home one.

*A lot of people say this, you probably see more of your work colleagues than you do of your family because you spend so much time here and I kind of class my colleagues as a family. I think because I enjoy what I do, I don't find it a hardship coming to work. It's like I say, it's my social time with my friends. [Davina, aged 34 - B]*

Pat felt that she really needed to feel more part of her local community, but work was her only community at the moment.

*Erm the one thing that I would change - I wouldn't move, well I would move my house, I would move my house closer to Middlesbrough but that's not going to happen. But what I would like is to continue being involved at the company and being part of the community here because I really do, strongly feel here that there is a community and I have got good - I've got friends at the old company but I've got good friends here that you know we all got on very quickly. But what I would like is to feel a bit more part of a community at home because I don't have, I don't know anybody. [Pat, aged 29 - B]*

### 3.1.6 Supporting Organisations as Community

The 'Widening Horizons' research revealed that women found new communities by becoming involved with community organisations and/or support groups. This is referred to as a psychological sense of community (Saranson, 1974) whereby an organisation/group brings structure and meaning to their daily life (cited in (Burroughs and Eby, 1998).

*Just a safe, it's a safe place to be. Knowing that, you know, there's no judgements at all and everybody seems to be very nice. You know, you don't get no nastiness or, you know, everybody's quite genuine and quite nice..... You know that if you come in and, you know, you are having a bit of a down day you can go to somebody and you would get that support there straightaway. [Juliet, aged 24 – WH]*

Also for many women who experience a change in their life due to illness, loss of job or increased caring responsibilities, their personal confidence can be affected. Voluntary organisations provide a safe environment in which to rebuild their confidence, improve their opportunities for interaction and in some cases, give them additional skills and knowledge.

*Obviously coming here has done me the world of good, meeting new people. I've made a lot of friends through the staff, eh everybody else, girls I've met on the other courses. Em and there's a few, you know, functions outside of WHIST, you know, I go to occasionally em and it's just I've, I feel that I've come, the last couple of years I've come on quite a bit, you know, after trying these things you know? [Clare, aged 31 – WH]*

In summary, most women in both the Barriers and Widening Horizons studies felt part of their local communities. This may shape their employment decisions in different ways. Some chose to live and work in separate communities, whereas others would not travel for work. This context is important in examining women's working lives and may shape their employment decisions in critical ways.

## 3.2 Identities, Roles and Work-Life Balance

### 3.2.1 Women's Roles and Identities

The Barriers study found that work meant different things to women; often it had multiple meanings that changed over the life-course. The current project has examined ways in which these meanings help shape women's identities. Women's working identities are shaped by everyday actions. This acts, in part, as a coping strategy. Identity is seen here as something people *do* other than something they *are* (Widdicombe, 1998). How women 'do' work and home and talk about it reveals its complexity. Work helps us to structure our identities. This is important in understanding the balance between work, leisure and family life (Fagan, 2001).

The debates on work-life balance have often excluded those without families or with other caring responsibilities. It has also indirectly placed women as a homogeneous group without sufficiently exploring the contexts in which they live and work. Furthermore, the subjective experience of women of work and home in a fundamental sense has been underplayed in comparison to the practicalities of juggling domestic and employment responsibilities. One possible underlying dimension to women's relationship with home and work concerns the meanings that work has for them.

This chapter first outlines the different roles and identities women mentioned as they talked about their working lives and then tries to focus on how these might be helpful in framing solutions for women's work-life balance.

For a small number of women like Isobel, work was just a means to an end.

I: What does it mean to you to go out to work? Why do you work?

*It's a means to an end, I actually work to live. I don't, not the other way round, it's not the be all and end all to me. It's a means to erm get the things that I want out of life and get the experiences that I want out of life and fortunately I enjoy doing it but erm you know m my time of life anyway I wouldn't be thinking of doing anything different. (Laughs) [Isobel, age 60 - B].*

For some women, factory work seemed more like a dead end. Denise was only 16 and found it limiting.

*The thing with the factory is you are in a dead-end job that's the only thing that bugs me because you're not going no where, you're not going to get any higher, your qualifications aren't going to change, you are not going to get any more skills out of it* **[Denise, age 16 - B]**

But the atmosphere was still important to her.

I: So what would, what would influence your choice to stay or go?

*I'm not sure [laughs] I would go away to work, but it's just I don't know it depends what type of an atmosphere and things because if it wasn't a nice atmosphere I think I'd say "oh God I want to go home". It's, it's got to be a nice atmosphere and friendly. There's no good working with people you don't get on with I don't think [laughs]* **[Denise, age 16 - B]**

For others, work was the most important thing in their lives.

*Interviewer: You loved [work] and you obviously got a lot out of it, so how did that love for your work filter over into the rest of your life? I mean, did you have another life or did you just sort of live to work?*

*Kathleen: Yeah I had a boyfriend at the time. He used to get pissed off with me because I was so dedicated - like for some people and for him it was "I go to work, I do my job, I come home, I get my wages at the end of the week". It wasn't like that for me. I wanted to talk about what I'd done in the day. I wanted somebody that I could share that passion for if you like, with somebody but it's very difficult. Mum was brilliant, she was fantastic and my dad, but my mum especially.* **[Kathleen, aged 32 - WH]**

Work gives many women a sense of purpose outside of family life and they feel valued.

*Interviewer: So can you tell me what work means to you - whether it's the work that you are doing now or work in a sort of theoretical sense?*

*Samantha: Well part of it's money, part of it's seeing different people, meeting different people. I enjoy basically helping the customers. The whole atmosphere really. I get on with everybody and I enjoy spending time with them - it's a bit of an escape really from - although I love being with him [the baby] it kind of gets a bit tying at times so it's good to break off and have adult company and adult conversations and you feel like, you feel like you've got a purpose if you are doing work. It's more, because you are getting paid for it, it's like you are more appreciated. It's more that sort of thing. Work as more than just a way to earn money.* **[Samantha, age 28 - B]**

For Barbara, work meant being valued by others as an individual. Being seen as someone *other* than a 'mother' clearly helped to boost her self-esteem.

*I remember the first day I went back to work, and it was a feeling of elation because, erm, I was actually putting some makeup on in the car as we were getting, and then it was a wonderful feeling because, I was becoming a person of worth. Now I remember that feeling quite clearly that I was no longer just a mother, I was - and it was a little part-time job that I'd actually got, just a couple of days a week for Christmas work - but it did give me a huge lift to be out there, to be valued in the workplace. I don't know why because I wasn't under valued at home, but it was a bit of a shot in the arm to think "Oh, well, I'm making a contribution". But to be valued as a person. [Barbara, age 54 - B]*

Some women felt learning skills was the important thing about work, part of their identity to be focused on new skills

*Interviewer: So how would you describe your relationship with your work? How important was it for you to work?*

*Kathleen: Priority - it was a top priority and it still is. It hasn't changed that much. If I want to apply myself to something that's it, I get tunnel-vision - completely focused and it takes over. I maybe love it too far sometimes but that's the way I am. [Kathleen, age 32 - WH]*

Lisa and Sheila viewed work as a primary source of their own identity.

*When I was young I always thought I could never not work, I thought I would always have to work. I suppose I still feel like that really, you get such a lot from work. You get an identity, you get a reason to get up in the morning and all the rest of it. [Sheila, aged 37 - WH]*

*Certainly in most of my life work's been incredibly important because it was really how I fulfilled myself I think' [Lisa, aged 54 - B]*

The meaning and role of work shifted for some after they had children.

*It changes you as a person because you're no longer the centre of your world, your children are. You have bigger responsibilities, you have more stability. Previously I moved to wherever there was a job that I wanted to go and do, and now I wouldn't do that. [Simone, aged 36 - B]*

Different identities take centre stage at different times and are privileged over others.

*I did actually make application for a promotion but it was in another town and when I sat down and thought about how convenient here was to us, how my childcare was all here, how the extra travelling would affect my childcare, I ended up withdrawing. I just thought I'd stay where I am. It would have added another couple of hours to my working day and the children were little and it would have been an hour later picking them up and an hour earlier dropping them off. For the benefits that were going to come I thought, "I'll just stay where I am". [Elizabeth, aged 45 - B]*



Women talked about the ways in which they juggled their different roles and identities and how they sometimes were in conflict. Faith found that developing her new work as a singer sometimes clashed with her role as mother.

*You know, and with every step they [children] take, it frees me up. And then as, like I say, the worries become something else. I was in a record company in London....I went down on me own, you know, met them and then I got a phone call and me daughter kicked off and whatever and me family aren't very, they're not very good at it (laughs) you know what I mean? And so I was like "right". So I'm sitting there and I've got this meeting and all I could think about was, "I need to get home, I need to get home". Where if I felt if I had someone in with us, they could cope with that d'you know what I mean, over time? - and it wasn't even a major one and I really shouldn't have been told until I'd got back cos it was nothing, you know?*

**[Faith, aged 32 - WH]**

Laura also found it difficult to adjust to the different roles.

*I found it extremely challenging that you had to get up in the morning, see to babies, see to children going to school. Get yourself ready for work. I had an image, I wanted to look professional. I wanted to be the office person, I didn't want to be somebody who was dragged in off the streets after dropping their kids off at school, so that was important to me. [Laura, aged 54 - WH]*

Marian found that her caring role within the family was causing her problems.

*I'm doing something for me...You know? I just - em I mean my daughter rang me up on Saturday - I'd been at work, I was really tired. She says 'Hi Mum are you, are you knackered?' I said, 'I am actually Annie.' I thought she wanted me to look after the baby. She said, 'I just wondered if you could look after Alice, but if you're really tired, just for a couple of hours?' I said, 'I'm sorry Annie, I really am tired otherwise you know I would say yes.' And I can say no now and she was fine about it but even if she hadn't been, when I say no I mean no now where it took me years to learn to say no. [Marian, aged 55] [WH].*

Kathleen has taken on increased responsibilities in her workplace which has resulted in having several 'identities' within the same space – student, teacher and professional. She viewed the merging of these 'identities' as quite difficult to manage.

*I come to the same place to do my studies and do my work and it's like putting different hats on. Tuesdays and Thursdays are going to be student role but come 4 o'clock I'm teaching. So between 4 and 8 one day and 4 and 6 another day, I become teacher role. So it's like this switch. I've even thought about what am I gonna wear? (laughs) because on a Tuesday and Thursday I'm normally in my jeans and trainers to just be the 'student me type' person but I won't be able to because I know I've got teaching afterwards, unless I bring a change of clothing... I have to have this change thing just to get myself into that role, you know? I can't teach in jeans and trainers, well I can teach in jeans but I certainly wouldn't wear trainers. So maybe it could just be the shoes...something has to change in order for me to be able to do that*  
**[Kathleen, aged 32 - WH]**

Kathleen's reaction to this situational blurring of boundaries is typical of how people manage interactions with others (Goffman, 1959). Situational interaction is dependant upon all those present understanding what is going on and reacting accordingly. As Kathleen's role changes within the same space, she feels the need to make obvious the difference, both to others and herself – even if that change is only putting on a different pair of shoes.

The multiple role changes in Kathleen's working life have filtered into her personal life and have affected her behaviour when socialising. Again, she feels the need for some clear boundaries.

*I'm much more wary about where I go out now as well. I haven't moved, I still live in [name of town] but I'm working - I've got one placement in [name of town] and [one in name of town]. One is not so bad but the other one is pretty close, it's like 5 miles away from home. I'm just becoming a little bit, bit more careful. Because I've been doing some teaching as well...I'm much more wary about going drinking in [name of town] now because of seeing my students and stuff like that. If it's an organised event where students and tutors come together then that's different but I'm kind of a little bit paranoid [both laugh]. I want definition between, you know, I don't want to be seeing people out and about...I can't do something daft. I think it's tailored where I go drinking or what I do, how I behave in certain places [laughs]. If I know where it's relatively safe, then it's just the same as normal but otherwise I get a little bit - I can't relax - I think that's probably what it is, I just can't relax as much*  
**[ Kathleen, aged 32 - WH].**

For some meaning, the way to cope with different identities was to put one on hold and put the most pressing at the forefront.

*'Erm. When I was younger and very you know ambitious, it was it was an important part of my life, it was something (Pause...) you know I wanted to achieve things, do things for myself and the like. Spent quite a long time studying, getting qualifications to some sort of fulfillment I suppose... you know it was something that you wanted to do with your life, I wanted to do with my life and it still is in a sense, but now because I've got children and they become my priority its now something which gives another aspect to my life rather than being at home all the time with my children and just seeing other mums and other children. I have still have a few days where I have something else in my life and I can you know later on if I want to go and do others.'*

**[Simone, aged 36 - B]**

Some of the women found that when they found fulfilling work, it became part of their identity. Faith discovered a new occupation as a singer and it changed her life.

*[My work is] pure passion. I can't explain it. It's like having a child, you know what I mean? It's something innate that I have to do and there's nothing else I want to do. It came late to me in life, you know, over the years trying everything and thinking, "Ahah, this feels right".* **[Faith, aged 30 - WH]**

Carrie found the two spheres of her life merged into one and brought greater meaning.

*I suppose in some respects I almost want to bring in a little bit of it [work] into my personal life or put some of my personal life into the work because I want it to be meaningful. I want my work to be meaningful and be part of me and, you know, your creative side - you want it to come out in your work, when it's this sort of work. So, yeah, there might be a change in that. There might be more of a coming together of that personal life and work, which would be really nice because its sometimes hard to keep it separate.'* **[Carrie, aged 34 - WH]**

Our findings suggest that women's attitudes to employment and the meaning that it has in their lives is complex and multifaceted and varies in relation to family relationships. The multiple meanings of work that women have identified appear to be necessary to cope with the multiple social identities that the women have in their lives and to find a balance between work and home. Women's identities shift and one gets privileged over another shaped by the particular context of their lives.

### **3.2.2 Work-life balance**

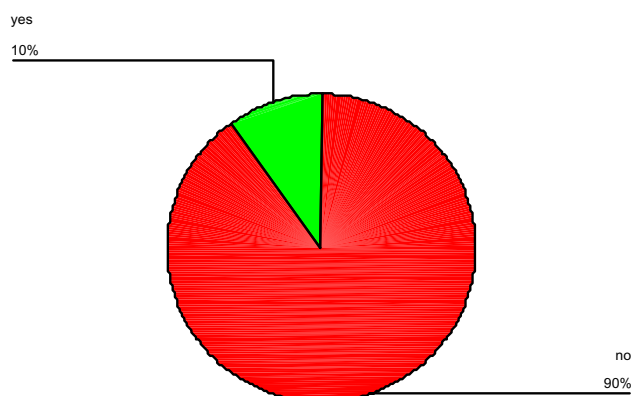
The impact of family responsibilities on women's careers and progression in the labour market has been well documented (Cabinet Office, 2001; Dench et al., 2002; Fagan and Burchell, 2002; Walby and Olsen, 2002; Fawcett Society, 2002). Women's careers and progression in the labour market is distinctly shaped by their lion's share of family responsibilities. Over a third of women in one study felt that their

commitments to care for others had prevented them from getting work or progressing in work (Hogarth et al., 2001).

The Barriers study revealed that juggling work and home was something many women were finding a challenge. 22% of women worked on average 30 hours or under per week, the majority worked between 31 and 40 hours. Women often mentioned the need to consider the needs of their children and partners in relation to their working lives. Their choices and patterns of work were shaped by childcare and their partner's employment, location, transport among other things. Women tend to bear the brunt of caring responsibilities in the home. In one study, over a third of women, 39.1%, said that they felt that their commitments to care for others had prevented them from getting work or progressing in work (Hogarth et al., 2001).

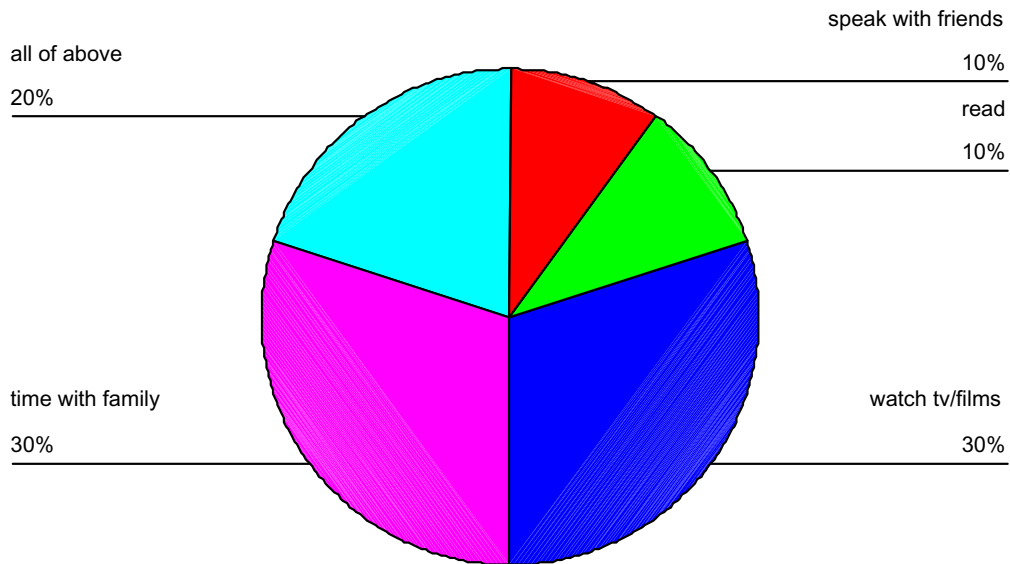
Our research found that women generally did not view work in isolation, but made employment choices in the context of wider roles and responsibilities. From the Ego-net data compiled from the Revisit women, there were some interesting findings about the amount of leisure time out of work that women had. The average was 20/30 hours a week (with a large range from 7-54). There were clear indications that women were not getting sufficient leisure time for themselves. 90% of this small sample felt it was not enough.

**Figure 6: Time for leisure/self**



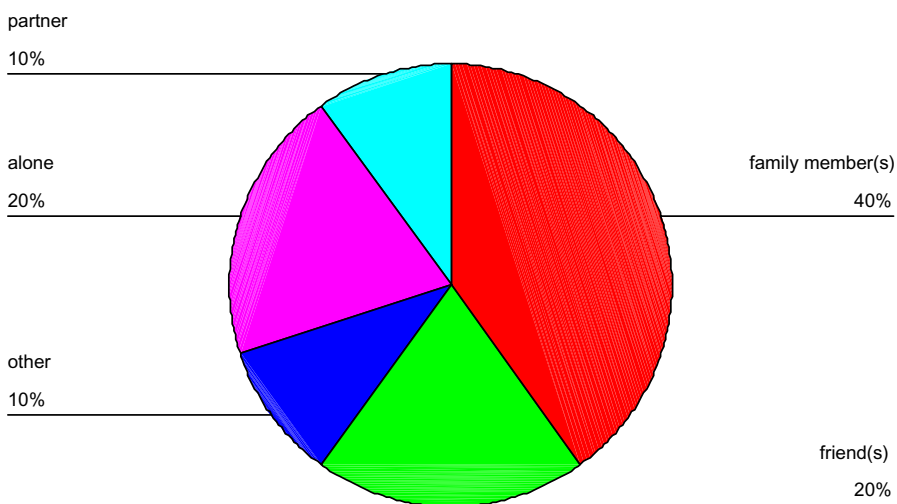
This time was spent in a variety of ways, with nearly a third spending it with their family and a further third watching TV or films.

**Figure 7: Main activity in leisure time/self**



Only 20% were carrying out these activities alone.

**Figure 8: Who activities were being done with**



This chapter has outlined some of the different ways that women's broader lives impact on work and their work-life balance. Of the women who took part in the Revisit

interviews, nearly all wanted more time for themselves and to be with their families and friends. The 'Barriers' study suggested that women were prioritising the needs of their children and partners, in relation to their working lives rather than their own. Women, particularly those with children, spend considerable time and effort in balancing their work and family life. The combined findings from our two stage study suggest that employers could profit from a better understanding of the place, context and time dependent meanings of paid work for individual women e.g. their prioritised, chosen and pivotal roles within the family/relationships. In other words, solutions to achieving work/life balance are context dependent and vary enormously for different groups of women and between individuals.

### **3.3 Social Networks and Communication**

The previous chapter demonstrated the role of community in relation to women's working lives. The women in our studies reveal a rich set of relationships within distinct communities and across varied social networks. This chapter explores these social networks, e.g. their importance and variety, and also examines how these networks are enabled and supported by the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). A key point here is that women's networks are a great resource, the value of which is not always recognised by either the women themselves or by policy makers. Making women more aware that they themselves can improve and further support their working lives by nurturing and broadening their existing networks could be a useful way forward.

#### **3.3.1 The Role of Social Networks**

The 'Barriers' research findings suggested that women's social networks, e.g. their friends and colleagues might play an important part in their working lives. Considerable research has examined the role of social networks in accessing and maintaining employment, suggesting that who we know, and the resources available through those contacts can have a key impact on our working lives i.e. better connected people do better ((Burt, 2001; Lin, 2001). However this is not straight forward since how relationships are formed is complex (Mouw, 2003). Neighbourhoods and communities can also be source of informational support. Neighbours routinely provide information for each other when they interact. As Unger argues, 'Social networks are the linkages that a neighbour develops with particular individuals both within and outside neighbourhood boundaries' ((Unger and Wandersman, 1985:146). People function in different social networks, at different levels, across different times and spaces, so that they may look for different things from their home area as a result (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001).

Many people have few ties outside of the community that they have lived in or near all their lives (Stoloff et al., 1999). However, those with good connections are likely to find better jobs. So who you know and where you live are important factors in understanding your working life.

Connecting this to the development of social capital is potentially valuable as it 'concerns the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which

both result in and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships' (Edwards, 2004:2). However given that many people have few ties outside of their immediate community, this can have also have a negative impact if the community is a disadvantaged one (Stoloff et al., 1999). 'Those with good connections are likely to find better jobs' (Stoloff et al., 1999:95).

### **Social Networks and Employment**

Social networks can enable sources of employment through word of mouth. Those without access to networks may be denied the opportunity to gain employment or to progress along their career (Stoloff et al., 1999; Krauth, 2004). However, women and men tend to have different types of social networks (Rothstein and Davey, 1995). Women tend to belong to small, community based/ voluntary organizations while men are more often integrated within large, economically orientated groups (Hanson and Pratt, 1995). Being linked to male networks is more likely to lead to employment opportunities and in particular, to better paid employment (Stoloff et al., 1999). As (Strategic Workshop on Immigrant Women Making Place in Canadian Cities, 2002) reports studies of social networks are very revealing of the gendered qualities of life in cities: women's social networks are more strongly rooted in family and close friends, whereas men's are more likely to include acquaintances; men's social ties tend to be more diversified than those of women, giving them access to a broad range of information, which often assists their social and economic mobility. This reduces women's opportunities to access a greater variety of positions, and also to have links to those in positions of power and employment decision-making. However, women's networks can also be valuable sources of diverse support.

### **The Nature & Diversity of Social Networks**

The diversity of a person's social network is a key indicator of both how successful they will be in finding work (Lin, 2001) and also the level of pay that they will receive when they get there.

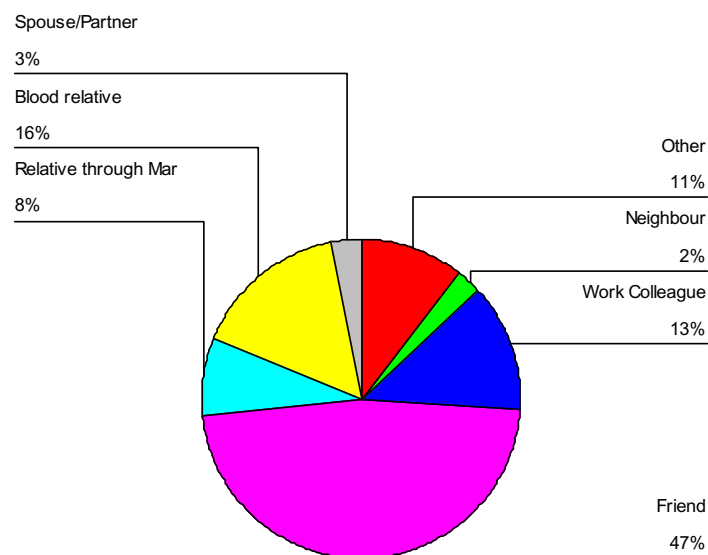
In our study, not all the participants were in employment, and several were also involved in voluntary organisations. However, belonging to a voluntary organisation or similar social groupings can benefit efforts in searching for employment. (Stoloff et al., 1999) p95). Being part of a community group can herald the start of the development of social networks which will result in better employment opportunities. This may enable women to both make new contacts and friends and also develop



new interests and skills, all of which can increase their contact with a wider range of people and help them to become more attractive to potential employers.

This research used Egonet, to tease out the social networks enjoyed by the Revisit women. Each participant talked about approximately 30 people within their social network. For some this included a very extensive network, but for others, it was mainly close family and friends. Of the 300 people that were described, 69% in the networks were female, and 87% of the sample was described as White British. Information on the nature of the relationship between the participants and the people in their social network suggests that the two largest groups of key people, other than family (26%), were friends (47.3%) and work colleagues (13%)

**Figure 9: Best Description of Relationship**



Of course, there are overlaps in how people are described in the social networks e.g. the extent to which work colleagues or neighbours become friends, but overall, the majority of the sample show that their social network is a mixture of family, friends, work colleagues and other people.

### **Social Networks at Work**

Social networks are significantly shaped by gender and the context of daily life. In general, men and women's social networks are qualitatively different, with women gaining most emotional support and men having more diverse and looser ties (Russell, 1999). Also there is a difference between unemployed and employed

women's networks. Unemployed women have many more links to other people who are unemployed and are therefore more likely to be excluded from important job information networks (Russell, 1999).

*you know closest buddies through work are females and we all, you know, support each other and help each other out with stories*  
**[Claudia, aged 32] [WH]**

*- I was stopped in the corridor last week erm - they're gonna create a Consultant Nurse post for Public Health. Erm I was asked if I was interested and I said, 'Well yes I probably would be but generally Consultant Nurses are Masters level' (laughs) and she said, "Well you know, we can make it a different kind of post" and I said, "well if I could use this you know as, as a way of studying a degree at the same time and doing it that way".* **[Gemma, aged 39] [WH]**

### **Importance of Networks**

Social networks appear to be paramount (Moerbeek and Need, 2003; Stoloff et al., 1999; Hanson and Pratt, 1995). For some women in the research, being without them was unthinkable.

*I: How important are these groups of people to you?*

*Everything. They're, they're absolutely everything to me (pause). I just kind of think without people (pause) for me would be just like 'what's the point?' Just people and being part of the social set or scene is everything to me.* **[Vicky, aged 48 – WH]**

An examination of how often the women in our study met with people in their social network (see Table B1 in the Appendix), demonstrated that work colleagues and neighbours were seen very frequently, as is the case for a spouse or partner. However, frequency of contact was not necessarily an indication of the closeness of the relationship or the degree of social support that may be given. (See Figure B1 in the Appendix). Nonetheless, being able to be in contact with people as often as they wanted was very important to our women.

*Interviewer: So how important are these different groups of people to you?*

*Jocelyn: Very important cause one of the reasons we came back to the UK because we did miss family members –* **[Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]**

Accessible sources of support and being physically close to family and friends can also play an important role in key decisions such as employment. Family and friends can provide a crucial role in the achievement of work-life balance and being away from them solely for the sake of paid work may not be an attractive proposition.

Interviewer: Okay. Would you be willing to move away from your current location to get work?

*Vicky: Not sure, I'm not sure on that one. I wouldn't rule it out.*

Interviewer: What sort of factors would you have to take into consideration?

*Vicky: I suppose my husband's work would have to come into it. Em family maybe, I say maybe I would have, if I wanted to move away somewhere else I know I would have the blessing of my family because they're very supportive but that would come into the decision and I've built up quite a nice network of friends and support which has helped me enormously I would say over the last two years so that would be hard.* **[Vicky, aged 48 – WH]**

The social networks that people develop become key in providing different levels of social interaction, support, friendship and care. The degrees of importance that are placed on these networks can influence major life decisions such as: where people live, and changing jobs, as well as whether or not they are able to draw on these links to improve their employment options. Social networks should not be dismissed as trivial, but rather be should be regarded as a cornerstone to an individual's life. Social networks can provide the anchor for a person's life and identity: without them there may be little practical or emotional support.

### **Social Networks as Social Support**

Social networks may also help to shape a person's identity and role in relation to work and home life (Passy, 2003). Given that it is often women who are the main carers in the family, social support is invaluable both in terms of emotional and practical support. Without actual help in providing care for children, infirm or older family members, women would be unable to go to work or to have leisure time (Russell, 1999). Managing the bulk of the social care in the family also means that women require emotional support. However, the kind of social networks that support these needs may not be the kind that are also helpful in finding jobs or progressing careers. Social networks, therefore, may have two main functions; firstly to provide close, emotional support and secondly to provide more diverse and less emotionally close, connections to people (Hanson and Pratt, 1995). Men and women seem to differ in the emphasis that they place on each of these functions and the relative size of the social networks that they allocate to each function (Russell, 1999).

For the New sample of women, Figure 10 shows a fairly even spread in the degree of closeness, with 16% described as 'very close' and 53% described as 'close' or 'quite close'. As the social networks for the entire sample total only 300 people, it indicates that the majority consider close family and friends as the core of their social network which also includes those work colleagues and neighbours whom they see most days.

**Figure 10: Closeness to the person**

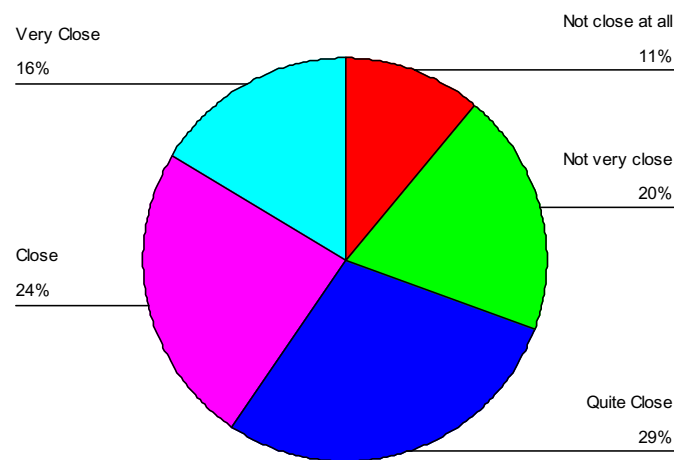


Table B2 (in Appendix) shows the degree of closeness that they felt with people in their social networks. In general it was the spouse/partner and blood relatives that were described as being 'close' or 'very close'. Only a select few friends were described as 'very close', and most just as 'quite close'. In general, work colleagues were described as 'not very close'.

From this, the strength and support given by social networks seems to come mainly from family and a few friends (Figure B1 in the Appendix)

*But my most support I would say is my daughters. Obviously my husband a little bit, when he's not at work. But when my back was bad he was doing just about everything, which was a good help. My friends from here, you know, I get a lot of support from them.*  
**[Madeline, aged 52 – WH]**

## Dynamic networks

Social networks are not static, but change over time, reflecting current social contexts and demands.

*Interviewer: So what do you, how have you reacted to that, because your situation in a way has been forced upon you and you've had to change, you've had to stop work. Have you kept in touch with those people? Do they continue to be in your life or have you sort of moved on?*

*Madeline: I've moved on. Yeah moved on, made friends. As I say, if I do see people outside that's, you know that's fine, say hello but I don't sort of keep in touch with those.* **[Madeline, aged 52 – WH]**

In some cases where an unwelcome change is enforced, there may be little desire to keep the old social network.

*Also em I've got, I do keep in touch with a couple of people that I've worked with in [name of occupation]. I find that very hard 'cause they're still in the job and obviously they talk about the job when we get together and I do find that a bit of a struggle, but I do like to keep in touch.* **[Vicky, aged 48 – WH]**

While social networks are strong and can have a strong influence in a person's life, they are never fixed. They are open to change and modification, and therefore, there is the possibility that they can be altered by the person in order enhance their own personal job opportunities.

A remarkable finding from this research is the degree to which a large number of members of key social networks were accessed relatively recently. Although the age range of the group was 30 – 54 yrs, Figure B2 (see Appendix) shows that 42% of all the members of the social networks had been met with in the last four years. For all the women in the sample, this means that a large majority of their current social networks have been forged since they were in their mid-twenties. Although family are important, and some friends may have been accessed at school or college, the social networks have changed and evolved over time to include new work colleagues, new neighbours, new members of the family and new friends.

*I don't know really. I've come as far as I can for now and I just, - it's what I wanna do and I will achieve it because I was just career ridden at first and then when I became a Mam, it just completely changed. But I've still got it there and I still wanna do it. I don't want to be somebody who sits at home and gets their money off the government and provides for their kids that way. I want to let them know that I've done me best for them and I've gone out and I've worked for everything they've got.* **[Juliet, aged 24 – WH]**

The way that people's social networks change over time is perhaps the key to understanding their significance. As Juliet says, she was career orientated and then having children changed her focus. When she was working, she spent time with work colleagues but once she had children she had to rely on her family and friends to provide childcare to allow her to have leisure time.

### **Impact of Location on Social networks**

Although work colleagues and neighbours may be seen every day due to their physical proximity, this is not necessarily an indication of the closeness of the relationship and the degree of social support that is given. There may even be benefits to having a social network which is not necessarily physically close. (Stoloff et al., 1999) It is important to note that Stoloff *et al* do not give a definition of 'neighbourhood'. A 'neighbourhood' could be considered to be as small as several houses, and as big as a town. Our sample were limited to giving details of only 30 people in their social 'network, which is not the same as referring to a neighbourhood.

However, in this research, the vast majority, 64%, were said to be local to the participant (defined as being within a 50km radius). There were several participants who had moved a distance from their family home, but still considered their family to be part of their social network. It is clear therefore that being geographically close to people or being related are strong factors in inclusion of a social network.

Although the majority of people who would be used as a social support lived locally, many people who lived further away were also considered to be social supports, including those who lived in Europe and the rest of the world. (See Figure B3 in the Appendix).

When asked about how close they considered themselves to be to people, not all of those whom they considered to be very close were local. This may be because although work colleagues, neighbours and relatives by marriage are seen often and live close by, they are not the people that the women chose to be their close friends.

An important factor in who is regarded as a social support is the increasing use of technology for communication, which will be examined in the next section. This may

be allowing people to maintain close relationships over long distances without the need for face to face meetings.

In summary, the previous report “Barriers” considered the main barriers that face women in the North East when they want to return to work or to progress in their careers. Social networks were identified as being central to these aims, and that is why it is important to look at the social networks of women in the North East. By understanding more about women’s social networks, women, organisations and employers may be able to overcome some of the barriers that women face in gaining employment and progressing in their careers. The social networks that people have reflect their current life; the needs, the obligations and personal preferences. Men and women’s networks might be intrinsically different due to general gender differences. However, the major determinant of the nature of a social network is the role or roles that the person has at that time. The social network is key in providing links to people with relevant information and skills, be it career information, childcare support or leisure pursuits. When there are changes in a person’s life such as redundancy or family commitments, aspects of the social network will change to accommodate the new lifestyle. By the same argument, in order to generate change such as employment opportunities, relationships with key members of the social network may become more prominent for a time, and aspects of the social network may change altogether.

### **3.3.2 The role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

Modern women’s daily lives include increasing access to technologies that can both enable and inhibit work and home-based communication. Understanding how women use and view these information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help us to understand and contextualise their everyday lives.

The Internet continues to grow in size and use, and mobile telephones are being used by a greater proportion of the population each year (National statistics on line, 2004). As more and more methods of communication become available, it is interesting to note the methods that women most commonly use and how they use them. Since the mid-eighties, technology has been perceived as a male dominated area from the research to the development stage (Sherriff, 2004), and even as late

as 2004, the Equal Opportunities Commission launched an investigation to why this unequal situation persisted

However, IT industries are belatedly starting to recognise the growth in women's spending power and are now beginning to target women specifically. Equally, women are increasingly discovering that electronic networking can provide access to global information and enable them to interact with people around the world, a development that was not available several years ago.

A potential downside to this is that the growth in technological gadgets has meant that women now feel more pressured to be contactable all the time (Sherriff, 2004) and as the plethora of ICT communication opportunities increase, what does this mean for women? What products/outlets are accessible to them and how do they use the different communication options open to them?

Statistics compiled by the UK Government, in 2002, demonstrate that 44% of households had satellite, digital or cable television and 98% had a landline telephone (National statistics on line, 2004). By the winter of 2004, 52% of households had access to the Internet. And by May 2003, 75% of all adults in the UK owned or used a mobile telephone.

Texting is become more and more popular as a method of communicating quickly.

*"Women are more prolific than men, with 46 per cent admitting to gossiping using SMS compared to 34 per cent of men. Women send 19 text messages a week compared to men's 15." (Lettice, 2004)*

This study found that the use of technology was central to the ways in which women communicated with their social networks.

### **From Texting to the Internet**

In this research all of the participants owned or had access to a landline telephone and to a mobile telephone. 94% owned or had access to a computer and 55% owned or had access to an interactive television. Of the small number of participants who talked about texting, 5 out of 8 (62.5%) women said that they send text messages. However, not all the women liked to text.



Interviewer: So why don't you text?  
*Jocelyn: Haven't really got used to it to be quite honest. Only if it's an emergency then I'll, you know, have a go. It's easier for me to either phone or use an email* [Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]

Most of the women used mobile telephones and the Internet, including sending emails, but did not necessarily value the ICT skills that they were using.

*I: Right so do you value those skills? Do you see those as important?*  
*Juliet: Not really no.*  
*I: Why not?*  
*Juliet: Cause it's not something that - I don't just like to sit there and play on a computer a long time, it's something that I only get to do like once in a blue moon because the full time work caring after Mam and the kids. But eh it's mainly texting.* [Juliet, aged 24 – WH]

Although the women were using mobile telephones to make calls and send texts, using computers to send emails and to communicate e.g. via Instant Messaging or to shop online, they did not perceive this as 'using technology'.

*I'm not sure about the interactive TV.*  
*I: That's like, you know, like when you've got Sky, if you've got Sky or digital TV and you can press the red button and*  
*Oh I have, so I've got that then!* [Vicky, aged 48 – WH]

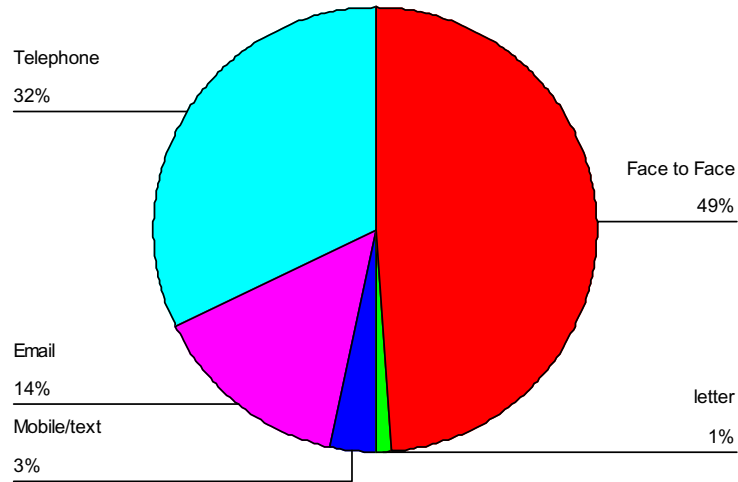
To them, using technology seems to be something that other people do, and involves an expertise that they neither understand or feel entitled to claim.

*To be honest I've never really thought about it very much, em but with me, my working life's always been so physical. I dabble a little bit on the computer now so I don't really know what I would like to do with it or where I would go with it but I'm quite interested and maybe would like to look into something but I'm not sure yet.*  
[Vicky, aged 48 – WH]

### **Communicating with the Social Network**

Almost half of the women in this research cited face to face communication as their main means of contact with their social network (see Figure 11). A further 32% used the telephone, with email used for 14% and mobile or texts used in on 3% of cases.

**Figure 11: All Participants - Network by main means of contact**



When asked about the main means of communication that they used with their social network, the majority (49%) said that they talked face to face.

I: And is your main, is your main contact with people face to face?  
*If it was up to me, yes. Because I just, I like to be with people, I like to talk to people, and I like to go out with people em, be social em. So although I, I do like talking on the phone that's not the same for me, I'd rather be with people. [Vicky, aged 48 – WH]*

For others it is not a social event that they wish to have so much as a personal contact with a person.

*I like to see somebody face to face. I don't, yeah I like talking to somebody on the phone but a, it's just like you know, you could be wandering around with your head space somewhere else where if you like I'm speaking to you, we're actually - there's eye contact going and you're, you know I think you're listening. [Marian, aged 55 – WH]*

Being able to see a person and their reaction was a highly valued method of communication. However, it is not always possible to meet face to face, and the next most popular method of communication was the landline telephone.

Email was used in 14 % of cases, but for specific groups of people in the social network. In the main, it was used to contact work colleagues and friends but not family (Table B4 in the Appendix).

*Face to face and we have a lot of older relatives who aren't on email so then we have to use the phone. I couldn't expect my husband's aunts and uncle who live in Newcastle, they're in their seventies, couldn't expect them to erm be on email or whatever (laughs)* -  
**Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]**

The Internet and access to email is lowest amongst households with older people (National statistics on line, 2004). This will necessarily dictate the other forms of communication that are used, but it also indicates that older people may be either more content to use more traditional means of communication such as face to face conversation and a landline telephone, or anxious about using ICTs. For older people who are searching for work, not having access to these forms of communication may limit their ability to search for jobs and to be contacted by people to tell them about opportunities. Some employers may also be concerned that they lack these skills when an application is made.

While many of the women had access to several means of communication, they favoured face to face and telephone contact over emails and texting. This may be because email and mobile telephones are still relatively recent inventions and are not as commonplace as landline telephones. There is also the issue of being able to use all the non-verbal communication signals which people utilise when talking face to face.

*Interviewer: A lot of your networks, your networks seem to be very much local?*  
*Vicky: They are and not only that, I prefer the personal touch as well, being able hear the spoken word rather than read it and I just like to feel like I'm speaking to another person rather than a machine.*  
**[Vicky, aged 48 – WH]**

A sense of connecting with other people was important, and although email is a written form of communication it was regarded as different to a letter or card.

*I actually keep all my cards that people send me and all the bits and bobs from the children that have, that they've, you know I've got stuff in the kitchen hanging up you know. "To a lovely, to a lovely Nana" and all this you know? I just love it you know, you can't, it's nice on the phone I mean they all say "I love you Nana" but to actually see it on the kitchen door, it cheers me up sometimes you know?*

**[Marian, aged 55 – WH]**

While emails can be printed out, they seem to be an intrinsically different form of communication, and it seems that the nature of the relationship between people in the social network as well as the content of the communication may determine which method is used.

*Interviewer: So are there certain people that you would ring rather than email?*

*Jocelyn: Yes, I have a girlfriend in Devon. We chat on the weekends and in the evenings. I don't email her very often. Erm we have other friends (pause) again if we want to just socialise talking really about nothing important. They will normally email us or telephone, so it's about the same, can't really erm but I would certainly email, I email more than I use the phone. **[Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]***

Another influence on the choice of ICT is location (see Table B3 in Appendix). For instance when were unable to meet, they tended to use a telephone. For work colleagues, almost all meetings would be face to face because of the nature and context of the relationship, but the other popular means of communication was email. Friends were most often seen face to face, but also contacted by telephone and email. Spouse/partner and neighbours all involved face to face contact.

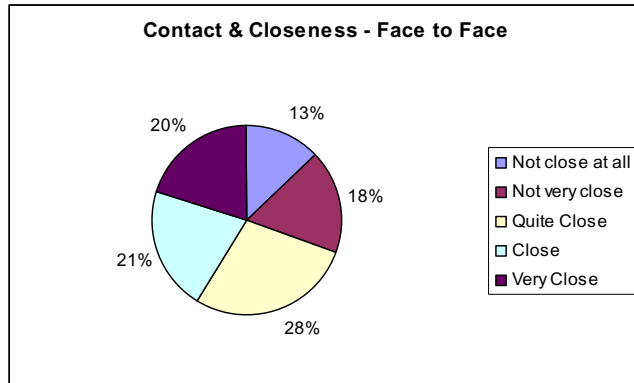
Most people who lived locally communicated face to face, or via telephone). For people living in the rest of the UK, telephone was used most often. Telephone and email were used almost equally for people based in Europe or the rest of the world. Interesting however, the greatest use of email was between people who lived locally to one another. This suggests that email has become a favoured means of contact between both friends and work colleagues including those who also tend to live relatively close to one another.

### **Contact & Closeness**

With face to face contact being the most popular means of communication with a social network it is unsurprising that it is most often used method of contact within the network regardless of the perceived level of closeness. When the distribution of

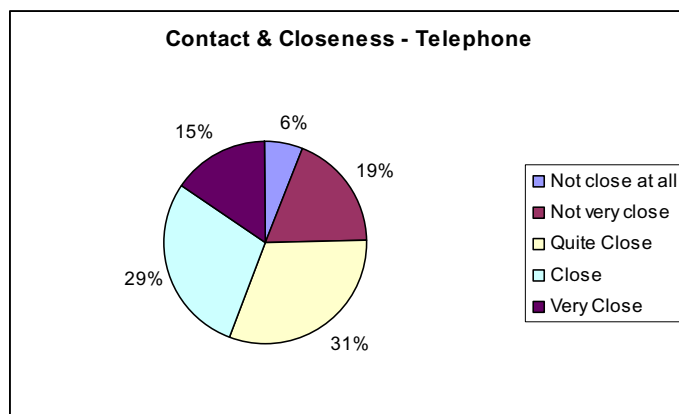
closeness for each communication method is compared, (Figure 12), there are some broad differences in how the three main communication methods are used.

**Figure 12: Contact & Closeness - face to face**



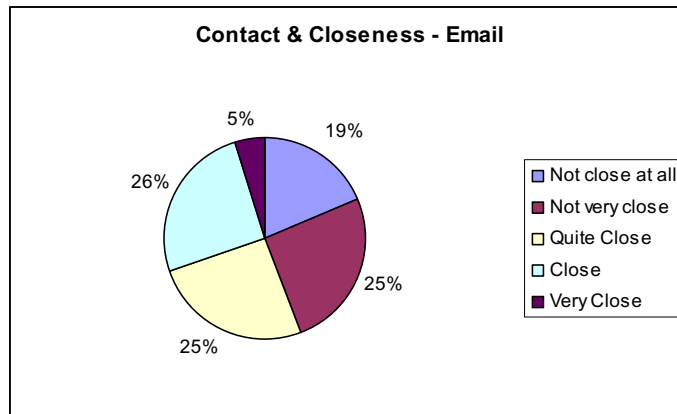
Of the face to face communications, 20% are between people described as 'very close'. This compares to the telephone where 15% of its use is for people who are 'very close'. For email, only 5% of its communications are for these people.

**Figure 13: Contact & Closeness - Telephone**



Where contact is made with people described as 'not close at all', this accounts for 13% of the face to face contacts, 6% of the telephone contacts and 19% of the email contacts.

**Figure 14: Contact & Closeness - Email**



This may be due to the fact that email is widely used in employment situations where it is being used to contact colleagues who are not close. The telephone can be used to pass on basic information to relatives, as well as being used for socially supportive conversations with close family. Neighbours, who may not be regarded as close will generally be seen face to face, as may be the case with relatives.

Face to face contacts give both a physical presence and immediacy to the conversation. A telephone conversation has some of this, but lacks the visual element. Email lacks immediacy, a physical presence and the non-verbal communications carried in bodily movements and intonation. For professional contacts and making arrangements between friends, these issues are not as relevant, however, they play a vital part in maintaining a strong and close contact between people who give and receive emotional support.

Mobile telephones can also be used in a personal or professional context. However the use of a specific number to contact a person rather than a switchboard number means that even in a professional context, it can seem to be quite a personal method of communication. Similarly for texting, the short space to type a message requires mutually understood shorthand between the sender and receiver in order to communicate effectively. This again means that the method of communication is quite intimate and reserved for those who are close rather than between merely acquaintances.

From these results, it appears that modern information communication techniques are not replacing face to face meetings and conversations using landline telephones, but are augmenting them, providing people with a variety of ways to keep in touch. It

is the nature of the relationship, the content of the communication and the availability of the technology that determines the chosen methods of communication.

### **What are women using ICTs for?**

Most of the women in the research used their ICTs to contact family and friends. For some families, the telephone is useful for being able to quickly check that all is well each day. Showing how much a loved one means is important, but other demands may mean that there is not time for a visit, however, a brief telephone call can put people together.

*Em I do like to keep in touch with mum and dad because em (pause) me mum's seventy five and me dad's eighty one and time's ticking on and you don't like to think about that but it is and so everyday I like to at least phone them. Em and I like to tell me mum I love her everyday as well. Em I just think it's important to say it rather than not say it and then regret it cause I hadn't said it. So I do like to keep in touch everyday - I don't see them everyday. [Vicky, aged 48 – WH]*

Women not only use ICTs to contact their social network, they also use it as part of their daily lives.

*I use it to, mainly to email people, friends to keep in touch. I use it to access jobs available on the websites. [Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]*

For some, being able to use a communication tool is vital to maintaining their health and well being.

*I have got a landline. I only use mobile which err for me GP's and stuff if they don't ring the house and if I'm not in then they've got a few contact numbers to ring me at. Like they've got me mum's and me daughter's. [Lucy, aged 49 – WH]*

Others use it to be able to plan events and make bookings.

*Very useful yeah, I mean the reason we went to Edinburgh was a sideline was because our friends were over from Australia and we wanted to get together for, ex friends from South Africa also in the travel industry. He works for X in Sydney, they were coming across to Glasgow for a wedding erm we got together with them in Edinburgh for the last two days, we did all that by email; made arrangements, booked the hotel, erm everything by email. [Jocelyn, aged 57 – WH]*

For others, it can serve as a way of helping them to feel safe and secure.

*Well I feel secure with the phone. If I do go to the local shops I know that all I've got to do is use this phone and, you know, my daughter or my husband or whoever would be there, if needed to.* **[Madeline, aged 52 – WH]**

*Because em I'm kind of em on the move a bit, quite a bit, and I, I just feel safe to have my mobile phone with me because I like to think I've got a link with somebody. So em when I'm out and about it's, it's always the mobile phone that I've got with me.* **[Vicky, aged 48 – WH]**

ICTs fulfil several functions. They can help a person feel safe and secure whilst away from home, make complex meeting and travel arrangements, search for work, keep healthy and to keep in touch with loved ones. These uses of ICTs show clearly that in an age where there is greater mobility of people, more opportunities for travel and not being next door to all the people who matter, ICTs are the method by which social networks can exist beyond face to face meetings. Landline telephones led the way by allowing communication without having to be in the same room. The Internet and mobile telephones provide greater physical and temporal flexibility. People can be contacted wherever they are with a mobile phone, and an email sent at anytime to be read at the receiver's convenience. The downside is the loss of non-verbal communication and physical closeness. However, ICTs are an addition to face to face meetings that allow social networks to continue without physical or temporal closeness, and as such boost the possibilities for maintaining both personal and professional relationships.

The importance of communication for employment attainment, sustainability and progression cannot be underestimated. How women enable this communication through a variety of ICTs is interesting. If strengthened networks can improve women's place in the labour market, then understanding the role of technology: the ways in which it can enable this is of value. Training may be useful for women to make more use of existing facilities and connections, supporting them to build and develop their networks.



### 3.4 Case Studies

This chapter presents two case studies to illustrate the importance of placing individuals within their personal, home and work contexts. Decisions about work are not made in isolation and events happening within one sphere of life have an impact on other areas. These case studies also demonstrate the variety, sensitivity and effectiveness of the particular research methods used: life grid, Egonet and interviews.

Frances and Carrie are both in their early 30s and come from the North East. Although their upbringing and schooling appear similar, their lives have differed in many areas. To illustrate the key elements of their working lives, we have developed timelines, which are visual presentations of key information. Looking at a section of their timelines (see Appendix C), it is possible to see how these differences have influenced the choices they have made regarding work. Each of the women will be discussed in turn in relation to the nature of their working lives, the role of social networks related to work and the decisions they've made.

Frances went into nursing training straight from College and thereon into full-time nursing. Her qualifications enabled her to work differently as her circumstances demanded it, including working abroad, agency work and into the wider sector of 'care work'. Even though her future is uncertain, Frances views her qualifications as worthwhile and knows that she can always get a job in the nursing sector again; her decisions about work are therefore viewed from this position of employability. She has purposefully adopted a strategy of 'waiting' in her own career until her children are older – a strategy that she sees as being a choice based in part on her husband's secure job and their joint decisions about childcare and lifestyle.

*If we needed to with money and things like that but right now we don't need to. We sacrifice other things so that I don't have to go back to work...I feel sometimes that I'm letting myself down that I've not gone back to nursing and what have you, but there'll be a time for me. [Frances, aged 30 – WH]*

For Frances, future employment choices will not be about *whether* she will be able to get work at all, but rather whether or not she *wants* to return to nursing and her

current situation reflects her conflict between feeling she ought to return to nursing because she has the training and wanting to do something different.

In contrast, Carrie had no idea what she wanted to do when she left school and drifted into a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) at a veterinary surgery and from there decided to train to become a veterinary nurse. Disappointing results in exams, combined with an unhappy workplace, resulted in Carrie losing confidence in her own abilities and feelings of being trapped. Travelling abroad brought her into contact with a different sphere of people and helped her to realise that she was in a rut at work and that her low confidence in her academic abilities could be holding her back. She decided to make changes and built up her confidence gradually by taking different levels of qualifications until she was able to apply for University.

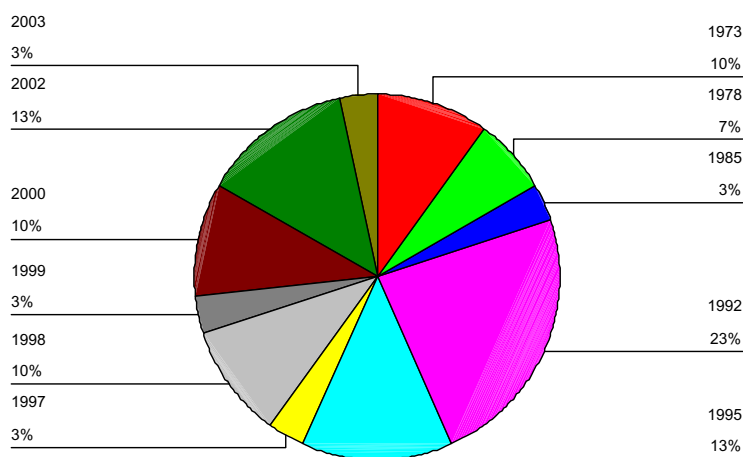
Carrie's decision to go to University fundamentally changed her future by offering different opportunities for employment. Like Frances, she had to make sacrifices to set them in motion, including giving up her job and steady income and moving back home to live with her parents for a few years. She sees these sacrifices as worthwhile, however, because of the long-term benefits of being in a career area that she wants to be in. From her life-grid it was easy to see that up until the point when she travelled abroad, events 'happened' to Carrie.

**Table 1: A section of Carrie's Life Grid**

Aged 16 years	Brother's girlfriend knew of a clerical training scheme for a vets (YTS) –worked there for 3 months then got a placement at a vets.	Had no idea what she wanted to do – felt like a lost soul. Hadn't done well at school – felt directionless. Said she felt like 'a fish out of water' and was thrown into the real world and was unprepared.
Aged 23 years	Left home Failed 2 <sup>nd</sup> year exam	Friend's mum had died and she wanted someone to live with her.
Aged 24 years	Re-sat the exam and failed. Said it destroyed her and she lost all her self-confidence, goals and ideas. Gave up on the idea and stayed with current position and felt stuck.	Her and her friend moved together to another house in the area; said it was her friend's decision, as she wanted a fresh start away from all her memories.

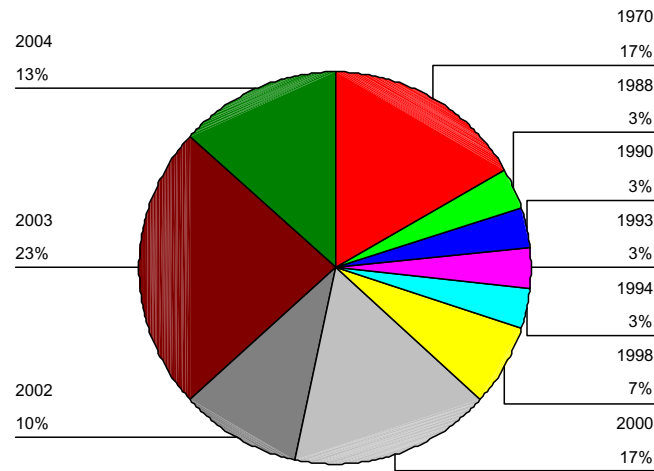
For Frances, work has had a powerful impact on her life. The graph below shows that 36% of Frances's network was met in 1992-1995, the period where she went through her nursing training and worked as a nurse. These contacts remain very important to Frances, even though she is not currently employed as a nurse. Only 29% have come into her network since 1999.

**Figure 15: Frances – Social Network by Year Met**



Carrie's network, on the other hand, reflects the impact of her decision to go to University and change career direction completely. Nearly two thirds of her networks have come into her life since 2000. Her networks have therefore changed dramatically in a short period of five years.

**Figure 16: Carrie - Network by year met**



This brief comparison of two women's lives demonstrates the different roles of work for them, and how this has impacted on how they view work in future. The decisions they made and their social networks can be significant in trying to understand their current position in the labour market. The ways in which social networks can form and reform is important here as it shows how in a short period of time, it is possible to strengthen networks to support greater opportunity.

This comparison also shows the richness of this data, comparing their interviews, life grids and Egonet findings. Each woman included in this study has to be understood as forming part of this complex relationship between experience and context, and these multivariate methods are invaluable in highlighting patterns and diversity.

## **Section 4 – The Way Forward: Three Models of Practical Solutions**

### **4.1 Potential Solutions**

This report has documented the importance of personal and social contexts in women's working lives. In this final section, we turn to more practical ways to support women in gaining, maintaining and progressing in their employment.

Retention of trained staff is a concern for Human Resources departments in all employment sectors, but as many of the women in this study demonstrate, discontent is not solely about lack of promotion and progression, but about being feeling undervalued by line-managers, trapped in jobs which appear to have no prospects or where hours of work clash with other responsibilities. It is impractical to think that everyone wants the same thing from work and this research has explored how the meaning of work influences how women to overcome barriers.

Widening women's working horizons can best be achieved by taking a holistic approach to women's lives. Practical solutions are often those which fit with the circumstances of the individual at a given moment in time. As women's lives evolve and go through transitions, so too do their aspirations and plans for the future. As this report demonstrates, women are actively involved in 'making things happen' for themselves, but often would benefit from help, advice and support from others, especially employers, line managers and work colleagues. Our research has highlighted three areas where that support from others and input from the individual women can combine to provide a practical solution:

- Networking
- Mentoring
- Personal Development Training

Each of these is now examined in turn.

## 4.2 Networking

(The Work Foundation, 2004) outlines key factors in supporting social networks for employment: time and space. Those with families and caring responsibilities tend not to have spare time to put in to networking inside and outside of the workplace, other than through the normal course of the working day. They suggest that a second factor is that networking happens in dedicated spaces. For those women with part-time or flexible hours, they may not be physically in the right place to make those networks. (The Work Foundation, 2004) suggests they are at risk of becoming 'de-networked' and hence deemed less effective and less dedicated to their jobs. However, this report has shown the women themselves have and maintain important social networks which may not yet be fully appreciated as a support for employment. Through women's networks, mentoring and informal social gatherings, women can booster their networks (McCarthy, 2004). Employers 'must think much more intelligently about how their employees are connected - to current and future clients, to suppliers and partners, and to each other, and how these patterns map onto needs and pressures around time and space' (The Work Foundation, 2004).

## 4.3 Mentoring

This chapter examines the potential of mentoring for **women** in widening their employment opportunities and enhancing their personal development. The study sought to establish whether issues such as confidence and self esteem could be addressed by participating in a mentoring programme.

### 4.3.1 What is Mentoring?

Most definitions of mentoring contain words such as 'guidance', 'support', 'realising potential' and 'learning'. Although having a mentor has often been seen as no more than having someone to turn to for advice - an older, wiser role model - the increase in the use of mentoring within workplaces and schools has led to the mentoring process itself becoming more structured and formalised. This has come about partly because of the increased recognition that entering into a mentoring relationship has certain roles and responsibilities for all those involved.

A mentor:

- is a role model
- is interested in the mentee and their personal development and/or goals
- is a good listener
- acts as a 'signpost' to guide the mentee to solutions to realise their own potential
- is an independent form of support and advice

The European approach to mentoring focuses on personal growth and development, the aim being to help an individual achieve and identify personal goals, including career development (Kram, 1985; Headlam-Wells et al., 2004). Since the late 1980s, mentoring has become increasingly popular in the UK and has been targeted at different groups such as in education, health and the business sector (e.g. Colley, 2003).

Such mentoring schemes are often based on **formal mentoring** where the mentoring relationships are structured or managed and are often authorised by the employing organisation in some way. The **Inland Revenue**, for example, view the relationship as an important way to increase diversity within their organisation by making the best use of their staff's abilities. They are prepared to invest in their staff by organising and supporting the 'Breakthrough' scheme, sanctioning the time needed as part of staff development.

Mentoring is an intentional relationship between people committed to their professional and personal development, which provides mutual benefit.

**'Breakthrough', Inland Revenue (2004)**

In contrast, **informal mentoring** is often not officially recognised by the employing organisation and may occur by chance or by individual desire. Informal relationships often last longer and therefore have more time to build the relationship and develop rapport (e.g. Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Zey, 1985).

Mentoring is something that's happening all around us in an informal capacity. If you think about the old days in the shipyards when the blokes had a young apprentice under them, what they were doing was acting as a mentor to them, although it wasn't identified as that. At school I had a teacher who I always went to...and I aspired to be like him in a lot of ways.

**Coordinator, STMS Project (2004)**

Informal mentoring may be the only option for some individuals where a formal scheme is not available. This can be problematic for individuals within under-represented groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, as these employees are less likely to be fully integrated into a company through the use of networks if the majority of senior staff are (white) men (e.g. (Dreher and Cox Jr., 1996).

#### **4.3.2 A Practical Solution for Women?**

Mentoring programmes targeted at women have often focused only on distinct groups, such as women under-represented in male-dominated occupations, or 'high-flyers' - women trying to break through the 'glass ceiling'. Nevertheless, research has shown that women who have a mentor gain specific career-related benefits (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995; Brockbank and Traves, 1995)

We think that mentoring may be of benefit to women at any stage in their life, including those seeking employment and/or returning to employment after a career break. From our research we discerned that both mentors and mentees interviewed were able to identify what being involved in a mentoring programme had offered them.

For mentees, the benefits included:

I felt as though I had someone's sort of moral back up, if you like. I felt as though I could conduct myself with a little more authority having run the ideas past someone else. It did give me a bit of affirmation – a little more confidence.

**Mentee, EMPATHY Project (2004)**

Hope – perspective – measured confidence and restraint. Oh and political awareness as well. Well no, actually, I've always been aware of the politics but I've never really known how to play the game before. It's knowing how to adapt that to me and knowing how to adapt myself to the office politics. So it's being able to recognise and develop certain aspects of myself that I think needed doing. It's learning a bit of measured restraint – learning more of the reflective skills – quite a spectrum of things.

**Mentee, Let's TWIST/JIVE (2004)**



She gave me an awful lot of advice and an awful lot of support. She's given me ideas for becoming motivated again. She's had a big effect on my levels of motivation and inspiration.

**Mentee, Let's TWIST/JIVE (2004)**

There were benefits for mentors too. These included:

I started to go through this period of change with redundancy coming up. It was good to have a sounding board who wasn't your husband, with all the baggage that you have in that sort of relationship, and wasn't a work colleague who was going through redundancy as well.

**Mentor, EMPATHY Project (2004)**

[When I was mentoring the schoolgirl] I do get the impression she was telling me stuff she hadn't really discussed with people and she did really seem insecure in herself initially, so I actually felt really pleased that I was offering her some kind of a relationship where she could rely on me and trust me.

**Mentee, Let's TWIST/JIVE (2004)**

For the women involved in the Widening Horizons project mentoring was largely seen as a positive experience. Some interviewees perceived that mentoring could be beneficial to women, especially when confidence is affected by being under-valued or taken-for-granted in the workplace.

I do get a crisis of confidence and part of it is, because in the job, I was being asked to do things and wasn't getting any support at all. So having a mentor would be useful but I get quite a lot of positive feedback from colleagues and friends and family and that always helps.

**Carol, aged 37 - WH**

As Carol has noted, networks of peers, friends or family may provide a support alternative or a compliment to mentoring (Hunt and Michael, 1983).

### 4.3.3 Conclusion

Our conclusion is that mentoring *would* be of benefit – both for women as mentees *and* as mentors. However, this would only be the case if the mentoring scheme in question followed good practice guidelines (Heggie et al., 2005). While mentoring may be a practical solution for widening women’s working horizons, we consider that it is more applicable as part of a holistic approach to personal development. In this way, women can focus on their own needs, *including* career aspirations, at specific points in their life. Our research has shown that employment is just one aspect of women’s lives and has to be juggled with other responsibilities and commitments. Mentoring programmes targeted at women, therefore, will need to take a flexible approach in order to appeal to women wishing to take part and also to retain participants to the end of an organised programme.

That little bit of encouragement, sometimes just tiny, can actually mean a lot to the mentee and bring them on.

**Coordinator, University of Teesside Mentoring Project (2004)**

## 4.4 Personal Development Training

Another practical solution to widening women's working horizons is through Personal Development Training. Personal development is when the individual sets the goals and the agenda for their own personal growth. Our research explored the options for women in the region by investigating what types of training were already available and who the training was targeted at. As has been already established, women constitute the bulk of the part-time workforce in the region. Women also are disproportionately clustered in the lower-paid levels of most businesses or organisations, where opportunities for advancement are limited.

Many employers already operate a system for annually reviewing objectives and incorporating them into 'personal development plans' or PDPs with employees where goals are normally agreed between the line manager and the individual member of staff. Many employers, especially larger businesses or public sector organisations, also offer their staff opportunities for development through in-house courses, financial help with further education and/or secondment. Staff Development Training, however, is often tailored to the perceived needs of the business, offering courses tailored to skills and knowledge transfer rather than to personal development.

Personal Development Training comes in two main forms:

- Structured courses such as 'Springboard' or 'Spring Forward' which are normally financed and organised by the employer.
- Individual courses offered by a variety of organisations such as community groups, training centres, local colleges or women's health centres which women can join at their own behest.

The common theme amongst all of these courses is for the individual to gain some insight into, and control over, her own personal growth. Many have a holistic approach, incorporating career/job, home and personal lives, since decisions about one area – i.e. career – cannot be made without affecting other areas of a woman's life.

#### 4.4.1 Structured Personal Development Training

*The Springboard Women's Development Programme helps women do what they want to do in their life and work. It gives them the ideas and skills to take more control of their life and then gives them the boost in self-confidence to start making things happen.*

**['Springboard' Training Literature, Newcastle University, 2004].**

*The overall spirit and purpose of The Spring Forward programme is to give access to good quality personal and work development training to as wide a range of women as possible...The objectives for the programme are that participants will:*

- *Take a fresh look at their career and personal development plans and set new action points*
- *Find coaching and mentoring support to match their aspirations*
- *Understand how gender, culture and managerial status affects communication and motivation*

*...Participants should be prepared to explore all areas of their lives and to try new ways of learning and developing.*

**['Spring Forward' Training Literature, Newcastle University, 2004].**

The 'Springboard' and Spring Forward' training courses can only be delivered by a licensed trainer, ensuring a consistency of course delivery and materials. This type of training can be effective, especially as it affords each participant the opportunity to take stock of her own situation and verbalise her own ambitions. Participating in the training opens up a new network of contacts to each woman and networking is considered an important part of personal development. This training also advocates women to gain access to coaching or mentoring to support them in the fulfilment of their ambitions.

While traditionally available to employees, the 'Springboard' training programme has been used to target specific groups. In 2004, the University of Durham, with help from the Race Equality Network, ran a 'Springboard' course for ethnic minority women under-represented in the North East. The course was held on a Saturday for 16 women from 10 different nationalities, none of whom spoke English as a first language. The themes are transferable across such 'barriers' as language, age, ethnicity and where each individual is in her life.

*The ['Springboard'] programme covers areas such as:*

*Knowing yourself*

*What you've got going for you*

*Setting goals*

*Promoting a positive image*

*Confidence building*

*Assertiveness*

*Interview skills*

*Making things happen*

*Changing what you want to change*

*Networking*

*Finding ideas and support*

*More energy – less anxiety*

*Blowing your own trumpet*

**['Springboard' Training Literature – University of Durham, 2004]**

#### **4.4.2 Women-only Training**

One of the criticisms we encountered while carrying out this research was that women-only courses, such as 'Springboard' could be counter-productive, in that women could be seen to be getting special treatment from the employer. Some of the trainers we spoke to acknowledged that this could happen but also pointed out that this type of training had originally been designed to target non-managerial women in organisations – the administrative and clerical grades – positions predominantly filled by women with limited chance of progression. As time had passed and needs had changed, other programmes had been developed - such as 'Spring Forward' or 'Navigator' – a similar programme designed for men. Most of the trainers we spoke to considered that gender-segregated training of this type was more beneficial to the group as gender could be critiqued within a 'safe space', allowing for different ways of learning.

#### **4.4.3 Individual Courses**

Many different types of courses are on offer around the region, from further education to vocational. We explored those on offer through particular agencies such as Women's Health and Well-Being Centres, Women's Training Centres or Community Groups in order to ascertain what might be accessed by women outside the traditional employment sector. Some specifically targeted rural women, such as Tynedale Women's Training Group in Hexham, which operates out of the Community Centre. Set up in the early 1990s by a group of local women who "...felt strongly that rural women were not being offered the same opportunities to access training and education as those living in nearby towns, and hence their chances of entering the

job market were limited” [Tynedale Women’s Training Group; Village Access News, Issue 1 (June 2004)].

*Barriers...included things like rural isolation, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, money, transport, lack of childcare and domestic commitments...This has been achieved through a unique system of free locally run courses chosen by the women themselves, with additional personal needs support, free childcare provided through the project’s own crèche service...and help with transport where necessary.*

**[Tynedale Women’s Training Group; Village Access News, Issue 1 (June 2004)].**

Each year it this group chooses three new communities and takes an individual approach to each one, trying to target resources to needs by sending questionnaires around all households in the community. It offers ‘taster’ courses to women in familiar surroundings, with follow-on courses as required. One of their aims is to tackle feelings of isolation for women of all ages in small communities by encouraging involvement in community activities, helping women build up new networks and by helping build up confidence levels.

Organisations, such as Women’s Health Advice Centre (WHAC) in Ashington and the Women’s Health in South Tyneside (WHIST) in South Shields, have charitable status and offer a service aimed at improving women’s health and over all well-being.

*WHIST ...provides a service relating to the well being of women and girls (14+), regardless of age, colour, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation...This includes physical, mental and social aspects of health in a relaxed, non-medical, non-judgemental, confidential setting.*

**[WHAC Annual Report 2003].**

*WHIST takes a holistic approach to health around mental, physical and emotional well-being...[It] offers one-to-one counselling, self help and support groups, advice and information, physical activities, courses aimed at improving self-confidence, gaining new skills, looking at alternative options, broadening horizons and offering support to enable women to move on in their lives.*

**[WHIST Annual Report 2003].**

The support and training provided by such organisations, often to the most vulnerable groups of women in the community, enables individual women to gain confidence in themselves and their own abilities and can help pave the way back into employment. Many women start out as service users, before becoming volunteers in the organisation, which prepares them for paid employment. Others, who are unable to work in paid employment through illness or disability, can feel that their contribution in the organisation is valued, thereby raising their own self-esteem.

Eh on the other hand I've got em my support work ..I've met quite a lot of people here from different backgrounds and different situations in life, em which has been interesting and also a great help. It's just been kind of a huge therapy session here to be honest (both laughing). [Vicky, aged 48] [WH]

#### **4.4.4 Personal Development**

Our research has shown that many organisations throughout the region already offer different opportunities for women to develop their personal and employment skills through either formal workplace training or community based courses. Although developed for different reasons, there are many common features between the organisations and what they offer, including:

- a desire for women themselves to foster wider networks of support
- a recognition that skills based training alone does not fully address such barriers as low confidence and self-esteem
- an awareness that physical, mental and emotional well-being are all equally important to women's health
- and that women have many skills and abilities which they sometimes undervalue – what is needed is the space and the time to recognise them and the support to develop them.

## **4.5 Conclusions**

The Widening Horizons study examined the personal and social context of women's working lives in the North East of England. Through innovative and complex methodologies, the study explored women's experiences, reflections and future plans in order to provide greater insight into their employment decisions, roles and relationships. It would seem clear that the understanding context of women's lives is a vital part of their position in the labour market and would merit further study. Women themselves, from the Revisit interviews, found the research process of value, often reflecting on how it had enabled them to see patterns and priorities more clearly. While the study does not have the breadth and statistical overview that Barriers to Women's Employment provided, it has grounded the debate, offering a keyhole roots to an ever expanding tree of knowledge.

The conclusions from the practical solutions aspect of the research would seem clear. Women themselves are actively managing their lives within a broader context. They have already developed and maintained social and community networks that can be extremely effective in supporting their working lives. Other women could be supported to strengthen their own networks, as this singly could be one of the most effective and cost effective way of widening women's horizons. They would seem to be at the cornerstone of women's lives.

The local community in which women live and their relationship with it, would seem to an under explored aspect of employment studies. Many women make strategic decisions about paid work in light of where they live and understanding their relationship with their home and community could enhance policy and local government initiatives, as well as inform employers. If women prioritise living and working in the same community, they may need support so that they are not limiting their employment choices. Furthermore, the role of community groups and organisations could also be supported and enabled as the study found that communities of all varieties play an important role in supporting women's life and employment decisions.



The other key conclusion is the enormous potential of mentoring and women's only training for women in the North East. We have documented here and within the Mentoring Handbook (Heggie et al., 2005), the value and scope for mentoring as part of the tool-kit for employment sustainability.

In combination, this report has hopefully made a contribution towards further understanding of women in the labour market, and steps which can be effective in widening their working horizons.

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## Appendix A

### Demographic Information on 'New' & 'Revisit' Participants

Demographic information was collected from all 20 participants. Two participants withdrew after the first stage of the process due to family bereavement. To indicate this, an asterix (\*) has been placed next to the relevant category in each table.

#### Age and Ethnicity

The average age of the total group was 38 years – 39 years for the 'New' group and 36 years for the 'Revisit' group.

**Table A1: Age distribution of participants**

Age Group	'New' Participants	'Revisit' Participants
16-20	1*	0
21-25	2*	0
26-30	0	2
31-35	2	4
36-40	0	3
41-45	0	0
46-50	2	0
51-55	1	1
56-60	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

The vast majority of women (85%) stated that their ethnic origin was White British. 10% were of Pakistani origin (\*) and 5% of Black Caribbean & White origin.

#### 'Living With' Status and Parental Status

Although participants were asked for their marital status, we found this to be problematic with regard to living situation. For example, a woman might declare her marital status to be 'single' but she might be living with a partner or a flatmate or parents. Likewise, non-heterosexual participants felt alienated by the terms used within the marital status norms, which they felt did not apply to them and yet other options were not available. Accordingly, we considered that it was more important in the context of the research to know about 'living with' status, which more fully demonstrates the reality of each woman's situation.

**Table A2: 'Living With' status of participants**

<b>'Living With' Status</b>	<b>'New' Participants</b>	<b>'Revisit' Participants</b>
Husband	5	2
Husband & children	0	3
Partner	0	2
Partner & children	0	1
Parent(s)	2*	1
Flatmates	0	1
Alone	1	0
Children	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

When considering parental status, it became obvious that many of the sample (perhaps a surprising number for such a small study) had step-children by marriage or from a long-term relationship. The table below shows the breakdown of the total group by parental status.

**Table A3: Parental Status of Participants**

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>'New' Participants</b>	<b>'Revisit' Participants</b>
<b>None</b>	<b>5*</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 (Step)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

### **Working Status**

One of the basic criteria for selection of all the participants was their current situation with regard to employment. Participants were also asked to indicate whether they worked part-time or full-time and, if not working, the reason being out of the

workforce. This was so each participant could be correctly classified as employed, unemployed or inactive.

**Table A4: Working status of participants**

<b>Working Status</b>	<b>'New' Participants</b>	<b>'Revisit' Participants</b>
Self-employed	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
Employed (Full-time)	<b>1*</b>	<b>6</b>
Employed (Part-time)	<b>2*</b>	<b>2</b>
Unemployed	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Casual Work	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Full-time Student	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
Inactive – Disability/Illness	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
Inactive – Looking after children	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

In relation to our interest in community and feelings of belonging, we asked all participants about where they lived.

**Table A5: Home Ownership status**

<b>Home Status</b>	<b>'New' Participants</b>	<b>'Revisit' Participants</b>
Owned (alone or with spouse/partner)	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
Rented (Council)	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Rented (Private)	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Parental Home	<b>2*</b>	<b>1</b>
Unknown	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>



## Appendix B

**Table B1: Frequency of meeting Social Network**

	Frequency of meeting						Total
	Yearly	3-4 times a year	Monthly	Fortnightly	Weekly	Daily	
Other	3	5	8	4	10	2	32
Neighbour	0	0	1	2	3	1	7
Work Colleague	0	7	12	7	8	5	39
Friend	8	25	42	21	30	16	142
Relative through Marriage	0	5	6	2	9	1	23
Blood relative	1	5	12	6	16	8	48
Spouse/Partner	0	0	0	0	0	9	9
Total	12	47	81	42	76	42	300

**Table B2: How close they feel to people with various relationships with them**

	How close are they					Total
	Not close at all	Not very close	Quite Close	Close	Very Close	
Other	11	7	10	2	2	32
Neighbour	4	0	2	1	0	7
Work Colleague	9	24	3	1	2	39
Friend	6	23	51	45	17	142
Relative through Marriage	2	3	10	4	4	23
Blood relative	1	2	9	20	16	48
Spouse/Partner	0	0	1	0	8	9
Total	33	59	86	73	49	300

**Table B3: Association between location and main means of contact**

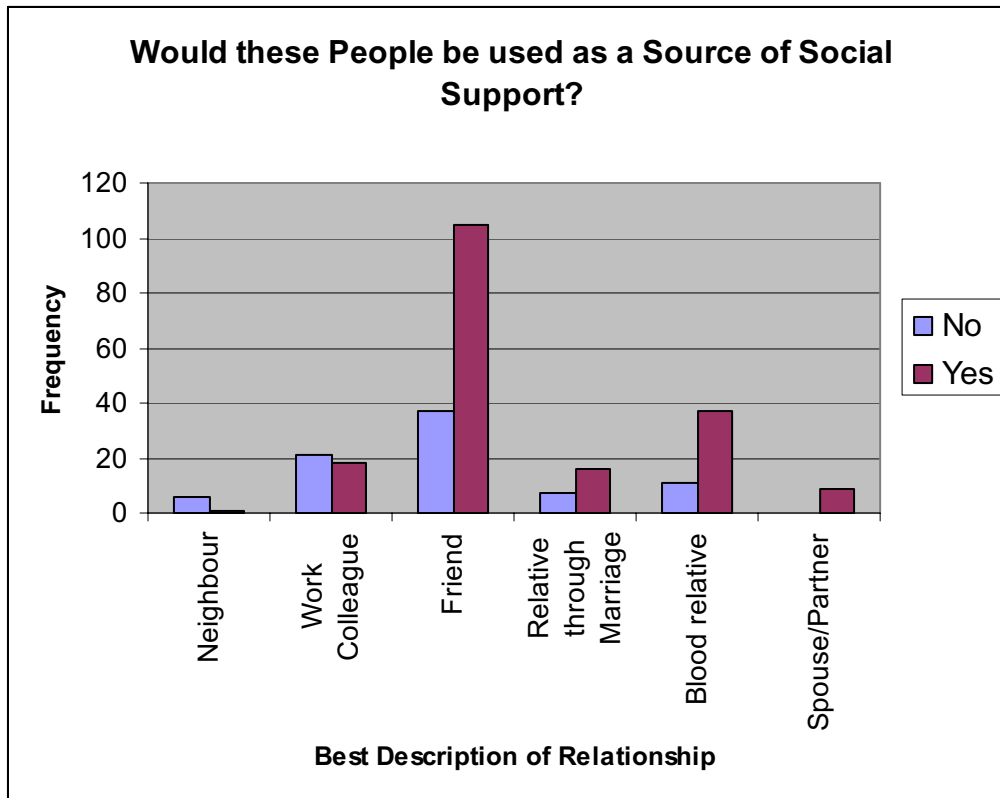
	Location						Total
	Local	Region	Rest of England	Scotland/Wales/ N Ireland	Europe	Rest of world	
Face to Face	123	2	11	6	1	0	143
Letter	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
Mobile/text	7	1	2	0	0	0	10
Email	19	4	9	5	0	3	40
Telephone	42	9	28	12	1	4	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>292</b>

**Table B4: Association between type of relationship and main**

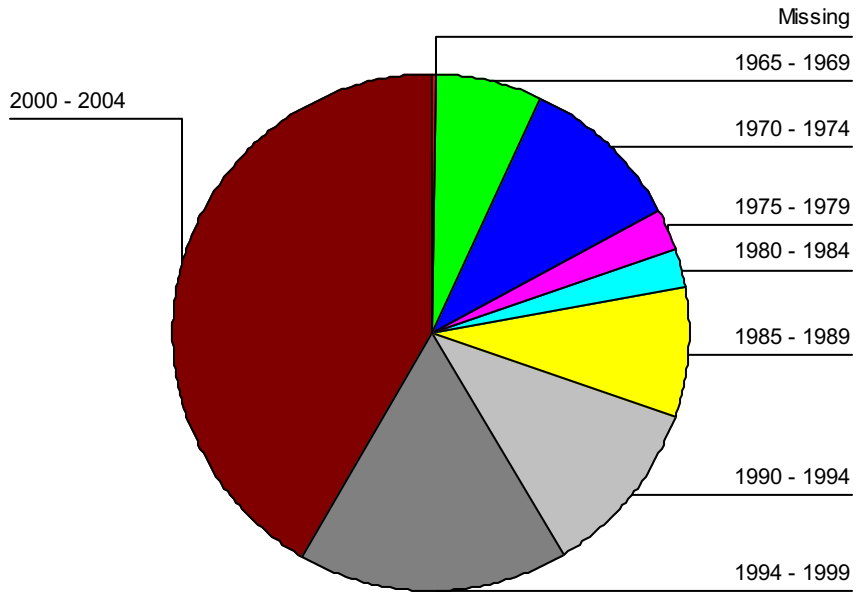
	Best description of relationship							Total
	Other	Neighbour	Work Colleague	Friend	Relative through Marriage	Blood Relative	Spouse/ Partner	
Face to Face	16	7	20	66	12	17	9	147
Letter	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
Mobile/text	0	0	0	8	0	2	0	10
Email	6	0	10	25	0	2	0	43
Telephone	10	0	9	41	10	27	0	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>300</b>

**means of contact**

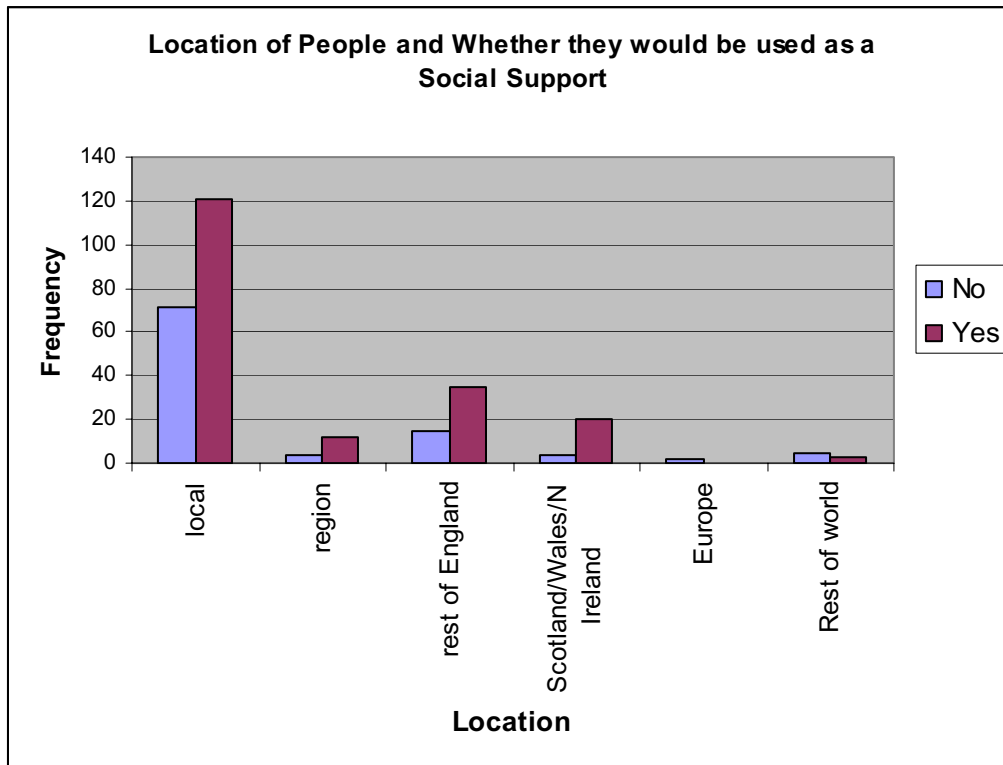
**Figure B1: Whether people would be used as a social support**



**Figure B2: All Participants - Year they met Members of Social Network**



**Figure B3: Impact of Location on Social Support**



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