

Degree is no protection against under-employment, research shows

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Having a degree or other qualifications is no protection against under-employment in Britain, new research shows.

The British Sociological Association's conference on work, employment and society in Warwick heard today [Wednesday 4 September] that qualified women were more likely to be under-employed than unqualified ones. Qualified men were just as likely to be under-employed as unqualified ones.

Dr Surhan Cam, of School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, said that as working hours were cut during the economic slowdown, so the number of people wanting to work longer had risen to more than three and a half million by 2012, around 11% of the workforce. Most of these under-employed wanted to work at least eight hours more a week.

Dr Cam's research found that women with degrees, or O or A levels were around 40% - 50% more likely to be under-employed than those with no qualifications. The levels were the same for qualified and unqualified men.

"In Britain higher educational attainments display no impact on men but a negative effect on women," said Dr Cam. "Since the beginning of the recession, women's underemployment has gradually begun to overtake men's. We found that female workers who have GCSE grades A to C or higher qualifications are more likely to become under-employed, compared to those who have no qualifications.

"This accentuation of work-status inconsistency in the case of women is arguably attributable to a glass ceiling against their access to high-ranking occupations."

The higher rates of female under-employment contradicted suggestions that there was "more preparedness among women for less work due to, among other reasons, family commitment and self-fulfilment," said Dr Cam.

Dr Cam said that in other EU countries the better educated were less likely to be under-employed, because they were much more likely to be working as managers or technical staff, and these professions had lower rates of under-employment across Europe, including Britain.

But in Britain the rapid expansion of education had given so many people qualifications that many of them were in non-professional jobs, which had higher rates of under-employment.

Dr Cam said that rates of under-employment were higher overall for women (13%) than men (9%), and were higher in the private sector, particularly among hotel and catering workers (almost 20% for women working in this area).

His analysis of UK Labour Force Survey data on 5,600 under-employed men and women – defined as those in work who want to work longer hours – also showed that rates were higher among part-time workers, but that around 6% of full-time workers wanted to work longer hours.

- Work, Employment and Society is a journal published by SAGE and the BSA.

For more information, please contact:

Tony Trueman
British Sociological Association
Tel: 07964 023392
tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk

Notes

1. The BSA's work, employment and society conference takes place from 3 - 5 September 2013 at the University of Warwick.

2. Cardiff University is recognised in independent government assessments as one of Britain's leading teaching and research universities and is a member of the Russell Group of the UK's most research intensive universities. Among its academic staff are two Nobel Laureates, including the winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Medicine, University Chancellor Professor Sir Martin Evans. Founded by Royal Charter in 1883, today the University combines impressive modern facilities and a dynamic approach to teaching and research. The University's breadth of expertise encompasses: the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences; and the College of Physical Sciences and Engineering, along with a longstanding commitment to lifelong learning. Cardiff's three flagship Research Institutes are offering radical new approaches to neurosciences and mental health, cancer stem cells and sustainable places. www.cardiff.ac.uk

3. The British Sociological Association's mission is to represent the intellectual and sociological interests of its members. The BSA is a company limited by guarantee, and registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235.