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WELCOME TO OUR NEW LOOK NEWSLETTER

We are pleased to be introducing a new style and themed research focus for our first newsletter of 2019. Our quarterly newsletters will now be taking a close look at a key area of research across the Life Course Centre, bringing together the latest findings from our researchers in a concise and easily accessible format.

For our first newsletter in this style, we have decided to focus on the issue of gender and why it matters to disadvantage. This was an easy decision as gender has been an important topic of research throughout the Centre since its inception. Highlighting our gender research is also timely given the marking of International Women's Day in March, and the involvement of a number of our researchers in the Australian Gender Economics Workshop in February. While much progress has been made towards gender equality in Australia, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. The following Research in Focus summary provides a snapshot of what our research across the Centre is telling us about gender, and its influence on disadvantage.

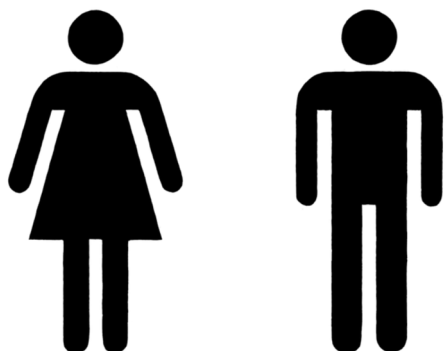


Our new themed newsletters are part of a Centre commitment to enhanced knowledge transfer in 2019, and will be complemented by regular News Digest summaries of our latest publications, events and achievements. You can keep up to date with all our news on our [Twitter](#) feed and on our [Website](#), where you can also read our recently-published [2018 Life Course Centre Annual Report](#).

Professor Janeen Baxter
Centre Director

WHY DOES GENDER MATTER TO DISADVANTAGE?

Equality



Gender inequalities continue to disadvantage women in many ways and demands further efforts and leadership to shift attitudes and provide the necessary work and family support structures.

The association between gender and inequality was featured in the Life Course Centre's [very first Working Paper in June 2014](#), and has been a key focus for our researchers ever since. Prior to the formation of the Centre, our Director Professor Janeen Baxter was instrumental in ensuring that measures of unpaid household labour by gender were added to the annual [Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia \(HILDA\) survey](#) - an important achievement that helped to highlight the stark gender inequalities in Australian households. When it comes to family dynamics, changes to deeply entrenched gender-role attitudes in Australia continue to be slow.

[The more things change, the more they stay the same](#). While 30-40 years of the feminist movement in Australia has led to more women in higher education and employment, [analyses of the latest HILDA survey results in 2018](#) show women still carry the bulk of housework and child raising duties in Australian households.

Stubborn gender inequality in the home is often referred to as a ['stalled revolution'](#) of feminism. It is estimated that [Australian women still do seven hours more housework per week than men](#) and, on current trends, it is forecast to take 30 years to close this gender housework gap. Traditional gender roles still prevail and our research shows they become even more entrenched in heterosexual couples

following the birth of children - that is, more likely to support arrangements where fathers are the main income earners and mothers the main carers. **Religion, ethnicity** and **family relocations** are also factors associated with stronger traditional attitudes in the home.

Money talks. These old fashioned gender-role attitudes at the household level are reinforced by the continuing gender pay gap in the workforce. In Australia, **the gender pay gap** has hovered between 15 per cent and 19 per cent for the past two decades. This ongoing pay disparity, coupled with a lack of access to quality, affordable and flexible childcare, means it is exceedingly difficult for families to have both parents engaged fulltime in the workforce when children are young. As a result, it sometimes makes financial sense for Australian families to conform to traditional gender roles for caring work. It is difficult to do things differently when men continue to out-earn women. However, women still do more unpaid and care work in the home than men, even when women work fulltime and longer hours than men. So it is not just about money - the problem is housework and family work are still defined by gender.

The repercussions of inequalities in paid and unpaid work. Disadvantage from this imbalance manifests in poorer outcomes for women across a myriad of financial, social, and health and wellbeing measures over the life course, and this is particularly the case for mothers. The amplified pressures of parenthood, where child raising responsibilities still fall primarily to mothers, has been shown to have a particularly **negative impact on women's mental health**. Research also shows that couples in more gender-equal societies enjoy **better sleep quality**. How **fairness in household duties is evaluated in married couples** can also have a major impact on relationship satisfaction and separation rates.



Financial insecurity, abuse, homelessness. Many mothers who move to casual or part-time employment or drop out of the labour market altogether to look after children can lose out in the long run. These decisions can lead to elevated levels of financial insecurity, particularly following separation, widowhood, and in old age. On average, women retire with significantly less superannuation than men. The impact of the gender pay gap on superannuation compounds throughout a woman's life and is worsened by breaks to raise children. Relationship breakdown is another factor that can lead to increased financial stress for mothers. Our research shows that when welfare payments for lone parents fall, there is an **increase in the speed of repartnering for separating mothers**. This raises important wellbeing questions, including whether the increased rate of repartnering reflects vulnerable women being forced back into abusive living arrangements. Increased financial insecurity means women are also more likely than men to experience poverty in old age. Our research suggests women are frequently part of the **'hidden homeless' population** rather than the more visible unsheltered homeless.

Maintaining attachment to the labour market. Assisting women at the transition to motherhood and helping them to retain employment can reduce the risk of household joblessness, welfare dependency, poverty, domestic violence, homelessness, and the transmission of disadvantage to the next generation. **Teenage mothers** are particularly vulnerable and their parenting role may have an especially detrimental impact on their later life outcomes. It is crucial for Government and employers to demonstrate leadership in terms of policy, affordable childcare access, closing the gender pay gap, and providing more flexible workplace arrangements for men and women. An often-overlooked factor in addressing the associations between gender and disadvantage is the need to foster more equal parenting participation between fathers and mothers. Gender inequality is not just a failure of women to behave more like men and nor should policies to address it focus solely on women. Government policies and labour market cultures must support men to share child raising and household responsibilities. It is still quite rare to see stay-at-home fathers in Australia and there has been a relative lack of interest in the role of father's as carers. However, our research has been filling this knowledge gap by highlighting the **positive benefits**

to children of more time with their fathers. This is an area of research that we will continue to explore in an effort to challenge the outdated gender narratives that still persist in many institutional and individual frameworks, and exert much influence on disadvantage.

CONTACT THE LIFE COURSE CENTRE

The Life Course Centre is proud of our strong research focus on gender and we are committed to deeper examinations of gender issues as they relate to disadvantage. Please contact us if you are interested in learning more about our research, or partnering with us on research projects. We also welcome your feedback on our new newsletter style and any suggestions for future themed editions. You can contact us at: lcc@uq.edu.au

The Life Course Centre is an Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence bringing together researchers from the University of Queensland, the University of Western Australia, the University of Melbourne, the University of Sydney and other leading international universities, in collaboration with key government and non-government organisations.

ISSR The Life Course Centre is administered by the University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research



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