

# Addressing Women's Poverty in Somerset: Local Labour Market Initiatives

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## Foreword

### Gender Equality

Somerset County Council has worked in close partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, and eleven other local authorities over the last three years to take part in the national Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets Programme (GELLM).

In taking part, Somerset County Council has committed to disseminate and implement the research findings by engaging with key stakeholders at significant stages of the project. The findings will form a critical part of the way Somerset County Council understands the impact of its services and partnership working on Somerset's diverse communities. Each and every County Council service is responsible for delivering gender equality in their Service Plans.

Through active participation in this research project, Somerset County Council is well prepared for its new legal responsibility for implementing the 'Gender Duty' requirements of the Equality Act 2006 in all key service areas, and to effectively address gender inequality throughout the county.

**Alan Jones**  
Chief Executive

**Chris Bilsland**  
Corporate Equalities Champion

**Cllr Sam Crabb**  
Member Champion for Equalities





# Acknowledgements

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## ***Focus group participants***

We would also like to thank the women who participated in the focus groups. Lively discussions took place in two focus groups held at Sydenham Family Centre. The participants provided detailed qualitative material about their experience and understanding of their community and the barriers and opportunities they face in the local labour market. Together with the local community activists who recruited and organised the groups, they enabled the researchers to enrich the local evidence contained in this report.

## **Members of the GELLM Team contributed as follows**

Statistical Analysis	Lisa Buckner; Gerard Poole
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## Key findings

This study has explored the scale and experience of women's economic disadvantage in Bridgwater, Somerset. It also examined barriers to paid employment and the extent to which current regeneration and labour market initiatives have supported women in accessing employment opportunities.

### ***Women's economic disadvantage in Bridgwater Hamp, Sydenham and Victoria wards***

- The wards have a relatively young population.
- The area is ethnically less diverse than the county.
- A third of dependent children in the area live in families with no working adult.
- Lone mothers were less likely to be in paid work than in Somerset as a whole.
- Among men and women of working age, poor health and limiting long-term illness is high.
- There is a high level of social renting in the area; the majority of residents live in terraced properties or flats.

### ***Women's position in the local labour market***

Compared with women in Somerset and England as a whole, women in the three wards are:

- Less likely to be in either full-time or part-time employment.
- More likely to work in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs.
- Less likely to be in professional or managerial occupations.
- If they have caring responsibilities, less likely to work either full-time or part-time.
- More likely to be unemployed or economically inactive, especially women of Pakistani or Black Caribbean origin.
- More likely to work close to home.

Low qualification levels and limited job opportunities are reducing women's employment prospects:

- Over a third of women of working age have no educational qualifications.
- Only a tenth of women of working age have degree level qualifications.

- Jobs created in local businesses have not replaced those lost from major local employers, where many men and women living in the locality once worked.
- Local stakeholders and women living in the area feel local residents are not benefiting from higher skilled and better paid employment opportunities available in the county, despite its close proximity to areas of employment growth across the South West region.

### ***Barriers to labour market engagement***

Local women and local organisations identified the following as important barriers to employment:

- Lack of formal qualifications and breaks in employment.
- Inflexible working practices among some employers.
- The tax and benefit system is a constraint on women's participation in the labour market.
- The availability and cost of childcare. Although childcare is improving for pre-school children, it remains limited for women seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market.
- Public transport services are limited for those women wishing to work who do not have access to a car.

### ***Area-based regeneration and labour market initiatives***

Analysis of regeneration policies, delivery plans, economic and employment targets and evaluation techniques showed that:

- Women's economic disadvantage in the local labour market had not been addressed as a specific issue in the SRB 6 programme.
- There are few explicit requirements to consider the position of women and men separately in the interventions to reduce economic inactivity, including those promoted through South West of England RDA.
- Data used in regeneration documents on the locality, including output data, are not disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.
- Evaluation approaches adopted in existing regeneration initiatives take little account of the key differences in women's and men's economic position and experience of living in the locality.



### **Services to support local women**

Somerset County Council and other service providers could do more to assist women by:

- Developing a clearer understanding of the employment and training needs of women living in the locality.
- Working more strategically on labour market initiatives with local services and community-based organisations.
- Ensuring that the steps to integrate local services which assist women in overcoming barriers to employment are developed and enhanced.
- Targeting resources which support community based training and workforce development initiatives at women in low paid employment.
- Offering childcare provision which reflects the differing childcare needs of lone parents and other low income households in the area.

### **Impact on women's economic disadvantage**

Labour market policy and regeneration initiatives have had limited impact on women's disadvantage:

- Public investment in the area has been largely focused on social infrastructure developments. There have been no specific employment projects supporting women living in the wards.
- Inward investment schemes have attracted employers, but many of the jobs available to women in the area are poorly paid.
- Sure Start has been successful in engaging local women, to undertake educational courses.
- Further work with local employers to address job flexibility, hours, pay structures and in-house training for women wishing to enter the labour market, is needed.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify how effective regeneration strategies and initiatives have been in addressing economic disadvantage among women living in three wards in Bridgwater, Somerset. The research was also designed to inform future regeneration strategies undertaken by Somerset County Council and its partners, to ensure the specific needs of women living on low incomes are directly addressed.

The research was undertaken during 2005 and used a variety of methods, including: statistical analysis of ward level data; documentary analysis of regeneration strategies and evaluations; key stakeholder interviews; and focus groups with women living in the selected wards.

This report presents research undertaken as part of the national GELLM research programme (Appendix 1). Parallel studies were also conducted in five other English local authorities; a synthesis report of the findings from all six areas is also available (Escott et al 2006). The *Gender Profile of Somerset's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2004) provides the district-wide statistical evidence and context for the study.

### **Women's poverty and economic disadvantage**

In the UK, women are more likely than men to live in poverty. Poverty amongst women remains a persistent feature of some local labour markets, despite recent policy changes. Women's poverty is often hidden, and is exacerbated by widespread assumptions about their financial dependence on men and about their role being primarily as mothers and carers rather than as wage earners. These assumptions contribute to the low pay of many women who enter the labour market and to the low incomes of those who remain outside it. Although there is a relationship between economic inactivity and poverty, employment does not necessarily provide an escape from poverty for women. Women in the labour market face the risk of low wages, insecure work, occupational segregation and lesser access to promotion than men, in jobs that are often fitted around domestic responsibilities.

It is important to recognise the ethnicity dimension of women's poverty, as some ethnic minority women face a particularly high risk of poverty (Women's Budget Group 2005). Poor

health and low self esteem, often associated with the stress of managing poverty has also been highlighted in other recent research (Bradshaw et al 2003; Yeandle et al 2003).

## Regeneration initiatives

Over the past 30 years, national, regional and local initiatives, under the broad heading of local economic development or 'urban regeneration', have sought to tackle disadvantage in areas of economic decline. Local authorities and others have invested considerable resources in these initiatives, and private sector urban renewal developments and investment have also been heralded as bringing prosperity to declining economies. This study focuses on area-based economic initiatives and developments, and explores their impact on women and on their participation in the local labour market. It was carried out in the context of a broader understanding of regeneration, including Oxfam's research on community engagement, which concludes that regeneration policies often fail to take into account differences between men and women in their experiences of a range of local services, including education, transport, care provision and economic development (Oxfam, 2005).

Existing research does not explain why so many women living in communities where there has been significant public and private investment continue to experience economic disadvantage. This study explores how local economic and employment structures continue to disadvantage women, and considers how women can be assisted by future initiatives.

## National and regional regeneration policy

The Government has a number of policy initiatives which are directly relevant to this study.

- The national target to engage more women and men in employment (DWP, 2004, 2006).
- A skills strategy which ensures fair access to training and jobs, including barriers between welfare and work (DFES, 2005).
- The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) to improve the quality of life in the most deprived areas of the country.
- The recognition that deprivation can be highly concentrated in neighbourhoods, requiring

tailored approaches to providing services, work incentives and promoting self-employment (SEU, 2004).

- The target to significantly reduce the difference between the employment rates of disadvantaged groups and the overall rate by spring 2008 (NRU 2005).
- The target to increase the employment rates for lone parents, ethnic minorities, and people aged 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications and those living in local authority wards with the poorest labour market position (NRU 2005).

To help address these policy issues in Somerset, this study offers a more detailed understanding of the local labour market in which women living on low incomes are located. To date, public policy evaluation and academic research assessing the success or otherwise of regeneration initiatives has only rarely adopted a gender perspective. While targeted regeneration projects are known to have differing impacts on women and men, and some focus on lone parents and ethnic minority groups, most fail to highlight gender issues. In addition, key differences in the experience of particular groups of women facing economic disadvantage, for example, young women, older women and women with disabilities, are often overlooked in the analysis. Stereotyping the issues facing women, for example through initiatives focusing on teenage pregnancy, are an added concern.

A further rationale for this study is the contribution it can make to the evidence base for labour market policy at regional level. The policy direction of *Regional Development Agencies* and *Regional Assemblies* and, at sub-regional level, of *Learning and Skills Councils* is increasingly important for economic regeneration, employment and training. Regional Economic Strategies and related sub-regional plans are expected to include 'equalities' as part of their policy framework, but the requirement to improve economic competitiveness and to promote economic development has rarely been enhanced by local analysis which informs the promotion of gender equality.

## Somerset County Council's approach

The Bridgwater Hamp, Sydenham and Victoria wards in the district of Sedgemoor were selected for the study by Somerset County Council, which identified them as areas suffering from relatively high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. Somerset County Council had noted that many local residents who had previously worked in manufacturing and processing jobs were still being affected by the results of economic restructuring. Job growth in the county did not appear to be benefiting local residents, many of whom were living on very low incomes, whether or not they were in work. Poverty levels were identified as particularly high among lone parents and the ethnic minority population in the selected wards.

Sedgemoor District Council's Economic Development Strategy (2004) identified a number of labour market objectives which aim to support the local economy and up-skill the local workforce as well as reduce inequality. SRB6<sup>1</sup> funding in the district has invested in a number of projects in Hamp (£2m) and Sydenham (£4m). The programmes, which ended in March 2006, developed a number of community and information and advice facilities. In Victoria ward a Building Communities scheme is underway, located at a site which will eventually include a Children's Centre, doctors' surgery, access courses, community facilities and other local services. The centre is also intended to assist in improving skills and employability in the area.

Somerset Strategic Partnership's *Somerset Economic Strategy* (2005) includes a series of strategic objectives of relevance to this study. The aim of increasing economic inclusion seeks to ensure that the benefits of growing economic prosperity are accessible to all. This is linked to a principle of addressing inequality within the workforce, population and communities across the county. Priorities for the M5 corridor, which includes Bridgwater, highlight the need to diversify the local economy to reduce dependence on existing manufacturing, address basic skills needs, develop the range of locally provided higher education and regenerate deprived neighbourhoods.

The *South West of England RDA*<sup>2</sup> is also engaged in the area. The Regional Economic Strategy aims to tackle the causes as well as the effects of economic exclusion and to improve the economies of poorly performing areas. Diversity and equality is also one of the cross-cutting themes in the Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2016. Funding for training projects is designed to support more effective labour market activity. For example, the Learning Works for All project, run by the South West Trade Union Congress, has received funds to help improve the performance of organisations and individuals by encouraging employees to learn new skills at work and achieve a greater work-life balance. The Somerset Sub-regional Partnership is also engaged in developing an economic strategy which includes the wards under study.

Sure Start operates in the three wards and the services it has developed are to be mainstreamed under the Children's Trusts.

Parallel studies on ethnic minority women (Stiell et al 2006) and the operation of the domiciliary care sector (Yeandle et al 2006) in Somerset have been the focus of other research on women and the labour market as part of the GELLM programme.

## Aims and objectives of the study

This study has assessed how far area-based regeneration initiatives have addressed women's economic disadvantage and poverty. Its specific objectives were:

- To identify and analyse the nature and extent of women's poverty and economic disadvantage in the Bridgwater wards of Hamp, Sydenham and Victoria.
- To develop an evidence base about the relationship between poverty, gender and local labour markets in the neighbourhood.
- To examine relevant area-based public and private sector initiatives, and their impact within the wards on women's labour market opportunity.
- To assess local service provision and to identify the service needs, including unmet needs, of women living on low incomes in the locality.
- To make policy recommendations of relevance to Somerset County Council, and its local partners, including the Local Strategic Partnership, and to regional and national policy makers.

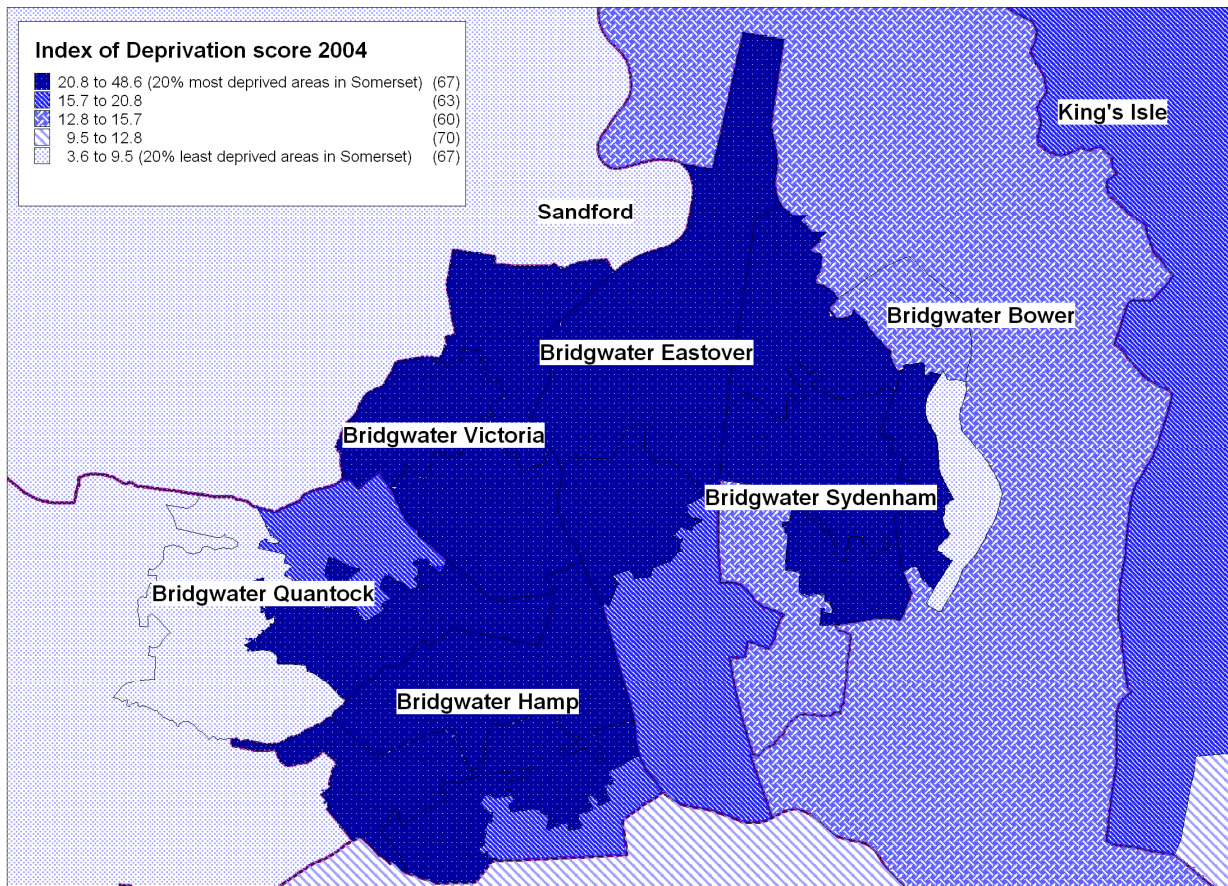
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<sup>1</sup> SRB 6 stands for the Single Regeneration Budget Round 6 programme which provided funds for regeneration initiatives. This has now been subsumed under the South West of England Regional Development Agency single programme.

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<sup>2</sup> The South West of England RDA is the Regional Development Agency for the South West region.

**Figure 1 Index of deprivation: Bridgwater Hamp, Sydenham and Victoria wards in Somerset**



Source: ODPM, Crown Copyright 2004, 2001 Census Super Output Areas, Crown Copyright 2004. This work is based on data provided through EDINA UKBORDERS with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is Copyright of the Crown

Note: This map shows Index of multiple Deprivation (IMD) score for each sub-ward area, with the total number of areas in each category in brackets This index covers information relating to income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and disorder and living environment.

### Women’s poverty and economic disadvantage in Somerset: evidence from three wards<sup>3</sup>

The study used a multi-method approach (see Appendix 2), combining qualitative and quantitative data:

- Ward/district level data from the 2001 Census.
- Documentary analysis of council reports and policies.
- Interviews with local organisations.
- Evidence from focus group discussions at three community based meetings.

<sup>3</sup> Data in this section are from the 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003 except where specified.

### The neighbourhood<sup>4</sup>

Bridgwater Hamp, Sydenham and Victoria are among the most deprived wards in Somerset. This is evident from population and housing data about the locality, as well as the labour market and economic indicators presented below. Figure 1 shows the two wards, with the Index of Deprivation 2004 scores for the areas within them.

In the wards, the level of social renting is high. Compared with Somerset as a whole, fewer local residents own their home; 16% of people in Victoria and 11% in Hamp live in rented social housing. 30% of Sydenham’s residents live in council owned property. The majority of people in

<sup>4</sup> Quotes in this and following sections are either from interviews with local organisations (marked A), or from focus group participants (marked B).

the locality live in a terraced or semi-detached property, and in Victoria 16% live in multiple occupancy housing.

**Low income households**

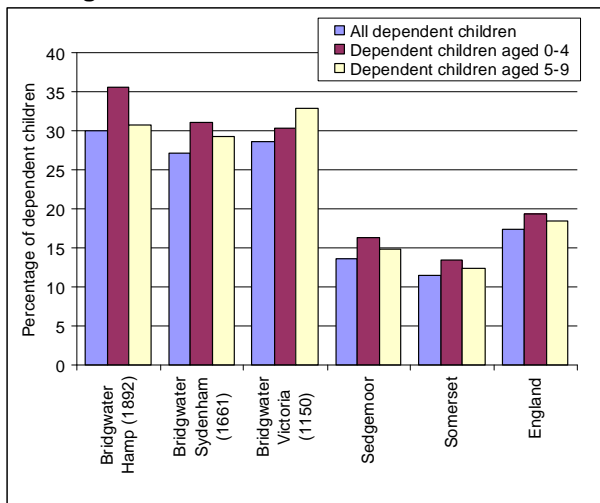
*I think in economic terms for women, it's the day to day pressure of feeding children. I get women saying they can't afford to buy food for themselves, let alone feed young children with fresh food.<sup>A</sup>*

*It's quite a transient community because of the housing tenure and a shortage of social housing.<sup>A</sup>*

*We have many young people in the area, local residents with no qualifications and older age poverty.<sup>A</sup>*

The locality has a relatively young population (25% of Hamp's female population and 22% of Sydenham's female population is aged 0-15) and fewer people aged 50 and over in these two wards compared with the county rate. Victoria's population largely reflects the district and county age profile. Almost 30% (4,700) of dependent children live in families with no working adult, considerably more than in the district, the county, or in England as a whole, as shown in Figure 2. The figures are particularly high for children aged 0-4 in Hamp and for children aged 5-7 in Victoria.

**Figure 2 Dependent children in households with no working adult**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Theme Table, Crown Copyright 2003.

Over 700 female lone parents lived in the wards in 2001. A higher proportion than nationally said that they were unemployed. Economic inactivity rates for lone parents were also higher in the three wards. There were low levels of full-time

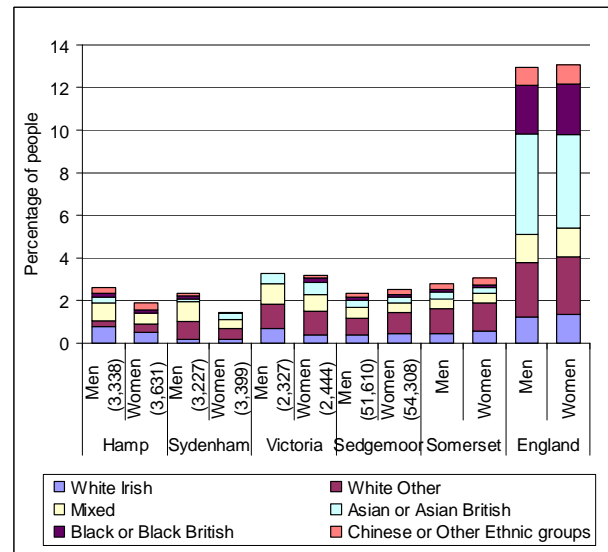
working and higher rates of part-time working among female lone parents in wards than at district or county level. Over one in 12 women of working age in the locality claim Income Support, well above the district and national average<sup>5</sup>. This represents over 740 women of working age in the locality, and almost two-thirds of all claimants.

Limiting long-term illness among women of working age is higher in the three wards than in the county or England as a whole, and women in the wards reported higher levels of poor health.

**Ethnicity**

As we showed in the *Gender Profile of Somerset's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2004), relatively few of Somerset's residents are from ethnic minority groups. The ethnic mix of the three wards largely reflects the county picture, with the largest minority group being people of Other Mixed and White Other origin (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 Ethnicity of resident population**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Table, Crown Copyright 2003.

Our interviews highlighted economic disadvantage among recently arrived ethnic minority groups living in the area, including Polish, Portuguese and Kurdish families. Our focus group participants also drew attention to the changing demography of the locality. Concern was expressed about the social isolation of recent arrivals into the area.

<sup>5</sup> Source: DWP, 2003

### Residents' views of the neighbourhood

Our focus group discussions revealed a weak sense of 'community'. The women interviewed did not feel that there was a strong community spirit, though some of the community facilities in the area did provide this.

*The only time you feel community is when you come up here. Your neighbours don't really talk. It's not really a family.*<sup>B</sup>

Participants said they felt safe in the area and the general view was that the schools in the area had improved. Affordable housing was an increasing concern, however, and focus group participants felt local health services had deteriorated in recent years.

Local organisations felt that there was a relatively strong sense of community which resulted from long established local authority housing estates. Many people felt content to stay in the area.

### Women's position in the local labour market

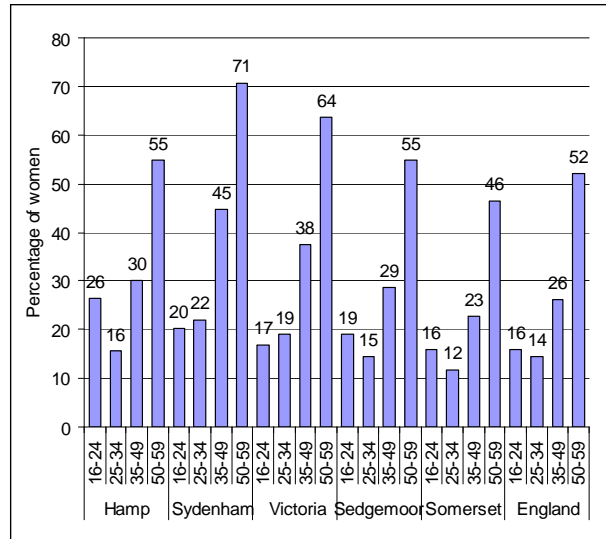
We reported elsewhere (Buckner et al 2004) the large increases in part-time employment affecting both sexes between 1991 and 2002. In these years, there was a large fall in the share of employment in manufacturing, and an increase in employment across all service sectors, particularly in distribution, hotels and restaurants, and in public administration, education and health, for women living in the district.

### Qualifications and skills

A higher proportion of women in the two wards have no qualifications than in Somerset and England (Figure 4). This is particularly marked among the older age groups. Over 70% of women aged 50-59 in Sydenham have no qualifications. In Hamp a high proportion of women (26%) aged 16-24 have no qualifications, and in the 35-49 age group 38% of women in Victoria and 45% in Sydenham are completely unqualified.

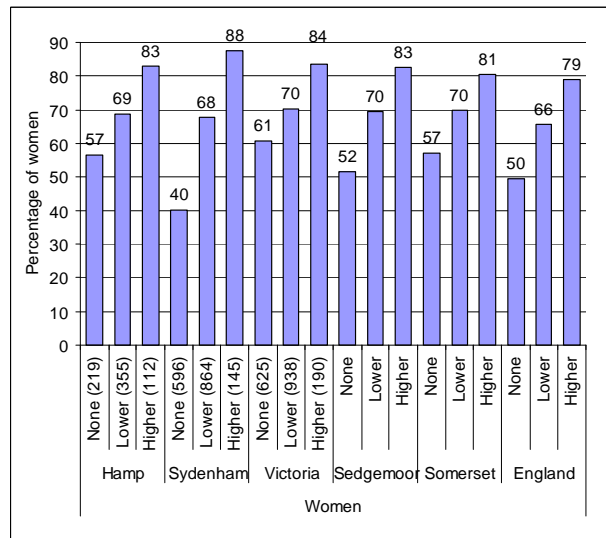
As elsewhere, those with higher qualifications are most likely to be in employment. However, only 9% of women living in Sydenham and 11% of women in Victoria have a degree, while over a third of women across the three wards have no qualifications. Just over half of women living in the locality have qualifications at the 'lower' level.

Figure 4 Women with no qualifications, by age



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Figure 5 Women in employment, by level of qualification



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Note: 'Lower' level qualifications are those equivalent to 'A' level and below; 'higher' level qualifications are equivalent to a university degree and above.

Women with degree level qualifications are more likely to be in employment in the locality than in Somerset or nationally (Figure 5). By contrast, among women with no qualifications, only 40% in Sydenham were in employment, compared with 57% for this group in Hamp ward and in Somerset, and 50% in England as a whole. Thus women in the neighbourhood are less well qualified but - when qualified - have similar rates of employment to the county and national average.

**Figure 6 Economic activity for women of working age**

	Hamp	Sydenham	Victoria	Sedgemoor	Somerset	England
<b>Economically Active</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>71</b>
Employee full-time	30	26	30	32	33	36
Self-employed full-time	2	1	2	3	4	3
Employee part-time	28	30	26	28	29	23
Self-employed part-time	1	2	2	3	4	2
Unemployed	4	2	2	3	3	3
Full-time student	4	4	4	3	2	3
<b>Economically Inactive</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>
Retired	0	1	1	2	2	1
Student	3	3	3	3	4	6
Looking after home or family	17	19	20	15	14	14
Permanently sick or disabled	6	8	6	5	4	5
Other	4	5	4	3	3	4

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure 7 Main occupations and industries of women in employment in the locality**

	Hamp	Sydenham	Victoria	Sedgemoor	Somerset	England
<b>Occupation</b>						
Managers, senior officials	8	6	8	11	11	11
Professionals	3	3	4	8	9	10
Associate professionals & technical occupations	10	6	10	12	13	14
Administrative and secretarial	19	16	21	21	20	23
Elementary occupations	19	24	19	14	13	12
<b>Industry</b>						
Manufacturing	10	14	11	9	10	9
Wholesale, retail, restaurants and hotels	32	32	29	27	26	24
Finance and real estate	12	13	13	13	12	18
Health and social work	20	16	20	20	21	19

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

### **Women's employment patterns**

Women in the three wards are less likely than women nationally to be in full-time employment, but more likely to be in part-time employment. (Figure 6). Almost a fifth of women of working age look after their home and family full-time, well above the rate at national level (14%).

As at national, regional and district level, there is a gendered pattern in men's and women's jobs (Figure 7). Women in the three wards are even more likely to work in lower level jobs, and are less likely to be in skilled, technical, professional or managerial occupations than at other levels. Fewer women are employed in administrative jobs than in the county and nationally.

A much higher proportion of women work in elementary jobs or operative positions and in sales and customer services than at the national level. Only 12% of women in Sydenham work in professional jobs and in associate professional and technical jobs, compared with 24% in Somerset and 25% nationally.

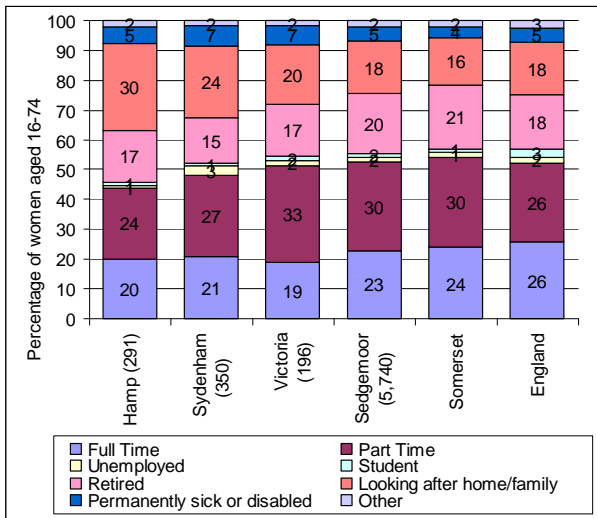
Local women are also quite strongly concentrated in certain employment sectors (Figure 7). Almost a third work in wholesale, retail and restaurants, and Sydenham has a relatively high proportion of women in manufacturing (14%). The health and social work sector is as important a sector for women in the area as nationally, but fewer local women are employed in education than in the county or nationally.

### **Caring responsibilities**

In the locality, women who have unpaid caring responsibilities<sup>6</sup> are less likely to be in paid work (either full-time or part-time) than in Somerset or nationally. This is particularly marked in Hamp, where only 20% of women who are carers work full-time, and just 24% work part-time (Figure 8). A high proportion of women who provide unpaid care look after their home and family full-time.

<sup>6</sup> The 2001 Census included a question asking people about help or support which was not part of their paid employment which they gave to family members, friends or neighbours with long term physical or mental ill-health or disability.

**Figure 8 Working age women who are carers, by economic activity**

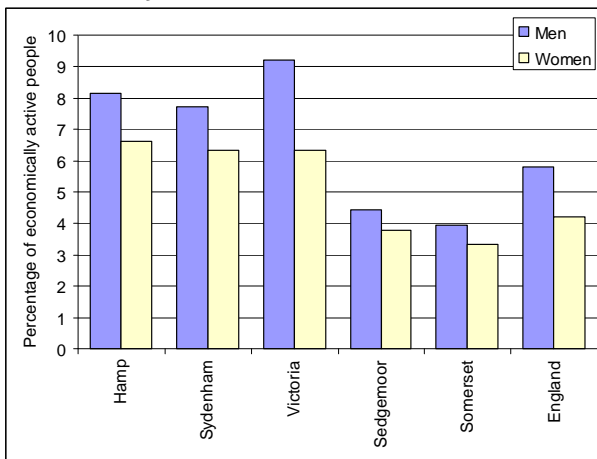


Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Unemployment and economic inactivity**

Local unemployment rates are considerably higher for both men and women than in Somerset and nationally (Figure 9). The rate of around 6% in the locality is almost double the county rate for women. Compared with the district and national picture, a high proportion of unemployed or economically inactive women in the locality had last worked in elementary jobs or as process, plant and machine operatives. This was particularly marked in Sydenham, where 44% of women had last worked in these occupations.

**Figure 9 Unemployed men and women of working age, as a proportion of those who are economically active**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

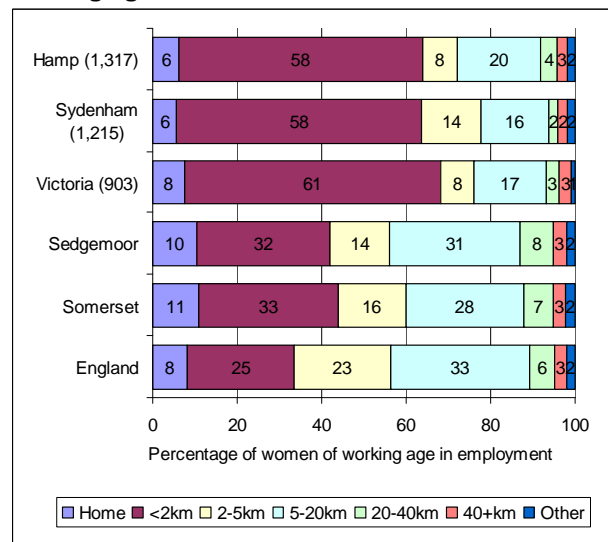
Women who had become unemployed or economically inactive tended to have previously worked in manufacturing, in wholesale and retail or in health and social work.

Economic inactivity among women decreased between 1991 and 2001 across the country, although it remains higher among women than men. Whilst the rate for women decreased across Somerset and in Hamp ward in this period, it went up in Sydenham. Over a third of women of working age in the locality were economically inactive, compared with a national rate of below 30% (see Appendix 3, FigureA7).

**Transport and travel to work**

Many residents in the locality live and work in close proximity, and this is particularly true for women. Almost two-thirds of women in the three wards travel less than 2km to work, compared with only a third in Somerset and 25% nationally (Figure 10). Associated with this, a high proportion of women in the neighbourhood walk to work, especially in Victoria ward (Figure 11).

**Figure 10 Distance travelled to work by women of working age**

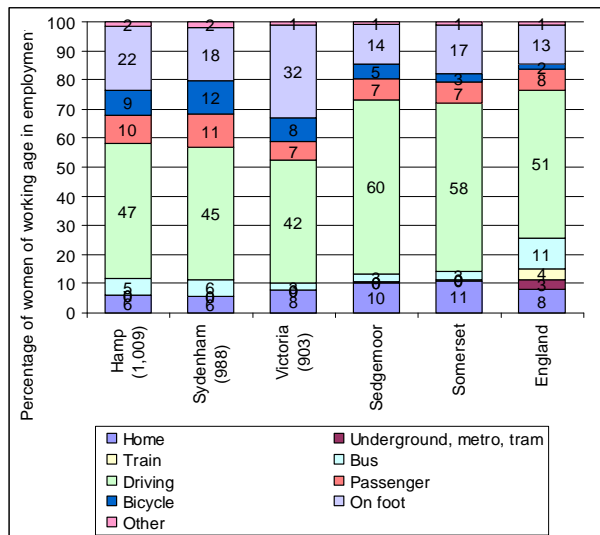


Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

In contrast to the county picture, fewer women drive to work: only 42% in Victoria ward, compared with 58% in Somerset as a whole. Bus use is higher among women living in Sydenham and Hamp than in Somerset, but much less than the national rate of 11%. The opposite is true for women who work in the area but live outside it, however, who have higher levels of car and van use than at county or national level.



**Figure 11 Travel to work by women of working age, who live in the area**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

### Views of the local labour market

County and regional level changes have impacted adversely on many households living in the neighbourhood. Long term unemployment remains high, and is closely connected to a shortage of social housing and poor public transport. Whilst job growth had occurred, particularly in smaller businesses, it was felt that local residents in the wards had not benefited. The loss of employment from major local employers such as Innovia Films (formerly British Cellophane) was highlighted as a continuing problem. Local residents needed to travel much further afield to find work.

A lack of basic skills was identified, and there was an increasing gap between those working for relatively high wages who could afford childcare and those on low wages who were unable to afford such services.

*We had a manufacturing base and many people worked in local factories. There is no historical tradition of getting qualified.<sup>A</sup>*

*There is a lot of hidden unemployment and a high proportion of low paid jobs. The industrial base has reduced and the area is more dependent on female employment, which tends to be low paid.<sup>A</sup>*

*There are many jobs in health and the care sector, but many of these are low paid.<sup>A</sup>*

The low wage economy of the area featured in the interviews and focus group discussions about women's employment opportunities. Much of the

work now on offer was shift work and women often did night shifts so that they could care for children during the day. For many women there was little chance of progression if they worked in low paid employment.

The majority of focus group participants had been in employment, typically low paid, prior to having children. Returning to employment was considered difficult. It was felt that many young women were relatively independent and better able to progress, but that women over the age of 35 struggled to enter or re-enter paid employment.

The transition from a manufacturing to a service based economy had proved very challenging for those living in the locality. Many higher skilled jobs were thought difficult to access, and better skilled jobs in the county were expected to go to people from outside the locality.

Many of the low paid and unskilled jobs were often not attractive:

*There are some very poor jobs, such as packaging and lots of cleaning jobs with anti-social hours. People work in double shifts at both ends of the day, sometimes 60 hours a week, to make ends meet and live in poor accommodation.<sup>A</sup>*

New staff are often recruited through agencies, and many posts are part-time and temporary.

### Barriers to labour market engagement

Most women in the focus groups either worked part-time or would like to work. Barriers to employment included aspects of the tax and benefits system, which can only be resolved at national level. Others relate to the economic, social and physical infrastructure of the locality, which can be influenced by regional and local agencies as well as by central government or private investment.

Focus group participants pointed out that whilst some childcare costs are paid, the costs of re-entering employment go beyond this: rent, council tax, and travel were cited as costs which they would find hard to meet if they accepted low paid employment.

Stakeholders were also concerned that there was not a clearer understanding of the barriers women in the locality face:

### **Tax Credit and the benefits system**

The benefits trap was highlighted as a problem for women living in the area. Local organisations explained that entitlement criteria were confusing, resulting in overpayment and problems of repayment by those on low incomes.

Focus group participants felt that the potential loss of benefits is stopping some from returning to work, and that the Tax Credit system made returning to work complicated:

*A lot of work is short term, and many won't go beyond the 16 hour limit in case they risk losing benefits.<sup>A</sup>*

Not many women in the focus groups were accessing Working Tax Credit, although they felt that it was beneficial.

*If I do something that is 8 hours Katie can go to nursery and the government or whoever pay for her nursery. If I do 16 hours<sup>7</sup> I come off Income Support and go on to Working Tax Credit which is great.<sup>B</sup>*

The situation was felt to be much harder for lone parents.

*If you're a single parent...you've got your rent to pay for, you've got Council Tax to pay for, plus you've got nursery taken out of that.<sup>B</sup>*

*Jobcentre Plus have been helpful in calculating benefits.<sup>B</sup>*

Many participants felt dependent on benefits, and several were economically inactive because of their childcare responsibilities.

*The more money you earn the less child tax credit. If you earn anything under £15,500 you get your prescriptions free, you get your dentist free, opticians and that free.<sup>B</sup>*

*I hate benefits, it's a stigma. I'd like to move off, but what can you do?<sup>B</sup>*

Respondents felt some of the Tax Credit regulations should be relaxed. Some women had partners whose earnings were high enough to disqualify them from working tax credit. For others it was essential:

*We would not get by. We would not be able to rent and pay for electric and food and everything. But it does make you feel that if I do go to work and pay for a childminder, fork out that money, and reduce my benefit as well. It makes me think I'm going*

*through all that stress and hassle for nothing, or very little. I gave up work voluntarily and my Family Tax Credit went up by so much I thought, 'Why was I working in the first place?'<sup>B</sup>*

Debt levels were high in the area, and several stakeholders highlighted the problems of managing household finances on low incomes.

### **Childcare**

Childcare responsibilities were identified as one of the principal factors preventing women from re-entering the labour market. This was linked to concerns about low pay in the area.

*They have to juggle around pre-school, so it's a nine to three culture.<sup>B</sup>*

*If there isn't affordable childcare, why bother working, if the quality of jobs is poor?<sup>A</sup>*

*Young women – as long as they don't have children, they're all right. You either put yourself and your job first, or your children first.<sup>B</sup>*

Childcare and other activities for school age children between 7 and 12 were limited.

*Over 12s have Rollercoaster, a youth centre, but it has restricted opening times and an entry fee has to be paid.<sup>B</sup>*

*They've done the bits for babies and toddlers, then you've got the after school clubs, but as they're getting to the end of primary school, secondary, there's nothing for that age that's improved.<sup>B</sup>*

Interviewees stated that although the area had seen some improvement in childcare for pre-school children, there were a number of continuing problems.

The cost of childcare is prohibitively expensive for those in low paid occupations, which were often part-time.

*There is enough provision, but the cost is expensive.<sup>B</sup>*

*Affordable childcare is limited. What is affordable? These women think £2.50 an hour is not affordable if you're on a wage of £4.50 an hour. You can claim it back through tax credits, but it is very difficult if you are a single parent and you've got several mouths to feed.<sup>A</sup>*

Childcare provision is limited for school age children. There were some after school clubs enabling women to commit to longer working hours, but provision was patchy.

School holiday periods posed a major problem for women in paid employment.

Whilst the Family Centre was an important local service which had started to assist women in employment, it did not provide full-time care.

*The nursery has helped me into employment, she goes there set days and I do my hours.<sup>B</sup>*

Sure Start and Family Centres were regarded as extremely important, as they had opened up more choices for women with children, particularly lone parents, who wished to return to the labour market. Some focus group participants were involved as service users or volunteers in childcare projects.

### **Work related skills and experience**

Women participating in the focus groups felt constrained by their lack of recent work experience and qualifications. Many suggested that more value was placed on qualifications as opposed to experience which often worked against women who had taken a break from employment. Others highlighted their negative experiences of school and problems of formal education approaches. This was repeated by local organisations who felt that there should be more avenues for women to take up educational opportunities to assist them into better paid employment.

Opportunities for training in local venues had increased, and focus group participants felt that bringing training into the community was important.

Outreach education services through Sure Start and Learn Direct were considered particularly important for women in the locality. One focus group participant who worked as a part time carer used the Family Centre services:

*I had my daughter at 16 so I never went to college. So coming to this place was my saviour.<sup>A</sup>*

Some women who had worked in low skilled jobs were now looking to find better paid work. Attending college and training was seen as a way to improve their chances of better employment. Previous work experience may not be useful, as it can be dated and in most cases is not entirely relevant.

Those with qualifications and experience have found a lack of jobs that offer flexible hours. Some focus group participants felt that there

should be advice on employment for women who had left school or further education. They were aware that the college offered a careers advice service, but only for younger women.

*There's no actual careers advisers any more. They used to have a lot more of them, but now they're charging for things. As soon as you reach 18 or older there's no actual careers advice.<sup>B</sup>*

### **Public service providers**

Stakeholders identified problems for residents in the locality in accessing services and jobs:

*The support structures are often not there, though we find that it's mostly women who access services.<sup>A</sup>*

In some cases this affected the types of jobs local residents considered applying for. It was felt that the employment and recruitment practices of public service agencies and providers did not reflect the local community. Although the health and care sectors were important potential employers, they required formal qualifications which posed a challenge for many women in the locality. Further community outreach work by statutory organisations was suggested by local women.

The lack of sustained educational opportunities for younger women was also mentioned as a problem. Many young women take up post-16 training but then drop out and have limited options open to them. Many young women started care and leisure courses, but felt dissatisfied and ended up doing other low paid jobs instead. Organisations working with young people felt there needed to be a more coherent strategy to encourage young people to move from education to employment and to widen opportunities for achieving this.

Community based initiatives were an important method for local residents to link up training, skills and employment, but this needed to happen on a much larger scale.

### **Transport and travel time**

As we have seen, many women in the locality walk or use the local bus service as their primary form of transport. Most public transport routes went direct to town and there were few routes to assist those wishing to work in locations on the edge of the town. Car ownership was low, and better community transport facilities were needed to assist women in the area. Several local

organisations highlighted poor public transport as a major barrier to employment.

*If you've got a car you are alright, or maybe cycling, but it's too far to walk.<sup>B</sup>*

*After 6 o'clock there are no buses. So if you don't finish work until 5 o'clock, you've got to rush, rush, rush to get wherever you're going to. Sundays and Bank Holidays, God forbid you need a bus, two or three hours' wait.<sup>B</sup>*

Travelling time also posed women with the dilemma of trying to balance employment and practical needs.

### **Aspirations and expectations**

Local organisations expressed widespread concern about a lack of ambition, particularly among young women and women who felt that they did not have the relevant qualifications for employment.

*The 13-19 year old group have low levels of ambition because they do not feel there is much potential. We do a lot of work on self-esteem and motivation.<sup>A</sup>*

The aspirations of focus group participants varied according to previous labour market experiences. Many women were motivated, but lacked the support they needed to progress.

*We expect that children will move away from Bridgwater, as there is nothing challenging for them here<sup>B</sup>*

Women's aspirations were restricted by low pay. They also raised issues about work-life balance.

*There's no way I could afford to get back to work earning £5 an hour and spending £3 an hour on childcare. That's why you get so many people working nights, because you've got to work around everything else. Then you're sacrificing everything else, like time as a family.<sup>B</sup>*

*Then at the weekend when they're off you go to work and you think, I should be at home. It's a constant battle. You either go to work and earn some money or you feel guilty at not spending time as a family.<sup>B</sup>*

Participants nevertheless highlighted the broader benefits of employment. Although employment might not provide much increase in household income, it was felt that health and well-being, would be likely to improve.

*Women need to go to work, and they like the idea of doing the training and building up their confidence and self-esteem.<sup>A</sup>*

*Ideally I would like to work in ASDA but there is a waiting list. I just need to be doing something. I'm going a bit mad. When you're on your own with the little one it's a bit tiring.*

Recent work with local women using Adult Education 'return to learn' approaches, where experience counts and individuals reflect on their life, was felt to be beneficial.

*You look at planning your journey through life, which builds confidence and helps women set goals.<sup>A</sup>*

Many aspire to work in schools, but childcare qualifications are needed to work in such an environment. Women also wanted improved opportunities for the younger generation and better chances for their children. Women in the focus groups suggested more school term time jobs, with returning students covering holiday periods.

Stakeholders and focus group participants identified a series of barriers to achieving these aspirations, including:

- Lack of high quality and well paid employment opportunities
- Care responsibilities
- Lack of qualifications and continuous employment
- Lack of relevant support from statutory agencies
- Lack of information on local services and available courses and employment opportunities

### **Area based public and private regeneration: gender perspectives**

The equalities dimension of regeneration strategies was examined through stakeholder interviews and documentary analysis<sup>8</sup>. The full version of this documentary evaluation has been made available to Somerset County Council. This found that there were few policy developments, delivery plans, economic and employment targets and evaluation techniques which specifically

<sup>8</sup> The documents evaluated for Somerset are listed with the references.

address women's economic disadvantage in the labour market.

Policy aims and objectives were geared to addressing neighbourhood problems, but they were generally weak on strategies which are required to address the unemployment, economic inactivity, low pay and financial hardship expressed by women (including lone parents, women who are in part-time and/or casual employment and ethnic minority women who may be doubly disadvantaged).

The Community Strategy for Sedgemoor (2003), which aims to improve the locality by maintaining low unemployment levels and economic success, makes few references to the needs of particular groups in areas of deprivation. Childcare provision was highlighted in relation to training, but not in relation to labour market activity.

The SRB delivery plans for Hamp and Sydenham were primarily geared to tackling social exclusion and improving the employment prospects, education and skills of local people. The issues raised by the plans included recommendations to reduce unemployment and create employment opportunities. There was, however, no specific recognition that these policies might affect men and women differently.

The SRB plan's sensitivity towards gender issues is demonstrated through commitment to childcare provision and to community support. Its lack of specific targeting may reflect a lack of gender disaggregated analysis.

Intended SRB6 beneficiaries include young and unemployed people living in the area, and basic skills training is offered, but there was no specific focus on young, unemployed or ethnic minority women. Affordable childcare was identified as a key target for the SRB programmes.

Some of the project delivery outputs and outcomes included local labour market criteria. For example, the SRB 6 programme initiated projects designed to provide: personal development, advice and training; support for neighbourhood facilities and projects and support systems for families. However, the wider themes relating to skills development and labour market opportunities were not addressed in relation to specific challenges facing women living in the wards.

Apart from the commitment to support lone parent families and to provide childcare facilities, there was no identifiable gender focus in the proposed interventions to address poverty. Targets were not disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. However, many of the strategies to address health inequality (Davies, 2004) are designed to assist women, for example, through increasing teenage parents in education, training and employment. The problems of domestic violence against women were also raised in a number of the strategies for the wards, including the work of Victoria Community Action Partnership. The Needs Analysis of Victoria ward included gender disaggregated data on the employment position of local residents, and made some important points of analysis about the economic position of women in the area, which are echoed in this research.

To date, evaluation approaches have taken little account of the key differences in women's and men's economic position or of their experiences of living in the locality. However, the success of the Family Centre, funded through SRB6, and of Sure Start centres in Bridgwater in assisting the confidence of parents and improving the quality of childcare services has clearly benefited women living in the area.

### ***Local views of regeneration***

Our focus group participants generally felt that regeneration had not greatly changed the economic position of the area. They felt that there had been little emphasis on employment and skills in the regeneration programmes. There was a lack of awareness about SRB investments, other than the community and family centres. No specific funding was mentioned, and participants were unable to identify employment projects which had specifically assisted women.

They mentioned an increase in population and more houses, but no-one had seen recognisable improvement in services. This had put pressure on the area.

*Bridgwater is expanding at a quicker rate than local services, they keep building and building, but the services don't get any better.<sup>B</sup>*

*They're trying to get more and more people into Bridgwater, but they're not improving anything else.<sup>B</sup>*

Local organisations reported very limited targeting of women though the regeneration funds in the area.

*We never really considered gender issues.*<sup>A</sup>

Locally relevant improvements were considered crucial to the future success of future labour market schemes. Stakeholders identified the important work carried out by local organisations seeking to strengthen community cohesion. Community projects had been assisted by SRB funding, but more work was required to support local residents in accessing services. Long term sustainability for regeneration projects was a constraint, and there were fears that future funding would be limited.

These views, which were confirmed by local organisations, explained that investment had concentrated on upgrading the social and physical infrastructure of the area, including lighting and safety. Reduction in the unemployment gap and the associated skills gap were also key priorities, as were community safety and housing improvements.

## Local services and support

In our qualitative research we discussed the types of services available to economically disadvantaged women living in the wards. Focus group participants were aware of the advisory services through Jobcentre Plus, the local authority and Connexions, but did not always find these services relevant or appropriate to their needs. The CAB<sup>9</sup> services are by appointment only, from 10am-2pm, so can be difficult to access.

The view of local Job Centre services varied according to personal experience:

*Jobcentre Plus has been very good to me. She rings me every week with the jobs coming in.*<sup>B</sup>

*I didn't find them very helpful.*<sup>B</sup>

*I don't like Jobcentre Plus, they look at you like you're dumb.*<sup>B</sup>

Other SRB initiatives had not been well advertised:

*We haven't heard about it. It hasn't been well advertised if there was anything.*<sup>A</sup>

Supporting economically inactive women was regarded as a major challenge for local agencies.

Interviewees from local agencies felt that engaging women who are not economically active in training and education initiatives was often effective on a one-to-one basis. The continuity of an advisor providing mentoring support, and regular intervention, were important for a scheme's success.

## Employer initiatives

Further work needed to be undertaken with organisations and employers to develop and enhance employment practices more suited to women's needs. Some local employers had introduced more flexible schemes which attracted women. Some focus group participants worked for a large retailer who was considered to be a considerate organisation to work for. It offered paid annual leave and unpaid leave if needed.

*I have to work certain shifts, but they are really nice to work for. If you've got a problem, like, we've got a single mother that I work with, and if she's got a problem with her little boy, she's allowed to be at home.*<sup>B</sup>

Whilst retail was attractive because the hours are flexible, not all retail outlets were regarded as "good" employers. For example, one employer only allowed 3 days' sick leave, and for mothers with children this was felt to be very restrictive.

*There is a lack of flexible working. I can't seem to find anything suitable.*<sup>B</sup>

*I went to an agency in town and just queried about part time work and flexible hours but there was nothing at all. I wanted flexible hours, to work around my partner's job because he doesn't work set hours.*<sup>B</sup>

*Employers don't understand the mother's role. They're saying we expect flexibility, we expect you to work every other weekend. But I don't know that my son is not going to have an asthma attack.*<sup>B</sup>

*The supermarkets tell you when you work, and it will change week to week. So you can't arrange anything around that.*<sup>B</sup>

*I hated it. I worked there for four years, but they're not very child friendly at all. I took a day to look after him and went back the next day. Then I took him to a doctor's appointment the following week and they weren't going to let me go home. I just thought, 'I'm going'. Places like that aren't child friendly, and it doesn't make you want to work.*<sup>B</sup>

*A lot of places say, 'We will consider a job share'. I think that will help if you could job share with someone.*<sup>B</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Citizens Advice Bureau.

Participants felt that employers could help by:

- Taking more of a lead by providing transport, crèche and flexible hours.
- Incentives to be paid while in training
- Assisting with better childcare options.

### **Addressing disadvantages faced by ethnic minority women**

Several interviewees stated that service providers needed to address local needs more directly. For example, the lack of English speaking among some new arrivals was a barrier to training and employment. Further translation and language services, including ESOL provision targeted at groups of women, was needed in the locality.

Careers advice was only provided to school-age children. Advice at the Family Centre would be popular. Most of the women would like to return to work at some point, but felt there was nowhere to explain the benefits system clearly enough.

*Maybe somewhere like this you could have a careers advisor come, especially for new mums. You think you've had your children, lost your job. What else is there?*<sup>B</sup>

### **Impact of initiatives on women's employment**

Measuring the employment impact of area-based regeneration in a locality is notoriously difficult. This study has examined qualitative evidence to consider whether women living in the wards have benefited from local labour market initiatives.

#### **Quality of employment and low pay**

Public and private investment in the area had attracted employers, but many of these jobs were regarded as poorly paid. Local organisations pointed out that this, and the lack of skills among local residents, resulted in a series of constraints.

*They haven't got the skills or confidence to go for a better paid job. It feels like there is a gap between low paid work and decent wages.*<sup>A</sup>

*Many local residents work in retail, especially ASDA, where they tend to work anti-social hours in packing and loading rather than on the checkout.*<sup>A</sup>

*In private sector care the employer tends to push employees to the point they can't take anymore, but there is always someone else who will work for low pay and awful hours.*<sup>A</sup>

Focus group participants repeated this view:

*I'm finding it difficult because jobs aren't out there. They want you to do shift work, they want you to do weekends, or evenings. It's just not possible if you've got a little one*<sup>B</sup>

*Why am I bothering? I've worked a twelve hour shift in a factory, which is not very pleasant, and then I've got to come home, get them tea and get them sorted. Then I've got to be up with the kids and get them to a childminder by 8am and just do it all over again.*<sup>A</sup>

*Job satisfaction just does not exist.*<sup>B</sup>

*There is low pay but people are willing to do it.*<sup>B</sup>

Several focus group participants worked part-time shift work:

*I just get so tired working round my husband and the kids. If I do 6 to 10 early mornings and weekends I just get so tired. I don't know how you do it.*<sup>B</sup>

The view was that work available to local people was in low paid jobs in supermarkets, factories and agriculture. Moving out of the poverty trap was extremely difficult, and many jobs were recruited through agencies.

*We are getting more foreign people willing to take those jobs at that price. Where my husband used to work, they got rid of people because they knew they could get people in a lot cheaper and they were a big employer. I don't understand how people can legally do that.*<sup>B</sup>

#### **Support for women with children**

The Family Centre located on the Sydenham estate, originally part funded through SRB, was regarded as an important facility. It provided support to families in a modern, well designed building and courses run by Adult Learning and other groups.

The Sure Start model was regarded as a positive one as it was targeted, simple to access and supported women directly. Some of these services involve assisting people referred through Jobcentre Plus or Housing services with benefits and potential routes to education and training. This holistic approach was felt by local organisations to be important, but in the climate of cutbacks in adult learning services, there was concern that this approach may be constrained in the future.

*The focus of the centre is on the child not the parent, which is absolutely crazy because the parents need to be supported more than the child.<sup>A</sup>*

Focus group participants identified the broader benefits of the Family Centre, including the co-location of mainstream health and social services including midwifery, counselling and health visitor services.

*The Family Centre is very much valued. The initial assumption was that it was for social services referrals, now there is no stigma attached in attending. The centre is relaxed and people come in and out. The centre is for the whole family, although the majority of users at the centre are women.<sup>B</sup>*

*In here we've got our own community within a community. Outside the people keep themselves to themselves. The Family Centre helps.<sup>B</sup>*

The Family Centre has given confidence to women.

*Coming through the door is the hardest thing. My confidence has improved 110%. I thought, 'I've got to do something for myself', that's when I came over here and started doing different things.<sup>B</sup>*

Gaps in childcare provision are important considerations for policy makers and labour market projects.

*For school age children, breakfast clubs and after school clubs enable you to do a full day's work.<sup>B</sup>*

### **Local training initiatives**

Several local organisations highlighted the need for better partnership working on education and training for local residents. This needs to engage Learn Direct, library services, the college and other providers. Although Bridgwater College is located in Sydenham ward, it was reported that relatively few local residents had participated in courses there. It was felt that courses on ICT, for example, did not always attract women living in the area and that a more innovative approach was required.

*Training needs to be accessible. We have an increasingly transient population and training needs to help people meet their expectations.<sup>A</sup>*

Once again the work at the Family Centre was cited as a key stimulus for women's involvement in informal and formal qualifications.

*I've done courses through the Family Centre that you would not normally have done. A lot of people did the MYEC (Make Your Experiences Count)*

*course. You used your life experiences of being a woman and a mother, or a man and a father, and you got a qualification for that.<sup>B</sup>*

*I'm not just a mum, I'm a chamber maid, I'm a cook I'm this that and the other, I'm a teacher because you teach your children. So we list everything that we do, and then we've got ten or twelve professions. It was really good for your self-esteem.<sup>B</sup>*

The SRB programme had run courses on confidence building and assisted local residents with practical skills. Focus group participants felt that these activities had helped to build confidence.

*I have an NVQ in community leadership which I am really proud of.<sup>A</sup>*

*When you start doing little bits of courses and start thinking and using your brain power you think, I'm not just a mum, I can do something else.<sup>B</sup>*

There were many learning opportunities in the area, but there were no distinctive services for young women and women who had not entered education since school. Several organisations highlighted the need for more pre-employment courses and greater recognition of skills gained through community activity. The lack of higher education facilities in the area was regarded as a constraint in ensuring longer term educational opportunities, particularly for young women and men in the area.

### **New approaches to employment**

Many agencies identified attracting and investing in higher paid, local employment as their underlying concern.

*4Wards2Work* is a county-wide initiative supporting people into work, funded through ESF and Job Centre Plus, and delivered through a charitable organisation. The Hamp and Victoria wards are included in this project, which targets groups such as lone parents and ex-offenders. Service users are supported in developing CVs, interview skills and job applications. The approach was felt to be beneficial, though the resource implications of one-to-one support were an added concern.

Sure Start had developed a range of provision directed at families, which went beyond childcare.

*Once I've established a relationship with them, I can help them with filling in forms, their benefits and then at a later date start advising them in*



*progressing towards work. You need an element of trust which may span over two or three years.<sup>A</sup>*

*They may have to work through multiple layers of services, and they need personal advice on a range of problems.<sup>A</sup>*

*The work is very intense, but it's working with some very hard to reach people who wouldn't normally come for help. I am working on overcoming all the barriers which prevent them from moving forward.<sup>A</sup>*

Specialised and targeted provision in the community, linked to employment opportunities, was regarded as an essential pre-requisite to engaging women. Practical courses were needed, along with numeracy, literacy and confidence building, assisting women to highlight the value of their own experience and set longer term goals.

Health and social care employment were felt to be important, providing further opportunity to retrain and upskill the workforce and increase qualification levels. Financial support for local residents who wished to raise their educational attainment in order to access jobs in the longer term was identified as a key requirement. This model has already been applied in the Sydenham SRB 6 programme. The increasing emphasis on NVQ qualifications was an important part of workforce development in the education and care sectors which needed to be incorporated into work with the local community.

Many of the focus group participants were volunteers, and volunteering was seen as having a value in its own right. Some had used voluntary work at the Family Centre as a stepping stone and confidence building opportunity.

### **Community provision**

Stakeholders identified the importance of community provision, arguing that work with women at this level required peers and mentors to work closely with groups. The work of Sydenham Information Centre was one facility, but it was insufficiently funded to take forward labour market initiatives. Support services in the locality involving benefits advice and advice on managing money were also identified.

The proposal for the Victoria Building Communities centre reflects a renewed emphasis on a neighbourhood resource funded through South West of England RDA. The project was developed with the community, and aims to

overcome many of the physical, social and economic barriers experienced by local residents in the ward. The intention is that staff will be recruited from the local area. As part of this investment, the centre aims to have comprehensive adult community learning services which involve the Learning and Skills Council, Forwards to Work and Job Centre Plus, as well as children's centre services.

Initial attempts to establish plans for local community enterprises and project work had been promoted through the Credit Union and Business Starter units. Project proposals aimed to meet local service needs by training and employing local people to provide those services. Some interviewees suggested that more strategic approaches were needed, such as broadening the work of the Credit Union and support for small business development. Higher quality employment supported by training and better pay was regarded as essential to improving the economic status of local residents. Regeneration workers were concerned to ensure that employment in public sector agencies reflected the local community.

## **Conclusions and policy recommendations**

This section provides key policy messages and practical suggestions for Somerset County Council and its partner local and regional agencies. These organisations are responsible for public service delivery and regeneration investment in the locality. Some recommendations, including those related to the tax and benefit systems, have a wider remit, as they are the concerns of central government departments.

### **Women's economic disadvantage**

The relative economic position of women living in the wards is considerably worse than in the county as a whole. Strategies encouraging more women to gain paid employment need to recognise and understand the scale of women's non-participation and distance from labour market opportunities in the county. Appropriate action is required to address low incomes among many groups of women. These problems are also a key challenge for the district's economy. Local employers will need to be able to access the experience and skills of women living in the area,

and to retain staff and fill job opportunities in the coming decades. Women in the neighbourhood need specific support to improve their education and skills levels to enable them to access jobs and improve their employment potential.

#### **Understanding local labour market barriers**

Employment strategies and project development need to recognise the barriers women face in the locality. These include addressing restricted training and employment opportunities, variable support services, limited childcare provision and high childcare costs, and recruitment and employment practices amongst employers.

- *Raise awareness and improve information on education, training, childcare support and employment initiatives, using a range of media in local community venues to women living in the three wards.*
- *Integrate local services and create employment projects which bring together training provision, childcare support, work experience, supported by effective local services.*

#### **Regeneration initiatives**

The question of whether women have benefited from regeneration investment cannot be answered, since baseline data, and monitoring and evaluation systems are not particularly gender sensitive. Our qualitative research shows that women are the beneficiaries of some community regeneration initiatives.

- *Strengthen working relationships between senior policy makers, community based organisations and regeneration agencies in the locality. Existing work by different organisations suggest the need for greater communication and partnership working. This should be in line with the Somerset Local Area Agreement which has been agreed by the Somerset Strategic Partnership (SSP).*
- *Establish explicit employment targets for public and private sector schemes designed to enhance job opportunities for local residents.*
- *South West of England RDA and its partners need to link economic development to social priorities, including women's poverty.*
- *South West of England RDA and Somerset County Council need to take gender equality into account in commissioning regeneration*

*programmes and working with partner agencies.*

- *Introduce gender impact assessment for all future regeneration and area based initiatives.*

#### **Delivery of area based projects**

Few labour market projects have been undertaken in the area. The practical delivery of regeneration and labour market initiatives, including those administered through Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset County Council and South West of England RDA, needs to ensure that differences in men's and women's position is reflected in local projects.

- *Integrate gender equality measures in regeneration policy making and delivery programmes.*
- *Use statistical evidence and qualitative information from those who work and live in the area to improve understanding of the neighbourhood.*
- *Identify baseline data and project delivery targets, including outputs and outcomes in terms of the specific impact on women and men.*
- *Include measures which are directly aimed at addressing women's poverty in the locality in monitoring and evaluation of regeneration schemes.*

#### **Taking advantage of employment potential**

In the context of inward investment and employment growth occurring in the county and region, many women living in the wards aspire to be trained and job ready for new investments.

- *Plan for new infrastructure and economic development initiatives which link up employment opportunities with transport, childcare and other support services.*
- *Establish self-employment schemes, including mentoring, to directly assist women who wish to develop businesses.*
- *Develop explicit support for young women and women who wish to return to paid employment in regeneration objectives.*
- *Maintain employment sites in areas of physical regeneration and housing redevelopment to prevent the further loss of manufacturing and service employment in the locality.*

### **Supporting women with care responsibilities**

Services are required at the neighbourhood level which address the specific needs of women who provide unpaid care for dependants. Childcare provision is improving, but remains particularly difficult for those mothers whose children are at school. Care for elderly and disabled dependants is also an area which requires consideration.

- *Invest in pre-school, after-school and holiday care services.*
- *Build on good practice found in family projects operating in the locality.*
- *Ensure that the success of Sure Start and community based services in targeting disadvantaged women living in the wards is maintained and developed.*

### **Employer responsibilities**

Interviewees stated that greater flexibility in working practices amongst local employers would benefit women living in the area. More work to convince employers that job sharing and other flexible modes of employment are mutually beneficial could be developed.

- *Engage employers in labour market projects which encourage clearer routes to work for women in the locality.*
- *Explore the role of public sector service providers (local government, health, education and related agencies) as local employers, and review their employment strategies.*
- *Identify public, private and voluntary sector employers who are increasingly facing skills shortages and problems in recruiting and retaining qualified and skilled staff in the locality and wider district.*
- *Provide resources and long term project development to support women to engage in non-traditional and higher paying sectors.*
- *Encourage local employers to consider providing on-site childcare services.*
- *Encourage flexible working patterns to accommodate women in the workplace. This would include greater responsiveness by employers to vary patterns of work, introduce annualised hours and explore the potential for term time only working.*

### **Qualifications, skills and advice**

Low levels of formal qualifications among women in the locality need to be addressed. Strategic approaches should include:

- *Mainstreaming successful skills and employment initiatives into the work of the statutory services operating in the area.*
- *Closer working between skills partnerships, including funding agencies (LSC, Job Centre Plus, Further Education) and voluntary sector training providers, with schools and community-based organisations.*

Initiatives to assist local women should include:

- *Clearer guidance for women returners on training options, work experience opportunities, preparation for job applications, confidence building in preparing for job interviews and information on childcare support.*
- *Targeted education and skills initiatives including pre-employment courses, and support for young women who may be constrained by their social situations.*

Limited post-19 careers advice is a constraint for women in the locality.

- *Target careers advice at the needs at women of different ages and ethnicities with differing care responsibilities.*
- *Introduce work experience schemes, including placements, which are clearly planned and supported.*
- *Support women returners, building on their previous employment and experience, through access courses and job related schemes.*

Promote and support schemes which:

- *Encourage women in the locality to consider access courses and degree level qualifications through further education initiatives.*
- *Introduce bursaries and other forms of financial support to access further and higher education for targeted groups of women living in the locality.*

### ***Working at the neighbourhood level***

Community based projects have proven success in working with women from a range of backgrounds and ages. Many women are volunteers working to improve local services, such as childcare, activities for the elderly and young people. The skills and experience of voluntary work should be more clearly acknowledged in employment projects.

- *Build community capacity through projects which address the social and economic needs of women living in the area.*
- *Develop accreditation for voluntary work and community based involvement which can be utilised in job applications and CVs.*

### ***In-work benefits and incentives***

Further work on state benefits and greater understanding of the key financial barriers to work were central concerns among local stakeholders. Simplification and greater flexibility in the tax and benefits system were considered crucial. In-work costs include childcare and transport. A particular issue for lone parents and families on low incomes is the increase in childcare costs when moving into work.

- *Introduce better financial incentives for women returning to work, and in-work incentives through the tax credit system.*
- *Develop greater flexibility in the benefits system for those women moving into work and for those taking a break from employment.*
- *Encourage greater take up of Working Tax and Child Tax Credits through support services.*
- *Improve information and advice for women living in the locality.*

The local authority and Job Centre Plus are key agencies in awareness raising and delivering locally based advice and support.

- *Develop further community-based services, and work with Jobcentre Plus to assist those households facing a benefits trap.*
- *Analyse Job Centre monitoring data by gender and ethnicity and use at local and regional level to inform strategies and local project work aimed at assisting claimants.*

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## Appendix 1 Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets

The *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* project was funded, between September 2003 and August 2006, by a core European Social Fund grant to Professor Sue Yeandle and her research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion*, Sheffield Hallam University. The award was made from within ESF Policy Field 5 Measure 2, 'Gender and Discrimination in Employment'. The grant was supplemented with additional funds and resources provided by a range of partner agencies, notably the Equal Opportunities Commission, the TUC, and 12 English local authorities.

### The GELLM project output comprises:

- new statistical analysis of district-level labour market data, led by Dr Lisa Buckner, producing separate **Gender Profiles** of the local labour markets of each of the participating local authorities (Buckner, Tang and Yeandle 2004, 2005, 2006) - available from the local authorities concerned and at [www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi](http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi)
- 6 **Local Research Studies**, each involving between three and six of the project's local authority partners. Locality and Synthesis reports of these studies, published spring-summer 2006 are available at [www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi](http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi). Details of other publications and presentations relating to the GELLM programme are also posted on this website.
  1. *Working below potential: women and part-time work*, led by Dr Linda Grant and part-funded by the EOC (first published by the EOC in 2005)
  2. *Connecting women with the labour market*, led by Dr Linda Grant
  3. *Ethnic minority women and access to the labour market*, led by Bernadette Stiell
  4. *Women's career development in the local authority sector in England* led by Dr Cinnamon Bennett
  5. *Addressing women's poverty: local labour market initiatives* led by Karen Escott
  6. *Local challenges in meeting demand for domiciliary care* led from autumn 2005 by Professor Sue Yeandle and prior to this by Anu Suokas

### The GELLM Team

Led by Professor Sue Yeandle, the members of the GELLM research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion* are: Dr Cinnamon Bennett, Dr Lisa Buckner, Ian Chesters (administrator), Karen Escott, Dr Linda Grant, Christopher Price, Lucy Shipton, Bernadette Stiell, Anu Suokas (until autumn 2005), and Dr Ning Tang. The team is grateful to Dr Pamela Fisher for her contribution to the project in 2004, and for the continuing advice and support of Dr Chris Gardiner.

### The GELLM Partnership

The national partners supporting the GELLM project are the Equal Opportunities Commission and the TUC. The project's 12 local authority partners are: Birmingham City Council, the London Borough of Camden, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Leicester City Council, Newcastle City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Somerset County Council, the London Borough of Southwark, Thurrock Council, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council and West Sussex County Council. The North East Coalition of Employers has also provided financial resources via Newcastle City Council. The team is grateful for the support of these agencies, without which the project could not have been developed. The GELLM project engaged Professor Damian Grimshaw, Professor Ed Fieldhouse (both of Manchester University) and Professor Irene Hardill (Nottingham Trent University), as external academic advisers to the project team, and thanks them for their valuable advice and support.

## Appendix 2 Research methods

The research included a mix of qualitative and quantitative research techniques:

1. Statistical analysis to assess the nature and extent of women's poverty and economic disadvantage in the selected geographical areas using Census 2001 and other relevant sources including: unemployment, economic inactivity, Income Support claimants, lone parents and unpaid carers and economic activity and travel to work.

2. Documentary analysis:

- A review of relevant academic and other policy literature
- Assessment of existing evaluations for the identified local regeneration initiatives in relation to women's economic circumstances
- An equalities and gender proofing template was used to facilitate the desk based exercise. The template identified equalities and gender sensitive approaches

3. Semi-structured interviews lasting an hour or more were held with thirteen representatives from local initiatives, Sedgemoor District Council and Somerset County Council. The interview schedule included a number of questions organised under the themes of:

- *Social and economic conditions in the locality*
- *Women's experiences of living on a low income*
- *Locality based regeneration and employment projects*
- *Addressing women's disadvantage in the locality*
- *Local services*
- *The local labour market*
- *Unemployment and economic inactivity*

4. The views of local women were explored through focus groups attended by women living in the area. The groups of 20 women ranged in age from 19-48 years and, apart from one Malaysian participant, included only White British women. The majority had lived in the area for a long period and were currently in paid employment. The rest of the group were seeking work or undertaking training. All but one participant had children, and most of the women lived with partners or husbands. Most of the group had some formal qualifications, including GCSEs and NVQ qualifications. The discussions held in local community venues included questions on the following themes:

- *Views about the neighbourhood – services, job opportunities, childcare, service improvements and regeneration projects*
- *Experiences of work and unemployment – types of job available, levels of income, opportunities and barriers, problems*
- *Aspirations for themselves and families*
- *Ideas and solutions*

## Appendix 3 Additional data for Hamp, Sydenham and Victoria wards in Bridgwater, Somerset

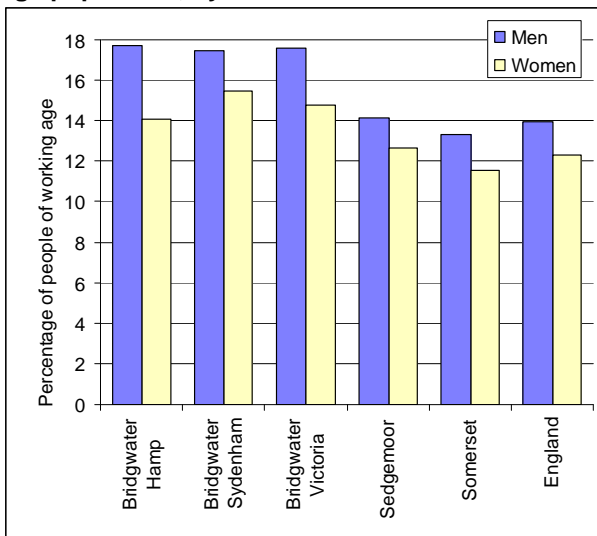
### General Information

Figure A1 Resident population by age and sex

	Hamp	Sydenham	Victoria	Sedgemoor District	Somerset County	England
All males (numbers)	3,324	3,210	2,325	51,591	241,959	23,922,144
0-15	25	24	23	21	21	19
16-24	11	10	10	9	10	13
25-49	35	32	37	33	33	36
50-64	17	19	16	20	20	18
65-74	7	10	8	10	10	8
75+	5	5	6	7	7	6
All females (numbers)	3,638	3,406	2,448	54,291	256,130	25,216,687
0-15	25	22	21	19	19	18
16-24	11	10	10	8	9	12
25-49	36	31	34	33	32	35
50-64	14	19	15	20	19	17
65-74	6	9	9	10	10	9
75+	8	8	11	11	12	9

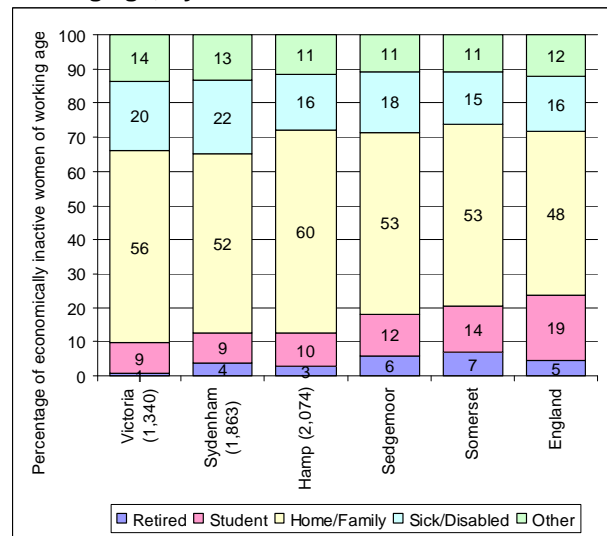
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Figure A2 Limiting long-term illness in the working age population, by sex



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

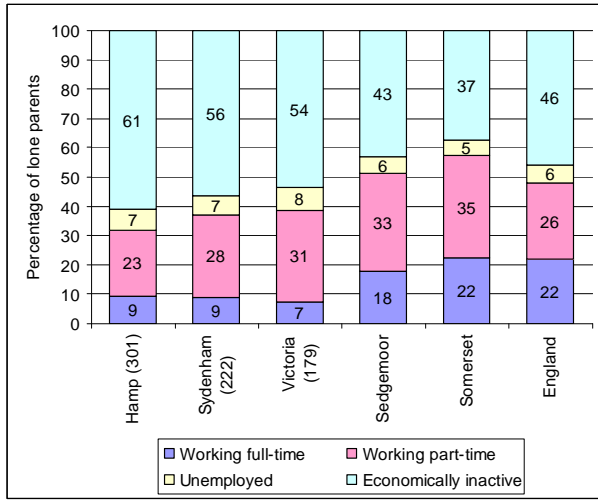
Figure A3 Economic inactivity among women of working age, by reason



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

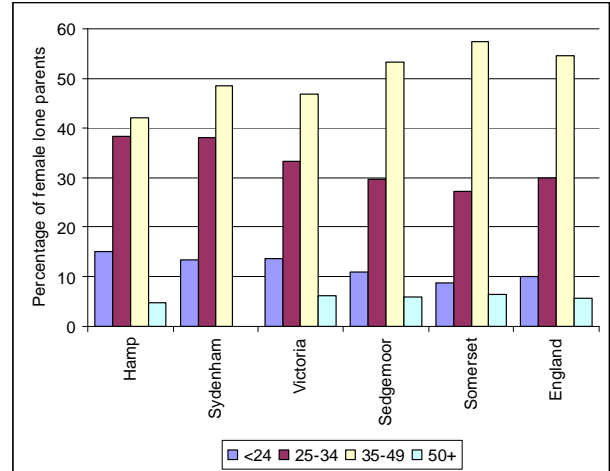


**Figure A4 Female lone parents by economic activity**



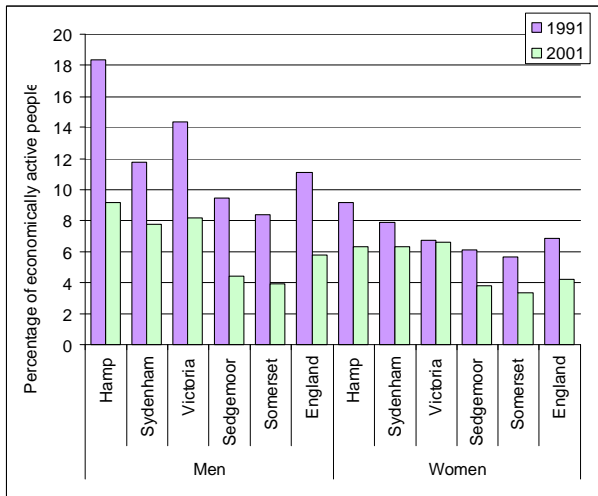
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A5 Lone mothers by age**



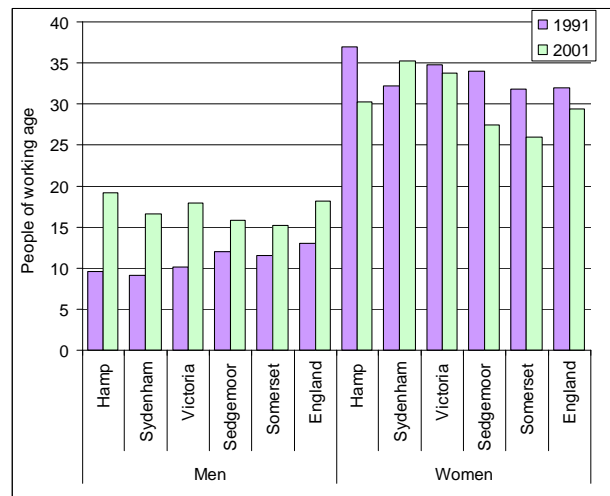
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A6 Unemployment rates 1991 and 2001**



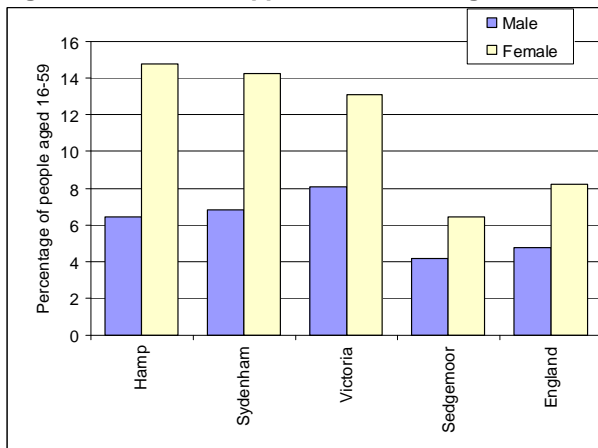
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003. 1991 Census LBS, Crown Copyright 1993.

**Figure A7 Economic inactivity of men and women, rates 1991 and 2001**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003. 1991 Census LBS, Crown Copyright 1993.

**Figure A8 Income Support claimants: aged 16-59**



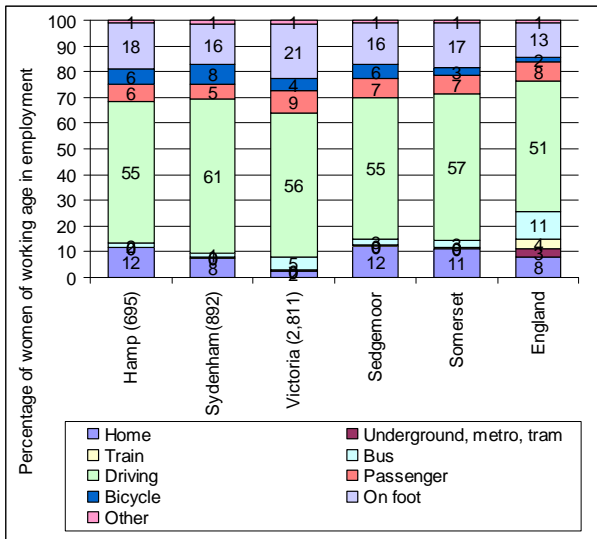
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003. 1991 Census LBS, Crown Copyright 1993.

**Figure A9 Former occupations and industries of unemployed and economically inactive women %s**

	Hamp	Sydenham	Victoria	Sedgemoor	Somerset	England
<b>Occupation</b>						
Managers, senior officials	4	7	1	7	7	7
Professionals	1	1	1	5	6	6
Associate professionals, technical	3	3	5	8	9	9
Process, plant, machine operatives	9	9	13	6	5	5
Elementary occupations	30	35	28	22	21	21
<b>Industry</b>						
Manufacturing	15	16	18	11	11	11
Finance and real estate	12	13	10	12	12	15
Wholesale, retail	27	28	25	24	22	22
Hotels and restaurants	12	11	15	10	11	10
Health and social work	14	16	11	19	19	16

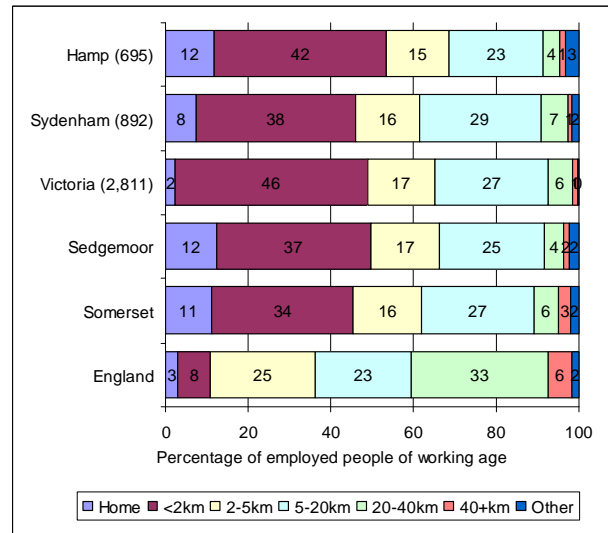
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A10 Method of travel to work: women who work in the area<sup>10</sup>**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A11 Distance travelled to work: women who work in the area<sup>10</sup>**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

<sup>10</sup> These figures include all women who work in the area, some of whom may live elsewhere, and excludes those who are resident in the area but work outside it.