

VOICING WOMEN MANAGERS' UNEMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE IN AUSTRALIA: THE HIDDEN TOLL

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The project was a national survey of unemployed women managers. The research format was qualitative and the first of its kind designed to explore the experiences of unemployed women managers in Australia.

Key Findings

1. Most of the women subscribed to the negative models in their experience and recovery, describing severe emotional trauma. The effects of their unemployment extended to their significant relationships, their financial situation and their inability to get back onto their feet again. This caused 16% of the respondents to withdraw from the workforce.
2. When describing the different exits for these women it became apparent that 40% of the respondents had a bullying or victimisation relationship with their manager in their last position. Despite a few of these women gaining replacement jobs fairly quickly, they still felt traumatised by the psychological abuse from their previous workplace. This group overall had the highest negative emotional outcome (83%).
3. Looking at the various work outcomes, small business offered a successful pathway to half of the women who became small business owners following their managerial unemployment.
4. Jobs that were taken below the respondent's level of competence had the most negative outcomes. No one in this group reported positively, feeling that this is but one more facet to be endured from their unemployment experience.
5. The respondents' advice to other women managers reflected how they were feeling about their unemployment experience. The top two pieces of advice were '*stick to core values such as a balance between family and work*' and '*network, network and network*'.
6. There is evidence from this project to show that one factor that may be adding to the depletion of women in managerial ranks is bullying and victimisation tactics. Men as well as women suffer this workplace psychological abuse. What makes the alarm greater though is that mostly senior male managers (as there are fewer women managers at this level) are targeting women managers. This puts immense pressure on the women to leave, and when they do, it is personalised as failure, creating ongoing emotional damage that changes their lives significantly. Some are unable to return to the workforce and most of the others face long-term unemployment. This is a waste to our economy through inefficient and inhuman work practices that is ignored by Boards of Management. These could well be the very Boards of Management that are seeking women managers to add diversity and improve the profitability of their companies.

7. The government policy section outlines specific policy and programming advice around a specialised response to this group.

It is imperative that these talented women :

- are helped immediately when they become unemployed to defuse the effects of psychological damage suffered from a forced exit from an organisation.
- have support to offset the effects of the several different types of discrimination, notably: age, gender, unemployment and expertise discrimination.

Currently this group flounders in their unhappy job search and most become long-term unemployed.

The Report can be seen in full at <http://www.unemployedwomenmanagers.com.au>

