
 [Print this article](#) |  [Close this window](#)

Jobless, single and male

By Adele Horin

October 2, 2003

Increasing numbers of men in their prime have neither full-time jobs, wives nor children and pose a threat to society, a senior labour market economist says.

Professor Sue Richardson, of the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University, said Australia was re-creating an underclass "of the excluded and the dangerous" not seen since the late 19th century.

"Back then, large numbers of men were excluded from secure jobs, never got to be fathers - at least officially - and were a menace to society."

Speaking at the Conference of Economists in Canberra yesterday, she said labour-market changes accounted for the rise of single or divorced men who were poor marriage prospects.

They were unemployed or reliant on part-time or casual work. Subsequently, many were forgoing fatherhood. She said 35 per cent of Australian men aged 35 to 44 in 2003 were not married and did not have a full-time job. This compared with 20 per cent in 1978.

Half the men aged 25 to 34 had not done what men in that age group had traditionally done: found a full-time job, married and had children. In 1978, only 30 per cent were not on that path.

"This is an extraordinary decline," Professor Richardson said in an interview. "Men of prime parenting age who are married and employed full-time are a threatened species."

While lifestyle choice might be part of the story, Professor Richardson said, changes in the labour market had made it increasingly hard for "sizeable numbers" of men to find secure full-time jobs; particularly men with no post-school education who could not find full-time work after they lost jobs in the declining manufacturing sector.

The official jobless rate of 5.8 per cent failed to capture the full picture, as it counted as "employed" people who had worked as little as an hour a week, Professor Richardson said.

In the 25 to 54 age bracket, full-time employment among men had fallen more than 10 percentage points since 1976. At least two men in every 10 in these key "family formation" years were not in full-time jobs.

"Some are unemployed, others are in part-time jobs and some are not in the workforce at all," Professor Richardson said.

"But whatever they are doing, they are scarcely in a position to become fathers, unless they can find a wife who can support the family."

Women were not stepping in to take on the breadwinning work vacated by men. The proportion of married women who worked full-time had hardly changed.

One consequence was that the fertility rate, at 1.7 children per woman, was the lowest on record.

While an "alarming" 18 per cent of children lived in a household with no employed parent, the growth was in sole-mother families, not couple families. Jobless men, it seemed, had chosen to forgo fatherhood.

Australia's answer to labour-market changes had been to offer men unemployment benefits. "We ought to be offering them full-time jobs," Professor Richardson said.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/10/01/1064988272235.html>