



Arsyllfa **Wledig** Cymru
Wales **Rural** Observatory

Gender and Rural Wales Scoping Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This scoping report investigates the issues surrounding gender that exist in rural Wales.

The report is divided into six sections.

- The first section provides an introduction and context for the study. It summarises previous research and theoretical writings around gender in rural areas and looks at the main questions that have come out of previous research.
- The second section looks at employment in rural Wales, and how gender is an important factor in understanding the way people acquire employment, what they do and why they do it. This section is divided further into sections that deal with part-time and flexible work, the shortage of affordable childcare, transport issues and language barriers.
- The third section examines why people move to rural Wales, and whether there is a difference between genders as to motivation for living there.
- The fourth section takes the community as its focus, and looks at issues of community involvement, social inclusion and exclusion and poverty as an issue for men and women.
- The fifth section appreciates the need to recognise that there is a shift in position for men in rural Wales and highlights the need to not focus solely on women.
- The final section outlines some preliminary conclusions and identifies the potential for further research.
- Appendices 1 – 7. These appendices present the crosstabulations that are referred to throughout the text.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This research emerges out of a need to develop understanding and information about gender and gendered relations in rural Wales. It fills a gap in current research that exists. While there has been gendered data available, this report presents a ‘gendered picture’ of rural Wales; developing gender in relation to other variables and privileging it as the main variable examined. There has been no previous work conducted by the Wales Rural Observatory which looks at this important part of rural life, and previous research has tended to present qualitative data. This report presents quantitative data around gender, examining the different issues and problems that women in particular encounter in relation to employment, community life and services.

Since the much quoted call to research the ‘neglected rural others’ (Philo, 1992), gendered analyses of rural societies and economies have had an ‘increasingly flourishing existence’ (Little and Panelli, 2003: 281). The landscape of gendered relations is changing due to a wide range of factors relating to changing employment relations, influx of people into rural communities for a wide range of reasons, different service provision from traditional allocation and the cultural shift around what constitutes acceptable gendered behaviour. Research must recognise this change and realign the theoretical tools used to examine gender relations and traditional loci of regulated gender positions such as the family and communities may need to alter accordingly. Research on gender in rural areas initially focused on the uneven roles that existed in rural communities, the gendered division of labour was described as a site of economic inequality and social disadvantage. This extended to agricultural studies, which were used to critically analyse how unequal patriarchal gender relations affected not just farms but entire rural communities. Within this body of research, the different roles held by men and women in the community began to emerge, typically that the men inhabited positions of power and authority and the females were expected to engage in activities associated with caring and nurturing. This theme is discussed further below. The research focus then turned to more post-structuralist work, informed by the cultural turn, to examine the way that gender relations and beliefs were produced, maintained, contested, and dissolved in rural communities. This report selectively borrows from each of these research foci, using previous research to develop a context for the recent research and a way of seeing what future research is needed.

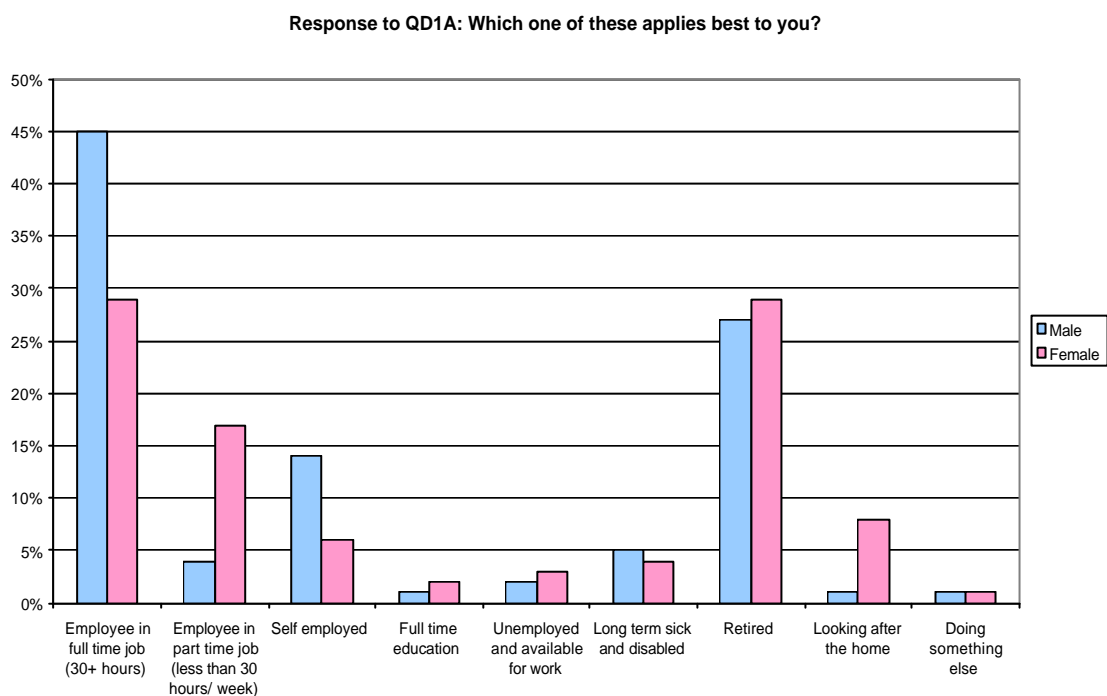
The 'rural idyllic' that exists in many narratives and discourses of the rural inherently projects a gendered division of power, responsibility and roles. Within these narratives certain gendered identities are celebrated and reinforced through the circulation of dominant meanings of 'rurality'. The strong countrywoman has been employed to represent the identity of a 'true' rural woman, a construction which maintains considerable power in the operation of gender relations and over the daily experiences of rural woman (Little, 1997, 2002; Hughes, 1997). The 'rural idyllic' operates in support of traditional gender relations, prioritising women's mothering role and fostering their centrality with the rural community. The adoption of these aspects of rural life, often the ones most valued by rural woman, are also the ones that allow them the least choices and opportunity (in relation to employment, service provision and domesticity). The traditional role of the woman was placed centrally within the family, home and community, nurturing and caring for her family, and this left no opportunity for work. While there has been a discernable loosening of the constriction this role once involved, due perhaps to the increase in technology available, cultural pressure and material necessity, there is still a certain necessity for reversion back to the traditional due to poor childcare provision, care of the elderly, public transport and lack of suitable employment (Hughes, 1997).

The data presented in this report is taken from previous research conducted by the Wales Rural Observatory in September 2004 and March 2005. The *Report on Living and Working in Rural Wales* (2004) was a telephone survey of 4023 households across rural Wales, incorporating at least 9904 people. This survey covers all rural settlement types, and there is proportional representation of eleven of the twelve Unitary Authorities understood as representing rural Wales. This research provided the data that constitutes the graphs and percentages below; the questionnaire asked respondents about themselves, the household overall and other individuals within the household (it is known as the Household Survey). The survey took just less than half an hour to complete and covered a wide range of issues relating to living in rural Wales, such as population and migration, housing, community well-being and social exclusion, rural services, employment and economy and attitudes to rural Wales. The gender of the respondent is always provided, and, as such, gendered understanding of the answers can be achieved. The other main source of data is the *Survey of Rural Services in Wales* (2005), a postal survey directed to the Community and Town Council Clerks. The questionnaire was constructed based on elements of the Countryside Agency surveys and on a previous

study undertaken in Wales in 1996 (Higgs and White, 2000). The questionnaire focuses on the Community level, asking the Clerks whether or not a particular service is available or not and about service facilities in their Community. It also gathers data regarding the change in service provision over the past five years. An alternative survey, devised for those councils with a population over 4000 was also used, incorporating more categorical questions for ease of response; for example instead of having an open question regarding numbers this survey provides categories of response; 5 -10, 10 -15, etc. These two surveys provide a comprehensive review of service provision and problems in rural Wales and as such are of great importance to this report. The sample used for graphs and statistics in the report relates to the data taken from the Report on Living and Working in Rural Wales (the Household Survey); 4023 households with at least 9904 people included, unless stated otherwise.

SECTION 2: EMPLOYMENT

The rural idyll presents an image of the women at home, caring for her children, the house and her husband’s well-being, but in the changing landscapes of employment, power and independence how well does this relate to rural Wales? This section looks at employment and gender, moving from a description of the sample, to problems finding employment and then to a gendered discussion of what these problems are and how they affect women. Employment is a key component of gender relations; the traditional image detailed above removes the women from the jobs market, which has contemporary links with poverty, disempowerment and isolation.



Graph 1: Responses to ‘Which of of these applies best to you?’ (Source: Household Survey)

The breakdown of employment in rural Wales predominantly follows the ‘traditional’ conceptions of gendered division of labour, and follows previous research on the topic. Males work full time more than females (45% to 29%), whereas females work more part-time (4% male to 17% female). In Appendix 1, the different factors of age, area, household income and social class are used to interrogate these statistics more. Of significance, in Table 4 of the appendix, it can be seen that the highest age group for part-time work for males is 16 – 24, with 12.3% of this age group working part-time. However, for women the peak occurs at a later age; with 15.5% of 16 – 24 year olds

working part-time, 24.2% of 25 – 34, 25.1% of 35 – 44, 23.1% of 45 – 54, 16% of 55 – 64 and 2% of 65 -74. There have been various reasons suggested for this, and within the rural setting the traditional ‘role of the woman’ has been suggested as the main factor (Hughes, 1997). The ability for women to retain the childcare role while working part time, particularly when the part-time hours correspond with their children’s education commitment, allows women to juggle both these responsibilities. The image of the ‘rural woman’, one who bakes, controls the house and nurtures the family holds considerable social sway in small communities (Hughes, 1997). As such, the traditional employment breakdown is expected, though there are considerably more women working than would have been ‘traditional’ (with 29% working full time). The percentage of women who are economically active, 29%(f/t)+17%(p/t)+6%(s/e), is 52%, which is less than the Welsh, 67.8%, and UK, 69.9%, average.

Women ‘look after the home’ substantially more than their male counterparts, with 1% of men and 8% of women assuming that responsibility, though it is almost even (4% of men and 5% of women) for people adopting a caring role for long term sick and disabled people. The ‘caring’ role is associated with women, often the lack of services for caring for the long term sick and disabled is cited as a reason why women would not enter the work force, but it is seemingly distributed evenly between the genders in this sample. The provision of services such as childcare and day care for the elderly and disabled in rural areas is recognised to be of key importance in allowing members of the family to gain employment. The Services Survey (2005) states that 74% of Town and Community Councils did not have a publicly run nursery and 78% had no privately run nursery, though only 38% had no playgroup¹. The report goes on to demonstrate that a large proportion of Councils in rural Wales below the 4000 population threshold have no nursery provision, and argues that this could have implications for the female workforce in such locations. The presumption that the mother will remain at home, or adjust her hours around her children, and not the father is perpetuated and created by the image of the rural woman as a carer and as someone who has chosen this way of life.

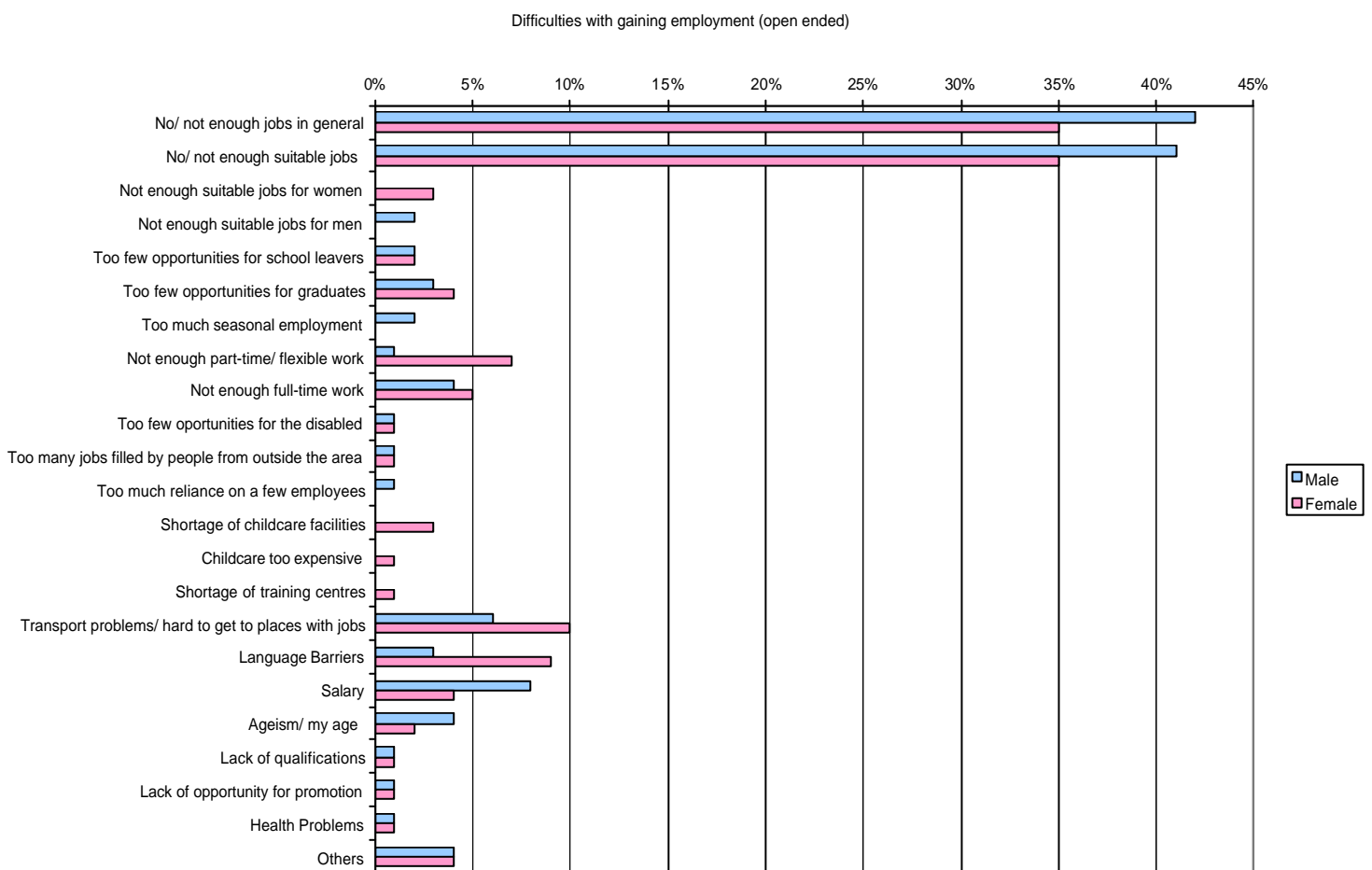
The Household Survey (2004) asks people if they have had difficulties in finding work, and the figures look even, so it is in the breakdown of the ‘no’ response that we can look for discrepancies between gender, as would be suggested by previous research.

¹ Playgroups are less formal than nursery schools and do not provide full time care, operating for only a few hours a day during school term time, often in the mornings.

Table 1: Percentage of People who have experienced problems finding employment

	Male	Female
Yes	26%	24%
No	64%	64%
N/a	9%	11%
Refused	1%	1%

The graph below allows us to interrogate the ‘yes’ responses by gender, looking at the different reasons people have experience difficulties with gaining employment.



Graph 2: Issues with gaining employment, by gender (Source: Household Survey)

This graph demonstrates that while men and women share concerns over job acquisition - the lack of suitable jobs in general and for men and women specifically, too few opportunities for school leavers and graduates, too few opportunities for the disabled, too many jobs filled by people from outside the area, lack of qualifications, lack of opportunity for promotion and health problems - there are also areas where they

diverge. There are certain areas that women are more concerned with; not enough part-time work, a shortage of childcare, childcare being too expensive, transport problems and language barriers. These constitute the following section.

(i) Not enough part-time/ flexible work

The lack of availability of part-time work influences women (7%) considerably more than men (1%). Drawing on previous literature and research (for example, Little, 2002; Hughes, 1997), there is evidence that these jobs need to fit into the other responsibilities that the women hold such as childcare, discussed below, household responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning, and community responsibility such as event organisation, helping in the local school or church and other *ad hoc* responsibilities. Recent research carried out by Mauthner et al (2001) found that parents in rural areas felt it important to look after their children themselves, particularly during the pre-school years, and therefore adjusted their paid work to meet the demands of childcare and childrearing often by taking 'flexible' but less secure, part-time jobs. Women find it more difficult to find part-time work than men across all the variables looked at (Appendix 2, Tables 13, 14, 15 and 16). This will be discussed further in the section Gender and the Community as the different community expectations and the rural gendered division of labour are examined.

(ii) Shortage of affordable childcare facilities

We can see from this that shortage of childcare facilities and childcare being too expensive are issues for women (3% and 1% respectively) but does not figure in male responses. The lack of continual nursery provision and as such the lack of support for young mothers can mean that they become reliant on friends and families to provide child caring services. The Services Survey (2005) highlights this with reference to the care provision for the elderly and disabled, with 70% or more of settlements with a population of 2000 or less having no care groups at all. As such, alternative arrangements are organised, with one respondent stating that 'neighbours and friends fulfil [the role of formal day-care]'. These *ad hoc* structures can work well, but can also breakdown or dissipate and they do not provide the same security that formal arrangements can. For this reason, it is important to recognise that ties between family and friends facilitate work. With 5% of men and 8% of women responding that they like living in their area because of their friends and family being close by, and with 27% of

male respondents and 33% of female respondents having their families less than one mile from where they live, and 22% and 20% respectively living between 1 and 5 miles, it is possible to recognise the web of support that family may supply. While this is not the only reason for people to live close to their families, the support it provides and the sharing of various caring roles (children, the elderly) can be dispersed around different family members. Using the additional variables in Appendix 2, it was significant that women noted the shortage of childcare facilities as an impediment to work across all income levels and in fact in the top income band of 31k+ it was highest (with 5.3% of this income level finding it a problem). Childcare was seen as too expensive for women across all variables, though it failed to be accounted for by men at all (see Appendix 2, Tables 21, 22, 23 and 24).

(iii) Transport problems/ hard to get to places with work

The problem of getting to work, or to places with work impedes women (10%) more than men (6%), with women in hamlets or open country-side (13.2%) finding transport more of a problem than those residing in towns (9.6%) or villages (9.7%) (see Appendix 2, Tables 25, 26, 27 and 28 for the crosstabulations with other variables). With 45% of households owning or having the use of one car or another motor vehicle, and 34% owning or having the use of two cars or motor vehicles there are a substantial number of people who cannot rely on their own motorised transport. From the graph below, we can see that there is a slight gendered variation in the way people get to work each day. The use of a household car, other motor vehicle or motorbike is the most prevalent, with 64% of men and 58% of women travelling by this means to work. The second most popular method is walking/ on foot, with 9% of men and 14% of women. This is significant due to the distance from home to work; and more women are able to cover this by foot. This relates to the 'suitable work' available and may suggest that women favour employment closer to their abode, which can facilitate walking to work and returning to the home quicker and at different times during the day. However, 2% of men and 1% of women cycle to work, allowing a slightly further distance than walking to be covered. The graph below demonstrates the various means people use to get to work, demonstrating a slight gender variation which appears to correlate to distance travelled to work which is seen on the second graph.

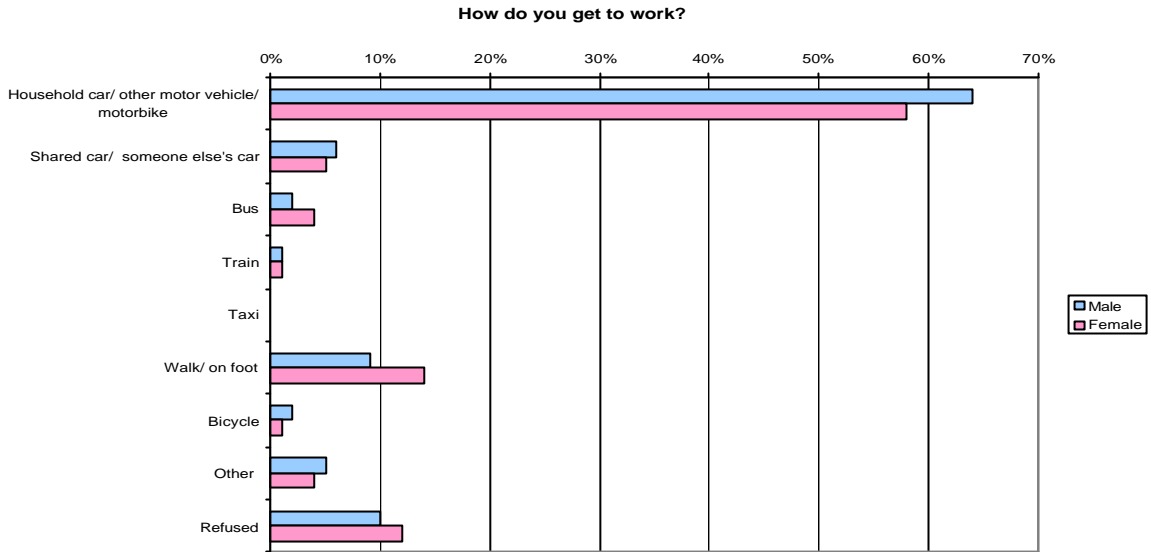


Figure 3: Gendered graph of how people travel to work (Source: Household Survey)

The graph below demonstrates a clear relationship between gender and distance travelled to work; women travel considerably less than men. Women travel less than five miles to work the most, with 37% of women and 26% of men. There are an equal percentage of men and women who travel between five and ten miles to work (17%), and then there is a higher proportion of men who travel the distances – 13% compared to 11% travel 11 – 20 miles, 9% to 6% travel between 20 and 49 miles, and 6% compared to 3% travel more than 50 miles.

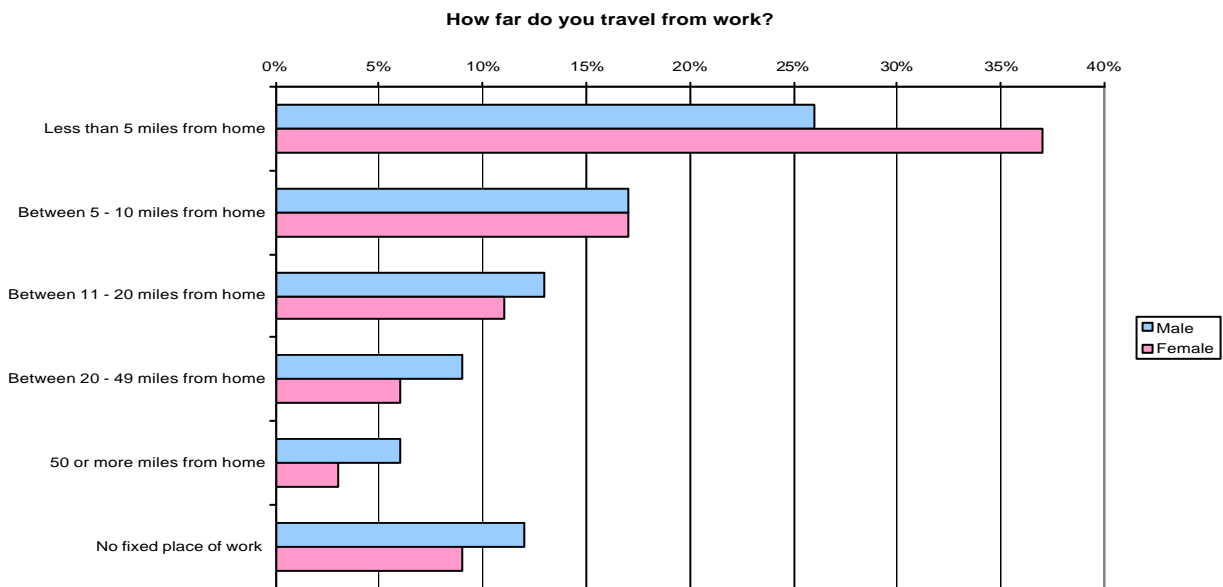


Figure 4: Gendered graph of distanced travelled to work (Source: Household Survey)

Public transport is favoured by women, with 2% of men and 4% of women travelling by bus. See Appendix 3 for the crosstabulations of how people get to work and how far they travel. There are considerable regional variations in how people travel to work, for example in Swansea only 57.1% drive to work, while 21.4% travel by foot for males and 40.9% drive and 22.7% walk for females, compared with the Vale of Glamorgan where 74.6% drive and only 3.2% travel on foot for males and 63.1% drive and 9.2% walk for females (Appendix Six, Table 11).

Table 2: Proportion of Town & Community Councils with and without bus services that operate at peak times (defined as 0700-0900 and 1500-1800 Monday to Friday)

Community Population Size	0 – 400	400 – 500	500 – 600	600 – 700	700 – 1000	1000 – 2000	2000 – 4000	4000+	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Proportion with no bus service	71.1	65.9	48.4	53.6	58.2	46.3	35.7	22.3	50
One or more bus services present	28.9	34.1	51.6	46.4	41.8	53.7	64.3	77.7	50

The provision of public transport is related to the size of the population; as the population of an area grows the provision of public transport does so as well. Linking this to employment, the need for people to travel to work is also related to population size, the smaller the population the greater the need for people to travel to suitable employment. The provision of services is a key area when thinking about rural Wales, and has been dealt with elsewhere (A Survey of Rural Services in Wales, WRO report, 2005).

(iv) Language Barriers

Interestingly, language barriers influence women (9%) more than men (3%) in their search for employment. When the individual responses are examined it becomes apparent that inability to speak Welsh is the main hindrance. As some of the responses summarise, ‘most of the jobs required to speak Welsh’, ‘local jobs needed Welsh speaking people’, ‘most jobs ask for bilingual abilities’, and ‘up here they only employ bilingual people so really to work here you have to be born here’. A gendered examination of people who speak Welsh shows that it is comparable between males and females; 17% of both men and women speak Welsh fluently, 10% of men speak Welsh quite well and 13% of women, 14% of men speak a few sentences of Welsh, and 17%

women, 24% of men speak a few words compared to 23% of women, and 30% of men and 34% of women speak no Welsh at all. Women consistently have a better understanding of Welsh; more can write in Welsh (34% of men, 37% of women) and more understand written Welsh (48% to 55%). So why are more women experiencing a language barrier to work? If more women speak Welsh, then there must be another factor preventing them from getting work. As such, it must be the jobs that women want or are able to apply for which demand Welsh. The graph below show the different sectors that the different genders apply for, excluding any values less than 3%. Within the excluded values, significantly there are more women cleaners (1% for women, nothing for men), hairdressers (1% for women, nothing for men), more women involved in charity work (1% for women, nothing for men), more men involved with the post office and mail delivery (1% of men, no women), and more men in entertainment and media (1% for men, nothing for women) and IT occupations (1% for men, nothing for women).

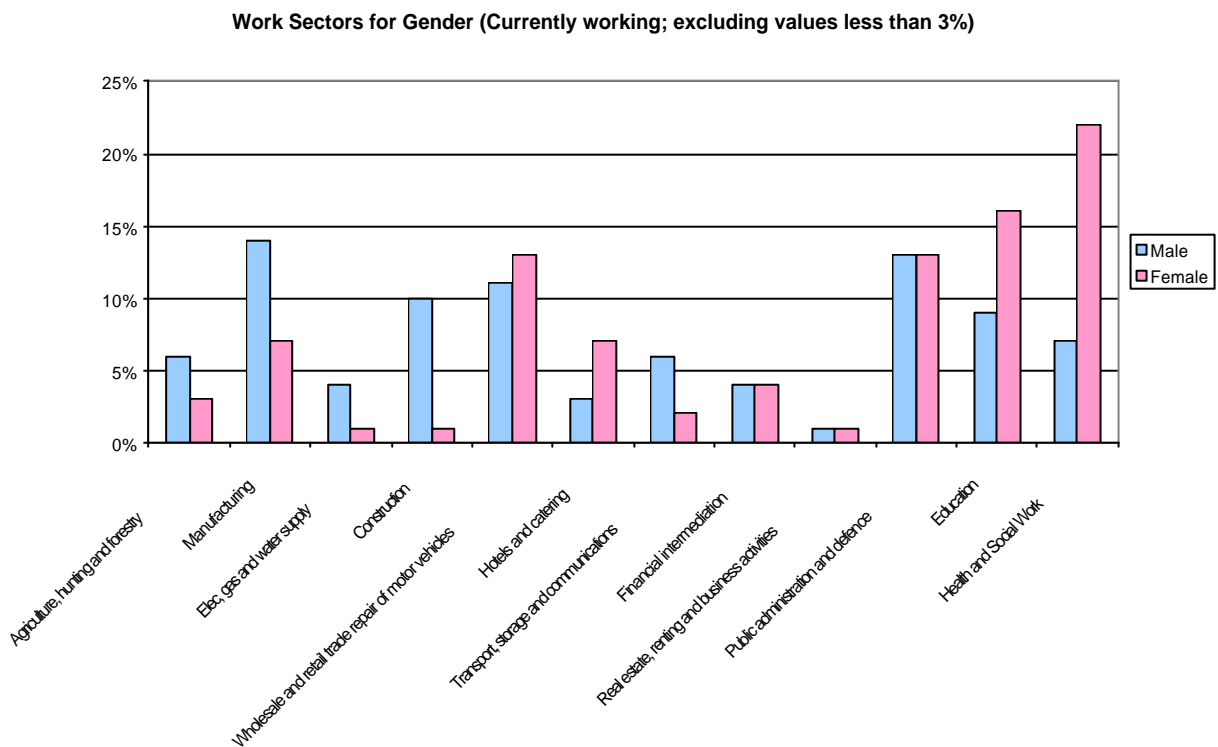


Figure 5: Gendered graph of work sectors (Source: Household Survey)

These sectors demonstrate a traditional break-down in employment, though it is not as pronounced and uniform as previous research may suggest. While males are more dominant in agriculture, hunting and forestry, manufacturing, construction and utility supply and women are more represented in hotels and catering, education and health and

social work, women are also, interestingly, more employed in wholesale and retail trade repair of motor vehicles, which contrasts with more traditional gendered employment understandings.

The employment areas that women are dominant in could be regarded as needing more bilingual staff; in hotel and catering the ability to speak Welsh would be advantageous for attracting Welsh speaking customers. In education it would increase employability as it opens up Welsh speaking schools. Figures for 2002/03 indicate that a total of 51,977 pupils are taught in classes where Welsh is the sole or main medium of instruction (In 448 primary schools pupils in such schools formed the majority). 39,458 pupils receive their education in a total of 53 Welsh-speaking secondary schools (that is, schools where more than a half of the following subjects: religious education and subjects other than Welsh and English which are foundation subjects, are taught wholly or partly in Welsh (<http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk>). Welsh became a compulsory subject for all pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (i.e. up to the age of 14) in 1990 and in 1999 it became a compulsory subject at key stage 4; this meant that all pupils in Wales study Welsh – either as a first or second language – for 12 years, from the ages 5 to 16. As such, the demand for teachers to speak Welsh at both primary and secondary level is continually increasing; as numbers attending schools increase, the need for Welsh speaking teachers does as well. In health and social work it would be important to be able to interface with Welsh speaking members of the community. The initial 2001 Census figures released back in February 2003 showed an increase of around 80,000 in the number of those who can speak Welsh. However, according to Rhodri Williams:

“The percentage of Welsh speakers in some wards in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion has fallen since the 1991 Census. As expected this has happened mainly in the rural areas. There have been great changes in these areas over the past decade and the linguistic element is only one factor in this change. But having said that, there is hope for the future here as well. The Board and several of our partners are active in these areas, and many groundbreaking projects are already bearing fruit in communities such as Ammanford in eastern Carmarthenshire.”

(<http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/>)

The ability to speak Welsh would be important in public administration, which appears equal for each gender on the above graph when coupled with defence, but from the graph below we can see that substantially more women work in a public sector body than men. The desire to increase the numbers of public servants who speak Welsh is great; it is an important statement of intent by the state towards the development of a bilingual state. There is a continual increase in the numbers who speak Welsh; 2001 census results have shown an increase in the number of young people able to speak Welsh. Figures

from the 2001 Census show that over 26% of people in Wales under the age of 35 are now able to speak Welsh, an increase of almost 9% on 1991 figures. The young population means that there will be a growing demand for these services where people need to be able to work bilingually, and as such the problems facing women for employment associated with language may continue to increase.

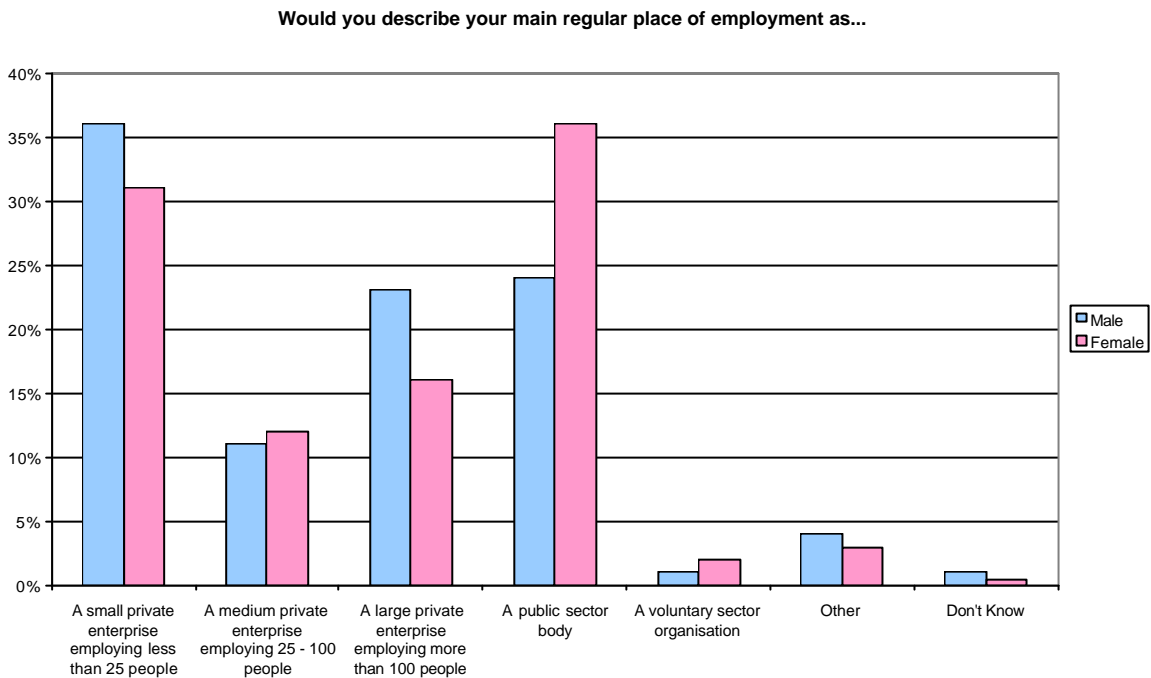


Figure 6: Gendered graph of where people work (Source: Household Survey)

There are significant regional differences with people experiencing language problems. Flintshire is the area where men and women both experience the most problems, with 13.3% of men from Flintshire and 24.5% of women experiencing difficulty in gaining employment because of perceived problems of language. Conwy is second for women, with 20.5% of women from that area highlighting problems, through only 6.8% of men. The second for men is Ceredigion, with 11.8% whereas only 5.7% of women have this problem in this area (see Appendix 6, Table 9). For women in hamlets or living in the open countryside language acted as more of a barrier (13.2%) than for those living in towns (8.9%) or villages (8.2%) (Appendix 2, Table 30). Language barriers were experienced by age differently depending on gender; with 8% of 16 – 24 year old males and 5.4% of 45 – 45 year olds as the two highest categories, and 14.9% of 45 – 54 year old females, 10% of 35 – 44 year old females and 8.5% of 55 – 64 year old females experiencing this barrier (Appendix 2, Table 31)

SECTION 3: WHY RURAL WALES?

People live in/ move to rural Wales for a wide range of reasons, illustrated in the graph below. The answers to the question ‘Why do you like living here?’, has elicited a wide variety of responses, some providing a comparison between this and other places (i.e. It is safe/ secure/ not much crime/ drugs/ vandalism, and the housing good/ cheaper) and others providing a more intrinsic reasoning (i.e. I am a farmer, or I’ve lived here many years), and a range of responses which fall between the two (i.e. It is a good/ safe place to bring up a family and the quality of life/ good standard of living).

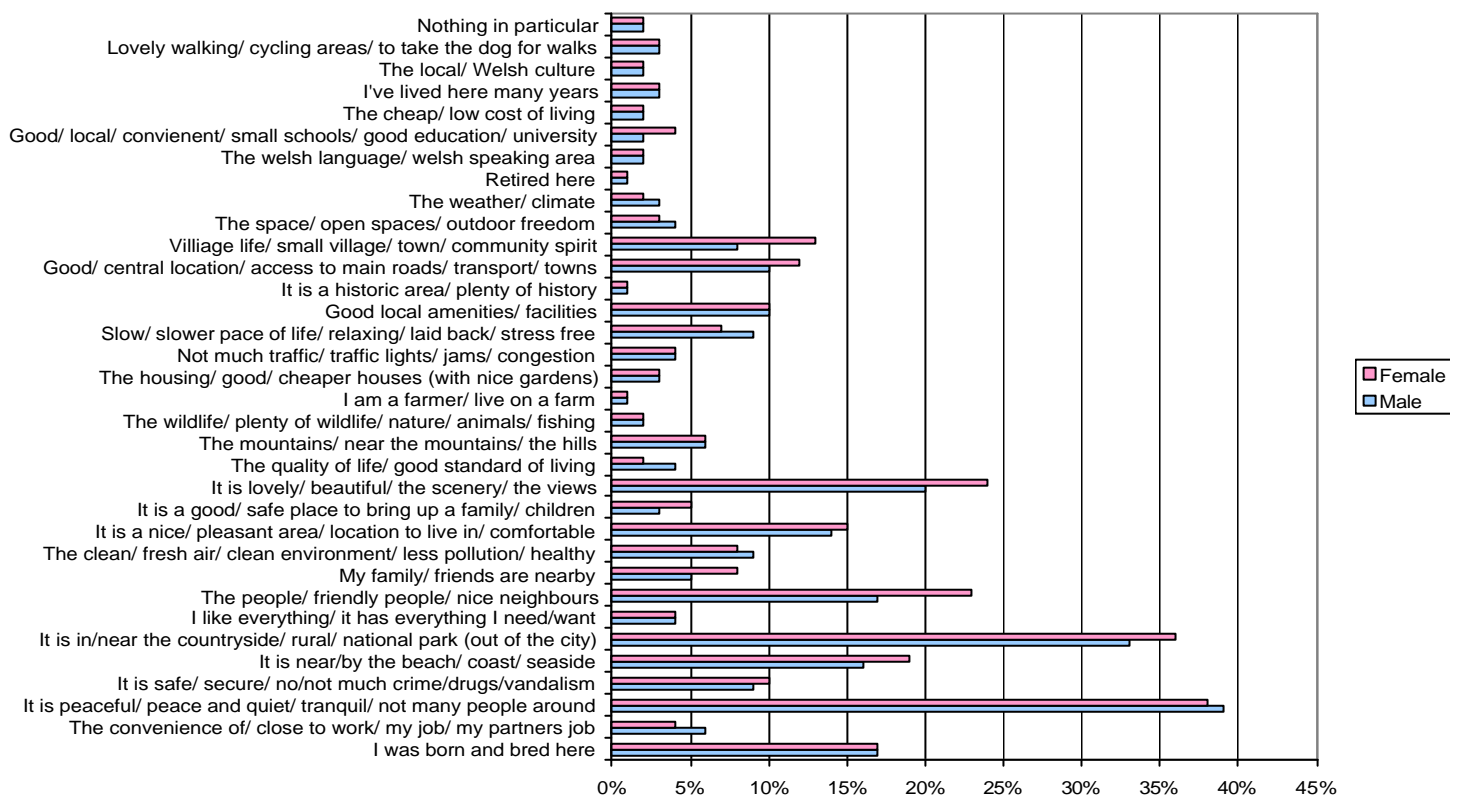


Figure 7: Gendered graph of why people like living where they do (Source: Household Survey)

If we examine the gendered results it is interesting to consider the different themes each gender has highlighted as what they like about living here. For women, location and community appear as the most significant. Under location, women have stated that they like living there because it is beautiful/ lovely scenery; it is rural or in a national park; it is near/by the beach/ coast/ seaside; it is near good education facilities and it has good access to transport/ main roads/ towns. There is a division within this category between more aesthetic, romantic ideals of living somewhere beautiful and more rational

justifications regarding practicality, and in fact they mean very different things. For community, women have highlighted the importance of village life/ small village/ town/ community spirit and that the people are friendly/ nice neighbours. Unfortunately the data does not break this down, and we cannot really tell if the reasoning behind this is romantic or rational; does it represent the rural idyll of community spirit or is it down to practical needs such as provision of childcare and help with the elderly.

For men, the romantic vision of rurality is paramount; men identify a slower pace of life as important, the stress free lifestyle that is relaxing and laid back. The quality of life and standard of living is also important, relating also to the clean air/ less pollution and that it is healthier. The peace, tranquillity and lack of people is part of this vision of the rural; an idyll without the hassles and bustle of modern city life. Men also highlight the importance to them of their location being close and convenient to their work or to their partner's job, though the graph below shows that women are far more likely to have moved to their current residence to be closer to their partner's job than vice versa. This is an area where further research would be informative, as it does not delve into the reasons behind different people choosing these categories and any discussion of possible reasons would be conjecture that would say more about the researcher than the research questions.

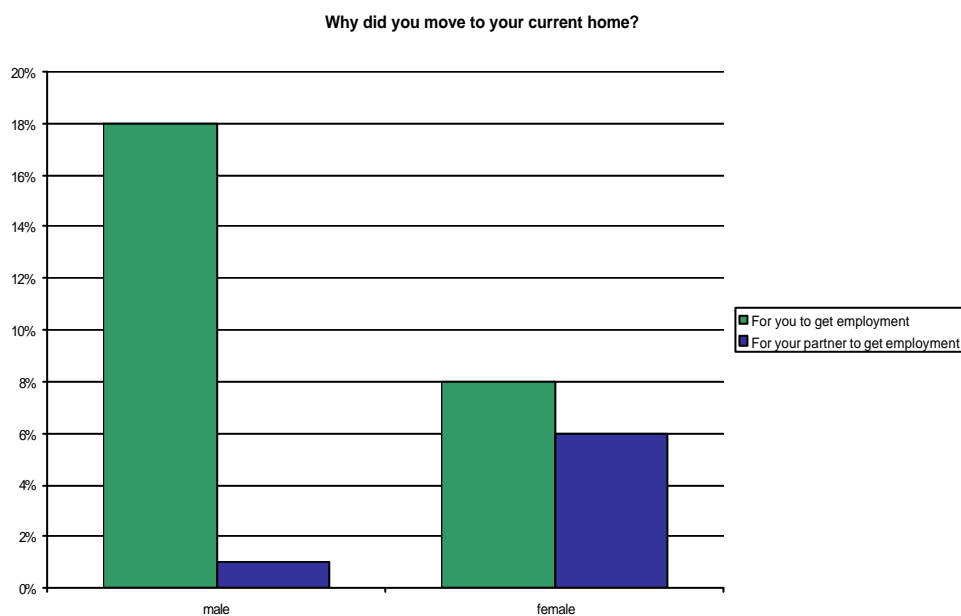


Figure 8: Gendered graph of whether people moved to their current home for their employment or their partners (Source: Household Survey)

From this graph we can see that men have moved to their current home for employment significantly more than women have, whereas women have moved to facilitate their partner's employment. This can be seen as placing the importance of the male partner's job before the females; and indeed this is reinforced by the statistics on employment above. The position that this places the woman in is unfortunate; there is continual reference to the difficulty in finding suitable jobs by women, and the problems associated have already been discussed. If the woman has to move to facilitate her partner's employment then she will not be able to move to decrease the incidences of these problems in her own employment. As such, the problem of female unemployment will be perpetuated, leading to issues surrounding poverty.

SECTION 4: GENDER AND COMMUNITY

Having already looked at the importance of gender in formal employment, this section looks at the other forms of 'work' undertaken in rural Wales. Since the early eighties, research has drawn attention to the gendered division of labour within rural communities (Stebbing, 1984; Hughes, 1997). This division of labour fell along seemingly traditional lines, and these studies sought to understand these relations. Initially, attention was drawn to the relationship between service provision within the rural community and gender roles, and Stebbing (1984) argued that the relative remoteness and the poor level of resources in rural communities reinforced the gender division of labour and emphasised women's roles. The practical difficulties involved in carrying out everyday domestic tasks served to complicate women's roles and confine them to the home and community. In addition, the lack of formal provision of health and community facilities, such as care for the elderly, care for children and social clubs, was more readily tolerated in rural communities where gender roles were more traditional and thus these responsibilities were seen as part of women's natural work. This natural 'caring' role that was seen as being performed by women was extended almost automatically from the home to the community. A whole range of community tasks were seen as a natural extension of this domestic role, and as such, these tasks became gendered in terms of involvement and responsibility.

This work by Stebbing (1984) is reinforced in a more contemporary, Welsh context by Hughes (1997) who noted the pivotal role of women in the organisation and operation of the community in her research in mid-Wales. In this research, women were more prominent in the whole range of community activities; from essential caring duties to the running of community activities such as village fête and the annual bonfire (Hughes, 1997). As Hughes (1997: 182) states;

'The gender division of labour in the organisation of village events is clear. Women were the backbone of the village community and, moreover, they were expected to carry out their community work. Community participation was perceived to be *their duty, their natural role*' (emphasis added)

Hughes's (1997) report is unique in most of the literature surrounding women's roles in the community as it doesn't skim over the surface and presume conformity throughout the community; instead, through its qualitative approach, this research is able to go into some depth in documenting women's attitudes towards their community role and

highlight the variation between women. This allowed the researcher to see if changing societal forces, such as the increase of women in paid work, changed the roles in the community. Hughes (1997) found that while younger women did suggest that their increase in paid work meant changing attitudes towards their communal role, essentially the assumption that women run the community remained intact at a local level. So for Hughes (1997), this increase in paid work was seen as restricting the time available for communal activity, while also taking women away from the village during the day when they would otherwise be performing *ad hoc* tasks connected with the caring role but the expectation remained in place for these tasks to be conducted by women. However, there is research (for example, Little, 1997) which counters this claim by saying that despite the increase in work amongst women there was no real decline in community involvement and tasks undertaken. However, Little (1997) does qualify this by recognising that there is a high influx of people into rural communities who may not be in a position to compare expectations and tasks to what happened before.

The wide range of tasks undertaken by women in rural communities is regarded as an extension of the domestic role, and as the domestic is integral to the rural women, so too are these roles seen as such. In addition, integration underpins women's acceptance of these roles; there is a strong sense of desire to fit in with the community, and conforming to these gendered roles means that integration occurs more easily. The flipside of this is marginalisation and exclusion, which can range from not feeling welcome in a community to being unable to function as part of the society or culture that is prevalent in the area. The idea of conformity underpins the development of the archetypal countrywoman, and as Hughes (1997: 179) describes;

‘There is a lot of pressure in the countryside to conform to what society wants of you. If you don't try and fit in with the village and what is organised you are not accepted... You have to work to prove yourself to feel as though you belong here’

This pressure to conform is cast in a positive light for Little (1997), with people expressing happiness that they were ‘allowed’ to participate, and enjoying the ‘honour’ of doing the church flowers (for example). This acceptance to perform certain roles relates to an acceptance of role, the achievement of being a countrywoman. The widespread existence of a dominant cultural construction of rural womanhood in developed capitalist economies which both shapes and is shaped by the endurance of highly traditional gender relations could be discussed in such a way as to suggest that there is no divergence from a homogenous rural woman. Instead, it must be recognised that

difference does exist, though not unproblematically. The power of a particular version of femininity, constructed through the various factors outlined above, is very strong in rural society and it holds with it a high level of exclusivity within contemporary rural gender relations. The belief that there is a traditional version of womanhood that is more suitable to rural life, one that positions women as mothers and wives, has become the dominant discourse and means of articulating rural womanhood. As such, in some senses, the articulation of difference within this group is a highly problematic thing to do; if one diverges from the set criteria one becomes ‘different’ as opposed to ‘rural’. The dominance of the ‘Same’ (Little, 2002) demonstrates the power that this construct wields. Further, for rural women to comply exclusively with the rural discourse of ‘sameness’, they become marginalised from the different, more prolific, versions of modern femininity that compete against this position. They effectively become the ‘Other’ of femininity in the modern world, a more traditional, gendered position that disrupts other versions of femininity with its on-going existence. Women and men who do not conform to the dominant expectations surrounding rural gender identities remain ‘other’ to this mainstream village society and community. As such, the ‘otherness’ of these people falls out of the dominant image of the society, and can be silenced and written out of accounts. It is not that counter ideologies and beliefs do not exist, they simply do not exist in this discourse; so the real challenge for researchers and women alike is to allow the inclusion of these marginal or minority accounts to be heard and accepted and for the conventional and traditional community forms to be widened to include them. The following sections will examine the issues raised in this introductory section, dealing with specific themes around ideas of community, inclusion and exclusion.

(i) Community Involvement

The questions in the Household Survey dealing with involvement in organisations concerned with outdoor, rural or environmental issues, involvement in activities organised by local groups or societies and whether they have participated in any ‘public’ activities² in the past twelve months asks the respondent if they or anyone else in their family is a member or takes part. This means that a gendered analysis is unavailable, as the response could refer to them or their family members which could be either gender. Drawing on other responses, we can see that women like living where they are because

² Such as attended a public meeting, contacted your MP or Assembly Member, worked for a local charity, signed a petition, taken part in a protest, etc.

of the village life, small village or community spirit more than men (13% of women, 8% of men). However, when looking at the questions that asked for agreement or disagreement with particular statements regarding rural life there is no clear difference. For example, there is no difference between men and women on agreeing that they consider themselves to be a member of the local community, with the ability to speak Welsh and the time of residence in the community being more significant. There is a slight difference between men and women regarding whether there is a strong sense of community feeling in the place they live, men agree 74% and women 78%, with men disagreeing 16% and women 12%.

The positions men and women occupy in rural society have been traditionally demarcated by the tasks they perform. A triad that informs a gendered understanding of the rural is between labour market – community – household. As already touched on, this relationship rests on broader lifestyle and life cycle strategies negotiated within the household, the assumptions and expectations of gender relations in the community and the ways in which the operation of both the households and the community construct, reflect and reproduce gender identities. The expectation of women to perform ad hoc tasks around the village or community is very strong (Hughes, 1997; Little, 2002), as is their adoption of caring roles relating to the elderly and children. By doing all these, the potential for partaking in paid work is decreased. As the mother is viewed as the primary carer of the children, any position must work around their school timetable, and as such jobs such as this are highly sought after.

(ii) Social Inclusion and Exclusion

There are different definitions and working understandings of social inclusion and exclusion, as there are with poverty. Social exclusion can be taken to indicate a rupture of the social bond between the individual and society (Silver, 1994), and it has become a key issue on the political agenda. In the early 1990s, the European Commission shifted its welfare policy programmes from anti-poverty to social inclusion. In 1997, the UK government formally accepted social exclusion as its key welfare policy tool and established the Social Exclusion Unit to ensure the development of social inclusion policies across government. The political definition of social exclusion, as adopted by the UK government, focused on the broad range of disadvantages that are experienced by poor groups.

Early research into disadvantage in rural Scotland (Shucksmith et al, 1994; 1996) as well as Cloke et al's (1994; 1997) rural lifestyles studies in England and Wales, identified processes of exclusion, marginalisation and disadvantage operating differentially in many rural areas of Britain. According to this body of work, labour markets and housing markets were instrumental in generating inequality and exclusion, with many respondents perceiving very restricted opportunities for well-paid, secure employment or affordable housing, while at the same time these markets enabled affluent household to move into rural areas. Young people, older people and women tended to have the fewest options in these situations. These impediments to inclusion were closely bound up with failings of private and public services, most notably transport, social housing and childcare. The welfare state was patently failing to reach potential recipients and the take-up of benefit entitlements was lower than in urban areas. Access to advice and information that was located in urban centres was problematic, and respondents were often unclear about their rights to benefits and benefit availability. On top of these state and market problems, there was a greater reliance on the voluntary sector, predominantly constructed by women, which itself was under considerable pressure, and on friends and family. Women's work is generally more ad hoc in this voluntary sector and as financial demands, as well as cultural shifts in the idea of what women *should do*; this voluntary sector of support faces new challenges. It is necessary to monitor the processes of social exclusion and to identify the factors that can trigger entry or exit from situations of exclusion.

The Wales Rural Observatory conducted a major study of poverty and social exclusion in rural Wales between October 2004 and July 2005. The main areas it looked at were the nature and incidence of poverty and social exclusion in rural Wales, the experience of poverty in selected areas of rural Wales and policy responses to poverty and social exclusion in rural Wales. Following Gordon et al (2000) this report adopted a four-dimensional definition of social exclusion. The four dimensions discussed are; impoverishment or exclusion from adequate income or resources; labour market exclusion; service exclusion; and exclusion from social relations. As such, low-income and poverty is positioned as one of several components of social exclusion.

(iii) Poverty

For Shucksmith et al (1994; 1996) the most challenging finding of the research in rural Scotland was that rural people's own assessment was at odds with official definitions of

poverty. Cloke et al's research (1997) shows how the presence of poverty is denied by the majority of respondents within rural settings, and most respondents living in low-income households. Changes in their living conditions since their own youth were employed to evoke improvement, and, as Little (2002) had discussed extensively the ideal of the rural idyll is a continual obstacle. As a book dealing with this rural idyll describes;

‘The rural idyll conceals poverty...the poor unwittingly conspire with the more affluent to hide their poverty by denying its existence. Those values which are at the heart of the rural idyll result in the poor tolerating their material deprivation because of the priority given to those symbols of the rural idyll: the family, the work ethic and good health. And when that material deprivation becomes so chronic by the standard of the area that it has to be recognised by the poor themselves, shame forces secrecy and the management of that poverty within the smallest possible framework... [At the same time] newcomers do not want to see the poverty because it is anathema to the rural idyll which they are seeking to preserve’

(Fabes, Worsely and Howard, 1993)

There is, therefore, a complex set of forces and discourses affecting attempts at empowerment and to encouraging people to take-up benefits entitlements without stigma or loss of self esteem. This account also does not develop the specific role of the woman in the rural idyll, something that this report deals with at the start. This specific role stigmatises the reliance on others and the declaration that it is difficult to cope. The survival and coping strategies employed by women who are living in poverty is something which requires further research. As the traditional support structures dissolve under the strain of new forces; higher rates of living; greater cultural and social demands and the breakdown in traditional roles within the community, it is necessary to uncover the contemporary challenges facing women in rural Wales.

The culture of independence and self-reliance in rural areas appears to affect the collection of state benefits. Individuals are reluctant to claim benefits it is argued (Shucksmith et al, 1994, 1996 on rural Scotland) because of this culture as well as the lack of anonymity in collecting benefits (usually at the village post office) and a greater distance to, and general scarcity of, information and advice about eligibility for benefits. The acceptance of benefits stands in stark contrast to the archetype of the rural woman, it demonstrates an inability to be self-sufficient, something associated strongly with this female role (Little, 2002), and this can be understood in relation to the opening section relating to the female archetype.

Drawing on Cloke et al (1997), and corroborated by the household data, the elderly emerge as the most significant group living in poverty in rural areas, as Table 1 in Appendix 7 shows. From this table, we can see that 56.6% of the 75 or over age group

have a household income of less than £10,000, the highest percentage of people living with that income. The second highest is the age category 65 – 74, with 45% of people living within that category on less than £10,000. Drawing on Table 2 in Appendix 7, which re-examines these statistics with gender, there are clear gender differences with the experience of poverty. With men aged 75 or over, 41.8% of them live on less than £10,000 a year, but with women this figure jumps to 71.3%. There are different factors that must be considered when looking at these figures; the data was collected from the householder, or one of the people in whose name the house was owned or rented. Traditionally, the head of the household is male, and so it could be suggested that the female responses come from a household where their spouse has died or they are separated, whereas the male heads of household could still be married and have two incomes or pensions coming into the home. Similarly, looking at the 65 – 74 age group, there is a higher proportion of women living under £10,000, with 57.9%, than males with 33%. This difference continues into the 55 – 64 age group, with 40.3% of females living on less than £10K, and 24.2% of males. The different age of retirement, 60 years old for females and 65 for males, when this survey was undertaken, may have influenced some of the findings but the main factor would appear to be the lack of female employment, especially full time employment. State Pension age is currently 65 for men and 60 for women born on or before 5 April 1950. Women's State Pension age will rise to 65 between 2010 and 2020. For women born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1955, when they reach State Pension age will depend on their date of birth. However, if women have not worked at all during their lives, and therefore paid no national insurance contributions, they will not qualify for the state pension. The elderly in the countryside may be instrumental in hiding poverty in rural areas; a lack of awareness of benefits and embarrassment at the inability to cope could lead to a pretence of being better off than they are. This is an area which requires further research to understand the factors that lead to poverty in the elderly and develop a gendered understanding of the different issues faced by old people in rural Wales today.

SECTION 5: MALE RURAL IDENTITY

This discussion of gender in rural Wales has so far been considerably one-sided; as has much research on rural geography. Rural men's identity is something that has held the hegemonic position in past research, and thus more contemporary research has moved away from this; an overcompensation of much gender research's urge to give the female 'other' a voice. The traditional focus on the male as the main research participant, thus effectively writing woman out of accounts has been taken as a starting point to move against. The feminist move to afford women voice in research has propelled the research on rural issues, and while this body is slowly growing in size there is little attention afforded to men's rural gender identities (Little, 2002: 180). Men in rural society have undergone the same challenges and difficulties facing their traditional behaviour as women; with the change in work patterns and the demise of farming as a full time occupation the way men conduct themselves both in the household and in the community needs to be examined. The responsibility for childcare and domestic chores has been linked with time available to complete them; the traditional woman did not work and so the responsibility fell to her, though of course the domestic tasks were considerable. However, as these traditional roles are dissolved and altered in a modern world, an understanding of both male and female roles needs to be developed.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

This report has presented the main themes that emerge when looking at gender and rural Wales based on previous research by the Wales Rural Observatory and others (primarily Cloke et al, 1997) and previous writing on the subject. It has presented a gendered understanding of some of the main issues that affect rural life, while also identifying issues specific to gender and especially women. Breaking from the rural idyll, this report has presented an alternative picture of rural femininity, one that is heterogeneous and that struggles with complex issues that affect the way women exist in rural communities. The complexity of the issue is sometimes lost in statistical accounts, the voices of the 'silenced others' that do not fit the archetypes of rural gender identities are lost in accounts and ignored as statistically insignificant. However, what the statistics do provide is a useful overview and introduction to the subject, highlighting areas where further research is need. The three main themes, Employment, Why Rural Wales and Community all indicate areas where more work is needed to understand the different power relations, relationships with services and ad hoc work and the cultural and social forces at play.

Gender does not stand as a causal factor alone: the different variables of age, social class, region, area and income are all important factors when understanding the different issues indicated as important within this report. So while this report has privileged gender, there is an inherent understanding that it is one of a multiple of influencing factors when trying to piece together an understanding of life in rural Wales. A number of different issues have also emerged from this report; employment issues linked to transport, language barriers and the availability of specific types of jobs, and these are things that span across genders as well as being differently specific to each. In addition the different experiences of poverty and social exclusion within different genders has been elaborated on by bringing in the important issue of the elderly, and the suggestions as to why this may occur should be developed and investigated through further research. This research neglects the variable of ethnicity, as there was no data available to include it, and this omission should also be rectified through further research. The lack of data on women's involvement in different community schemes is important to remedy as well, especially in light of policy developments in this area from Europe.

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