GENDER ISSUES IN
EMPLOYMENT, UNDEREMPLOYMENT
AND INCOMES IN FIJI

Dr Wadan Narsey
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Inquiries Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics
Ratu Sukuna House, Mac Arthur Street, Victoria Parade, Suva, Fiji Islands

P O Box 2221 Telephone: [679] 3315822
Government Buildings Fax No: [679] 3303656
Suva E-mail: info@statsfiji.gov.fj
FIJI Website: www.statsfiji.gov.fj

or

Dr Wadan Narsey, Box 524, Suva, Fiji

wlnarsey@connect.com.fj Ph: 3384158 or 9910564

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Preface by Government Statistician (FIBoS)

The Bureau normally conducts an Annual Employment Survey (AES) with employers who are on the Bureau’s Business Register. This Survey tends to focus on formal sector employment, with little coverage of the extremely large informal sectors, and those who are unemployed. To also cover the latter, the Bureau has occasionally conducted a number of national surveys usually in response to special requests from other arms of government, such as the Ministry of Planning.

Thus the first major employment and unemployment survey was conducted in 1973, as a response to a request from the then Prime Minister’s Working Party on Unemployment.¹ Then in 1982, an Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS) was conducted by the Bureau in response to the needs of the Fiji Employment and Development Mission.² The report was published in 1985.³

The most recent survey has been the 2004-05 Survey on Employment and Unemployment a Report on which, also authored by Dr Wadan Narsey, was published in May 2007. The Report presented basic tables on national employment, unemployment, and under-employment conditions by a number of useful disaggregations: rural/urban, gender, divisions, ethnicity, age, industries and occupations.⁴

This monograph is particularly focused on gender issues arising out of the 2004-05 Employment and Unemployment Survey. The work done for this study, and its publication are in keeping with the Bureau’s objective of maximising the use of relatively expensive national surveys of this nature, for the benefit of all our stakeholders. The Bureau hopes to repeat such surveys every five years, funds permitting.

I am grateful to AusAID for funding the analysis, the writing and publication of this Report.

I am particularly grateful to the author, Dr. Wadan Narsey. The Bureau is fortunate to have secured his services. Users of the report should find the tables and analysis in this report easy to read, extremely illuminating and useful.

Timoci I Bainimarama
Government Statistician

It is tempting to think that there is no time to waste in gathering and analysing data when the key task for developing countries is to get on and address poverty, educate children, deliver services and grow the economy. On reflection, though, it is clear that, without solid information, none of these tasks will be achieved and policy makers will be working in the dark. Evidence is crucial to public policy and good governance. We need to know who is poor, where and why? Which children are in school and which are not? Who is able to access services and who is not? Gender is one of the key considerations in answering these questions. This is one of the reasons gender equality is an overarching principle of Australia’s development program.

If governments are to support their people to increase economic engagement, improve productivity and share the benefits of economic growth, it is necessary to understand how men and women across the country use their time in economic, productive and domestic activity. The analysis in this report, “Gender Issues in Employment, Unemployment and Incomes in Fiji”, reveals the range of activities that occupy women and men in Fiji and sheds light on barriers to economic engagement. In integrating unpaid household work into economic analysis, Dr Narsey has handed us a powerful policy and planning tool.

Women make a tremendous contribution to economic and domestic life but women’s role is often to support men’s economic activity. Women are often so closely associated in our minds with care of family and home that we can forget that the way women use their time is work, and that women do a lot of it. This report clearly points out the time burdens women struggle with, that interfere with their ability to contribute to economic activity. It emphasises that women suffer financially for the domestic and caring work they do. For example, women do 52 percent of total work in the economy, but receive only 27 percent of the total income.

The report indicates that the relations between work and remuneration for men and women are not straightforward - outcomes are mixed and there are many complexities beneath the headline results. Yet overall, there is clear evidence that some of the inequalities between women and men are being addressed. The data demonstrate the powerful effect of education in reducing gender based income gaps.

This report, in highlighting a number of uncomfortable truths, lays down a challenge for policy makers and development practitioners, indeed for the whole society. Are these arrangements fair? Are they making it difficult for women to contribute equally to economic growth and poverty reduction in Fiji? How can men and women be better supported to use their skills and talents to help the development of their nation?

What we do not measure we cannot value. This report equips us to understand and value women’s and men’s contribution to Fijian society and will help to ensure that development in Fiji is both fair and harnesses the skills, talents and contributions of all men and women.

Sally Moyle
Gender Adviser
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics for allowing the use of their 2004-05 Employment and Unemployment Survey data, for this important gender analysis. Thanks are due to AusAID for very willingly funding this study. I am grateful to Richelle Tickle (First Secretary, Development Cooperation, AusAID) for her keen facilitation of the study and detailed comments on two drafts.

It is an odd coincidence that almost thirty years ago, I was the subject of wry humour from my Economics Department colleagues because I insisted on including gender economics as an essential part of my Microeconomics course. Gender issues are now central in any global discussion of development.

With my wife first starting work at the YWCA some three decades ago, there have been many friends and associates who worked towards the empowerment of women: the old pioneers including the late Amelia Rokotuivuna (former Director of the YWCA), Ruth Lechte, Anne Walker, Taufa Vakatale, Esiteri Kamikamica, Suliama Siwatibau; the current seniors including Claire Slatter, Vanessa Griffin, Shamima Ali, and Imrana Jalal; and a new younger generation including Virisila Buadromo and Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls. Some proudly advocate their feminism, while others, simply live the spirit of feminism through their personal lives.

Gender equality cannot become reality unless ordinary women are encouraged to empower themselves. My mother (Maniben Narsey) and mother-in-law (Yee Lum Po Yang) both for decades did “two working shifts”, caring for their respective broods of eight children, while also working in their husband’s business. My wife Joan Yee (USP Librarian), like many professional women today, has with great determination, balanced family responsibilities with a successful career. Our respective sisters (Padma, Champa, Mangi, Saras, Veena Chauhan, and Sin Ling, Virginia, Corinne, Juliet, and Pamela) have all been strong career women who have battled to empower themselves, while being corner-stones of their families. It is a personal observation that it is the women in our societies who bear the brunt of work at social gatherings for births, marriages, deaths, and social and religious events in general. The women also play a bigger part in the care of aging parents.

To change a nation’s attitudes towards gender equality for women requires fundamental changes to male attitudes within each and every family. Many of the men in the lives of these empowered women have also shared equally in household responsibilities. Not only has this assisted the careers of the women, but I believe the men have enjoyed richer relationships with those around them. Their daughters tend to have a “can do anything attitude” while most of their boys equally share in household responsibilities. Gender equality is not just good for women and girls, it is very good for men and boys, whose real everyday commitment to gender equality can do so much to advance the cause.

Dr Wadan L. Narsey
Vauavou Publications
References


