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0521802490 - Work to Welfare: How Men Become Detached from the Labour Market

Pete Alcock, Christina Beatty, Stephen Fothergill, Rob Macmillan and Sue Yeandle

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Work to Welfare

How Men Become Detached from the Labour Market

This book provides a new perspective on joblessness among men. During the last twenty years vast numbers of men of working age have moved completely out of the labour market into ‘early retirement’ or ‘long-term sickness’ and to take on new roles in the household. These trends stand in stark contrast to rising labour market participation among women. Based on an unprecedented range of new research on the detached male workforce in the UK, and located within an international context, the book offers a detailed exploration of the varied financial, family and health circumstances ‘detached men’ are living in. It also challenges conventional assumptions about the boundaries between unemployment, sickness and retirement, and the true health of the labour market. *Work to Welfare* represents an important contribution to debates about the labour market and benefit systems, and will be of interest to readers and practitioners in social policy, economics and geography.

Pete Alcock is Professor of Social Policy and Administration at the University of Birmingham. He has published extensively on poverty, social exclusion and the benefits system.

Christina Beatty is a research fellow at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, and a statistician by background.

Stephen Fothergill is a Professor at CRESR and an economist by background. He has published extensively on urban and regional problems in the UK.

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Preface

The detachment of large numbers of men from paid employment is one of the most significant social changes of the last twenty years or so. The once near universal expectation that men's working lives would extend from the time of their leaving school through to their state pension age has been shattered, probably for good. In Britain – the focus of the new research reported here – more than one in five of all 16–64-year-old men, or nearly 4 million men in total, are no longer in employment.

There has always been unemployment, of course, and during the 1980s and 1990s redundancies hit men very hard. But only a minority of the men who are now detached from employment are conventionally unemployed. Early retirement, ill-health and domestic responsibilities – and sometimes a combination of these with an important element of unemployment thrown in – are all key factors, too.

There is scant evidence that this increase in labour market detachment among men was ever anticipated by policy-makers or academic analysts. It has grown quietly, year on year, and even now the true scale of this phenomenon is not widely recognised. What is more, the trend among men stands in marked contrast to what is happening among women, who are becoming engaged in paid employment in ever larger numbers. Women's rising 'labour force participation' is well known and has been the subject of much research and vast discussion in the media. That at the same time men are dropping out of employment, or are being pushed out, has prompted comparatively little comment or investigation. We should not jump to the simplistic conclusion that this is a case of women taking over in the workplace. Most of the jobs that used to be filled by men were in very different sectors and occupations from those now held by women.

Nor should we assume that men's growing detachment from work is mainly a voluntary phenomenon, prompted by rising affluence and greater choice. Early retirement on a comfortable pension is only a small part of the story. More often, men's labour market detachment is supported by the public purse, through the benefits system. Quite apart from the loss of potential output which labour market detachment represents,

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as the source of a major financial claim on the Exchequer it is an issue of legitimate concern.

This book attempts to fill some of the gaps in current knowledge about men's changing relationship to the world of work. As befits an issue that spans several disciplines, the book's authors comprise an economist, a statistician, a political scientist, a sociologist and a social policy expert. This diversity of perspectives is reflected in the contrasting approaches of the chapters. However, despite the varied and at times contradictory academic baggage the members of the team brought to this study, we have found a good deal of common ground about what is actually happening.

The immediate background to the book is a research project carried out at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University, between 1997 and 1999. This was mainly financed by a grant from the UK government's Economic and Social Research Council (ref. no. 000236958). It was supplemented by a grant from the Rural Development Commission that allowed the survey to be enlarged to include men in a number of rural areas as well as in towns.

Like nearly all academic research, the project built on the foundations of work we had previously undertaken. This included in particular a study by Christina Beatty and Stephen Fothergill of labour market adjustment in the wake of pit closures, which was one of the first to observe that job loss was much less likely to result in higher recorded unemployment than in men dropping out of the labour market altogether. The project was able to deploy Sue Yeandle's substantial experience of interview-based research exploring the relationship between labour market change and family life, and to build on Pete Alcock's and Rob Macmillan's work on the benefits system and its influence on individual decision-making.

Special thanks go to Alison Herrington, who worked as researcher on the project for several months and carried out some of the in-depth interviews. Dave Drew and the staff and fieldworkers of the Survey and Statistical Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University played an important role in gathering the extensive survey data. We would also like to thank the local authority staff who provided practical assistance in each of our survey areas. Sheila Walker provided invaluable administrative and secretarial support throughout, and Carol Goodale and Nicola Smith helped from time to time with the overload. Many colleagues from academia and the policy world provided valuable advice and comment. Among these we wish especially to mention Paul Convery, Jane Davidson, Arthur Fleiss, John Philpott, Lorna Reith and Simon Wood, who all sat on the project's advisory group. The final product is, however, solely our own, and we take responsibility for any errors of judgement or emphasis.

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HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANISED

The book is organised in three sections. The first deals with the context for labour market detachment. Chapter 1 describes the main relevant trends in the UK labour market. Chapter 2 considers the international context and ch. 3 explores how welfare policy relating to the labour market has developed in Britain.

The second section of the book sets out our new evidence, based on the surveys described in the appendix. Chapters 4 to 6 present the findings from the large-scale survey of the main groups of men of working age who are outside full-time employment. Chapter 4 provides an overview of this ‘detached male workforce’. Chapter 5 gives special attention to men who are recipients of sickness and disability benefits, while ch. 6 concentrates on the situation of older men. These chapters show that there is extensive concealed unemployment among men who are officially recorded as ‘economically inactive’. The geography of labour market detachment, and in particular the high incidence of joblessness in older industrial Britain, forms an important component of these chapters.

Chapters 7 to 10 introduce evidence from our in-depth follow-up interviews. Chapter 7 explores the relationship between family circumstances and labour force detachment, and considers the impact of age and of relationships. Chapter 8 examines the health circumstances of men in further detail. Chapter 9 focuses attention on how men without jobs cope with their financial situation, while ch. 10 explores the barriers they face in trying to re-enter employment. These chapters provide rich and contextualised evidence about what it is really like to be outside the labour market. Finally ch. 11, which comprises the third section of the book, looks at the policy implications of our findings.

Overall, we believe this has been an important, timely and innovative study. It provides answers to several key questions about current trends in the labour market, although new questions also arise from our research. We have called the book *Work to Welfare* because this has been the experience of so many of the men in our study. If policy is to succeed in moving men like these back from welfare to work, we believe it needs to build on the knowledge and understanding that this book attempts to provide.

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Abbreviations

BHPS	British Household Panel Survey
CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DSS	Department of Social Security
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ED	Enumeration District
EHPS	European Household Panel Survey
ELFS	European Labour Force Survey
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FRS	Family Resources Survey
IB	Incapacity Benefit
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IVB	Invalidity Benefit
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
NI	National Insurance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SCELI	Social Change and Economic Life Initiative
WAP	Working-age population