

***Developing Gendered Social and Economic  
Indicators: A Pilot Program of Broadening  
Research Methods***

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Discussion Paper Number 22

June 2002

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# **Developing Gendered Social and Economic Indicators: A Pilot Program of Broadening Research Methods**

## **Introduction**

This article outlines a pilot program undertaken to assess some of the advantages and disadvantages of including significant elements of grounded theory methodology in a research program examining the measurement of women's social and economic progress. The pilot program involved ten affinity group discussions with sixty-two women and six men on the issue of women's progress in Western Australia. The program aimed at broadening the range of data collection and analysis methods in the field of gendered social and economic indicators. The results of the pilot program have implications for future research on women's well being.

## **Broadening Methodologies**

Social and economic indicators are *surrogate measures* for unobservable aspects of social activity. They are used to assess changes in a social activity that is, in itself unobservable. The usefulness of an indicator derives from its relation to the unmeasurable concept for which it is a proxy. Its main feature is that it is quantifiable, thereby allowing comparisons to be made between jurisdictions, populations and over time (Michael Carley 1981). Gendered indicators can be used to assess changes in women's social and economic status and where changes are apparently favourable they may be perceived as indicating "progress", that is, movement towards a desired goal or position.

However perceptions of what constitutes improvement in one's economic and social situation are subjective, as can be the assessment of whether changes in an indicator represent positive or negative change for specific persons or in specific contexts.

(Michael Carley 1981; Alaka Malwade Basu 1992; Yasmeen Mohiuddin 1996; Leroy Stone, Zeynep E. Karman and W. Pamela Yaremko 1998; Mona Danner, Lucia Fort and Gay Young 1999; Iulie Aslaksen, Ane Flaatten and Charlotte Koren 1999; Fredrik Barth 1999; Siri Naess 1999).

Currently, many gendered indicators reflect existing statistical data disaggregated by gender. These statistical data collections typically allow comparisons of diverse social and economic outcomes such as life expectancy, average wage rates, access to resources, average working hours and political representation. However, as is the case with other apparently gender-neutral institutions, statistical data collections can fail to reflect women's interests (Desley Deacon 1985; Nancy Folbre 1991; Julie Nelson 1993; Michèle Pujol 1997; Faye Duchin and Anushree Sinha 1999; Elizabeth Durbin 1999; Gillian Hewitson 1999; Sabine O'Hara 1999). The relative lack of data about domestic violence, the working conditions of outworkers and the distribution of resources within households are some examples (Folbre 1994; Danner, Fort and Young 1999; Durbin 1999). Therefore, while existing gendered indicators allow many useful insights into women's relative economic and social status, it is possible that issues of importance to women may be neglected. It is also possible that women's perceptions of the relevance and meaning of existing indicators may vary according to their experiences (Patrice Flynn 1999; Naess 1999).

Reliance upon gender breakdowns of existing statistical bases also raises the possibility of increasingly benchmarking women's experiences against those of men. This may contribute to a framework where women's experiences are devalued and/or men's experiences are perceived as achievements that women should emulate. It contains elements of an "add women and stir" approach to economics (Sandra Harding 1987; Prue Hyman 1994) and may contribute to a relatively uncritical application and validation of existing theoretical constructs to new areas (Susan Himmilweit 1995; Sabine O'Hara 1999). This poses a challenge for those who seek to monitor women's social and economic status: to develop a framework which is capable of both recognising the value in some of women's differing experiences while identifying sources of social and economic injustice in others.

These considerations encouraged the research team to seek out a research framework in which the categories and themes for data collection and the development and evaluation of indicators are related to women's own perceptions and experiences of economic and social change.

An obvious candidate for this task is grounded theory. This theory provides a research methodology in which data collection and hypothesis formation are conducted concurrently as part of an all-inclusive process of theory development. In an iterative process, data are collected on the topic of interest, analyzed for emergent themes and linkages, and then hypotheses are formed. In comparison with more orthodox forms of hypothesis formation and data collection used in economics, grounded theory gives a relatively low priority to a priori theorising and reliance upon existing theoretical constructs.

This does not mean that researchers are expected to approach a research question as though they are value free “blank slates”. It is accepted that researchers will bring theoretical sensitivity to a research program and a knowledge of the theoretical constructs and conceptual insights provided by literature are seen as integral to the research program (Wanda J. Orlikowski 1993). Having framed a research question, however, the methodology requires that theoretical constructs developed by researchers be explicitly developed from data. It is from data that the most significant issues are identified and the linkages between issues developed. In an iterative process, grounded theorists generate hypotheses, gather and analyze data, refine or reformulate hypotheses and gather further data.

Grounded theory is criticized as "soft", "lacking rigor" and "not really scientific" and there are conflicting views as whether it is possible to generalize from theory which ‘emerges’ from this methodology. Some argue that the verdict on this issue is yet to be determined (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Others argue that grounded theory generates analytical generalisations of theoretical concepts and patterns, which, while their statistical significance may vary according to context, can be of universal significance (D. Leonard-Barton 1990; Orlikowski 1993; Firestone 1993).

Despite these possible limitations, grounded theory is a methodological framework that may prove well suited to the task of identifying and developing those indicators of social and economic progress indicators that are based on women’s own perceptions of the issue. The theoretical approach involves collecting and analyzing broad ranging data on women’s perceptions of social and economic progress without significant reliance upon existing theoretical constructs to determine the areas of

women's lives that are relevant to the development of meaningful gendered social and economic indicators. The process relies upon data collection and discourse based reflections upon the meaning and measurement of social and economic progress (O'Hara 1999).

Developed by sociologists, grounded theory has been utilized successfully in situations when existing theories appear inadequate for reasons associated with their social and cultural specificity. For example, it has gained some prominence among nursing scholars hoping to incorporate knowledge of problems specific to their patients into their treatment plans (Barbara Keddy, Sharon L. Sims and Phyllis Noerager Stern 1996, p.450). It has also proven useful to management theorists finding inadequacies in existing theoretical structures applied in non-western contexts (Nancy J. Adler, Nigel Campbell and Andre Laurent 1989; Gert-Jan De Vreede, Noel Jones and Rabsan J. Mgaya 1999; Judith Y. Wiesinger and Paul F. Salipant 2000); in contexts of rapid technological change (Deborah Dougherty 1990; Wanda Orlikowski 1993); and where cooperation rather than (the expected) competition has emerged among firms (Larry Browning, Janice Bayer and Judy Shelter 1995; Judy Scott 2000).

This is of importance to feminist research. Women's experiences do not always fit the established theoretical frameworks of economics based on autonomous individuals and market exchange. Further, as women are themselves a diverse population, research method needs to accommodate the possibility of divergent experiences and views (O'Hara 1999). Grounded theory is also consistent with the view that knowledge is socially constructed and that researchers play an interpretative role when collecting and analyzing data and formulating theory.

## **Designing and Implementing a Pilot Research Program**

### *Aims of the project and the research question*

The ultimate goal of the program was to gain familiarity with research methods associated with grounded theory, and to assess the possible advantages of integrating this research method into studies of indicators and women's social and economic progress.

From the outset, this research program was designed to be limited in scale. While the ultimate aim of grounded theory research is to generate new theory, the researchers in this case did not intend to develop new theories from the project. Rather, it was anticipated that the project might proceed as far as identifying themes and issues of importance to women's social and economic well being in Western Australia. At a later stage, this data would then be used to evaluate the adequacy of existing measures of women's progress and develop new measures as needed. In keeping with the exploratory nature of the research, a relatively limited program of data collection and analysis was planned. Financial resources, commensurate with the size of the program, were made available by Curtin University's Business School and Western Australia's Women's Policy Office, an office of the state government.

### *Data Collection*

A grounded theory methodological framework does not, in itself, necessitate a specific form of data collection. Various forms of data are consistent with a grounded theory approach to research, including field research, secondary data and literature. As our program involves the construction of definitions of women's social and

economic status and this, in turn, involves questions of meaning, the description of values and the relating of experiences of change over time, interviews and/or the recording of conversations are the most appropriate methods of data collection (Janice Morse 1994).

Interviews and conversations can be conducted in a variety of ways. It was decided that the use of focus group discussions had several advantages for examining perceptions and experiences of changes in women's social and economic status. Foremost, this form of data collection facilitates the emergence of themes from discussion among the participants rather than being more narrowly defined, to one extent or another, by interview questions developed by the researcher (Irene Van Staveren 1997; Frances Montell 1999). Feminist research from other social sciences, and increasingly from within economics, provide considerable theoretical and practical guidance as to appropriate strategies for conducting this form of data collection (Harding 1987; Mary Hirschfield 1997).

It was decided to collect data by means of a particular type of focus group known as natural affinity groups. This entailed locating groups of people with similar backgrounds, who knew one another, or at least had something in common, and who could meet in a place which was convenient and familiar to them. The use of natural affinity groups enables a researcher to listen in on conversations in which participants are comfortable speaking with one another about what could be sensitive or controversial issues (Eileen Van Aken, Dominic Monetta and Scott Sink 1994). A program of ten affinity groups was planned.



### *Participant Selection*

Affinity group participants were selected with the goal of maximum variety sampling. This means that rather than selecting a statistically representative sample of the population, participants are selected in order to represent, as much as possible, a heterogeneous sample. This process of selection facilitates the collection of two types of data: high quality case descriptions which document uniqueness and; common experiences across participants (Morse 1994). This form of sampling was consistent with the researchers' interest in areas of commonality and diversity within a varied population.

Western Australia is a large, culturally and geographically diverse state. We identified a non-exhaustive list of five broad, interrelated areas of diversity for women living in Western Australia: socio-economic background; cultural background; age/stage in the life cycle; geographic location; and attachment to the labor market. While each affinity group consisted of a relatively homogeneous group of participants, the total range of participants was purposefully but randomly recruited to encompass a diverse range of women and men. To assist with monitoring and ensuring diversity, each participant was asked to complete a short survey summarising demographic, social and economic variables.

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods, including requests made to a retirement village, a primary school, tertiary institutions and a personal contact in a regional town. The Women's Policy Office assisted with the recruitment of participants in regional areas and a consultant was engaged to assist with recruitment of indigenous participants. In each case the initial contact person was informed about the broad nature of the research project and asked if they could gather a group of 6-8

people who would be willing to discuss the idea of women's social and economic progress. The venues for these discussions were chosen to be familiar and convenient for participants, for example, a classroom at their child's school, local community activity centre, a small function room at a local hotel or private homes. The resulting ten groups were characterized as:

1. Women in professional or managerial occupations
2. Mothers of primary school aged children
3. Women residing in Kalgoorlie (a major regional centre based on the mining industry)
4. Women residing in Bunbury (a major regional centre with a diverse industry base)
5. Women residing in Manjimup (a small rural town)
6. Women residing in a Perth retirement village
7. Women aged 17 to 20 (of varying educational attainment)
8. Urban Aboriginal women
9. Urban Immigrant women
10. A group of fathers of school children

The information from the short initial survey confirmed that the participants represented diversity in the areas of income, place of birth, age, employment status, occupation and household structure and responsibilities.

#### *Affinity Group Questions and Discussions*

The aim was to keep each discussion as broad as possible but within the following parameters: What are the participant's goals and aspirations? What constitutes 'progress' for them as individuals? How would participants describe progress for women in general? This was achieved through a brief introduction by the focus group facilitator in the following terms:

We have been undertaking some research into how women's progress is measured. This is important because many policy decisions affecting women use statistics, sometimes called indicators, to measure whether women are becoming worse off or better off in our society.

We would really like to get your ideas on what you think progress means. Perhaps if we start by thinking about your ideal or perfect society: What would you be doing? What would other women be doing? Would things be very different from the way they are now?

This introduction proved suitable for initiating enthusiastic and lengthy responses from participants with minimal direction from the facilitator. Discussions proceeded for at least ninety minutes and in some cases were wound up by the facilitator after two hours. When necessary, the facilitator prompted further conversation by seeking clarification or further exploration of issues previously raised by discussion groups rather than referring to a list of structured questions.

#### *Taping and transcription of conversations*

Taping was carried out using a high quality transcription tape recorder which could capture the voices of people sitting around a table or room. Two researchers attended each group discussion with one researcher acting as a discussion facilitator and the other taking notes. The notes were taken to ensure that some data collection could proceed in the case of equipment or power failure. Following each affinity group, the tapes were transcribed for analysis. analysis

### *Data Analysis and use of software*

The transcripts were analyzed by reading through them and noting the different themes and issues which emerged during the group discussions. Relevant sections of each transcript focusing on different themes were given a code which was used in subsequent transcripts when the same theme arose. For example, sections of transcript discussing the relationship between paid and unpaid work were given one code, sections dealing with physical safety and well being another code, and so on. Sections of different transcripts with the same code were then grouped together to facilitate analysis of themes by different groups.

The coding and analysis process was facilitated by the use of software known as NUD\*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data\* Indexing Searching and Theorising). This program allows each part of a transcript to be electronically categorised, labelled according to group and collated according to theme. New codes (NUD\*IST calls these nodes) can be created when new themes emerge and existing codes can be merged, moved or renamed as data collection proceeds. With appropriate formatting of the original transcript, a coded section can be as small as a sentence, or, if the conversation focuses upon one issue for a lengthy period, several pages. The software allows conversations on related themes from different transcripts to be readily grouped together for further analysis, such as examining whether there was consensus or diversity of views on a specific issue, whether the issues were raised by only one group or by a range of groups and the linkages between this issue and other themes discussed by participants.

Coding commenced immediately following the first affinity group and was subsequently done upon the transcript of each group discussion becoming available. Following analysis of transcriptions from the first two groups, it appeared that the diversity of issues was so great that each affinity group would generate a different set of themes and categories. However, as further discussions proceeded a number of central themes emerged, as discussed below.

To the surprise of researchers, a number of seemingly important issues relating to women's social and economic status did not arise during the early discussions. These related particularly issues relating to the availability of health and educational services and environmental issues. It was decided that towards the end of the next two affinity groups, these issues would be introduced by the facilitator to examine whether these issues generated significant debate or were, in fact, of little interest to the participants of these groups. While these more specific questions initiated some conversation among participants, they did not emerge as central concerns and it was decided not to proceed with further specific questioning in later groups. The issue of apparently neglected topics is discussed in further detail in the outcomes section of this paper.

### **Outcomes – Findings on the Progress, Status and Goals of Women in Western Australia**

The small-scale nature of the project meant that the resulting analysis could not generate conclusions necessarily applicable to the population of Western Australian women. The data obtained were rich and diverse but did not have statistical validity nor allowed the confident formation of firm hypotheses. In the language of grounded theory, "saturation" had not been achieved. However, analysis of the qualitative data

was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, as a pilot program, it was essential that the researchers gain familiarity with this form of analysis. Secondly, it was hoped to achieve an appreciation of the insights that could be gained through this process rather than relying on statistical data alone. It is within this context that the outcomes are briefly summarised in the paragraphs below (Austen, Jefferson and Thein 2001).

Initial themes from the first two focus groups were diverse and the first themes and categories identified proved difficult to apply as further data were collected. However, as the coding and categorisation of data proceeded, four main themes emerged. These are listed in Table 1, below, along with the various sub-categories of data which were identified.

INSERT TABLE 1, HALF PAGE

The first theme related to the ways in which people identified change and social progress over time. By referring to specific social and economic changes over the past four to five decades participants identified developments they felt had facilitated women's ability to reach their goals. Discussion from different groups revealed some consensus that changes related to women's greater participation in paid employment and its benefits, such as greater career choices and improved access to finance, constituted progress for women. Employment conditions which facilitated women's labor force participation were also seen as progress, particularly the introduction of maternity leave. Participants also identified significant advances unrelated to paid work, including greater control over fertility and improved labor saving technologies.

However, most groups considered that not all social and economic change was positive. Participants felt that they, or their children, were under increased pressure to achieve success in formal education and careers. There was an impression that there were few real prospects for those who did not pursue goals in these areas. Some participants felt that there were difficulties with defining appropriate roles for those who had relied on traditional models in family and household relationships and that old stereotypes were being replaced with new expectations. Others expressed concern about 'new' social problems such as the greater availability of illicit drugs, declining physical safety and the breakdown of informal care structures within the community.

A second major theme related to women's experiences with increasing participation in the workforce and their simultaneous retention of substantial responsibility for unpaid household work. Discussions on this theme were broad ranging. Participants felt that while women had greater opportunity in the workforce it is difficult for women to achieve all they would like in their careers. The reasons for this ranged across exclusionary work practices and workplace cultures, labelled by some participants as "boy's clubs", workplace policies governing issues such as working hours and salary packaging, formal institutional arrangements for childcare and the changing availability of informal care through families and friends.

Thirdly, there was considerable discussion on the impact of social context upon women's ability to achieve their goals. Changing expectations (from men and women) regarding women's roles, lack of access to educational and employment opportunities in their local area and the significance of cultural background were included in this category of data.

Finally, participants identified a diverse range of social and economic goals, with most participants wanting to achieve or maintain at least one of the following: a balanced life; self employment; financial independence and security; a contribution to the community; pursuit of further education and interests; good health and; a spiritual basis to their life. It was the extent to which social change contributed to these goals which frequently determined whether it was viewed as a positive or negative step for women. Participants from all groups felt that there was some distance to travel before women could hope to achieve their goals without facing substantial impediments. Overwhelmingly, we gained the impression that women feel that they continue to face stark choices and substantial costs when they bear children. These were attributed to the direct economic penalties associated with absences from the paid workforce, the lack of recognition and status afforded to those who undertake household work and a loss of financial independence. Some younger women felt that it was embarrassing and a risky career move to even mention that they would like to have children.

Some issues appeared to be important to specific groups of people. For example, many goals discussed by indigenous participants related to their wishes to contribute to the further development of their local communities. The pursuit of skills and education which would facilitate such contributions were viewed as important. Within this context, policies assisting reconciliation and attempts to include indigenous history and culture within mainstream education were seen as social changes which could assist with these goals. Similarly, physical safety seemed to be of particular concern for older women. The identification of specific concerns for different groups



of women provides an example of the possible advantages of developing additional indicators relevant to women's diverse circumstances.

As noted above, while these findings were of local interest, the pilot scale of the research program limits their significance. The diversity of views presented throughout the project illustrates the importance of canvassing the views of participants from a wide range of backgrounds. While there were several issues which were raised by all or most groups, there were also issues which were raised by only one or two groups. It is quite likely that some important issues remain unidentified because of the limited number of groups included in the study. Substantially larger numbers of participants need to be included in a comprehensive study in order to ensure the capture of as many views as possible. For this reason, no attempt was made to prioritise issues based on the frequency with which they were raised or their distribution across groups.

### **Lessons from this Research**

As a pilot program, the main outcomes of this project are the lessons that can be learned for future research utilising the piloted research methods. In this regard, one of the main outcomes was a richness and understanding of data which could not be gathered from our previous focus on existing statistics and indicators (Siobhan Austen, Therese Jefferson and Alison Preston 2000a, 2000b). The process of listening to participant's experiences and the complexity of the linkages between different areas of social and economic activity will provide an area of future analysis which we expect will assist in developing insights into the types of indicators which may prove useful in the future. The use of a grounded research approach therefore offered

advantages that were not previously gained through more narrowly defined research questions.

A few examples serve to illustrate some of the dimensions added by collecting data directly based on people's experiences within a grounded theory approach. The first example is the prominence many women gave to the impact that social and institutional contexts played in decisions they had made throughout their lives:

...I've made a journey but that journey hasn't taken me as far as I would have liked to have gone...perhaps because of the choices I made earlier in my life that were to do with the way I was brought up and things that I was led to believe that women were supposed to do.

That again is pressure on women like us. They expect you to have a good job and also raise children and be a good mother too. There is a different pressure in that way. When you were growing up you had one kind of pressure to have family and children, but these days we have two pressures from two sides. When asked what you do – it's just not complete if you just say I am a mother.

...I find that hard, I've got ten years, I've got to get this done, I've got to get myself established as a person before I can have that family or have that pressure of having to have a family. You've got that biological clock thing and society pressure that you've got to have a child before your thirty-five or forty because otherwise you're a nutter or something.

Another example was the complex relationship between women undertaking different roles within society and the importance of recognizing diversity among women. It was clear that women do not see themselves as a homogeneous group and that policies suited to some women may not be welcomed by others.

There is also tension between women. Some women have to cope with an extra workload when they [other women] are off with children.

Discussions of changing social structures illustrated the complex linkages between family, community and social support which allow women to pursue goals outside their home, particularly when they have primary responsibility for the care of children or other family members:

Here we have the nannas of the world working as well. My children, if they need me to look after their children I am working, I've got my own job, so I can't baby sit my grandkids so readily. So childcare is necessary for them.

...we don't have the support to help- the grandmothers are not there to help to look after the kids or help with the housework. Or you don't have your sister two blocks away to mind the kids so you can do what you want. It's like gone. We are by ourselves; we are isolated now we have to create our own community.

A final example is provided by women's evaluations of the adequacy of their wages or their ownership of assets. This was frequently assessed by reference to the degree

of financial independence they had gained, rather than by comparison with men's rates of remuneration and control of assets.

If my husband walked out on me tomorrow, I wouldn't be financially independent. I've always depended on him to support me. I've had part time work but I've never had a career where I could feel that I could walk away if I chose to and still support myself.

I have my own property – it's my safety net. It's mine... I have basically created my own empire I don't know why – I just wanted my independence... Even now I wouldn't have children unless I knew I could bring them up myself - just in case.

It's independence. If you're young and you're a woman and you've got no money then you can't be independent of your parents or your husband or your boyfriend.

Insights into the role of social expectations, institutions, complex social and economic linkages, diverse needs and the motivations for seeking financial independence and asset accumulation may have implications for the development of theory relevant to women's experiences. While the study was too small to contribute to the development of any specific aspect of theory, the methodology appears to demonstrate some difficulties associated with theoretical frameworks and data collection methods which treat social and economic institutions and individual preferences as exogenous to women's roles as economic decision makers.

The researchers also gained insights into the importance of the introduction of the topic to participants. On reflection, the research question may have contributed to the very limited discussion of reductions (or improvements) in government services, the increasingly casual or temporary nature of work contracts, long working hours or environmental issues, to name a few issues which researchers felt may arise.

Similarly, relatively few groups raised issues related to the accessibility of educational and health services, except where this was specifically raised as an issue by the facilitator, as discussed above.

While it may be the case that these issues are of little concern to the participants, it is also possible that the research question itself encouraged particular responses. The term “women’s progress” carries an implicit comparison with men’s achievements and participants appear to have focused on those areas of social and economic activity where women may be perceived as being at a disadvantage compared with men. If an area of social or economic activity is perceived as equally advantageous or disadvantageous to both men and women, it is possible that participants may not have viewed it as relevant to the introductory question.

Further, the term “progress” appears to have resulted in participants focusing on the economic aspects of well being. If people equate “progress” with economic gain, this may result in participants focusing upon certain aspects of their experiences rather than others.

These issues do not mean that the research findings are not valid. There is little doubt that the issues raised by participants during discussions were considered by them to be significant. It may mean, however, that the list of issues covered in this study is unlikely to be exhaustive.

Thus, the introductory questions raised by facilitators may need to be reconsidered in future projects. For example, in order to overcome the implicit comparison with men's achievements, it may be prudent to open the discussion with a general question relating to social and economic progress for all and then to later introduce the question of whether this means something different for women compared with men. Using a term rather than "progress", for example "well being", may also provide some insights into the likelihood that the particular word "progress" was prompting particular themes to arise during discussions.

There were various practical lessons learned which will facilitate the efficiency of future projects. In one case, a tight travelling schedule for the researchers' visit to a regional centre meant that a planned discussion with indigenous women could not take place when a funeral was held on the same day. A more generous timetable for this aspect of the project may have facilitated holding the discussion on the following day.

On a more positive note, attention by the facilitators to relatively simple issues such as the availability of quality transcription tape recorders, extension leads to allow the best placement of the recording equipment and the use of note taking in addition to

recording of conversations, proved to well worth while in assisting the widest possible capture of data.

## **Conclusions**

The findings of our pilot program will do little to dispel the view that grounded theory methodology can yield results which may be difficult to generalise, particularly because of their lack of statistical validity. However, this project illustrates several advantages with utilising a grounded theory approach to research on issues relevant to feminist economics. Firstly, and despite some concern about the introductory questions raised at each affinity group, the process allowed issues to emerge which would not have been considered had the researchers developed more narrowly defined questions. For example, the relatively unstructured nature of the discussions allowed indigenous women to focus on the importance of reconciliation between indigenous and colonial cultures, facilitated discussion between young women on the perceived risks of wanting to have children and allowed women from various groups to reflect on the spiritual side of their lives.

Secondly, it illustrates the influence that researchers can have on deciding which indicators are appropriate for monitoring of women's social and economic status. The research method facilitated this by allowing 'new' issues to be raised by participants and by illustrating that issues of importance to individual researchers will not necessarily be raised in discussions. By lessening the emphasis given to a priori theorising and encouraging the identification of key variables and themes from data, the pilot program illustrates that new insights may be gained from a more iterative approach to hypothesis formation and data collection.

An assessment of the data gained through this pilot program also shows that data gathered in a grounded research project can provide a valuable comparison with existing quantitative indicators. For example, many participants focused upon employment related issues, particularly gender wage gaps and the availability of employment conditions such as maternity leave and flexible working hours. These outcomes provide an endorsement of the use of many of the more readily available indicators comparing earnings between genders and those which compare employment conditions across jurisdictions.

However, while economic and financial aspects of women's lives were a major feature of the discussions, there were a wide range of issues discussed which are less readily measured. Goals related to achieving a balanced life, making a contribution to the local community, achieving a spiritual basis to life are examples which pose greater complexities to the development of suitable indicators. However, if it is accepted that these goals are significant to women's social and economic well being the challenge remains to fulfil this task.



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Table 1: Categories developed for data analysis

1. Change and progress over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Changes</li> <li>1.2 Careers and work, new sources of identity</li> <li>1.3 The invisible role of unpaid work at home</li> <li>1.4 Change and lack of change in society</li> <li>1.5 Changing relationships with men</li> <li>1.6 New Choices</li> <li>1.7 New Problems</li> </ul>
2. Home and work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Entering and maintaining careers</li> <li>2.2 Different rewards</li> <li>2.3 Boy's clubs and men's attitudes in the workplace</li> <li>2.4 Gender balance and bias</li> <li>2.5 Other workplaces</li> <li>2.6 Support structures in the workplace</li> <li>2.7 Government policy</li> <li>2.8 Support from the family</li> </ul>
3. Social context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Expectations of women</li> <li>3.2 Relationships between women and men</li> <li>3.3 Regional and social variations</li> <li>3.4 Cultural differences</li> </ul>
4. Goals and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 A balanced life</li> <li>4.2 Self employment</li> <li>4.3 Contributing to the community</li> <li>4.4 Financial security and independence</li> <li>4.5 Lack of money – an obstacle to reaching goals</li> <li>4.6 Physical safety</li> <li>4.7 Self realisation</li> </ul>