

Newly arrived immigrant women in the work force

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Chapter Two: The literature on migrant women

Introduction

During the 1970s and 1980s, the broad outlines of a picture of migrant women workers' experiences were delineated in the Australian literature (see Martin 1984 and 1986). After describing this picture, this chapter will review the Australian literature on non-English speaking (NES) migrant women workers in more detail, focusing particularly on research findings that refer to newly arrived women...

Migrant Women as Workers

Since 1945, the majority of non-English speaking background women who have migrated to Australia have come as dependents of men (wives, mothers and daughters). The labour force goals of Australian governments' immigration programs have typically been met by assisting the entry of males with appropriate capacities or skills; they continue to be the 'principal applicants', accompanied by their families (DEIR 1986:3). Migrant women have been considered more frequently in terms of the government's population-building goals (see Martin 1984: 112) and ethnic affairs policies have rarely been oriented towards the needs of migrant women as workers.

However, historically, NES migrant women, and in particular married and recently arrived migrant women, have been over-represented in

the paid work force compared to their Anglo-Australian counterparts. Between 1970 and 1980 work force participation rates among newly arrived women ranged between 50 and 85 per cent (ibid) compared with around 45 per cent for English speaking background women. Higher rates of economic activity among immigrant women compared with the indigenous population has been observed in other Western industrial countries. Although in Britain, for example, there is substantial variation among ethnic groups, most Black and Asian immigrants aged 25 years and over have higher rates of participation in the work force, and particularly in full-time employment than white, indigenous women (Brown 1984). Often, migrant women from non-metropolitan areas are entering paid employment for the first time; and the reasons are primarily economic. The cost of establishing a home, family and life in a new country are high; two low or medium incomes are usually required to support a basic standard of living in host countries. Migrant women's husbands are more likely to be unemployed or employed in poorly paid jobs than the husbands of Anglophone women; and often migrant women are supporting relatives in their country of origin.

The Jobs Migrant Women Do

Because they lack the 'human capital' of marketable skills or qualifications, because of structural and attitudinal racism and sexism and because of the urgency of their financial needs, NESB women have historically been a cheap, flexible and dispensable source of labour for manufacturing industries in Australia. They have been concentrated in an extremely narrow range of poorly paid and low status occupations which typically involve repetitive, onerous and boring work with little job security and a high risk of occupational injury and disease. In 1981, 76 per cent of employed Yugoslav born women,

73 per cent of Turkish women and 74 per cent of Vietnamese women worked in the trades or process work occupations compared to 36 per cent of the Australian born population (VEAC 1988:6).

In addition, migrant women are located in a narrow range of industries, mainly in manufacturing. The clothing industry pays the lowest wages of any industry in Australia and is notorious for poor working conditions (O'Donnell 1984: 99); while it employs one-fifth of women who work in manufacturing, it employs nearly double that proportion of NES migrant women working in manufacturing. Others are in the textile and footwear industries (like clothing, declining areas of the economy); food, beverages and tobacco; metal products; electronics and electrical components; plastics, rubber and paper products industries. The latest statistical data from the 1986 Census will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Decline of Manufacturing Industry in Australia

Economic recession, international restructuring of the world economy and the micro-electronic revolution have combined to cause a major retraction in Australia's manufacturing industry over the last fifteen years. By the 1980s it was becoming increasingly recognised that migrants were bearing a disproportionate share of the burden arising from these changes. In the Kirby Report on labour market programs, for example, it was noted that:

The greatest falls (in employment) have been concentrated in the processing and assembling sectors in manufacturing. This has important implications for the future employment opportunities of low-skilled people, particularly non-English speaking migrants (quoted in VEAC 1988:4).

The Deregulation of Employment Relations

The other major trend affecting migrant women's paid work in the last ten years in Australia is the increased deregulation of the

labour market and the growth in people working outside the centralised industrial relations and wage-fixing systems. Again, these developments are part of an international trend in developed industrial countries involving the transference of jobs to the unregulated and underground economy, in order to survive the competition of imports from low-wage countries in the last decade (see, e.g. on the European clothing industry, Mitter 1986). A recent study by the CMS (Castles, Morrissey and Pinkstone 1988) documents the extent of the decline in full-time male jobs in the manufacturing industry and the concomitant increase in the numbers of migrant women in part-time, casual jobs or classified as 'self-employed'. The best-known example of this phenomenon in Australia is the rise of outworking in the clothing industry, now estimated to involve as many women as are involved in factory-based production. The spread of clothing outwork has depended on the ready availability of newly-arriving migrant and refugee women whose lack of English language skills and lack of child-care prevents them from moving into other jobs.

As migrant women, NES women share the problems of other NES migrants in Australia and experience the structural discrimination and exclusionary processes of their new society. With other working class women, they share a subordinate position in the paid work force, and shoulder the additional and often unrecognised load of unpaid work at home. However, the situation of migrant women is not simply equal to the sum of separate oppressions as is sometimes implied, but has its own specificity and dynamics. Australian literature on NES women has increasingly helped constitute their experiences as an object of study in their own right.

Australian Literature

The 'Definers of Public Knowledge'

As Jean Martin has suggested (1978:203), the process of defining 'the migrant presence' in Australia occurred at the same time, historically,

as the growth of feminism and strong, popular demands to examine and redefine women's roles in paid and unpaid work. Noting the fruitful consequences of these twin processes in producing some in-depth, high quality research on migrant women, she went so far as to comment that "this has led to the position where there is now more social knowledge about migrant women workers than about men" (idem).

While her conclusion is open to dispute, certainly if one considers quantitative analysis where immigrant workers are often still assumed to be male, it is true that the qualitative studies examining the experiences of migrant women as workers which appeared in the mid 1970s were not only path-breaking, but have been the major 'definers of public knowledge' (ibid:26) about NES migrant women in Australia since that time.

The first, **We cannot talk our rights**, was a large scale survey of Australian and overseas born women based on a sample of households from two high migrant density Sydney local government areas (LGAs) (Cox, Jobson and Martin 1976). One thousand and twenty-four women from seven different language groups were interviewed about their work patterns, the extent of their training and work-related experience, and their family and household situations. The majority of the immigrant women had arrived in Australia in the last five years. The study found that, although two-thirds of the immigrant women had never worked in a paid job before coming to Australia, more than 50 per cent were in the work force at the time of the interview, though many were unemployed. For these women, the trauma of immigrating to a new society was accompanied by the difficulties of combining paid work with their domestic responsibilities in a society that ignored the needs of working mothers. More than 80 per cent of the recently arrived women (in this case Arabic, Spanish, Yugoslav and Turkish) intended to enter the work force in the future, whether or not they were working now (56). The migrant women were concentrated in semi- or unskilled blue collar occupations, and

the majority said that they would give up work were it not for the money (3). While Australian-born women sometimes made positive remarks about their work situation, the migrant women rarely did and their "...perceptions of the jobs they were in were always related to their domestic situation" (3). Child-care was reported to be the major single problem facing working migrant women.

Extensive recommendations were made in relation to the provision of child-care, literacy and English language teaching for migrant women, education and retraining opportunities, union and local government activities, the establishment of craft cooperatives, and the encouragement of part-time work.

The second study, **But I wouldn't want my wife to work here**, focused more specifically on migrant women workers and in particular on those working in factories (Storer et al 1976). Conducted in 1975 in Melbourne, it was part of an action research project which aimed at the development of "strategies which would enable (migrant women workers) to organise and come together so that they *themselves* could articulate their situation, their grievances, their needs and requirements" (i). A survey of the views and needs of 710 women working in thirty factories was conducted, as well as extensive interviews with trade unions and management, and the report went much further than **We cannot talk our rights** in providing graphic descriptions of the uncomfortable, unhealthy and unpleasant environments, regimented and inhuman work systems, appalling wages and conditions, racism, union neglect and employer abuse to which many migrant women factory workers were found to be subject.

In terms of newly arrived migrant women, the study found that the length of residence in Australia appeared to correlate with the types of industries where the women worked. More recent migrants from Yugoslavia, Turkey or South America were concentrated in the relatively more 'dirty' industries such as the meat and boot industries, cold storage and some food processing, compared to longer resident

migrant women who worked in 'cleaner' clothing, food and electrical industries (108).

Its account of shop-floor level of class struggle and its conclusions that migrant women workers are like a "dormant volcano, likely to explode at some time in the future" (114) have had a substantial public impact in terms of exposing migrant women workers' oppression and defining their problems. A number of recommendations were made; many centred on the role of trade unions as well as making demands on governments and employers. The report was written from a perspective which viewed migrant women workers first and foremost as a super-exploited section of the working class. Their oppression was seen as the result of the structural dynamics of capitalist society, and the conclusion drawn was that little could be done to improve substantially migrant women's situation without "massive reforms and changes in both the industrial field as well as in the wider Australian society" (117).

Rather than emerging from academic institutions, these seminal studies were both the product of women (and some men) working in community organisations; of people who knew or worked with migrant women in their everyday lives, albeit often in a community worker-client relationship. They are written in a style that is popular and eminently practical, and being reports, they contain only limited discussion of theoretical issues concerning migration, economic or gender relations. They are highly and unashamedly partisan and committed; written above all to prompt action to remedy the problems migrant women face. Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of the Australian literature on migrant women through the 1970s and 1980s is that most new work has continued to take this form and indeed, to emanate from the community level. In addition to the studies on outwork to be discussed below, another example of the inventive research strategies such organisations adopt is a phone-in on sexual harassment conducted among migrant women by the NSW Ethnic Communities' Council in 1981 (ECC 1981). The phone-in evoked a good response

from factory workers and cleaners who described the various types of sexual harassment to which they were subject at work, but which, in a less anonymous situation, they would have felt scared to report for fear of losing their jobs.

Outworkers

While some of the community-based studies have followed the same track as the earlier 1970s research in further documenting the oppressive situation of migrant women factory workers (see e.g. Nord), much of the more recent work has been concerned with supplementing this image with that of another: the immigrant women outworker, working in an highly exploitative situation, in her own home. While difficulties with documenting accurately the extent and nature of this type of unregulated production process remain, several studies have provided excellent accounts of the experiences of women, mainly migrants, working in this section of the underground economy (see, e.g. Flood et al 1982, TNC 1985, Cummings 1986, Centre for Working Women 1986, NSW Department of Industrial Relations and Employment [hereafter DIRE] 1987, Tassie [forthcoming] 1989).

One of the most graphic and useful studies of this type is documented in a report called **Women outworkers** by the Centre for Working Women in Melbourne. Like **But I wouldn't want my wife to work here**, the research was part of an action research project which involved the Centre working with, counselling and organising outworkers around issues of concern to them. Two earlier studies by a trade union-based research organisation in Sydney (TNC 1985 and Cummings 1986) dealt with outwork as one of the growing number of employment practices which seek to defeat or undermine the operation of industrial awards and avoid other systems for regulating work. This perspective was retained in the Centre's study where the growth of outwork was situated in the economic context of declining profitability of the Australian manufacturing industry in the 1970s and 1980s. The view that outwork represents, to some extent, an answer

to the needs of working mothers was disputed. As well as outworkers who were young mothers with small children, many of the women who contacted the Centre for assistance were older women, retrenched or injured workers and also young girls who had not been able to get an 'in-door' job on leaving school (15). Moreover, child-care was found to be as big a problem for outworkers as for factory and other workers.

The Centre's work indicated that outwork should not be seen as a temporary resort of the newly arrived; outwork was common amongst both newly arrived and older established non-English speaking background groups, although the financial insecurity associated with it posed more extreme problems for recently arrived families whose financial commitments were heavy. In an earlier study, interviews were conducted with thirty-two clothing outworkers in the Illawarra; among those the average years of residence in Australia was seven and a half years - again indicating that outwork is common among both long-settled and newer migrants (Flood et al: 18).

While most migrant women outworkers are concentrated in the clothing industry, and it has been the Clothing Union that has been most active in campaigning on their behalf (see Alcorso 1987, ACTU 1987) the belief that outworking is confined to a declining and decrepit industry must be modified in the light of some recent work. Outwork has been found to be common in a number of industries other than textiles and clothing: the Centre for Working Women found outwork to be widespread in the electrical, electronics and metal industries as well as in the packaging industry, in the food industries, as well as in the white-collar area (although the report is confined to manufacturing). While 35 per cent of the respondents to the NSW DIRE's survey were machinists in the clothing industry, the 224 women in the sample ranged across twenty-seven different occupations (13). The literature indicates that all women working from home have trouble obtaining fair pay for their work and work under worse conditions than their workplace-based counterparts; however, it is also

apparent that, as Carol O'Donnell has said: "the labour market of outworkers is segmented, as is the traditional labour market, along ethnic and educational lines" (NSW DIRE:v). The type of outwork done by migrant women is the most onerous, oppressive and exploitative; one study reported that:

almost without exception the (migrant) women presented their work as unrelieved, low paid drudgery which is often injurious to health, and involves long hours of work (ibid:37).

Another, reporting on the experiences of migrant women, found that:

most outworkers, in practice, receive no holiday pay, no long service leave, no sick pay, no workers' compensation, and lower rates of pay than factory workers doing similar work (Centre for Working Women 1986:23).

The State and knowledge about migrant women

We have referred to the strength and vitality of community-based literature about migrant women and work in Australia, and the comparative dearth of research conducted out of academic institutions. A third key contributor to the production of knowledge in this field in Australia has been the State; its role in producing knowledge about and constructing definitions of migrants has been, in Australia, a particularly vigorous one. First, governments have been a primary source of funding for research about migrant women. Secondly, they have played a role in disseminating versions of the information produced by community-level primary research. Thus, for example, an internal paper by Women's Bureau in the Federal Department of Employment and Industrial Relations outlines the 'treble disadvantage' faced by migrant women and discusses "the employment of migrant women largely in jobs which are the most repetitive, most menial and the most poorly paid, and which have some of the worst working conditions which the labour market can offer" (Neari 1984: 1). The ROMAMPAS review of government services

and programs for migrants has a section on immigrant women which states:

Immigrant women of NESB frequently experience a triple disadvantage as immigrants, as women, and because of low levels of English proficiency

and goes on to discuss their location in the work force, unemployment rates, the problems of child-care and outwork (Jupp 1986:52-3).

Other examples include reports by ethnic affairs units within State Governments (see e.g. SA Ethnic Affairs Commission 1984, WA Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission 1988; a long list of such publications is included with some discussion in Eliadis et al 1988).

While not taking us much further in understanding migrant women's work experiences, or in providing broader definitions of migrant women's work, the various reports and papers disseminated by the State play a useful role in disseminating knowledge about the problems migrant women face as workers and in maintaining some pressure within the state for the implementation of measures to overcome them.

Thirdly, the State has played a role in the production of knowledge about migrant women through providing forums for immigrant women themselves to articulate and debate their concerns. Among the most important of such assemblies have been a series of consultations held by the National Women's Advisory Council in 1978 (National Women's Advisory Council 1979), the National Conference on Immigrant Women's Issues held in 1985 (DIEA 1986) and a conference organised by FECCA on behalf of the Office of the Status of Women in 1986 (FECCA 1986). Non-governmental groups and organisations have also arranged meetings which have been an important means of drawing public attention to migrant women's issues (e.g. a national speak-out on employment and health issues organised by the Australian Council of Churches in 1982 and the two conferences organised by the Italo-Australian Women's Association); often in these cases too, however, government assistance has been a condition of success. Another mode whereby,

increasingly, migrant women's voices are being heard is that of television and radio broadcasting. Again, in this area it has been primarily the government-funded Special Broadcasting Service which, with series such as **Australian Mosaic** and the **Vox Populi**, has helped to put migrant women's issues on the national agenda. (In 1988, for example, the former included "Paying our dues", a program about the involvement, and barriers to the involvement, of migrant women workers in trade unions).

The impetus behind government-convened forums has been to overcome the historic invisibility of immigrant women's issues; in the words of one conference organiser to "draw attention to the many problems experienced by... women whose voices are not often heard and who... have little access to power and decision-making" (ACC. 1983:2). Typically, immigrant women have played the major role in organising such events. Thus, not surprisingly, a key demand to emerge from them has been for participation in the decision-making processes of governments and for representation on government and semi-governmental bodies.

Rather than seeking to create 'new' knowledge the consultations are ways of pooling and integrating existing knowledge about migrant women, including, importantly, 'common sense' knowledge emerging from the women's everyday lives. The inclusion of the views and feelings of women 'from the floor' (i.e. from the audience) in the texts from such meetings gives them a fresh and powerful style notably absent from bureaucratic and much academic literature. An example is the comment of an interpreter participating in the first Italo-Australian women's conference:

I was asked by a health professional why all those injured had names ending like mine and I answered that it was because people with names ending like his were not doing the jobs that people with names ending like mine were doing (85).

The focus of analysis characteristic of these consultations and speak-outs (one which differs

from that in research discussed earlier) is to identify and address the specific and additional disadvantages suffered by migrant women in various areas of public and personal life (compared, explicitly or implicitly to other women and migrant men). However, the view that these disadvantages are in some way a result of the women's attributes (a view that will be further discussed below) is clearly rejected. Instead, disadvantages are seen to be the result basically of the failure of the State to respond adequately to migrant women's needs. The consultations tend to take the form of dialogues with the State (though clearly the parties are unequal and the communication often distorted); to a lesser extent, audiences of trade unions, the media and sometimes churches are addressed. There is a characteristic movement in these texts; from, on the one hand, descriptions of exploitation and oppression of migrant women workers by employers and managers within capitalist work relations to, on the other, demands made to the State to effect change. An example is the account "The boss is a like a dictator" in a 1983 Speak-out where the speaker says:

the boss behaves like a petty dictator. The worker only has the right to work. If she complains she gets the following answer, "if you don't like it, go home". And so the woman is continually humiliated and degraded...(1983:9).

The recommendations from this conference on work issues, however, are mainly demands for government inquiries, service provision and legislative change. The power relations in the workplace disappear from the scene when it comes to developing a strategy for reform.

In terms of substantive reforms, work-related demands have been a major priority. Two of the four areas given priority by the 1985 National Conference focused on issues relating to women's paid work:

improved health, safety and working conditions for the female immigrant work force (DIEA 1986:18);

improved access to language, education, training and

retraining for immigrant women (ibid:22).

After reviewing the various papers, conferences, seminar proceedings, speak-outs etc where migrant women have articulated their problems and needs, Eliadis et al compiled a list of those in the area of paid work:

occupational health and safety, recognition of overseas qualifications, status and conditions of workers, training, career counselling, unions, workers' compensation, ESL on the job (11).

A More 'Optimistic' Picture?

All of the literature discussed so far emphasises the problems NES immigrant women face, their disadvantaged position in the labour market and their generally oppressed condition in Australian society. There is a poignancy in the literature and the gap between the women's expectations for a better life, a future for their children, and in the case of refugees an escape from political persecution and turmoil, and the reality of their lives in Australia: "...the problems of language and under-utilised work skills, the need to work ...and all the depression and loneliness of another country" are often contrasted (DIEA 1987: 36). Initiatives such as on the job English classes, training and retraining courses for NES women, work-based child-care and factory-based health projects have been established in response to the articulation and identification of these needs; although government action has been heavily criticised for being insufficient and inappropriate (see e.g. Eliadis et al 1988: 23-5 et passim) such initiatives nevertheless provide certain opportunities for migrant women not in place at the time of the 1970s studies discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

The only literature which presents an alternative, and more optimistic, picture of the situation of immigrant women in Australia, and which inevitably indicates other policies, are certain empiricist studies using large scale, quantitative data analyses. Produced primarily by a group of researchers based at the Australian National University, but also used notably by the Stromback, from Curtin University of

Technology, the approach relies on the statistical method of multi-variate standardisation applied to census and other data to 'control' for the influence of specific factors (e.g. years of schooling, possession of credentials) on the outcomes of different ethnic groups. As Castles has noted, "the answers of these researchers to the question of the specific problems of ethnic minorities in Australian society, is that there are no ethnic minorities and no specific problems" (1987: 20-1). Much emphasis is placed in this literature on recency of arrival, making it of particular relevance to our review. The basic argument is that most migrants do as well as can be expected given their endowments; and that whatever 'problems' exist (e.g. high unemployment rates compared to native born people with the same endowments) can be explained as a difficulty associated with settling in to a new country. Even when these problems persist for 'a large part of an immigrant's working life', they are still regarded as 'settlement' or at least 'immigrant' problems (Stromback 1988: 18).

These techniques have been applied to analysing immigrant women's situation by Mariah Evans, among others, most notably in an article in the prestigious international journal, **International Migration Review** (Evans 1984). Here, Evans concludes comfortably that:

The Australian labour market appears to be nearly blind to ethnicity, except that Mediterranean women having little education get better jobs than their Australian peers... It is likely that the labour market treats everybody about equally. In most countries where there are legal restrictions on employment... for immigrants, the potential for discrimination is much greater (1987).

Similarly, Ann Seitz, after comparing quantitative indicators of life outcomes of immigrant and native born women in Australia argues that:

the new 'trinity' of class, gender and ethnicity, often described as the triple disadvantage suffered by immigrant women, should not, perhaps, be accepted at face value (Seitz: 15).

Seitz criticises researchers involved in the work we have discussed earlier (e.g. Storer and Hargreaves) as "tending to conform to and support the prevalent and pessimistic picture" (idem).

As with the work on immigrants generally by writers such as McAllister, Kelly, Stromback and Jones, the argument hinges on the fact that some groups of NES migrant women have less 'human capital' - particularly years of education, qualifications and relevant work experience - and therefore cannot expect to do as well as their better endowed sisters in the Australian labour market. As Evans puts it: "These differences in educational attainment imply very different work opportunities. For example, even if all else were equal, many fewer Mediterranean women would be eligible for white-collar jobs learnt in school" (1984: 1073). The problem is basically with the individuals, not with society. In fact, Australian society is seen as being more than fair to these newcomers; both Evans and Seitz emphasise the fact that "immigrant women... are not necessarily financially in a worse position than comparative groups of Australian born and British women" (Seitz 1986: 15) and that some groups of NES migrant women have a greater proportion classified in censuses as 'self-employed' and 'employers' than do English speaking background (ESB) women.

This type of argument has been extensively criticised on several grounds elsewhere (see, e.g. Castles 1987, Castles and Jakubowicz 1987). Firstly, the use of statistical data is completely uncritical and the data itself is often misinterpreted. Evans' unquestioning portrayal of those in the 'self-employed' census category as 'entrepreneurs' despite the numerous accounts indicating the statistically ambiguous status of outworkers and others working in deregulated work relations (typically migrant women) and the consequent possible miscategorising of such women is a case in point. Another example is her interpretation of the interesting finding from the 1981 Census that while having children and a husband depresses labour force participation for most

women it has little effect on the participation of Mediterranean and East European women (1074). Evans concludes that these groups' work patterns are therefore little affected by child-bearing (idem); ignoring the important findings of qualitative research that indeed it is precisely the need to enter the paid work force whilst in the child-bearing period of their lives that so constrains migrant women's choices. Secondly, this type of analysis takes no account of the structural barriers that many migrants face to obtaining reward for, let alone increasing their 'human capital' in Australia. Many overseas qualifications are not recognised in Australia, particularly those from non-English speaking countries (see Castles et al 1989); many of migrants' skills and employment-relevant experience (especially those of women) are sought after by employers but do not bring the bearer high pay or status. Moreover, as many studies have emphasised, mainstream educational and training opportunities are often either not accessible to, or not relevant to, migrant men and women in Australia (see e.g. SA Ethnic Affairs Commission 1986). Thirdly, as Castles and Jakubowicz have argued, the use of this method obscures more than it reveals:

By holding specific group characteristics constant in the name of comparability... the historical recruitment of migrant labour is made meaningless. The whole point about labour recruitment is that it does not lead to migrant populations similar to the host population (19).

Although not always articulated in theoretical language, the qualitative approach of studies such as **But I wouldn't want my wife to work here** offers a useful corrective to these quantitative studies. The former emphasise the nature of the social (in particular, work and family) relations which characterise migrant women's lives in Australia; relations which, in the case of work are, by and large, found to be oppressive. By contrast, Evans and Seitz analyse ethnicity as a set of empirical characteristics which themselves produce certain consequences. While the latter approach can be used to make optimistic conclusions (for example, that migrants' problems are simply settlement

problems) it is not helpful in understanding or explaining the experiences of NES migrants in Australia.

Other Australian literature concerning immigrant women

It has not been possible in this literature review to examine all the literature on immigrant women in Australia. Omitted from the discussion so far has been the body of material on issues of particular concern to migrant women workers such as occupational health and child-care. Studies on work injury and disease, workers' compensation and child-care needs may not have migrant women as their specific focus. However, they often contain considerable information about the work conditions, problems and experiences of such women; qualitative research in these areas has often yielded valuable information about the experiences of working migrant women (see e.g. Blackett-Smith and Rubinstein 1985 and Dawson et al 1983 on work injury and Brennan and O'Donnell 1986 on child-care).

In the ethnic affairs area, too, some non-gender specific studies have contributed to knowledge of migrant women's experiences (although until recently many did not examine the specificity of women's work). A recent study on migrant workers and workers' compensation in NSW found that migrant women from certain Mediterranean countries and the Middle East were even more over-represented among seriously work-injured compensation claimants than men from the same countries (Alcorso 1988:56). One of the very few Australian studies dealing specifically with recently arrived migrants is a study of the settlement of Central and South Americans who arrived in Sydney since 1981 (Morrissey 1987). In contrast with an earlier study of Spanish speaking women in Melbourne (DIEA 1987), housing and employment were emphasised as the main problems facing new immigrants in Sydney. Lack of English language skills (the main problem identified in the Melbourne study) was seen as only one of the barriers to new Latin Americans' successful integration into the work

force. Of equal importance was the non-recognition of many of the immigrants' prior work experience, qualifications and training as both the men and the women in the sample were relatively well-educated and qualified compared to the Australian population (Morrissey 1987:47-8). The study also found that unemployment was an even greater problem for the women in the sample than for the men: the rates were 60 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. The women's desired labour force participation rate was very high at 90 per cent, confirming earlier findings of high participation among women in the years after arrival, despite concurrent family formation.

Finally, deserving of mention is the small but growing number of small-scale, ethnographic studies of women from particular ethnic communities (DIEA 1987, Elley 1988). This type of study, while inevitably drawing attention towards the characteristics of the women and away from the larger social processes in which they are involved, has the potential to allow a more holistic treatment of women's experiences, including an understanding of their pre-migration lives, and of cultural and community factors affecting the women as well as more general labour market factors. A particularly good example of this approach is the long-term work on Turkish immigrant women in Melbourne by Joy Elley (see Elley 1985 and 1988). She stresses the importance of understanding the subjective dimensions of migrants women's experiences. Advocating an ethno-specific, qualitative approach she argues that most literature "generally does not examine the relationship between work and the settlement process *as experienced by the migrant*" (1988:79 - my emphasis). She is critical of theories which see entry to the paid work force as an emancipator of migrant women, having found in her own work that "entry to the work force is only one of the many changes experienced by women who for the first time in their lives must live without the support of an extended network of female kin and in a situation in which language barriers limit their opportunities of access to, and participation in, the life of the host society" (97).