

Degree is no protection against under-employment, research shows

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Having a degree or other qualifications is no protection against under-employment in Britain, new research shows.

The British Sociological Association's conference on work, employment and society in Warwick heard today [Wednesday 4 September] that qualified women were more likely to be under-employed than unqualified ones. Qualified men were just as likely to be under-employed as unqualified ones.

Dr Surhan Cam, of School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, said that as working hours were cut during the economic slowdown, so the number of people wanting to work longer had risen to more than three and a half million by 2012, around 11% of the workforce. Most of these under-employed wanted to work at least eight hours more a week.

Dr Cam's research found that women with degrees, or O or A levels were around 40% - 50% more likely to be under-employed than those with no qualifications. The levels were the same for qualified and unqualified men.

"In Britain higher educational attainments display no impact on men but a negative effect on women," said Dr Cam. "Since the beginning of the recession, women's [underemployment](#) has gradually begun to overtake men's. We found that female workers who have GCSE grades A to C or higher qualifications are more likely to become under-employed, compared to those who have no qualifications.

"This accentuation of work-status inconsistency in the case of women is arguably attributable to a glass ceiling against their access to high-ranking occupations."

The higher rates of female under-employment contradicted suggestions that there was "more preparedness among women for less work due to, among other reasons, family commitment and self-fulfilment," said Dr Cam.

Dr Cam said that in other EU countries the better educated were less likely to be under-employed, because they were much more likely to be working as managers or technical staff, and these professions had lower rates of under-employment across Europe, including Britain.

But in Britain the rapid expansion of education had given so many people qualifications that many of them were in non-professional jobs, which had higher rates of under-employment.

Dr Cam said that rates of under-employment were higher overall for women (13%) than men (9%), and were higher in the private sector, particularly among hotel and catering workers (almost 20% for women working in this area).

His analysis of UK Labour Force Survey data on 5,600 under-employed men and [women](#) – defined as those in work who want to work longer hours – also showed that rates were higher among part-time workers, but that around 6% of full-time workers wanted to work longer hours.

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