

The Working Experiences of Tradeswomen in the Australian Construction Industry

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Background

The presence of tradeswomen in the Australian construction industry remains extremely low. Fewer than two percent of construction tradespeople in Australia are female and this trend has continued for the last 30 years¹.

Research Aim and Objectives

This study aims to examine the working experiences of tradeswomen in the Australian construction industry. The specific objectives are:

- to identify the major types of construction trades and trades services of tradeswomen;
- to examine factors that influenced tradeswomen's career choice to work in construction trades;
- to explore the career barriers faced by tradeswomen and strategies to overcome barriers; and
- to examine the overall job satisfaction of tradeswomen in their construction trades career.

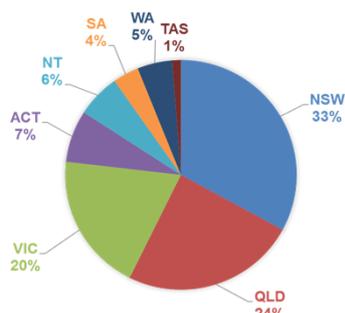
Research Method

An online questionnaire was distributed to construction tradeswomen via the Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen (SALT) and the Lady Tradies Australia organizations. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tests were used to analyse the responses from 85 ($n = 85$) construction tradeswomen.

Key Findings

Demographic characteristics of respondents:

- Sixty-one (71.8%) respondents were below 40 years old.
- About 90% had post-secondary education in TAFE colleges and universities.
- Sixty-six (78.6%) respondents are licensed tradeswomen.
- Forty-five (53.6%) respondents have been working in construction trades between 2 and 10 years, while about another one-third (31%) between 11 and 20 years.
- About half (55%) of the respondents worked between 21 and 40 hours per week, and the second largest group (35.5%) worked between 41 and 60 hours per week.
- In terms of annual income, about one third (32.9%) earned up to 40k, nineteen (22.4%) respondents between 41 and 60k, and the remaining were distributed quite evenly into three annual income levels: 61k to 80k (14.1%), 81k to 100k (15.3%), and above 100k (15.3%).
- Distribution of the respondents across Australian states and territories is shown below:



Types of construction trades and trades services

- The top three trades are electrical ($n = 30$); carpentry and joinery ($n = 18$); and plumbing ($n = 10$).
- In terms of the top three types of trades services, fifty-one (60%) respondents were employed by firms; twenty-three (27%) of them were self-employed; and five (6%) were in family business.

Factors that influenced tradeswomen's career choice

- The four key influential factors with mean values of above 4 (out of 5):
 - ✓ opportunity to develop new skills and abilities;
 - ✓ opportunity to complete challenging tasks;
 - ✓ self-derived motivation; and
 - ✓ personal interest in construction trades.
- The three least influential factors with mean values of below 2 (out of 5):
 - ✓ family business in construction trades;
 - ✓ friend influence; and
 - ✓ media advertising.

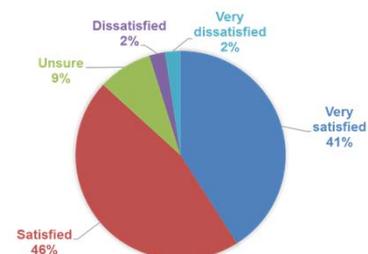


Career barriers and strategies to overcome barriers

- Out of the sixteen barriers identified, two were considered 'somewhat a barrier' with mean values of above 3 (out of 5):
 - ✓ discrimination in hiring; and
 - ✓ male-dominated culture in the industry.
- The other barriers that were considered 'somewhat not a barrier' include: sexual harassment, negative attitudes of male co-workers, physical strength, and barriers related to working conditions (for e.g., long working hours, changing work location, and fewer career support).
- Respondents adopted multiple strategies to overcome barriers; where the three most cited strategies are: adapting to the present industry environment ($n = 54$); completing more trades qualifications ($n = 38$); and getting supports via family and friends' informal networks ($n = 39$).

Overall job satisfaction

- The respondents' overall level of job satisfaction increases with their annual income (i.e., a statistically significant positive correlation).
- The overall level of job satisfaction of respondents is shown below:



- Sixty-eight (80%) respondents indicated that they would stay in their construction trades jobs for the next five years.

Conclusion

- The respondents appreciated the opportunities for personal development offered by trades jobs and they had not experienced too many career barriers.
- Most of them had high level of overall job satisfaction, which was positively associated with their annual income level, but not other demographic variables including age, working hours per week, years of experience in construction trades.
- The suggestive evidence on positive working experiences among the construction tradeswomen is a welcome finding that could provide a fresh stimulus to current initiatives to promote and recruit women into construction trades in Australia and other regions of similar institutional structure in the construction industry.