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## International Women's Day: insecure work is the hidden driver of the gender pay gap, say unions

Better pay, paid parental leave and equal opportunity laws are important advancements but cannot alone reverse the deep-rooted inequity that women continue to face at work, say unions.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said International Women's Day was an important time to consider the challenges Australian women still faced at work, despite recent improvements.

She said the fundamental root of ongoing gender inequality was that too many women were trapped in insecure work.

"It is true that without these essential rights and protections, Australian women would be well and truly left behind, but unfortunately these things are not alone the answer to eliminating inequality," she said.

"The gap between a man and woman's income is still too high, at 17.6%, and is a very real beast preying on women's lives. The gap continues to exist for many reasons – a lack of value of what is seen as women's work, the fact men are more likely to ask for a pay rise and the reality that women often work less hours than men once they have children, to name just a few.

"Importantly, a hidden driver of the pay gap is the lack of options for women to balance their work and family commitments - forcing them into low paid, low skilled and often insecure work. The thousands of employers who perpetuate the problem by hiring under insecure terms know it – and they don't want anything done about it."

Ms Kearney said employers wrongly claimed women liked this type of work because it meant they could work casual hours and balance the job with family responsibilities. But she said the reality was women in insecure work did not have sick pay, annual leave and job security and often only learned of roster changes a week or days ahead of time.

According to ABS statistics, almost one third of all women workers are engaged as casuals and a significant proportion of these work irregular and unpredictable hours.

"A lack of family friendly work arrangements, forcing many women into insecure work and the lack of rights that goes along with it, is a real driver of inequality," Ms Kearney said.

Ms Kearney said she hoped this year's major win by unions for equal pay in the community and social services sector would help address the problem, just like paid parental leave last year was a major step forward.

"And the recent moves by the Government to introduce the new Workplace Gender Equality Act will mean minimum standards and performance benchmarks will be developed in consultation with industry, unions and experts," she said.

"We applaud all these things but if we want to address the gender pay gap then we have to ensure women in insecure work have the entitlements and rights afforded to those in permanent work."

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