

# Management Progression and Ambition: Women and Men in Social Work

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## **Abstract**

*Explanations for the disproportionate under-representation of women managers in social services focus either on discrimination in appointment practices and/or career development, or emphasise the disadvantages faced by women because of family and caring responsibilities. It has also been suggested that women are less committed to career progression than men. Using data from the 1994 National Institute for Social Work (NISW) Workforce Surveys, this paper examines differences in management progression and management ambition between women and men who had been in field social work for a minimum of five years. Analysis found that differences between women and men in management progression arise at the brink of entry to first-line management mainly because of part-time working and women's absence from the workforce during their thirties, identified as a critical age for promotion. These findings support theories which stress the constraint of women's caring responsibilities on career progression. At the same time, the findings also pointed to the existence of an organisational culture in which it was unusual for men not to have any management ambition whereas many women were committed to direct work with clients rather than to management progression.*

## **Introduction**

Women are at the heart of the statutory social services workforce. Yet although they predominate numerically, they are under-represented in management, especially middle and senior positions. This issue has received considerable attention, not least because women are the main providers and also the main users of services and yet policy and decision-making lie primarily with men. Apart from the inequity of this situation, it has been pointed out that the under-representation of women at senior levels wastes skills and experience and potentially may fail to recognise the needs of women users (Social Services Inspectorate, 1991). Despite the implementation of equal opportunities policies and procedures in the 1980s and 1990s, this situation has continued. In 1996, across the UK, there were 192 social services authorities, of which 39 were directed by women (Social Services Inspectorate, 1997).

The primary explanations offered for women's under-representation in management in social services echo those given for other occupations, although there is limited research on field social workers. The explanations are discussed in detail elsewhere (Davey et al., 2000) and are outlined briefly here. The first emphasises direct discrimination in the ways women are appointed and developed in their careers, focusing on barriers in the workplace, whether real or perceived, where women are subject to discrimination by an organisational culture in which equal opportunities

policies are subverted (Social Services Inspectorate, 1991; Taylor, 1994). The second explanation is based on gender differences in employment patterns associated with women's lack of qualifications and experiences and/or their family roles (Ginn and Sandell, 1997). These explanations have been used to illuminate women's 'failure' to reach senior management in a wide variety of public and private organisations (Crompton, 1997; Evetts, 1994a). Research has focused in particular on the negative effects of taking career breaks for childbearing and working part-time (Dex, 1987; Joshi and Newall, 1987).

Generally, interpretations of the research evidence have emphasised the structural and cultural constraints on the career progression of women, especially a gender ideology within which women still carry the main responsibility for children and where, in Britain at least, there is limited state childcare provision. A more recent theory has emphasised the role of agency and argued that women's preferences and choices are key factors in determining career outcomes (Hakim, 1996; Hakim, 1998). Hakim has developed a threefold typology of women in relation to work as a central life goal; home-centred, adaptives and work-centred. Of the latter two types of working women, the minority work-centred group are 'committed' to a career, always give priority to career plans over family considerations and plan to work across the lifecycle. On the other hand, 'adaptives', the largest category of women 'want to work but are not totally committed to a work career' (Hakim, 1998:138). This group

incorporates women who want to balance work and family life in various ways, including working part-time and taking career breaks. Reviewing studies in the U.S. and Europe, Hakim determines 'commitment' from questions asking whether respondents would continue to work if financial necessity were removed. Working part-time is also a demonstration that women are 'uncommitted' to a work career. She also argues that in general men reach senior management positions in greater numbers than women because they are more ambitious (Hakim, 1996).

Hakim's preference theory has been heavily criticised as follows. The heterogeneity of women in employment preferences is not denied nor the contention that women make choices. Choices, however, are never exercised in the abstract but are constrained by structural and organizational factors, for example, available options in terms of employment or good quality childcare. Moreover, preferences are not fixed and women's aspirations and working patterns may vary over the life cycle, depending on their family and caring circumstances (Ginn, et al., 1996; Ginn and Sandell, 1997; Crompton and Harris, 1998a; Proctor and Padfield, 1999). Hakim does not deny that preferences are constrained by social structures but argues that sex-role preferences are *the* key determinant of work behaviour (Hakim, 1998). The counter argument is that preferences are not the major independent variable explaining employment patterns (Crompton and Harris, 1998b). Crompton and Harris demonstrate the complexity of work orientations of women doctors and bankers to warn against reducing explanations of women's employment behaviour to the choices of 'types' of women (Crompton and Harris, 1998a).

Another strand of criticism has focused on the definition of commitment. It is argued that the commitment concept is a social construction that can have multiple meanings, and is often gendered. Defining commitment to work as a central life goal by using hours worked and measures of 'paid work as key life interest' provides only a partial representation of the nature of commitment. The use of the masculine job model of a continuous, linear career as the norm negates the work commitment of women whose careers follow a

different pattern because of family and caring responsibilities (Healy, 1999). Women continue to be disproportionately responsible for the home and family and this does not mean that commitment to family life precludes commitment to paid work and it should not be assumed that only one commitment is possible, especially in relation to women.

Crompton and Sanderson draw a distinction between organisational/linear careers which can lead to management and practitioner/occupational careers, where women are often concentrated, the latter including part-time employment and career breaks (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). Within social work, it has been argued that perceptions of roles have served to limit women's advancement, where the practitioner task of caring is seen as suitable for women, and management with its imperative of control is perceived as a role for men (Grimwood and Popplestone, 1993), even though the nature of front-line social work itself can involve tasks of both care and control. The tension between ideas of management and ethics of care and assistance has been long debated in social work (Jones and Hearn, 1981; Cousins, 1987), and it has been suggested that the rise of managerialism in the public sector has increased the contradictions (Hearn, 2000). Many social workers find contact with clients a rewarding aspect of the job and the reason they chose to enter social work and would not wish to relinquish the people-centred aspect for what may be regarded as managerial, administrative roles, especially in senior management. Therefore, staying in a practitioner role may be one way women have managed the balance between work and home in many occupations but it may represent a different type of commitment in social work. This aspect of commitment has been defined elsewhere as occupational commitment, common to caring professions such as social work, nursing and teaching, resulting in a primary attachment to the profession itself (Dex, 1990; Healy, 1999).

The vocational aspect of this type of commitment requires a dedication to front-line working with clients, often in tension with a single-minded pursuit of career progression into management. Yet in the main, it is field social work that supplies the entrants to middle and senior management in

the statutory social services (Lawler, 1993; Andrew, 1999) and for this reason, these staff are the focus of the following examination of management progression and ambition. Using data from a unique study of the statutory social services workforce, the paper suggests factors influencing the differential rate of management progression between women and men and explores gender differences in ambition to reach management. Various reasons why staff do not seek management positions are also discussed.

### Research Methods

The longitudinal studies of the statutory social services workforce in five social services departments in England, two in Scotland and all four boards in Northern Ireland were funded by the Department of Health and undertaken by the National Institute for Social Work (NISW). Interviews took place in early 1994 with second interviews in early 1996. Respondents were asked about their current job and work histories since first job in social care. Respondents fitted four general occupation categories of manager, field social work, residential work and home care. A more detailed account is available in Balloch et al. (1999). This paper is concerned only with those staff who had been in a field social work position (up to and including first-line manager) in 1988 to assess career progression until interview. Because of the small numbers of men in social care, men were over-sampled in the studies and the data subsequently weighted to reflect the true proportions in the social services population, i.e. 70% women and 30% men. Thus the unweighted numbers of men are much higher than the weighted, allowing a more reliable interpretation to be placed on the findings than might appear from the weighted numbers reported in the text.

Field social workers were defined as those located in the community, not in a residential setting. Using the job titles given by respondents, staff were classified into groups to create large enough cell sizes to undertake useful analyses as follows.

*Other field staff* - included social work assistants, community care assistants, community workers, welfare rights workers and project workers, generally unqualified.

*Field social workers* - included social workers and senior social workers who did not manage other staff.

*First-line managers* - comprised senior social workers who manage staff, assistant team leaders and team leaders.

*Senior managers* - were defined as any of the following: area managers, senior support staff, registration and inspection officers, training officers, advisors and planners through to divisional directors and directors of social services.

The time period was chosen for the following reasons. First, only three per cent of staff were promoted between first and second interviews. Second, five years was considered a reasonable length of time to examine progression to first-line and higher levels of management, allowing for variations in length of service. Third, it would be expected that staff would also have a fairly accurate level of recall over that period. For the rest of this paper, interview refers to the first interview in 1994. Work history files were used to select all those who were in field social work grades up to team leader level in 1988 (although they may have been in these grades before that date, giving a total sample of unweighted (n) 463 respondents and weighted (base) 372.

Table 1 shows how the concept of management progression has been measured, using field social work grade held in 1988 and job held at interview. A move from any non-managerial grade in 1988 to a managerial one in 1994, or from a first-line managerial post to a higher first-line or senior managerial grade is considered as management progression.

Questions relating to ambition to manage were asked at first interview. Management was defined as management of staff.

The multivariate analysis undertaken for this paper was in the form of a series of logistic regression models. Logistic regression directly estimates the probability of an event occurring, in this case, management progression. The odds ratio in these models is the probability of management progression compared to the probability of not

<b>Table 1 Definition of management progression</b>		
<b>Social work grade in 1988</b>	<b>Recoded 1988 social work category</b>	<b>Management progression: Grade reached by 1994</b>
Unqualified social worker/social work assistant/welfare worker/rehab worker/youth worker	'Other field work staff'	Senior social worker managing staff, assistant team leader, team leader or any senior management grade; <i>plus</i> Assistant day centre manager Day centre manager Assistant officer-in-charge of a residential home Officer-in charge of a residential home Assistant home care organiser Home care organiser
Field social worker	Field social worker	Senior social worker managing staff, assistant team leader, team leader or any senior management grade
Senior social worker not managing staff	Field social worker	Senior social worker managing staff, assistant team leader, team leader or any senior management grade
Senior social worker managing staff	First-line manager	Assistant team leader, team leader or any senior management grade
Assistant team leader	First-line manager	Team leader or any senior management grade
Team leader	First-line manager	Any senior management grade

progressing. Odds of 1 indicate an even chance of management progression. For each independent variable, the odds ratios are related to a particular reference category, whose ratio is defined as 1. The difference between each odds ratio and its reference category compares the effect of that category of the variable on probability of management progression with the effect of the reference category. Ninety-five per cent confidence intervals are shown in the models to allow observation of the magnitude of the effects and the precision with which the effect is estimated. Therefore, we can be 95% confident that the population odds ratio lies within the range given. It follows then that the narrower the range, the more precise the estimate. The difference in -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) is shown as each variable enters the model. This allows an estimate of the change in the goodness of fit of the model at each step. The larger the difference in -2LL, the greater the contribution of that variable to the goodness of fit of the model.

*Differences Between Women and Men in Management Progression*

Women were under-represented in first-line management in 1988 as shown in Table 2. Twenty per cent of the sample were first-line managers, 34% of men but only 15% of women. The majority of staff, 65%, were in the middle level field social worker category, with proportionately more women than men (70% cf 52%). Similar proportions of women and men, 15%, were at the lowest level.

Seventy per cent of staff, similar proportions of women and men, had changed job. For men this was more likely to be to a higher grade, whereas this was not the case for women. Sixty per cent of men who had a job change had been promoted or had taken a more senior job but this was true for only 44% of women.

Twenty eight per cent of the sample had moved into first-line or more senior managerial grades over the period. It would be expected that there would be differential rates of progression into management by job category with those in the lowest grades the least likely to reach managerial

Field social work category	Women %	Men %	All %
First-line manager	15	34	20
Field social worker (incl. senior social workers not managing staff)	70	52	65
Other field work staff	15	15	15
<b>All %</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>base</i>	262	110	372

positions in that period. This was the case with 15% of these staff, compared with 28% of field social workers reaching management. Overall, differences in progression between women and men were significant, 40% men compared with 23% of women (Chisq 10.688; df 1;  $p \leq 0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.17$ ). However, Table 3 shows that when gender differences are examined within job grade, it is mainly at field social worker level that men were more likely to move to management. There was no evidence of any differences between women and men first-line managers in advancing to higher levels.

Similar proportions of women and men first-line managers moved to senior management over the period, although numbers were too small to be conclusive (11 and 12 respectively). Again, it was at field social worker level where differences arose, with 9% of men and 3% of women moving to senior management, although numbers were small (6 and 5).

It has been shown that at the 1988 starting point, proportionately twice as many men as women were in first-line management positions. There is no evidence that this inequality in representation had been addressed by developing and promoting more women staff into management over the period. If there were, it would be expected that proportionately more women than men would have progressed into first-line and senior managerial grades. The over-representation of men in first-line management in 1988 and the fact that more

	Women %	Men %	Significance	All %
<b>First-line manager</b>				
Progressed	37	39		38
Did not progress	63	61		62
<i>base</i>	38	36	Chisq 0.33 df1 ns Cramer's $V=.02$	74
<b>Field social worker</b>				
Progressed	22	46		28
Did not progress	78	54		72
<i>base</i>	184	57	Chisq 11.635 df1 *** Cramer's $V=.23$	241
<b>Other field staff</b>				
Progressed	14	18		15
Did not progress	86	83		85
<i>base</i>	40	16	+ns Cramer's $V=.04$	56

ns=not significant \*= $p \leq 0.05$  \*\*= $p \leq 0.01$  \*\*\*= $p \leq 0.001$   
+based on Fisher's Exact Test

male field social workers than similar women had moved to management grades meant that by 1994 more than half of men in the sample, 55%, were first-line or senior managers compared with only one-third of women. Figure 1 shows these differences. By 1994, 39% of the 1988 sample were managers, with nine per cent reaching senior management. Thirty nine per cent of men were still working at or had advanced to first-line level compared with 26% of women. Sixteen per cent of men had reached senior management compared with 7% of women.

**Figure 1 Management positions at interview: percentages by gender**



women - base 262  
men - base 110

Therefore, differences between women and men can partly be accounted for by the fact that twice as many men as women were in first-line management in 1988. Examination of progression by field social work grade also showed that male field social workers were significantly more likely to progress into management, including senior levels, than similar women. These two factors meant that by 1994, for this cohort, differences between men and women in management status had increased.

**Factors Influencing Management Progression**

It is important to establish why women field social workers were less likely than men to move into the first levels of management, especially if, as the data suggest, once women reach first-line management, they are as likely to progress as men. Moreover, findings from a postal survey of qualified social workers suggest that as women advance, they become more ambitious (Lyons, et al., 1992). This section examines other factors that may be influential based on explanations that focus on differences in working patterns of women because of their family roles, and/or lack of qualifications.

Caring responsibilities of staff in 1988 cannot be accurately determined. However, relevant factors

available for examination are age, hours of work, career breaks, qualifications and work experience. The women and men in this sample were equally qualified. Ninety five per cent of first line managers and 91% of field social workers held a social work qualification. The main gender differences were apparent in age distribution, hours of work and career breaks. They are described briefly followed by the findings from logistic regression modelling to illuminate the most influential factors.

*Age and work experience*

Mean ages in 1988 were similar for women and men, although women's showed a greater variation, 36.1 years (SD±8.2; range 22-59) and 36.4 years (SD±6.8; range 23-58) respectively. Management progression for both women and men was more likely for those aged in their thirties. At least half of men aged in this age group made a management career move over the period, 50% of those aged 31-35 and 52% of those 36-40. This compares with one-third of women in these age groups, 31% aged 31-35 and 35% aged 36-40. Management progression was less likely for younger staff, aged 30 and under, and here there was very little difference between women and men (19% and 22% respectively). Staff aged over 40, however, were also less likely to be promoted. This was especially the case for women, with only

12% moving to first-line management or higher compared with 26% of men. The data suggest that for this cohort at least, the thirties are the 'golden years' for promotion. However, there were proportionately fewer women than men in this age group, 45% compared with 60%, suggesting that women are out of the workforce at the time of greatest career opportunity. This may explain some of the difference in work experience where for women, there was a slightly smaller mean but a wider variation than for men, 9.54 years (SD±6.17) and 10.22 years (SD±4.98) respectively.

#### *Hours worked and career breaks*

In 1988, 22% of women worked part-time compared with only three per cent of men. All were working as field social workers or other field work staff. All women first-line managers were working full-time. Only 10% (6) of part-time staff had made a management career move compared with 32% of those working full-time.

Seven per cent of women (17) and no men had taken a career break over the period for either maternity leave or to look after their families, with all but three resuming work on a part-time basis. Only three women who had taken a career break had progressed in management and they had been working part-time both in 1988 and at interview. Because of the high correlation with part-time working, the career break variable is not included in the multivariate analysis.

#### *Multivariate analysis*

A series of logistic regression models were undertaken to estimate the likelihood of management progression taking these variables into account. Length of service was omitted because of its negligible and insignificant contribution and relatively high correlation with age (Pearson's  $r = .65$ ;  $p <= 0.01$ ). A key concern is to identify whether gender is an influential factor once working patterns, age and qualifications are accounted for. Table 4 shows odds ratios, significance levels, 95% confidence levels and changes in  $-2 \text{ Log Likelihood } (-2LL_{\text{diff}})$  as each variable was entered into the model. These terms are explained in the Research Methods section.

Table 4 shows that age was the most important factor associated with management progression

( $-2LL_{\text{diff}} = 33.79$  df 3,  $p <= 0.001$ ) with those aged 31-35 years and those aged 36-40 years more than twice as likely (odds ratios of 2.34 and 2.36 respectively) to progress to first line management and higher than the reference group of staff aged 30 and under. Those aged over 40 were no more likely than the youngest age group to advance in their management careers. This confirms that for this group of staff the thirties are a crucial period for career progression, particularly important for women given the under-representation of women in this age group.

The next most influential factor was social work qualifications ( $-2LL_{\text{diff}} = 17.1$  df 1,  $p <= 0.01$ ) with qualified staff three times (odds ratio 3.00) as likely to advance in their management careers as those who were unqualified. This does not explain differences between women and men in management progression because they were similarly qualified in 1988 and gained qualifications in similar proportions, 34%, over five years.

The hours staff worked were statistically significant in the model but made the smallest contribution ( $-2LL_{\text{diff}} = 9.21$  df 1,  $p <= 0.05$ ). Staff working full-time were nearly two and a half times as likely (odds ratio 2.46) as those working part-time to reach first line management positions or higher. In relation to the field social work category, the model shows that field social workers were 28% less likely to advance in their management careers as first-line managers (odds ratio .72 cf. odds ratio 1.00). This difference, however, did not reach statistical significance. Of interest, though, is that one quarter of women field social workers were working part-time and of these, more than half were aged 31-40, the age when management progression is most likely to occur. These factors may go some way towards explaining differences in management progression between women and men at this grade.

Once age, social work qualification and hours worked were taken into consideration, the gender differential was small and non-significant and there is, therefore, insufficient evidence of direct discrimination against women. Although women were under-represented in management at the starting point, as shown in Table 1, the data

<b>Table 4 Management progression between 1988 and 1994</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>-2LL<sub>diff</sub></b>	<b>odds ratio</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>95% CIs</b>
<b>Gender</b>	6.53 df 1			
Men		1.00		
Women		.90		.58 - 1.40
<b>Field social work category</b>	1.90 df 2			
First line manager		1.00		
Field social worker		.72		.44 - 1.18
Other field staff		.82		.34 - 2.08
<b>Hours worked</b>	9.21 df 1		+	
Part-time		1.00		
Full-time		2.46	*	1.17 - 5.20
<b>Social Work Qualification</b>	17.1 df 1		++	
Not Qualified		1.00		
Qualified		3.00	**	1.36 - 6.58
<b>Age in 1988</b>	33.79 df 3		+++	
30 and under		1.00		
31-35		2.34	**	1.24 - 4.41
36-40		2.36	**	1.24 - 4.50
over 40		.78		.40 - 1.53
<i>base</i>	372			
n	463			
-2LL null	599.473			
-2LL final	536.745			
Model chisq	62.728 df 8 p<=0.001			
Prediction success (%)	69.33			

Odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals from logistic regression using ENTER method  
 +Significance of variable in the model: += p<=0.05, ++=p<=0.01, +++=p<=0.001  
 \*Significance of difference from reference category: \*= p<=0.05, \*\*=p<=0.01, \*\*\*=p<=0.001

suggest that a woman who was aged 31-40 in 1988, holding a social work qualification and working full-time was as likely to progress in management during the five year period as a man with similar characteristics. For staff who had been working in field social work for a minimum of five years, women were more likely than men to be absent from the workforce during their thirties,

the most likely reason being childcare responsibilities, but there is no direct observation of the current family situation of those who have left. This career interruption and part-time working, especially at the brink of entry to first-line management, support theories which suggest women's working patterns due to family responsibilities as an explanation of women's



'failure' to achieve career success in terms of management progression. The management aspirations of staff at the start of their careers are beyond the scope of the work history data. However, questions relating to management ambitions were asked at interview in 1994 and this issue is explored next for the same sample.

### Management Aspirations

At interview, staff were asked whether their job currently involved managing the work of others. In 1994, 44% of the sample said that it did, 59% of men but only 38% of women.

Twenty per cent of staff, similar proportions of women and men, said they were looking after or giving special help to an older, disabled or sick person. A small number of women, three per cent, spent 20 hours or more per week caring but no men had this type of responsibility. Overall, 40% of women and 48% of men had children aged under 13. Three per cent of all women in the sample were lone parents. Numbers were too small to include them as a separate category. As would be expected, for women part-time working was strongly associated with having young children with 76% of those working part-time having children aged under 13. Table 5 shows the association between age of youngest child at home and women's working hours.

Age of youngest child	Full-time %	Part-time %	Total sample %	<i>base</i>
No children at home	93	7	51	132
0-4 years	62	38	23	59
5-12 years	35	65	17	43
13-20 years	73	27	9	24
<b>All (%)</b>	74	26	100	259

The majority of women who had no children at home (93%) and almost three-quarters with the youngest child aged 13-20 years were working full-time. Fewer women with their youngest child

aged under 5 worked full-time although the majority did (62%). The majority, 92%, of women in this group were aged between 31 and 40 at interview. Where the youngest child was of school age but still young enough to require care after school, 5 - 12 years, only 35% of women were working full-time. However, this group were older with 54% aged over 40.

One quarter of women were working part-time in 1994. From 1988 until interview, 24% of women part-timers had changed to working full-time and ten per cent of full-timers had changed to part-time, an indication of the way women's patterns of working may change over the life-cycle depending on caring responsibilities. Only a small minority of women, three per cent worked part-time but had neither children aged under 13 nor were carers. All were in a non-managerial position.

Non-managerial staff were asked if they would be interested in moving to a job involving the management of staff and if not, asked to give their reasons from a set of options derived from pilot interviews. Caution must be exercised in interpretation of some of the findings because of the small weighted number of men non-managers, 44, although the unweighted number is 77.

The majority of men, 69% (30), expressed an interest (fairly or very interested) in moving to a position managing staff compared with only 40% of women (Chisq 11.248;  $df1; p \leq 0.001$ ; Cramer's V.24). Only a very small number of men completely rejected the idea of moving to a staff management role, 11% (5) said they were not at all interested compared with 28% of women. This means that for this cohort, 87% of men were either managers or were interested in becoming managers compared to 63% of women.

One explanation for the difference in management ambition was age. Women non-managers were older than similar men with 33% of women aged 45 and over at interview compared with one-quarter of men. For men, age was not associated with interest in management but it was for women. Fifty one per cent of women aged under 45 said they would be interested in moving to management but only 22% aged 45 and over (Chisq 13.000;  $df1; p \leq 0.001$ ; Cramer's V.29).

There were significant differences in ambition between women who worked full-time compared with those working part-time. Forty seven per cent of full-time women said they were interested in becoming a manager compared to 26% of those working part-time (Chisq 6.212; df1;  $p \leq 0.05$ ; Cramer's V.20). Being a carer did not appear to have an individual effect for either women or men, although numbers were too small to allow for the influence of intensity of caring. For men, having a young child at home was not significantly associated with interest in management. This was not the case for women, where those most interested were women with their youngest child at home aged 13 or over, and childcare no longer needed, although numbers were small.

**Table 6 Management ambition of women non-managers 1994: per cent (row) by age of youngest child**

Age of youngest child	Interested in management %	Not interested in management %	Total %	base
No children at home	34	66	52	83
0-4 years	56	45	20	32
5-12 years	25	75	16	26
13-20 years	66	35	12	18
<b>All (%)</b>	40	60	100	159

Table 6 shows that two-thirds of this group of women were interested in moving to management, whereas the least interested were those with a young child aged 5-12 (25%) More than half of women (56%) with a child aged under 5 years were interested. Surprisingly, only one-third of women with no children at home said they were interested in moving to management. Closer examination reveals, however, that this can be explained by age. In this group of women, 50% (20) of women aged under 45 had management ambition compared to 19% (8) of those aged 45 and over (Chisq 8.712; df1;  $p \leq 0.01$ ; Cramer's V .32).

To summarise, men seem to see their careers in terms of management regardless of their domestic circumstances or age. For women, however, the situation is more complex. Women were less ambitious than men especially if working part-time. It is not possible to establish whether women had similar career ambitions to men when they entered social work. However, the data does suggest that women's management aspirations vary depending on age, hours worked and childcare responsibilities. Whether women work part-time or not is in general associated with caring responsibilities, especially where children are aged under 13. Part-time working is in the main associated with the age of youngest child at home, especially when the child is of primary school age and this is reflected in management ambition of women in this group. Proportionately more women with a youngest child aged under 5 were working full-time and were more likely to have management ambition than women with a youngest child of primary school age. This may be due to difficulties in arranging satisfactory childcare after school, or may be a reflection of a more continuous career pattern of women with children under 5. Women in this group were younger, all were aged in their thirties at interview, already identified as the years when management promotion was most likely. Whether or not women had childcare responsibilities, those aged 45 and over were less ambitious than women who were younger, a particular concern for this cohort, where non-managerial women were older than similar men.

Staff were asked to select the reasons why they would not be interested in moving to management from a set of statements. Table 7 shows percentages given by men, women working full-time and women working part-time.

The main difference between women working full-time and men was the choice of 'I would have to make too many compromises' with a majority of men selecting this compared with less than one-quarter of women. Sixty two per cent of men selected the reason 'not wanting to toe the management line', compared with less than half of women. All of these men also gave 'too many compromises' as a reason. This and the fact that male social workers are in the minority suggests

**Table 7 Reasons for not wanting to move into management 1994**

Reason	Women	Women	Men
	part-time %	full-time %	%
I would not want to toe the management line	44	48	62
I would have to make too many compromises	22	22	66*
I wouldn't want the responsibility	39	34	30
It would mean work becoming too dominant in my life	79	37	37
I would have to get qualifications	8	6	2
I don't have the skills to do it	15	10	2
Direct work with clients is what I enjoy most	87	89	83
<i>base</i>	38	55	14

\* $p < 0.05$  based on Fisher's Exact test

that for this cohort, most men who are not interested in becoming a manager perceive themselves in a particular way, as uncompromising and different from men who become managers.

However, liking working directly with clients was the reason given by the majority of women and the few men not interested in management. More than 80% of non-managerial women and men gave this as an explanation. Although the reasons offered cannot capture the complexity of different working patterns and family responsibilities, the main difference between women working full-time and part-time was choosing 'work would become too dominant'. Nearly 80% of part-time workers selected this compared with 37% of women working full-time, a similar proportion to men. Yet similar proportions of men, 30%, and women (full-time and part-time, 34% and 39% respectively) said that they did not want the responsibility. One possible explanation for this is that for many part-time workers, it is not the responsibility of managing staff that is a problem but that they would have to work full-time hours to do it. Ninety per cent (28) of part-time staff who

selected 'work would become too dominant' also selected a preference for working directly with clients, suggesting that they may have reduced their time commitment but still had a vocational commitment.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Analysis of differences between women and men in field social work will always be problematic because of the disproportionate representations of women and men in this field. This means that samples for women and men will always be unequal and where the sample sizes are not overly large, as in this case, the cell sizes for sub-groups of men will be very small, leading to large standard errors for these groups in analysis. Often there may not be enough sensitivity in the design of these studies to detect actual differences that exist between women and men in upward mobility for various sub-groups of staff. In this analysis, five years was chosen as the period over which to explore management progression. This period is of course essentially arbitrary and differences between women and men in management progression would vary depending on the chosen period of time.

Subject to these caveats, based on staff interviewed in 1994 who had been in field social work grades since 1988 or earlier, twice as many men as women, were in first-line management positions at the 1988 starting point and by 1994, more than half of the men were in first-line and senior management positions compared with only one-third of women. Therefore the under-representation of women in management had not been addressed by developing and promoting more women managers. There was no evidence to suggest, however, that women who were already at first-line management level were any less likely than their male colleagues to advance to higher levels of management, including senior positions, although caution must be exercised because numbers were small. Numbers were also too small to identify whether men had reached higher management grades than women. However, differences between women and men in management progression were most evident at the brink of entry to first-line management, at field social worker level.

Multivariate analysis revealed that staff working full-time were more likely than those working part-time to reach first-line management and higher. In 1988, all women first-line managers were working full-time whereas one-quarter of women field social workers were working part-time, explaining some of the difference between women and men at this grade. The two other influential factors revealed by multivariate analysis were age and holding a social work qualification. Equal proportions of women and men field social workers held a social work qualification so this did not explain the differential rate of advancement between women and men. Age was the most influential factor and did account for some of the differences between women and men. Staff aged in their thirties were the most likely to progress into management yet fewer women than men were in this age group, suggesting that women were more likely than men to be absent from the workforce during the crucial years for promotion. It can be surmised, though not demonstrated, that this absence is due to childbearing and childcare responsibilities. These findings lend support to theories explaining women's lack of career progression by working patterns due to childbearing and caring responsibilities rather than direct discrimination.

This does not answer whether women are as committed to career progression as men. At interview, only 40% of non-managerial women were interested in moving to management compared to 70% of men. However, women's management aspirations varied depending on their childcare responsibilities. Most women worked full-time except those where the youngest child at home was aged 5-12 years, where only a third did so and this was reflected in the lower management ambition of these women, with only one quarter expressing an interest. Women with a youngest child at home aged 13 and over were the most likely to say they would want to move to a management post. This finding suggests that women's aspirations change over the life cycle depending on their caring responsibilities. However, a surprising proportion of women with a youngest child aged under 5 worked full-time. More than half of non-managerial women in this group had management aspirations. These women were all aged in their thirties, already identified as

crucial years for promotion suggesting that some younger women are more ambitious and committed to continuous employment even with childcare responsibilities and want to consolidate their careers at this important stage. Certainly, the data show that older women are less ambitious than younger, even when there are no children at home. This may be a cohort effect or due to a perception within society that women age earlier than men. Other writers have argued that 'gendered ageism' constrains women's promotion opportunities (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995). Whether age is a real barrier to promotion, women may at least perceive that they have fewer promotion opportunities once they are over 40.

It was striking how unusual it was for men *not* to see their careers in terms of management, the vast majority were either managers or interested in moving to management and their ambition was not affected by their domestic circumstances or age. Men who did not want to become managers seemed to see themselves as perhaps 'non-traditional' where they would have to make unacceptable compromises. This is particularly interesting in the light of defining what commitment is especially in a profession such as social work. Fewer women than men were interested in management and the overwhelming majority of them said the reason was that direct work with clients is what they enjoyed most. This could be an argument that more women than men are committed to the job of social work rather than to career progression. This commitment was evident for women working part-time as much as those working full-time. These findings highlight that Hakim's definition of work commitment is too narrow and does not allow for vocational commitment essential for working on the front-line.

The vocational commitment required to stay in front-line work means that for social workers wishing to retain their professional practice base, senior management roles are not attractive. This rise of managerialism in the 1990s has led to senior managers becoming detached from social work practice, its special knowledge, skills and theoretical issues. However, the job of social work is changing and it has been argued that the social work task itself is becoming managerialised

(Harris, 1998). Social workers need skills in purchasing and contracting for services and often costs of services may conflict with professional considerations. As the nature of social work changes with a reduced emphasis on counselling and therapy, social work may not be as attractive to many women (Harlow, 2000).

There are of course barriers in the form of an organisational culture where men are the managers, especially at senior levels, and the lack of peer support and role models for women means that women must have more determination than men if they want to advance in management. Earlier research on the NISW dataset included field social workers who had entered the profession after 1988 and who were, therefore, in general younger and were less likely to have childcare responsibilities. There were no differences between women and men in management aspirations (Davey, et al., 2000). Therefore, the findings in this paper raise questions as to whether women lose ambition because of increased family responsibilities as they grow older, or whether they perceive barriers against them because of their age, or whether there is a cultural cohort effect. These questions are too complex to be answered by Hakim's explanation that certain types of women exercise particular choices. The findings highlight that full-time continuous employment is necessary for management progression and that discontinuous and part-time working disadvantages women. However, it also suggests that for many women commitment to the job of social work is more important than moving into management. Therefore, although employers must be encouraged to develop policies to ensure that there are no unfair impediments to management progression, it is also important to challenge the idea that women who do not move into management are 'uncommitted', whether or not they work part-time.

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