



Work Regulation & Professional Identities: The Case of the UK Veterinary sector

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Global Equality & Diversity Conference 2015
ulster.ac.uk



Work Regulation and Gender Inequalities

Working Time Directive – promotion of sex equality in the workplace

Flexible working – work-life balance

Women more likely to avail of flexible and fragmented work patterns

Regulations frequently circumvented by contractual waivers

UK Veterinary sector

Last of the UK professions to admit women in 1922

‘Man’s work’ – physicality and normative gender assumptions

Feminising profession retaining a masculine gendered culture

Occupational segregation – vertical and horizontal

Middle-class, white, highly-educated, professional women

Work Regulation and Gender Inequalities

- Presenteeism – physical presence in the work place and long working hours
- Underpins constructions of professional commitment – basis for recognition
- Commitment = competence, productivity and hours worked
- Senior positions remain attainable for those who individuals who demonstrate commitment through presence.
- PT workers – deleterious perceptions of professionalism and commitment

Professional Discourse

- *'they all want to go off and have babies and work part-time afterwards' ... "no-one wants part-timers" [Male stakeholder 3]*
 - "It's been mentioned to me in my appraisal before. They said to me, "the only problem...is that we are looking for someone to be head vet more long term and if you're thinking about having a family, then that won't really fit in".
- *She had a baby and went part time and the way she was treated changed completely...Where she'd always been included in all the discussions and decisions and things before, we'd suddenly have all the meetings on the day she was off...and she had no say in anything anymore" [Gwyneth]*

PT Women Veterinary Surgeon's

"I felt in practice that you could get part time work but I think often it's easier to be side-lined within a practice and not get to do as many interesting cases...whilst there are opportunities it's not always going to be as fulfilling as what you think it might be." [Diana]

*"[There are] a few part time vets and...yes, they perhaps **do get put on consults more than ops**" [Alicia]*

*"My perception is that they're not taken as seriously if they're part time...at my previous job, the owner of the hospital is a very driven career woman...we were sitting talking about the surgeon who had worked for us and she said, **"She's gone down to three days a week. Well she's ruined her career. It's down the toilet now. No one's ever going to take her seriously again"**...[Gwyneth]*

Yvonne highlights, **"They probably do get more instant acknowledgement and respect"** with Olivia commenting, **"People would much more trust a chap"**.

"had more to prove as a vet" (Grace) and so, it seems they frequently tried to de-emphasise their gender and prove themselves as competent workers (Kelan, 2009)

Professional Regulations

Professional Regulations (RCVS):

- 24 hour cover
 - Practising outwith competency
 - Non-vets owning practices (1996)
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- ‘Guys definitely turn over more money than females’ [Male stakeholder 1]
 - *“I believe they are less entrepreneurially oriented, vets generally, but women significantly less so than male vets..... I think they are risk averse and less assertive than males and so that would be a factor. If you give me 100 guys and 100 girls, I’d say many more of the guys would be entrepreneurial.” [Male stakeholder 1]*

Implications for Women Veterinary Surgeons

- Less committed
- Long-term deskilling at the first referral, GP level
- Corporate investors owning large chains of practices – employed profession

Work Regulation and Gender Inequalities

Bradley (2010, 2013) 'ideal worker' – 'ideal vet': a male who is spatially and temporally flexible, unencumbered by domestic responsibility

Women Veterinary surgeons – mid-ground positioning (technically competent but less available); gender neutral, neoliberal worker

Women Veterinary Surgeon's: Professional Identities

- *“I do think being a vet defines who I am and gives me status...I'm quite proud of saying I'm a vet”* [Suzanna].
- As veterinary surgeons their identity was reportedly a construct of a scientist, medic, caring ‘professional’ and animal welfare protector.

“I felt like that’s what being a proper vet was, actually that is required for the economy, for the food system, for providing and the produce and everything else; that’s actual true vetting, whereas actually the rest of us are just luxury items, you know, no one really needs a poodle and no one really needs a horse.” [Donna]

“I think it’s seen as a hugely negative thing, I’m almost a bit embarrassed about it myself actually! I know it sounds weird but you feel like it’s seen as something which is going to make the profession fall apart....definitely...in my experience, it’s seen as a negative thing and almost you feel a bit apologetic for that..”

As Good as it gets?



Practical Recommendations

- Tighter limits on contractual waivers and audits to circumvent increasing practice of having 'self-employed' employees.
- Barr the use of gendered and subjective terms in contractual arrangements – 'commitment'
- Raise awareness of distinction between quality and quantity of part-time working opportunities.
- Remove Structural barriers to women's pursuit of practice ownership - 24-hour service provision for practices that are majority-owned by women veterinary surgeons in areas where 24-hour provision already exists or is planned.
- Veterinary associations should assist members in exploring different valuation models and equity release options. The potential for financial instruments and arrangements, akin to the co-ownership housing schemes for first-time buyers, should be investigated as a means to reduce the financial barriers to entry for individuals or small teams interested in sole proprietorship or partnership purchase.