

**the
invisible
woman**



about the project

The Invisible Woman project promotes awareness and actions for women and gender diverse people to **age with dignity, security and safety**, and embraces perspectives from backgrounds that vary by race, ethnicity, social background, religion, gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and nationality.

Once a woman hits 50, her access to opportunity is limited, and she is often **excluded from fully participating** in society.

Such limitations can be even more challenging for women with low education and skills, migrant women, women of colour, and women with differing levels of ability.

The project builds from the research, evidence and lived experience of women and gender diverse people over 50 in Australian society, with a view to **learning, evolving and effecting change**.

The Invisible Woman is **online** on video, on podcast, in your inbox, on social media. It features women sharing their stories.

It connects women **in person** and with business helping them exit social isolation. It changes the conversations and works against ageism and discrimination at the workplace. It enables **businesses to commit to action**.

The Invisible Woman is working for **gender & age equity**.

Join the movement.



Introduction

Worldwide people are living much longer than they used to.

By 2030 female life expectancy will be 85.3 years and male 78.1. The typical life cycle (education-work-retirement) is changing and people are required and expected to work longer.

However, currently in Australia people over 45 are considered “mature age” workers and according to official data are facing age discrimination. The number of older Australians that are on Newstart is growing by 10,000 a year. Those main trends and other current data indicate we have to work against ageism in the workplace.

For women the challenges are bigger as they are facing an extra obstacle, that we have named *The Invisible Woman Syndrome*.



what is The Invisible Woman Syndrome?

It is an under-reported global issue, happening to women around the world in the last 25 years. No matter what a woman does during her life, by the time she reaches 50 she “vanishes”, as she is no longer considered productive, valuable or employable. She is gradually excluded and ignored in social and political life.

Here is the [link](#) to the research our Director of Impact conducted for the Centre for Social Impact that was the starting point.

Invisible in'vizib(ə)l/ Adjective = unable to be seen.



"I have a fake hip, a fake knee," Jane Fonda says. "I've got so much metal in my back. I have a fake thumb. I have osteoarthritis."

"I have osteoarthritis and these joints poke out," Lilly Tomlin adds, flexing her hands to demonstrate. "My hands are just ruined. I used to have lovely, graceful hands and now they're kind of like a kielbasa."

"They work, though," Fonda reminds her.

"They work — exactly, exactly," Tomlin nods in agreement.

Jane Fonda & Lilly Tomlin talk about ageing without fear (Villarreal 2018)

Since then, we continued the research at Just Gold looking into age equity, with a pool of resources, interviews and notes with people from around the world that has resulted in the design of a campaign that changes perceptions on age equity.

In the meantime, we have noted a gradual shift in the public sphere, with shows like [Frankie & Grace](#) on Netflix, discussions on public TV (watch this episode of [SBS Insight](#)), articles and [TedTalks](#), Isabella Rossellini talks about the [experience](#) of getting fired by Lancôme

at the age of 40 for looking 'too old' and getting a new contract at the age of 60, while only a few days ago it was [announced](#) that Cher will be the new face of dsquared2 at age 73.

Isabella Rossellini on ageing, beauty and her return to Lancôme

The actress first became the face of the brand in the 1980s



what happens when women become invisible?

They work less. As a result, they get paid less, have less or no superannuation and rely more on their partners to survive. They are vulnerable to what is called the three Ds (Divorce, Death of partner or Disease). At the same time, they become a part of a wicked problem, that cannot be solved in a linear way, does not come with one solution and becomes more complex as time goes by.

why is happening right now?

This group of vulnerable women is getting bigger and bigger due to the ageing of the global population. Globally, population aged 60 or over is growing faster than all younger age groups. Fertility is declining, life expectancy is rising; as a result, the proportion of the population above a certain age rises as well. According to the UN, population ageing is occurring throughout the world.

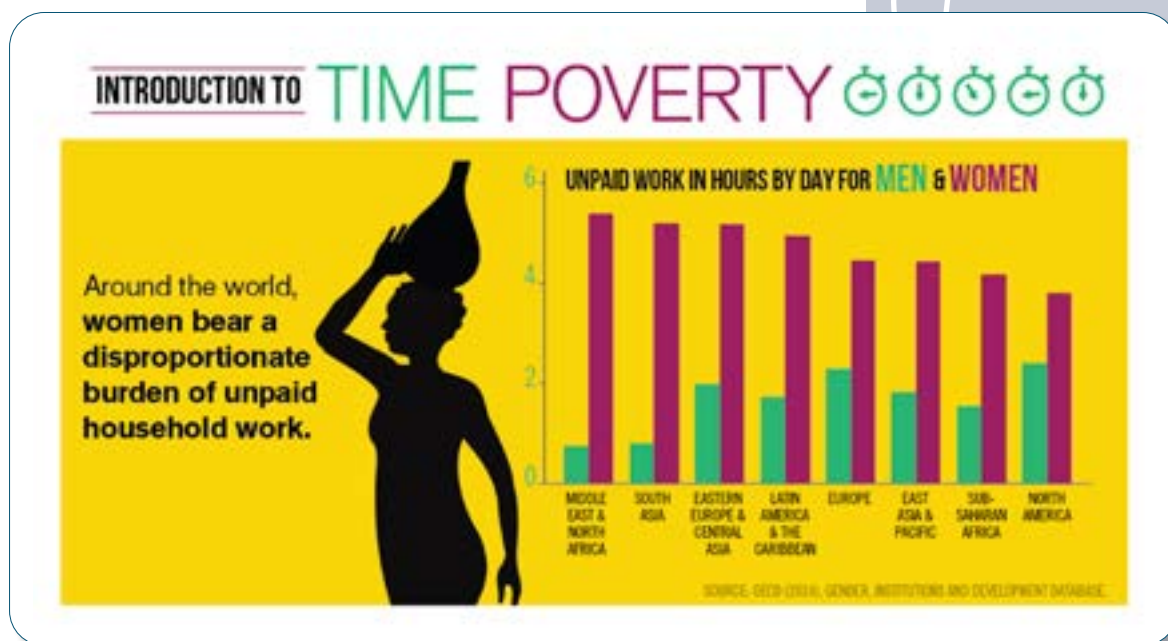
what's the estimation of global population ageing?

Over the next few decades, a further increase in the population of older people is going to happen, given the size of the cohorts born in recent decades. The fact is raising issues of the support network that will be needed and the numbers of workers per retiree in the future; these upcoming fiscal and political pressures have been thrown on the table to start the conversation, however not with the urgency one would anticipate given the fact that many countries are likely to face challenges in the coming decades in their public health care system and the pensions the growing older population will need.



is gender linked to poverty?

Surprisingly, yes. Age and gender inequalities according to the UN are usually linked with poverty and various studies are suggesting the gendered nature of poverty and the relationship between the two on a global scale. There is, however, little systematic incorporation of gender into multifaceted studies of poverty and ageing.



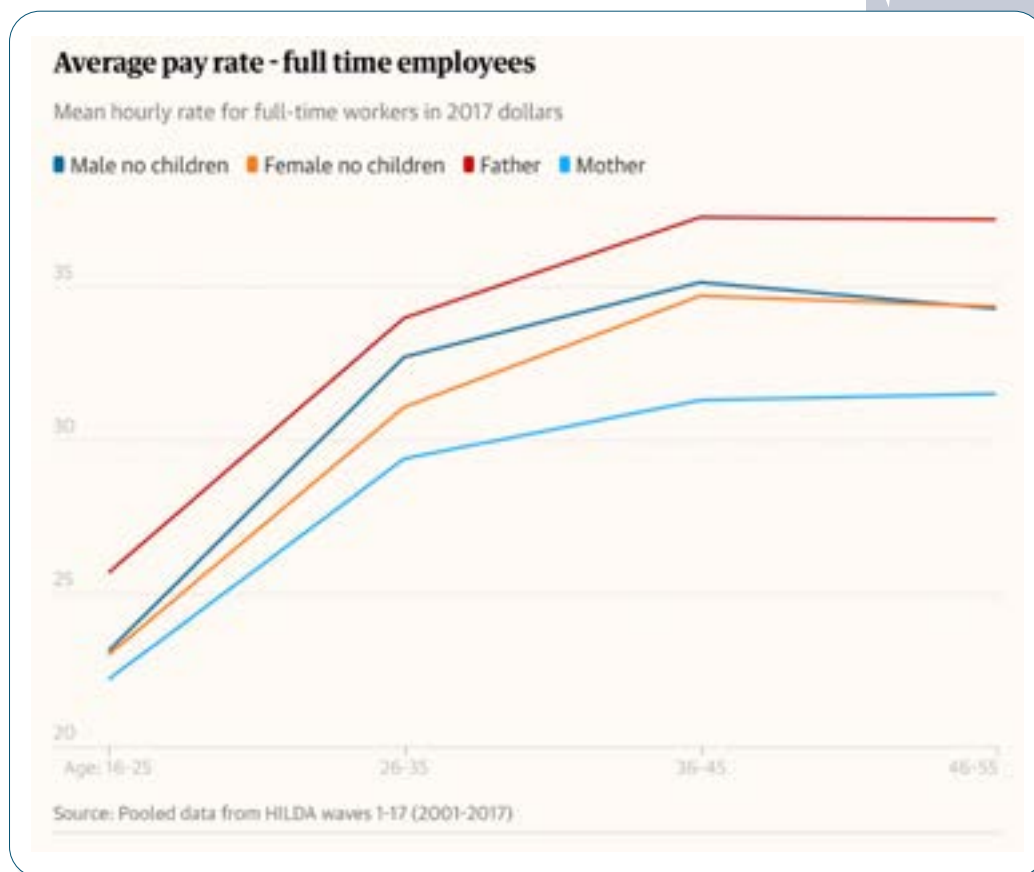
what is going on in Australia?

The 'baby boomers', defined by the ABS as people born between 1946 and 1964, comprise at the moment the 25% of Australia's population. They are the first generation that will live longer, but also the generation that has to work more years than their parents. This complicates things even more for the women baby boomers, as they live longer and usually outlive their partners.

what about the gender pay gap?

Research from the Melbourne Institute found that there are significant disparities in the minimum wage between Australia's 122 awards, and the difference is largely due to the relatively low value we place on women's work.

A childcare worker with a Certificate III qualification is paid an award rate of \$21.29 per hour, compared to a metal fitter with the same level of qualification who earns the award rate of \$39.47 per hour. As a society, we value the men who build machines almost twice as much as we do the women who build our children's minds. This is where the gender pay gap bites. It is women at the lower end of the income scale who suffer real poverty and disadvantage as a result of reduced lifetime earning capacity due to factors related to their gender.



Composition of childcare workforce in Australia



Source: ABS 2018 census table builder

Composition of aged care workforce in Australia



Source: ABS 2018 census table builder

what are the numbers in Victoria?

Victoria's population mimics the global trends. People aged 55 and above comprise more than a quarter of the population (26.3%). People aged 65 and above comprise 15% of Victoria's population (Healthy ageing literature review 2017).

Population aged 65 and over is projected to increase as follows in Victoria:

- 16.4 % in 2021
- 18.8% in 2031
- 20.4% in 2041
- 21.8% in 2051

The number of Victorians aged 85 years and over is expected to increase from around 2% of the population currently to 4.6% in 2051.

what is happening in Melbourne?

Women in the city of Melbourne have been [hit the hardest](#) during the pandemic.

- According to latest data from the University of Melbourne, women and young people were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- Women living in Melbourne and in regional areas of Australia are bearing the brunt of the coronavirus pandemic more than men, according to research also showing that female workers were disproportionately affected by Victoria's second lockdown.
- Research by the Melbourne Institute found Melburnians were the worst off between August and November, with workers there more likely to report cuts to work hours and the probability of unemployment due to COVID-19 was two percentage points higher in metropolitan Melbourne compared with other cities.
- According to the author Guyonne Kalb from The University of Melbourne women in the city of Melbourne are not recovering from the pandemic as quickly.



what we have identified as priorities

Awareness is key: We have reached the point where it is critical to help women in their 30s make informed decisions, women in their 40s find meaningful employment and women in their 50s to exit social isolation. Would women make different choices if they knew the [future risk](#) of retiring into poverty? Would they design a different life plan with their partners?

Ask your network 'did you know that women over 55 are on the top of the list of homeless people in Victoria?' and create awareness today.

Age equity: we are starting to see the results of this wicked problem in women but is part of a complex ageism work culture issue. It requires big changes in the professional world starting with the development of a toolkit that provides direction for achieving age equity in businesses, government or organisations.

As a social enterprise, Just Gold works with a goal to co design with organisations and professionals the paths to innovation. Our goal is to help equip professionals with the skills and resources to accelerate strategic, sustainable and meaningful change within their teams and ultimately bring systemic change.

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