RTPI Research Paper

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WOMEN AND PLANNING

An analysis of gender related barriers to professional advancement

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Acknowledgement

We are immensely grateful to all the participants of this study and wish to thank them very warmly for taking the time to fill in our questionnaire or for taking part in our interviews. We also wish to thank all of our participants sincerely for speaking with great courage and honesty about (sometimes) deeply personal issues. We very much hope that this research will convey (at the very least) the personal emotions and feelings attached to the difficult issues we set out to explore, and we very much hope to do justice to the testimonies shared by those who trusted us with their stories.

Dedication to Corinne Swain

This work is dedicated to Corinne Swain OBE FRTPI FAcSS. Highly regarded within the planning profession and beyond, Corinne will be remembered for her work and personal commitment to promoting the aims of the profession. Corinne was a caring professional and always gave her support to others. She was a great supporter of women in planning and was a strong advocate for equality, diversity and inclusivity.

Contents

About this research

This research was prompted (first and foremost) by an intuition which called to be tested empirically – the perception, as perhaps is the case in many other professions, that women working in planning today are still experiencing gender related barriers preventing them from growing and thriving in their careers.

The impetus for the research was the 'Women and Planning in the UK' conference at Leeds Beckett University, in May 2019. This conference brought together academics, professional planners and members of the RTPI to re-open the debate on the issues faced by women working in the planning profession and the impact of planning on the day-to-day lives of women. The success of the conference was two-fold. It revived discussions about a long-standing topic of interest to professional planners and academics alike[1]. It also led to the creation of the 'Women and Planning Research Group' established to continue raising awareness and addressing issues pertaining to gender (in)equality within the profession.

This event also offered the RTPI the opportunity to explore in more detail results produced by earlier studies focusing on women's careers in planning. To gain a better understanding of the matter, we published a call for volunteers to take part in a new piece of research to inform our presentation at the *Women and Planning in the UK* conference. The level of interest generated by our call for volunteers exceeded our expectations. Very soon, it became clear that a majority of participants who approached us did so with the hope that by sharing their experiences they would help the next cohorts of women joining the profession. As one of our participants explained during her interview:

> ***"When I think about my career, I ask myself three questions: was I discriminated against because I am a woman? Yes. Did I miss out on promotion because I am a woman? Yes. Did having a family hold me back in terms of career progression? Yes. When I think about my experience, I think that the things that have happened to me should not happen to other people. I don't want anything like that for the next generation".***

Studies on gender (in)equalities are now often met with the criticism that discriminatory practices do not simply target women, but affect many different categories of people (i.e. based on race, age, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics). Critics may also state that specific groups of people face specific barriers – hence only exploring the issue from a gender perspective may somehow conceal the challenges met by other groups.

[1] Papers presented at this conference are due to be published in a special edition on Women and Planning in *Town Planning Review.*

While the focus of this research is on gender related barriers, it was considered that an attempt to tackle discrimination of every kind within this research paper would risk 'watering down' the uniquely complex and distinct challenges faced by each group. But, it is true that equality, diversity and inclusion are very complex questions going beyond gender related issues.

Echoing the RTPI's vision statement published in November 2018, this study is the first step towards more comprehensive research about equality, diversity and inclusion in the planning profession to be published in February 2020.

We profoundly believe that a planning profession that is more representative of women and society at large is crucial to bringing about inclusive environments that meet the needs of everyone and we hope that this report will contribute to addressing what has become a crucial and timely question.

Introduction

The case for gender equality in planning was made in the 1960s and 1970s by two generations of women who battled hard to have their ideas heard, their work respected and – at the most basic level – to pursue a career in a notoriously male dominated profession. Yet, despite almost sixty years of feminism and discourse around equality, inclusion and diversity, a survey carried out by the RTPI in 2017 found that more than 20% of women working in planning have faced – and are sometimes still facing – gender related barriers to their professional advancement.

While the 1990s and 2000s saw progress with an increasing number of women joining the profession, austerity (and a certain form of complacency) has meant that recent years have actually witnessed a backwards step away from the progress made towards gender equality during these decades. As a profession, town planning appears to have a balanced gender profile in aggregate – and certainly a better profile than some other parts of the built environment sector. However, recent evidence suggests that there is a glass ceiling in operation within the profession[2].

Against this backdrop, the RTPI decided to launch a comprehensive study on women and planning in March 2019. The primary aim of this study was to better understand the barriers directly related to gender as experienced by women working in the planning profession. A second aim was to gauge the impact of gender mainstreaming on planning related issues — that is, to gain an in-depth understanding of the success and failure to implement planning policies sensitive to gender specific needs in urban and rural environments.

This report focuses on part I of the study. It looks at the barriers to professional advancement experienced by women planners today. Feedback and testimonies gathered during the course of the study highlight a very simple (yet important) point: a majority of women working in planning today are still encountering barriers to their professional advancement because of their gender.

Close to 50% of participants in the study said they had experienced sexist or inappropriate comments at work. Almost 60% said they sometimes felt they were not taken seriously by male colleagues. Nearly 80% said they felt that their workplace reflected “masculine norms and behaviour”, also referred to as the “boys' club mentality”.

While gender equality is crucial to all parts of society, it is particularly essential to planning because the lack of gender diversity affects not only *the way* we design and plan, but also *who* we design and plan for. Hence, the benefits of having women in planning go far beyond fulfilling the industry’s

[2] In 2019, the organisation ‘Women in Planning’ conducted research on the number of women at leadership level in the private sector across the UK. 83% of director and above roles were held by men and only 17% by women. Above Director level (Senior Director, Senior Partner, Managing Director or Chief Executive) the research found that 95% of these roles were filled by men, with women filling only 5%.

immediate skills needs. Developing the conversation around the need for diversity in the planning profession is not a ‘parochial’ exercise. Without genuine commitment to address issues around gender inequality there is a real risk that the profession will miss out on the benefits of nurturing and retaining real talents as well as the opportunity to create diverse and inclusive communities.

Key insights

- The majority of women who took park in the study said they felt at a disadvantage in workplaces that overwhelmingly reflect ‘masculine’ cultures and norms of behaviour, and argued that this is having a tangible effect on their careers.
- More than half said they felt their opportunities for promotion are limited because of their gender, and close to half said they had experienced sexist or inappropriate comments at work.
- Results suggest that women are particularly at risk of discrimination when returning from maternity leave and when opportunities for promotion arise in their workplace.
- Respondents who said gender had not been a barrier to their professional advancement also said they had on occasion experienced sexist comments or behaviour on the part of their male counterparts.
- Results suggest that such behaviour is equally likely to come from the younger generation of male planners as from the older generation.
- Respondents who have moved across sectors (public, private or academic) mentioned that sexism/discriminatory practices very much depend on the culture of the particular workplace.
- Interviews found that some women felt that advancement might require adopting ‘male’ behaviour traits and that other women in more senior positions are their greatest barrier – an example of ‘Queen Bee syndrome’.
- Interviewees also mentioned that some employers merely pay lip service to equality in the workplace – perhaps as a way of making themselves look like a modern, progressive employer.
- Results suggest that sexism is sometimes accompanied by ageism, racism and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Key recommendations

Listed below are our 15 recommendations for improving gender equality in planning:

1. Establishing equal pay between men and women
2. Testing unconscious bias during job interviews
3. Monitoring the ‘office culture'
4. Setting up a safe, confidential, and professional system for reporting sexist behaviours
5. Encouraging mentorship and networking activities
6. Offering career development and leadership training to women
7. Implementing family and carer-friendly policies for men and women
8. Implementing flexible working hours
9. Improving support before, during and upon return from maternity leave
10. Carefully monitoring managers’ behaviours when women are most at risk (e.g. upon return from maternity leave, when promotion opportunities arise, at events…)
11. Publishing examples of good practices in the workplace
12. Appointing dedicated senior members of staff to monitor ethics, equality and diversity issues
13. Taking transparency and accountability seriously (e.g. defining KPI, and tracking and publishing progress across organisations)
14. Encouraging women to take leadership roles (and ‘defining’ leadership)
15. Encouraging macro and micro behavioural shifts

Background

'The Big Picture'

A 2018 report published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that women earn on average 8.6% less than males who are in the same role[3]. This figure rises to 20% further up the hierarchical ladder. In addition, male managers are 40% more likely than female managers to be promoted into higher roles according to data from the Chartered Management Institute[4].

Within the built environment professions, there is a willingness to normalise female leadership and actively challenge the misconception that top positions are solely for men. Similarly, within the construction industry, a recent Ranstad study found that 93% of the existing workforce said that having female senior leadership would maintain or improve standards of work[5].

Planning and other built environment professions

The composition of the RTPI's membership is relatively diverse compared to the 'top four' built environment institutes, but there is some way to go until it can be said to reflect the wider community:

- The current RTPI membership gender split is 39% female, 61% male, compared to a UK 2011 census split of 51% female and 49% male;
- The RTPI membership is 7% black and minority ethnic (BAME) compared to the 2011 census of 14% BAME (England and Wales);
- The RTPI's membership is youthful, with 52% of members being under the age of 45;
- Final year student membership is 45% male, 55% female, with BAME students accounting for 10%[6].

The international context

From a European and international perspective – progress towards gender equality in the workplace (and beyond) has proven slower than anticipated. In 2019, a UN report describing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals highlighted that despite new impetus and progress towards gender equality brought about by the 2030 Agenda, there remain a number of challenges related to the set of gender equality indicators associated with Sustainable

[3] Smith, R. (2018). Gender pay gap in the UK: 2018. *Newport: ONS*
[4] See: www.managers.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/cmi-press-releases/men-forty-percent-more-likely-than-women-to-be-promoted-in-management-roles
[5] www.randstad.co.uk/future-of-the-construction-workforce/
[6] Figures based on RTPI membership data in January 2020

Development Goal 5. The report stresses that insufficient progress on structural issues at the root of gender inequality – such as unfair social norms and attitudes – are undermining the ability to achieve SDG 5 (UN, 2019)[7].

An OECD report, *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle,* published in 2017 shows that there has been progress in some areas. For example, in education where girls now outperform boys and are reaching higher levels of education, and in employment where gender gaps have also narrowed. However, there is still a wage gap of 15% (in OECD countries) and there are many positions in senior management, public leadership and entrepreneurship that are unreachable for women. In 2016, women made up only 4.8% of CEOs internationally.

These figures very much resonate with the current situation in planning. Although there are more men than women planners today, this is changing. Across planning schools and entrants to the profession there is generally a fifty-fifty split. However, while the diversity of the membership may be changing, this is primarily at lower levels. Representation at senior levels – both in the public and private sectors – is heavily dominated by white males.

Why does gender equality matter and why have we not closed the gender gap?

Notwithstanding progress in public awareness and policies, lack of equality has much to do with entrenched gender bias in cultural patterns and behaviours. Cultural norms are strong. They define gender roles both at work and at home. For instance, the sharing of caring responsibilities – for children and the elderly – is still seen as a woman's role. In the UK, ONS figures show that men spend an average of *16 hours* a week of unpaid work (which includes adult care and child-care, laundry and cleaning) while women spend an average of *26 hours*[8]*.*

Better policies (i.e. flexible working arrangements and good quality childcare to enable both parents to work) are part of the solution. Quotas and support for women in the workplace may also help. However, such policies have already been adopted by many employers and gender related barriers to professional advancement persist.

Hence, in that context, obtaining better information on the specific barriers and challenges faced by women throughout their professional journeys seems a crucial exercise to shed light on what appears to be a complex, nuanced and persistent problem – which, although not specific to, is prevalent in the planning profession.

[7] See (2019) Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, report of the Secretary-General. Economic and Social Council, United Nations. See also: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5
[8] See ONS (2016) Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work' www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10

Method

Aims and objectives of the research

The main objective of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the professional journey of women working in planning, with a particular focus on the barriers and obstacles to professional advancement. The aim here is not to try to generalise results produced by our analyses to the entire population of female planners in the UK (and/or abroad), but to explore women's experiences and adopt an interpretative approach to understanding their journeys. Having said that, future studies could use our research as a 'springboard' to develop more quantitative analyses with the aim of testing hypotheses against a larger sample of data.

Data collection

To gain an in-depth understanding of the professional journey of female planners and in particular gender related barriers to professional advancement, we used elicitation techniques in the form of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. We advertised the research on the RTPI website via a blog post and invited potential participants to take part in the research via social media and through dedicated networks. Where possible, we conducted face-to-face or telephone interviews with participants. When geographical and/or time constraints did not allow face-to-face interviews to take place, we sent the interview topic guide (or 'questionnaire') to participants asking them to fill it in and return it to us via email.

Cases and variables

Overall, we conducted 11 interviews and received 41 completed questionnaires from respondents. 50 women and 2 men across 6 countries took part in our research. The vast majority of our respondents were based in the UK (29 in England and 5 in Scotland). We also gathered the views of 2 respondents in Australia, 8 in New-Zealand, 7 in Canada and 1 in the US.

Topic guide

Our topic guide was structured in three parts. Part one asked participants to reflect upon their professional experience as planners and to describe any barriers or obstacles to professional advacement which may have been gender related. Part two asked partcipants to consider how current planning policies address (or fail to address) gender specific needs. Part three asked partcipants to think about challenges lying ahead for the current and next generations of female and male planners.

In addition to information pertaining to gender and country of residence we asked partcipants to provide information regarding their professional background (viz. public, private, third sector, academic, mixed sectors) and their age range (viz. >25 years old, 25-34 years old, 35-44 years old, 45-54 years old, 55-64 years old, <65 years old).

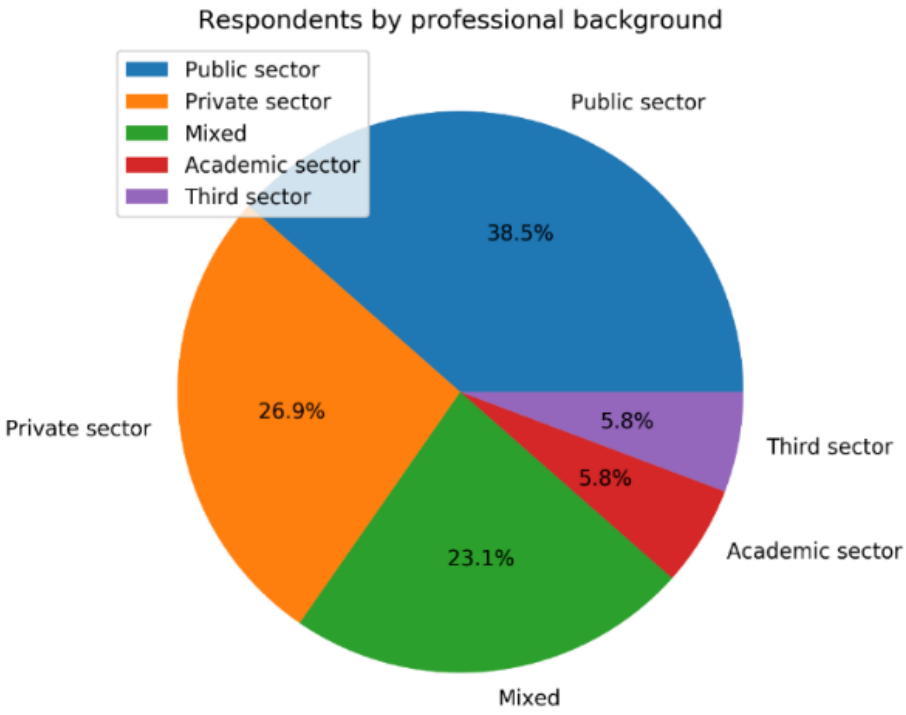

Figure 1: Respondents by professional background

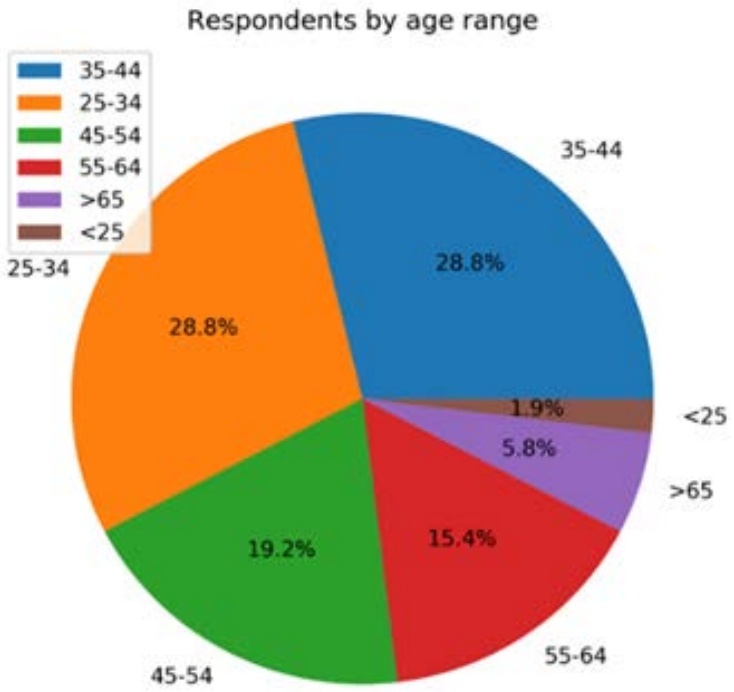

Figure 2: Respondents by age range

Data analysis

Interviews were analysed using traditional qualitative data analysis methods (viz. thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis). Types of answers (or 'categories of argument') were derived from the data following an iterative process. For instance, we have identified 'masculine culture and norms' as a category of argument because of the recurrence of this type of answer in the interviews. We then compiled a dataset counting the occurrences of the various types of answers in all our interviews and questionnaires. The results presented below provide a visual representation of the proportion of each category of argument that emerged from the data collected. They do not, however, aim to represent the experience of the entire population of women working in planning in the UK or abroad.

Results

Positive experiences and good practices

The majority of female planners who took part in our research mentioned that gender had acted – and on occasions continued to act – as a barrier to their professional advancement. However, for some women (about 7.5% in our study) gender did not appear to have had any negative effect at all.

Highlighting the reasons why gender almost never negatively impacted their professional activities, participants mentioned flexible working hours, family friendly employment policies and the support employers provided to women working in male-dominated environment.

> ***"I have just cut back my hours to 37.5 as my children are now 4 and 5. This allows me to do two school pickups a week. My employer has been very accommodating and allows me to start work at 7am, and be as flexible as possible. I am fortunate that I was supported in cutting back my hours, but I know this is not universal and other planners I know in my workplace have not been able to reduce their hours".***

> ***"In many ways I have been really lucky – my employer is really supportive and I know that I have their total confidence, not only in my ability as a planner, but also in being able to go into 'male' spaces as a female. Much of the work we do on infrastructure/ rail related projects requires interdisciplinary working with historically male-dominated professions (e.g. engineering) which has meant I have often been the only or perhaps one of a small minority of women involved with a project or particular meeting. However, being able to speak openly about some of my frustrations to my colleagues – and feel listened to – is really helpful".***

Other key factors cited in interviews and questionnaires as having a positive impact on women's ability to thrive in the workplace while having a family were (perhaps unsurprisingly) salary and partner/husband support.

> ***"I do not think being female has ever been a barrier to my career. I had two children while working for central government and whilst financially that was a struggle, the role was kept open for me, and the domestic leave policy meant I could take time off if I needed to. I was also fortunate to have a salary which allowed us to afford my husband to be a stay at home dad for a couple of years, and then a nanny to look after our children during the day".***

Interestingly, even female participants in our study who did not consider that their gender had acted as a direct barrier to their career progression (and who described their experience as a female planner as generally positive) still mentioned they had faced sexism, witnessed favouritism (for male co-workers) and made career choices not because particular jobs suited them, but because the role allowed them to work flexibly.

> ***"I do not consider that gender has acted as a barrier to my professional advancement to date. My current employers are family-friendly which has made working whilst caring for two young children manageable. Not all employers would offer the same level of support/flexibility, so I do feel apprehensive about my professional advancement in future, especially as there are limited opportunities to progress in my current office. That said, I have experienced sexist behaviours, directly and indirectly. I've chaired meetings where questions that I am able to answer have been directed towards male colleagues; I've written presentations that senior male colleagues have then presented to senior management and/or elected members or at events/conferences; I've been asked to clarify my qualifications; I'm often asked how long I've been a planner or in my current role (because that seemingly has a bearing on my professional competency); I've experienced applicants and agents contact senior male colleagues to discuss matters relating to applications/projects that I am the lead officer for".***

> ***"Family friendly employment policies have been fundamental to my career choices since I had my first child 8 years ago. I've selected jobs not because they were the best job objectively for me, but because they practically work with the balancing act I undertake between parenting and professional duties. Lack of adoption of family friendly or flexible working has been a barrier in me taking up other employment".***

Gender related barriers

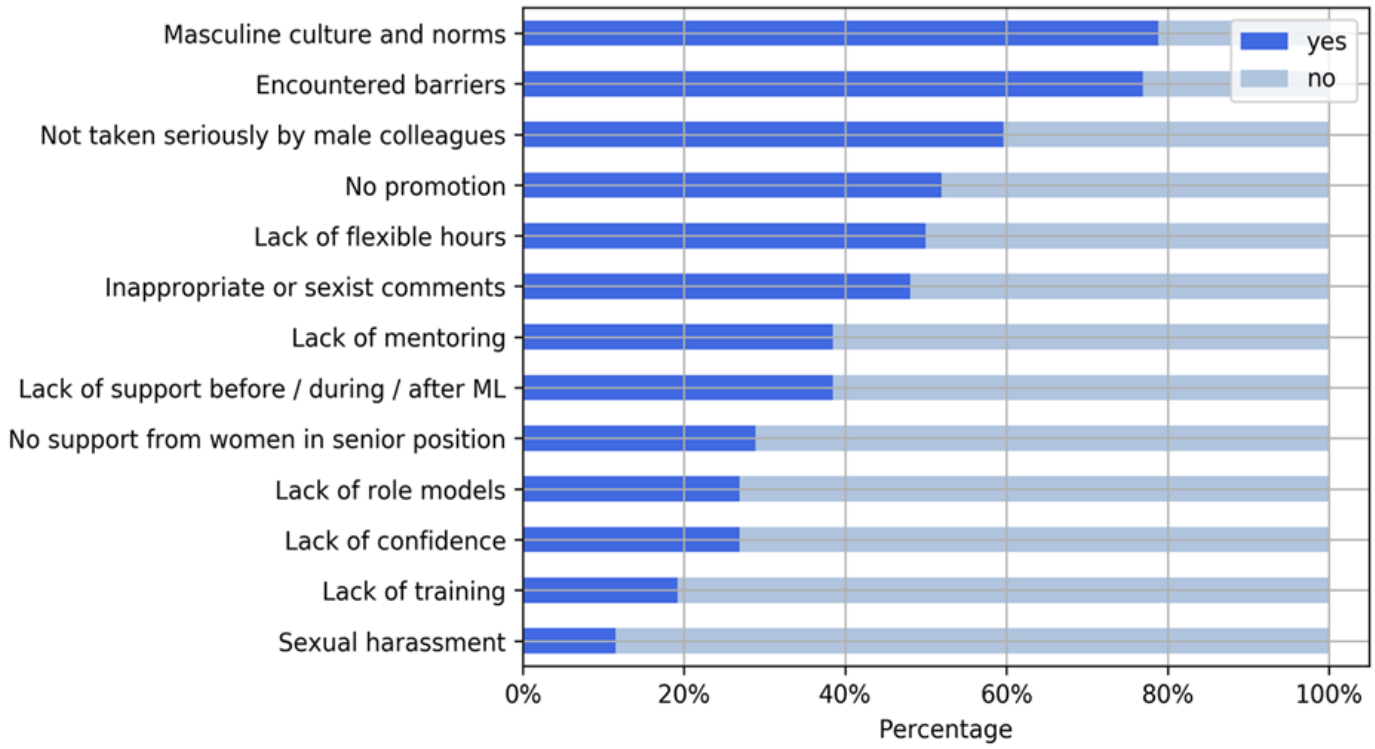

Figure 3: Gender related barriers

Masculine culture and norms

An overwhelming majority of participants in our study mentioned that workplaces are still heavily dominated by masculine culture and norms, with various impacts on women ranging from not being acknowledged or talked to directly by male counterparts/clients, to finding it necessary to adopt male behaviours and traits (in relation to leadership skills and language).

> ***"Gender has meant that Councillors and members of the public have talked to members of my team, assuming they are the boss because they are male rugby player types and I'm not".***

> ***"Leadership skills are defined by the male construct of this. I am only learning now that to me, being a leader means nurturing and caring".***

'Masculinity' was also often perceived by female participants in our study as heavily influencing the office culture itself – for example, the organisation of events and networking activities – culminating into a 'Boys' club mentality' excluding or subordinating the roles of women.

> ***"I do believe that I am not invited to social occasions among male colleagues (e.g. beer nights, curling team, hockey team etc.) which allow them to develop closer relationships, which translates into a greater tendency to partner with each other on research grants, etc.".***

> ***"The industry is very male-dominated and I believe there is very much a 'boys' club' culture which I view as being a potential barrier (…) Things like golf days, rugby events etc. have made me feel like I cannot partake in certain things, and even more personal things like not feeling like you can go out for a drink with a male client without it being read into".***

The roots of this 'boys' club' mentality, along with its prevalence and perpetuation, are often directly related to the behaviours of senior members of staff.

> ***"The CEO holds favour with his male members of staff. He likes to present himself as one of the lads. He has a whisky club for them and plays golf with those members of staff. None of the female staff are invited or involved with these activities. At the Xmas parties and corporate away days, he holds court at a table surrounded by those male colleagues downing beer".***

One of the consequences of the prevalence of masculine culture and norms in the profession highlighted by our interviewees was the need for women to 'work harder' than men 'to prove themselves'. This was often expressed as the need to 'fight' for recognition and to retain ownership of their ideas.

> ***"As a woman owned firm we have to prove ourselves, build relationships, and offer our expertise for less reimbursement before we can formally get a contract. In some cases, once we have the contract, we are faced with continued questioning about our skillsets and expertise. Some of our clients have sought out a second opinion from male colleagues who will share what we have reiterated multiple times. In other instances, male lead firms may benefit from the work we have done and obtain a contract with a former client".***

> ***"Possibly the biggest challenge I have currently is with superiors in my current organisation, all male, who put their name on my work without having had***

substantive input and often remove my name. This is very frustrating, and I am learning to be more specific about giving instructions on what needs to have my name on it, and in seeking direct contact with clients".

'Encountered' barriers

A vast majority of our participants (slightly more than 75%) mentioned facing either direct or indirect gender related barriers to professional advancement. For instance, missing out on promotions or potential job offers because the possibility of pregnancy might worry potential employers to the point of hiring a man rather than a woman. Or, slower career progression because of caring responsibilities.

"On my student placement they were very clear they would not take on female staff under the age of 40 due to risk of pregnancy and future child care needs. However other LPA's were not like this at all".

"There is no understanding of the mental load that a woman carries in comparison to a man – there are lots of mums and dads in the team, but I can guarantee that the mums are carrying the load of school lunch, kids to school, kids being upset, Christmas and birthday gift shopping, paying the bills on time, caring for sick children and family members and so on – so the level of mental exhaustion is sometimes overwhelming, but can't be 'brought to work' where you are just meant to be another staff member".

Interestingly, the views of male participants in our study tended to echo females' perceptions about the prevalence of masculine culture and norms and their impact in the workplace. Issues around caring responsibilities were also raised by men though not necessarily considered as a potential barrier for women only.

"I think my gender has worked in my favour because the majority of agencies I have worked for have been dominated by mature males – within their executive. I have no doubt they hire on the basis of someone they can relate to which has worked in my favour – or alternatively to the detriment of some of my female counterparts".

"*Basically I think children rather than gender per se are probably the issue today in terms of career progression. Time out to look after young children is treated as a blank, and similarly no allowance is made for other forms of family-related caring. Things like job-share and part-time work and CPD and volunteering all help to blur the divide, but in today's world the bottom line is judged to be productivity, output,*

delivery. Overall though, I think that class is now a more significant barrier to entry to planning or similar professions than gender".

Not 'taken seriously by male colleagues'

A majority of women in our study (around 60%) said they felt they were not taken seriously by male colleagues.

> ***"There is an arrogance amongst male colleagues, particularly within male dominated professions such as the roads and traffic sector, that presumes that as a female you shouldn't be in their space. On a number of occasions, I've had to ask people to respect my right to speak and to point out that if they carry on with their behaviour that I'll remove myself from the conversation. The alternative is to disengage which feels very unprofessional".***

> ***"In my experience on certain boards, male voices are dominated around the table and some of the women do not challenge or question what is being said, suggested, or decided upon. The males only partially listen to some of the feedback provided by women. This leaves a feeling of frustration".***

The proportion of men and women in the workplace was not considered as a determining factor for professional advancement. Rather, the culture of the workplace (viz. behaviours tolerated and reinforced) was considered a crucial element.

> ***"I think gender can affect professional advancement. It is very much dependent upon the culture in the workplace and whether behaviours are tolerated, rather than whether the mix is more male than female. For females in the workplace, it is also down to being respected and taken seriously by male colleagues. Given the nature of the work, sexist behaviours are prevalent outside the office in what was traditionally a male dominated profession and field of work".***

Beyond the sentiment of not being taken seriously by men, some women highlighted that disparities in the treatment of men and women transpired sometimes during interviews when male and female candidates were asked different questions.

> ***"I was once on an interview panel for the appointment of senior civil servants, where women candidates were asked by male panel members about being distracted from their work by housework. The men were not asked that question, but neither was there any commitment to fair and equitable questions of all candidates".***

One of the effects of *not feeling taken seriously by men* mentioned by some women in our interviews, was the necessity to adopt what are generally perceived to be 'male' behaviour traits –

including more ‘direct’ communication styles and ways of working (viz. working longer hours than expected).

> ***“There is a difference in the way males and females ‘speak’ – in fact, I feel that I often have to change the way I speak! Although I would be inclined to explain things at great length (in detail) I feel that I need to adopt a more direct style of communication and get to the point a lot quicker than I would normally do”.***

Lack of promotion

A focal point of the disparities between men and women, and a key point raised by participants about gender differences in terms of career progression, regarded issues around growth and promotion. The majority of participants noted a difference in the ‘pace’ of promotion between men and women, while ‘risks’ of potential pregnancies were often cited as one of the most important barriers to career progression for women.

> ***“I have seen my male peers from planning school experience rapid growth and promotion, while my female classmates have at this point mostly left the profession”.***

> ***“I have been told outright in the past that I would not be selected for a promotion because I would ‘probably just have a baby anyway’ (I was recently married at the time)”.***

> ***“After multiple years of advancing through the system, I was advised at one point when I was unsuccessful for a Director of Planning role, that the CEO was aware I was going through IVF treatment and that this was for the best as this way I could focus on getting pregnant and spending time at home (I had held a management position in that organisation for 10 years by that point).”***

Lack of growth and promotion were also cited in relation to lack of opportunities to be interviewed for positions.

> ***“At one point, I found out that a male colleague (private sector) was being paid 50% more than me, and he routinely had to ask me to help him do the job. For the record, I applied for the job and wasn’t even interviewed for it”.***

Lack of flexible hours and family friendly policies

Lack of flexible hours and family friendly policies were perceived as critical factors holding women's professional advancement back. This was expressed in relation to childcare, but also in relation to caring for parents and siblings.

> ***"I have been criticised for missing work with a critically ill child and during a difficult pregnancy (where I was put on full bed rest)".***

> ***"There has definitely been and continues to be a lack of family friendly policies. There is no recognition that family is also about parents and siblings. There is also no acknowledgement of work life balance, particularly if you live on your own. So work life balance is seen as a privilege, not a right".***

When flexible hours are implemented and used by women they are sometimes perceived as a barrier to promotion.

> ***"I have a friend who has not been elevated to a senior role simply because she does not work a full 40 hour week (due to child care commitments)".***

In a similar way, family friendly policies, even when adopted and implemented in the workplace, were often described as attracting 'negative feelings' towards those using them.

> ***"Even though we have a family friendly policy I feel that there is some negative feeling surrounding when I have to have time off for family related things".***

> ***"There is not a full understanding from the all-male directors of the juggling act that has to take place when you are a mother".***

Lack of flexibility and family friendly policies were thought to negatively affect men and women equally.

> ***"At a personal level, as father to four children (at one stage all were under 7 years old), there were no family friendly policies from my employer, nor did we (as a staff team in the school) create any. Academic careers were always very competitive, and have got more so; you just work as much as you can. I did not publish as much when we had children than I did before or after they left home. This had a negative impact on my career progression, I believe, though it was not the only factor".***

Inappropriate or sexist comments

An important point frequently made by women in our interviews regarded the prevalence of sexist and/or patronising comments and behaviours.

> ***"I've experienced plenty of off-handed sexist remarks, usually inappropriate discussions of sex or sexual attributes".***

Interestingly, even respondents that said gender had not been a barrier, had on occasion experienced sexist comments or behaviour on the part of their male counterparts. Such behaviour included being called 'darling' during meetings, or being asked if they were the "tea girl".

> ***"I've had people pat me on the head, shush me, and assume they know what I am going to say".***

> ***"There is always sexism – be it comments like 'you're a pretty young thing' to being the only woman in a meeting full of men, to men not taking your advice and wanting to hear it from a man (when you are by far the most experienced/knowledgeable person in the room), to being in meetings and being the leader of the meeting but the men refuse to address their questions/comments to you and direct them to a man".***

Sexism was often perceived by respondents as being maintained and perpetuated by everyday language and the different perceptions of men and women's behaviours.

> **"*In my group at work there is about 30% women and the coordinators and manager are all male. Unconscious bias and sexism perpetuates through everyday language and the treatment of women***
> ***(i.e. I've been told I have "no filter" at a meeting for providing constructive feedback and my manager called one of the coordinators a "sissy" the other week)".***

> ***"I have noticed that when a female planner stands up for herself it is often considered to be aggressive behaviour whereas a man is considered to be assertive".***

Lack of mentoring

Our interviews and questionnaires suggest that although women can benefit from mentoring, female mentors are often lacking. Participants in the study were keen to point out that the shortage of female mentors more than likely reflects the lack of women in management positions. Female participants with children remarked that their mentors often did not have children or family responsibilities and, therefore, could not serve as role models for successfully combining career and family. A majority of respondents acknowledged having had helpful relationships with a mentor

(of either sex) during their career, however a number of participants reported having experienced poor mentorships.

> ***"One female assigned as my mentor was more harmful than helpful. She was not supportive, she was too "superwoman". I did not really think we shared the same values. She had quite an impressive career but her attitude toward career progression and her relationships with others (including her own family) were not, I'm sorry to say, an inspiration to me".***

Lack of support before, during and after maternity leave

A crucial point emerging from our study is that women are particularly at risk of discrimination when returning from maternity leave. For many women, returning to work after parental leave would appear to be a key career transition point. However, this is typically when women are faced with reduced responsibilities, reduced workload and/or reduced opportunities for promotion. Although discriminatory practices and lack of support usually happen upon return to work, some women also pointed out that challenges and pressures often started before going on maternity leave.

> ***"It has recently been pointed out to me that if I choose to start a family my career will not be able to progress beyond a certain level".***

In many interviews, maternity leave was viewed as a major disruption to professional advancement – with professional relationships often deteriorating, colleagues holding unconscious biases against returning women, and women feeling so isolated (when they return) that they often considered leaving their role.

> ***"Once I returned from maternity leave to a different reporting structure, with predominantly male management. Our family-friendly work policies and practices seemed to have gone out the window. All of a sudden I was no longer included in management of the department and all decisions/recommendations made had to be signed off by the CBO/Manager (who had no planning knowledge or experience at all). He started sitting in on all my planning meetings and asked to review even small reports that went to Committee of Adjustment (which never happened in my 3 years working there with no issues). It was like all of a sudden now that I had other family priorities I could not be trusted with the work I used to do with flying colours".***

> ***"I don't feel that gender had any effect on my career until I had children, but the impact of two maternity leaves was significant (despite being 4 years apart). Both were dealt with correctly in terms of policy, but in both instances I returned to work to find that the person (women both times) had been kept on because the manager***

(again a woman both times, but a different manager each time) had decided that I wouldn't be able to cope with my own job following my return to work. Neither time was this discussed with me, nor were there any changes to the job or my hours that would indicate that I would not be able to fulfil my duties as I always had".

Dealing with sexism and discriminatory practices upon return from maternity leave was not considered an easy task. Women in our study often mentioned that they were reluctant to escalate the issues they encountered, or to complain about managers' behaviours by fear of being perceived as the 'angry woman', 'the difficult woman' or 'the woman who complains'.

"One issue that I faced was when I came back from maternity leave and my line manager (a man) wrote in my PDR that I needed to 're-establish myself in the department/ among my colleagues'. What does that mean? I did talk about this with colleagues who found his comment highly inappropriate. But what can you do? You do not want to be perceived as the woman who complains".

Lack of support from women in senior positions

As previously mentioned, our interviews found that some women felt that advancement might require adopting 'male' behaviour traits (especially communication and management styles). Our results also suggest that this behavioural shift further perpetuates the lack of support that women receive from other women in more senior positions, who can act as a barrier to professional advancement – an example (arguably) of the 'Queen Bee syndrome'.

"In short, gender has negatively affected my career once I became a parent, but those effects have been caused by other women in management positions".

***"Also I hate the fact that the very few females who have become senior managers feel the need to act and manage like men!! And don't encourage consistent, transparent and fair female development across their teams. They perpetuate the inequality across Local Authority Services*".**

"When I had children, I was then told by a woman that despite being the best candidate, I didn't get the job because she was concerned that I wouldn't be able to balance it all. She then said not to ever quote her on that and if I did, people would not believe me anyway. At the time, I was a single parent and it was even more difficult because of the lack of a support network and because flexible working time did not exist".

Lack of role models; lack of confidence; lack of training

Lack of role models, lack of adequate training and lack of confidence were identified as key problems by about 20% of our participants.

> ***"It also feels like there are a lack of role models from the over 35s who are female and still work in planning. It sometimes feels like we are invisible and undervalued".***

An important point which was made in relation to lack of training was that women tend to miss out on workplace learning and development programmes because they are not aware of the opportunities available to them. This would seem to suggest that managers have an important role to play in ensuring that training and development opportunities are shared equally across organisations – considered vital, since access to learning and development is a key motivator, and a key factor in promotion.

Sexual harassment

Finally, about 5% of women in our study revealed that they had faced sexual harassment, inappropriate behaviours and/or threats by males in their workplace. Sometimes this was not dealt with appropriately by their employers.

> ***"I was sexually assaulted by a senior male registered professional planner early in my career. Due to my immigration status, I ended up having to work for him for the subsequent 5 years, during which he sexually harassed me and other female planners".***

> ***"I have (in the past) been a target of sexual harassment as a result of my job as a planner; from sexist comments made by colleagues (male planners) to being brought into contact with a member of the public who started stalking me. Thankfully, my employer was also very supportive and managed, via its legal team, to shut that down fairly quickly, but it was not a pleasant experience at all".***

Intersectionality

Intersectional analysis of our data revealed that age, race and sexual orientation were often perceived by our participants as either adding an extra layer to existing gender based discriminatory practices, or as providing fertile ground for complex forms of discrimination.

Reported examples of ageism and gender discrimination were highest amongst our oldest cohorts of respondents.

> ***"Personally, I feel that gender discrimination has become more of a barrier for me personally as I have gotten older; although it is hard to differentiate between ageism, sexism and racism as they appear to overlap".***

Having said that, all age groups seem to have been affected to some degree.

> ***"When I worked in the local authority there were only a handful of women in professional roles in what was a large department. One was at Supervisory Planning Officer level. The others were at Planning Assistant level, like me, but also of similar age to myself. So there may have been barriers but it is difficult to say definitively from this sparse evidence. Also as a young planner I thought there were barriers from age".***

> ***"Gender and age are related. Women are the primary care giver and take time out to have children, then they are disadvantaged as they do not stay in the system and get the leadership experience they require to progress in their careers. They are then disadvantaged both because they are too old and they lack management experience. They then have less earning power, with the subsequent on-going disadvantages that this brings".***

Sexual orientation and race were also considered as crucial factors contributing to (or creating) barriers to employment. Some women in our study identified these as having stronger influences on professional advancement than 'gender'.

> ***"(…) Yes, definitely, gender has played a role in practically keeping me out of employment in the planning profession. However, so has race. When I read the data of the number of women of colour who have been accepted into and completed master's-level trainings in urban and regional planning (or some variation of this discipline), I would say that colour has had a stronger influence in creating barriers to employment".***

> ***"Our firm is made up of folks who, quite frankly, could all be classified as marginal – bi-racial; Indigenous; orientation. We survive and, at times, thrive - but I often feel we have to work 2, 5, and 10 times harder to be considered equal or close to that of other male-led firms (…) Other collaborators share – we can see how much harder you have to work. First because you are a woman owned and operated firm, second because people who find out you are gay – sometimes have to do a double consideration, and third because you employ other marginalized people".***

Results by sector

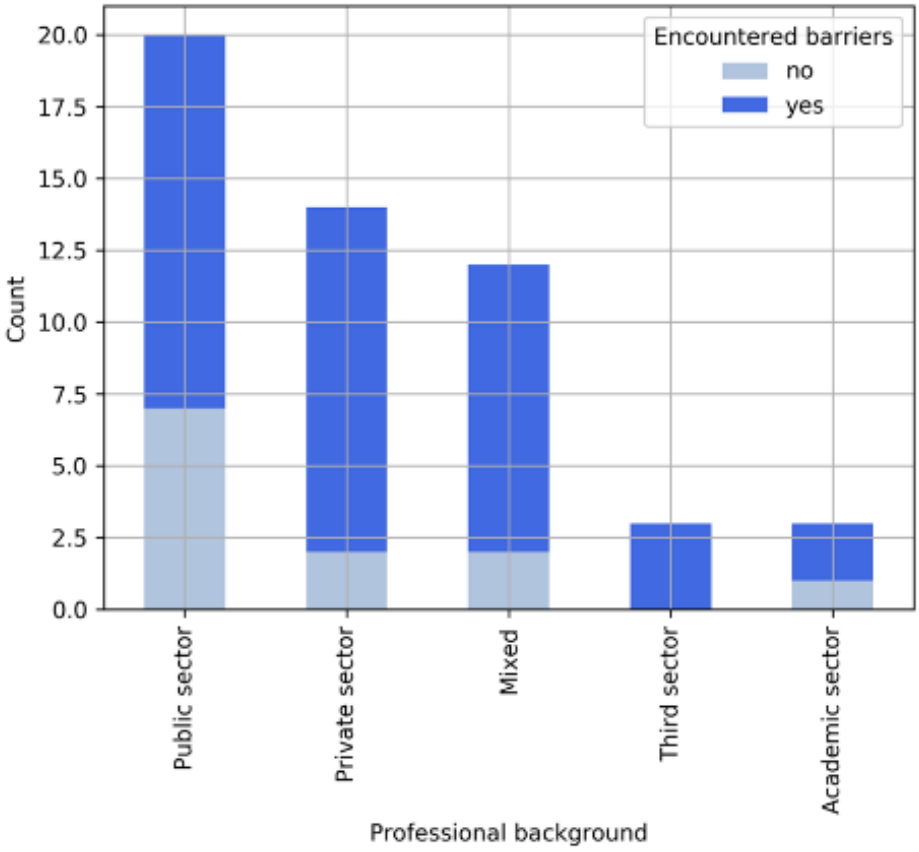

Figure 4: Results by sector

The breakdown of our results by sector suggests that gender related barriers to professional advancement and discriminatory practices are equally prevalent in all sectors (viz. public, private, academic and third sector). Respondents who have moved across sectors mentioned that sexism/discriminatory practices very much depend on the culture of the particular workplace rather than a particular sector per se. Having said that, a general perception in our interviews was that the situation is perhaps slightly better in the public sector, mainly thanks to the activities of employee unions.

> ***"Being a young female in the private sector in the 1990s and with the recession of 1992, my progression opportunities were non-existent. I would never have had the opportunity to progress within the company. Working in the private sector meant that the company's clients had a bias towards what a female planner could achieve and frequently questioned my professional judgement".***

"In general, working in the public sector, I would say that women were treated better than in the private sector, mainly due to the activities of the public sector unions. To a certain extent, rights were more or less acknowledged in the public sector, but in the office, attitudes depended upon the individual. A decent male boss was ok in the Scottish local authority I worked for, but his replacement by an unpleasant misogynist resulted in pernicious working conditions for the females (planners and administrative staff) as well as difficult for men who had children. An elderly man made serious complaints (sexism, ageism, general discrimination) against that boss and action was taken by the public authority employer".

"Towards the late 1980s, I joined the university where, in general, working conditions were more or less equitable. I am aware of current debates about differentials in the pay of women and men, but I was not aware of that. The public sector and presence of trade unions helped, as well as more regulation about maternity pay and leave of absence".

Results by age range

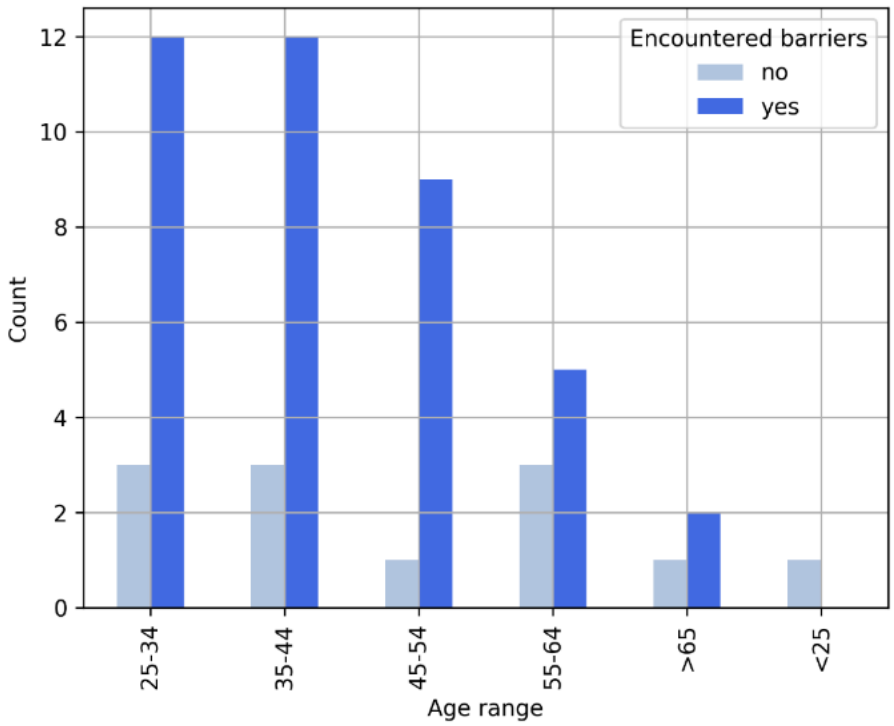

Figure 5: Results by age range

Looking at our results by age range, it would seem that all cohorts of women who took part in our study were similarly affected by sexism and/or barriers to professional advancement with the exception of the under 25 cohort. This might be a by-product of our data – with only few respondents falling into this age category. Or, it may be a reflection of the short amount of time spent in employment by these women so far. Interestingly, the exact same number of women falling into the 25-34 and 35-44 age ranges reported having experienced barriers.

When asked about their perception about changes in the profession over time, women often expressed mixed opinions. On the one hand, there was a general sentiment that things might have changed for the better. On the other hand, feelings were expressed that the progress made could be interpreted as a bit of a sham and/or that there is still room for improvement.

> ***"The changing attitude towards women has brought more opportunities for us to participate in high profile activities and be invited to events. However, over the last few years, it is rather annoying to know that one is being invited to sit on appointment panels and to give presentations because they need a woman there to be politically correct!".***

> ***"There are now more women in the profession and therefore a better gender balance. However, due to the fact that more women will still take career breaks than their male colleagues, those numbers shrink the higher up you get in the profession".***

When asked about the key factors which might have facilitated positive changes in the workplace, participants mentioned various key variables, such as the role of employee unions, the introduction of more flexible ways of working, general changes of attitudes, and the recent impact of social media campaigns.

> ***"There was no discussion about 'family-friendly' policies in either the public or private sector, maybe until the 2000s. Membership of trade unions was helpful in the public sector (local authorities) but non-existent in the private sector, something which is probably still true".***

> ***"I definitely feel that there have been major changes and progress in both the wider work culture and employers' policies towards women. I also felt that most barriers tended to be related to the attitude of certain individuals; but lucky enough, the university sector tended to have more open-minded people and that meant that the environment on the whole was more flexible and sufficiently robust for an individual to make progress".***

> ***"In the last few years with the rise of '#metoo' there has been more thought into how people behave in work environments, but it can still feel intimidating and unbalanced. The behaviour towards different genders is still dependant on culture, age and location".***

In a similar way, failure to imbed positive changes were largely attributed to deeply rooted workplace cultures and practices.

> ***"There have been various initiatives related to advancing women in the workplace, hiring more female managers, and starting a women in planning group internally. However, these are minor changes and don't seem to be really changing the overall work place dynamics. There is still very much a water cooler/bro type mentality within planning, as the majority of builders, developers and contractors are also men".***

Generally speaking, the analysis of participants' views about changes over time reveals two important points:

First, female planners nowadays do face barriers to professional advancement. However, those barriers are not the same as the ones previously faced by older cohorts, who encountered 'open resistance', it seems, when trying to enter (and stay) in the profession. Women are now facing barriers which are (arguably) more 'subtle' – including a lack of flexible hours to undertake child/elderly care. These barriers are sometimes at the intersection of the professional and personal spheres (i.e. negotiating childcare responsibilities/domestic chores and professional commitments) and are not necessarily easier to address than those previously experienced – quite the opposite in fact. This suggests that the structures in place to help women overcome these barriers need to be considered (or re-considered) in light of these new challenges.

Second, echoing recent studies on a similar topic, many participants suggested that despite higher levels of female students studying planning at university and a higher level of women than men at entry and mid-seniority professional levels, the number of women in management and top positions remains rare. A possible explanation for this, and a recurring point made in our interviews, is that male planners might not necessarily welcome increased levels of gender balance and/or diversity in the profession. Although the exact percentage of male planners who are unsympathetic to a move towards a 'female friendly' profession remains undetermined, a general assumption of many participants is that men are still trying to hamper women's progress (either consciously or unconsciously) due to a reluctance to deviate from social/workplace norms.

> ***"I have noticed that things are improving. In the 13 years that I have worked in the profession there are many more women that I encounter now. But, I think that there are still many older men who have the opinion that they would rather deal with male colleagues, and I still feel that as women we take the lion share of childcare etc. and that this conflicts with corporate life".***

> ***"There is definitely a lot more awareness around the issue of involving women more heavily in the industry, and the number of female-targeted events are fantastic. However, I don't feel like males in the industry are necessarily on board with this trajectory. There is very much a perception that quotas and driving female participation will hurt males chances of promotion, exposure etc. and for this reason I know a lot of the males in my office and in the industry are not particularly supportive of change".***

Some participants suggested that intersectionality was again a key element to be taken into consideration over time – suggesting that diverse groups of women might be affected in different ways over the years depending upon their representation in the profession.

> ***"From my perspective, there have been improvements in the representation of white women, but not so much in the representation of women of colour, in the planning profession. This means women of colour continue to be marginalized from planning journey-level positions and, consequently, excluded from planning project opportunities that could potentially address social inequalities and other injustices faced by communities of colour, such as excessive pollution in, or economic divestments from, predominantly coloured neighbourhoods. Another impact is emotional. Women planners of colour may have entered planning training programs to improve conditions in communities of colour. Their experiences with discrimination, like white women, also give them insight into the factors that drive inequalities and injustices in communities of colour, and they would be able to convert this understanding into innovative ideas to empower residents of colour. Their marginalization from journey-level planning positions makes it difficult for them to fulfil this mission, which can be extremely demoralizing".***

Country differences and specificities

Reported below are comments made by participants regarding what they considered to be specific aspects (or traits) of the planning profession within their own countries. Although we cannot generalise the content of these comments beyond the scope of this research, they do provide useful insights and reflexions about countries' specificities.

> **New Zealand – Lack of family friendly policies, childcare responsibilities and ageism**
>
> ***"Lack of family friendly policies is more prevalent here in NZ than it was in the UK. Flexible working is far less common. Having said this, it is much more acceptable to take career breaks and to change jobs".***

"I think that women are disadvantaged in NZ as they (still) do the bulk of child care and are more likely to want to work part-time following having children. However, the work place and job market is primarily set up for full-time workers".

"For me, gender is less of an issue compared to age. Ageism seems alive and extremely well in New Zealand. Most people seem to want to employ people younger than themselves as they feel they are less likely to be threatened in any way by these people. They think employees will be prepared to work full-time, have minimal time off and work in the office each day of the week, and they can pay them less".

United States – Qualifications, race and law enforcement

"In the United States many public planning offices do not hire individuals as planners with related or direct skills and knowledge in urban planning. Many of these individuals hired without planning qualifications are men. Planning employers will hire such men over women with planning qualifications. Planning employers should first hire those with the qualifications to be fair to those who have spent the money and time completing the graduate or undergraduate planning degree. After all, if one cannot make it through an urban planning training program complete with tests, one probably cannot identify, decipher, or assess planning problems to a standard as expected of professional planners".

"In the United States, laws have been passed to mandate gender equity and equality in the workplace, but despite such social advancements women continue to trail behind, with women planners of colour lagging behind white women planners, as I had mentioned in a previous response. The reason this difference continues in gender representation in the planning profession is because the planning industry does not enforce the laws, indicating there also needs to be a change in attitude regarding the way women's planning trainings, and thus their skills and knowledge, are perceived and valued. Attitude plays a significant role in fostering gender equity."

Canada – Being the 'difficult woman'

"Planning is very small and gossipy in Canada, so having the reputation of being 'difficult woman' (or even not 'likeable') can really hurt one's chances of being hired, plus career advancement, promotions, and pay".

Dealing with sexism

Although this study focuses on the identification of gender related barriers to professional advancement, rather than assessing the impacts of those barriers on women's personal and professional lives, in practice it is difficult to differentiate between the two. To do so would be to ignore the multifaceted consequences of discriminatory practices in the workplace.

The impacts and consequences of discriminatory practices at work range from the difficulty to communicate sexist behaviours, to hesitations about escalating them to senior members of staff, and experiencing feelings of isolation at work. Some of these impacts and consequences are reported below, along with suggested solutions and/or 'coping mechanisms' devised by study participants.

The next section of the report sets out, in greater detail and in the form of recommendations, specific suggestions and mechanisms put forward by participants to address gender-related barriers and sexism in the planning profession.

Recognising and calling out bad behaviours

> ***"The biggest challenge has been getting men to recognize and call out other men's bad behaviours and, related to that, communicating to men in planning that the core issue isn't 'communication styles' but rather blatant bullying and harassment and issues of power and privilege. It's really hard to show people who experience life at the default settings what the experience is like for everyone else with less power and privilege".***

> ***"Trying to explain sexism and racism to senior white male colleagues in my experience has been like trying to explain colour to someone who has never seen colours before. If I had known it was going to be like this, I think I would have just gone into engineering instead where I would have at least expected these attitudes and behaviours. I don't know why I thought planning would be different".***

'Putting up and shutting up'

> ***"I have never been a complainer, mainly because I've never had to, and I like to be positive and deal with situations quickly and move on. However, going home every day upset, I decided I had to complain about my manager, but the Director decided that we just had to sort it out. He didn't want anything to do with the situation. I was given the strong message by him that I wasn't to raise it again and that I would just have to put up and shut up. I was also given the message that as a manager I had to***

tow the party line; which meant I was to support the HoP's actions and behaviour with my team no matter what he did".

'The difficult woman'

"endured the behaviour of my team member for longer because it was clear that (XXXX employer's name) did not support me and I didn't want to cause a fuss only to be just left to pick up the pieces".

Isolation and lack of support

"Most of what I had experienced was invisible to my team. I had no support at work".

Impact and consequences on women's careers

Returning to work as self-employed
"I have returned to work as a self-employed consultant so that I can manage my family and work life balance. I was unable to make the Associate Director position fit with the requirements of family".

Stepping down the career ladder
"I found another job in a planning authority. This was a significant step down the career ladder, essentially taking me back to where I had been 13 years beforehand. It also meant I had to shift to working full time again as it is very difficult to find reasonably well paid part-time jobs as a planner in the public sector".

Resignation from co-founded company
"I felt forced to leave a company I co-founded due to the level of harassment".

Resignation and career break from planning
"These issues all contributed to me leaving my position (without a new position in place) and taking a break from planning before launching my own company".

Lack of confidence and 'imposter syndrome'
"What has happened to me over the last five years has significantly affected my confidence in my abilities. I do know that I'm an excellent planner and manager but sometimes I feel like an imposter. I'm constantly questioning my abilities and I would never have done this previously (…). Would a man be so lacking in confidence when sending out quotes for planning services? Would a man spend twice the necessary time checking and double checking their work before passing it to their clients? I do beat myself up a lot that I should be stronger because as a woman I must prove myself more".

Mental health issues and resignation without a new position

"I finally quit my job last July. I was having to attend a mental health professional due to my low mood. I have never had mental health issues before working at (XXX). I had been holding everything in for five years ... She made me see that my work place was extremely toxic (and I wasn't the only one she'd seen from XXXX) and that realistically for my health I had to get out. I chose to leave even though at the time I had no job to go to".

Coping mechanisms and solutions

Challenging masculine norms and behaviours

"I am a proponent of the importance of micro-level social interactions to undermine implicit gender barriers which often occur in my work teams (which are frequently all-male, often older than me, and professionally my 'superiors'). I refuse to make tea in a meeting, for example, so as not take up a traditional serving female role. When complimented on my physical appearance by a male at work (e.g. 'nice dress') I make a point of also complimenting them on their physical appearance (e.g. 'nice tie'), so as to unsettle the tendency to make a woman's appearance relevant to her professional abilities".

Calling men on their behaviours

"On a smaller scale I have often had the experience of being talked over, which I tend to now just call out at the time. The first few times I did this it was profoundly uncomfortable but I think I've got used to doing it. I think this is an example of an issue where sometimes men don't realise what they are doing until it is pointed out to them, and sometimes women are scared to point it out for fear of being seen as an angry woman".

Recommendations

In this section, we set out 15 recommendations to improve the workplace and the experience of women working in planning. All the proposals reported here are drawn from our interviews and questionnaires – they are not listed in any particular order.

1. Establishing equal pay between men and women

Equal pay has been part of the UK law since the 1970 Equal Pay Act, and it is now part of the Equality Act, 2010. Despite the right for men and women to be paid the same when doing similar jobs or doing work that has been rated as equivalent – equal pay is still an issue within the profession. Hence, this recommendation calls for more transparency on pay, and for a commitment from employers in the public and private sectors to ensure that equal pay is enacted.

2. Testing unconscious bias during job interviews

Our research has found that unconscious bias is still an issue and that much more needs to be done in order to address it – particularly when recruitment opportunities arise. This recommendation calls for the implementation of measures to address unconscious bias during job interviews across the industry. These measures could include (but are not limited to) unconscious bias training and specific recruitment policies – such as removing any identifying information from CVs and cover letters before reviewing them and/or using gender neutral language in job descriptions.

3. Monitoring the 'office culture'

Although every public and private sector employer has policies covering equality issues, our research identified gaps between written policies and their implementation in the workplace. Our research also highlighted a need for a culture shift within the profession – that is, for a culture of equality to be promoted in the workplace. Measures could include systematic equality training for managers (who should lead by example) and for training to be based on real examples (not limited to desk-based exercises which can be disconnected from reality).

4. Setting up safe, confidential, and professional systems for reporting sexist behaviours

A key finding of this study is that more needs to be done to address sexist behaviours and harassment. Despite the legislation that is already in place, a significant number of respondents mentioned that it is often hard to prove harassment in the workplace and that it takes time, money and confidence to file a complaint. In this context, professional bodies such as the RTPI could play a key role to ensure that sexist behaviours are rooted out of the profession. It is recommended that planning institutes worldwide set up safe, confidential and professional systems to report bullying and harassment, not just on the basis of gender identity, but also sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity …).

5. Encouraging mentorship and networking activities

Mentorship and networking activities were identified as key measures to support women in the workplace and to help tackle gender related issues. It is recommended that more systematic mentorship programmes are encouraged – in particular, women to women mentorship. Networking activities should also be encouraged – especially women only networking events which provide a 'safe space' to share experiences, questions and struggles as well as to provide a source of encouragement.

6. Offering career development and leadership training to women

In order to address the issue of female underrepresentation at senior levels in the profession, it is important to positively encourage women to progress to senior roles. As highlighted above, mentoring of young female planners is often perceived has a key measure that should be encouraged and promoted across the profession. Another recommendation is to offer in-house training opportunities to enable women to progress through internal promotion with a focus on leadership training.

7. Implementing family and carer-friendly policies for men and women

It is recommended that family and carer-friendly policies are implemented across all sectors in the workplace. Improved working practices to enable employees to also undertake carer responsibilities through the promotion of flexible hours should be considered for everybody – women and men. Policies that encourage fathers to take on more childcare responsibilities, work at home and take paternity leave (particularly those at senior levels) should be promoted in order to normalise male role models (encouraging men to be seen as equal to women in the household and in the workplace). Finally, much more could be done at the national level to establish family friendly policies (e.g. a national strategy for low-cost childcare).

8. Implementing flexible working hours

Flexible working hours is seen as an essential part of family and carer-friendly policies and is therefore a standalone recommendation. Embedding flexible working into the structure of an organisation is essential in order to address the challenge of balancing parenting and caring duties with work commitments. This study suggests that 'institutional commitment' is as important as the capacity and willingness for employers to implement flexible working hours.

9. Improving support before, during and upon return from maternity leave

Our research found that support (or rather the lack of support) for women before, during and upon return from maternity leave is still a critical issue. Hence, more needs to be done to support women at this time of their lives, including keeping women engaged with the workplace during maternity leave (if they want to be), and ensuring checks are put in place to make sure that women return to the same level of responsibility and can choose to work flexible hours if they want to.

10. Carefully monitoring managers' behaviours when women are most at risk

Managers' behaviours should be carefully monitored to ensure that discriminatory practices are avoided when women are particularly vulnerable – e.g. upon return from maternity leave or when they have made a complaint about someone. When promotion opportunities arise, managers' behaviours should also be monitored to ensure that the process is fair and transparent. Events should be designed so as to ensure that women are not at a disadvantage (viz. events should not be designed simply around 'traditional male activities' – i.e. pub/football – but should aim to be as inclusive as possible).

11. Publishing examples of good practices in the workplace

Many participants in our study mentioned that the RTPI and other professional institutes have a convening power and are uniquely placed to promote good practices across the industry. One recommendation is that professional institutes publish examples of good practices in the workplace and encourage their wider implementation.

12. Appointing dedicated senior members of staff to monitor ethics, equality and diversity issues

Our research also highlights the importance of senior management to take a lead on ethics, equality and diversity issues. It is recommended, therefore, that a dedicated person at a senior level is appointed to undertake a monitoring role. This, in turn, will help achieve the cultural shift that is required within the profession.

13. Taking transparency and accountability seriously (e.g. defining key performance indicators, tracking and publishing progress across organisations)

Tracking and monitoring progress towards greater gender equality within the profession is essential in order to assess the 'maturity' of the profession in terms of diversity of talent. This should be done at an industry wide level and within individual organisations (i.e. private consultancies; public sector/local authorities). Clear action plans/Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategies and KPI should be designed to clearly track progress and identify areas, sectors (or organisations) lagging behind in terms of diversity.

14. Encouraging women to take leadership roles (and 'defining' leadership)

Many participants in the study highlighted the importance of leadership within the profession and the distinct lack of female leaders in top positions (especially in the private sector). Hence, it is recommended that women be more systematically encouraged to take on leadership roles. Earlier recommendations such as mentoring, development and leadership programmes, family friendly policies and flexible hours could all help create the right conditions for women to take on leadership roles. Another measure is for academic courses (especially those accredited by the RTPI) to give greater visibility and recognition to women and their contribution to planning.

15. Encouraging macro and micro behavioural shifts

Finally, changing attitudes and behaviours are key to ensuring that the profession recruits and retains women at all levels. It is recommended, therefore, that macro and micro behavioural shifts be encouraged. For instance, encouraging a mental shift in thinking regarding women in management roles; away from an assumption that women who seek such roles are typically those who have limited parental or caring responsibilities and are therefore the ones who can 'handle' the management workload. It is also recommended that education in planning and the promotion of planning as a career be encouraged at an early age for all genders. In addition, when engaging with communities, the profession should be clear about being neutral and inviting all persons (regardless of gender, race, and religion etc.) to participate in processes.

Conclusion and a way forward

The results of this study highlight a seemingly simple but important point – women working in planning today are still facing gender-related barriers that inhibit their personal development and professional advancement. Although we would have liked to report a more flattering picture of the profession – self-honesty is the best place to start.

Of course, planning is almost certainly not the only profession affected by the persistence of sexism and gender inequality. Other traditionally male-dominated working environments – within and outside the built-environment – might similarly still not provide favourable grounds for women to thrive.

However, a surprisingly positive aspect that has emerged from this study is that a large majority of women who have encountered gender-related barriers (in one form or another) have remained passionate about their work – a sign that planning remains an attractive profession (and often 'vocation').

One of the most important points emerging from our research is that female planners nowadays face fewer challenges than past cohorts of women in attaining *entry* into the profession. There are now a lot more junior female planners in meetings than 30 or 40 years ago. However, the relatively equitable number of women and men entering the profession is not resulting in changes at the top level of companies. The main problem is thus not to *attract* women but to *retain* them and help them progress throughout their professional journeys.

Tackling this challenge, however, will not be an easy task – quite the contrary. It is easier to openly call out outrageous sexist behaviours and to put in place quotas, than it is to challenge subtle, complex and nuanced behaviours which are often deeply rooted in organisational, cultural and social norms.

To be clear, the 'boys' club mentality' is alive and well not because the profession is inherently dominated by regular pub-goer middle-aged white males who only care about football, but because social norms, or (more precisely) the mechanisms which translate and maintain those social norms within organisations, often penalise those who become primary care givers (irrespective of gender).

Men's testimonies on this point in the study were (arguably) spot on. While it is maybe easier for men to be promoted, their careers are affected in similar ways to women's careers when they have children. To reiterate a blunt but telling point made by one of our male participants: ***"children rather than gender per se are probably the issue today in terms of career progression"***.

As in many other professions, planning needs sound employment policies facilitating primary care givers (men and women) to return to work, in addition to programmes, schemes and structures to help support their progress in a way which accommodates their other commitments.

But of course one could (rightly) argue that even if all the right employment policies are in place, nothing will ever be achieved if we do not challenge deeply rooted perceptions about gender roles and abilities. In other words, nothing will change if current unconscious bias and gender stereotypes are permitted to remain.

Yes, planning (and many other professions) also needs a culture change. Now, culture changes are not just about women. If they are to be successful, culture changes are about men and women who are conscious and respectful of human dignity, and who strive to build balanced and caring societies.

This is, in fact, the most difficult area to tackle because it extends beyond workplace policies and behaviours. Decisions about how much women and men should devote to their careers (along with the professional and personal sacrifices which determine whether or not to pursue a career) are negotiated at home and are often rooted in a long-standing set of values. Again, our study highlights a very simple but crucial point – women who did not suffer from any gender-related barriers throughout their professional careers had three things in common: an employer with family friendly policies, a good salary, and a supportive partner.

Hence – we need to challenge micro and macro forms of sexism, question our own bias and strive to challenge gender stereotypes in the workplace. However, we also need supportive partners and affordable childcare – both of which are beyond the scope of the planning profession (and indeed any professional body) to address directly.

So, where does that leave us regarding the future of women in planning?

There are a number of actions that the RTPI has recently committed to undertake to improve not only gender equality but also diversity and inclusivity within the profession[9]. Outlined below are some of the first key measures – recently designed by Brook Graham and adopted by the Institute as part of its 2020 Action Plan – to promote the place of women and underrepresented groups within the profession.

First, the RTPI will strive to create and promote a clear vision and definition of diversity and inclusivity.

[9] In 2018, the Institute proposed the adoption of a vision statement on diversity and inclusivity and posited that an Action Plan will support this 'vision'. In 2019, specialist diversity and inclusion consultant Brook Graham was appointed to undertake a series of activities to support the institute in preparation of its Action Plan.

Second (and echoing recommendation 12 in this report) the Institute is committed to setting up effective structures to drive (and measure) diversity and inclusivity strategies and plans – including the appointment of a diversity and inclusivity manager to drive changes at the RTPI.

Third, the Institute will leverage its convening power to create a more diverse and inclusive planning industry. It is dedicated to equip leaders with the skills and insight to drive inclusive cultures (for instance, to develop a role model program).

Finally (and in line with recommendation 10 in this report) the Institute is committed to supporting and promoting a working culture in which diverse talent can thrive and progress – ensuring, for instance, that all RTPI events are designed to be inclusive and appeal to diverse interests and cultures.

Of course, these are just a few initial steps towards the immense task of tackling social, cultural and organisational barriers which prevent women from thriving in their planning careers. We very much hope that these initial measures will act as a springboard to nurture a profession able to harness, at last, a variety of talents; a crucial exercise if we are to help build diverse, inclusive and cohesive communities.

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