

# **THE CONTINUED FEMINISATION OF THE LABOUR FORCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN ANALYSIS OF RECENT DATA AND TRENDS**

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The post-apartheid period 1995 to 1999 has witnessed a continued feminisation of the labour force. In 1995, 38 percent of all females between the ages of 15 and 65 were either working or actively looking for work in South Africa; by 1999, this had increased to 47 percent. This study describes changes in female labour supply and employment using data from the 1995 and 1999 October Household Surveys, paying close attention to the quality of the data upon which the empirical investigation is based. We find that the continued feminisation of the labour force is associated particularly with an increase in female unemployment, and where employment has grown, this has been mostly in self-employment in the informal sector. These findings may reflect an increasing number of women who are “pushed” into the labour market, one possible explanation for which is the erosion in women’s access to traditional forms of (male) income support.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Between 1995 and 1999, there has been a continued feminisation of the labour force in South Africa. While more women and men have been entering the labour market over this period, the increase for women has been proportionately greater, such that women’s share

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of the economically active population has risen<sup>2</sup>. Over the same period, reported employment has grown, but by far less than the change in labour supply. As a result, unemployment rates for both women and men have also increased.

Of the total number of jobs in the economy, an increasing proportion in 1999 were occupied by women. A large part of the increase in recorded female employment, however, is due to the growth of self-employment in the informal sector, employment typically associated with low earnings, little protection and insecure working conditions. Furthermore, although the increase in employment has been larger for women than for men, it has not been sufficient to absorb the proportionately greater number of women who have entered the labour force over this period. As a result, significantly more women than men have also joined the ranks of the unemployed in 1999. It seems therefore that the continued feminisation of the labour force in South Africa is associated with rising levels of female unemployment and a feminisation of low-paid insecure forms of employment.

In this paper, we explore these changes in labour supply and employment in greater detail. In the first part of the study, we sketch changes in women's labour force participation before 1995 in South Africa. The focus of the discussion, however, is on the data provided by the 1995 and 1999 national October Household Surveys. We seek both to describe recent trends in labour force participation and to evaluate the quality of the data that inform this description.

The second part of the study considers briefly why more women are entering the labour market. The feminisation of unemployment, and the relatively smaller increase in the demand for

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<sup>2</sup> The labour force (or economically active population) consists of those labour market participants who are working or who would like to work. The labour force participation (or economic activity) rate is then defined as the percentage of the total working age population participating in the labour force, i.e. the employed and the unemployed.

female labour in the formal sector, would seem to indicate that a greater number of women are looking for employment principally because they are being pushed, rather than pulled, into the labour market. We suggest that one of the factors driving more women into the labour market is the decrease in women's access to male income support.

## **2. MEASURING WOMEN'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION**

### ***a) Some history: literature and trends.***

Over the past decade in particular, much has been written on the increasing feminisation of the labour force in both developed and developing countries around the world (Standing, 1989; Cagatay and Ozler, 1995; Horton, 1999; Mehra and Gammage, 1999; Ozler, 2000). In the international literature this feminisation has referred to the increase in women's share of the labour force coupled with the increase in women's share of employment. In South Africa, there is also evidence of a trend of feminisation, although there has been relatively less discussion on the nature of women's changing participation in the labour market.

In Standing *et al* (1996) and Barker (1999) measures of female labour force participation are calculated for the period 1960-1991 using data from the five-yearly Population Census. These studies show that female labour supply has been increasing, and at a much faster rate than male labour supply. In 1960 women accounted for 23 percent of the labour force in South Africa, by 1985 this had risen to 36 percent and by 1991 it had reached 41 percent<sup>3</sup> (Standing *et al*, 1996: 60). In fact, this leads Standing *et al*

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<sup>3</sup> Note that these figures do not take into account the TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei). Also, because there is a strict and a broad definition of unemployment, the latter including those discouraged work-seekers who do not engage in active job search, there is also a strict and a broad

(1996: 60) in the ILO review of the South African labour market to remark that "Perhaps the most important change in labour supply over recent years has been the rising labour force participation rate of women." Posel and Todes (1995) also provide evidence from the Census data of an increase in women's share of employment as well as of their share of the economically active workforce in KwaZulu-Natal between 1980 and 1991.

Female labour supply has also increased in the 1990s in South Africa as a whole. Klasen and Woolard (2000) find female labour force participation rates to be rising based on data from the 1991 and 1996 Census and the 1995, 1996 and 1997 October Household Surveys (OHSs). The data from these studies are not directly comparable because of the use of different data sources and definitions of employment and unemployment, as well as changes in the data collection process itself over the years, but they give us some indication that the trend observed over the second half of the 1990s represents the continuation of an already established phenomenon.

### ***b) Data Issues***

A number of problems are encountered when trying to measure labour force participation in South Africa over time. Two main possible sources of data are the Census and the October Household Surveys. Neither data source is without problems, but the Census is perhaps less appropriate for a study of labour market activity. First, it is only conducted every five years and there is also a substantial lag between data collection and the release of the data for public use. Second, the Census coverage is not consistent over time. For example, up to 1970 the data included the former TBVC states, but between 1980 and 1991, as 'independence' was gained, they were

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definition of economic activity. It is not clear which definition of participation is reflected in these figures. Nonetheless, they give us some sense of the increase in women's economic activity.

excluded (Barker, 1999: 49). Third, there have been changes in definitions as well as inconsistencies in the way in which the economic status of men and women has been classified within and across the years, particularly with respect to subsistence farming. For example, the 1951 and 1960 censuses treated men of working age in the former homelands as employed in subsistence farming if another occupation was not specified, while women in the same position were treated as “housewives” and hence not economically active. The 1970 census continued to classify the wives of male household heads in the former homelands as “housewives”, but classified other females of working age as employed in subsistence farming. After 1970, women in subsistence agriculture were again treated as not working, and therefore as not economically active (Posel and Casale, 2001). Fourth, because the Census asks only a limited number of questions on labour force participation specifically, the measurement of employment status is likely to be crude and the reliability of reported information cannot be checked. In 1996, for example, classifications of employment and unemployment status were each based on a single question. Fifth, no distinction is made between formal and informal sector employment.

In 1993 Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) introduced the annual October Household Survey (OHS), one of the principal aims of which was to provide a more reliable and detailed picture on employment and unemployment in the country. An entire module in the questionnaire is devoted to labour market questions, permitting more textured definitions and analysis of labour market activity. The OHS includes also more detailed questioning on the socio-economic characteristics of individuals and the households within which they live, making it possible to examine how changes in household composition and structure affect the individual’s decision to supply labour.

Like the Census, the OHS data cannot easily be compared over time. In 1993, for example, the TBVC states were not included

in the survey, and for 1993 and 1994 a different sampling methodology was used from the later years. Population weights based on information from the Census 1996 are available from 1995 onwards only, making the later years of the survey more comparable. Nonetheless, the 1996 and 1998 surveys were based on a sample of only 16 000 and 20 000 households respectively, and there has been some concern over whether the results from these surveys are consistent with those provided by the other OHSs (Klasen and Woolard, 2000).

In this study, we analyse data provided by the 1995 and 1999 surveys, which seem to be compatible in terms of sampling methodology and scope. There are still problems, however, with comparing information over the two years. With each subsequent survey, attempts have been made by Statistics SA to improve the questionnaire. In the worker module some new questions have been included, some have been excluded, while others have been reworded for the sake of greater clarity. Although this is useful if one is looking at the data for a single year, it creates problems of comparability when trying to study changes over time. Furthermore, Statistics SA has not been consistent over the years in how they have defined and derived statistics on employment and unemployment from the various questions relating to employment status.<sup>4</sup> For the empirical analysis in this study, we therefore recreate employment and unemployment variables for 1995 and 1999 to ensure, as far as possible, that the data measures are consistent over the two surveys and that the observed increase in measures of economic activity represent real changes in the economy. The Appendix provides details of the method used to classify individuals as employed, strictly unemployed or broadly unemployed. It shows

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<sup>4</sup> Klasen and Woolard (2000: 9) found that the definitions used in the 1994 and 1995 OHSs were not consistent with those of 1996 and 1997. We find that the 1999 OHS is also not consistent with the earlier years (see the Appendix for details).

also how the adjusted classifications of employment status differ from those provided by Statistics SA.

A further change in the questionnaire that is problematic for a study of labour force participation concerns the measurement of the informal sector. In recording the informal sector, the 1995 OHS differentiated only between registered and unregistered self-employment. The 1999 OHS, however, also distinguished between those “employees” who were working for registered businesses and those who were working for unregistered (or informal) businesses (see also Bhorat, 1999). The 1999 data show that about 10 percent of all employees (excluding domestic work and unskilled agriculture) were employed in the informal sector, with little difference when disaggregated by gender. But we cannot identify from the OHS whether there has been any change in this type of employment between 1995 and 1999, or whether the change has been greater for men or for women<sup>5</sup>

There are other problems with the capture and measurement of economic activity in the OHS. The suspected underestimation in each year of small-scale and subsistence farming is a case in point, and one that we will return to in the section below. Nonetheless, given these data constraints, we do our best to provide a consistent picture of trends in labour force participation between 1995 and 1999. Where possible, we highlight the likely biases that exist in the data, and the direction in which these biases are likely to operate.

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<sup>5</sup> Another change in the OHS questionnaire, relating also to informal sector employment, concerns questions about the income earned by the self-employed. In 1995, the questionnaire asked the self-employed for information on gross income or turnover of all own account activities as well as all the expenses incurred to generate this income. In 1999, the self-employed were only asked for “total income (before deducting expenses)”. This means that we cannot examine how returns to this type of employment have changed over time.

**c) *The feminisation of the labour force: changes between 1995 and 1999***

Using our adjusted data for 1995 and 1999, there is clear evidence of a continued feminisation of the labour force over this period. A greater proportion of both women and men of working age (i.e. between the ages of 15 and 65) were working or willing to work in 1999 than in 1995, but the increase for women was greater than the increase for men. The proportion of all economically active individuals who were women therefore increased<sup>6</sup>. The data are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: *The working age population and labour force participation***

	Female		Male	
	1995	1999	1995	1999
<b>working age population</b>	12 686 000	13 656 000	11 545 000	12 607 000
<b>share of working age population</b>	52.4	52.0	47.6	48.0
<b>strict labour force</b>	4 857 000	6 375 000	6 771 000	7 708 000
<b>broad labour force</b>	6 067 000	8 287 000	7 606 000	8 904 000
<b>strict participation rate</b>	38.3	46.7	58.6	61.2
<b>broad participation rate</b>	47.8	60.8	65.9	70.7
<b>share of strict labour force</b>	41.8	45.3	58.2	54.7
<b>share of broad labour force</b>	44.4	48.2	55.6	51.8

(source: OHS 1995, OHS 1999)

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to point out that when using two years of cross-sectional data in an analysis of labour force participation, it is only possible to pick up *overall* changes that have occurred. This means we cannot identify any churning that has taken place in the labour market. For example, it is possible that a large number of men and women also left the labour market over the period, but because a larger number entered, we observe an increase in participation. Using two cross-sections we can only say that, for instance, in 1999 there were 3.5 million *more* men and women participating in the labour force than in 1995. Also, we cannot identify *which* women or men were participating in 1999 and not in 1995. This can only be done with panel data, and as of yet no national panel data set exists for South Africa.

Between 1995 and 1999, the female population of working age increased by almost one million. But the number of (broadly defined) economically active women increased by more than two million women over the same period. Table 1, which provides labour force participation rates for women and men, shows that according to the strict rate, some 38% of all women of working age were economically active in 1995, while nearly 47% were active in 1999. In terms of the broad definition this increase is more pronounced: while approximately 48% of all women of working age were economically active in 1995, close to 61% were part of the economically active population in 1999.

The male population of working age, and the proportion of these men who are economically active, also increased between 1995 and 1999, but by proportionately less than for women. Although male participation rates are still significantly higher than female participation rates, women's share in the economically active population has risen. In 1999, close to half of all those recorded as working or willing to work were women.

The increase in labour supply of both women and men, however, was not matched by an equivalent increase in demand or employment, and as a result rates of unemployment had also increased by 1999. Table 2 shows that absolutely more women than men joined the ranks of the unemployed over the period, and that they were more likely than men to become "discouraged" work-seekers. Female unemployment, broadly defined, grew by some 1.6 million between 1995 and 1999, approximately 45% of which represents an increase in the number of women who reported wanting to work but not having actively looked for work in the past four weeks. In 1995, some 38% of all economically active women were broadly unemployed; in 1999, this had increased to 47%. Male unemployment rose by some 1.1 million men in 1999, roughly one third of whom were reported as discouraged. Although the proportion of economically active men who were broadly

unemployed rose from 23% in 1995 to 32% in 1999, men remained significantly less likely than women to be unemployed.

**Table 2: Employment and unemployment by gender**

	Female		Male	
	1995	1999	1995	1999
<b>employed</b>	3 785 000	4 368 000	5 858 000	6 022 000
<b>share of employment</b>	39.3	42.0	60.7	58.0
<b>strictly unemployed</b>	1 071 000	2 006 000	913 000	1 686 000
<b>broadly unemployed</b>	2 282 000	3 918 000	1 748 000	2 882 000
<b>strict unemployment rate</b>	22.1	31.5	13.5	21.9
<b>broad unemployment rate</b>	37.6	47.3	23.0	32.4
<b>share of strict unemployment</b>	54.0	54.3	46.0	45.7
<b>share of broad unemployment</b>	56.6	57.6	43.4	42.4

(source: OHS 1995, OHS 1999)

Increasing rates of unemployment are often associated with jobless growth in South Africa (cf. Barker, 1999; Hofmeyr, 2001). The data from the 1995 and 1999 OHS, however, suggest that there has been a net increase in employment over this period, albeit small (particularly in relation to the growth in labour supply). If the data are to be believed, then total recorded employment grew by 750 000 (see Table 2). Close to eighty percent of this increase reflects greater female employment. Women's share of employment therefore also increased over the period. In 1995 the proportion of the employed who were women was approximately 39%; by 1999 this had risen to 42%.

The small growth in total reported employment, however, derives principally from a considerable growth in the number of people who are self-employed. As Table 3 illustrates, much of this self-employment is in the informal sector. For both men and women, the number of people reported with unregistered self-employment more than doubled, but the change was considerably larger for women. More than half of the growth in female

employment between 1995 and 1999 can be attributed to the growth in women making work in the informal sector. Registered self-employment also increased dramatically and particularly for women, but from a much smaller base.

**Table 3: Distribution of employment<sup>7</sup>**

	Female		Male		% Change	
	1995	1999	1995	1999	F	M
<b>all employees</b>	2 631 000	2 764 000	4 603 000	4 752 000	5.1	3.2
<b>Informal self-employed</b>	178 000	487 000	214 000	525 000	173.5	145.2
<b>Formal self-employed</b>	65 000	127 000	237 000	360 000	93.9	51.7
<b>Domestic workers</b>	696 000	767 000	93 000	41 000	10.2	-55.9
<b>Unskilled agriculture</b>	215 000	220 000	711 000	337 000	2.3	-52.6
<b>total*</b>	3 785 000	4 365 000	5 858 000	6 015 000	15.3	2.7

(source: OHS 1995, OHS 1999)

\* The total employment figures do not correspond exactly to those in Table 2 because of missing values for sector and type of employment.

The OHS data suggest that there has been a net increase in the number of 'employees' in the economy over the period, but this has been relatively small<sup>8</sup>. Although the increase in the number of female employees accounted for approximately 23% of the overall growth in female employment, the relative change in this employment was only five percent. Because the 1995 OHS did not distinguish between those working for registered versus unregistered businesses, we cannot tell how much of the increase in this group is due to a greater demand for female labour in the

<sup>7</sup> There were also a small number of workers who said that they worked for someone else *and* for themselves. They constitute only around one percent of the total number of workers in both the 1995 and 1999 sample, and therefore did not warrant a separate category. We included them in the 'employee' category, as it is likely that they are either formal or informal sector workers predominantly, engaging in own-account activities on the side to supplement their income (Bhorat and Leibbrandt, 2001: 76).

<sup>8</sup> Note that when the term 'employees' is used here, we are excluding domestic workers and unskilled agricultural workers each time.

formal or in the informal sector. Numerous studies have documented the growing practice of outsourcing and the informalisation of work, and particularly of women's work (cf. Orr, 2001; Skinner and Valodia, 2001), which would suggest that the composition of this employment is shifting over time. According to the 1999 OHS, however, approximately 90% of people recorded as employees in that year had employment in the formal sector, employment that would be subject to labour legislation suggesting greater security for workers<sup>9</sup>.

Close on two thirds of the economically active who are recorded as "employees" are men. As Table 4 illustrates, there does not seem to be a shift towards employing proportionately more women in the South African economy. The proportion of all employees who are women has hardly changed between 1995 and 1999, with men remaining over-represented in this type of employment (relative to their share in total employment). Men are also over-represented in formal self-employment, work that may be associated with larger earnings. The only particularly low-paying sector in which men are over-represented is unskilled agriculture, although their share in this type of employment has decreased dramatically over the period due to the large decreases in male employment in this sector<sup>10</sup>. Women, in contrast, remain over-represented in domestic work and self-employment in the informal sector, work usually seen to have low returns and little security or protection for the worker.

It would seem, therefore, that the continued feminisation of the labour force is associated with rising rates of female

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<sup>9</sup> It would have been useful here to disaggregate employees into union and non-union members. Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain with any certainty the change in the relative size of these groups over the period because there were approximately 1500 missing observations in 1999 for union membership. When weighted, this amounts to around 680 000 individuals.

<sup>10</sup> Klasen and Woolard (2000) also point to the large decrease in this sector over the period 1995 to 1997.

unemployment and the feminisation of generally insecure forms of employment. The total increase in female employment has been very small relative to the growth in female labour supply, and where net employment has increased, then this derives principally from women ‘making work’ for themselves, and particularly in the informal sector.

**Table 4: Share of employment type**

share of	Female		Male	
	1995	1999	1995	1999
<b>all employees</b>	36.4	36.8	63.6	63.2
<b>informal self-employed</b>	45.4	48.1	54.6	51.9
<b>formal self-employed</b>	21.6	26.0	78.4	74.0
<b>domestic workers</b>	88.2	94.9	11.8	5.1
<b>unskilled agriculture</b>	23.3	39.5	76.7	60.5
<b>total</b>	<b>39.3</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>60.7</b>	<b>58.0</b>

(source: OHS 1995, OHS 1999)

As argued earlier, one of the problems that complicates the interpretation of these trends concerns the reliability and comparability of the OHS data, particularly with respect to measures of the informal sector. We are not able to identify shifts in the demand for labour by formal and informal businesses between 1995 and 1999. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the observed increase in informal sector self-employment reflects the better capture of data rather than an actual change in this type of work. As Statistics South Africa has sought to improve data collection over the 1990s, so there has been more attention paid to the capture of informal sector activities. The 1999 OHS was perhaps more explicit than the 1995 survey in identifying informal sector work as employment<sup>11</sup>. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that better

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<sup>11</sup> Unlike in 1995, the 1999 questionnaire included a prompt on what should be counted as employment in the first question on the individual's activity of the previous seven days. Work was defined as: “formal work for a salary, wage or profit; informal work, such as making things for sale, selling things or providing a

data capture alone accounts for the dramatic increase in reported self-employment in the informal sector. It is also probable that informal sector activities remain under-estimated in 1999 (cf. Stats SA, 2001b: 52). Because women are more likely than men to be self-employed in the informal sector, the implication of this bias is that female labour force participation and women's share of employment (in informal sector employment in particular) are underestimated<sup>12</sup>.

A further significant source of underestimation in the OHS labour market measures is the undercount of small-scale and own-account agriculture (see Standing *et al*, 1996; Posel and Casale, 2001), an activity that is highly feminised. In 2000, Statistics SA introduced a new Labour Force Survey (LFS) to better measure employment and unemployment in the country. One of the main objectives of this survey is to ensure the more efficient capture of all kinds of work, and in particular, of small-scale and own-account farming, through the introduction of "more probing questions" (Stats SA, 2001a). The initial estimates from the pilot round of the LFS conducted in February 2000 give an indication of the extent of the undercount of subsistence farming in recent years. In 1999, some 131 000 women and 165 000 men were estimated to be involved in informal agriculture. In the LFS pilot survey, these numbers change to 896 000 women and 612 000 men (Stats SA, 2000; Stats SA, 2001a). The more efficient capture of subsistence farming, and the coding of this work as employment, substantially increases labour force participation rates and employment rates for

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service; work on a farm or land, whether for a wage or as part of the household's farming activities; and casual/seasonal work."

<sup>12</sup> It could be argued that the observed feminisation of the labour force over this period is simply a product of the better collection of informal activities in 1999. We have shown however, that while there were 2.2 million more women as part of the broad labour force in 1999, the increase in women in informal self-employment amounted to just over 300 000. Even if all of these 'new' jobs were only a result of the more efficient capture of informal activities, a strong feminisation of the labour force would still be recorded.

women in particular. But the addition of these farmers to the employed increases also the proportion of women with recorded employment who live in poverty (see Posel and Casale, 2001, for further discussion of the implications for measures of women's economic activity of these new data practices towards subsistence farming).

### **3. WHY ARE MORE WOMEN LOOKING FOR WORK? SOME LIKELY CAUSES**

If there has been relatively little discussion in the literature on increasing labour force participation in South Africa, there has been even less on *why* there has been this increase in participation, and in female labour force participation in particular. Klasen and Woolard (2000: 12) suggest that the labour supply of men and women has been growing in post-apartheid South Africa due to the “significant number of Africans of working age who had been catching up on previously missed education” now entering the labour force. The data does indeed support such an argument: there were approximately 585 000 more women and 400 000 more men in the economically active population in 1999 with a matric, compared to 1995<sup>13</sup>. Also, of the total increase in the labour force, some 485 000 women and 333 000 men were between the ages of 20 and 24, the age range in which we might expect many African school-goers to have matriculated.

While education is certainly an important factor explaining the rise in labour force participation in post-apartheid South Africa, it is unlikely to tell the full story about why there has been a proportionately greater increase over the period in *women's* labour supply specifically. There have been large increases in the proportion of 16 to 65 year old women who are either working or

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<sup>13</sup> All estimates of changes in labour force participation are based on the broad definition of economic activity.

wanting to work in the older age cohorts (see Table 5). There were also significant increases in the labour force participation rates for those with no or incomplete schooling. These changes suggest that there are factors other than education driving the greater labour force participation of women. While we do not propose to provide an exhaustive answer to the question of why more women entered the labour force during this period, a simple analysis of the data does provide some possible determinants<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 5: Broad labour force participation rates by age and education**

<b>Age cohorts</b>	<b>Female</b>	
	<b>1995</b>	<b>1999</b>
15-19	9.3	14.2
20-24	45.3	63.4
25-34	67.9	83.9
35-44	66.6	81.3
45-54	54.0	65.6
55-65	21.5	28.0
<b>Education</b>		
No schooling	38.9	49.7
Incomplete primary	48.7	57.8
Primary	45.4	55.2
Incomplete secondary	39.6	52.9
Matric	61.7	76.8
Diploma	73.7	86.8
Degree	79.1	82.8

(source: OHS 1995, OHS 1999)

Labour force participation is influenced by both demand- and supply-side factors. For example, we would expect that an increase in the demand for female labour due to a structural change in the economy might 'pull' more women into the labour market, as the

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain from the OHS data which individuals are the new entrants into the labour market. We therefore cannot map these individuals' personal or household characteristics to their changing labour force participation. The most we can do using cross-sectional data, is look at how the working age population's average characteristics have changed over the period, to infer any likely causes for the change in labour force participation.

probability of finding employment would have increased. However, there does not seem to be much evidence of such a shift operating here. The period 1995 to 1999 has been characterised by relatively little net growth in labour demand. Rather, as we have shown above, the feminisation of the labour force over this period has been associated particularly with a rise in female unemployment and an increase in informal sector self-employment. More women are entering the labour market despite the rising probability of not being able to find regular employment.

The nature of this feminisation would be consistent with women being predominantly pushed, rather than pulled, into the labour market. An important factor pushing women into the labour force may be the fall in access to male income. There are several reasons why we would expect women's access to male income to have decreased over this period. The most obvious is the increase in male unemployment: in 1999 there were approximately 1.1 million more unemployed males according to the broad definition, than in 1995. The percentage of females between the ages of 15 and 65 living with at least one employed male in the household fell from 53 percent in 1995 to 44 percent by 1999<sup>15</sup>.

Other possible explanations for declining male income support over this period include the deepening of the HIV/Aids epidemic, as well as the greater possibility for migrants (who historically have been mostly male) to settle in urban areas, which could be associated with a reduction in remittance transfers to women. A change in household structure and particularly the

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<sup>15</sup> This argument is based on the *added-worker hypothesis*, which proposes that during periods of reduced aggregate demand, when the usual breadwinner becomes unemployed, labour force participation actually rises because additional family members (usually women) begin searching for employment to maintain family income. Indeed, based on the OHS data from 1995 to 1997, Klasen and Woolard (2000: 12) observe that with the rising trend in labour force participation there is also "a corresponding decline in full-time 'housewives' ", providing additional support for this argument in South Africa.

increase in female-headed households may also signal a decline in women's access to male earnings in South Africa. A trend of rising female headship, which has been documented in earlier work (cf. Posel and Todes, 1995:230), has continued into the latter 1990s. The percentage of household heads between the ages of 15 and 65 who are female increased from 28 percent in 1995 to 34 percent in 1999. The increase in female-headed households may reflect greater male desertion, but it is also possible that more women are choosing to remain unmarried<sup>16</sup>. The proportion of the female population of working age who reported themselves as married decreased from 39.5% in 1995 to 35.2% in 1999, while the proportion of females either living with a partner, divorced or separated, or never married, increased over the same period. As a growing number of women live without men, and particularly men with employment, so women's access to male income is likely to have become eroded, forcing more women into the labour market.

#### **4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Despite the problems encountered when trying to put together a consistent picture of the changes in economic activity in South Africa, the evidence points quite clearly to an increase in the labour force participation of women in particular. There is little evidence, however, that this feminisation of the labour force is associated with women's increased mobility in the labour market. The biggest changes observed for women are in unemployment and in self-employment in the informal sector where women are likely to be engaged in low-paying survivalist activities.

An important question, that has been given inadequate attention, is why more women are entering the labour market. It is unlikely that an increased demand for female labour is driving a

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<sup>16</sup> Of course, there is also the possibility that part of the increase in female headship reflects the greater willingness of women to report themselves to the interviewers as household heads.

feminisation of the labour force that has resulted in increases predominantly in unemployment and in informal forms of employment. A more extensive examination of the supply-side forces behind the increased feminisation is beyond the scope of this paper, but we have suggested some possible determinants. We propose that a likely influence in the increasing numbers of women in particular who are wanting paid work is the erosion of male income support over the period under review. The number of women of working age living with at least one employed male in the household decreased substantially between 1995 and 1999, while the number of households headed by women increased. This hypothesis needs to be tested more rigorously in a multivariate context, suggesting a direction for future research.

## **APPENDIX**

Statistics SA has not always used a consistent or clear methodology when defining employment and unemployment using the OHSs. We have therefore redefined these variables for 1995 and 1999 to ensure comparability in our discussion of labour force participation over the period.

The employed are defined as those individuals between the ages of 15 and 65 who claimed that they had a full time, part time, or casual/seasonal job in the past seven days.<sup>17</sup> Those who did not work in the past seven days due to the following reasons: illness, strike, bad weather, problems with transport, vacation, study/training leave, maternity/paternity leave, unrest and other; but did have a full time, part time or casual/seasonal job to return to, were also classified as employed. Those who had not worked in the past week due to off-season activity or a temporary reduction in

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<sup>17</sup> Some studies define the working age as 16 to 64 (Klasen and Woolard, 1999; 2000). It was decided to use 15 to 65 here as this is the official working age range used by Statistics SA, although this addition makes very little difference to labour market measures.

economic activity were classified as strictly unemployed even if they had a job to return to as this constitutes frictional/seasonal unemployment.<sup>18</sup> This differs slightly from Statistics SA's definition as they also include as unemployed those individuals who had not worked in the past week due to problems with transport, unrest and "other".

The unemployed are defined as those individuals who did not have a job but would accept a job if a suitable one were offered. For the sake of comparability our definition of unemployment does not require that a person be available to accept work within a week. While we believe this is a fair criterion, it could not be used here because the question concerning availability for work was omitted in the 1995 OHS<sup>19</sup>. The distinction between strict and broad unemployment is then based solely on the individual's work-seeking activity. Those individuals who said they wanted work and had actively searched for work in the past four weeks were classified as strictly unemployed. Those who claimed that they wanted work but had done nothing to search for work in the past four weeks were classified as discouraged work-seekers, and thus as part of the broadly unemployed. Active work-seeking included waiting or registering at an employment agency or trade union; enquiring at

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<sup>18</sup> Because of the sequence of the questionnaire, there is no further unemployment information on the frictionally/seasonally unemployed and so we do not know whether or not they were actively searching for other work. Following Klasen and Woolard (2000), these individuals are classified as strictly unemployed.

<sup>19</sup> It seems that the majority of those who say they would accept a job if a suitable one were offered are generally available to start work within a week. Klasen and Woolard (1999:7) found that in 1994, 95% of the strictly unemployed and 91% of discouraged work-seekers said they would be available to start work within the next week. In 1999, of those who said they would accept a suitable job, 94% claimed to be available to start within the next week. In 1994, even though it was asked, Statistics SA did not use this question as a criterion in their definition of unemployment. In 1999, it was used as a criterion in Statistics SA's definition of strict unemployment, but was relaxed for the definition of discouraged work-seekers, even though the 1999 statistical release (Stats SA, 2000) claims otherwise.

workplaces, farms, factories or possible employers; placing or answering advertisements; seeking assistance of relatives or friends, looking for land, building or equipment or applying for a permit to start a business or farming; and waiting at the street side.

While this method of classification follows very closely the one used by Statistics SA in 1995, in 1999 (in fact, from 1996 onwards) Statistics SA used a more restrictive definition of unemployment which makes these results inconsistent with those produced in 1994 and 1995. In 1999 Statistics SA classified as unemployed *only* those individuals, who *also* claimed that they were "not working (but looking for work)" in one of the first questions on economic activity. This is problematic as some individuals, who may indeed have been willing to accept suitable work, who would have in fact preferred to work, and who may even have searched for work, might have categorised themselves in this question as students or housewives because this was their main activity at the time. As Klasen and Woolard (2000: 9) point out "the definition of employment should really be focused on not working, a willingness to accept work within a specified time frame, and a preference for working, and not on a description of the actual activities in the past week". Furthermore, in 1999 an additional option that did not exist in 1995 was added to this question: "Not working, not looking for work but available for work". It is assumed that this category was included to capture discouraged work-seekers and yet in 1999 Statistics SA excluded this group of people altogether from the definition of unemployment so that they ended up being classified as economically inactive. In fact, the majority of this group (around 70%) later claimed that they would accept a suitable job if one were offered. According to what we view as a more consistent definition for 1999, a large number of individuals were therefore reclassified

from not economically active to either strictly or broadly unemployed<sup>20</sup>.

Following Klasen and Woolard (2000) the other substantial change that was made for both years was redefining as “not economically active” those unemployed individuals according to Statistics SA's definition, who later on in the questionnaire stated that their reason for not working was one of the following: scholar/student, housewife, retired and *prefers not to work*; or illness, invalid, disabled and *unable to work*. It is not clear why these individuals state earlier in the questionnaire that they *would* accept a job if one were offered. Nonetheless, it seems more reasonable to exclude them from the unemployed if they explicitly state they prefer, or are not able, to work. These individuals are recoded as economically inactive.<sup>21</sup>

The table below shows the difference that our changes make to the strict and broad unemployment rates produced by Stats SA. As expected, our more restrictive definition of what counts as unemployment for 1995 (due to the exclusion of those who said they preferred not to work or were unable to work) has resulted in slightly lower rates of unemployment. In 1999, however, our definition is less restrictive as even though we exclude, as in 1995, those who said they preferred not to work or were unable to work,

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<sup>20</sup> Some of those who said they were "Not working, not looking for work but available for work" ended up being classified as strictly unemployed even though they stated they were 'not looking' in this first question. It is likely that many of these individuals were not sure what constituted 'work-seeking' when they answered the initial question. Waiting on the street side, for example, might not have been understood to be active work-seeking. Also, the question on work-seeking that is found further on in the worker module asks about activities *over the past four weeks*. It may be that some of these individuals were not looking for work at the time, but had actually done something over the past month to search for work.

<sup>21</sup> There are some other more minor changes that were made. As they involved only a handful of individuals they will not be discussed here. These can be made available by the authors upon request.

we included a larger number of those individuals who had been overlooked by Stats SA because they said they were “Not working, not looking for work but available for work.” Our unemployment rates are therefore noticeably higher than those of Stats SA in 1999.

**Table 6: Comparison of unemployment rates**

	Female		Male	
	1995	1999	1995	1999
<b>Strict unemployment rate</b>				
Stats SA’s definition	22.6	28.0	13.6	19.9
Adjusted definition	22.1	31.5	13.5	21.9
<b>Broad unemployment rate</b>				
Stats SA’s definition	39.2	43.2	23.5	30.0
Adjusted definition	37.6	47.3	23.0	32.4

(source: OHS 1995, OHS 1999)

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