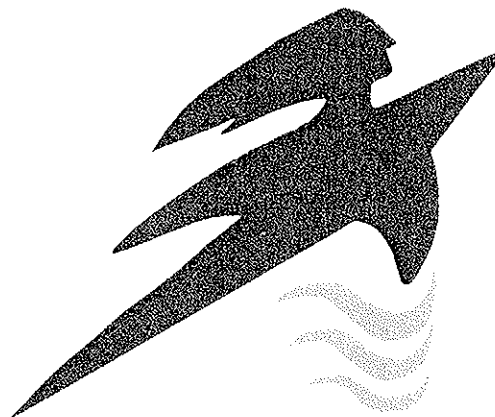


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Just a Sec! A Comparative Study of the Changing Role of Secretarial Staff in Australia and New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Little progress has been made in Australia and New Zealand towards achieving gender balance in management. One factor that has received little consideration in seeking explanations for this lack of progress is the lack of recognition given to professional secretaries. This paper reports a study of 600 members of professional secretarial associations in Australia and New Zealand. The major purpose of the study was to assess the relevance of the 'ghetto' thesis (Benet, 1972) to this type of work. Also investigated during the study were any possible links between industry type, sector or size of organisation and the status of secretarial work.

The study clearly shows that, although secretarial work still displays many of the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations, professional secretaries are undertaking a large number of management-type tasks and that autonomy levels experience are very similar to those of management. Industry, sector and organisational size were shown to have little effect on the status of secretarial work indicating that the factors restricting opportunities and rewards for secretarial workers are extraorganisational rather than intraorganisational in nature and based on deeply entrenched perceptions of this highly feminised occupation. A number of theoretical perspectives are investigated to help explain why this group of workers has remained partly ghettoised. Explanation is given to a number of factors limiting organisational progress which are restricted to secretaries rather than affecting female employees in general.

Introduction

The 'just a sec' syndrome is having a dual deleterious effect on organisations of the 1990's. Firstly perceptions of secretarial work as a 'dead-end' job for women i.e. a female 'ghetto' occupation are turning well suited and often well qualified men and women away this type of work. Secondly, when lower level middle management positions disappear from downsized organisations a number of additional responsibilities are often pushed down to office support staff. Rarely, however, are these support staff compensated for these additional responsibilities on the premise of the 'just a sec' syndrome i.e. when these responsibilities become part of a secretary's job they tend to become invisible and unrewarded.

Management needs to look closely at their support staff and how they are being utilised and compensated. Unless perceptions, attitudes and reward systems are revamped quickly, organisations are likely to find themselves faced with a shortage of these valuable employees.

The Problematic

Secretarial work has undergone a significant degree of change over recent decades. The changes which have already taken place together with potential future changes are outlined in Figure 1. The changes outlined therein are based on a wide review of the relevant literature but reflect the author's perception of an optimistic scenario towards which secretarial work *could* progress. Such

change results, in part, from innovations in office technology and from organisational restructuring. The effect of such change was addressed by the Career Path Project undertaken in Australia in 1993 which identified a conflict between traditional perceptions of secretarial work as identified within the literature and empirical data reflecting a strong similarity between skills required of secretarial workers and those employed by management. The Career Path Project recognised the immediate need to address the "structural and cultural issues resulting from the feminised, supportive, pervasive nature of the (secretarial) workforce and the low status of the occupation" (Career Path Project, 1993: p 2).

Theoretical Background

A comprehensive review of the relevant literature revealed that there are a number of labour market theories which have been used to explain the perpetuation of the low status afforded secretarial work (see Table 1). The theoretical perspectives set out in Table 1 serve to set the historical context of secretarial work and to demonstrate how the occupation has come to be perceived as demonstrating certain characteristics as displayed in Figure 2.

Although a consideration of a combination of a number of theories is necessary to explain the status of secretarial work, the concept of dual labour market theory and 'ghetto' occupations has received the major focus in respect to secretarial work (Benet (1972); Crompton and Jones (1984); Giles (1985); Eisman (1990); Leibowitz et al (1990); Truss et al (1992); Hunt (1993)). The variables selected for study in this paper (and indicated in Figure 2) are based principally therefore on dual labour market theory and the ghetto thesis.

Dual labour market theory has perhaps had the most significant influence on the perceptions of the status of secretarial work. Dual labour market theory suggests that a dichotomous labour market has evolved over time leading to a primary and a secondary sector typified by quite different rules (Lonsdale, 1985: p 7). Dual labour market theory comprises three related hypotheses:

- (a) two sectors exist within the labour market, i.e. a primary sector comprising 'good' well-paid jobs and a secondary sector comprising 'bad' low-paid jobs;
- (b) primary and secondary sectors of the labour market differ with respect to wage entry mechanisms and wage determination processes;

- (c) limited mobility exists between the two sectors to that workers tend to become trapped in the secondary sector. (Norris, 1993: p 176)

Traditionally the concentration of women both within particular sectors of employment and in specific occupations within sectors has been cited as evidence of the segregation of women into a 'secondary' labour force (Crompton & Jones, 1984: p 147). Since secretarial work is female dominated (Norris, 1993: p 153), it is likely that secretarial work will reflect the characteristics of secondary labour market occupations. Occupations which are female-dominated and which can be categorised as secondary labour market employment have become known as female work 'ghettoes' (Benet, 1972: p 7).

Benet's classic text *Secretary: Enquiry into the Female Ghetto* (1972) initiated the concept of office work as a female ghetto occupation. The description of typing and secretarial work as a 'ghetto' occupation is also supported by Crompton and Jones (1984) who refer to empirical studies by Benet (1972), Davies (1974), Barron and Norris (1976), McNally (1979), and Silverstone and Towler (1984) which found limited rewards and promotional opportunities for workers within these categories. Truss (1992) conducted a cross national study of secretarial work in England, France and Germany and reached the following conclusions in respect to the 'ghetto' status of secretarial work:

- the occupation was found to be predominantly female
- support existed for the concept of secretarial work as a ghetto occupation in respect to limited opportunities for promotion
- secretarial work could not be regarded as routine and repetitive in any of the countries partly contravening the 'ghetto' thesis
- the degree of gender attributions i.e. 'domestic' content of secretarial work reflected the norms of femineity and attitudes towards women's work in each country

At the heart of dual labour market theory and the concept of 'ghetto' occupations lies segregation theory. Walby (1988: p 17) describes segregation as the 'concentration of persons by ascriptive criterion such as gender and race in particular sectors of employment.' In relation to secretarial work the relevant ascriptive criteria is gender.

FIGURE 1: POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE IN CATEGORISATION OF SECRETARIAL WORK

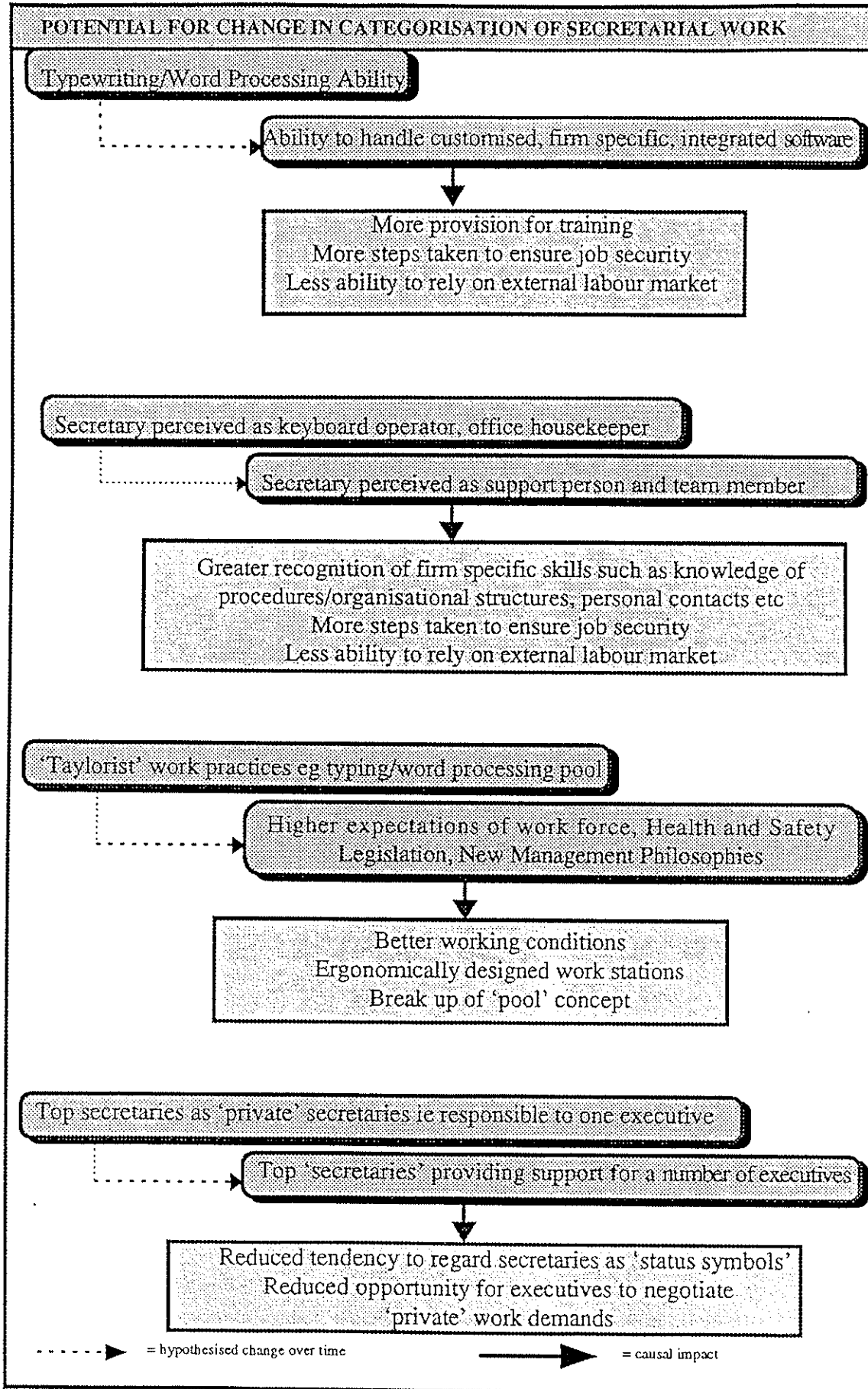
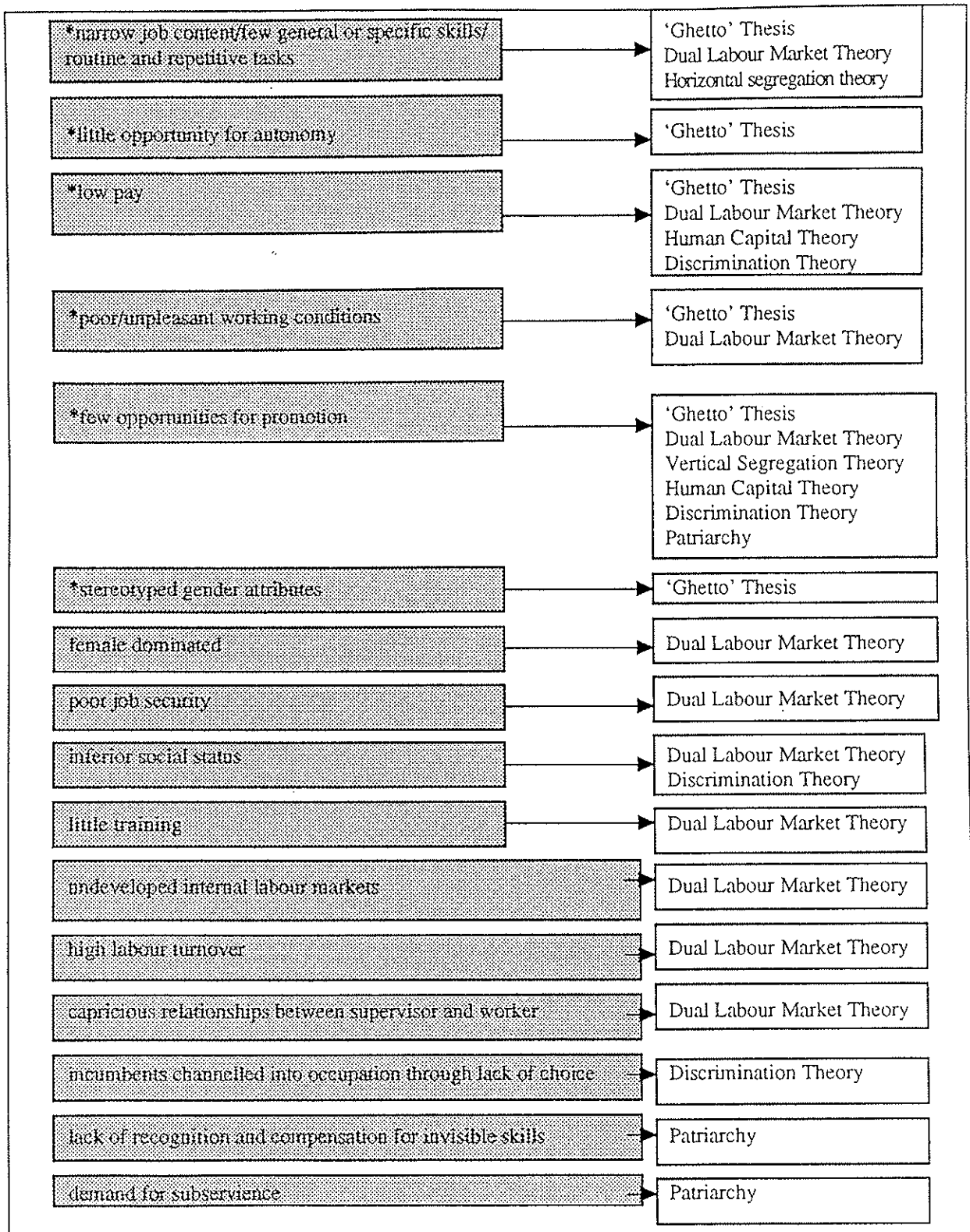


Table 1: Labour Market Theories Used to Explain the Perpetuation of the Low Status Afforded Secretarial Work

| Theory | Scope | Relevance to Secretarial Work |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Ghetto Thesis | Female work ghettos are typified by incumbents displaying lack of occupational choice, poor conditions of employment, low pay, few opportunities for advancement. | Benet (1972) classified secretarial work as the typical female work ghetto. Her work has formed the basis of the selection of variables within secretarial work which have acted to perpetuate the ghetto title. Such variables include narrow job content, little opportunity for autonomy, low pay, poor working conditions, few opportunities for promotion and the presence of stereotyped gender attributes |
| Dual Labour Market Theory | Labour market developed into a primary sector (good jobs) and a secondary sector (bad jobs). Certain workers restricted by discrimination to a secondary labour market | Secretarial work is female dominated. Women have traditionally been concentrated within the secondary labour market typified by low wages, poor job security, inferior social status, few general or specific skills, little training, limited scope for advancement, undeveloped internal labour markets, poor/unpleasant working conditions, high labour turnover and capricious relationships between supervisor and worker. |
| Segregation Theory | Concentration of persons by ascriptive criterion into particular sectors of employment. Horizontal segregation - mean and women recruited into sex-typed occupations. Vertical segregation - men predominate in higher echelons of organisational hierarchy | Horizontal segregation has traditionally resulted in female office employees eg secretaries being relegated the routine and repetitive tasks while the more intellectual tasks have been relegated to males. Vertical segregation has traditionally restricted secretarial staff to the bottom rungs of the organisational ladder. |
| Human Capital Theory | Employers recruit and compensate labour on the basis of the human capital which each workers has accrued in the form of education, qualifications, training, experience and skills. | Women employees including secretaries have traditionally been perceived as possessing less human capital and hence deserving of lower pay and promotional opportunities. |
| Discrimination Theory | Groups of workers are denied the opportunity to develop their capabilities and denied equal rewards for equal capabilities. Encompasses both direct and indirect discrimination prior to and after entry to the workforce | Indirect discrimination prior to work has traditionally channelled many women into limited occupational choices including secretarial work.. Once within the work-force direct discrimination has resulted in lower pay, opportunity for promotion and status for secretarial workers. |
| Patriarchy | Refers to a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. | Lack of recognition and compensation for invisible secretarial skills. Private ownership of secretary by boss demands subservience and discourages promotion. |

FIGURE 2: THEORETICAL DETERMINATION OF CHARACTERISTICS OF SECRETARIAL WORK



* = variables selected for analysis in this study

It would appear that the conditions experienced within secretarial work may be influenced by both horizontal and vertical segregation theories. The concentration of women into jobs sex-typed as female (secretary, typist, keyboard operator, filing clerk etc) while men occupy the higher grades likely to be connected to promotion ladders within the organisation is well documented in studies such as those by Holcombe (1973), Anderson (1976), McNally (1979), Barker and Downing (1980), Davies (1982), Crompton and Hones (1984), Zimmeck (1986) and Walby (1986). In the context of the office of the 1990's, it has been suggested that the presence of a personal computer on the desks of both secretarial staff and clerks/administrators is significantly reducing differences in work undertaken by these two groups of workers. However, one needs to investigate human capital theory to understand why a weakening of vertical segregation may be much slower moving. Human capital theory argues that employers select labour on the basis of the human capital which each worker has accrued in the form of education, qualifications, training experience and skills (Bradley, 1989: p 64). Secretarial staff have traditionally been placed in a no-win situation in respect to the acquisition of human capital. Historically the perception of secretaries requiring 'dexterity' rather than skill and the lack of promotional opportunities for female office workers has discouraged the acquisition of further education, qualifications or training. Then because they lack the necessary education, qualifications and skill, the lower pay and reduced promotional opportunities are likely to persist.

Given the fact that in the 1990's traditional socialisation processes have altered considerably and that secretarial along with other female employees are increasing their human capital through higher education, it becomes necessary to investigate discrimination theory to help explain the limited career opportunities and relatively low pay attributed to secretarial workers. Historically, as women entered the ranks of office workers, new positions were created for them, at lower rates of pay than that payable to male office employees and attracting considerably fewer promotional opportunities as well as offering far lower status than male office positions. Evidence may still be found of such direct discrimination in the recruitment and selection policies of many organisations today despite attempts by legislators to break down such practices. Once within the labour market secretarial workers are still likely to encounter direct discrimination in

respect to pay, promotional opportunities and status. Little appears to have changed since the scenario described in the following extract from "The Guardian" in 1971:

"..before women were significantly represented on the labour market many men started their business careers by doing just these jobs.. a male secretary would be required to act as stand-in and possible successor to the boss.... Once women enter the labour market the promotional paths become different. The male clerical jobs become a sort of express promotion stream and the jobs available to women become what we are all too familiar with, dead-end jobs" (quoted in Benet, 1972, p 24)

Why, when women's human capital is increasing and socialisation processes no longer producing low expectations of the working lives of women, is secretarial work not acquiring the recognition, rewards and status that many recent authors are proclaiming it deserves?

Patriarchy may help explain this lack of recognition, rewards and status for secretarial work. Patriarchy has been defined by Walby as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1988: p 214). Wajcman (1991) uses the concept of patriarchy to explain the socialisation of skill; the fact that skill is defined to give priority to traditionally male work and the fact that the skills that women use are not fully recognised and valued. Patriarchy could be regarded as the basis of both horizontal and vertical segregation theories and as the socialisation process underpinning the gender aspect of discrimination theory. Zimmeck (1986) proposes that in clerical work patriarchy resulted in a line being drawn between the intellectual, which was the province of men, and the routinised, which was the province of women. Many writers refer to the "patriarchal nature of office relations" reflected in the status involved in male executives having a personal secretary (Giles, 1985; McNally, 1979; Barker & Downing, 1979). Benet (1972) blames this 'private ownership' of each secretary by her boss for the continued 'ghettoisation' of secretarial work. Kanter (1977, cited in Game and Pringle, 1986, p285) sees the secretary-boss relationship as 'the most striking instance of the retention of patrimony within the bureaucracy'.

The question may be asked as to whether, in the organisational context of the 1990's, patriarchy may be preventing the effective use of a large

pool of well qualified, well experienced and loyal employees from within the internal labour market.

Organisational Context

Recent literature would suggest that, within the context of the organisation, secretaries are 'on the brink' of change. My own perception is that secretaries are at a point where their perceived role could change from purely subordinate to that of administrative/managerial team member. However, before such a change can eventuate several problems are yet to be overcome.

In respect to task variety and complexity, little evidence can be found of the deskilling of clerical/secretarial work predicted by the 1970's literature. In contrast to the pessimism of the proponents of deskilling, recent literature refers to the upskilling of secretarial work which finds empirical support in the work of Schmitt et al (1993) as well as the current survey. Such upskilling has resulted in a number of supervisory/management type tasks being included in the responsibilities of secretarial staff. This trend has the potential to reduce the applicability of the social construction theory of skill in relation to secretarial work as it may become difficult to recognise management work as skilled and to provide no such recognition for secretarial work when evidence is provided of considerable overlap of duties. However, this process may be complicated by the perpetuation of patriarchal relationships in the office context.

In respect to promotion opportunities for secretarial workers considerable agreement exists within the literature in respect to the continued lack of promotional opportunities despite increases in task variety, task complexity and autonomy. It would appear that secretarial workers face a number of barriers in addition to those faced by women employees in general. One such barrier is the tradition process of rug rankings/ratings - an arrangement whereby secretarial promotion and pay are dependent upon the progression and status of her boss rather than on secretarial merit, achievement or qualifications.

In respect to compensation levels for secretarial staff, the literature suggests that secretarial work has traditionally been low paid because of its position within the secondary labour market; the historical gender construction of clerical work; the use of rug rankings to determine secretarial pay; the lack of recognition for the

skills and qualities required for secretarial work; and the fact that secretaries are not perceived to help revenue producing positions. Despite the decreasing relevance of a number of these factors, increases in compensation may prove difficult to achieve because of the pressure to maintain internal pay relativities.

The perpetuation of stereotyped gender attributes is well supported in the literature as well as by the result of the current study. Wichroski (1994) suggests peripheral tasks such as office housekeeping are often determined by the nature of the personal relationship between boss and secretary, and although openly performed, are often denied recognition. It is this aspect of secretarial work which offers the greatest potential to continue the denigration of the status of the occupation and which sets it apart from a number of other sex-typed occupations.

Another problem faced by secretaries is that the inclusion of stereotyped gender attributes in the secretarial role combined with a lack of promotional opportunities and a lack of clear job descriptions has resulted in secretaries having a poor perception of their own profession. (Eigen, 1991).

It would appear that at the level of the organisation, changes in both behaviour and attitude are needed together with job redesign and organisation restructure (Senge, 1990) in order to enhance the conditions and status of secretarial work.

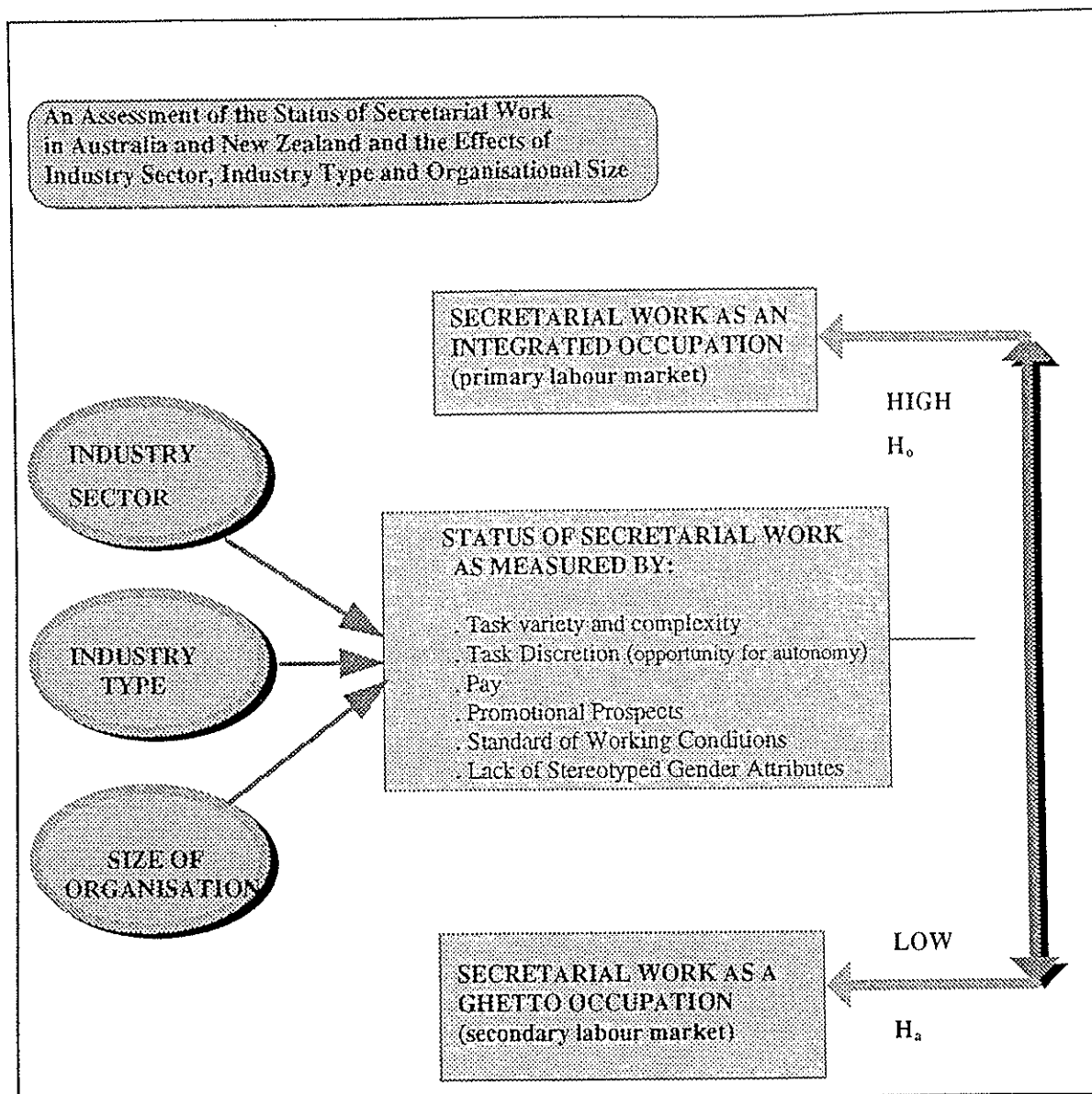
The Aims of the Current Study

This study was designed to provide an accurate assessment of the status of secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand as determined by a number of variables selected from an extensive review of the literature. These variables included task variety, task discretion, compensation levels, opportunities for promotion, standard of working conditions and presence of stereotyped gender attributes. In addition an investigation was carried out of any relationship between the status of secretarial work in these two countries and organisational size, sector or type of industry. The research model utilised is set out in Figure 3.

Methodology

A mail survey of 1000 members of professional secretarial bodies in Australia and New Zealand was undertaken. A response rate of 64.6% was

FIGURE 3: MODEL OF AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF SECRETARIAL WORK IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND



attained and after a filtering process, useable responses were reduced to 577. Data from these respondents were summarised and a series of recoding processes were carried out in order to either increase the comparability of the data or, in the case of open-ended responses, to enhance the information provided by respondents.

Summary of the Data Obtained

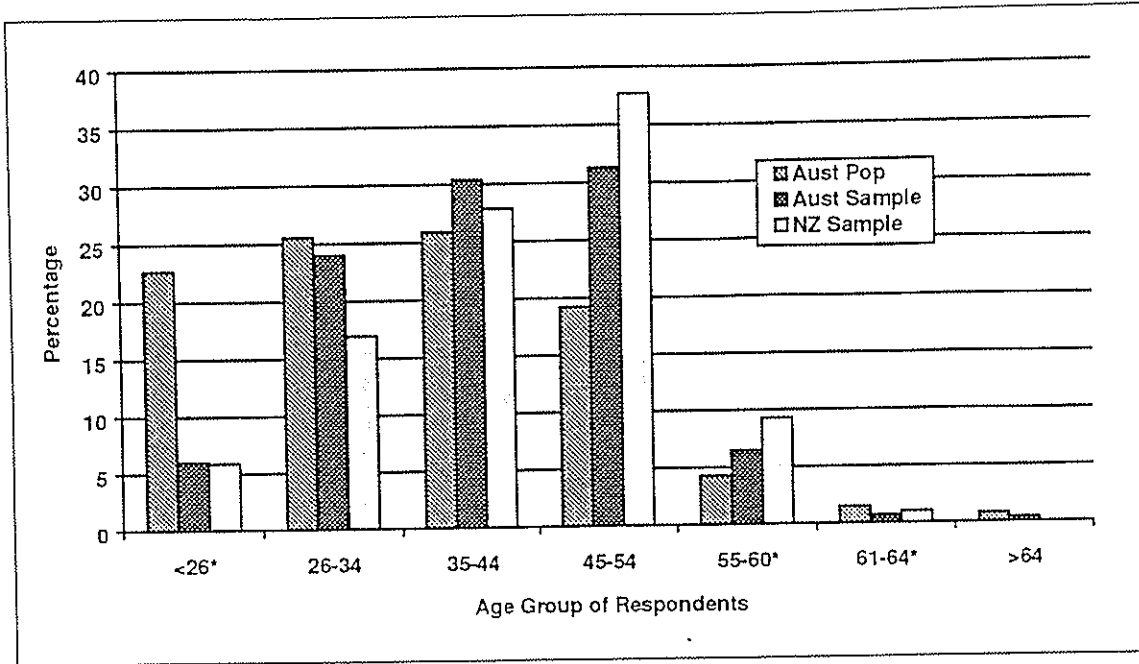
Gender

As expected 99.5% of respondents were female supporting the description of this occupational group of one of the most highly feminised occupations in Western industrialised nations (Truss, 1993).

Age

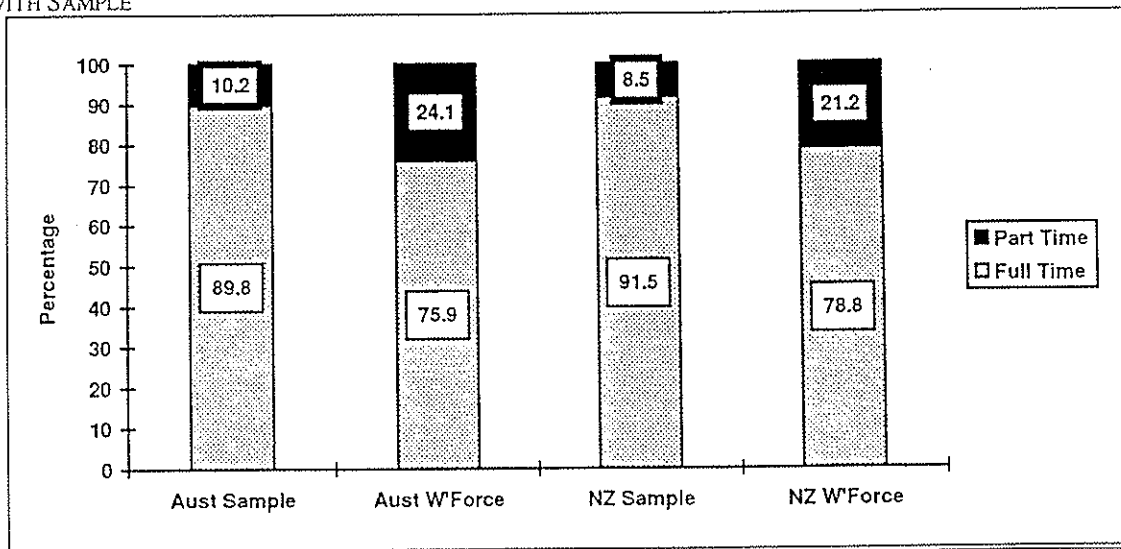
A surprising aspect of the data was the fact that the sample group were older than could be expected from the population age distribution. A comparison of both the Australian and New Zealand sample data and the Australian population age distribution is revealed in Figure 4. The relatively low number of respondents in the under 26 age category could result from the sampling frame i.e. since respondents were members of professional secretarial bodies in Australia and New Zealand it is possible that younger secretaries had not obtained the professional expertise or qualifications necessary for membership. Alternatively the low representation of the younger age groups may

FIGURE 4: - COMPARISON OF AUSTRALIAN FEMALE WORKFORCE AGE DISTRIBUTION AND AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE - JULY 1994



(ABS, 1994, *The Labour Force Australia*, Cat No 6203.0)

FIGURE 5: STATUS OF EMPLOYMENT - A COMPARISON OF AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND WORKFORCE DATA WITH SAMPLE



(ABS, 1994 (a), *September Quarter Employed Wage and Salary Earners Australia*, Cat No 6248.0 Statistics New Zealand, 1994 (a), *Household Labour Force Survey*, Data received by facsimile, 22.09.95)

Table 2: August 1994 - Sector of Employment

| | Australia | | New Zealand | |
|----------------|--------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| | Work Force % | Sample % | Work Force % | Sample % |
| Private Sector | 73 | 61.1 | 80 | 52.7 |
| Public Sector | 27 | 38.3 | 20 | 46.3 |

(ABS, 1994, *September Quarter 1994 Employed Wage and Salary earners Australia*, Cat No 6248.0 Statistics New Zealand, 1994 Quarterly Employment Survey, data received by facsimile 22.09.95)

reflect the fact that the occupation has lost its appeal to school leavers. Of greater concern may be the over representation in the 45-60 age range. Such over representation in this age group may result from the 'ghettoisation' of this occupation i.e. the lack of a career path out of secretarial work.

Status of Employment

A comparison of employment status for the sample group with work force data from Australia and New Zealand revealed a significant under representation of part-time workers (Figure 5). The under-representation of part time workers may also have resulted from the sampling frame i.e. it could be anticipated that most respondents would be full-time employees of their respective organisations.

Sector

The sample also displays an under representation of the private sector (see Table 2).

The over representation of the public sector could be reflective of the clerical/administrative nature of the work performed by the sample group and the subsequent large percentage (45%) of respondents working within the education, health and public administration industry classifications. Such a pattern of distribution across sectors would most probably be typical of the general population of secretarial workers in both countries.

Industry

The distribution of sample respondents across industry types is presented in Table 3.

Size of Employing Organisation

Chi-square analysis and cross tabulations revealed a significant difference between the size of employing organisations in Australia and New Zealand ($df = 5, p = .021$). A comparison of organisational size is presented in Figure 6. The major contributing factor to the significant difference in the size of employing organisations is the fact that public sector organisations in Australia are somewhat larger than those in New Zealand (See Table 4).

Compensation Levels

The salaries paid to respondents were considerably higher than could have been predicted by the relevant literature. Salaries for secretarial workers in both countries were considerably higher than average female earnings. This could result principally from the under representation of the Wholesale and Retail Trade and Recreation, Personal and Other Service industry classifications for which average workplace weekly earnings are lower than for the industry groups represented by the majority of the respondents (Callus et al, 1991, p 324). A comparison of salary levels for respondents with average male and female earnings in both countries is presented in Figure 7.

Table 3: Distribution by Industry Type

| Classification | Australia (n=387) | | New Zealand (n=189) | | Combined Sample* (n=576) | |
|--|-------------------|------|---------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Education | 77 | 19.9 | 35 | 18.5 | 112 | 19.4 |
| Public Administration | 63 | 16.3 | 29 | 15.3 | 92 | 16.0 |
| Manufacturing (inc Electricity gas and water and Construction) | 53 | 13.7 | 33 | 17.5 | 86 | 14.9 |
| Property and Business Services | 53 | 13.7 | 27 | 14.3 | 80 | 13.9 |
| Health | 38 | 9.8 | 13 | 6.9 | 51 | 8.9 |
| Finance and Insurance | 31 | 8.0 | 13 | 7.9 | 46 | 8.0 |
| Transport and Communication | 14 | 3.6 | 14 | 7.4 | 28 | 4.9 |
| Entertainment Recreation and Other Services | 15 | 3.9 | 9 | 4.8 | 24 | 4.2 |
| Wholesale and Retail | 14 | 3.6 | 6 | 3.2 | 20 | 3.5 |
| Mining | 19 | 4.9 | 0 | 0 | 19 | 3.3 |
| Other Community Services | 6 | 1.6 | 4 | 2.1 | 10 | 1.7 |
| Other | 4 | 1.0 | 4 | 2.1 | 8 | 1.4 |
| TOTAL | 387 | 100 | 189 | 100 | 576 | 100 |

*missing n = 1

FIGURE 6: SIZE OF EMPLOYING ORGANISATION

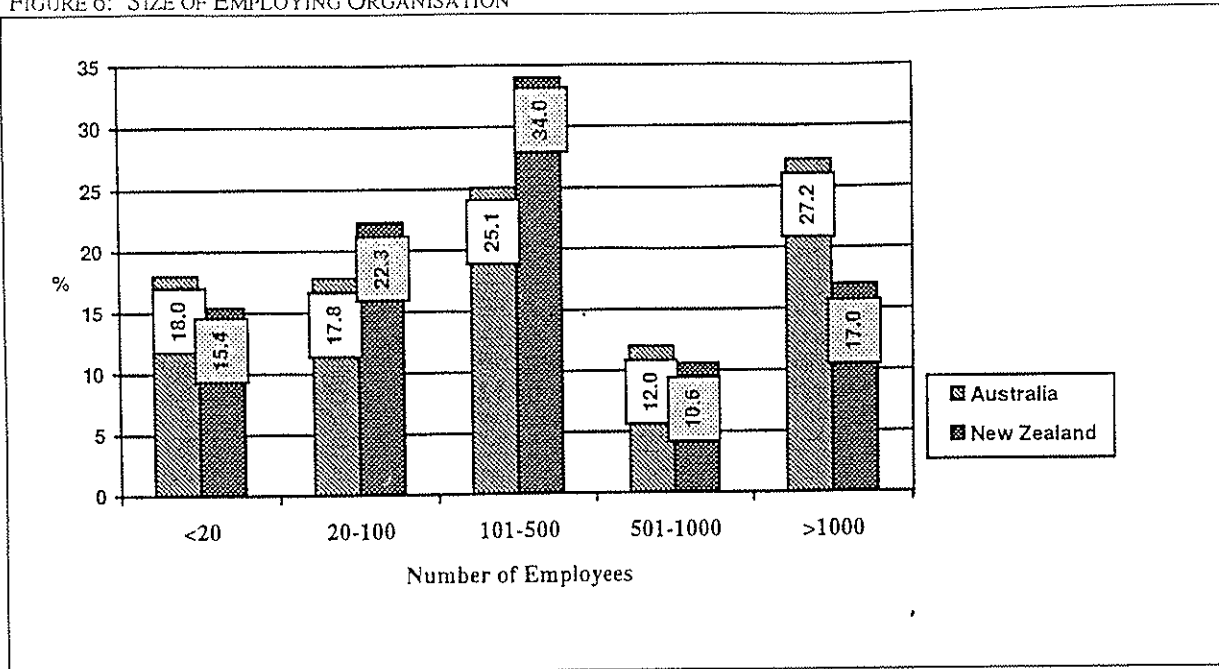
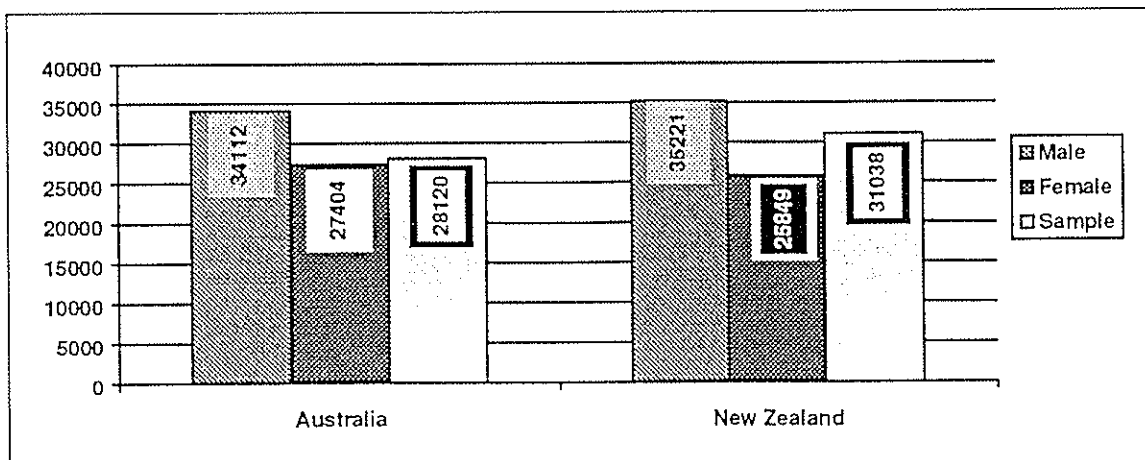


Table 4: Size of Organisation by Sector

| | Private | | Public | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| | Australia | New Zealand | Australia | New Zealand |
| <20 employees | 23.4 | 21.2 | 8.2 | 7.0 |
| 20-100 | 21.3 | 24.2 | 12.3 | 20.9 |
| 100-500 | 27.2 | 37.4 | 21.9 | 31.4 |
| 501-1000 | 10.2 | 4.0 | 15.1 | 18.6 |
| >1000 employees | 17.9 | 13.1 | 42.5 | 20.90 |

FIGURE 7: COMPARISON OF EARNINGS - MALE, FEMALE AND SAMPLE



Prospects of Promotion

Less than one third (32.8%) of respondents indicated that they planned to apply for promotion in the near future. In anticipation of the fact that this low rate of intended promotion could reflect the age of the sample and the number of years within the work force, cross tabulations were run and the results are displayed in Figures 8 and 9.

One could be led to believe that the drop off in the number intending to apply for promotion after the age of 40 could reflect the fact that these employees had reached the top of their career ladder/salary scale. However, this is not supported by the data. 76.3% of respondents in the over 40 age group were employed as secretaries, personal assistants or executive secretaries/assistants with secretaries in particular working for salaries which were significantly less than the mean salary levels for the entire sample.

Data relating to barrier to promotion are presented in Figure 10.

Two of the perceived major barriers to promotion (inability to move due to spouse's job and obligations to family/children) have been identified as barriers facing most working women. However, the number of respondents indicating unrecognised qualification/skills and unwillingness to leave current position as major barriers to promotion may be particularly relevant to secretarial staff. Wichroski (1994) referred to the invisible nature of much of the work that secretaries carry out such as political and peripheral labour which lie outside the bounds of a position description and it may be these aspects of their work which secretaries feel go without recognition. Secretaries' unwillingness to leave their current position may stem from the highly personalised, 'office-wife' nature of many relationships between secretary and superior.

Work Rewards Most Sought

Data relating to work rewards revealed that the work reward most valued by both Australian and New Zealand secretaries was a sense of

achievement while the reward least sought by both groups was opportunity for promotion. Full details of the data relating to this question is supplied in Table 5.

Australian respondents rated job security significantly higher than their New Zealand counterparts which could reflect the fact that the restructuring process is somewhat more advanced in New Zealand than in Australia.

Factors Reducing Job Satisfaction

Similar results were found in relation to the perception of the effect of lack of promotion opportunities on job satisfaction. Australian respondents rated this variable as having a significantly greater impact in reducing job satisfaction than New Zealand respondents. This could result from the restructuring process causing considerable uncertainty in respect to career pathing in a number of Australian organisations at the time of the survey.

Task Analysis

An investigation of the actual tasks undertaken by this diverse group of workers was undertaken in order to assess the degree of task variety and complexity and autonomy experienced by secretarial workers. The tasks performed by the sample group are set out in Table 6.

A task variety index was derived by computing the sum of tasks performed by each respondent. Full details are supplied in Figure 11.

The results of the analysis indicate that some respondents carried out as many as twenty-eight tasks as part of their jobs. The mean score for task variety was 16.5. Using the National Clerical-Administrative Competency Standards - Private Sector (NOSFAB, 1993) and the Competency Standards for Managers and Clerical/Administrative Staff in the ACE Sector (AAACE, 1995), each of the tasks was then assigned a level of complexity and a complexity index was developed for each respondent (Figure 12). The values of the complexity index ranged from 2.5 for a respondent who indicated that her only task performed was word processing to 97.5

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents intending to apply for promotion in near future by age

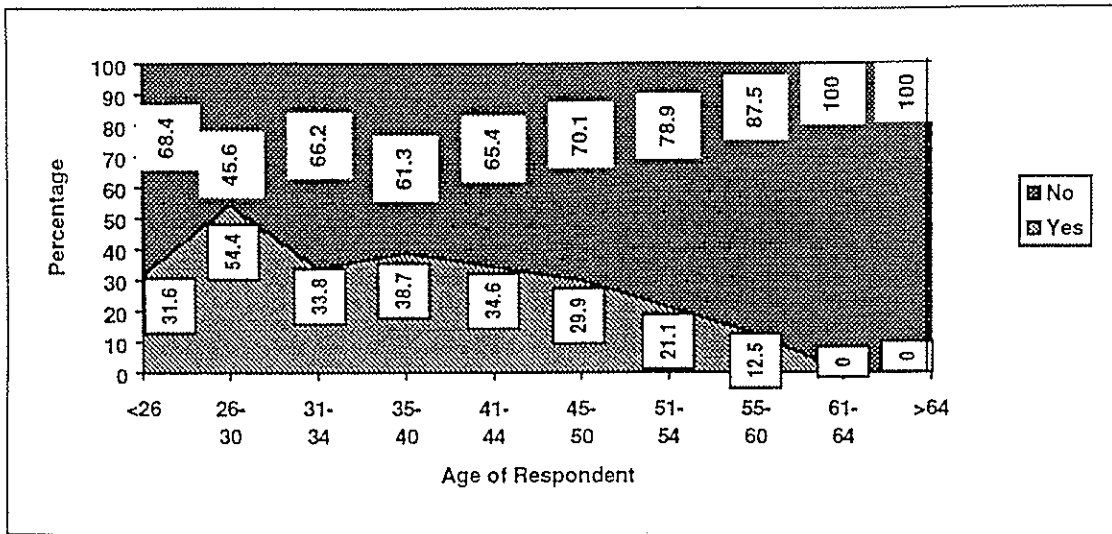


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents intending to apply for promotion by years in workforce.

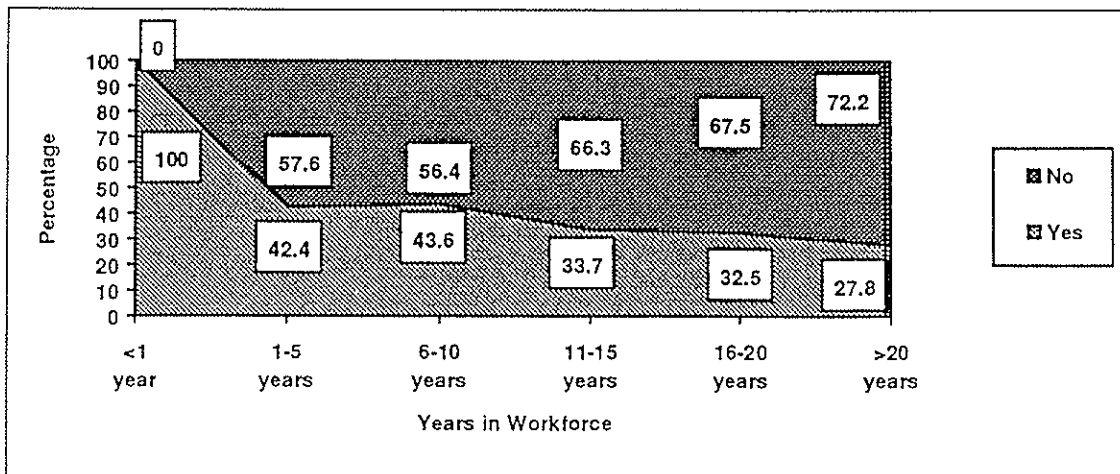


Figure 10: Perceived Barriers to Promotion

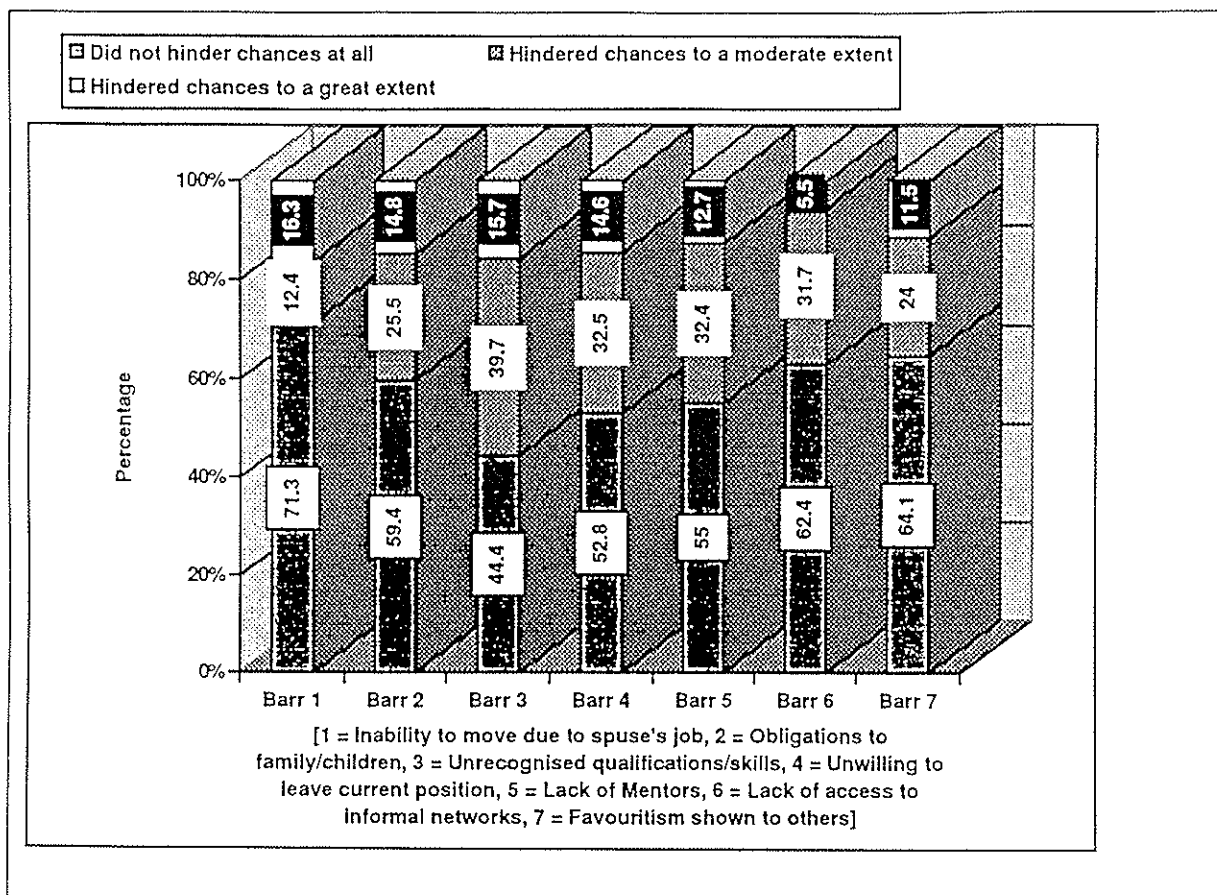


Table 5: Mean Scores - Work Rewards Most Sought

| Reward | Australia* | | | New Zealand | | | Combined Sample* | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|------------------|--------|--------|
| | n | mean | st dev | n | mean | st dev | n | mean | st dev |
| Sense of Achievement | 368 | 3.3636 | 2.5398 | 168 | 3.3690 | 2.5326 | 536 | 3.2966 | 2.5357 |
| Job Security | 368 | 4.2527 | 3.1448 | 168 | 4.6964 | 3.1064 | 536 | 3.1367 | |
| Responsibility | 367 | 4.4469 | 2.4264 | 168 | 4.5090 | 2.4714 | 535 | 4.4636 | 2.4384 |
| Pay | 368 | 4.8777 | 2.8107 | 168 | 4.2798 | 2.5192 | 536 | 4.6903 | 2.7345 |
| Opportunity for Personal Growth | 367 | 4.8883 | 2.8945 | 168 | 4.5536 | 2.8783 | 535 | 4.7832 | 2.8909 |
| Recognition | 368 | 5.2799 | 2.6515 | 168 | 2.8404 | 2.8404 | 536 | 2.7100 | 2.7100 |
| Good Work Conditions | 369 | 5.8970 | 2.8202 | 168 | 5.8036 | 2.7123 | 537 | 5.8678 | 2.7851 |
| Relationships with Colleagues | 368 | 6.0489 | 2.7379 | 167 | 5.8802 | 2.6949 | 535 | 5.9963 | 2.7232 |
| Job Status | 369 | 6.6403 | 2.8747 | 168 | 6.5774 | 3.0060 | 535 | 6.2606 | 2.9139 |
| Opportunity for Promotion | 368 | 7.0326 | 2.6378 | 168 | 7.0952 | 2.6492 | 536 | 7.0522 | 2.6371 |

*ranked according to combined mean sample

Table 6: Tasks Carried out by Sample Group

| Task | Australia (n = 374) | | New Zealand (n = 183) | | Combined Sample* (n = 557) | |
|--|------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Word Processing | 376 | 97.2 | 184 | 97.4 | 560 | 97.2 |
| Using Facsimile | 372 | 96.1 | 177 | 93.7 | 549 | 95.3 |
| Composing Correspondence | 364 | 94.3 | 175 | 92.6 | 539 | 93.8 |
| Filing | 340 | 88.1 | 171 | 90.5 | 511 | 88.9 |
| Making Appointments | 338 | 87.3 | 171 | 90.5 | 509 | 88.4 |
| Travel Arrangements | 286 | 74.1 | 146 | 77.2 | 432 | 75.1 |
| Keyboarding - typewriter | 270 | 69.8 | 124 | 65.6 | 394 | 68.4 |
| Arranging Conferences/Functions | 250 | 64.8 | 116 | 61.4 | 366 | 63.7 |
| Ordering Office Supplies | 238 | 61.7 | 121 | 64.0 | 359 | 62.4 |
| Office Housekeeping | 240 | 62.0 | 113 | 59.8 | 353 | 61.3 |
| Preparing Reports | 243 | 63.0 | 101 | 53.4 | 344 | 59.8 |
| Design In-House Forms | 236 | 61.0 | 96 | 50.8 | 332 | 57.6 |
| Shorthand | 219 | 56.7 | 108 | 57.1 | 327 | 56.9 |
| Reception (including screen calls) | 218 | 56.3 | 110 | 58.2 | 328 | 56.9 |
| Selecting Equipment | 220 | 57.0 | 102 | 54.0 | 322 | 56.0 |
| Taking Minutes | 206 | 53.3 | 114 | 60.3 | 320 | 55.7 |
| Designing Filing Systems | 208 | 53.7 | 94 | 49.7 | 302 | 52.4 |
| Conducting Research | 209 | 54.1 | 89 | 47.1 | 298 | 51.8 |
| Spreadsheets | 203 | 52.6 | 93 | 49.2 | 296 | 51.5 |
| Audiotyping | 184 | 47.7 | 107 | 56.5 | 291 | 50.6 |
| Control of Office Supplies | 195 | 50.3 | 96 | 50.8 | 291 | 50.5 |
| Electronic Mail | 185 | 47.8 | 92 | 48.7 | 277 | 48.1 |
| Supervision of Other Staff | 180 | 46.6 | 90 | 47.6 | 270 | 47.0 |
| DataBase | 181 | 46.9 | 69 | 36.5 | 250 | 43.5 |
| Office Design and Layout | 151 | 39.1 | 63 | 33.3 | 214 | 37.2 |
| Desktop Publishing | 130 | 33.7 | 60 | 31.7 | 188 | 32.7 |
| Preparing Press Releases/Newsletters | 84 | 21.8 | 32 | 16.9 | 116 | 20.2 |
| Accounting/Financial Tasks | 19 | 4.9 | 13 | 6.9 | 32 | 5.6 |
| Client/Customer Service (inc sales) | 15 | 3.9 | 9 | 4.8 | 24 | 4.2 |
| Using Micro-Imaging | 17 | 4.4 | 3 | 1.6 | 20 | 3.5 |
| Administration/Management (inc Network Admin) | 8 | 2.1 | 10 | 5.3 | 18 | 3.1 |
| Training/Teaching | 11 | 2.9 | 6 | 3.2 | 17 | 3.0 |
| Human Relations (inc Dispute Resolution, Negotiation, Problem Solving, Coordination) | 6 | 1.6 | 5 | 2.6 | 11 | 1.9 |
| Public Relations/Advertising | 7 | 1.8 | 4 | 2.1 | 11 | 1.9 |
| Personnel Functions (inc Recruitment, Interviewing etc) | 3 | .8 | 7 | 3.7 | 10 | 1.7 |
| Arranging Meetings | 2 | .5 | 5 | 2.6 | 7 | 1.2 |
| Developing Systems and Procedures | 5 | 1.3 | 1 | .5 | 6 | 1.0 |
| Personal Errands | 2 | .5 | 1 | .5 | 3 | .5 |
| Using Micro-Imagin | 17 | 4.4 | 3 | 1.6 | 20 | 3.5 |
| Administration/Management (inc Network Administration) | 8 | 2.1 | 10 | 5.3 | 18 | 3.1 |
| Training/Teaching | 11 | 2.9 | 6 | 3.2 | 17 | 3.0 |
| Human Relations (inc Dispute Resolutaion, Negotiation, Problem Solving, Co-Ordination) | 6 | 1.6 | 5 | 2.6 | 11 | 1.9 |
| Public Relations/Advertising | 7 | 1.8 | 4 | 2.1 | 11 | 1.9 |
| Personnel Functions(inc Recruitment, Interviewing etc) | 3 | .8 | 7 | 3.7 | 10 | 1.7 |
| Arranging Meetings | 2 | .5 | 5 | 2.6 | 7 | 1.2 |
| Developing Systems and Procedures | 5 | 1.3 | 1 | .5 | 6 | 1.0 |
| Personal Errands | 2 | .5 | 1 | .5 | 3 | .5 |

Figure 11: Aggregate Score for Task Variety

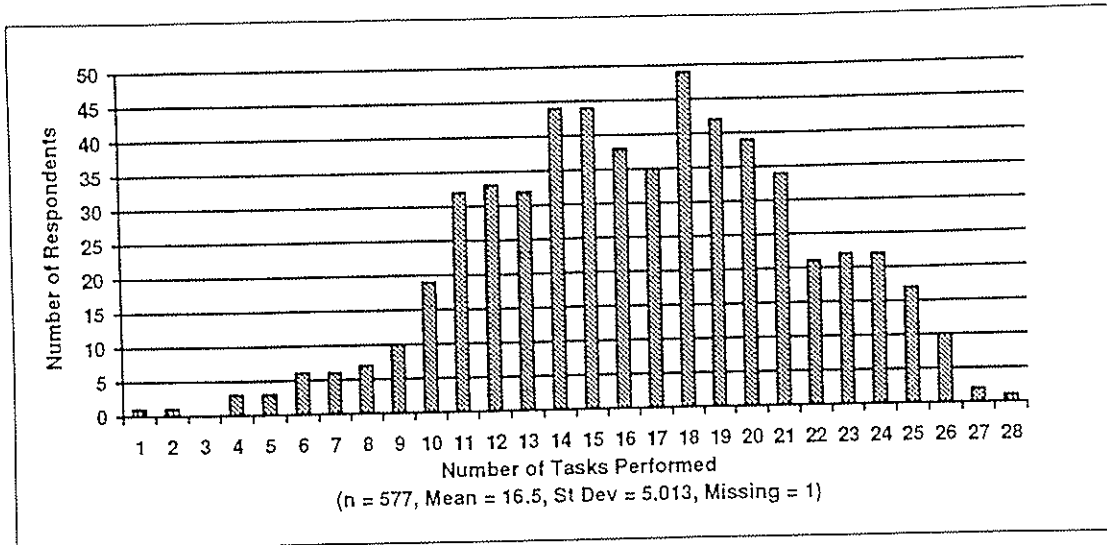
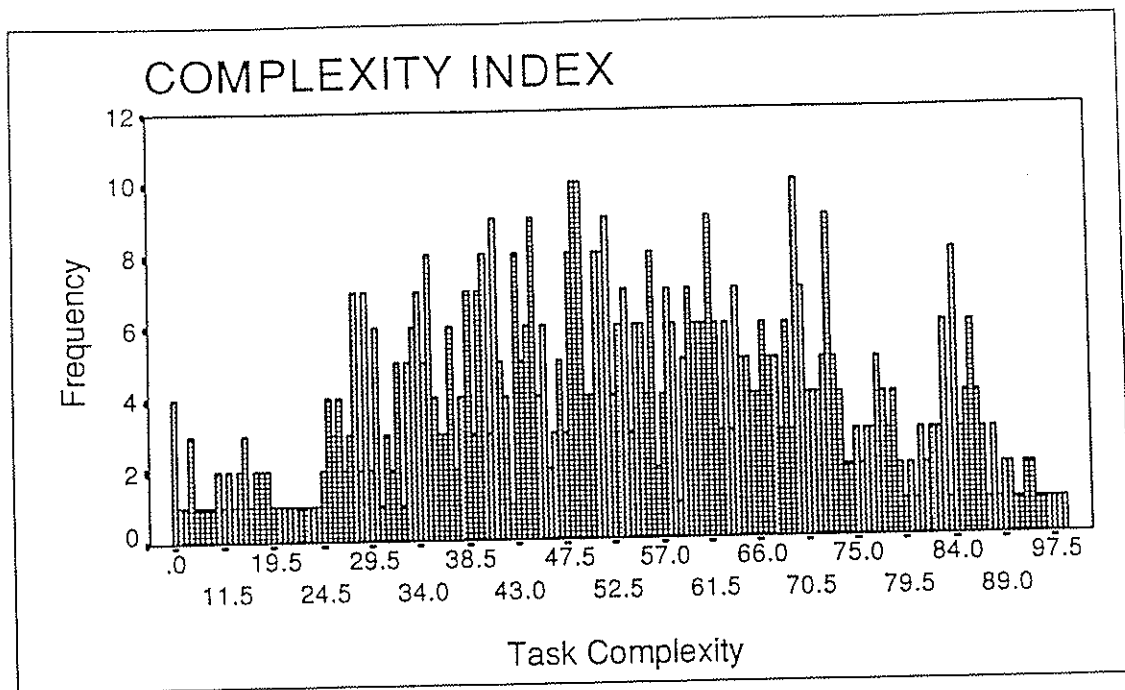


Figure 12: Task Complexity Index



Hypothesis Testing

The following hypothesis tests were carried out:

1. Secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand does not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations

Because 'ghetto' status was measured in respect to six variables this key hypothesis was tested through testing of a number of supplemental hypotheses i.e.

- 1(a) Skill variety in secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand does not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations i.e. the sample mean would equate to or exceed the Job Diagnostic Survey National Norm for skill variety of 4.7 as established by Oldman, Hackman and Stepina
- 1(b) Task discretion (autonomy) levels in secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand do not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations i.e. the sample mean would equate to or exceed the Job Diagnostic Survey National Norm for the autonomy construct of 4.9
- 1(c) Pay levels for secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand do not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations i.e. the sample mean would equate to or exceed average female full-time earnings of 3.4807 (Australia) and 3.16957 (New Zealand)
- 1(d) Opportunities for promotion within secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand do not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations i.e. the sample mean for lack of promotional opportunities as a factor reducing job satisfaction would equate to or be less than 1 i.e. would have reduced job satisfaction to a minor or lesser extent
- 1(e) Standard of working conditions within secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand do not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations i.e. the sample mean for standard of working conditions as a factor reducing job satisfaction would equate to or be less than 1 i.e. would have reduced working conditions to a minor or lesser extent
- 1(f) The presence of stereotyped gender attributes within secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand does not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations i.e. the proportion of respondents indicating that they undertook tasks such as office housekeeping, personal errands etc would equate to or be less than 50%.

2. The status of secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand is not related to industry
3. The status of secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand is not related to organisational size
4. The status of secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand is not related to sector.

Results

A summary of the results of all data analysis is provided in Figure 13. The results show that there is sufficient evidence to reject $H_{(0)}$ which hypothesised that secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand does not reflect the characteristics of 'ghetto' occupations. The evidence suggests that although secretarial work has progressed out of 'ghetto' status in respect to task discretion, comparative pay levels and working conditions, the 'ghetto' status of this occupation is still demonstrated in respect to task variety and complexity, promotional opportunities and stereotyped gender attributes.

There is also sufficient evidence to reject the null hypotheses in relation to industry and sector effects on the variables assessing the status of secretarial work at least for Australian respondents. The fact that few of the variables used to assess the status of secretarial work in Australia and New Zealand were affected by industry, size or sector would appear to confirm the validity of the ghetto thesis. Since there appear to be limited intraorganisational effects on the status of secretarial work, the reasons for the continued ghettoisation of various aspects of this profession would appear to be extraorganisational in nature. This in turn would suggest the continued influence of dual labour market theory, socialisation of skill, patriarchy and discrimination theories on this occupational group.

Limitations

The results outlined above may reflect some degree of sample bias as the sample was found to be skewed in relation to status of employment, pay levels and age of respondents. Such skewness was considered to result from the professional membership of respondents. Both professional bodies (IPSA and NZSES) require a period of involvement in secretarial work before full membership is granted. Professional membership of these bodies might also be expected to be attained by full-time rather than part time employees. The skewness of the sample was not

considered to invalidate the findings. It could be expected that any negative aspects of secretarial work established in the sample group would be somewhat more prominent in the general population of secretarial staff in the two countries.

Future Research

The limitations outlined above suggest the need for a similar study encompassing both members and non-members of professional secretarial bodies. This would assist in identifying any sample bias or cohort effect inherent to the current study and enable adjustments to the findings in respect to the status of secretarial work or the effects of organisational size, industry type or sector to be made before a policy platform is established to address any inequities in respect to the treatment of secretarial work.

Policy Issues

Based on the findings of the current study which reveal considerable evidence of the continued 'ghettoisation' of secretarial work, it will be necessary for organisations to quickly address the issues of secretarial job content, promotional opportunities and compensation levels in order to attract suitable applicants for secretarial positions. Improvements in such areas will only be forthcoming if greater awareness of the skills and abilities required by secretarial staff is created, making them more visible. Such an

awareness may result in greater recognition of the similarities that have been outlined between the responsibilities of duties of secretary and manager and help break down the sex-typing of this occupation.

Secretaries themselves need to be proactive not reactive in respect to qualifications and perceptions of their own occupation. They need to take pride in their occupation and to ensure that the work that they do is recognised, compensated and included in their job descriptions. They also need to be aware of the increasingly important role that secretarial staff are playing in organisations and to acquire the qualifications that will enable them to successfully fulfil that role and to take part in the more open and somewhat longer career pathing which should result.

Summary

This study has shown that secretarial work has progressed in part from its traditional 'ghetto' status but that organisations, secretaries themselves and professional secretarial associations will need to work together to ensure that the skills and abilities of this diverse group of workers are fully utilised and equitably rewarded. While promotional opportunities remain limited and the 'invisibility' of much of what secretaries do is perpetuated, workers in this occupational group are likely to remain ghettoised and prevented from reaching their full personal and organisational potential.

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FIGURE 6.7: SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

| REFLECT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GHETTO OCCUPATIONS? | | DOES THE STATUS OF SECRETARIAL WORK IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND - | | AS MEASURED BY THE FOLLOWING VARIABLES | | RELATE TO | | ORGANISATIONAL SIZE? | | | | INDUSTRY? | | | | SECTOR? | | | |
|--|-----|--|-----|--|-----|-----------|-------|----------------------|-----|-------|----|-----------|-------|----|-----|---------|----|----|-------|
| | | A | NZ | Total | Yes | No | Total | A | NZ | Total | A | NZ | Total | A | NZ | Total | A | NZ | Total |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| No | No | No | No | No | No | n/a | Yes | No | No | n/a | No | No | No | No | n/a | Yes | No | No | n/a |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |

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