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# The Round Table on Women's Issues Snapshot Project: The Status of Women in Libraries, Internationally

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## Introduction

This project was commissioned by the Round Table on Women's Issues (RTWI) at the 66th IFLA conference. The Round Table on Women's Issues is a sub-division of IFLA which concerns itself extensively with questions and issues that have special relevance for women in the library profession and in the user community. Further it develops programmes designed to enhance the opportunities and the image of these two groups of women. The Round Table on Women's Issues promotes the collection, research, publication and dissemination of information on the status of women in librarianship. Another concern is to identify discrimination in all forms, and disparities in resources, programmes, and opportunities relating to women in librarianship.

At the 66th Conference, members of the Round Table discussed the Association of Research Libraries' *Annual Salary Survey, 1999–2000* and noted that the average salary for female directors (USD 132,000) in United States university libraries was slightly higher than the average salary of male directors (USD 125,000) (pp. 16–18). There is now the highest number of women in top administrative positions than there has been before: 54 women out of a total of 111 directorships.

This was of course the good news. The bad news was that the overall salary for women in research and academic libraries in the USA was still only 94 percent that of men. During the 19 years that statistics have been gathered women have been gradually closing the earnings gap, as in 1980 they earned only 87 percent, but it is a slow process. Overall, men represent only 35 percent of the workforce among professional librarians.

The Round Table felt it would be interesting to discover how this compared with salaries in other countries and other sectors. This could form the basis for some comparative statistics if other members of the group could follow up.

Although aware that delegates at IFLA conferences were not representative of the profession as a whole, it was felt that it might be possible to conduct a 'snapshot' project of

delegates, women officers and committee members at IFLA's 67th conference to ascertain the status of women librarians internationally. Sandra Parker and Pat Gannon-Leary from the Information Management Research Institute, University of Northumbria School of Information Studies, obtained an IFLA small grant to undertake this work and to report on findings at the 68th IFLA conference.

## **Methodology**

A questionnaire was devised and circulated around RTWI members for feedback. Initially it was targeted purely at women attendees but, on reflection, it was felt that male delegates needed to be involved too, to provide a basis for comparison. Once the questionnaire content was agreed it was mounted on the IFLA RTWI website.

It was agreed that the questionnaire would be printed in the *IFLA Express*, the free multi-lingual newsletter, issued during the IFLA conference. A box would be provided at the 67th conference in which delegates might 'mail' their completed questionnaires. This box was placed in the Distribution Area at the conference, usually a high traffic area.

Unfortunately, neither of the two researchers engaged in the project were able to attend the 67th conference so were not there to encourage delegates to complete and return the questionnaires.

This may explain the poor response rate: only 26 questionnaires were posted in the box!

As a follow-up, reminders were posted to IFLA-L, Cirplus, Lis-link and similar mailing lists, requesting that those who attended the conference should visit the website and complete the questionnaire. The researchers also received an Excel file from IFLA HQ of some 3,000 names of people who had signed up to attend the conference. About 2,000 of these had e-mail addresses, so an e-mail message was circulated requesting completion of the questionnaire. As a result of this, a few more questionnaires were returned but many people had problems with the pdf format of the questionnaire on the website. They could print it and fill it in manually but could not download it and complete it electronically. Also, some people were concerned about the fact the questionnaire asked their name, institution and salary (even though the latter was banded in fairly broad categories). In consequence, another e-mail was sent out. This one had a Word version of the questionnaire as an attachment as well as containing the questionnaire in the body of the text. It was also suggested that respondents could leave out name and institution details if they preferred and merely put their country and the type of library under the heading 'institution'. This second e-mail was more successful, bringing the overall response rate up to 169 (85 percent of whom were women) from 60 different countries. Not surprisingly, given that the conference was held in Boston, Mass., the most responses received came from the USA (50) with 12 from the UK, 8 from Canada and 7 from the Netherlands. In many cases only one reply was received from a country but it is quite possible in some instances that only one representative from that country attended the conference. To assist analysis, the countries were grouped by geographical area, roughly approximating continent (Table 1).

| Continent                   | Frequency | %     |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|
| North America               | 58        | 34.3  |
| Latin America & West Indies | 8         | 4.7   |
| Australasia                 | 5         | 3.0   |
| Western Europe              | 42        | 24.9  |
| Eastern Europe              | 11        | 6.5   |
| Middle East                 | 5         | 3.0   |
| Africa                      | 22        | 13.0  |
| Far East                    | 17        | 10.1  |
| India/Sri Lanka             | 1         | 0.6   |
| Total                       | 169       | 100.0 |

*Table 1: Distribution of Responses by 'Continent'.*

Figures from the IFLA conference showed that the attendance was over 5,000 so any results cannot be said to be statistically significant although they are, hopefully, of interest and may point the way to other areas for research. Factors inhibiting a higher response rate may include the following:

- not all delegates were librarians, many were exhibitors and company representatives
- some delegates did not post their responses in the correct mailing box at the conference
- not all delegates had e-mail addresses so could not be targeted in follow-ups
- not all putative delegates, listed in the Excel file, were able to attend the conference – some, e.g., were refused visas
- some delegates had retired or moved to another organization since the conference
- some institutions had an e-mail delivery system which rejected any e-mails with an attachment
- many e-mail addresses in the Excel file were incorrect and resulted in delivery failure
- some people just don't like filling in questionnaires!

## **Results**

### *Contribution to Society in the Information Age, Status Generally*

Expectation is that the information age should bring about recognition of the important role which information professionals can play. Libraries have been in existence for a long time in many countries and so should have become an integral part of the culture. However, the important societal role is not always recognized in terms of money or status. This was a common concern expressed by respondents from Norway, Thailand, South Africa and the USA, e.g.

Thai librarians have yet to prove that library and information plays an important role in communities and society we serve. [Female, Thailand, university]

In South Africa ... there is a lot of lip service as to the value of libraries, but when it comes to status, salaries etc, this is not reflected. [Female, South Africa, public]

It is not always the status of women which is an issue but sometimes the status of the profession. Respondents from several countries agreed that the status of everyone working in libraries was lower than it should be. In some cultures it was still the case that

the library public were unaware there was more to librarianship than sitting “behind the counter to loan and return books ...” [Female, Papua New Guinea, international]. In some cases (e.g. the Middle East and Africa), it was felt women were not respected by the administration. Eastern European respondents reported that library work was considered more fitting employment for women than for men, most of whom worked in IT.

Consensus was that women needed to stand up for their rights; create awareness of their importance and what they could offer; get themselves into the community, involving themselves in projects and services to earn more appreciation and respect.

### *Do Women Rule?*

Traditionally, in many cultures, librarianship has been seen as a female-dominated profession and yet the senior posts are predominantly held by men. Is this still a true picture or is it now a cliché? One North American respondent felt it was now a cliché and that, generally, with pay equity women were respected and respectable and held major positions in libraries across the country.

Other North American respondents varied in their perceptions. One believed that:

Women rule in US! However, more library directors should be women. [Female, USA, university]

Most respondents felt the profession was still considered to be female-dominated, especially in, e.g., areas like nursing librarianship.

This was slowly changing and some respondents cited the number of research library director positions now held by women although this was countered by some who felt that many of the top officials in libraries and professional organizations were men.

In the Far East, librarianship was female-dominated (percentages of between 75 and 90 were quoted) and generally respondents reported that there were still few female head librarians and that salaries were low.

In Australasia, there was recognition that changes were happening but that some inequities persisted. A large number of Australian institutions such as state libraries, the national library, university libraries, etc. have women either as head or in senior positions.

In South Africa, most library directors were men, most library workers women, in spite of strong efforts toward equal opportunity. A gender bias persisted in librarianship as it did in nursing and teaching. There could be the added dimension of colour:

most managerial positions are held by males ... but the profession is dominated by white females in professional library posts and the few that are management are predominantly white female. [Female, South Africa, university]

However, Nigerian respondents felt things were changing with women now beginning to occupy executive positions and contribute effectively to the rapid development of librarianship in their country.

Western European female respondents generally agreed that there were a large number of women in libraries but a low number in positions of responsibility. One Western European felt that a glass ceiling should not exist in Scandinavia, but it did:

Coming from a liberated Scandinavian country all should be well but we also have a glass ceiling (just below directors of the largest research libraries). [Female, Denmark, national]

Male respondents from Western Europe felt there was equity but expressed dissatisfaction with their professional status:

We are really in the bottom of the academics, although many of us have 4 or 5 years of studies, which is comparable to medical doctors and other highly paid professionals. [Male, Sweden, public]

Librarianship appears to be taken up overwhelmingly by women and the profession itself has a low status among equivalent professions. [Male, UK, national]

### *Examples of Women Holding Key Positions*

A note of hope was sounded in Australia with women occupying many senior posts such as Director General of the National Library of Australia; each of the six state libraries was headed by a woman; and of the university libraries approximately 60 percent were headed by women. From Western Europe, a respondent reported on the recent appointment of the first female university library director.

Several African nations reported on women in top positions, e.g. the University of Botswana had a female director and two female deputy directors. The Botswana National Library Service had a female director and deputy. In Zimbabwe out of the seven universities with substantive librarians in the country, six of them were headed by women.

| Post                   | Frequency | %     |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Director               | 63        | 37.3  |
| Deputy Director        | 11        | 6.5   |
| Head of Dept.          | 52        | 30.8  |
| Senior Staff           | 31        | 18.3  |
| Job title not indicate | 12        | 7.1   |
| Total                  | 169       | 100.0 |

*Table 2. Post held by Respondent (male and female).*

| Annual salary (USD) | Frequency | %     |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| Less than 20,000    | 40        | 23.7  |
| 20,000-29,000       | 18        | 10.7  |
| 30,000-39,000       | 25        | 14.8  |
| 40,000-49,000       | 21        | 12.4  |
| 50,000-99,000       | 52        | 30.8  |
| More than 1000,000  | 8         | 4.7   |
| Salary not divulged | 5         | 3.0   |
| Total               | 169       | 100.0 |

*Table 3. Annual Salary of Respondents.*

### *Are Men on a Faster Track?*

Several respondents felt a sense that men were on a faster track, possibly because they feel themselves to be ready for the next position sooner than women do, and that women's rise through the ranks was less meteoric than that of their male colleagues:

I am still astonished at recent male library school grads going directly into a director's position. It still happens. [Female, USA, college]

Others saw librarianship as a labour of love for women:

Most are very passionate about what they do and many see the career as an important and meaningful part of their lives. [Female, Singapore, national]

[Women] are generally doing a job they love and therefore (not necessarily out of choice) may accept lower salaries than their male counterparts. [Female, USA, college]

### *Progress and Equal Rights*

North American respondents had varying views on how far progress had been made. Many felt there was still some work to be done in terms of pay equity which was being addressed via government legislation in some jurisdictions. The complexity and importance of traditional female work was starting to be recognized, at least by the more progressive elements in society. It was felt that, at last, the proportion of women at the highest level of administration was starting to resemble the proportion of women in the profession as a whole. Women were now fully competitive for directorial and management positions in libraries and received equal consideration with men in job search evaluations.

However, for others, the ideal status had not yet been achieved and there was doubt about the practical applicability of equity laws:

It can be hard to determine in practice whether men and women are being considered equally for administrative positions, because there are so many intangibles that must be considered. [Female, USA, public]

Generally there was scepticism about the adequate implementation of equity laws, seeing their application, in many cases, as subjective, arbitrary and inconsistent.

One North American respondent, alarmingly, felt that, although progress was made within the last decade, there appeared to be a regression with many young women

Personally I think its time to revive the women's movement on a grander scale, as a lot of girls and young women are thinking they have to primp and preen to be worthy. Having been part of the first women's class at a formerly all male college, I found myself constantly having to define my equity via the book, not the 'bod[y]' [Female, USA, special]

Another alarming response came from one African librarian who believed women in top positions did not ensure equity for other women:

Women do not enjoy the same opportunities as their male counterparts, albeit the fact that the government has a policy to promote them. Their suppression lies at the work level ... or worse than this, where other women are in position of authority, they are even more suppressive to other [women] than males... [Male, Zimbabwe, University]

### *Salary Issues*

Of those respondents who indicated their job title, the greatest number (63) were directors. The second largest group (52) were heads of a department or service. This is to be expected given the status of the IFLA conference and the resources available to those in more senior positions.

Given the job titles of many of the respondents, the salary scales were quite surprising. The modal salary band was USD 50,000–99,999.

One New Zealand respondent pointed out with respect to the salary ranges used in the questionnaire that the band in which she fell (USD 30,000–39,000) was not representative of salary relative to standard of living. A Canadian respondent who fell into the same band (USD 30,000–39,000), pointed out that she earned CAD 50,000 which in buying power or standard of living was worth USD 50,000+, but for currency exchange was two thirds only. An Australian respondent earned AUD 105,000 but pointed out this was part of a package which came with a car, free petrol, mobile phone, part home phone bill paid, business

class travel, etc. Also, the salary band USD 50,000–99,999 was probably too broad. Some respondents indicated that their salaries were at the bottom end of this rather than at the top.

Salary breakdown in relation to continent showed that many people in senior posts in Western Europe, Africa and the Far East were in the lowest salary band, i.e. earning less than USD 20,000 per annum.

Respondents, both male and female, felt that women often earned less than men in comparable positions, with support staff in librarianship often earning barely existence wages even after 20–40 years' service.

Recent research on salaries in the USA and UK has indicated that differences between male and female salaries still exist. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics *Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2000* states that: In 2000 median weekly earnings for female full-time wage and salary workers were USD 491 or 76 percent of the USD 646 median for their male counterparts.

In 1979, when comparable earnings data were first available, women earned about 63 percent as much as men did ...<sup>1</sup>

The *Financial Times*, in September 2002, reported on an Institute of Management survey which showed that, while more than four out of ten women managers in Britain earned more than their partners and a third were equal breadwinners, a third of 1,500 women managers questioned said pay discrimination persisted in their organization, and nearly half thought women still encountered discrimination over promotions. The report showed women accounted for 24 percent of managers. Ten years ago only 9 percent of managers were women.

| 'Continent'                  | USD<br>20,000 | USD<br>20,999-<br>29,999 | USD<br>30,999-<br>39,999 | USD<br>40,999-<br>49,999 | USD<br>50,999-<br>99,999 | USD<br>100,000 |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| North America                | -             | 3                        | 6                        | 11                       | 32                       | 6              |
| Latin America &<br>W. Indies | 3             | -                        | 1                        | 1                        | 1                        | 1              |
| Australasia                  | -             | -                        | 2                        | -                        | 2                        | -              |
| Western<br>Europe            | 2             | 8                        | 13                       | 6                        | 11                       | -              |
| Eastern Europe               | 9             | 1                        | -                        | -                        | -                        | -              |
| Middle East                  | 1             | -                        | 3                        | -                        | 1                        | -              |
| Africa                       | 16            | 3                        | -                        | 1                        | 2                        | -              |
| Far East                     | 8             | 3                        | -                        | 2                        | 3                        | 1              |
| India/Sri Lanka              | 1             | -                        | -                        | -                        | -                        | -              |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>40</b>     | <b>18</b>                | <b>25</b>                | <b>21</b>                | <b>52</b>                | <b>8</b>       |

Table 4. Salary Breakdown by 'Continent'.

| 'Continent'                  | USD<br>20,000 | USD<br>20,999-<br>29,999 | USD<br>30,999-<br>39,999 | USD<br>40,999-<br>49,999 | USD<br>50,999-<br>99,999 | USD<br>100,000 |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| North America                | -             | 3                        | 6                        | 10                       | 27                       | 5              |
| Latin America &<br>W. Indies | 3             | -                        | 1                        | 1                        | -                        | 1              |
| Australasia                  | -             | -                        | 2                        | -                        | 2                        | -              |
| Western<br>Europe            | 1             | 8                        | 11                       | 5                        | 7                        | -              |
|                              | 8             | -                        | -                        | -                        | -                        | -              |



|                 |           |           |           |           |           |          |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Eastern Europe  | 1         | -         | 3         | -         | 1         | -        |
| Middle East     | 12        | 3         | -         | 1         | -         | -        |
| Africa          | 7         | 3         | -         | 2         | 3         | 1        |
| Far East        | 1         | -         | -         | -         | -         | -        |
| India/Sri Lanka |           |           |           |           |           |          |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>33</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>23</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>40</b> | <b>7</b> |

*Table 5. Women's Salary Breakdown by Continent.*

| 'Continent'               | USD      | USD           | USD           | USD           | USD           | USD      |
|---------------------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
|                           | 20,000   | 20,999-29,999 | 30,999-39,999 | 40,999-49,999 | 50,999-99,999 | 100,000  |
| North America             | -        | -             | -             | 1             | 5             | 1        |
| Latin America & W. Indies | -        | -             | -             | -             | 1             | -        |
| Australasia               | -        | -             | -             | -             | -             | -        |
| Western Europe            | 1        | -             | 2             | 1             | 4             | -        |
| Eastern Europe            | 1        | 1             | -             | -             | -             | -        |
| Middle East               | 4        | -             | -             | -             | 2             | -        |
| Africa                    | 1        | -             | -             | -             | -             | -        |
| Far East                  | -        | -             | -             | -             | -             | -        |
| India/Sri Lanka           |          |               |               |               |               |          |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>7</b> | <b>1</b>      | <b>2</b>      | <b>2</b>      | <b>12</b>     | <b>1</b> |

*Table 6. Men's Salary Breakdown by Continent.*

Pay inequality appeared to be a much greater obstacle in the private than the public sector, with half the respondents in the former sector reporting pay discrimination compared with fewer than a third in the public. It would be interesting to see if this is mirrored in the public and private library sectors.

#### *Qualifications, Training and Development Issues*

Is women's progression hindered by lack of qualifications? One American librarian pointed out that directorial positions demanded a PhD when most librarians held Master's level only. However, such a restriction could equally hinder men. On the other hand, in some instances, a library qualification may not be what advances your career. One American respondent reported that many of the top administrators (male) were not actually qualified librarians.

Another respondent, on this occasion from Western Europe, felt that many women professionals were working below their educational level. Those women who have chosen to take a career break for child rearing may need access to top-up training on returning to the profession. Other respondents identified a great need for continuing education, especially in technology topics: people needed hands-on experience, a support group and childcare for in-service training that took place outside the working day.

The lack of training for new technologies led, some felt, to the devaluation of older women workers over younger and over older male workers with skills learned outside the library that relate to information technologies. The lack of input of women library workers in developing information technologies was seen as contributory to de-skilling for library workers.

Alternatively distance education was seen as having potential to help paraprofessionals improve their prospects. More formal training was desirable for non-professionals to encourage them to move into the professional arena and, in this case, staff development in

management skills was desirable. Time and funding were issues which needed resolution if this was to be made possible.

### *Particular Sectors*

Respondents came from a variety of sectors, the majority being from universities and the fewest from school and college libraries. This is to be expected, given the resources available to be able to afford staff an opportunity to attend a conference.

Does it make a difference which sector you choose to work in? There were particular sectors highlighted by respondents from specific countries

#### Public libraries in North America

One Canadian librarian observed that generally, in the public library sector, many women librarians in large institutions were in middle management or lower positions, unable to break through the glass ceiling. Those who did achieve management positions were in the more traditional library management areas, e.g. reference or cataloguing or acquisitions but not in the technical or digital or preservation services.

American public librarians reported that public and youth service colleagues were underpaid and undervalued.

#### School libraries in Western Europe

Among the lowest paid librarians in the Netherlands, Norway and the UK were school librarians, according to respondents. They tended to earn substantially less than teachers and rarely got paid holidays. In some instances it was reported that they were treated more like secretaries than professionals.

#### The IT sector in Australia

While generally it was felt that the promotional and career opportunities for women in Australian libraries were good, the IT sector within libraries remained male dominated on the applications side. However, the web services side seemed to attract more women.

#### Special libraries – a paean of praise

One respondent from a library for the blind commented on the fact that such libraries had many women in senior positions, especially in Europe and, to some extent, North America. This respondent found that:

when one looks to libraries for the blind that are open and have established co-operative working networks with other libraries, they are almost all run by women.

Where one finds the defensiveness and fence building, they are almost all run by men. [Male, Netherlands, special]

While admitting this to be a generalization, he felt that it was also almost a truism, backed up from personal observation that indicated that:

working conditions, co-operation and level of professional and personal respect within the libraries tends to be very much better in libraries run by women. [ibid.]

| Sector                   | Frequency | %    |
|--------------------------|-----------|------|
| University               | 62        | 36.7 |
| Special/Research         | 32        | 18.9 |
| Public                   | 21        | 12.4 |
| National/International   | 29        | 17.2 |
| Government/Parliamentary | 13        | 7.7  |
| School/college/education | 11        | 6.5  |

|                      |     |       |
|----------------------|-----|-------|
| Sector not indicated | 1   | 0.6   |
| Total                | 169 | 100.0 |

Table 7. Sectors From Which Respondents Came.

### Suggestions for Further Research

A recent study by Linehan and Walsh<sup>3</sup> aimed to develop an understanding of the senior female international career move in a European context in order to more fully appreciate covert and overt barriers limiting women's international career opportunities. As the authors point out, across the European Union less than 5 percent of senior managers are female. In the rest of Europe the figure is 2 percent.

Although this study examines the international management stage, there are some points of relevance to this project. Linehan and Walsh identify the barriers faced by women seeking senior international appointments as:

- . glass ceiling
- . trailing spouse
- . career vs. long term relationship and children
- . lack of mentors
- tokenism
- . exclusion from networks.

Barriers existed in all countries in which their survey participants worked – USA, South America, Australasia, Africa, China, Singapore and Japan. In particular the German respondents averred it was unusual for a woman to have the primary career.

The RTWI snapshot project did not attempt to look at more personal factors such as partners and dependants on this occasion but perhaps further work should be done on these. As a result of additional barriers faced by women, Linehan and Walsh believe women need more psychosocial support than men, e.g. mentors, role models and networks. This is an area in which the Round Table on Women's Issues might have more input. It is a ready-made group of female professionals with a keen interest in improving the status of women in the profession and would seem to be the ideal forum to provide mentorship and networking opportunities.

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