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This Equal Pay Day unions call for women to stand up against inequality with research showing they earn less depending on 'life stage'

Urgent change is needed in Australian workplaces to stop the generational income loss women face depending on their stage of life, with the wage gap for some generations being a staggering 62 per cent.

Across all age groups women earn around 82.5 per cent of a man's wage and about one million dollars less over a lifetime. But a better understanding of the barriers to wage equality is gained by looking at how 'life-stages' impact upon a woman's earnings.

"Year after year, Equal Pay Day, is a reminder of just how much less women earn compared to men. What we continue to see are generations of Australian women starting behind and that wage gap increases throughout their life time until they retire on much, much less," Ms Kearney said.

Ms Kearney said 'life stage' factors contributed to the monetary loss.

"When you break it down you see each life stage provides a unique set of barriers that causes women to earn much less than men of the same age group.

"For example, female graduates earn up to 15 per cent less than the guys and men aged 25-34 who have children earn more than twice as much as women. That gap persists throughout their working life," she said.

She said some inequality was inexplicable other than to point to entrenched gender bias in Australian workplaces.

"Women in childbearing years without children still earn a lot less than men which is pretty perplexing," Ms Kearney said.

"The only reason we can point to is that employers worry they might have children and therefore hold their wages back. Or, perhaps the women themselves don't fight for a pay rise. Either way what we end up with is a generation of employees who are underpaid just because they are women."

Graduates are another example of nonsensical inequality. "Why should a women graduate get less than a bloke? Until Australia closes the gap we will continue to cheat these employees."

Ms Kearney said it wasn't just about employers catching up with the reality of a modern workplace, women also had to stand up and be counted.

"Too many times women trade off pay rises or promotions so they can keep family friendly hours and, importantly, they don't identify discrimination when it's staring them in the face. That needs to change," Ms Kearney said.

"We know it's hard and there are many barriers women face to achieving equality at work, but women must be strong and stand up for their rights- we must not be apologetic about having family responsibilities, we must not keep trading off pay rises and promotions against family friendly hours, and we must identify discrimination and call it when we see it."

On a positive note union membership attributed to higher wages:

- Female employees who are union members are paid more than female non-union employees at \$209.2 extra a week or 25.4%. For comparison the premium for men is \$97.2 a week or 7.5%.

- Full time female employees who are union members have a premium of \$102.6 a week or 8.9%.
- Part time female union members have the largest union wage premium at \$220.4 or 46.6%.

“This demonstrates what we have been saying all along. Joining a union gives workers a stronger voice and better outcomes in the workplace,” she said.

Contact Eleni Hale for the detailed analysis report.

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