



RELATIONSHIPS

F O R U M

An Unexpected Tragedy

■ Evidence for the connection between working patterns and family breakdown in Australia

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RELATIONSHIPS FORUM AUSTRALIA INC

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March 2007

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This report would not have been possible without access to the work of Australia's leading social researchers and the personal involvement of the researchers themselves. In particular, we are sincerely grateful to Michael Alexander, Jennifer Baxter, Michael Bittman, Cath Bowtell, Iain Campbell, Lyn Craig, Bob Cummins, Don Edgar, Clive Hamilton, Hugh Mackay, Barbara Pocock, Lyndall Strazdins, Ruth Weston and Mark Wooden, each of whom gave freely of their time to review our approach and to help us understand the nuances of their individual areas of study. We were inspired by their obvious passion for their work and, closely linked to this, their motivation to reduce work-related suffering in the Australian community. Their specific areas of research are outlined on pages 6 to 9 of this document.

We also thank the members of our Independent Reference Panel:

- John Anderson – former Deputy Prime Minister and Member for Gwydir
- Bob Carr – former Premier of NSW
- Kay Hull – Chief National Party Whip and Member for Riverina
- Ben Keneally – Executive Director, (NSW) Premier's Delivery Unit
- Lindsay Tanner – Shadow Finance Minister and Member for Melbourne.

The Panel provided guidance and a measure of accountability, helping ensure the relevance of the report's content to the formulation of public policy. Individual members of the Panel also provided valuable input to our thinking as it developed through the course of the work. It is important to note that the members of the Panel did not provide input to preparation of this final report, and do not necessarily endorse all its findings or conclusions.

Lastly, we gratefully acknowledge the support of Michael Schluter and his team at Relationships Foundation in Cambridge (UK). Michael's work over many years in this area provided inspiration for the formation of Relationships Forum Australia and for the conception of this study specifically. Michael has provided much profound insight to our work.

Michael Schluter's colleagues, Michael Clarke and Nicola Templeton, have helped us draw lessons from UK experience and have provided valuable editorial assistance.

About Relationships Forum Australia

Relationships Forum Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to promote the importance of relationships as a fundamental ingredient of individual and community wellbeing. The Forum's activities are governed by an honorary Board, whose participants have had a ten-year association with the Cambridge (UK) based Relationships Foundation (see www.relationshipsfoundation.org).

Relationships Forum's current work is directed mainly at researching, from a relational perspective, critical issues in the areas of politics, economics, business and society – and to promote its key findings in these spheres. It also aims to provide education and training to advance the understanding and implementation of relational principles in public and private life in Australia and beyond.

About the Authors

Paul Shepanski

Paul has 18 years of international senior management experience. From 1987 to 1999, he worked with The Boston Consulting Group where his clients included some of the region's most significant consumer businesses, including leaders in the areas of retailing, banking, telecommunications and travel. He served as the managing partner of BCG's Auckland office in 1997 and 1998. From 1999 to 2001, Paul served as Group General Manager e-Commerce for Qantas Airways.

Today, Paul lives in Sydney with his wife, Alison, and two daughters, Rebecca and Natasha. He is an executive director of an Internet-based travel business, Jetabroad, and devotes around half his time to working in his local community through his church. Paul also enjoys writing, playing and recording music.

Michael Diamond

Michael has ten years of international investment banking and strategy consulting experience. From 1994 to 2000, he worked in institutional equity research/sales for investment banks in Asia, where his clients included some of the region's largest funds managers. From 2001 to 2004, he worked with The Boston Consulting Group where his clients included some of the largest banking and financial services businesses in Australia.

Michael currently works as an independent strategy consultant, advising businesses and governments on strategy, business improvement and national policy. His clients span a variety of industries in Australia and Asia. When not working, he enjoys Australia's great outdoor lifestyle and sports, as well as spending time with his young family.

Michael is married to Andrea, and has two sons, Alexander and James.

The Contribution of Leading Australian Social Researchers

This report would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Australia's leading social researchers. Some of the activities of these experts are described here. It should be noted that these researchers did not provide input to preparation of this final report, which presents the findings of Relationships Forum Australia.

Long and Atypical Hours, Temporary Workers And Impact On Family Time

Michael Bittman

Michael Bittman is a Professorial Fellow at the University of New England, having previously been based at the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (Michael is continuing his association with the SPRC as an Honorary Research Associate).

Michael is an expert on the collection and analysis of time-use statistics. His research interests include social policy and social change, family dynamics, time spent in unpaid work (especially caring for others), trends in working hours, and the distribution of leisure.

Current projects include a study of how income affects time spent in unpaid work, research on the effects of non-parental child care on parenting, measuring social participation and using time-diaries to identify the needs of carers.

We have used Michael's research to show the incidence of weekend work, and the impact on family time lost as a result of these atypical working patterns, and also to understand the impact of children on parents' time use.

Iain Campbell

Iain is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Social Research (CASR), RMIT University. His main topics of research include working time, work and family issues, unemployment and the future of work.

Iain is experienced in the use of official labour force statistics, both in Australia and cross-nationally, and has published numerous articles that have been of value to this study, particularly regarding international comparisons of long hours and temporary employees. Iain is also a co-author of the recent book 'Fragmented Futures: New Challenges In Working Life', which examines how working life has become more fragmented as a result of social and economic change in Australia, and 'Key Work And Family Trends in Australia'.

Iain is currently working on two topical projects: job quality and part-time work in Australia, and labour regulation and work/life balance.

Lyn Craig

Lyn Craig is Research Fellow at the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), University of New South Wales. Lyn's research interests include the time impacts of children and motherhood, work-family balance, the division of domestic labour, and comparative family and social policy. Lyn has been a recipient of an Office for Women Time Use Research Fellowship (2004-5) and holds an Australian Research Council Post-doctoral Fellowship (2006-9).

Research by Lyn used in this study has mainly been focused on the impact of children on parents time use (particularly mothers'), and the differences in this time use between employed and non-employed mothers.

The Impact Of Atypical Work Patterns On Family Wellbeing

Lyndall Strazdins

Lyndall Strazdins is the leader of the Work, Family and Health research team at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (Australian National University). Lyndall's topics of research include: work, family and the wellbeing of parents and children; the quality of work; and, the linkages between macro-economic contexts (for example, the 24-hour economy) and the quality of work and family life.

We have drawn extensively from two studies that Lyndall and her colleagues have conducted on the link between atypical working patterns amongst dual-earner families, and the quality of their family environment and children's wellbeing (Strazdins et al. 2004 and Strazdins et al. 2006). These studies are based on data from the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) – a study designed to monitor the development and wellbeing of a representative sample of Canadian children.

Lyndall is currently developing a time impact toolkit to enable planners and policymakers to address time costs and/or benefits of policies, and to guide initiatives to reduce time pressures on families.

In conjunction with a multidisciplinary team of other academics, Lyndall is also going to investigate job quality and the mental health and wellbeing of working parents and their children.

Wellbeing And Happiness

Bob Cummins

Bob Cummins is Professor of Psychology at the Australian Centre on Quality of Life (Deakin University), editor-in-chief of the Journal of Happiness Studies and author of the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index.

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index provides a rigorous, comprehensive and systematic subjective measure of quality of life (how people feel about life and the material conditions in which they live). It has the aim of promoting greater public and political awareness of the social factors underpinning wellbeing, as well as enhancing scientific understanding of subjective wellbeing. Since the first survey conducted in 2001, results from 16 surveys have been published. These and future surveys will provide important longitudinal data for the measurement of changes in subjective wellbeing as well as the key factors causing those changes.

Clive Hamilton

Clive Hamilton is the Executive Director of The Australia Institute (an independent public policy research centre). He has previously been an academic economist and a senior public servant, and has held visiting academic positions at the University of Cambridge, the Australian National University and the University of Sydney.

Research of Clive's that has been used in this study includes the extent and reasons for downshifting, as well as the attitudes of Australians to happiness and social wellbeing. Clive has also authored two books, 'Growth Fetish' and 'Affluenza' (co-authored with Richard Denniss), both of which investigate the social and economic changes that have taken place in Australia and their effect on happiness and wellbeing.

Hugh Mackay

Hugh Mackay is a social researcher, psychologist and author who has spent 35 years studying the attitudes and behaviour of the Australian community. For the past 22 years he has been publishing his findings in the quarterly research series 'The Ipsos Mackay Report' (previously the Mackay Report), which he founded.

Hugh is an Adjunct Professor in the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, based at ANU.

In addition to Hugh's advice, we have drawn on data compiled by Ipsos Mackay for The Australia Institute, relating to Australians' views on happiness.

Changing Working Patterns, Their Causes And Their Impact On Family Life

Australian Institute Of Family Studies

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) is a leader in identifying, developing and providing timely and reliable information about issues affecting families in Australia. This research informs the Australian Government and the community, and influences policy, services and support for families.

As well as co-managing the HILDA survey, the AIFS manages 'Growing Up In Australia: The Longitudinal Study Of Australian Children' which explores family and social issues, and addresses a range of research questions about children's development and wellbeing. Its longitudinal structure enables researchers to identify the long-term consequences of policy innovations.

This report has utilised research and advice from several members of AIFS staff, including Ruth Weston, Michael Gray, Michael Alexander and Jennifer Baxter, covering topics as diverse as statistics on changing family structures in Australia, impacts of atypical work on family life and relationships, long work hours and the wellbeing of fathers and their families, and the views of children about their parents' working patterns.

Don Edgar

Don was the founding Director of AIFS, and is a writer and social policy adviser. He has directed the innovative New Links Workplace Project and has acted as a consultant to government and business on work-family policies and programmes. He has written many books, reports and articles on work and social policy.

His latest book, 'The War Over Work', published in 2005, provides an overview of changes to the work environments and its social context, and argues that we cannot continue to focus narrowly on work-family balance as though it can be achieved through simple programmes within individual workplaces.

Barbara Pocock

Professor Barbara Pocock is Director of The Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia. For over two decades, Barbara has been researching aspects of work in Australia, including industrial relations, trade unionism, pay and pay equity, vocational education, inequality in the labour market and – since 2003 and the award of a Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship – the intersections between work, family and community.

Barbara's two books 'The Work/Life Collision' and the recently-published 'The Labour Market Ate My Babies', provide an extensive overview of the changes in working patterns and the nature of work in Australia, the social and institutional causes and outcomes of these changes, as well as the views and opinions of everyday Australians, their partners and children.

The Centre for Work + Life has a range of projects under way looking at changes at work and their effects on workers, households and Australian society. These include specific studies of work and family, low pay, and the impact of legislation on vulnerable Australians.

Mark Wooden

Mark Wooden is a Professorial Research Fellow and Deputy Director at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (University of Melbourne). Mark is also Director of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey.

Mark's current research topics include the changing nature of work and employee relations. We have included analysis from several reports authored by Mark (mainly based on HILDA survey data), particularly with regard to the persistence of long hours working patterns and employees' preferences for fewer hours of work.

The HILDA survey is a household-based panel study, begun in 2001, that collects information about economic and subjective wellbeing, labour market dynamics and family dynamics.

Interviews are conducted annually with all adult members of each household (7,682 households and 19,914 individuals), with panel members followed over time in successive survey waves.

The HILDA Survey was initiated, and is funded, by the Australian Government through the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Responsibility for the design and management of the survey rests with a group comprising: The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (University of Melbourne), The Australian Council for Educational Research, and The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

Three Ways to Read this Report

This report documents conclusions based on a thorough review of available social research and related information. Because not all readers will have an equal interest in studying the underlying data on which the conclusions are based, the findings are presented in three forms.

The *Executive Summary* is the five minute version, suitable for those who wish to quickly understand the report's overall findings.

The *Main Report* (the one hour version) is for those who are interested in reviewing the report findings thoroughly without fully engaging with the underlying research. A set of exhibits highlights core research elements, the reasoning behind findings is explained, and recommendations are included in full. Data sources are generally not referenced in this version.

The *Appendix* (two hours plus) lays out the complete basis for the work undertaken through a comprehensive set of exhibits. Pages of text linking the exhibits permit the reader to follow the complete argument so that this section can be read as a stand-alone document. All data sources are fully referenced and a complete bibliography is included.

An Unexpected Tragedy

Evidence for the connection between working hours and family breakdown in Australia

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

A Nation Dominated By Work

Thirty years ago, the average Australian worker spent less than forty hours a week at work – the vast majority of this time was in steady employment, working on weekdays between the hours of 8am and 6pm. This pattern of working life was shared across the broad community, providing opportunity for most Australians to enjoy consistent patterns of life *outside* work – to spend time on a predictable basis with family and friends, and in other community-related pursuits.

The past three decades have been a time of unambiguous economic prosperity for our country. But this success has come at a price. Working patterns have altered to such an extent that Australia is now the only high-income country in the world that combines:

- average working hours that are at the top end amongst high-income nations
- a strong tendency for work on weeknights and weekends, and
- a relatively large proportion of the working population employed on a casual basis.

The Harsh Reality: Relational Breakdown and Dysfunction

A significant body of evidence suggests that those people who work long and unsocial hours spend less quality time with their families and friends and that most Australian families are suffering time pressure resulting from their work.

An emerging body of international research shows that these long and atypical working patterns are associated with dysfunctional family environments, including:

- a) Negative health outcomes for those working these times, particularly if they are parents
- b) Strained family relationships
- c) Parenting marked by anger, inconsistency and ineffectiveness

And, critically, both long/atypical hours and dysfunctional family environments are associated with:

- d) Reduced child wellbeing.

Notably, these associations are evident when either or both parents work atypical schedules, so the timing of fathers', not just mothers', work matters to children. And although low-income members of Australian society are generally more keenly affected by these changes, the impact is shared across all strata in our community.

Unsurprisingly, over the last 30 years in Australia, the decline in family relational health has led to an increased incidence of separation and divorce. And there are now more single parents than ever before. With only a single parent providing care for one or more children, increased time pressure and stress increase the probability of adult ill health, and parenting and child difficulties.

Other trends in the Australian workplace, and society more broadly, exacerbate the relational health problems described here and leave the workforce increasingly vulnerable to an eventual downturn in the economy. These trends include a sustained reduction in job stability, intensification of work responsibilities and increased household debt.

What Australians Want

In 2006, 77% of surveyed Australians agreed with the statement: “A government’s prime objective should be achieving the greatest happiness of the people, not the greatest wealth”. And when asked “What is the most important thing for your happiness?”, almost 60% of surveyed Australians cited partner/spouse and family. A further 8% specified community and friends. It would appear, then, that a large proportion of the Australian population believes that a primary responsibility of government is to support and protect their happiness, founded in relationships with their family, friends and the broader community. At the same time, only one quarter of those surveyed think that life is getting better.

What Australia Needs

To date, Australian governments have shown little awareness of the general association between working patterns and quality of relationships, particularly those in our immediate families. However, a variety of signals point to growing, broad-based dissatisfaction with the way that working patterns have evolved over the last three decades, particularly as they affect workers’ ability to foster relationships with family and friends. More than two-thirds of Australians believe that too many of us are working long hours. And almost two-thirds of those working long hours consider that their hours of work interfere with their family and personal life.

Sustained discontent with this core aspect of our shared social structure indicates an underlying imbalance of power between employers and employees. Two conditions will be required for policymakers to redress this imbalance:

1. A broadly-held public preference for the government to take action needs to be communicated clearly to those responsible for implementing public policy. The analysis and findings included in this report are intended to provide important grist to public debate. It is the task of politicians, journalists and other leaders within the Australian community to engage personally with this critical issue, encourage broad public discussion, independently gauge public opinion and, ultimately, push for policy reform.
2. Policymakers must have access to tools that will enable them to take appropriate action to support strong relationships in families and in the wider community. Two key tools required by policymakers are an integrated set of performance indicators to understand critical aspects of working patterns and relational outcomes, and practical policy options, so as to be equipped to take appropriate and timely action to foster relational health within households and families, and in the community more broadly.

It is likely that, once implemented, a set of policies that builds a platform for relational wellbeing, while minimising any downside to employers, will have a strong ongoing positive impact on the Australian macroeconomy, as well as greatly improving the lives of all Australians.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the connection between changing working patterns and a general decline in wellbeing associated with relationships – particularly those in families, but also including friendships and participation in the broader community. The cold statistics hide immense human tragedy.

If the link between working patterns and family disintegration is accepted, it is incumbent on political leaders to take urgent action to address working time issues – so as to avert emerging social and economic repercussions, and to ensure a stable and sustainable society in the future.

An Unexpected Tragedy

Evidence for the connection between working hours and family breakdown in Australia

Main Report

Preface

Context

The issue of working patterns is increasingly the subject of international debate, for example in the UK, Canada, the EU and Australia. There has been growing concern from social commentators and church leaders, as well as from trade unions and politicians, about social impacts of long and unpredictable working hours. At the same time, there has been growing public concern about the breakdown of marriage and family life, and the consequences for the wellbeing of children. The time seems right to study the possible links between these two phenomena.

Scope Of Study

The objective of this report is to seek to establish whether there is a link between changes in Australian working patterns and aspects of wellbeing associated with relationships, particularly those in families, but also including friendships and participation in the broader community. It is intended that the output of this work will provide valuable input to broader community debate about working time and patterns, as well as provide an analytical foundation for family and community impact assessment and policy development.

The report has not been written primarily for an academic audience, with a process of peer review, though the detailed Appendix is extensively referenced and the authors have consulted many Australian experts in the area of social policy in the course of compiling the report.

The document is not intended to provide a set of definitive policy proposals, nor to investigate the causes of the changes in working patterns. The final section of the main report responds to the unease felt by many Australians (as evidenced by assembled data) and to set out a possible way forward. We suggest both a more comprehensive and better integrated set of indicators, including more consistent data collection and reporting, and a range of possible policy responses. The latter need to be tested and evaluated in the light of international experience and discussed in detail with policymakers, business leaders, trade unions and those with a professional or personal interest in the relevant fields.

Sources And Uses Of Information

This study has been directed at identifying *existing* data sets and research of relevant and reliable information that can be analysed to yield conclusions regarding working patterns in Australia and their impact on relationships and associated wellbeing.

Considerable research and analysis have been conducted within Australia examining the topics of working time and relational health. This study aims to raise awareness of important conclusions from existing research and to synthesise them into a compelling argument to provoke public debate.

To date, most research attempting to show a link between changing working patterns and family/child wellbeing has demonstrated correlation, without showing causality. Several major Australian surveys will, in future, provide data that can be used to analyse the link between long and atypical working patterns and family/child wellbeing, and potentially to identify the direction of causality of these associations (e.g. the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia – HILDA, and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children – LSAC).

This report makes use of a number of international studies; research projects conducted in Canada and the UK have been particularly helpful. We have no reason to think that the conclusions from the studies used here are not applicable in the Australian context, but would encourage that similar research be conducted in Australia.

Some of the studies cited contain data up to ten years old. This partly reflects the nature of the studies themselves, particularly those including longitudinal research, which relies on data collected over a period, and time use studies, which require a great deal of work to analyse their detailed data sets.

Definitions For ‘Long’ and ‘Atypical’ Working Times

There is no consistent definition of standard working times in Australian or international literature on working patterns, apart from classifying any work on the weekend as atypical. The main sources of information used in this study have generally defined weekday atypical working times as either 6pm to 8am or 7pm to 8am. Long working hours are generally defined as 45 or 50 hours per week or more.

Information on the incidence of long and atypical working patterns can be based on either ‘usual’ or ‘actual’ work at these times. In general, the incidence of actual long and atypical working patterns is higher than the incidence of usual working patterns because of the bias for people to work beyond what they define as their ‘normal’ schedule.

‘Usual’ working times are reported from surveys that ask individuals about their usual or regular working patterns, and are therefore considered a reflection of their normal working patterns.

‘Actual’ working times are reported in surveys where individuals are asked about their actual working patterns during a given period (for example, a week or month). Actual working patterns, therefore, provide a snapshot of the specific time period, including any variations from usual working patterns (such as people away on holiday/sick leave) and daily fluctuations of working times, which generally reflect the unpredictability of work patterns.

1. Introduction

Thirty years ago, the average Australian worker spent less than forty hours a week at work – the vast majority of this time was in steady employment, working on weekdays between the hours of 8am and 6pm. This pattern of working life was shared across the broad community, providing the opportunity for most Australians to enjoy consistent patterns of life *outside* work – to spend time on a predictable basis with family and friends, and in other community-related pursuits.

Since the mid-1970s, a combination of factors has caused Australian working patterns to alter markedly:

- Now participating in the global economy, local businesses are exposed to greater international competition. The resulting pressure for increased labour productivity and improved utilisation of fixed assets has led to changing requirements for total hours worked by employees, the times of day and night that labour is needed and the balance between permanent and temporary employment. Closer integration with markets in different time zones, combined with the availability of low cost telecommunications, provide further incentive for work to be conducted outside regular working hours

- The emergence of value based management (where value creation is assessed rigorously from the sole perspective of shareholders) as the guiding business philosophy has led to unabating pressure for shareholder returns, in turn, placing continuing pressure on labour productivity
- The move to a seven day trading week has led to a growing requirement for labour outside traditional working hours, particularly for retail, food service workers and those in associated transport and distribution services. And to some extent, this change has had a demonstration effect for workers in other sectors of the economy who, increasingly, see evening and weekend work as normal.

Over the last three decades, working patterns have altered to such an extent that Australia is now the only high-income country in the world that combines:

- average working hours that are at the top end amongst high-income nations
- a strong tendency for work on weeknights and weekends, and
- a relatively large proportion of the working population employed on a casual basis (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1 (See Appendix p.5)

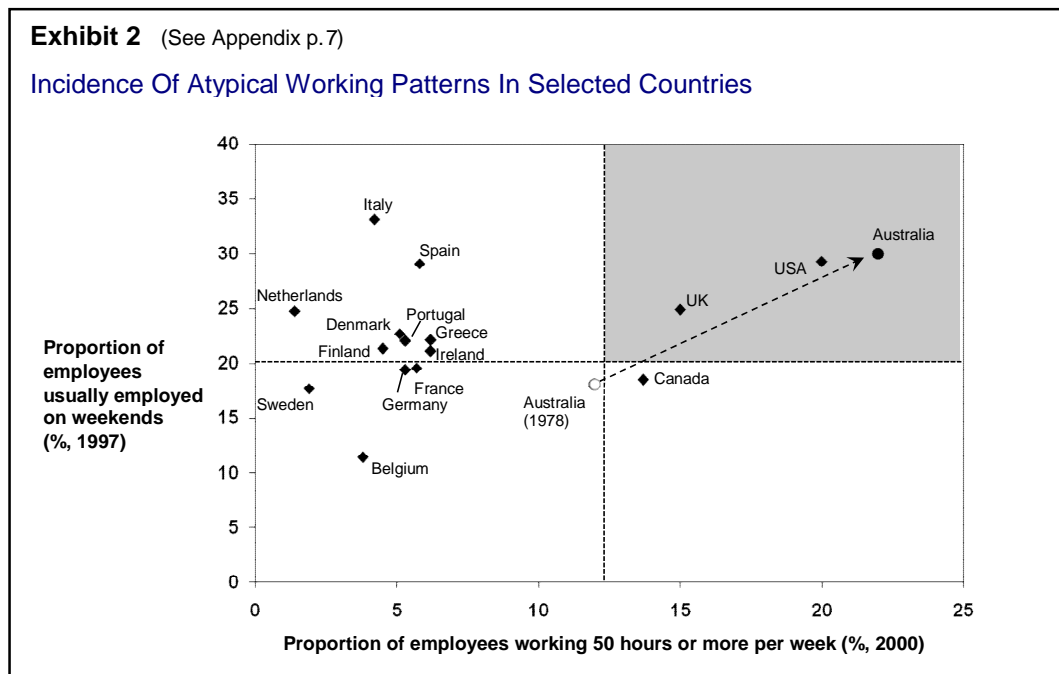
Summary Of Working Patterns In Selected High-Income Countries (% Of Employees)

Country	Long Hours (>50 per week)	Country	Regular Weekends	Country	Temporary Employment
Japan	28	Italy	33	Spain	31
Australia	22	Australia	30	Australia	27
New Zealand	21	USA	29	Portugal	22
USA	20	Spain	29	Finland	17
UK	15	UK	25	Sweden	16
Canada	14	Netherlands	25	Netherlands	14
Greece	6	Denmark	23	France	14
Ireland	6	Greece	22	Japan	13
Spain	6	Portugal	22	Canada	13
France	6	Finland	21	Germany	12
Portugal	5	Ireland	21	Greece	11
Germany	5	France	20	New Zealand	11
Denmark	5	Germany	19	Italy	10
Finland	5	Canada	19	Denmark	9
Italy	4	Sweden	18	Belgium	8
Belgium	4	Belgium	11	UK	6
Sweden	2	Japan	n/a	Ireland	5
Netherlands	1	New Zealand	n/a	USA	4

A significant body of evidence suggests that those people who work long and unsocial hours spend less quality time with their families and friends, which in turn is associated with relational breakdown and dysfunction within the family unit and poor relational outcomes for children. Parallel trends – including increased intensification of work responsibilities, reduced job stability and rising household debt – compound the pressures placed upon Australian households and family relations.

This report gathers together, for the first time, the substantial body of relevant research and analysis documenting these trends, assesses their implications for Australian society – with a particular emphasis on parents and their children – and makes some initial recommendations on how policymakers might remediate these problems.

2. A Quiet Revolution: From the Lucky Country to a Nation Dominated by Work



Over the last thirty years, Australia has emerged as one of the most intensely work-focused high-income countries in the world, with around 20% of employees now working 50 hours or more each week and a high proportion working outside what were once considered regular working hours (Exhibit 2). Today, more than 30% of Australian workers regularly work on weekends.

Longer Hours

Average working hours for full-time employees steadily increased during the 1980s and 1990s, stabilising at around 41 hours per week in the last decade (Exhibit 3). The typical Australian working day is now longer than in all comparable high-income European countries, where hours worked have generally declined over the last ten years.

Over this period, the actual *number* of Australians working long hours and at atypical times has increased at an even faster rate due to a 60% increase in the size of the labour force, a result of both population growth and increased female labour force participation.

The United Kingdom is most similar to Australia – experiencing a moderate rise in the 1980s and early 1990s. But even in the UK there has been a decline in the last ten years, to a level similar to that of 20 years ago. Countries such as France and Denmark, where reductions in standard full-time hours have been debated publicly and then implemented, have experienced significant declines in average hours worked.

Of high income countries, Australia stands out – along with Japan, New Zealand, USA and UK – as having a large minority (~20%) of long hours employees (50hrs or more) in comparison with other OECD countries (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 3 (See Appendix p.8)

**Average Actual Weekly Hours For Full-Time Employees
(Australia And Selected EU Countries)**

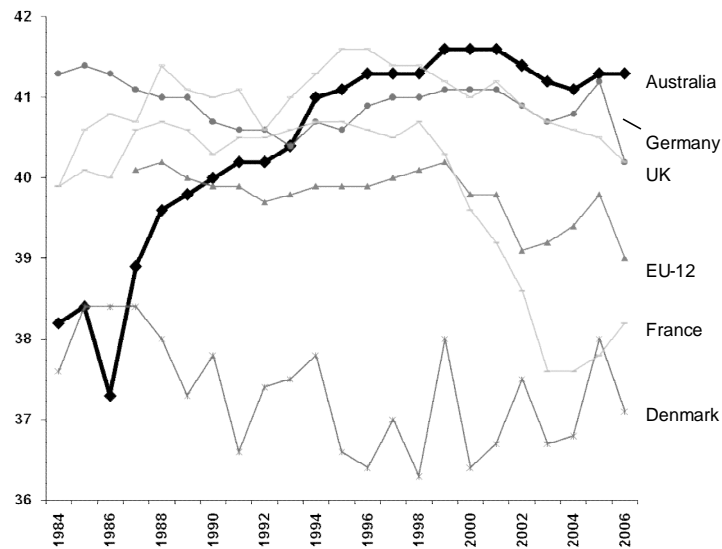
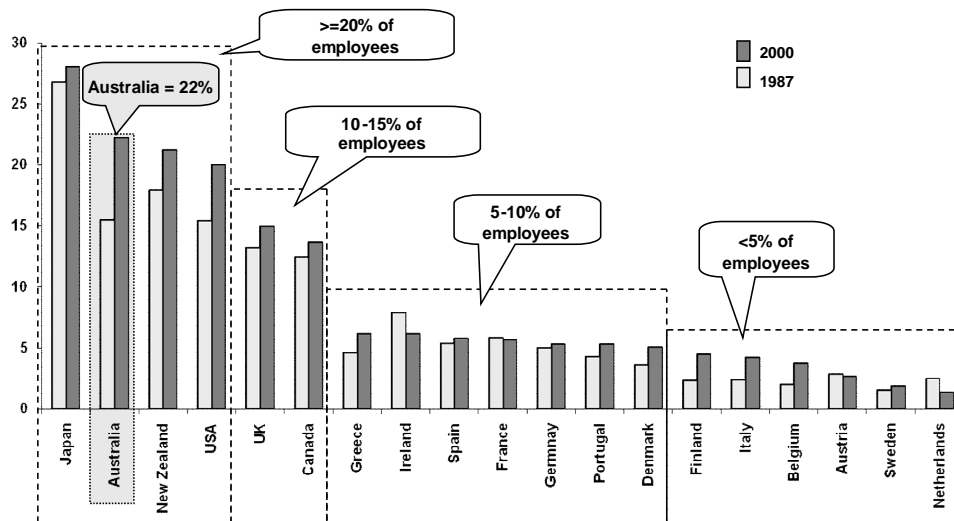


Exhibit 4 (See Appendix p.9)

**Proportion Of Employees Working 50 Hours Or More Per Week
(% OECD Countries)**



In Australia, the proportion of the workforce working more than 45 hours per week rose from 20% in 1978 to 26% in 2000 before stabilising at 25% in 2005. A greater proportion of men (34.6%) than women (13.0%) work long hours. However, the number of both men and women working long hours has increased.

Most people who work long hours continue to do so for an extended period: 70% of people working long hours carry on into the next year, while 55% continue to work long hours for at least the next two years.

The proportion of employees who generally work on weekdays between 7pm and 7am or any time on weekends grew from 56% in 1986 to 64% in 2000. It is possible that this figure has continued to rise over the last few years, and quite unlikely that it has fallen.

The Death Of Nine To Five

The proportion of the workforce working atypical hours (generally defined as 6pm-8am weekdays or anytime on Saturday or Sunday) has increased over the last 15 years. Available information shows a strong increasing trend over the last three decades.

Between 1992 and 1997, the incidence of work on weekdays between 6pm and 8am rose from 59% to 64% of the workforce (Exhibit 5).

The proportion of employees usually working on Sundays increased from less than 13% in 1974 to 23% in 1997, while 35% of employees were usually at work on Saturdays (Exhibit 6).

By 1997, 75% of male and 47% of female workers were working atypical hours.

Exhibit 5 (See Appendix p.11)

Incidence Of Work At Atypical Times on Weekdays (% Of All Employed Persons)

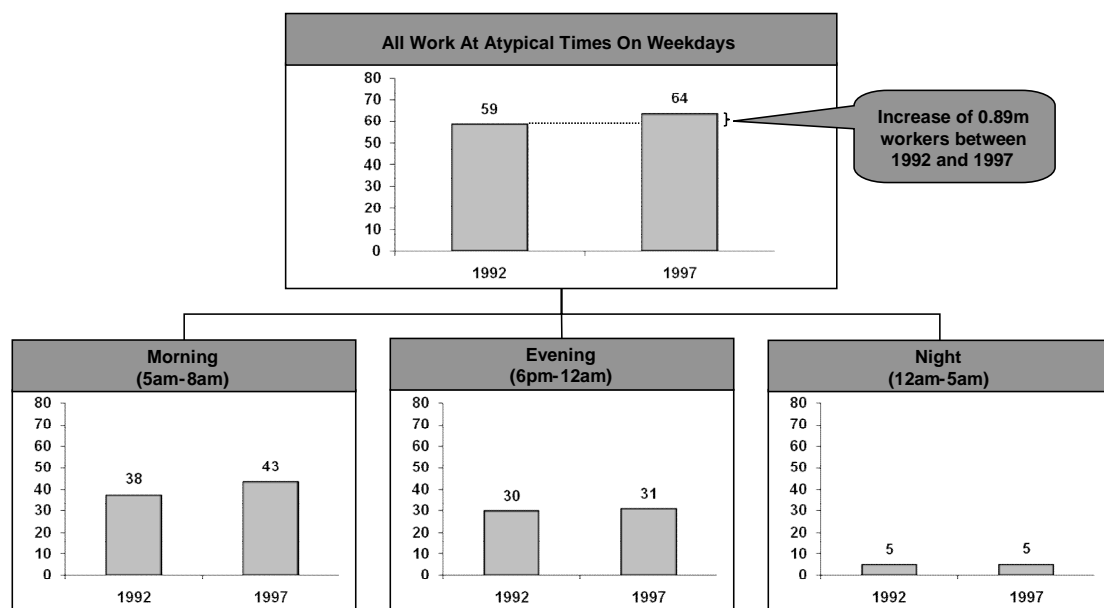


Exhibit 6a (See Appendix p.12)

Proportion Of Metropolitan Employees Aged 20-59 Usually Working On A Sunday (%)

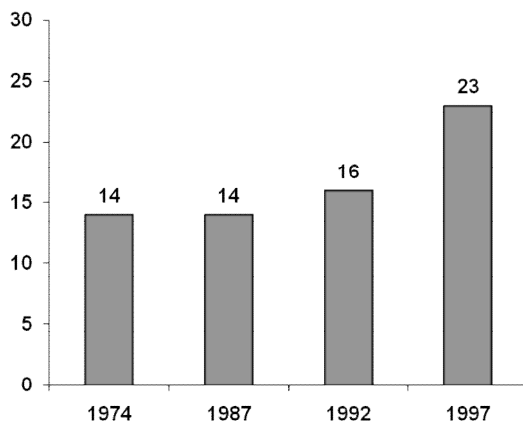
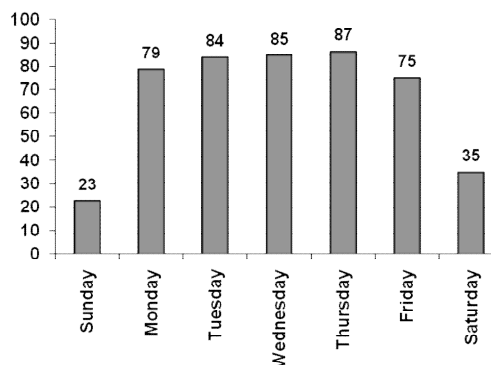


Exhibit 6b (See Appendix p.13)

Proportion Of Employees Usually At Work By Day Of The Week (1997)



Less Predictability

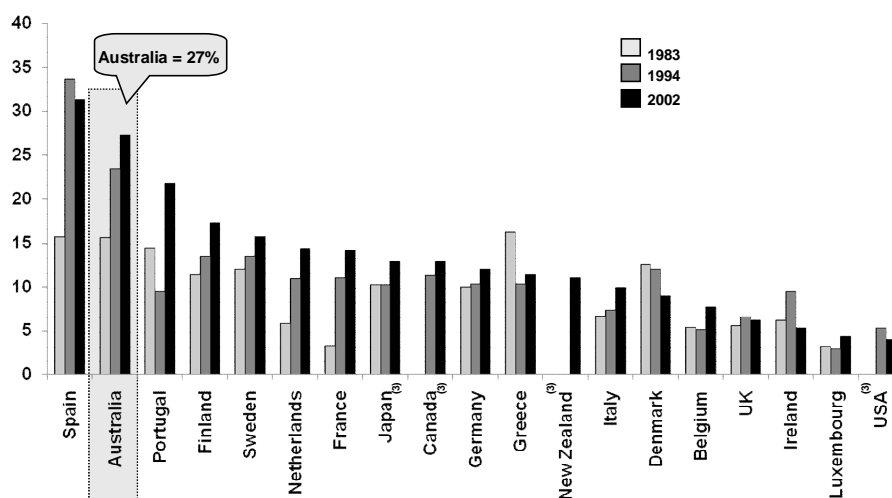
While Australians have been moving to working long and atypical hours, working patterns have also become less predictable for many. This is largely due to rapid growth in the proportion of the workforce in casual

or temporary employment, as well as the proportion working long hours (generally without fixed start and finish times).

Today, 27% of Australian workers are employed on a temporary rather than permanent basis, one of the highest proportions amongst OECD countries (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7 (See Appendix p.14)

Proportion Of Temporary Employees (Selected OECD Countries)



The incidence of overtime work, particularly unpaid overtime, is another key indicator of irregularity in working patterns. Between 1993 and 2003, the incidence of regular overtime rose from 33 to 37%. This is particularly skewed towards men – and especially to fathers of young children – half of whom work overtime on a regular basis. Two-thirds of all overtime worked attracts no additional remuneration.

A Distributed Burden

Although some groups of workers show a greater bias towards long hours, atypical working patterns, or unpredictable work patterns, the burden of more onerous working arrangements has been spread widely across the working population.

Long working hours are experienced in a variety of industries. Property and business services, manufacturing, construction and retailing together account for about half of those working more than 45 hours a week. 56% of those working long hours are in managerial, administrative and professional occupations.

People who regularly work outside standard hours are typically to be found in different industries and occupations from those who work long hours. And different industries require work to be conducted at different times during the evening, night and early morning. A wide variety of people work in the evenings (6pm to midnight), including part-time, hospitality, professional services workers and students, as well as men in the mining industry and female managers. Night workers (12am to 5am) are most likely to be in manual occupations and the mining industry. Early morning work (5am to 8am) is generally undertaken by low-skilled workers in manual occupations and industries.

Casual employment, closely linked to unpredictable working hours, is most prevalent in the retail and hospitality industries (39% of casual employees) and other service industries (41%). Only 20% of casual workers are in non-service industries such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing and construction. Half of casual employees are clerical and service workers, one third are labourers, tradespeople and production workers, with only 16% working as professionals and managers. Casual workers are also more likely than permanent employees to deal with the complexity of holding more than one job.

3. The Hard Choice: Work vs Family?

More Time At Work = Less Time At Home

There is a compelling case that the growing numbers of Australians who work long hours and at unsocial and unpredictable times, sacrifice time with their families and friends.

Available local data, combined with recent research in the UK, provide a good guide to the likely impact on the amount and quality of time that individuals have with family, friends and community.

Australians' non-employment related activities remain concentrated on the weekend. It is not surprising then that our 3 million weekend workers are able to spend less quality time with their families, friends, communities and clubs/associations (Exhibit 8).

On average, the 2 million Australians who work on Sundays do so for almost a full working day, typically losing six hours of family time and social contact, which is not compensated for during the week (Exhibit 9).

Working mothers sacrifice personal care, household and social time in order to minimise time lost with children. Many parents in dual-earner families also adopt a strategy of shift-parenting, requiring them to sacrifice time spent together as a couple and with their families. Both couples and singles lose leisure time with friends, colleagues and neighbours.

Research in the UK, where working patterns are similar to those in Australia, further demonstrates the impact of long and atypical work on family time. In British two-income families, mothers working at atypical times lose an average of eight hours per week with their children, while fathers lose four hours. Single-income fathers who work at atypical times lose an average of ten hours per week with their children.

Exhibit 8 (See Appendix p. 22)

Social Contact With Family, Friends, Colleagues And Neighbours By Day Of Week
(Average Minutes Per Day, 1997)

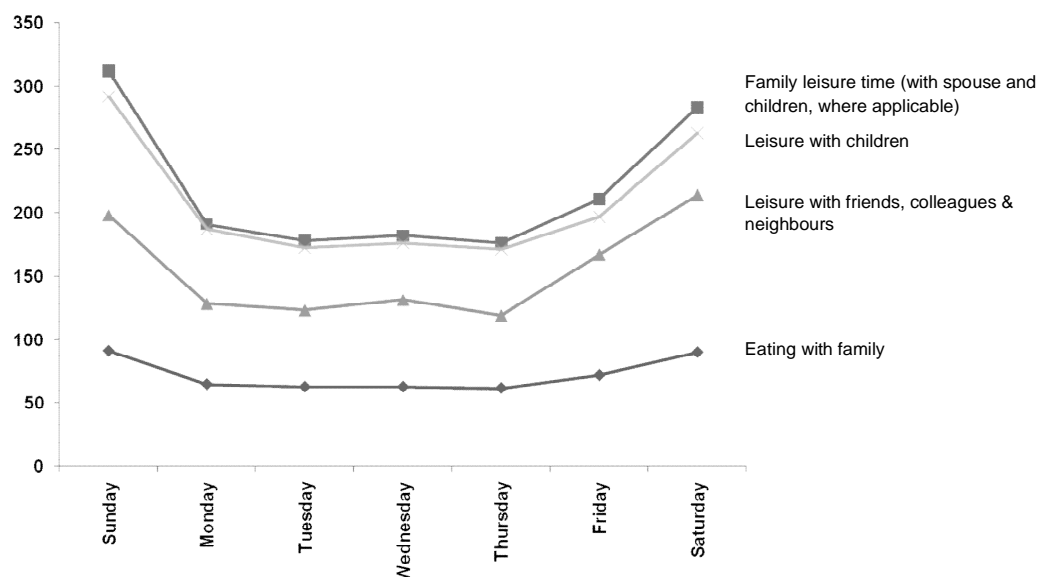
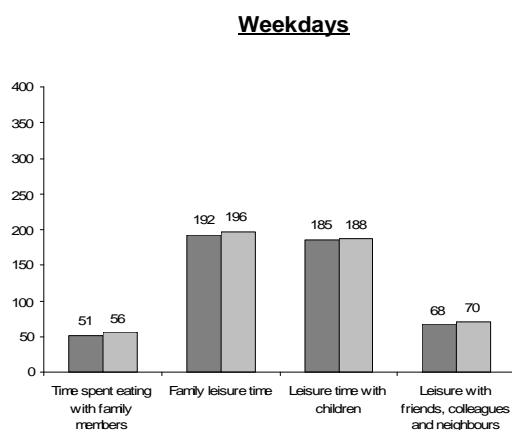
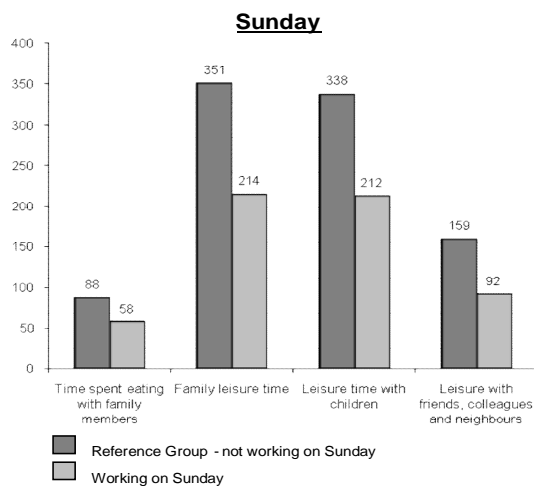


Exhibit 9 (See Appendix p.23)

Time Spent With Family And Other Social Contact
(Minutes, 1997)



In Australia, the proportion of working couples (that is, where both are employed) with children has risen from 42% 1981 to 60% in 2005, largely due to the significant increase in the number of women at work. Available information suggests strongly that these parents spend less time, in total, with their children than their counterparts where only one parent works.

Temperature Rising

Most Australian families are suffering time pressure resulting from their work. 63% of parents who work more than 45 hours a week miss out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent because of work commitments (Exhibit 10).

Nearly half report that work leaves them with little energy to be the parent they would like to be.

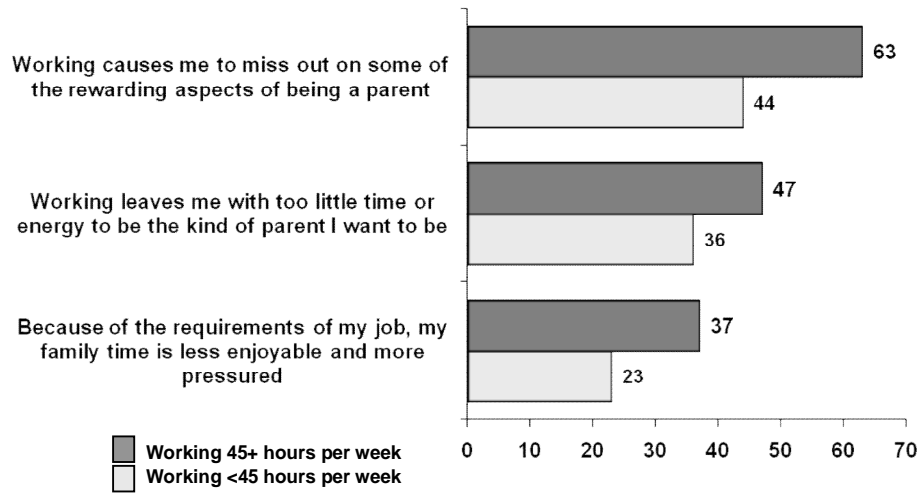
‘Well I would say when I do work a lot, it does make me more tired, yes. And there would be sort of repercussions on children when you are not as easygoing and have a tendency to flare up a bit more’ (father of two, works full-time)
Hand & Lewis (2002), Fathers’ views on family life and paid work, Family Matters 61, AIFS.

Couples with young children (0-4 years) perceive a higher degree of time pressure than those without children. And women, in particular, perceive greater pressure than men. 51% of fathers with young children report time pressure often or always, while 62% of mothers with young children report time pressure often or always. 66% of all fathers and 40% of mothers consider that work responsibilities cause them to miss out on family activities in which they would otherwise have taken part.

Although, the use of flexible work arrangements can reduce the amount of family time/activities missed, the use of these types of arrangements is still low for fathers and, in any case, only offers a partial solution.

Exhibit 10 (See Appendix p.30)

Perceived Conflict Between Work And Family Commitments
(%, 2001)



4. The Harsh Reality: Relational Dysfunction and Breakdown

An emerging body of international research is showing that long and atypical working patterns are associated with dysfunctional family environments¹ (Exhibit 11), including:

- Negative health outcomes for those working these times, particularly if they are parents
- Strained family relationships
- Hostile and ineffective parenting.

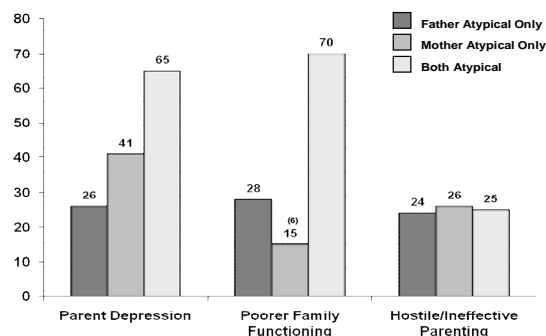
And, critically, both long/atypical hours and dysfunctional family environments are associated with:

- Reduced child wellbeing.

Notably, these associations are evident when either or both parents work atypical schedules, so the timing of fathers' not just mothers' work matters to children.

Exhibit 11 (See Appendix p.37)

Increased Probability Of Worse Family Environment In Canadian Dual Earner Families (%)



a. Negative Health Outcomes For Parents

Dual-income parents suffer more depressive symptoms when mothers or both parents work at atypical times. These depressive symptoms correlate with a wide range of psychological problems, including anxiety, mild depression, major depression and non-specific psychiatric diagnoses.

Long and atypical work schedules are linked to parents' depressive symptoms via fatigue and disruption to biological systems (for night work), and because parents find it harder to find time to unwind and maintain the family relationships important for their own wellbeing. Two different relational responses to an increase in job stress have been identified: increases in conflict/anger and social withdrawal.

Increased risk of depression and stress results when employees work atypical times or are time pressured. This, in turn, is associated with marital problems and divorce.

Atypical work times also add to pressures on families with young children. Children's need for care, supervision and their dependence on families are greater when they are young, placing pressures on parents' time and energy. Time pressures for dual-earner parents are particularly high, and so dual-earner parents with young children, especially mothers, are at greater risk of depression.

A number of factors causing stress at work have been clearly identified. When these factors are in evidence at work, stress causes a spill-over into the home environment.

¹ These observations are based on a 2004 study of the relationship between work patterns and family wellbeing in Canada. It would be desirable for this research to be replicated in the Australian context. However, there seems to be no reason why the results, which relate to underlying human behaviours, would not be valid for Australian workers and their families.

b. Strained Family Relationships

Family functioning is worse when fathers or both parents work atypical times in dual-earner families. This includes the quality of relationships such as communication of feelings, family roles, emotional involvement and responsiveness, problem solving and behaviour control.

Relationships require time together to give and receive support, build intimacy and repair conflict when it arises. This is true for both partner and child-parent relationships. Time is a family resource; parents' working patterns influence when they are available for their children and for each other.

A substantial and consistent body of research shows that working *atypical times* may make it harder for employees to maintain family relationships because they miss out on shared family events, routines and outings. Evening and night work schedules are particularly stressful for parents, affecting their sleep and increasing depression, as well as disrupting family routines, and may reduce parent involvement and responsiveness to children.

Several studies support the view that *long hours* are also detrimental to personal and family wellbeing, including the quality of marital relationships².

The likelihood of separation or divorce is greater when parents work in the evenings or at night; the association between evening/night work and separation is not as clear for childless couples, suggesting that the stresses and complexities of atypical work are increased when there are also children to consider. Other cross-sectional and longitudinal studies show associations between shift work and marital discord and divorce.

c. Hostile and Ineffective Parenting

Parent-child interactions are more likely to be characterised by hostile and ineffective discipline when fathers, mothers or both parents work atypical times in two-income families. These parents are more likely to be angry, inconsistent or ineffective in their parenting.

The quality of parenting is also a key influence on children's wellbeing, and several lines of research

suggest a link between the timing of parents' work and their parenting. Parents' mental health is important for relationships with their children, as well as for their own wellbeing. The stressfulness of atypical schedules may alter parents' mood and energy, leading to more irritable interaction with children. Depressed parents are less spontaneous, more withdrawn, angry and sad. International research has found that children of depressed parents are more likely to have emotional or behavioural difficulties, poor physical health and impaired social and academic performance.

All types of atypical schedules (weekend, afternoon, evening and night) can disrupt family routines and reduce parent-child involvement. Compared with parents on standard hours, those working any type of atypical hours spend less time reading, playing and helping children with school work, are less likely to share a family meal, and are less satisfied with the time they spend with children.

Shift-parenting may mean that parents have less opportunity to negotiate a shared parenting style, leading to inconsistencies, conflict and confusion.

d. Reduced Child Wellbeing

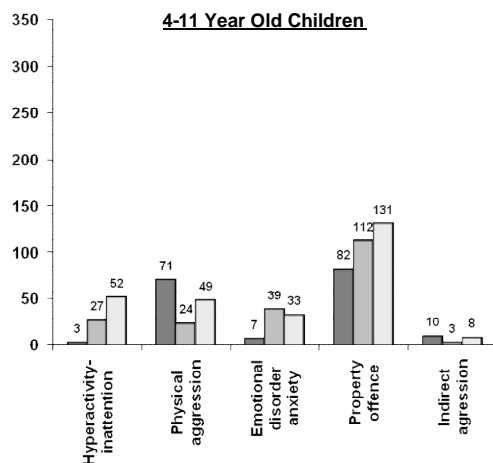
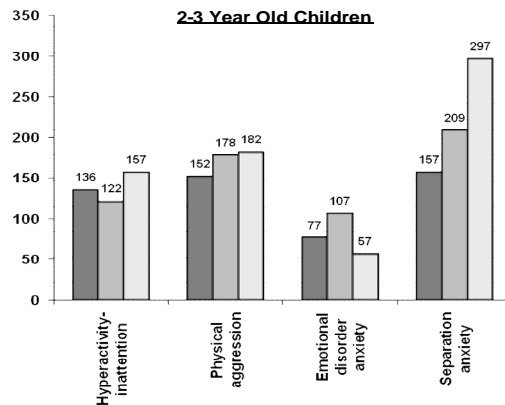
Independent pieces of research show that both long/atypical working patterns and dysfunctional family environments are associated with reduced wellbeing for children.

Atypical work schedules are related to a range of child difficulties including hyperactivity-inattention, physical aggression, emotional disorder-anxiety and separation anxiety, property offences and indirect aggression. These difficulties are more likely to occur when mothers, fathers or both work atypical hours in dual-earner families (Exhibit 12). For example, in a study of Canadian dual-income families, it was found that toddlers were twice as likely to show signs of physical aggression if both parents worked atypical hours (compared to children of parents where neither worked atypical hours). Children's wellbeing depends on the quality of family relationships. Non-standard work schedules may make it harder for parents to build family closeness and establish effective patterns of discipline.

² Other studies have failed to find an inverse relationship between work hours and the aspects of wellbeing examined. For example, in Australia, one study suggests that long work hours did not adversely affect men's satisfaction with their marriage or with their children. To some extent, the impact of long work hours on wellbeing is likely to vary according to the reasons for working such hours (for example, financial necessity, fear of job loss, and personal commitment to a corporate culture, or even the intrinsic enjoyment of their jobs) and people's satisfaction with these hours.

Exhibit 12 (See Appendix p.37)

Increased Probability Of Child Difficulties in Canadian Dual Earner Families (%)



Parents' interest in their children's education has been shown to have a positive association with attainment as measured by ability in reading, mathematics and overall exam performance across all subjects. This factor influences academic attainment above and beyond any direct effects of parental education and class. When both mothers and fathers read with their children or help with homework, fewer behavioural problems and better academic performance result. Mothers' time has been shown to have a stronger relationship, which may be evidence of a better interaction style or a reflection of the relative length of time that mothers spend doing these activities.

Children's difficulties are more likely among atypical hours working families with young children (pre-school age), and there is also a trend for more child difficulties in lower socio-economic status families.

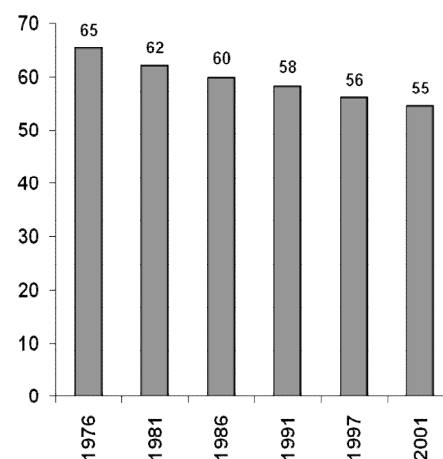
Some families may be more vulnerable than others to the strains arising from atypical schedules. Low income and financial hardship are risk factors for a range of problems including parent depression and less effective parenting. Low-income families are less able to pay for services such as daytime child care or after-school care. These services are expensive and harder to find outside regular daytime hours. Low status employees are also less likely to control when they can start and finish, increasing the potential for work to conflict with family needs and events.

The Endgame: Relational Breakdown

Over the last 30 years in Australia, the decline in family relational health has led to an increased incidence of separation and divorce. Although proportionately fewer people are entering marriage or *de facto* relationships, and more people have never been married, the national divorce rate has risen consistently since the mid-1980s³ (Exhibits 13, 14 and 15).

Exhibit 13 (See Appendix p.38)

Married And De Facto Relationships (% of Adult Population)



De Facto Couples (% of all couples)	6	8	10	12
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³ The exceptionally high divorce rate in 1976 was due to the introduction of the Family Law Act that year.

Exhibit 14 (See Appendix p.38)

Never Married
(% of Adult Population)

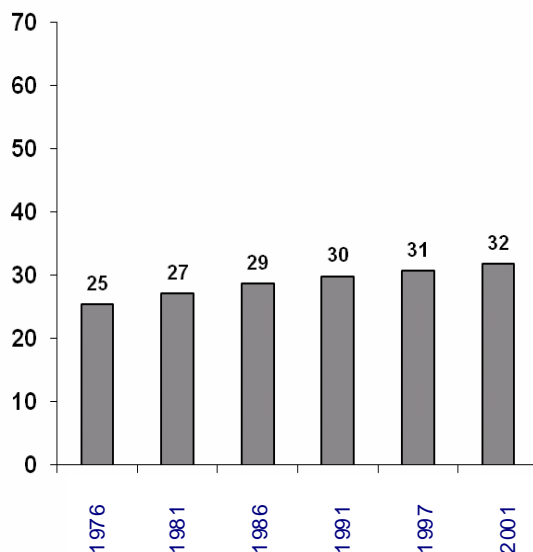


Exhibit 16 (See Appendix p.40)

One Parent Families With Dependent Children
(% of All Families With Dependent Children)

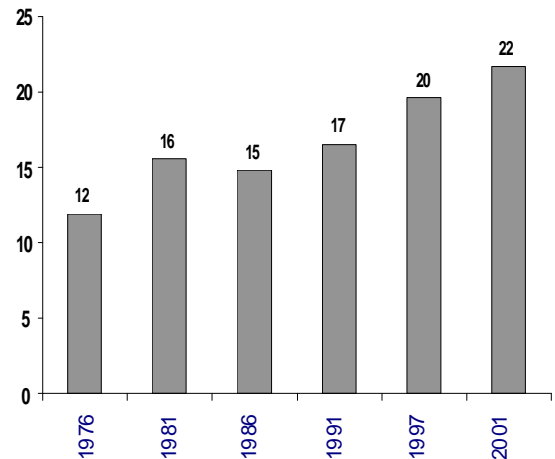
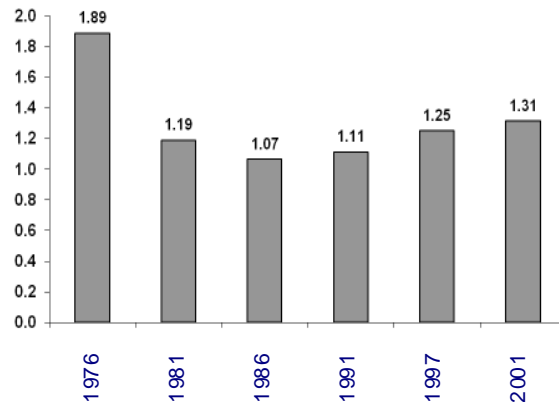


Exhibit 15 (See Appendix p.39)

Annual Divorce Rate
(% of Married Population)



There are now more single parents than ever before (Exhibit 16). With only a single parent providing care for one or more children, increased time pressure and stress increase the probability of parenting and child difficulties.

Worse To Come?

Other trends in the Australian workplace, and society more broadly, exacerbate the relational health problems described here and leave the workforce increasingly vulnerable to an eventual downturn in the economy. These trends include a sustained reduction in job stability (linked to the trend towards casual employment), intensification of work responsibilities and increased household debt.

Work-to-family strain is exacerbated by unpredictable or irregular schedules, job stress, casual employment and the household financial situation. Adverse work conditions – including job strain, insecurity and a perceived inability to get another job – increase the probability of negative health outcomes.

Work overload and organisational expectations for long hours tend to have a negative effect on family life. Wives whose husbands experience high work overload feel less loving towards their husbands, are less able to take their spouse's perspective, see their spouse as less able to take their perspective, and experience more conflict.

Employees with less perceived job security have worse mental health than those with higher job security, so the casualisation of jobs can be expected to lead to a deterioration in overall mental health of those affected (and increased stress-related problems).

During the 1990s, the number of mental health claims in NSW more than doubled for men, and quadrupled for women, even though reported job insecurity (and unemployment) have declined during the period due to sustained economic growth.

The steep rise in the level of household debt has reduced the power of many employees to negotiate with their employers. These workers feel impelled to work long hours so as to service high levels of debt. The stress due to their debt burden compounds inherent strain from long hours, and atypical and unpredictable working patterns.

It is likely that the strong economy has masked an underlying deterioration in job stability that has occurred, leaving a large proportion of the population more vulnerable when the next economic downturn occurs.

Low-income earners – and in particular those with young children – are likely to be the hardest hit. Reduced child wellbeing associated with long and atypical hours is even more likely in families with pre-school aged children (0-5 years old) and there is a tendency for greater difficulties for families from low socio-economic groups. Atypical work times are more often a condition in low-paid jobs, especially in the expanding service sector, so dual-earner parents with fewer skills or less education face the double jeopardy of low income and work at atypical hours. These parents also have the greatest difficulty accessing affordable child care when they need it, or obtaining services that might help them cope, further widening status-based inequalities in parent and child wellbeing. Any softening in the labour market is likely to be felt most keenly by these weaker members of our community.

“When you think about it, you realise the long-standing trend to part-time and casual employment is about shifting risk to workers. When the boss employs a worker full-time she bears the risk that there will be a time of the week or the year when she’s paying for labour she doesn’t really need. But replace a full-time worker with a few part-timers brought in at peak periods and that risk is transformed into the loss of income for some would-be full-timer. And here, I suspect, is the killer: the next time the economy turns down we’ll see that the greater freedom [now afforded] employers will permit them to shift the risk of recession – to some extent, at least – from business profits to workers’ wages. So profits will fall less while wages fall more. It’s hard to see how this will cushion rather than accentuate the recession’s effect.”

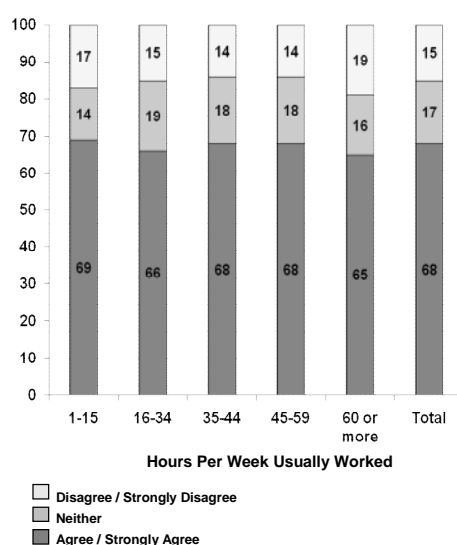
Ross Gittins (2007), Risky Business, But Not For The Boss, Sydney Morning Herald

5. What Australians Want

Although many of us may be unaware of the extent to which our country has become dominated by work, more than two-thirds of Australians believe that too many of us are working long hours (Exhibit 17).

Exhibit 17 (See Appendix p.46)

Responses To Statement: 'Too Many People Are Working Long Hours In Australia Today' (% , 2003)



Interestingly, half of employees believe that working long hours is a choice made by the individual rather than something over which they have little or no control. This is even more strongly felt by those who work long hours, 57% of whom expect employees to have more control over their working patterns. However, these same workers are the ones most likely to report that their hours of work interfere with family life, and that their employers expect them to work long hours. And in 2004, almost three-quarters of surveyed Australians believed that, in general, big business had too much power – up from around 50% in 1987.

“Australia’s working time regime is an institutional environment that sanctions unlimited hours, [and] encourages ... the belief that working long hours is determined by [an] individual’s commitment to work. By contrast, legislative limits on hours remind the public of the social hazards of long hours.”

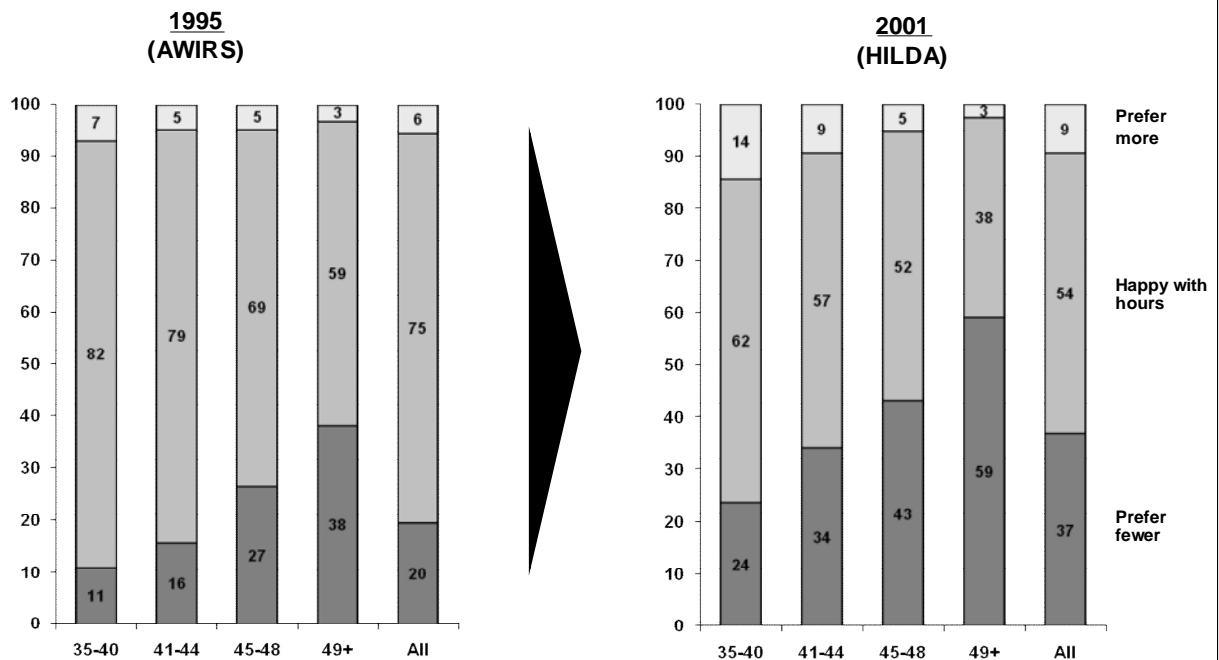
Van Wanrooy & Wilson (2006), Convincing The Toilers? Dilemmas Of Long Working Hours In Australia, Work, Employment & Society 20:349-368.

This combined evidence suggests that many Australians now share a sense of resignation to a ‘system’ that demands some combination of long hours and irregular and unpredictable working patterns. With limited room for movement inside the system, an increasing number of Australians have made the personal choice to ‘downshift’, making a voluntary, long term change in their lifestyle that involves accepting significantly less income and consuming less. Between 1992 and 2002, 23% of surveyed Australians aged between 20 and 59 downshifted. While 29% of these workers were able to reduce the number of hours in their existing job, the majority have changed to a lower-paying job, changed career or stopped working altogether. The most common reason cited is ‘more time with family’ (35% of those polled).

While many have taken action to slow the pace of their working lives, over the same period there has been a significant increase in the proportion of full-time employees who would prefer to work fewer hours (Exhibit 18).

Exhibit 18 (See Appendix p.51)

Working Hours Preferences By Hours Usually Worked (%)

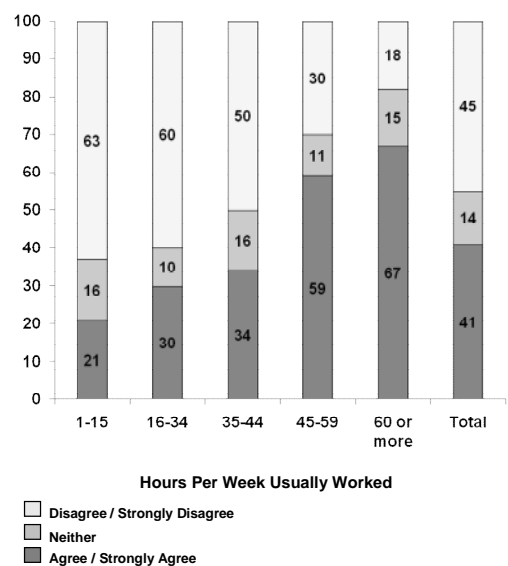


Between 1995 and 2001, of the growing number of people working more than 45 hours a week, the proportion who would prefer to work fewer hours grew from around a third to over a half. Their overall preference was to reduce their average 54 hour week to 40 hours. By 2003, more than 60% would rather be working less hours.

Almost two-thirds of those working long hours consider that their hours of work interfere with their family and personal life, compared with only a third of those who work between 35 and 44 hours a week (Exhibit 19).

Exhibit 19 (See Appendix p.52)

Responses To Statement: 'Hours Of Work Interfere With Family/ Personal Life' (% , 2003)

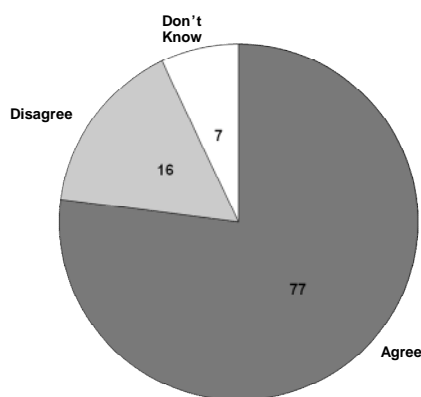


6. What Australia Needs

In 2006, 77% of surveyed Australians agreed with the statement: “A government’s prime objective should be achieving the greatest happiness of the people, not the greatest wealth” (Exhibit 20).

Exhibit 20 (See Appendix p.54)

“A Government’s Prime Objective Should Be Achieving The Greatest Happiness Of The People, Not The Greatest Wealth”
(%, 2006)



And when asked “What is the most important thing for your happiness?”, 59% of surveyed Australians cited partner/spouse and family. A further 8% specified community and friends (Exhibit 21). It would appear, then, that a large proportion of the Australian population believes that a primary responsibility of government is to support their happiness, founded in relationships with their family, friends and the broader community.

At the same time, only one quarter of those surveyed think that life is getting better (Exhibit 22).

Exhibit 21 (See Appendix p.55)

“What Is The Most Important Thing For Your Happiness?”
(%, 2006)

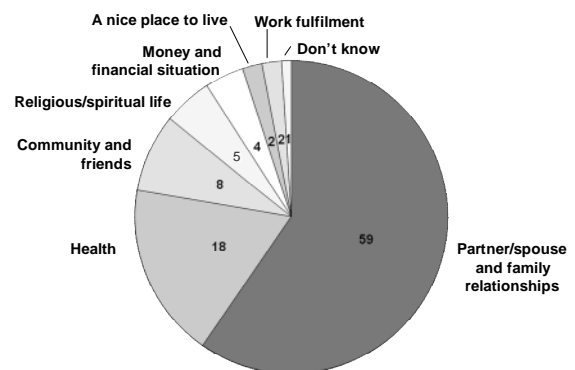
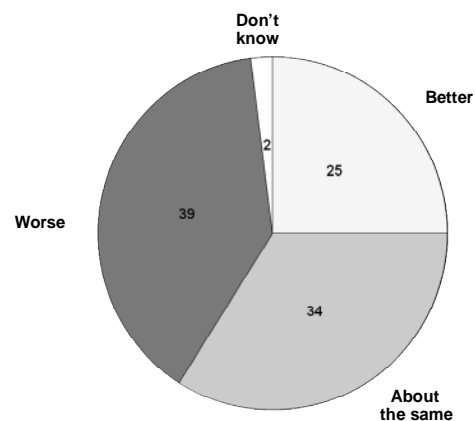


Exhibit 22 (See Appendix p.55)

“Is Life in Australia Getting Better, Worse, Or Staying About the Same?”
(%, 2006)



To date, Australian governments have shown little awareness of the general association between working patterns and the quality of relationships, particularly those in our immediate families. However, a variety of signals point to a growing, broad-based dissatisfaction with the way that working patterns have evolved over the last three decades, particularly as they affect workers’ ability to foster relationships with family and friends.

Sustained discontent with this core aspect of our shared social structure indicates an underlying imbalance of power between employers and employees. Two conditions will be required for policymakers to redress this imbalance:

1. A broadly-held public preference for governments to take action needs to be communicated clearly to those responsible for implementing public policy.
2. Policymakers must have access to tools, in terms of data and policy options, that will enable them to take appropriate action to support strong relationships in families and in the general community.

Informing Public Opinion

Employees' concerns about their lack of power relative to employers are regularly voiced through public opinion polls and articles written by sympathetic journalists. However, a broadly-held preference for governments to take positive action through policies that support household, family and community relationships is not often clearly articulated or heard.⁴ It seems that, like the frog in a pot of water being brought to the boil, many Australians are aware of increasing discomfort but do not have a sense of what action to take.

The analysis and findings included in this report are intended to provide important grist to public debate. It is the task of politicians, journalists and other leaders within the Australian community to engage personally with this critical issue, encourage broad public discussion, independently gauge public opinion and, ultimately, push for policy reform.

Tools For Policymakers

The two key tools required by policymakers are *an integrated set of performance indicators*, so as to understand critical aspects of working patterns and relational outcomes, and *a set of practical policy options*, so as to be equipped to take appropriate and timely action to foster relational health within families and in the community more broadly.

An integrated set of performance indicators should quantify both inputs and associated outcomes.

Inputs include the various aspects of working patterns reviewed in this report: usual and actual hours worked for individuals and households, the actual and usual incidence of atypical work (weekends and weekday atypical), the amount of time spent in work at atypical times, and the predictability of work (including the proportion of workforce employed on a casual/temporary basis). All of this information needs to be available in sufficient detail to permit segmentation by family/household type, demographic group, industry and occupation. Considerable data describing individual work hours are already available, but there is limited information concerning the combined work hours of households, and very little data (or consistency of definitions) for atypical working patterns.

Outcomes include time spent at home by parents, parents' satisfaction with their own performance as parents, aspects of family dysfunction and breakdown (including parents' health, strain in family relationships, hostile and ineffective parenting and children's wellbeing). Importantly, sample sizes for this data gathering should be large enough to permit meaningful analysis of different groups within society, particularly across the socio-economic spectrum and across families with children of varying ages.

These indicators will determine the relevant information that must be collected, building on the excellent longitudinal sets of data already being gathered (eg through ABS, HILDA and AIFS). Data collection should be closely coordinated, perhaps overseen by a panel of Australia's leading social researchers, so as to ensure that the resulting data sets leave as few gaps as possible in understanding all key inputs, outcomes and linkages. Relevant information should be collected and reported in short cycles to allow quick policy response.

A set of practical policy options should be identified to help support strong relationships in families and in the community generally. The process of developing and assessing policy options should involve close consultation with employers and industry groups, trade unions and other interested parties within the community.

⁴ A notable recent exception, less than two years ago, was the West Australian referendum on extending trading hours for all businesses, where 61% of voters opposed later weeknight shopping and Sunday trading. And in January this year, the will of the people was reinforced as the WA Government heeded community calls to retreat from another push for Sunday retail trading and extended shopping hours.

A shortlist of potential policies can be developed through a survey of local and overseas experience, and through consultation with community leaders, social researchers, and union and business leaders. A set of assessment criteria can then be applied to evaluate short-listed options. Likely assessment criteria include:

- The projected *effect on relationships*, including fostering of strong family and community relationships
- Potential *micro- and macro-economic implications*. Broad-based consultation with employers and industry groups would help identify policies that will support a 'level playing field' domestically and minimise any potential deterioration of Australia's competitive standing internationally
- *Equity* across different groups in society. Policies will need to be tested to ensure that all employees have access to any related benefits
- Potential for *acceptance*, socially and politically, in the Australian context
- Ease and cost of *implementation*.

A preliminary list of policy options for assessment would include:

- a) Regulating various aspects of employment, for example through:
 - Premium payments for long or atypical hours
 - Limitation on the hours or days of work per week that can be demanded of employees (such as in the EU's Working Time Directive)
 - Establishing a weekly, or perhaps monthly, shared weekend day off, allowing for the provision of essential services (as in Germany)
 - Special work provisions for parents. Examples include:
 - Parents with school-aged children to be protected from the requirement to work on both Saturday and Sunday on any given weekend so that all parents have at least one day a week with their children

- The right to request flexible working for all parents who have children up to age 18.⁵

b) Empowering employees.

- A new framework for collective bargaining
- Providing information to help employees make informed choices (for example, requiring employers to report average hours per week actually worked by their employees)
- Taking steps to help employees understand the dangers of consumer debt and how to escape from it.

Additional Benefits

It is feasible that, once implemented, a set of policies that builds a platform for relational wellbeing, while minimising any downside to employers, will have a strong ongoing positive impact on the Australian macroeconomy, as well as greatly improving the lives of all Australians.

Improved relationships should provide a range of economic benefits. Healthier adults and children will place less demand on ballooning public and private health care expenditure. Improved productivity (including a reduction in absenteeism) should result from less stressed workers.

A fall in separation and divorce rates will lead to reduced duplication of housing and transport requirements, reducing costs to individuals and the economy as a whole, and placing less strain on the environment.

Improved family relationships stand to have a lasting impact on Australia's international competitiveness as children in stable families arguably have greater opportunity to develop the relational skills that will be critical in the 21st century global service economy.

⁵ The UK has been successful in providing parents of children up to six years of age or of disabled children with the right to request flexible working arrangements. To date, around three-quarters of requests have received positive responses from employers.

Reduced government expenditure should result, not only from lower healthcare requirements, but also from lowered cost of education, aged care and welfare. Greater time availability for parents to spend with their children should lead to less disruption from children with behavioural problems and fewer special-needs children, which will lift a significant cost burden from schools.

The cost of caring for the aged should fall as adults have more time available to care for elderly relatives. Lower welfare payments and lower costs associated with juvenile crime should result from the reduction in the number of broken homes and fewer dysfunctional young adults.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the connection between changing working patterns and a general decline in wellbeing associated with relationships – particularly those in families, but also including friendships and participation in the broader community. The cold statistics hide immense human tragedy.

If the link between working patterns and family disintegration is accepted, it is incumbent on political leaders to take urgent action to address working time issues, so as to avert emerging social and economic repercussions, and to ensure a stable and sustainable society in the future.

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Errata

Page 19, Exhibit 1, page 20, Exhibit 2 and page 22, Exhibit 4 - the proportion of Australian employees working long hours (>50 hours per week) should be 20% rather than 22%.

There is no change to the body of text in the document.