

Australian Work and Life Index 2012

The Big Squeeze: Work, home and care in 2012

AWALI

Natalie
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Executive summary

The AWALI 2012 survey

The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI) survey measures how work intersects with other life activities, as seen by a randomly selected representative group of 2,887 working Australians.

Alongside its usual assessment of work-life interference in Australia, the 2012 AWALI survey offers new insights on six particular themes:

- How women who work full-time are experiencing worsening work-life outcomes;
- How employees are experiencing high levels of work intensification;
- How employee requests for flexibility have changed since the *Fair Work Act 2009* created new rights to request flexibility for some workers;
- How men request flexibility much less frequently than women, and are much more likely to have their requests refused;
- How the length of parental leave relates to work-life outcomes;
- How working from home affects work-life outcomes.

AWALI 2012 also included questions on ethnicity/language background, education and training and the meaning of work; these findings will be reported later in 2012 in publications from the Centre for Work + Life.

Some things change, but work-life interference is persistent

AWALI 2012 is the fifth AWALI survey, with previous surveys carried out in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

In recent years a number of major events have influenced Australians' work, personal, family and community lives. The global financial crisis commenced in 2007/8 and international financial markets have experienced continuing instability. The *Fair Work Act 2009* introduced a number of changes to the regulation of work. These included a new net of National Employment Standards that incorporated a formal right for some workers to request flexibility or extended unpaid parental leave from 1 January 2010. A national system of paid parental leave came into effect in January 2011. At the same time, the Australian labour force has continued to evolve, with increasing participation of women, declining rates of participation amongst men, an aging workforce and a continuing shift in the composition of employment away from manufacturing and agriculture towards the services sector.

Amidst these changes, widespread work-life interference has remained persistent since 2007 and particular groups are consistently more affected:

- Around one quarter of the Australians surveyed report that work frequently (often or almost always) interferes with other life activities;
- Women's work-life outcomes are worse than men's when we take into account differences in work hours;
- Mothers have worse work-life outcomes than fathers, whether single or partnered;
- Managers and professionals have worse work-life interference than other occupations;

- Work-life outcomes are worse for those in female-dominated industries, and in jobs that involve interaction and service provision to others. These include retail, accommodation and food services and education and training, allowing for differences in work hours;
- Workers in the mining industry have the worst work-life outcomes, probably reflecting their long average working hours;
- Long hours and a poor fit between actual and preferred working hours are both associated with worse work-life outcomes;
- Most of those who work long hours would prefer not to.

Full-time women: things are getting worse

Women working full-time are the exception to the general pattern of consistent findings over recent years. Their work-life outcomes have become worse on a range of indicators:

- Work-life interference for this group has increased from 2007 to 2012, whereas men's outcomes have remained steady;
- Full-time women's dissatisfaction with their work-life balance has risen (from 15.9 per cent in 2008 to 27.5 per cent in 2012) while men's has showed no change;
- Their experience of chronic time pressure has increased, with 68.6 per cent of full-time women often or almost always feeling rushed and pressed for time, up from 63.4 per cent in 2008 (with no change amongst full-time men);
- In 2012, the gap between full-time women's actual and preferred hours is the largest since 2007. On average they would prefer to work 8.7 hours a week less than they actually do;
- 41.8 per cent of mothers in full-time employment would prefer to work part-time – the largest proportion since 2007.

It is therefore unsurprising that issues like the pressures on working mothers and women cause vigorous public discussion. Women and mothers in full-time employment are hurting. The recent national and international debates on these themes - including the latest round in the US (Slaughter, 2012) and in Australia (ABC Radio National Breakfast: Panel 'Gender on the agenda', 5 July 2012; Kinchen, 2012) reflect the fact that many women are under pressure. The Australian policy environment has *adapted* to working women around the edges – modifying 'standard' employment practices, made in the image of men without care responsibilities, to provide part-time work and paid parental leave for example – but it has not fundamentally *transformed* to reflect the different life-time work and care patterns of most women. Women are stretched in light of this partial adaption which leaves them very busy on the work and home fronts.

Full-time women perceive that the pressures on them are increasing. The evidence points to continuing and increasing strains for working women, despite some policy advances. This raises some important challenges in a country that aims to increase women's workforce participation, sustain fertility and respond to the needs of an aging population. Each of these aims is likely to intensify care responsibilities, most of which will fall to women. Combining paid work and care is currently - and likely to remain - a struggle for the majority of women. Inflexible work arrangements, work intensification and unsupportive workplace cultures need to be addressed. Until then it is likely that Australian women's employment participation will continue to lag behind comparable industrialised countries, as will their capacity to realise the personal and financial benefits of engaging in quality, well-paid jobs over the life-cycle.

21st century women in a 20th century world of work

Recent decades have seen profound changes in the way that men and women engage in paid work. Two-thirds of Australians are now participating in the labour force (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a) and women's rate of participation has been increasing. Dual earner families are increasingly the norm, and the majority of sole-parents are engaged in paid work.

Yet despite these profound social changes, the male breadwinner /female caregiver model of the 20th century is alive and well in 21st century Australia and many workplace cultures are made in the image of the full-time, male worker unencumbered by care responsibilities. Australian women work around this image and the practices it embeds – while doing around twice as much caring and domestic work as men (Craig, 2005). Not surprisingly, women are much more likely to work part-time (69.5 per cent of part-timers are women and almost half of women work part-time) with implications for their life-time and retirement earnings, training and job quality. However, AWALI surveys show that part-time work is not a 'silver bullet' for work-life conflict, and neither is self-employment or casual work.

- Women working part-time report the same degree of chronic time pressure as men working full-time;
- The self-employed have the same levels of work-life interference as ordinary employees – whether male or female and whether differences in work hours are controlled for or not;
- Casual workers have no better work-life outcomes than permanent workers when we control for differences in working hours.

Working carers and work-life strain

It is well established that combining paid work with caring for children increases work-life demands and pressures - the ubiquitous 'struggle to juggle' that most parents (and mothers in particular) experience on a daily basis.

AWALI 2012 shows that work-life strains continue to be high for working mothers.

Sole mothers

- Work-life pressures are particularly high for sole mothers: controlling for their fewer paid work hours, their work-life strain is equivalent to that experienced by long hours' workers or those with a wide gap between their actual and preferred hours.

These issues are a cause for concern. Increasing work and training participation requirements for sole mothers may have unintended consequences: sole mothers experience high levels of work-life spillover, especially where incomes are low or precarious.

Work-life outcomes for those who care for the aged or those with a disability

AWALI 2012 compares the well-recognised work-life strains experienced by working parents (especially mothers) with those workers with other kinds of care responsibilities, finding:

- Around a fifth of both male and female respondents have 'other' care responsibilities (i.e. personally looked after or gave help or support to family members or friends with a long-term physical or mental illness or disability, or who had problems related to old age). The incidence of these responsibilities increases with age;
- Work-life interference is comparable for mothers and women who care for others (both have AWALI scores of 48);
- This suggests that policies (like the right to request flexible work arrangements) are likely to be as helpful for women with non-parental care responsibilities as for mothers;

- Women who combine care of children with other care responsibilities – the ‘sandwich’ generation - have worse work-life outcomes than any other categories (with AWALI scores of 54.2);
- Work-life interference is higher amongst fathers than for those men who care for others, and both are higher than amongst men without parenting or care responsibilities. However, all are lower than amongst equivalent women.

Work Intensity

Jobs that overload workers and create time pressures are not good for health. They increase the likelihood of stress, burnout and poor physical health, and negatively affect relationships with family and partners. AWALI 2012 included three measures of work intensification, including the frequency of working at high speed, tight deadlines and work overload, finding that work pressures affect between 30-40 per cent of the workforce often:

- 36.8 per cent of workers say they are working at very high speed for three quarters of their working time or more (40.2 per cent of women, 33.9 per cent of men);
- 40.6 per cent say they work to tight deadlines three-quarters of the time or more (38.7 per cent of women, 42.2 per cent of men);
- 31.7 per cent believe that they have too much work for one person to do (33.2 per cent of women, 30.3 per cent of men);
- Women are more likely to work at high speed for most of the time, and parents and sole-parents in particular, are most likely to report having to work at very high speed for most of their working time;
- These perceived rates of intensification are higher than in Europe using similar measures;
- Higher rates of work intensification – on all of the above measures – are associated with worse work-life interaction for both women and men.

These findings may well help explain why full-time women are experiencing worse work-life interference, more time stress and are becoming less satisfied with their work-life outcomes and more inclined to reduce their working hours. It is not just their full-time hours that contribute to work-life interference and time pressures, but the intensified work expected in each working hour.

The Right to Request Flexibility at Work

The Australian Government has recently introduced two reforms with the aim of better supporting parents to manage work and care. From 1 January 2010 as part of the National Employment Standards (NES) parents of pre-school children or children under 18 with a disability have a ‘right to request’ (RTR) flexibility from their employer. Secondly, a national system of Paid Parental Leave (PPL) is now available to parents of children born or adopted after 1 January 2011, providing 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the minimum wage to the primary carer. These initiatives are important supports for working parents. They are designed to help parents put together their jobs and caring responsibilities over the life cycle.

Results from AWALI 2009 showed that workers who ask for flexibility and get it, have lower work-life interference than those who would like flexibility and do not ask, or those who ask and do not get what they want (Skinner and Pocock, 2011). AWALI 2012 shows that:

Awareness of the RTR

- Many workers are unaware of the right to request flexibility: 26 months after its enactment only 30.2 per cent of those surveyed knew about the RTR. Awareness was particularly low amongst those eligible to make requests: only 23.5 per cent of mothers of pre-schoolers knew about their right (34.0 per cent of similar fathers);
- Awareness was higher amongst those from higher income households, in larger firms, in managerial and professional occupations and in the public sector;

Rate of request-making

- The rate of request-making has not increased in 2012 compared with 2009: in the 12 months to March 2012, 20.6 per cent of workers had made a request for a change in their work arrangements, just below the level of 22.4 per cent recorded in AWALI 2009. The new RTR has not been accompanied by a greater general inclination to request flexibility;
- Most of the decline in request-making is concentrated amongst full-time women whose rate of request-making has fallen from 26.4 per cent in 2009 to 20.3 per cent in 2012;
- It seems that fewer people are discontent with their work arrangements and seeking out flexibility in 2012: for example 55.1 per cent of full-time workers who had not requested flexibility were content with current work arrangements in 2012 compared with 44.9 per cent in 2009. Greater perceived economic uncertainty may be at work here, affecting full-timers' inclination to seek a change in work arrangements;
- However, a quarter of workers are not content with current arrangements but have not requested flexibility (a third of full-timers). We call these 'discontent non-requesters'. Many of these say that flexibility is simply not available to them (either because they are not convinced their employer will allow it, or their job does not allow it, or flexibility is simply not possible);

Who asks?

- Not surprisingly, patterns of request-making remain highly gendered. In 2012, 43.0 per cent of eligible women (mothers with pre-schoolers) made a flexibility request (47.8 per cent in 2009), compared to 19.8 per cent of similar fathers – up a little from 17.1 per cent in 2009;
- Many workers without children seek flexibility: 19.7 per cent of women without children asked for flexibility in 2012, and 16.0 per cent of similar men;

Why ask?

- Most requests are to meet childcare (more common amongst women) or study commitments (more common amongst men), and the majority relate to working time (working part-time or reduced hours);

Who gets it?

- The majority of requests are fully agreed by employers. This is comparable with outcomes in 2009 (61.9 per cent were agreed in 2012, compared with 68.8 per cent in 2009);

Does it help?

- As in 2009, having a request fully agreed is associated with lower work-life interference, compared to those who do not have their requests fully met.

These findings suggest that targeted information to those eligible for the RTR would be helpful.

It seems that a fifth of workers do not need a legal right to facilitate flexibility requests: they were asking for flexibility before the right came into law, and a similar proportion continue to do so. On the other hand 15 per cent of employees perceive that flexibility is simply not possible in their workplaces as things stand: they think it is not worth asking for this. It may be that a greater level of flexibility – especially for workers in inflexible workplaces – may require a stronger right to request flexibility, backed up by some means of external review when requests are refused. It may also be assisted by a wider set of policy interventions, including promulgation of positive practical examples and benefits of more flexible work provisions to meet employee needs.

Finally these findings show that many workers without children seek flexibility and would benefit by wider practical access to it.

Paid Parental Leave

The new national system of Paid Parental Leave is an important benefit for working parents. Analysis of AWALI 2012 shows that:

- The majority of respondents – 76.6 per cent – were aware of the national Paid Parental Leave provisions. Parents are more aware of these provisions than those without children;
- Amongst female respondents who took parental leave, the average period of leave was 18 weeks paid and 18 weeks unpaid;
- The longer the period of parental leave taken by mothers, the lower their rate of work-life interference and the association is slightly stronger for paid than unpaid leave.

Working from home: a double-edged sword?

Working from home is increasingly enabled by new technologies and growth in jobs where work can be completed away from the workplace. AWALI 2012 included a range of questions about working from home, finding:

Who works at home?

- 16 per cent of respondents work at home on a regular basis, with little difference by gender, parenting status or work hours;
- Taking work home on an irregular basis is more common, with 40 per cent of workers reporting this (some workers did both). Parents are more likely to do this, as are part-time workers and women. Just over half of full-time women report taking work home;
- 44.2 per cent of respondents worked from home sometimes (whether regularly or not);

How many paid and unpaid hours are worked at home?

- On average respondents worked around 22.3 hours a month from home, about half paid (12.7 hours) and about half unpaid (11.8 hours). Thus those who work from home donate on average 17 days a year of unpaid labour to their workplace. There is very little variation in these hours between women and men, or those with and without children;

Why work from home?

- Many of those who work paid hours at home do so to be more productive (57.6 per cent gave this reason), while a similar proportion do so for flexibility (58.6 per cent) and a smaller proportion to catch up on work (48.2 per cent);
- Unpaid hours are motivated more by catching up on work: 70.5 per cent gave this reason, followed by 'having too much to do' (63.0 per cent). 62.3 per cent said they were motivated

to work unpaid hours because they enjoy their job. Just over a third believe that their unpaid hours will assist their career development;

A negative effect on work-life interference

- Those who take work home have worse work-life outcomes compared to those who do not work at home. This effect is concentrated amongst full-timers, and is common to both women and men;
- The worst work-life outcomes occur amongst those who work both paid and unpaid hours at home, followed by those who do unpaid work at home, and then those who work paid hours at home – but all are worse than those who do not take work home.

Hours of work

Men's levels of work-life interference have remained stable over the past five years. However, many men work long hours – most of them reluctantly - and experience high levels of work-life interference:

- 28.0 per cent of surveyed men work long hours (48+ hours a week) (9.7 per cent of women);
- There is little indication that these long hours are worked by choice: most men working long hours (72.0 per cent) would prefer to work at least half a day less;
- Fathers are the group most likely to prefer to work at least half a day less – half say they would like to do so.

AWALI surveys also reveal a strong and consistent preference for shorter hours amongst many working Australians.

Size of firm

AWALI 2012 includes data on size of firm.

- Workers in larger firms have higher work-life interference than those in smaller firms. This may reflect the larger proportion of managers and professionals in larger firms given that these occupations have worse work-life interference than others.

Getting more work out of Australian workers?

At a time where policy continues to focus on the need to increase the supply of labour, the risk of reduced hours from workers already in the labour market is of concern. AWALI 2012 shows that most Australian workers feel that they are giving sufficient or too much time to paid work. This is especially the case for men and women working full-time, and those working longer hours in particular. Part-time work provides a better work hours' fit for women, but increases the risk of under-employment, relative to preferences, especially amongst men. Parenting responsibilities also increase the likelihood of a poor fit between actual and preferred hours for men, as they are less likely than women to work part-time when they have children.

AWALI 2012 survey shows that mechanisms that help workers – both men and women – get the hours they prefer are important. Work-life interference is high amongst those working long hours, or more than they would like and those who do not get flexibility when they request it. Longer hours are particularly a problem for fathers, with many having a significant gap between their usual and preferred hours. As in previous years, most workers working long hours want to work less (taking account of the effect on their pay packets) but many appear to have difficulty reducing their hours.

The Big Squeeze

AWALI data has now been collected five times since 2007, and there has been little positive change in Australians' work-life outcomes on average over this time. Indeed there is firm evidence that pressures are mounting on women who work full-time. Many workers would like more flexibility to vary their hours and to avoid working long hours. A quarter experience frequent negative spillover from work into life beyond their jobs – and many of these are not parents. Many experience job overload and high levels of work intensification.

Over the past five years some significant reforms that provide additional supports and entitlements to parents have been introduced. These are important steps in the right direction and they are associated with measurable positive effects. They include the right for many parents to request flexibility or extended unpaid parental leave, and an 18 week paid parental leave scheme. Where they are utilised, the right to request flexibility and parental leave make an important positive difference: for example, they are associated with lower rates of negative work-life interference.

However, many parents are unaware that they have a right to request flexibility, and – after its first two years of existence – it has not been associated with an increase in the rate of request making. To date, the new right has not served as a 'climate shifter'. As occurred before the RTR was introduced, around a fifth of workers request flexibility and most of them are women and mothers. The majority of requesters get what they ask for and they have not needed a formal right to ask for the flexibility they want.

In many workplaces getting flexibility is difficult especially where standard working arrangements are dominant, the climate is hostile to flexibility, or workers' anticipate a stigma arising from a request for flexibility. Improving things will require basic knowledge of rights to request, and workers' confidence that their request will be treated seriously and not result in negative consequences. Without effective redress, a right to request is not much help in workplaces where cultures are resistant and arbitrary refusal is likely.

Enabling men to work more flexibly – as many would like to – requires a change in workplace practices in many workplaces. Despite being discontent with their current work arrangements, many do not ask, and they are much more likely to be refused than women. A firmer, more widely understood right would be of particular assistance to men.

Further, many people beyond those who are eligible to request flexibility would like to request changes in their work arrangements. Carers of the aged or those with disabilities have the same levels of work-life interference as parents of young children. Beyond these, many people *without* caring responsibilities are not happy with their current work arrangements and would like more flexibility, as is the case for many older workers.

Five policy amendments to the RTR are therefore likely to help remedy these difficulties:

1. wider knowledge of the right to request;
2. high levels of confidence that the RTR process will unfold fairly and that unreasonable refusals have some means of redress;
3. more support for men to make requests, and have them treated reasonably rather than being refused at higher rates;
4. greater efforts to change cultures and practices in workplaces that are unused to non-standard hours and work arrangements, and wider publicity to managers and leaders about the benefits of flexibility;
5. access to a RTR, and protection from unreasonable refusal, to more workers: preferably to all who seek flexibility, but at least to all carers.

Other countries have extended an initial RTR for parents to all carers. For example, the UK Government has recently committed to extend these provisions to all workers (UK Government Consultation on Modern Workplaces, May 2011).

More policy change and more action in workplaces is necessary to better enable workers to reconcile their jobs with the rest of their lives. Such action needs to extend beyond parents and carers of babies, young children or children with a disability – important as the needs of this group are. In a diverse workforce that is also aging, there is a pressing need for reform that extends flexibility to all workers, regardless of their life circumstances, as well as management and cultural change in workplaces to reduce long hours of work, reduce work intensification and mitigate negative work-life interference.

However, change needs to include but go beyond legislate rights to request – to affect workplace cultures, supervision and management practices and leadership, especially in workplaces that are inflexible at present. Addressing workload management, job design, supervisor practices and workplace norms will help ensure that work-life reconciliation has real operational meaning in workplaces where cultures are firmly fixed against doing things differently (Bailyn, 1997; Lewis, 2001).

The high rates of negative work-life interference for full-time women along with the relatively high rates amongst part-time women, create a case for more active discussion about the ‘double day’ experienced by working women. Women’s continuing responsibility for the bulk of domestic work and care – while long-recognised – continues to be a significant reason for women’s high levels of time pressure. Women’s capacity for greater labour market participation, alongside an inexhaustible capacity to care, cannot be easily assumed. The combination is already exacting high costs for women’s private lives, and these demands are likely to increase amidst an aging population. Increasing men’s involvement in caring and domestic work is an important part of the longer term solution.

Section 1: Introduction

What AWALI measures

The AWALI index contains five measures which assess respondents' perceptions of work-life interference (Pocock, Williams, & Skinner 2007). Given that our 2007 survey revealed that work-to-life interference is much greater than life-to-work interference, we refined AWALI in 2008 to focus only on work-to-life interference.

AWALI measures two dimensions of that interference: first, the impact of work on respondents' capacity to satisfactorily engage in the activities and responsibilities of other spheres of life (which we term a 'general interference' effect) and, secondly, the time available to spend on activities outside work (which we term a 'time strain' effect). AWALI also measures the effects of work on community connections. Putting more hours into paid work affects our relationships beyond home, including our capacity to build friendship networks in the broader community, but these are generally not investigated in assessments of work-life interference. AWALI also employs a commonly used single measure of time pressure in daily life ('feeling rushed or pressed for time'), which is an indirect measure of work-life fit and strain. Finally, AWALI includes a general assessment of satisfaction with work-life balance.

Thus, AWALI measures perceptions of:

- 'General interference' (i.e. the frequency that work interferes with responsibilities or activities outside work);
- 'Time strain' (i.e. the frequency that work restricts time with family or friends);
- 'Work-to-community interference' (i.e. the frequency that work affects workers' ability to develop or maintain connections and friendships in their local community);
- Satisfaction with overall 'work-life balance';
- Frequency of 'feeling rushed or pressed for time'.

The work-life index

To arrive at the AWALI composite work-life index measure, we average and standardise the five measures of work-life interference described above. The minimum score on the index is 0 (indicating the lowest work-life interference) and the maximum score is 100 (the highest work-life interference). The five-item work-life index has satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

In the 2012 survey, the average (mean) score on the index is 42.8, and the median is 40.0 (the middle score which 50 per cent of respondents' scores fall above, and fifty per cent fall below). Therefore, scores above the average of around 43 indicate a work-life interference that is worse than average, and scores below this level indicate a better than average work-life relationship.

Past AWALI surveys

Each AWALI survey contains a core set of items relating to employment and social demographics, the work-life index items and an additional set of questions on one or two particular themes. The 2007 data collection featured items on life-to-work interference and the extent of commitments outside work (caring responsibilities, domestic work, and volunteer work). The 2008 data collection featured items on unsocial work hours (weekends and evenings/nights) and organisational culture. The 2009 data collection featured an international comparison of work-life fit, analysis of employee requests for flexibility and their outcomes, and participation in education. The 2010 report explored intergenerational differences in work-life

interaction and considered the issues of holidays: who takes them and how they affect work-life interference. This 2012 report has a particular focus on requests for flexibility, working from home, size of firm and parental leave.

The AWALI 2012 sample and methodology

The concepts, methods, literature, measures and pre-tests underpinning AWALI are set out in Pocock, Williams and Skinner (2007) *The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI): Concepts, Methodology & Rationale*.

AWALI surveys a randomly selected cross-section of the adult Australian employed population by means of computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). Of those successfully contacted by phone and who were eligible to participate within the set quotas, 46.9 per cent participated in the 2012 survey.

AWALI surveys different people each year: it is not a longitudinal survey of the same people. As such it can be seen as ‘taking the temperature’ of work-life interference at a point in time, and it allows us to compare results over time.

AWALI 2012 is a national stratified sample of interviews conducted over four weekends in February and March. As in previous years, Newspoll conducted the survey. In accordance with usual Newspoll practice, respondents were selected by means of a random sample process which includes a quota set for each capital city and non-capital city area, and within these areas a quota set for statistical divisions or subdivisions. Household telephone numbers were selected using random digit dialling, and there was a random selection of an individual in each household by means of a ‘last birthday’ screening question. The survey sample comprises 2,887 employed persons, 2,500 were employees and 317 were self-employed (70 did not specify).

Telephone surveys have strengths and weaknesses. They allow fast data collection and increased quality controls through interview controls and clarifications, and they permit data collection from individuals regardless of their reading and writing ability. A system of call backs and appointments, to facilitate a higher response rate and inclusion of responses from people who do not spend a great deal of time at home, means that this possible distortion is minimised in AWALI. However, the survey is likely to be biased against those who do not have a telephone at home.

Statistical conventions in this report

The following statistical conventions are used in this report unless otherwise specified.

Following Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conventions, full-time employment is defined as 35 or more work hours per week. All contrasts discussed in the text are statistically significant (i.e. not likely to be due to chance) at $p < .05$. The Dunn-Bonferroni correction was applied to multiple comparisons.

Work hours have a clear and consistent impact on work-life interference: as hours increase work-life interference also tends to increase. Therefore, work hours are entered as a covariate in some analyses in which mean scores on the index measure are compared. This means that the effect of work hours on the index scores is removed, or ‘controlled’, to observe the effect of another factor (e.g. gender) on work-life index scores. In this type of analysis we are essentially asking the ‘what if’ question of how work-life interference differs between groups (e.g. men and women) if they worked the same hours. For example, ‘what if men and women worked the same hours, would there be any difference in their work-life interference?’.

The dynamics of the interaction between work and non-work activities are likely to be different for self-employed persons compared to employees. Therefore, in analyses that do not directly

compare self-employed persons and employees, we focus exclusively on employees. Section 6 examines differences between the self-employed and employees.

As a sample drawn from a much larger population, the estimates presented in this report are subject to a degree of sampling bias; that is, the estimates may be different from the figures that would have been reported had all Australian workers been surveyed. Two strategies have been used to reduce this bias. All reported estimates have been weighted by Australian Bureau of Statistics data on age, highest level of schooling completed, sex and area (capital city and balance of State/Territory) to adjust for differences between the AWALI sample and the Australian population on these key demographics. We also follow the threshold rule used in the HILDA study (Heady, Warren, & Harding, 2006) which sets a minimum of 20 units (i.e. respondents) that must contribute to the value of a cell for that figure to be considered reliable. Estimates that do not meet this threshold requirement are accompanied by an asterisk indicating that the estimate should be interpreted with caution.

What we know from previous AWALI surveys

Previous AWALI surveys have shown that work-life interference affects many Australian workers and that this work-life interference is much more significant than the reverse life-to-work interference effect.

A range of employment factors are associated with poor work-life outcomes: higher work-life interference is associated with jobs that lack flexibility and have high workloads, an unsupportive organisational culture and longer work hours. However, there is much more to work hours than their length. Unsocial work hours (evenings, weekends) and hours that are a poor fit to preferences are also strongly associated with worse work-life outcomes. Casual work and self-employment are not associated with better work-life outcomes compared to permanent workers or employees. Those in managerial and professional occupations are most likely to have poor work-life outcomes than workers in other occupations.

Particular social-demographic characteristics are also associated with worse work-life outcomes. Not surprisingly, parenting responsibilities significantly increase work-life strains. This most likely explains the higher levels of work-life interference observed for those in their middle years (aged 34-55). AWALI 2009 showed that engaging in education or training increases work-life challenges and strains, especially for women. Further, work-life issues (lack of time, fitting study in with work-family commitments) are prominent barriers to workers' willingness to engage in education or training. AWALI 2010 showed that many workers stockpile their paid holiday leave, with negative effects on work-life interference for parents, especially mothers.

AWALI 2009 investigated the frequency of workers' requests for flexibility, and the positive impact on work-life of having a request fully agreed. This provides a baseline against which the impact of the *Fair Work Act 2009* and its new 'right to request' flexibility can be assessed. Section 8 of this report compares request making in 2009 with 2012.

Structure of this report

This report is in ten sections. Section 2 describes the AWALI sample and its representativeness and general characteristics. Section 3 analyses the work-life interference of men and women in 2012, considering the component parts of the AWALI index and its summary measure in comparison with previous years' findings. Given the significance of working hours to work-life interference, Section 4 focuses on work hours and their fit with respondents' preferences. Section 5 analyses the personal and household characteristics of respondents and their work-life interference. Section 6 considers employment characteristics and work-life interference. Section 7 looks at work intensification and its impact by gender, household type and employment characteristics and draws an international comparison of the Australia data with that of similar industrialised counties in the European Union. Section 8 compares flexibility requests in 2012

with those reported in the 2009 survey, before the recent Right to Request legislation. Section 9 explores the use of working at home (both paid and unpaid) and its impact on work-life interference. Finally, Section 10 looks at paid parental leave.

Section 2: The AWALI 2012 sample

The AWALI 2012 sample comprises 2,887 employed persons (2,500 employees, 317 were self-employed, 70 did not specify). Overall, the AWALI sample is representative of the Australian labour market at the time of the survey, although there are a few exceptions. See Table 1 for an overview of the AWALI 2012 sample.

Table 1 Overview of the AWALI 2012 sample (per cent)

	Men	Women	All	ABS survey
All				Men: 54.5; Women: 45.5
State				
SA	12.6	11.6	12.1	7.2
WA	12.6	13.0	12.8	10.8
QLD	16.8	16.6	16.7	20.5
NSW	27.3	28.1	27.7	31.5
VIC	24.4	25.1	24.7	25.0
TAS	4.3	3.4	3.8	2.1
ACT	2.0	2.3	2.2	1.8
Age group				
18–24	13.0	11.9	12.5	16.4
25–34	15.2	15.8	15.5	22.3
35–44	26.1	29.0	27.5	22.4
45–54	26.7	26.7	26.7	21.6
55–64	14.3	12.4	13.4	13.9
65+	4.7	4.2	4.5	3.1
Highest level of education				
University degree	36.6	41.4	38.9	23.7
TAFE/college	39.2	32.6	36.1	26.5
Secondary school	24.2	26.0	25.0	49.7
Occupation				
Manager	14.0	10.5	12.4	13.0
Professional	21.5	29.9	25.5	21.2
Technician/trade	22.0	3.5	13.3	15.1
Community/personal service	12.5	21.1	16.6	9.6
Clerical and administrative	5.9	19.7	12.4	14.9
Sales	7.3	10.9	9.0	9.3
Machinery operators	8.6	1.2	5.1	7.0
Labourers	8.1	3.2	5.8	9.9
Type of employment				
Employee	86.1	91.7	88.7	81.8
Self-employed	13.9	8.3	11.3	18.2
Work hours				
Part-time (< 35 hours per week)	21.1	50.7	35.1	29.9
Full-time (35+ hours per week)	78.9	49.3	64.9	70.1

Note. ABS data sources: ABS Cat. No. 6202.0 Labour Force, June 2012; ABS Cat. No. 6227.0 Education & Work Australia, May 2011 and ABS Cat. No. 6359.0 Forms of Employment, November 2011. ABS data includes those aged 15 years and older.

The AWALI 2012 sample provides a fair representation of employed Australians by gender, state, and work hours.

The sample is reasonably representative by education and occupation, although there is an over-representation of those with higher qualifications, workers aged 35 to 54 years old and those in professional occupations. Self-employed workers are also slightly under-represented in the sample.

The AWALI 2012 sample also slightly under-represents casual workers. In the sample 18.0 per cent of employees are employed casually, compared to ABS estimates of 19.8 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b). This probably reflects the inclusion of workers aged 15 to 17 years old in ABS surveys, whereas the AWALI sample is aged 18 and older.

Turning now to the household composition reported by AWALI respondents, Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents are partnered (60.7 per cent). Just under half (45.9 per cent) of respondents are living in households with children. Of those respondents who have children, around one-third has a pre-school aged child. Single parents comprise only a small proportion of the sample (3.4 per cent). The most common household type was partnered with children (38.2 per cent).

Table 2 Household demographics of the AWALI sample, 2012 (per cent)

	All
Adults in household	
1 adult	17.3
2 or more adults	82.7
Marital status	
Married/de facto	60.7
Divorced, separated, never married or widowed	39.3
Children in household	
No children	54.1
1 child	18.5
2–3 children	25.2
4 or more children	2.2
Ages of children^{1,2} (<i>parents only</i>)	
≤ 4	31.7
5–12	51.5
13–17	47.6
Type of household	
Single parent	3.4
Couple with children	38.2
Single no children	27.1
Couple no children	31.3

Note. ¹Percentage as proportion of respondents with children in the household. ²Total is greater than 100 as some had children in more than one age group.

Section 3: Work-life interference: a gendered analysis

Men's and women's experiences of combining work with family, social and personal activities are often quite different. There are broad gendered patterns in hours of work, industry, occupation and work roles that account for some of these differences. We explore the impact of these employment characteristics on work-life outcomes in later sections. Another obvious gender difference is that in Australia, like most countries, women continue to spend more time on unpaid care and domestic work, even with comparable work hours to their male counterparts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a; Budlender, 2010; Sayer, England, Bittman, & Bianchi, 2009). This is a major contributor to how work fits with other life activities and responsibilities.

In this section we compare men's and women's experiences of combining paid work with other life activities, with a particular focus on work-life interference and time pressure. In many of these analyses we consider part-time and full-time workers separately, to provide more meaningful comparisons across the years of AWALI data collections and between men and women.

Men, on average, are more likely to work longer hours than women. Therefore, a direct comparison of men's and women's work-life outcomes is effectively a comparison of groups who differ by gender and working hours. In examining men's and women's work-life outcomes we take differences in work hours into account by either comparing men and women working similar hours (e.g. all full-timers), or by statistically adjusting for differences in work hours. Analysis in this section includes only employees (the self-employed are considered in Section 6). Here we examine men's and women's responses to each of the five items that comprise the work-life index, and the overall AWALI index which is a combined measure of these five items.

Work-life interference in 2012: Individual work-life index items

As Table 3 shows, frequent work-life interference continues to be a common experience for Australian men and women. For around one quarter of all workers, work often or almost always interferes with activities outside work and time with family and friends. A further 29 per cent of workers say that work sometimes interferes with these other life domains. A substantial proportion of workers - around 18 per cent - also report that work frequently interferes with their community connections. These patterns have been consistent across all AWALI surveys since 2007. However there is one change of significance: women are more likely to report that work frequently interferes with their activities outside work. In 2008, 19.6 per cent of women reported this, compared with 23.3 per cent in 2012. There has been no change to the levels reported for men.

As observed in previous surveys, the largest gender difference continues to be around time pressure, with 60 per cent of women reporting chronic time pressure compared to 48 per cent of men.

Despite the relatively common experience of work-life interference, the majority of workers (69.1 per cent) report that they are satisfied with their work-life balance, and this has changed little over the past five years.

Table 3 Work-life index items by gender, 2008 - 2012 (per cent)

	2008 Often/ almost always	2009 Often/ almost always	2010 Often/ almost always	2012 Often/ almost always
Work interferes with activities outside work				
Men	23.7	24.8	25.2	25.2
Women	19.6	22.3	23.0	23.3
All	21.8	23.6	24.2	24.3
Work interferes with enough time with family or friends				
Men	27.8	26.9	28.2	28.7
Women	23.7	24.1	24.8	24.6
All	25.9	25.6	26.6	26.7
Work interferes with community connections				
Men	21.9	17.8	19.3	19.6
Women	16.4	16.7	16.1	17.8
All	19.3	17.3	17.9	18.8
Feel rushed or pressed for time				
Men	50.2	47.1	47.2	48.3
Women	60.2	62.0	60.8	60.7
All	54.9	54.2	53.5	54.2
Satisfaction with work-life balance				
Men	69.0	67.2	67.0	68.7
Women	67.5	67.7	66.9	69.5
All	68.3	67.5	66.9	69.1

Note. Response scale on all items except satisfaction scale was never, rarely, sometimes, often, almost always. Table excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 2500; 2010 N = 2377; 2009 N = 2306; 2008 N = 2383.

Work interferes with activities outside work

We now turn to an analysis of each of these work-life items, considering full-time and part-time workers separately. As Figure 1 shows, frequent work-life interference is common for full-timers (i.e. those working 35 hours a week or more). Work interferes with activities outside of work ‘sometimes’ or ‘often/almost always’ for over half of these workers, and this occurs frequently for around 30 per cent of full-timers.

In the 2012 survey, there is also evidence of a widening gap between men and women. Women full-timers are more likely to report frequent work-life interference (32.7 per cent) than men (28.4 per cent). There has been a significant increase in work-life interference for both full-time men and women between 2008 and 2012 – but the increase is most marked amongst women. The proportion of those who believe that work interferes with activities outside work has increased from 23.2 per cent in 2008 to 32.7 per cent in 2012.

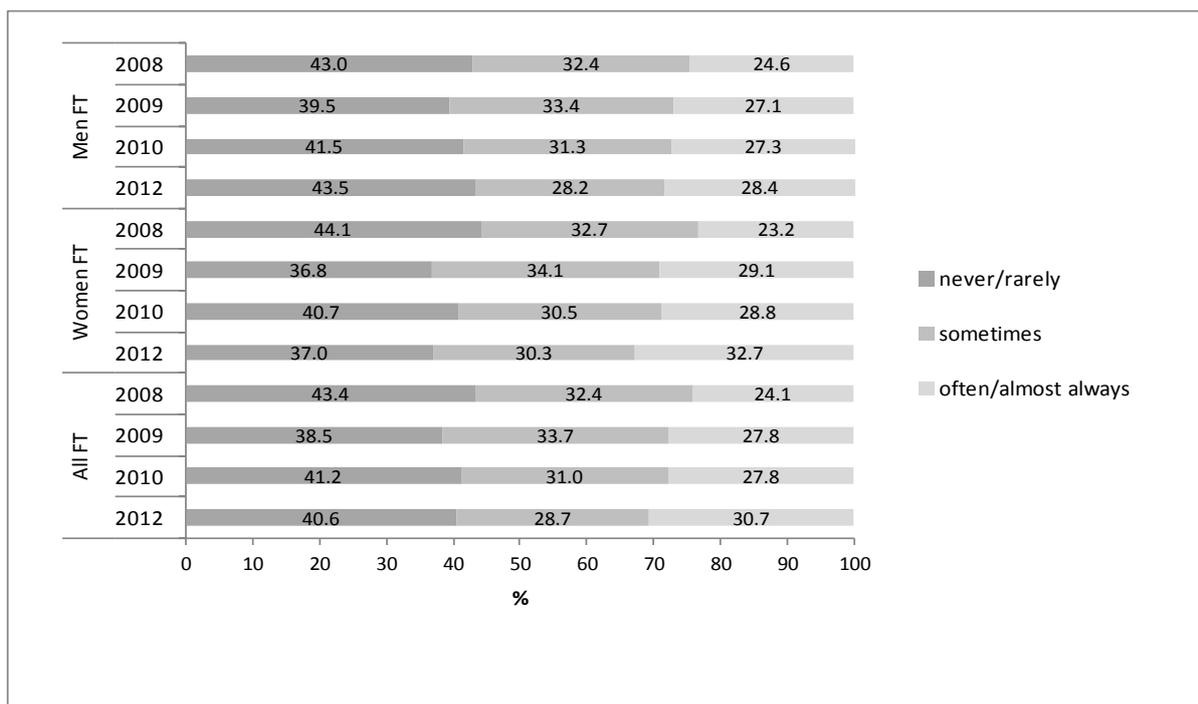


Figure 1 Work interferes with activities outside work reported by full-time workers by gender, 2008–2012 (per cent)

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 1641; 2010 N = 1647; 2009 N = 1539; 2008 N = 1715.

As expected, part-time employees consistently report lower levels of work-life interference on each of the work-life index measures. Between 2008 and 2012, around 15 per cent of part-time employees report that work frequently interferes with their non-work activities, with very little difference between men and women.

Time with family and friends

Very similar patterns of work-life interference are evident for work-related time restrictions (Figure 2). As reported in previous AWALI surveys, in 2012, work continues to restrict time with family and friends for a substantial proportion of full-time workers. Full-time women are slightly more likely to report frequent time restrictions than men, a consistent pattern over the past four years. In 2012, 35.2 per cent of full-time women and 31.9 per cent of men say that work frequently restricts their time with family and friends (however, this gender difference is not statistically significant).

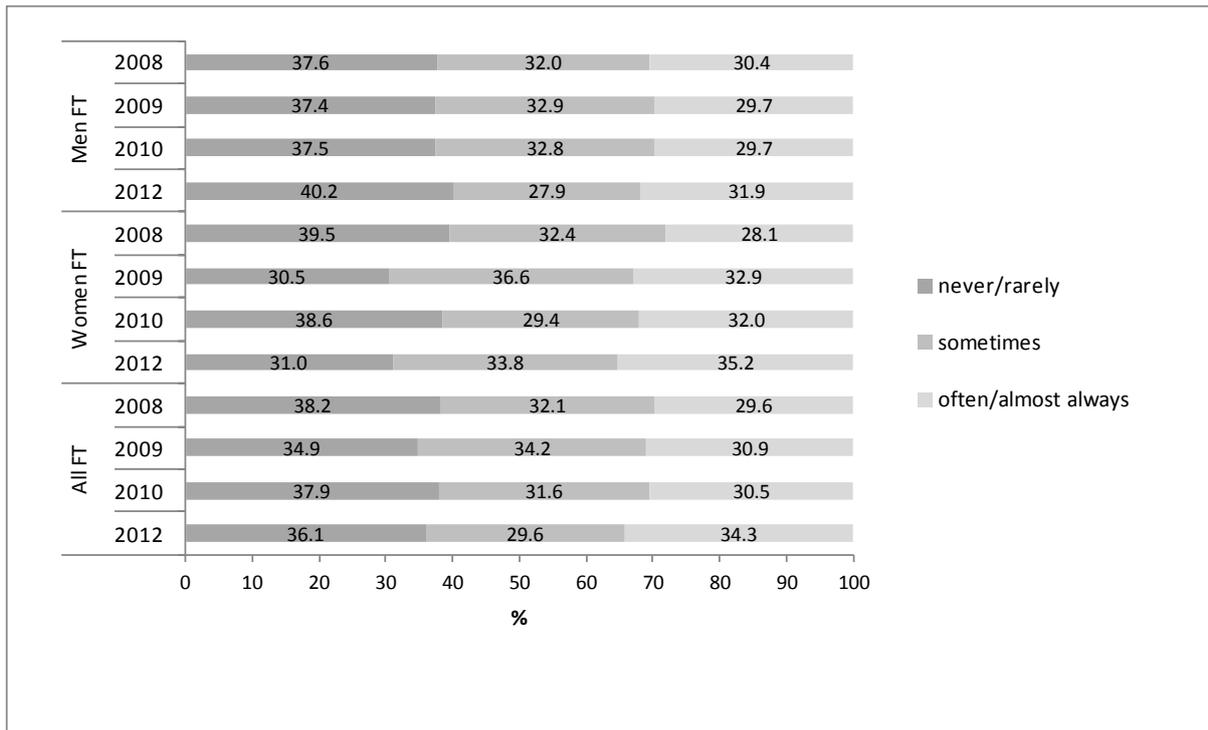


Figure 2 Work restricts time with family/friends reported by full-time workers by gender, 2008–2012 (per cent)

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 1641; 2010 N = 1647; 2009 N = 1542; 2008 N = 1717.

Part-time employees are less likely to report time restrictions with family and friends compared to full-timers: only 14.5 per cent report frequent time restrictions.

There is some evidence that the experience of part-time work is changing for men. In 2010 we observed that men who work part-time were more likely than women to report that work frequently restricts time with family and friends. This pattern continues in 2012, with 20.8 per cent of part-time men reporting frequent time restrictions compared to 14.5 per cent of women. Indeed, time restrictions have remained relatively stable for part-time women over time, but are more common for part-time men in 2012 than in 2008.

Community engagement

There has been little change in perceptions of work interfering with community connections. Consistent with previous AWALI surveys, 22.2 per cent of men and 24.5 per cent of women reported regular work-community interference (Figure 3). Again, part-time workers are less likely to report work-life interference: only 10.1 per cent report frequent work-community interference.

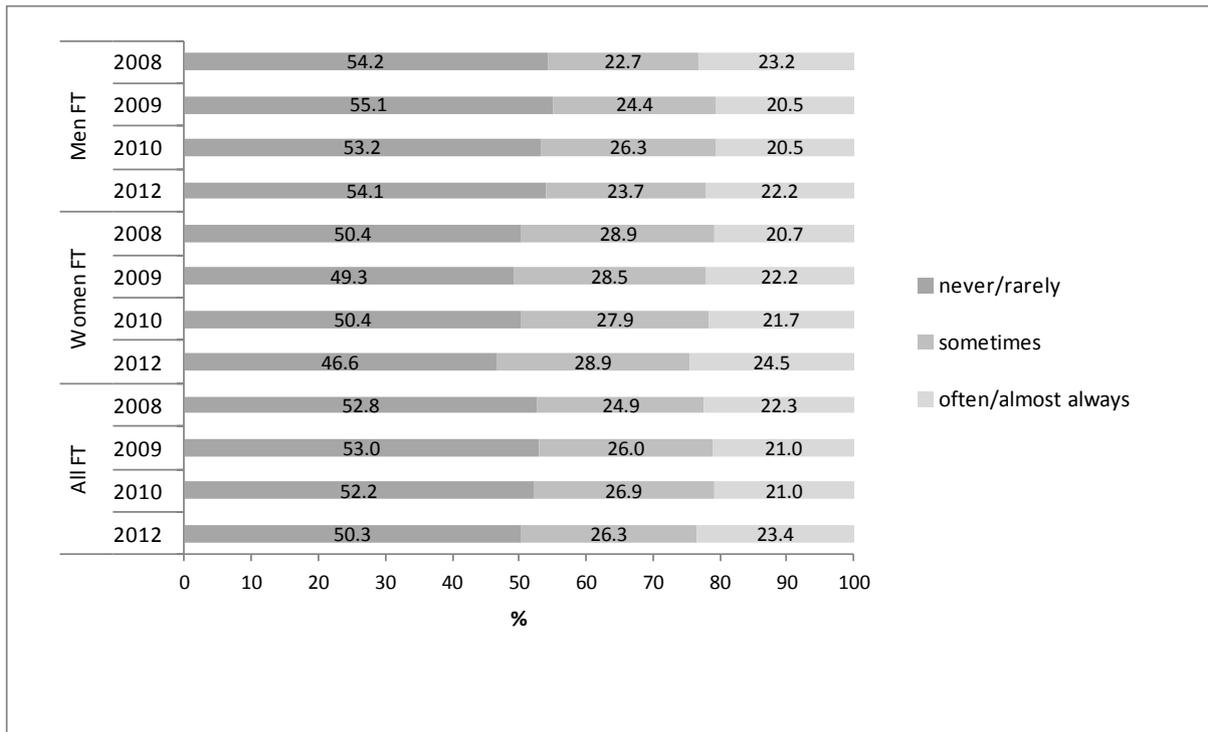


Figure 3 Work interferes with community connections reported by full-time workers by gender, 2008-2012 (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 1641; 2010 N = 1646; 2009 N = 1542; 2008 N = 1717.

Time pressure

The extent to which people feel rushed or pressed for time is a simple and direct indicator of the ‘busyness’ of their lives, and also reveals how well work and non-work activities are fitting together.

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of full-time workers experience chronic time pressure, and this is consistently higher for women. In 2012, around half of full-time men (53.1 per cent) and over two-thirds of full-time women (68.6 per cent) report frequent time pressure. The likelihood of experiencing time pressure has increased in recent years for full-time women, while there has been no change for full-time men.

Part-time hours relieve time pressure to some extent, but as observed in previous years, part-time work offers more protection for men than women. Just under 30 per cent of part-time men report frequent time pressure compared to just over half (53.3 per cent) of part-time women (Figure 5). Contrary to the trend amongst full-time workers (especially women), in 2012 frequent time pressures are less common amongst part-time men and women compared to previous years.

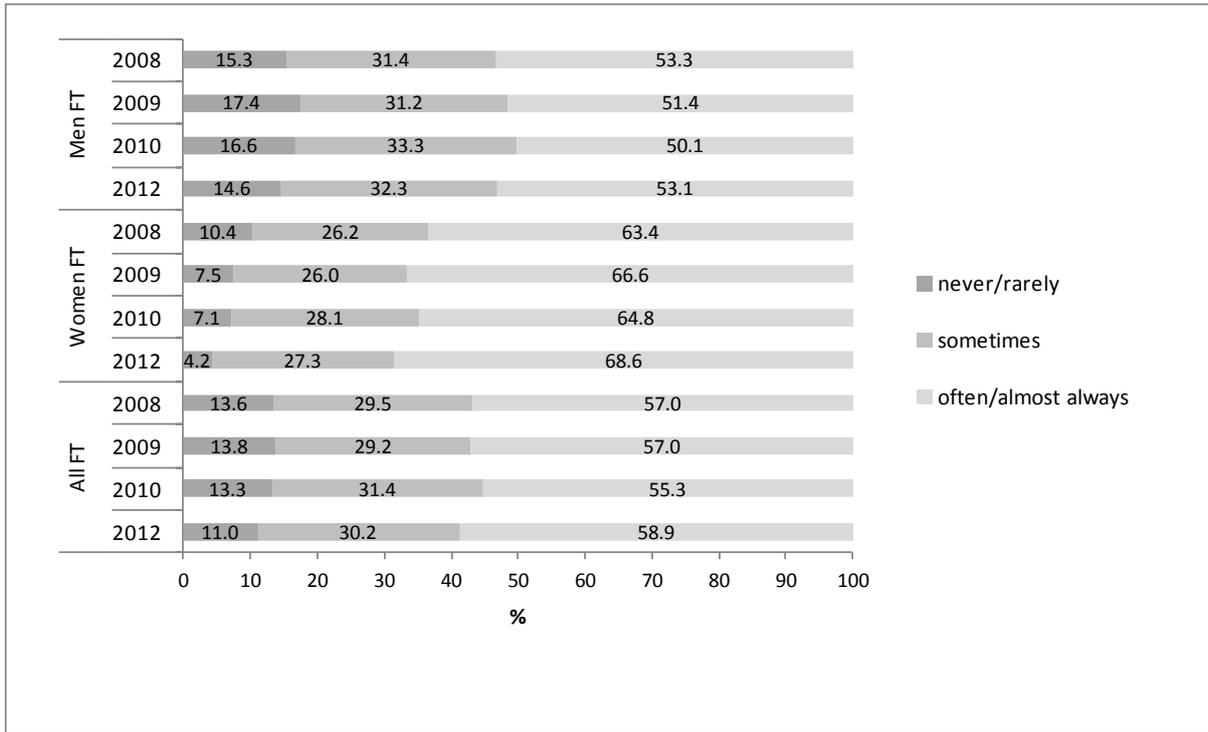


Figure 4 Feeling rushed or pressed for time reported by full-time workers by gender, 2008-2012 (per cent)
 Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 1641; 2010 N = 1647; 2009 N = 1543; 2008 N = 1718.

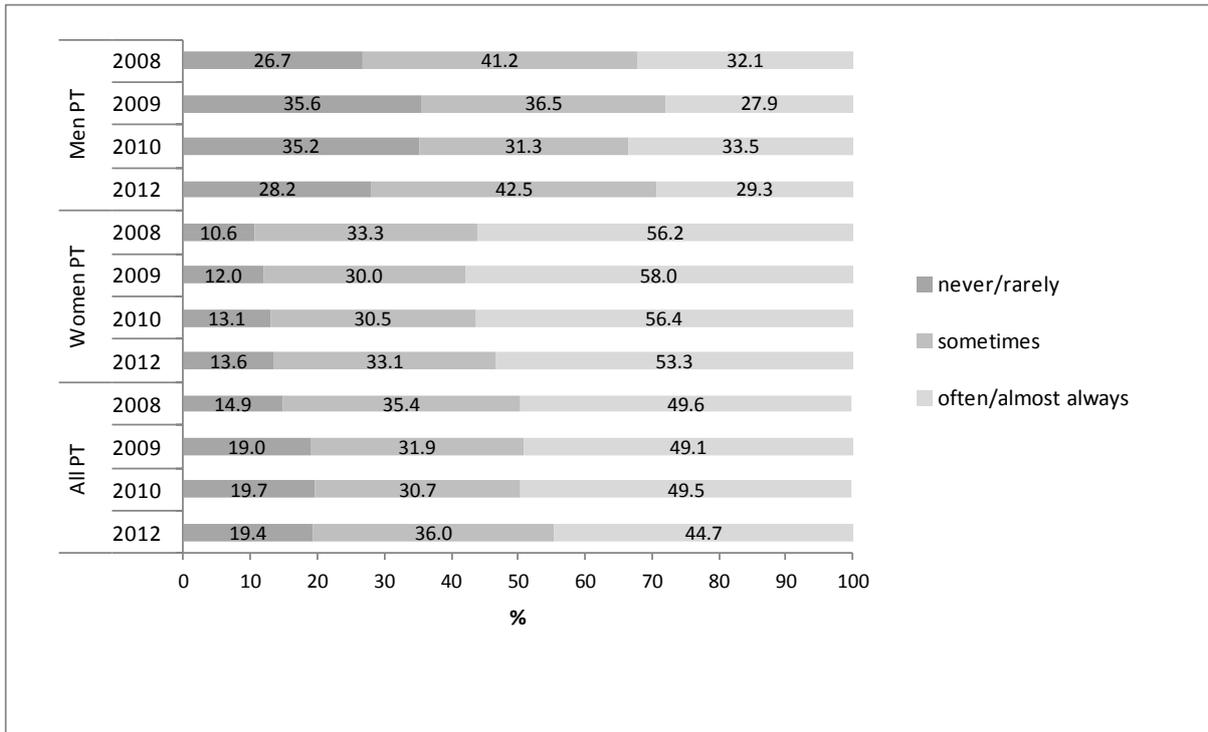


Figure 5 Feeling rushed or pressed for time reported by part-time workers by gender, 2008-2012 (per cent)

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 852; 2010 N = 755; 2009 N = 728; 2008 N = 665.

Overall, 60.7 per cent of women are frequently time pressured in 2012, compared to 48.3 per cent of men. This high level of time pressure for women has been consistent since 2008.

Mothers are particularly affected by these pressures, with 69.7 per cent of mothers frequently time pressured in 2012 (59.3 per cent of fathers) – consistent with previous years. This is a clear indication of the pressures experienced by working parents, and mothers in particular. Chronic time pressure is likely to have implications not only for the health of individuals and their families, but is also likely to affect women’s inclination to participate in paid work in general, and to commit the substantial time required in particular for full-time work.

Satisfaction with work-life balance

An interesting pattern that has emerged in each of the AWALI surveys is the relatively common experience of work-life interference occurring alongside comparatively high levels of overall satisfaction with work-life balance. This may reflect the fact that frequent time pressure and work-life strains and tensions are accepted as a normal part of life - just the way things are in busy 21st century households. Are we, as a community, becoming socialised to accept busy and hectic lives that are increasingly affected by work? This issue is worthy of further qualitative research to analyse perceptions of the pace of working life, what explains high levels of time pressure and work-life interference, and how individual’s reconcile these with positive evaluations of overall satisfaction with work-life balance.

The majority of full-time workers are satisfied with their work-life balance (64.6 per cent), with men more likely to be satisfied (66.9 per cent) than women (60.5 per cent) (Figure 6). Amongst full-time workers, dissatisfaction with work-life balance has been relatively stable for men since 2009, at around 20 per cent. In contrast, full-time women’s dissatisfaction is increasing. The proportion expressing dissatisfaction has risen from 15.9 per cent in 2008 to 27.5 per cent in 2012. If this trend continues next year, women’s dissatisfaction with their work-life balance will have doubled in five years.

Part-time workers are more likely than full-timers to be satisfied with their work-life balance: 76.6 per cent are satisfied.

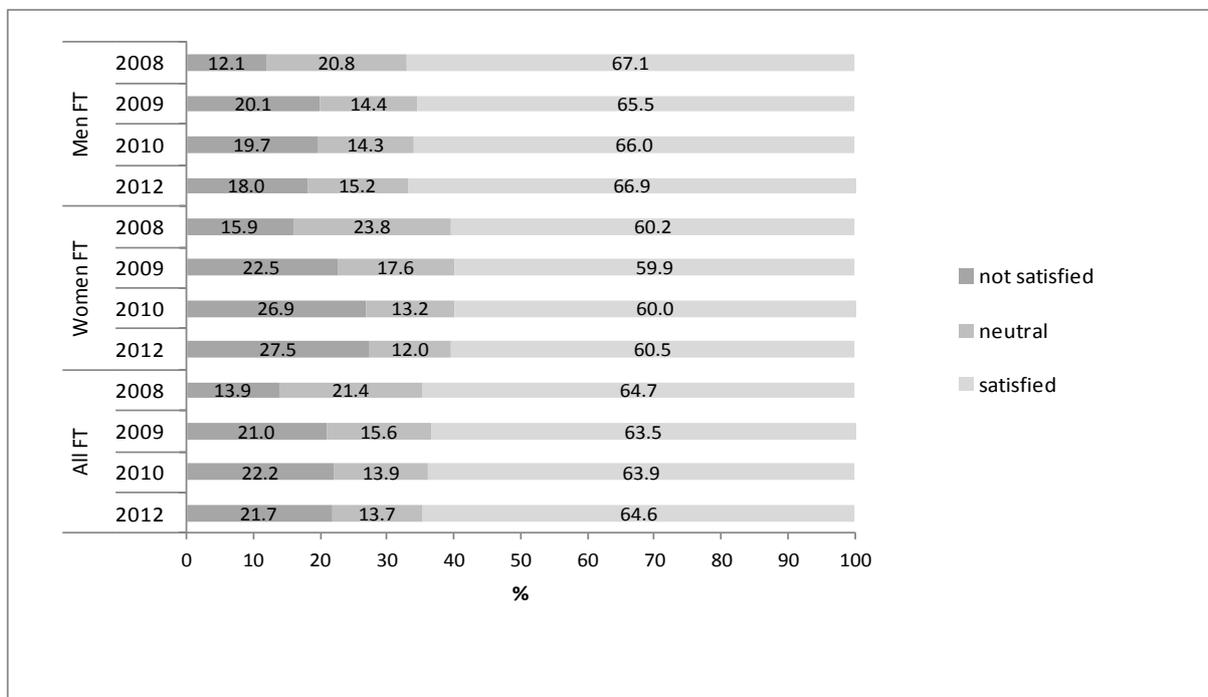


Figure 6 Satisfaction with work-life balance reported by full-time workers by gender, 2008–2010 (per cent)

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2012 N = 1641; 2010 N = 1642; 2009 N = 1537; 2008 N = 1718.

Australians' work-life interference from 2007 to 2012

We now consider the overall work-life index, a summated measure which combines responses on the above five work-life items into a single score. This score gives an overall indication of the intensity of work-life strains and pressures. It is a standardised scale with 0 as the lowest score (very low work-life interference) to 100 as the highest score (very high work-life interference).

As we discuss in Section 4, length of work hours has a substantial effect on work-life interference. Therefore, to identify the contribution (independent of work hours) that gender, employment type or other factors have on work-life interference, we statistically adjust index scores for differences in work hours between the groups that are being compared (e.g. men and women). We compare data from the five AWALI surveys, conducted from 2007 to 2012 (i.e. over six years).

Key trends by gender and work hours

We begin by reporting on work-life index scores for men and women both adjusted and unadjusted for work hours.

Work-life interference has been fairly stable between 2007 and 2012. When gender differences in hours are not taken into account (unadjusted scores), men and women have very similar levels of work-life interference. However, when differences in hours are statistically controlled (adjusted scores), we find that women report higher levels of work-life interference (46.0) compared to men (40.3). Work-life index scores have demonstrated little change over the past six years for men or women.

Women who work full-time have significantly higher work-life interference in 2012 (with a mean score of 50.7) than in 2007 (45.6). Full-time men have a consistent level of work-life interference, of between 44 and 45, in each AWALI survey from 2007 to 2012.

Part-timers are less likely to experience work-life interference, and this is also reflected in their lower work-life index scores (35.3) compared to those working full-time (46.9). Part-time women have slightly higher work-life interference (36.0) than part-time men (33.8), a pattern that has been consistent since 2007.

Summary

- The 2012 AWALI survey allows us to examine trends since 2007. Whilst we observe small changes and differences across the years, some consistent patterns are evident;
- Around one quarter of Australian workers report that work frequently interferes with their capacity to engage in activities outside work and spend time with family and friends;
- Gender differences in work-life interference are pervasive. Women consistently have higher work-life interference than men, regardless of whether they work full-time or part-time. They also have worse work-life outcomes when gender differences in work hours are controlled statistically;
- Time pressure is ubiquitous, especially for women. The majority (60.7 per cent) of women feel frequent time pressure (and this is consistent over recent years), and nearly half of men (48.3 per cent) also report being often, or almost always, rushed or pressed for time;
- Part-time workers consistently experience better work-life outcomes than full-timers, with men's work-life outcomes benefiting more from part-time work than women's;
- Amongst full-time employees, men's work-life interference has remained stable over recent years, and lower than women's. However, women's work-life interference is not only higher than men's but has increased markedly over the past six years. 2012 showed

the highest work-life index score so far observed amongst women who work full-time;

- When we look at work-life dissatisfaction, men's levels of dissatisfaction have remained relatively constant between 2008 and 2012. However, there have been rising levels of dissatisfaction amongst full-time women. Indeed, if this trend continues next year it will mean full-time women's dissatisfaction with their work-life balance has doubled in five years.

Section 4: Working time: actual and preferred working hours and the relationship with work-life interference

The length of a working day and week is clearly a major factor that affects work-life relationships. In this section we take an in-depth look at working hours, focusing on two aspects of working time: the length of work hours and the extent to which work hours fit with workers' working time preferences.

As we observed in the previous section, longer hours are associated with worse work-life interference for most workers. How long is too long at work is a matter of debate, as it depends on a wide range of factors. These include the nature of work, the demands and resources inside and outside the workplace, the life-stage of the worker and the scheduling of work. Nevertheless, working long hours increases the risk of negative work-life, health and wellbeing outcomes for the individual, their family and community (Caruso, 2006; Pocock, Skinner, & Williams, 2012).

In this report we follow international conventions that define long hours as 48+ hours per week. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines these working hours as 'very long'. The European Parliament's Working Time Directive places an upper limit on weekly working hours of 48 hours including overtime.

Workers' working hours preferences change over the life-cycle, with changing caring and household circumstances, and with employment type. Most obviously, caring responsibilities for children and the aged affect workers' willingness and capacity to work particular hours and work schedules. Indeed, Australian and international research has consistently shown that working longer hours than preferred is a stronger predictor of health and wellbeing outcomes than length of work hours per se (Barnett, 2006; Wooden, Warren, & Drago, 2009).

In this section we describe patterns of work hours and examine who is likely to have a better or worse fit between their actual and preferred hours. We also describe the implications for work-life outcomes of both longer hours and working longer hours than preferred. This section continues the focus on employees, with a separate analysis of self-employed workers presented in Section 6.

Working hours and work-life interference – comparing men and women

In 2012 workers reported that they worked an average of 36.2 hours a week (including paid and unpaid overtime), with men working on average 9.4 more hours each week (40.7 hours) than women (31.3 hours). Beneath these averages lie further significant gender differences.

In the AWALI 2012 survey, less than half (45.8 per cent) of all employees worked between 35 to 47 hours a week (Figure 7). These hours are more common for men (51.7 per cent) than women (39.2 per cent). Almost one fifth (19.3 per cent) of employees work longer full-time hours (48 hours+ per week). More than three times as many men (28.0 per cent) work these long hours than women (9.7 per cent).

Over half of women (51.1 per cent) work part-time compared to just 20.3 per cent of men. Longer part-time hours (16 to 34) are also more common for women: 34.5 per cent of all women work these hours compared to only 11.8 per cent of men. A small proportion of women work shorter part-time hours (16.6 per cent) - a work arrangement that is rare for men (8.5 per cent).

This distribution of working hours is close to that detailed in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Labour Force survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a) (Figure 7) although more workers in the AWALI 2012 survey report long full-time hours (19.3 per cent) than the national average (12.2 per cent).

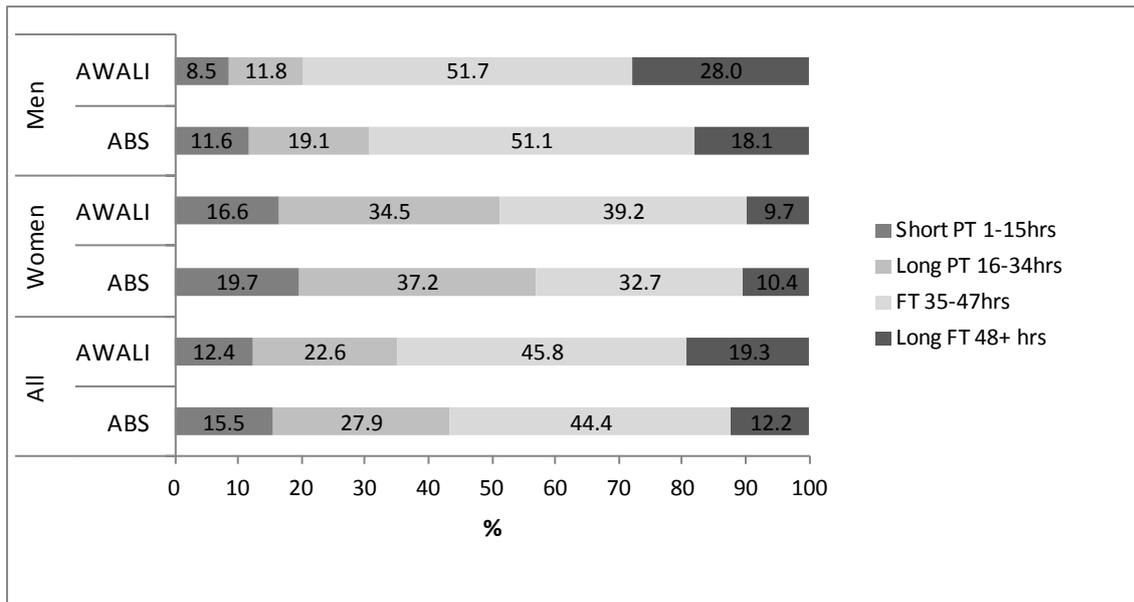


Figure 7 Short and long work hours by gender, AWALI 2012 and (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a) (per cent)

Note. PT = part-time, FT = full-time. Figure excludes self-employed persons. AWALI N = 2500.

There is a clear and consistent association between longer work hours and worse work-life outcomes, as indicated by higher scores on the work-life index (Figure 8). Work-life interference increases most steeply between the 35-47 hours and 48+ hours categories. These patterns are evident for men and women and consistent across AWALI surveys since 2007.

Women's work-life interference is more sensitive to increases in working hours compared to men's. Women's work-life interference increases more sharply than men's with each category of greater hours. The highest work-life interference across all groups is reported by women working long full-time hours (an index score of 64.5). Men's and women's work-life interference is similar only amongst those working short part-time hours.

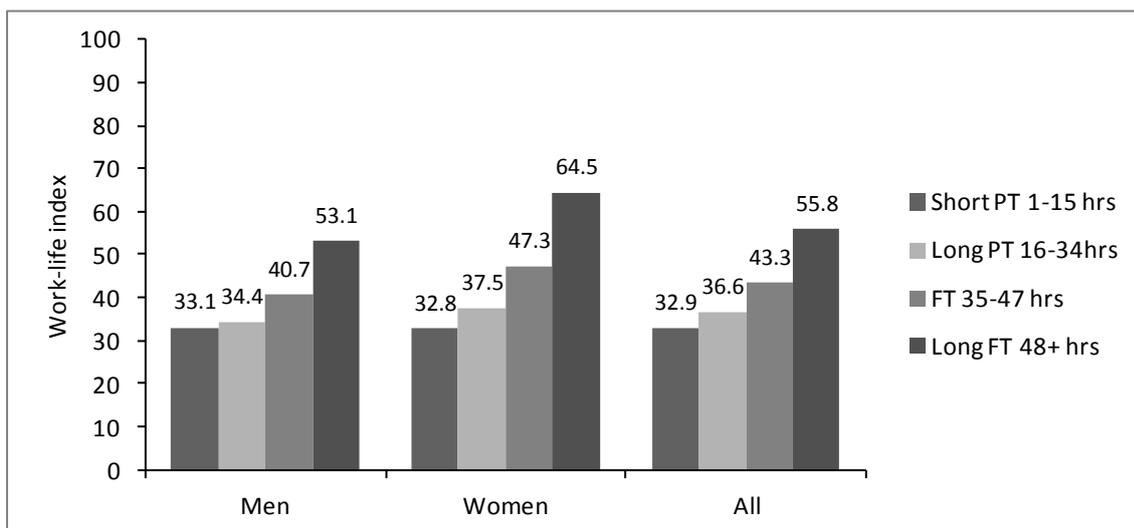


Figure 8 Work-life index scores by short and long work hours and gender

Note. PT = part-time, FT = full-time. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

What hours would Australian workers prefer to work?

In each AWALI survey we ask respondents to indicate the number of hours they would prefer to work, taking into account the effect of any change in hours on their income. A consistent finding across AWALI surveys is that there is a large unmet demand in the Australian workforce for reduced working hours.

In the 2012 AWALI survey respondents reported that they would prefer to work 3.4 hours fewer per week (Table 4), which is the largest gap between actual and preferred work hours in AWALI data since 2008. This gap between actual and preferred hours is similar for men and women which is an unusual finding. In previous AWALI surveys the gap between actual and preferred hours is larger for men, reflecting their longer average work hours. Here we find further evidence of increasing time pressures for working women: they would prefer to work around 3.2 hours less in 2012 (up from 1.8 hours in 2010), whereas men wanted to work 3.6 hours less in 2012, compared to 3.9 hours less in 2010.

When we consider full-time and part-time workers separately, full-timers would prefer fewer hours, whereas part-timers would like more hours - and this is particularly the case for men.

We observed in Section 3 that work-life interference in general, and time pressure in particular, is increasing for full-time women. These patterns cannot be explained by an increase in work hours: there has been little change in average working hours for full-timers between 2010 (men 46.1; women 42.3) to 2012 (men 46.2; women 42.8).

Table 4 Actual and preferred work hours by part-time/full-time work status and gender

	Actual work hours	Preferred work hours	Work hours mismatch	Work-life index
Men				
Part-time	19.0	26.5	-7.5	33.4
Full-time	46.2	39.7	6.3	45.3
Total	40.9	37.2	3.6	42.7
Women				
Part-time	20.0	22.1	-2.1	36.1
Full-time	42.8	34.0	8.7	50.1
Total	31.2	27.9	3.2	43.0
All				
Part-time	19.8	23.4	-3.7	35.3
Full-time	45.0	37.7	7.2	46.9
Total	36.3	32.8	3.4	42.8

Note. The work hour gap for those who prefer more hours is negative reflecting the number of extra hours desired to work (i.e. actual hours minus preferred hours). Table excludes self-employed persons. Index scores not adjusted for work hours. N = 2500.

In 2010, full-timers wanted to work an average of 5.6 hours (or about three quarters of a day) less than they currently worked. In 2012, this reached 7.2 hours – or almost a full working day, although this increase was not statistically significant. Indeed, full-time women would prefer to reduce their hours by more than a standard working day (8.7 hours). Full-time men preferred a smaller, but still substantial, reduction of 6.3 hours.

Women's preferences present a real challenge to government's efforts to increase women's contribution to working hours. On average, full-time women worker's preferences are to decrease rather than increase their participation in paid work. This preference probably reflects their high levels of time pressure and negative work-life interference. While women working part-time would like to increase their working time by about 2 hours, they are outweighed by the number of women working full-time who are seeking to reduce their working time by more than a standard day. Achieving a policy goal of increased female work participation – especially amongst women in their childbearing and rearing years – will require concerted action to relieve

their time pressures and high levels of work-life stress. This necessitates a focus on workplace and labour market issues, as well as the nature of time demands on the home front.

The opposite pattern around working hours preferences is evident for part-timers who would prefer to work more: around three and a half hours more per week. A preference for longer hours is particularly the case for part-time men who would prefer the equivalent of an extra day of work a week (7.5 hours). This is slightly higher than in 2010 when part-time men said they would prefer an additional 6.8 hours, although this difference is not statistically significant. In contrast, women working part-time would prefer only a small increase of 2.1 hours per week, a slight fall from 2010 when part-time women preferred an additional 2.8 hours (however, this difference is not statistically significant).

These findings are particularly noteworthy when we consider that women working part-time are more likely to report chronic time pressure and higher work-life interference than their male counterparts. A much greater proportion of part-time men are involuntarily under-employed than women, possibly reflecting the lack of suitable full-time jobs (particularly for less educated men) (Gregory, 2012).

Half a day less: preferences to reduce work hours by at least four hours

The data we have discussed so far suggests that there is a significant unmet need in the Australian labour market for fewer working hours amongst full-timers, and longer working hours for many part-timers.

It is also useful to have a metric that enables us to gauge how common these preferences are. We define a 'poor hours fit' as a gap of four or more hours between actual and preferred hours, which represents a substantive gap. For those who prefer to work less, having at least half a day's worth of time away from work is likely to significantly ease the 'struggle to juggle' work and non-work activities. For those who want to work more, an extra half a day of work (at least) would provide a meaningful increase in income.

Using this definition of a poor hours fit, just over half (54.6 per cent) of employees in the AWALI 2012 survey had a poor hours fit. More than two thirds of these would prefer to work fewer hours. Changes in economic activity since 2007 have had little impact on this proportion with just over half of respondents in each year saying they were 4+ hours from their preferred working hours.

Women are slightly more likely to have a good match between their actual and preferred hours (46.8 per cent) than men (44.0 per cent). Just over one-third of women (36.0 per cent) and almost four in ten men (39.7 per cent) would like to work fewer hours (Figure 9).

These findings have significant implications for strategies and initiatives to increase total working hours. The majority of Australian workers (83.3 per cent) feel the length of time they spend in paid work is about right, or too long. The strong and consistent association between working hours and working hours' preferences on the one hand, and time and work-life pressures on the other, suggests that encouraging more time in paid work (and preventing a retreat of women from full-time work) will take more than economic incentives. It will require – particularly for full-time women (the group below most comparable to OECD countries' participation rates) – adjustments to the total workload that women experience. This includes the hours and intensity of demands arising from both paid and unpaid work and the levels of negative work-life interference and time stress they create.

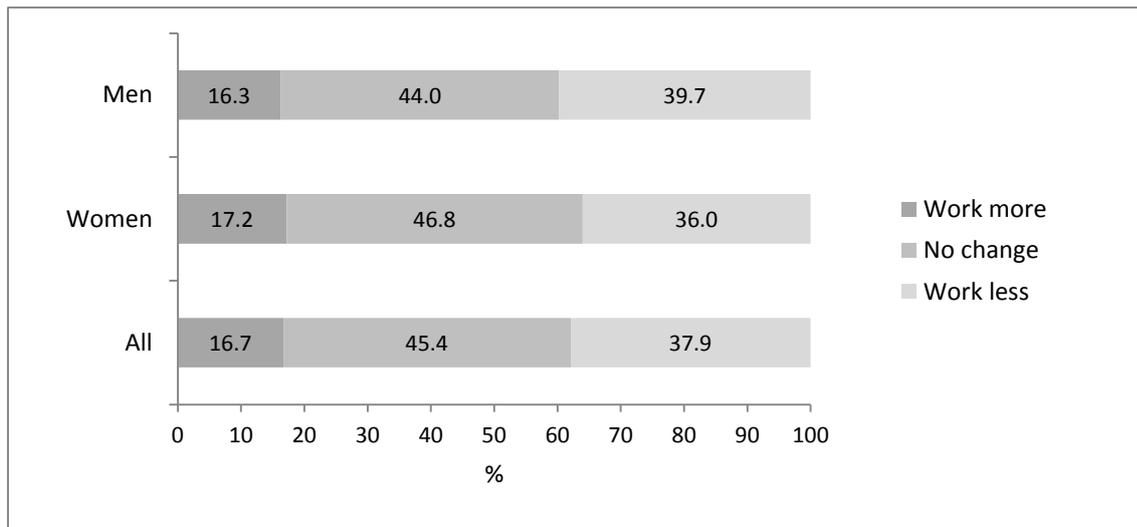


Figure 9 Work hours fit with preferences by gender (per cent)

Note. No change = 0 – 3 hours gap between preferred and actual hours. Work more = prefer to work 4 or more hours more than actual hours. Work less = prefer to work 4 or more hours fewer than actual hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

We previously observed that full-time employees, on average, prefer fewer hours whereas part-timers prefer more hours. Figure 10 highlights the extent of these mismatches between hours and preferences. Part-time workers are most likely to have a good hours fit with preferences (52.4 per cent) with those working 48+ hours having the worst fit (75.5 per cent want to work less).

Women working long full-time hours are most likely to prefer shorter hours (86.6 per cent), although a clear majority of similar men (72.0 per cent) would also prefer to reduce their long hours.

For many women, full-time employment of 35 to 47 hours a week is still too long. Men working these hours are more likely to be satisfied with their work hours (54.8 per cent) than women (43.2 per cent). Indeed, just over half of these women would prefer fewer hours (53.1 per cent) compared to just over a third of similar men (35.9 per cent).

Very clear gender differences are also evident in the experience of part-time work hours. The majority of women working part-time are satisfied with their hours (56.1 per cent). In contrast, the majority (55.9 per cent) of men working part-time would prefer to change their hours, with almost ten times as many of them wanting more hours than less.

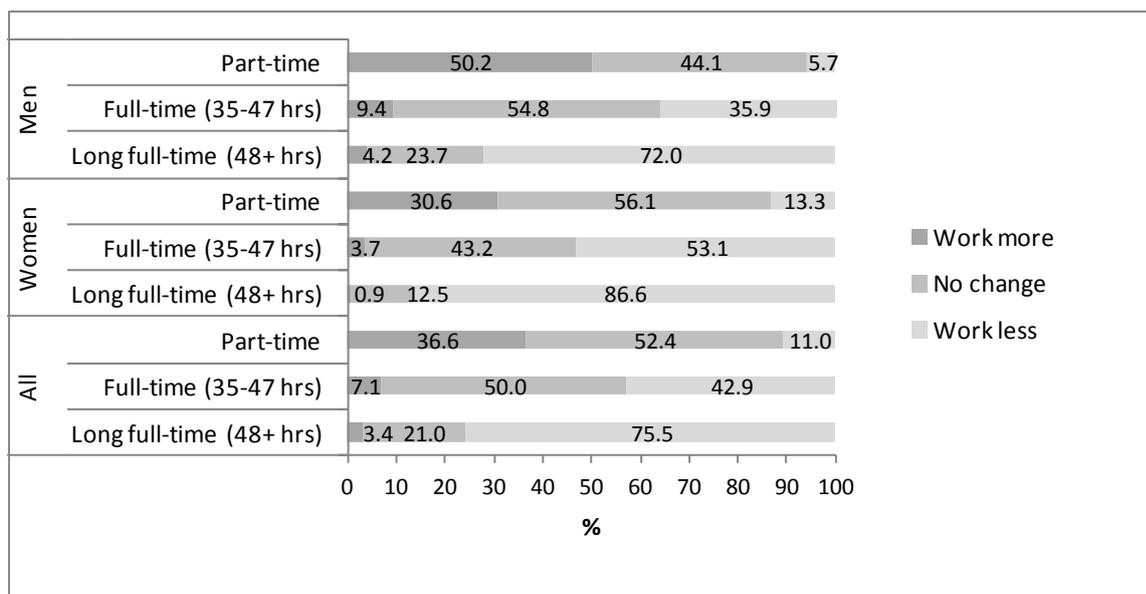


Figure 10 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and work hours (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. No change = 0 – 3 hours gap between preferred and actual hours. Work more = prefer to work 4 or more hours more than actual hours. Work less = prefer to work 4 or more hours fewer than actual hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Full-time employees' preferences for part-time hours

A gap of half a day or more (4+ hours) represents a substantial difference between the hours actually worked and those that are preferred. Another simple but compelling indicator of the extent to which work hours fit with preferences and life circumstances is workers' stated preference for part-time or full-time work.

As with the 2010 AWALI survey, in 2012 around a third of full-time women, with and without children, said they would prefer to work part-time, taking into account the reduction in income that this would entail. In 2012 many full-time mothers would like to become part-time (41.8 per cent) compared with 31.5 per cent of women without children. These findings suggest that much more needs to be done to support women's participation in paid employment.

The work hours preferences of men working full-time are very different. Only 13.0 per cent of these men would like to work part-time. Men without children are slightly more likely to prefer part-time hours (15.8 per cent) than fathers (12.1 per cent). Fathers' preferences to remain full-time reflect the continuing dominance of the male full-time/female part-time model of managing work and childcare in many Australian families with children.

Working hours and preferences in single-parent and couple households

It is well established in Australia and similar countries that parenting responsibilities impact differently on men's and women's working patterns. Women are more likely to work part-time whilst combining work and care for children, whereas men's work hours are much less likely to fall with parenting responsibilities (see Web Appendix Table A1).

Combining paid work with care is increasingly common with the rise in dual-earner households: 63 per cent of couple families with dependent resident children are now dual-earner households. The majority of sole-parents (55 per cent) are also engaged in paid work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a).

The intersection between work and care can be very different for partnered parents compared to those of sole-parents. In this section we analyse the experiences of workers in these different circumstances. Understanding these differences, and particularly the challenges experienced by

sole-parents combining work and care, is important given recent Australian Government requirements for some sole-parents to engage in more work or study.

Table 5 compares the actual working hours and preferences of coupled and single employees with and without children. In the AWALI survey a person is defined as a parent if they have a child residing in the house, to capture those parents who are likely to have primary responsibility for the care of their children.

Partnered fathers work the longest hours (45.7) and also report the greatest mismatch (6.6) between actual and preferred hours. In contrast, partnered mothers report working the shortest hours (30.2) - but even so would prefer to work 4.6 hours less per week on average.

Single fathers work 44.3 hours per week and would prefer to work just over half a day less. Single mothers report an average working week of 32.5 hours (more than mothers in coupled households) and would prefer to work 1.3 hours a week less. In March 2012, sole mothers' working hours were closer to their preferences than for most parents, despite the fact that they work a little more (2.3 hours a week) than mothers in couple households.

Table 5 Actual and preferred work hours by household type and gender

	Actual work hours	Preferred work hours	Work hours mismatch
Men			
Single with children	44.3	40.3	4.0
Couple with children	45.7	38.9	6.6
Couple without children	35.7	35.7	0.1
Single without children	41.3	36.3	4.7
Women			
Single with children	32.5	31.3	1.3
Couple with children	30.2	25.3	4.6
Couple without children	32.0	29.7	2.3
Single without children	33.7	29.2	4.5
All			
Single with children	35.4	33.4	1.9
Couple with children	39.1	33.1	5.7
Couple without children	33.9	32.8	1.1
Single without children	33.6	32.9	4.6

Note. The work hour gap for those who prefer more hours is negative reflecting the number of extra hours desired to work (i.e. actual hours minus preferred hours). Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Which household types have the widest gaps between actual and preferred working hours?

Using the benchmark of four or more hours' gap between actual and preferred hours as indicative of a substantial mismatch, we now examine which types of households are most likely to have a poor hours fit with preferences.

Figure 11 shows that partnered parents are most likely to prefer to work at least four hours less per week (46.3 per cent), than couples without children (31.6 per cent).

Fathers are most likely to be working more hours than they would prefer, with 50 per cent of single fathers and just over half (51.2 per cent) of all partnered fathers preferring to work fewer hours.

As observed previously, women are less likely to be working longer hours than they prefer, reflecting their shorter work hours overall. However, regardless of whether women are partnered or not, or mothers or not, there is a consistent preference for working fewer hours. About a

third of single mothers and partnered women with no children desire a shorter work week, and about 40 per cent of women with partners and children, and single women without children feel the same way.

A preference to work longer hours is most common for couples with no children (24.7 per cent) and single parents (19.5 per cent). In this latter group, single mothers are more likely to prefer more hours (22.4 per cent) compared to single fathers (10.0 per cent), though this finding should be viewed with caution as the number of single fathers in the sample is small.

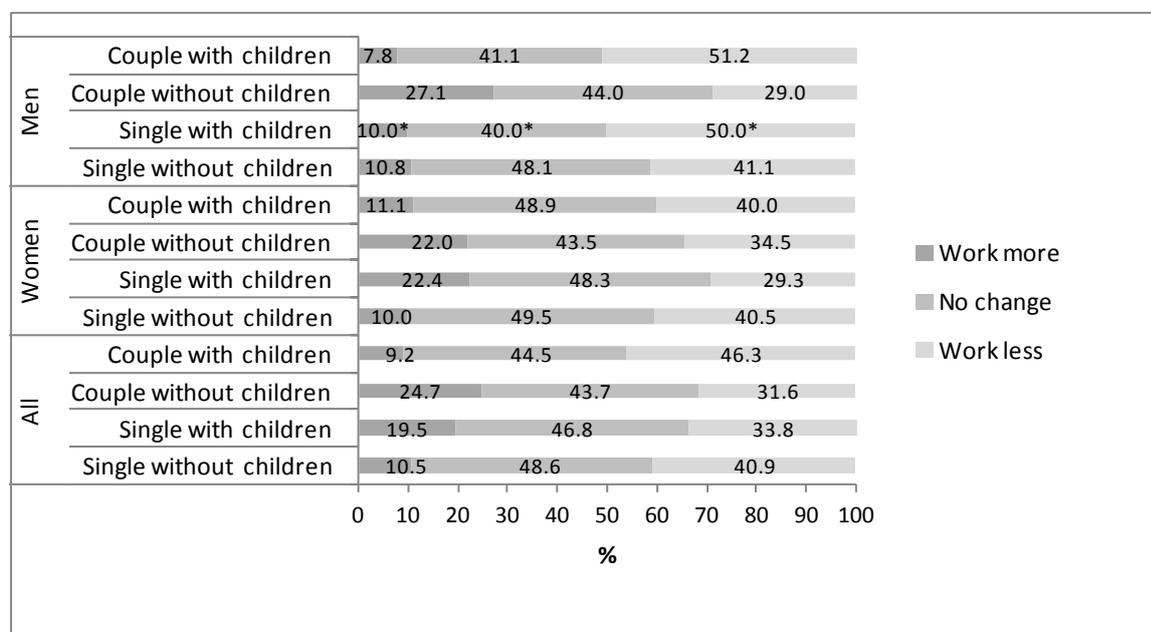


Figure 11 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and family structure (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. No change = 0 – 3 hours gap between preferred and actual hours. Work more = prefer to work 4 or more hours more than actual hours. Work less = prefer to work 4 or more hours fewer than actual hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Age and the fit between actual and preferred working hours

Work hours follow an inverted U-shaped trajectory across the life course, with younger and older people working the shortest hours, and those in the middle-years working the longest hours (see Web Appendix Table A2). In all age groups, men work longer hours than women on average.

Broadly speaking, different age groups correspond with particular life stages. In the work domain those aged 20 to 29 are often developing their careers, those aged 30 to 44 are often consolidating career trajectories, while many older workers are moving towards retirement. Family dynamics and composition also differ across these age groups: most experience transitions over the life-course from pre-family formation, to family formation and early years of parenting, to parenting of young people and adults into later working life.

The ageing of the population has led to an increased focus on policies and programs to keep older workers in paid work for longer and increase their contribution to working hours (Skills Australia, 2010). Therefore, understanding the experiences and preferences of older workers in paid work is of increasing importance.

As Figure 12 shows older workers aged 65+ are most content with their current hours (67.2 per cent). Younger workers (aged 18-24) are considerably more likely to want to work more hours (38.9 per cent) than those in other age groups. The desire for fewer hours is highest for the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups (46.5 per cent and 44.3 per cent respectively).

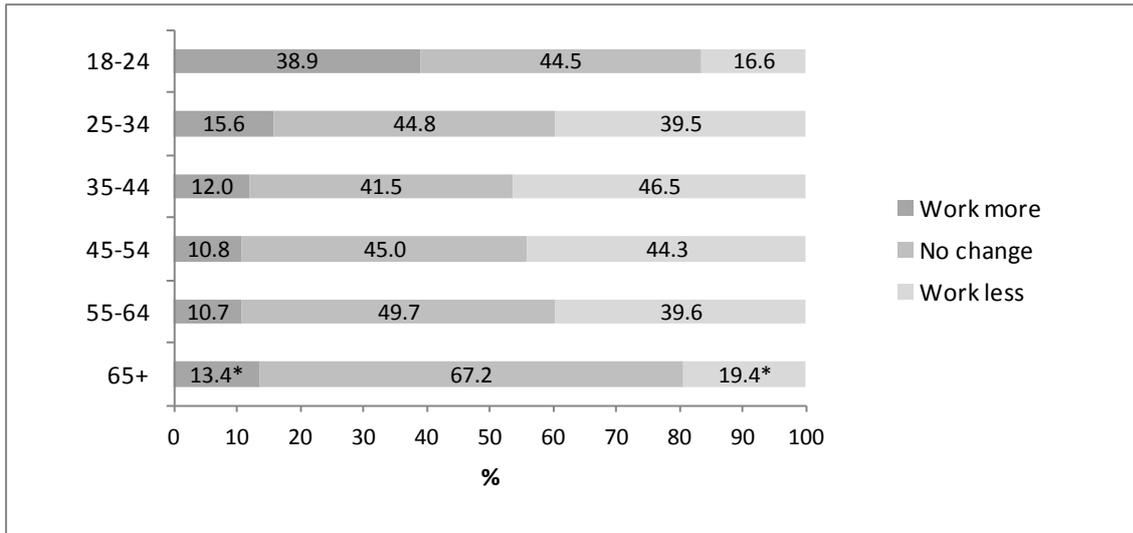


Figure 12 Work hours fit with preferences by age (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. No change = 0 – 3 hours gap between preferred and actual hours. Work more = prefer to work 4 or more hours more than actual hours. Work less = prefer to work 4 or more hours fewer than actual hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500

When considering men and women separately (Figure 13), some gender differences are evident. In the prime childrearing years (25 to 54), men are more likely to want to reduce their hours than women, probably reflecting their longer working hours. Beyond the age of 25, women are generally more content with their working hours than men, with women over the age of 65 being the most content (77.8 per cent have a fit between actual and preferred hours). Both younger men and women (aged 18-24) would like to work more hours (37.4 per cent of men and 40.4 per cent of women) - more than in any other age category. These findings suggest that – under current arrangements - there is very limited scope to entice older workers to increase their working hours: many more over 50 year olds would rather reduce their hours than increase them.

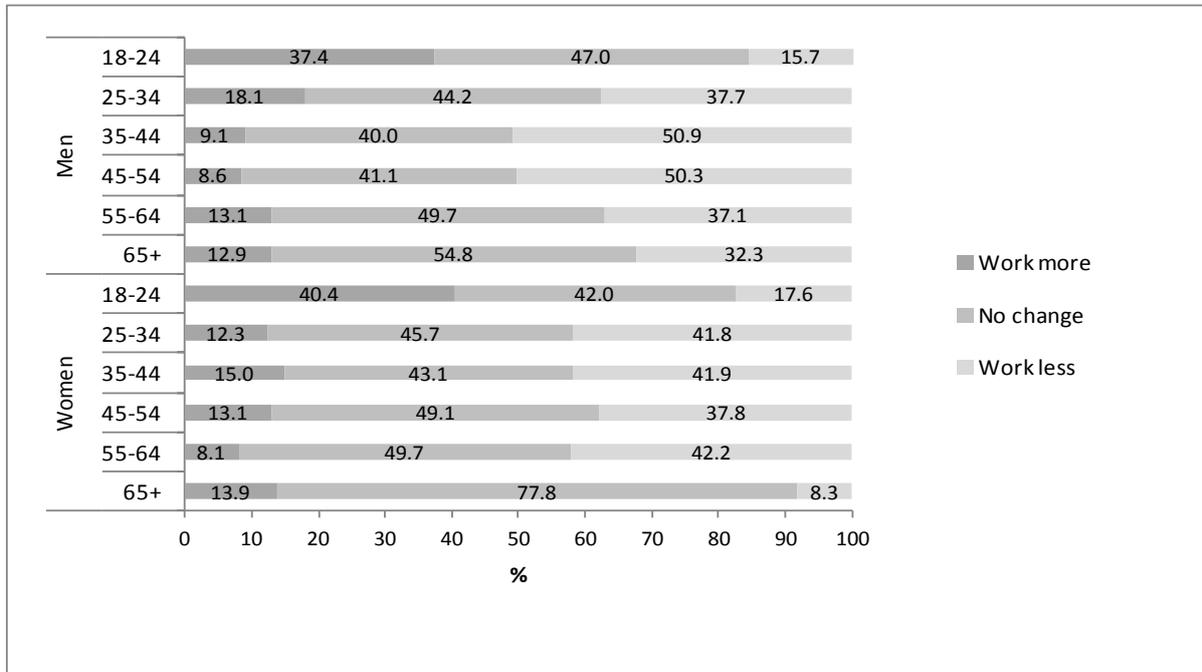


Figure 13 Work hours fit with preferences by age and gender (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. No change = 0 – 3 hours gap between preferred and actual hours. Work more = prefer to work 4 or more hours more than actual hours. Work less = prefer to work 4 or more hours fewer than actual hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Work-life interference and hours ‘fit’

A preference to reduce hours, taking into account the effect on income, is a simple but clear indicator of the extent to which paid work is experienced as taking up too much time in daily life. It is therefore not surprising to find a clear association between a poor hours fit and higher work-life interference. As Figure 14 shows, work-life interference is significantly higher for men and women who would prefer to reduce their working week by at least four hours.

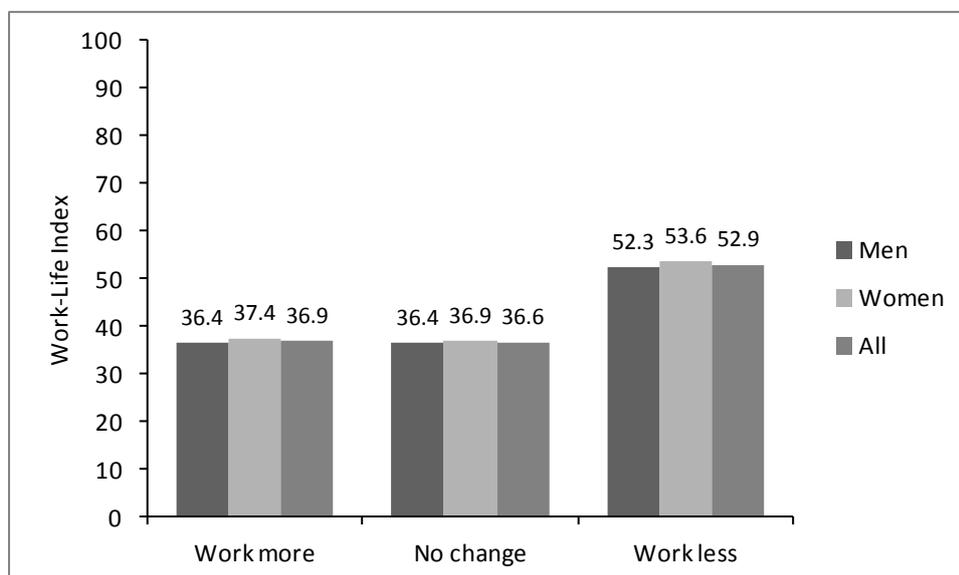


Figure 14 Work-life index scores by work hours fit

Note. No change = 0 – 3 hours gap between preferred and actual hours. Work more = prefer to work 4+ more hours than actual hours. Work less = prefer to work 4 or more hours fewer than actual hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Summary

- A substantial proportion of the Australian workforce is working long hours. In the AWALI 2012 survey, almost one fifth (19.3 per cent) of employees work 48 hours a week or more. Amongst men, 28.0 per cent work these long hours, compared to 9.7 per cent of women. Most people who work these hours would prefer not to. These are consistent findings across AWALI surveys since 2007;
- It is not hard to understand why so many workers would like to reduce their long hours: they are strongly associated with poor work-life interference. This negative impact is particularly pronounced for women who work 48+ hours a week;
- Poor work-life interference is also strongly associated with a poor fit between actual and preferred working hours. More than half of all respondents have a sizeable gap (4+ hours) between their actual and preferred weekly work hours and this has remained constant since 2007, despite changes in economic activity and employment regulation. Both the quantum of hours and the extent to which they exceed preferences, matter to work-life outcomes. Working 4+ hours more than preferred has an equivalent negative impact on work-life outcomes to working 48+ hours a week;
- In 2012, 54.6 per cent of employees surveyed in the AWALI survey had a poor hours fit. More than two thirds of these would prefer to work fewer hours. There is a large and persistent unmet preference for shorter working hours, especially amongst full-timers and those working long hours (particularly women);
- Women have higher work-life interference than men working similar hours, with the exception of short part-time hours where gender parity is evident;

- The aging of the workforce in Australia has turned policy attention to two groups from which a greater work contribution might be drawn: older workers and women. Under current conditions, neither group will be easily drawn into working longer hours based on our findings;
- Many more workers over 50 would rather reduce their working hours than increase them. This represents a real challenge to the repetitive policy calls for increased contributions from older workers;
- The same challenge exists in relation to women. A narrow range of policy levers are often emphasised to overcome this: usually focused on tax and benefits (Daley, 2012). Our findings suggest that attention also needs to be paid to the conditions of work and the widespread work-life and time pressures that constrain the quantum of hours worked by women. On average, full-time women workers would prefer to *decrease* their hours in paid work, rather than increase them, reflecting their high levels of time pressure and negative work-life interference;
- While women working part-time would like to increase their hours by around two hours a week, this is outweighed by the decrease in work-time of over a day sought by full-time women. To realise a policy goal of increased contributions by women in paid jobs – especially amongst women in their childbearing and rearing years – will require more than economic adjustments to tax and benefits policy. It is likely to also require concerted action to relieve their time pressures and work-life stress. This means a focus on the conditions of work and the total workload borne by women – both in the home and the labour market. Creative policy changes will also be necessary to entice more working hours from older workers.

Section 5: Work-life interference: household type, caring responsibilities, age, income and location

Recognising that combining paid work and parenting is a common source of work-life strains and difficulties, in this section we examine how work-life outcomes are affected by care responsibilities, with a particular focus on the similarities and differences between single and partnered parents ('single' parents are defined as single adults with children under 18 years old living in their household). We analyse work-life interference by age, income and geographic location. We provide an overview of patterns, with detailed data provided in the Web Appendix.

Household type

In Section 4 we described work hours and their fit with preferences across different household types (single or coupled), observing that fathers work the longest hours and are most likely to prefer fewer hours. Substantial proportions of women would also prefer to work less, and this is the case regardless of their parental or relationship status.

Given that work hours differ substantially between these household groups, it is important to statistically adjust for these differences to examine the unique impact of household type on work-life interference. As Figure 15 shows, parenthood - whether partnered or not - is associated with higher work-life interference for women than men. (See Web Appendix Table A1).

The clearest gender difference is evident for single parents: single mothers' work-life interference is much higher than that of single fathers'. However, estimates for single fathers should be interpreted with caution given their small sample size. In couples with children, women have significantly higher work-life interference than men.

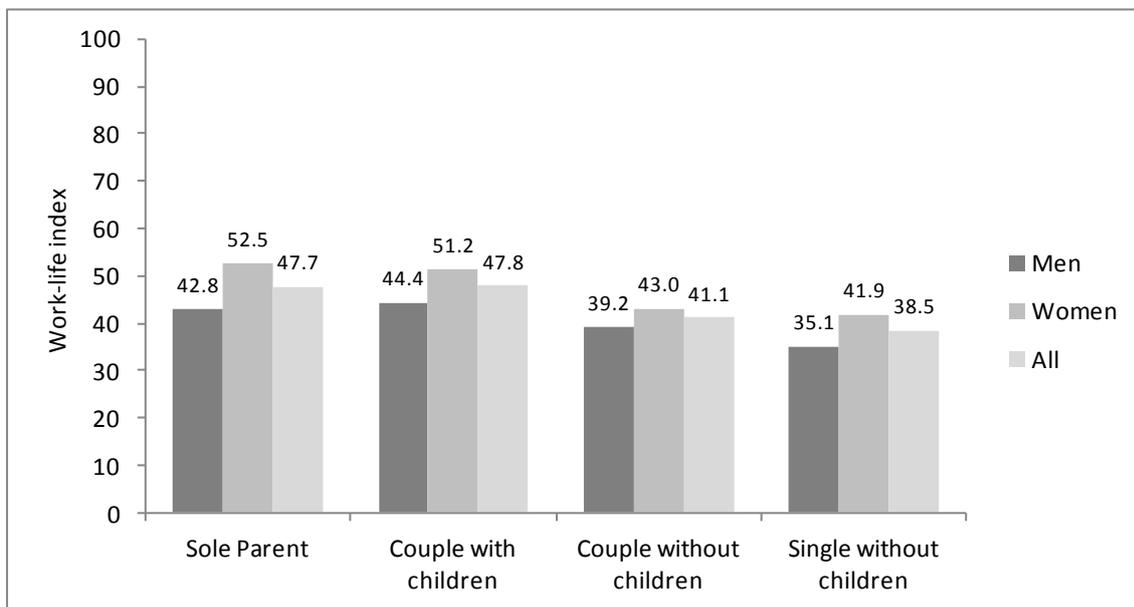


Figure 15 Work-life index scores by household structure and gender

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2500.

These findings highlight the ongoing gender inequities that women experience when combining paid work with care. Whether partnered or single, when we statistically control for differences in work hours, Australian mothers experience the greatest work-life strains and pressures. This is particularly the case for single mothers, whose work-life outcomes (adjusted for work hours) are comparable to those who work very long hours, or who have a poor fit between their actual and preferred working hours. This no doubt reflects the much greater challenge of combining paid

work with unpaid care and domestic work faced by sole-parents – most often mothers - compared to those who are parenting in partnership.

These findings regarding the high work-life pressures of sole-parents, particularly sole mothers, are important as a growing number of children are spending at least some of their childhood with a single parent. Around one in five households with a child aged 15 or under are now headed by a sole-parent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). There are also increasing public policy pressures for sole-parents to combine care with work or study (Craig, 2005). For example, since 2006 sole-parents in receipt of parenting payments have been required to participate in part-time work, job search or training once their youngest child turns six years old. They are no longer eligible for these payments once their youngest child turns eight.

Very high levels of work-life interference amongst sole mothers are a cause for concern, particularly in light of this changing policy context. It may be that these work-life strains add to already high levels of stress for sole-parents in households that are dealing with family and relationship change. Increasing work and training participation tests for sole mothers in these households may have unintended and unmeasured consequences for the mothers (and consequently their children) who experience the effects of high levels of work-life spillover – especially where incomes are low and/or precarious.

Caring responsibilities for adults

‘Work-family’ issues are commonly discussed in terms of parents caring for children. Although this is the most common type of work-care arrangement, many workers also provide care to others who are not children, especially aged parents and people with disabilities. In the AWALI 2012 survey we asked respondents if they ‘personally look after or give help or support to any family members or friends who have a long-term physical or mental illness or disability, or who have problems related to old age?’ Around one in five said that they provided this type of care, (which we define as ‘other care’) with no significant differences between men’s and women’s responses (Table 6). Providing this type of care is more common for those in the older age groups (55+), which is not unexpected as this is the age when caring for elderly parents’ starts for many people. It is also the age at which parents may be caring for adult children with illnesses or disabilities.

Table 6 Provide care to those with long-term physical or mental illness or disability or aged person, by gender, parental status and age

Provide such care to others	
Men	17.9
With children	15.3
No children	20.3
Women	20.2
With children	16.7
No children	23.1
Age	
18 – 24	12.2
25 – 34	15.5
35 – 44	16.1
45 – 55	23.1
55- 64	28.8
65+	28.4

Note: Table excluded self-employed persons. N=473.

We have already discussed how caring for children increases the likelihood of high work-life interference, especially for women. This is also the case when we consider other types of care for

family members or friends who have a long-term physical or mental illness or disability, or who have problems related to old age.

The high work-life costs affecting women who are ‘sandwich’ carers

Figure 16 which shows work-life index scores adjusted for gender differences in work hours, indicates that work-life interference is higher for those with care responsibilities.

The highest work-life interference is reported by women who combine two forms of care: that is care of their children combined with care of family members or friends who have a long-term physical or mental illness or disability, or who have problems related to old age. These are the ‘sandwich’ carers who are often looking after both their own children and their aging parents.

Work-life interference is similar amongst mothers and those women who care for others. This is an important finding given that most work-family policies focus mainly on the care of children. For example paid parental leave is oriented to the care of infants, and the Right to Request flexible work under the *Fair Work Act 2009* is available only to parents of pre-schoolers or children under 18 with a disability. Yet our analysis shows that all women carers - whether looking after children or others - experience comparable work-life strain, irrespective of the type of care.

It is also notable that, regardless of their care circumstances, women report higher work-life interference than men. Men who have care responsibilities have worse work-life interference than men without such responsibilities. The highest work-life interference for men occurs for those who are both fathers and provide other types of care as well. However work-life interference levels for men are consistently lower than for women. These findings create a firm case for extending rights to request flexibility to all carers, whether parents or not. Such a right is likely to be helpful to both men and to women, but especially to the latter.

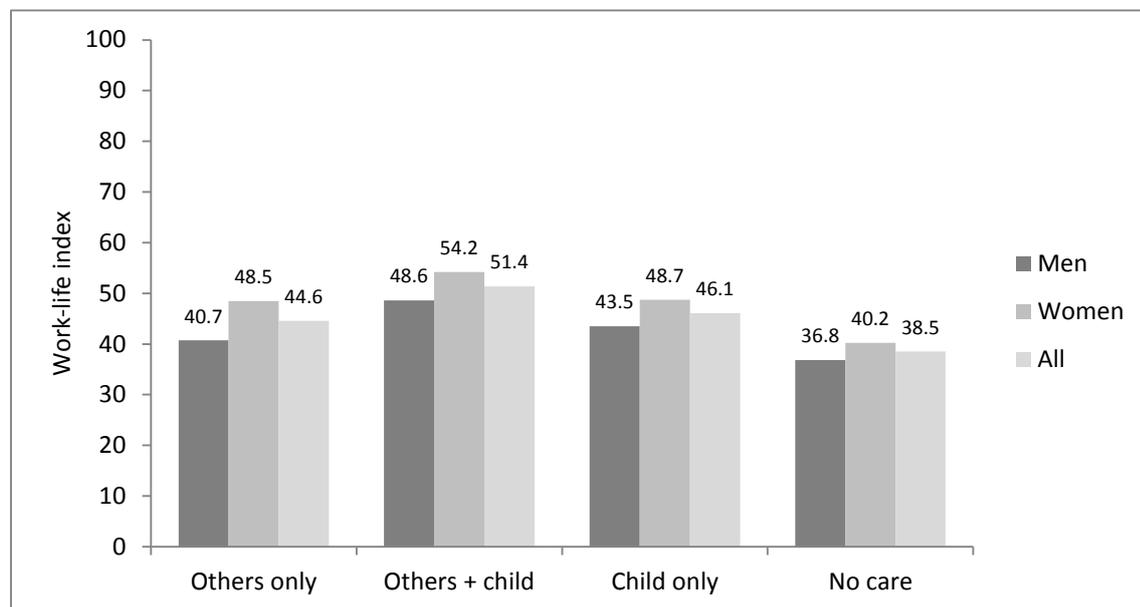


Figure 16 Work-life index scores by type of care responsibilities and gender.

Note. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N=2500.

Age and work-life interference

As the previous section described, younger and older people work the shortest hours, and those in the middle-years’ work the longest. In all age groups, men work longer than women on average. When we adjust for gendered differences in working hours, women experience slightly higher levels of work-life interference than men across most age groups; however, these gender

differences are not statistically significant (Figure 17). Beyond the main childrearing years (35-44 years), work-life interference is lower for men and women aged 55 to 64 and 65+.

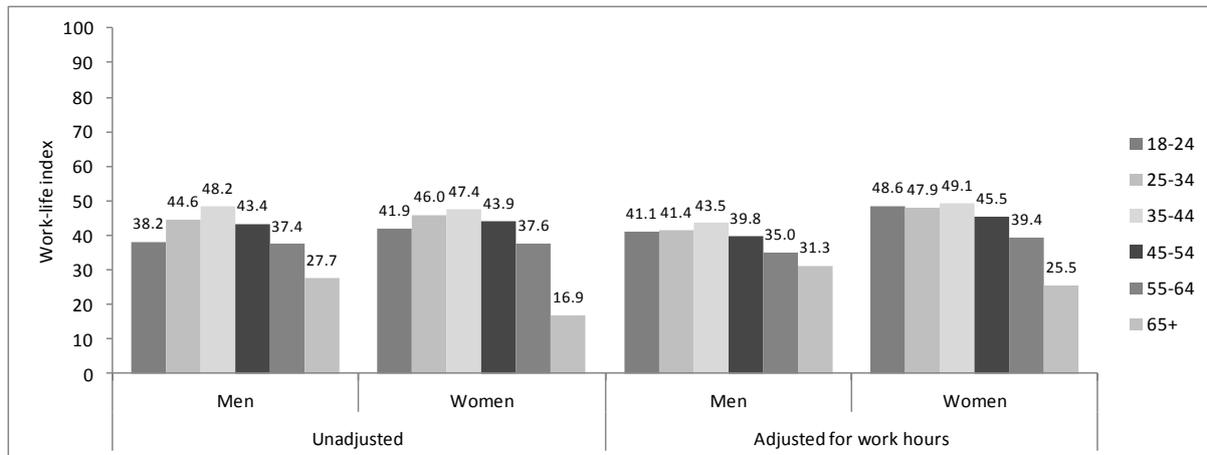


Figure 17 Work-life index scores by age and gender

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2500.

Looking at index scores unadjusted for work hours, men in the 25 to 54 age categories have the worst work-life outcomes compared to all other men; this is not surprising given that they also work the longest hours. When adjusted for hours, women in the 35 to 44 year range have the highest work-life interference (a score of 49.1).

Household income

Having sufficient income to achieve a good standard of living is an essential resource for the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. Income can also be used to buy in resources to help alleviate work-life pressures by purchasing time-saving goods and services (e.g. childcare, house cleaning, gardening or – most commonly - pre-prepared foods). On the other hand, higher income often means longer work hours and/or employment in managerial or professional occupations, where levels of work-life interference are worse and create negative stress effects.

Those on lower incomes must manage work and family commitments without access to time-saving resources. As such they are more likely to experience time strains and negative stress related to reliance on public transport and longer commutes from suburbs located some distance from their jobs (Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008).

As Table 7 shows, men and women in the lowest household income group (< \$30,000) have the shortest work hours per week (21.6 for men; 20.2 for women). Work hours are significantly longer in the highest income group (\$90,000+), especially for men (44.5 hours per week for men; 34.9 for women).

Controlling for differences in work hours, those with the highest incomes report the worst work-life interference. This suggests that a negative stress effect outweighs the positive resource effect amongst higher earners: that is, access to more income/resources does not outweigh the negative effect of more demanding jobs, even when we control for their longer hours.

At all income levels, women report higher levels of work-life interference than men, with the greatest difference in the highest income category (\$90,000+). For men, there is little difference in work-life interference for those earning more than \$30,000 per year. Men earning less than \$30,000 per year report the best work-life outcomes, but this is likely due to fewer working hours.

Table 7 Work hours and work-life index scores by household income

	< \$30,000		\$30,000 – \$59,999		\$60,000 – \$89,999		\$90,000+	
	Hours	Index	Hours	Index	Hours	Index	Hours	Index
Men	21.6	38.5	37.7	42.0	39.7	40.3	44.5	40.5
Women	20.2	41.8	29.8	44.9	32.2	45.8	34.9	47.1
All	20.6	40.1	34.0	43.4	36.2	43.1	40.4	43.8

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2500.

Geographic location

As in previous years, there is little difference in work-life interference between the states and territories (see Web Appendix Table A3).

Summary

- The findings in this section show that working hours are not well aligned with the needs or preferences of most of the Australian workforce – and this result is persistent over the past five surveys;
- Many younger workers want more hours of work, whereas many men - particularly fathers - would like to work less, taking into account the effect on their income;
- Sole mothers face unique challenges and experience the worst work-life interference when compared with coupled and single father householders;
- Older women workers (65 years+) are most content with their work hours - 77.8 per cent don't want any change to their work hours. They are also the group that experiences the lowest work-life interference;
- It seems it will be difficult to get older workers to increase their working hours – as more would like to work less than more;
- There are significant gender differences in relation to work-life interference, with women experiencing higher work-life interference than men, across age and income scales, and regardless of parenting status. Parenting contributes to higher work-life interference for both men and women, with mothers continuing to experience higher work-life interference than fathers;
- Work-life interference is similar for those in caring roles, regardless of whether they are caring for children, family members or friends who have a long-term physical or mental illness or disability, or problems related to old age. This creates a good case for extending access to the right to request flexibility and other family-friendly policies beyond parents;
- Regardless of their type of care responsibilities (for children, others or both), women have worse work-life outcomes than men, and 'sandwich' carers – those looking after children as well as other dependents – have the worse outcomes, especially women;
- Though income provides a greater opportunity to buy in services and other labour savings resources, higher levels of work-life interference amongst those with higher incomes suggests that the demands of these jobs negate the positive effects of more income.

Section 6: Employment characteristics and work-life interference

In previous sections we have looked at how work-life outcomes vary with gender, working hours and their fit with preferences (Sections 3 and 4) and the impact of life stage, household type and other social demographics (Section 5). In this section we take a closer look at the relationships between work-life interference and employment characteristics such as type of employment contract (permanent, casual), self-employment, occupation, industry and public/private sector. For the first time we examine how work-life interference varies according to the size of the employer organisation.

Amongst Australia's 9.3 million employees, 2.2 million workers (24 per cent) were casually employed in 2011 (the ABS define casual workers as those who do not receive any paid sick leave or holiday leave entitlements (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a)). Such employees often have no guarantee of ongoing employment and have fewer benefits and entitlements than employees in ongoing employment. In this section we begin by looking at the impact of casual and fixed-term contracts and self-employment on work-life outcomes.

Type of employment contract

As shown in Table 8, the majority of employees are on permanent/ongoing contracts, with this type of employment more common for men than women. Women are much more likely than men to be employed on a fixed-term or casual basis.

As measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 21.0 per cent of male employees and 27.6 per cent of female employees were in casual employment in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). The AWALI 2012 sample includes a smaller proportion of casual workers than ABS labour force survey data probably reflecting the latter's inclusion of 15-17 year olds, which are excluded in AWALI surveys. Younger workers are more likely to be casually employed than older workers.

Table 8 Work hours and work-life index scores by type of employment contract and gender

	AWALI sample (per cent)	Hours	Index (unadjusted)	Index (adjusted)
Men				
Permanent/ongoing	76.8	44.2	43.7	39.1
Fixed-term	8.6	41.1	47.9	45.1
Casual	14.6	22.3	34.7	42.9
Women				
Permanent/ongoing	67.8	34.9	45.1	45.9
Fixed-term	10.5	36.3	44.0	46.6
Casual	21.7	19.0	36.4	46.4
All				
Permanent/ongoing	73.1	40.1	44.3	42.6
Fixed-term	9.7	36.3	45.9	45.9
Casual	17.2	20.2	35.7	44.6

Note. N = 2500.

Work hours vary substantially between employees on different types of contracts. Those on permanent/ongoing contracts work the longest hours, and casuals work the shortest. Within each group, men work longer hours than women.

Given that there is a strong association between longer work hours and work-life interference, it is not surprising that casual employees have lower work-life interference.

When we statistically adjust for differences in work hours a different picture emerges. Work-life interference is worse for workers on fixed-term contracts than in ongoing employment, although this contrast is only statistically significant for men.

Indeed, men on permanent/ongoing contracts have lower work-life interference (adjusted for work hours) than all other groups (although the contrast with casual men is not statistically significant). For women, work-life outcomes do not differ according to the type of employment contract (adjusting for work hours).

The shorter average work hours of casuals are associated with less time strain and work-life interference, but are likely to create other pressures (for example, those arising from a lower or unpredictable income). A substantial proportion of casuals would prefer to work more hours (43.8 per cent), a circumstance indicative of significant economic strain. A desire to work more hours is relatively rare for permanent (10.3 per cent) or fixed-term (14.5 per cent) workers. Just over half of all male casual workers would prefer more hours (51.6 per cent), as would 38.0 per cent of casual women. In contrast, around 45 per cent of workers on fixed-term or permanent contracts would prefer to work at least half a day less, compared to only 10 per cent of casuals (see Web Appendix Table A4).

Self-employment

Self-employment can be a qualitatively different experience than working for an employer in ways that are likely to affect work-life outcomes. Self-employment can provide greater opportunity for control over the timing, arrangement and conduct of work. On the other hand, in tougher economic times particularly, the self-employed can feel under pressure to accept all work offered to them because of uncertainty about future work. In addition, business administration, finance and the responsibility for meeting deadlines can add further pressures for the self-employed.

Self-employment is a more common work arrangement for men than women: almost twice as many men as women are self-employed in the 2012 AWALI sample (13.3 per cent and 7.6 per cent, respectively). Here we examine how self-employment affects work-life outcomes, and whether these effects differ for men and women. Similar to findings for employees, self-employed men work longer hours than self-employed women (46.0 and 31.3 hours, respectively).

As observed in 2010, there are no significant differences in work-life interference between self-employed and employee workers, and this is the case for men and women (whether work hours are controlled for or not). It seems that greater autonomy for self-employed workers does not result in significant work-life benefits. Perhaps this is because the demands of self-employment override the positive effects that might arise from the greater autonomy of self-employment – or perhaps because such autonomy is in fact illusory.

Although self-employed men work the longest hours, they do not report significantly higher work-life interference than employed men or women, or self-employed women. This is the case whether work hours are statistically controlled or not.

In sum, women work shorter hours than men, whether they are self-employed or employees. Despite their shorter hours, men's and women's work-life outcomes are equivalent for employees and self-employed.

Occupation

A consistent finding in the AWALI surveys is that managers have the worst work-life interference compared to most other occupational groups, whether differences in work hours are statistically controlled for or not. This pattern continues in 2012 (Figure 18).

Adjusting for differences in work hours, the highest work-life interference is reported by managers and professionals, and this is the case for both men and women. Men in clerical occupations also report high work-life interference – and higher levels than women in this occupation, though this difference was not statistically significant. In other occupations men and women have similar work-life outcomes, adjusting for differences in work hours.

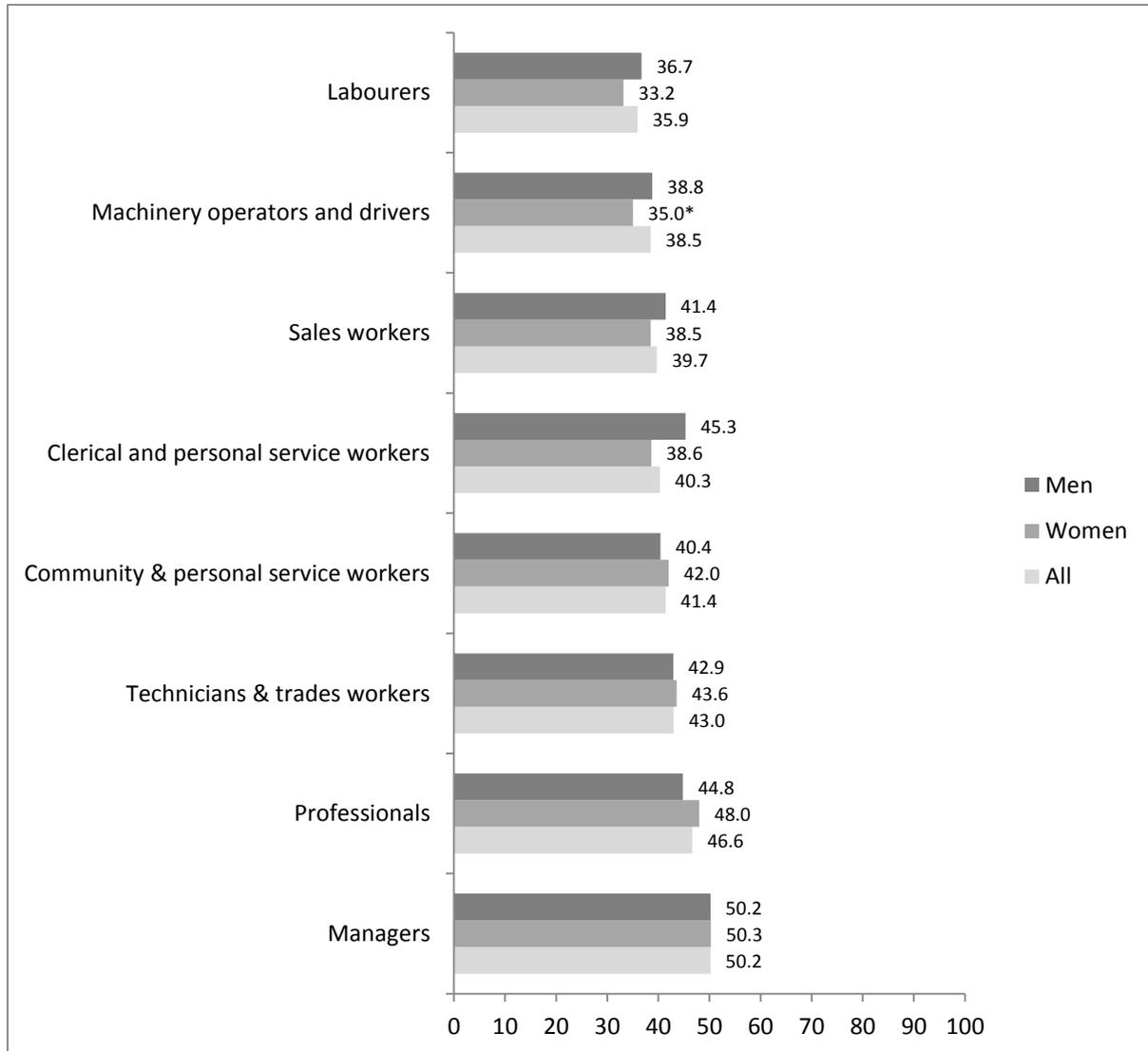


Figure 18 Work-life index scores by occupation and gender

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N =2500.

Industry

As observed in previous AWALI surveys, work hours and work-life outcomes also differ across industries. The longest weekly work hours are reported in traditionally male-dominated industries such as mining (51.7 hours), construction (43.1 hours), electricity\gas\water\waste services (42.5 hours) and agriculture\forestry\ fishing (42.1 hours). The lowest weekly hours are reported in industries which tend to be female-dominated with a high percentage of casually employed workers, such as accommodation and food services (28.0 hours), retail trade (28.7 hours), administrative and support services (30.6 hours), and arts and recreation services (31.4 hours).

Controlling for differences in work hours, Table 9 shows work-life interference is highest in the retail trade, accommodation and food services, and education and training industries. For retail

workers in particular there is little difference in the adjusted and unadjusted index scores, which suggests that factors other than work hours (perhaps gender and the incidence of family responsibilities) contribute to the poor work-life outcomes of workers in this sector.

A common link between each of these industries is that much of the work revolves around delivering good or services to clients, customers or - in the case of education - students. This type of work has unique stressors, such as the requirement for 'emotional labour' in managing the mood and emotion of oneself and others (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). This is one possible explanation for the worst work-life interference in service-related industries.

Table 9 Work-life index scores unadjusted and adjusted for work hours by industry (from highest to lowest adjusted score)

	Index adjusted	Index unadjusted
Education and training	46.9	45.6
Accommodation and food services	46.8	42.2
Retail trade	45.2	41.0
Arts and recreation services	44.5	41.8
Professional/scientific and technical services	44.4	45.5
Health care and social assistance	44.4	42.4
Administrative and support services	43.4	39.6
Manufacturing	43.1	46.0
Financial and insurance services	42.0	43.9
Rental/hiring and real estate services*	41.9	44.7
Public administration and safety	41.6	42.6
Agriculture/forestry and fishing	40.6	43.8
Wholesale trade	40.4	42.1
Electricity/gas/water and waste services	39.8	43.2
Transport/postal and warehousing	39.4	42.0
Mining	38.9	47.7
Construction	37.7	41.4
Other services	37.0	38.6
Information media and telecommunications	36.9	36.8

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500. * = less than 20.

In contrast, when controlling for work hours, mining and construction are amongst the industries with the lowest work-life interference (38.9 and 37.7 respectively). The mining industry has the largest gap between unadjusted and adjusted index scores, indicating that long work hours have a strong influence on work-life outcomes in this industry. Indeed, looking at the unadjusted scores the mining industry has the worst work-life interference, which is probably a function of both long hours, shift-work and extensive travel requirements (e.g. fly in/fly out arrangements). This finding and its causes and remedies is worthy of further research.

What difference does public, private, non-government employment make to work-life interference?

AWALI 2012 includes data on the sector of employment (private, public, family business/farm, non-government organisation (NGO)). This might influence the demands and resources available to employees and managers, the development and implementation of policies and the interpersonal and cultural dynamics in an organisation.

The majority of AWALI respondents work in the private (62.4 per cent) or government (24.4 per cent) sectors, with a minority employed in a family business/farm or a NGO. There was little difference in work-life outcomes between workers from different sectors, whether work hours

are statistically controlled or not (see Web Appendix Table A5). This was the case for men and women. It seems that gender, the number of hours worked, and the industry and occupation of employment are the most important associations with work-life interference rather than the sector of employment (i.e. public or private employment).

What difference does firm size make to work-life interference?

Here we examine whether work-life outcomes differ for workers in smaller or larger organisations (measured by the number of people at the respondents' workplace, or the office or location where they work - including full-time, part-time and casual workers). The majority of respondents were employed in medium (20-99 persons) or large (100+) sized organisations. As Figure 19 shows, those in large firms (100+) have worse work-life outcomes than those in smaller firms (unadjusted scores) (with no significant difference between firms with 10 to 19 compared to 20 to 99 employees). This difference by firm size is mostly a result of longer hours worked in larger firms. When differences in work hours are statistically controlled, then only the contrast between the largest and smallest firm size is statistically significant.

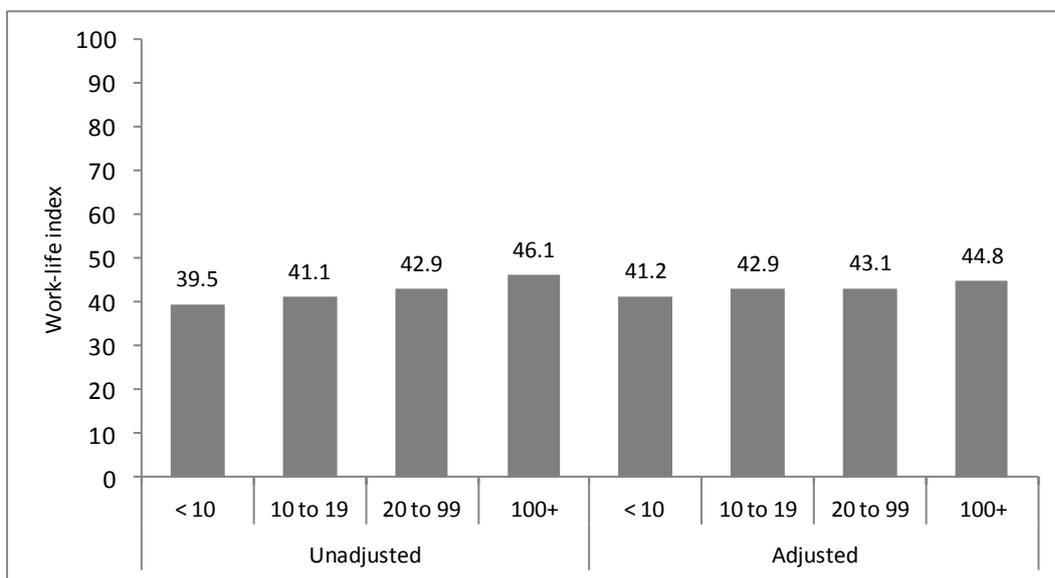


Figure 19 Work-life index scores by size of firm

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

In terms of gender, there was some evidence that work-life interference is higher for women in larger firms. This probably reflects the longer average hours that women work in larger organisations. Men's hours show little variation with firm size. Regardless of whether differences in work hours are statistically controlled or not, women working in large firms (100+ employees) have the worse work-life interference, and those in the smallest firms (less than 10 employees) have the lowest work-life interference (Figure 20; also see Web Appendix Table A6 for specific contrasts that are statistically significant). One possible explanation is that professionals and managers are more likely to be employed by larger companies and they experience worse work-life interference than average.

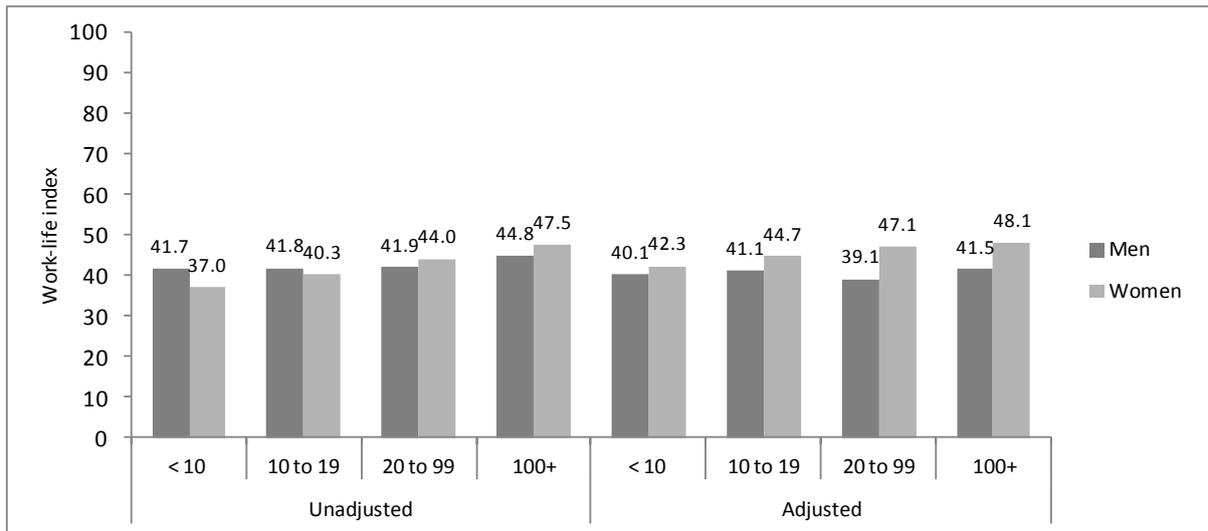


Figure 20 Work-life index scores by size of firm and gender

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Summary

- In this section we have considered a range of employment characteristics that might affect how work is organised and experienced. Some of these factors make more of a difference to work-life outcomes than others;
- Those on fixed-term contracts have the worst work-life interference when hours are statistically accounted for (though this is only statistically significant for men);
- Casual workers are more likely to be under-employed (and to prefer more hours). When differences in hours are accounted for, their work-life interference is no better than that of permanent workers;
- The employment sector - whether private, public, NGO, family business/farm – makes no significant difference to work-life interference;
- Work-life interference is worse for those employed in larger firms, especially for women, and this may reflect the longer hours worked by these workers;
- Managers and professionals have worse work-life interference than those in other occupations, as do workers in the retail, accommodation and food services and education and training industries (when difference in work hours are statistically controlled);
- Workers in the mining industry are also more negatively affected which appears to be a reflection of their longer hours of work.

Section 7: Work intensity

The discussion so far has focused predominately on issues around working time. We have described the experiences of full-time and part-time workers, and examined the effects of flexible work arrangements and changes to working time (e.g. working part-time, reducing hours or varying the scheduling of work which are the most common flexibility practices).

Here we turn our attention to a second central dimension of work, one that is often a significant influence on work-life interference: work intensification. In essence, the intensity of work refers to how hard we are working in any given period. Work intensity is commonly assessed according to the frequency that workers have to work at speed, to tight deadlines and/or manage high workloads (Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2008).

Intensification of work, characterized by heavy workloads and time pressure, is a common experience in industrialised countries (Green, 2008). Existing evidence shows that demanding jobs that are relentless and offer no break or respite from heavy workloads and time pressures, are bad for health. These jobs increase the likelihood of stress, burnout and poor physical health, and negatively affect relationships with family and partners (Kuper & Marmot, 2003; Michie & Williams, 2003). Section 8 which follows, shows that high workloads are a significant driver of working unpaid hours from home. Further, in AWALI 2010 we found that work overload was a common reason why workers did not take their full entitlement of four weeks' paid recreational leave (Pocock, Skinner, & Pisaniello, 2010). Thus a busy, intensive and demanding job can reduce the quality of life outside of work for individuals and also their families and communities.

In the AWALI 2012 survey, we included three measures of work intensification: frequency of working at high speed, working to tight deadlines, and the experience of work overload (i.e. too much work for one person to do). The first two measures are widely used measures of intensification, and allow us to make comparisons between Australia and similar countries in the European Union. The third measure was first included in the AWALI 2008 survey. Overall, there is little change from 2008 to 2012 in reports of work overload – 54.5 per cent of workers in 2008 said they had too much work for one person to do, compared to 54.2 workers in 2012. There is one exception - women working full-time – as discussed below. In this section we identify which Australian workers are most likely to be exposed to high intensity work, according to key social and work characteristics.

Gender and household type

Around 30 to 40 per cent of workers are working intensively, as defined earlier (see Figure 21, Figure 22, Figure 23). Men and women report similar levels of work intensity with the exception of the working at speed measure – women are more likely to report working at very high speed (40.2 per cent) for most of the time than men (33.9 per cent).

The experience of working at high speed or to tight deadlines also differs for workers from different types of households. Workers with children, and sole-parents in particular, are more likely to report that they work intensively for most of the time, compared to workers without children. (See Web Appendix Table A7 for more detail). Perceptions of work overload (having too much work to do) do not differ by parenting status or household type.

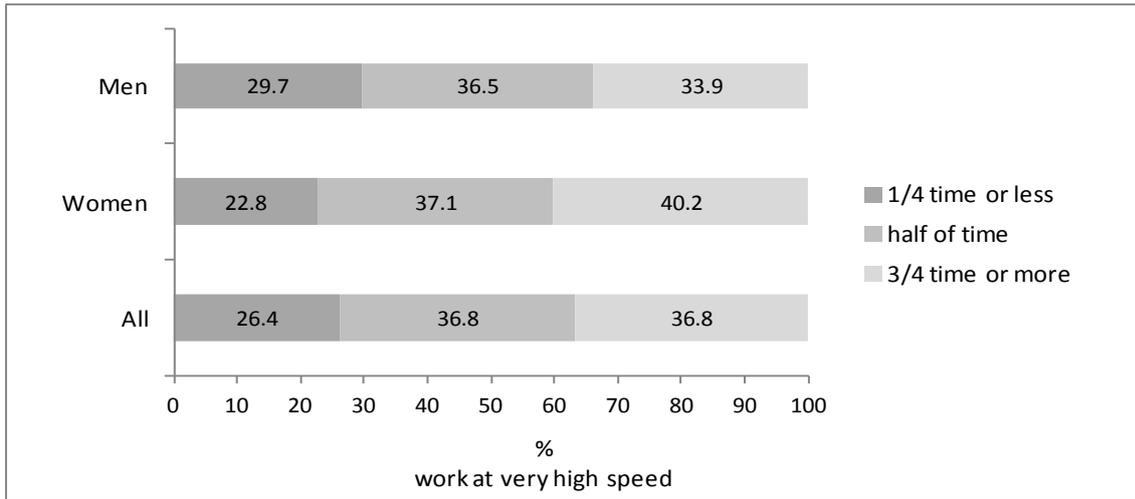


Figure 21 Frequency of working at very high speed by gender (per cent)

Note. '1/4 time or less' category combines response options: 'never', 'almost never' and 'around 1/4 of the time'. '3/4 of the time or more' combines response options 'around 3/4 of the time', 'almost all of the time' and 'all of the time'. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

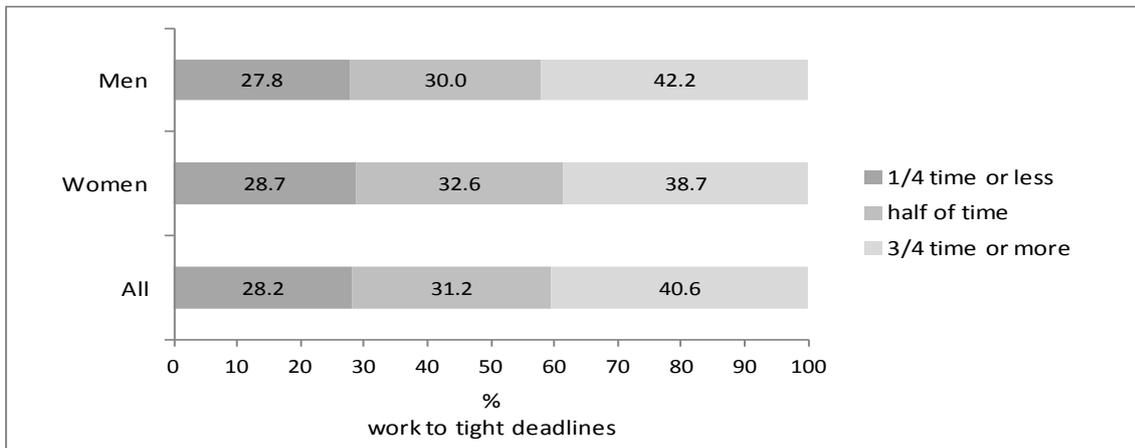


Figure 22 Frequency of working to tight deadlines by gender (per cent)

Note. '1/4 time or less' category combines response options: 'never', 'almost never' and 'around 1/4 of the time'. '3/4 of the time or more' combines response options 'around 3/4 of the time', 'almost all of the time' and 'all of the time'. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

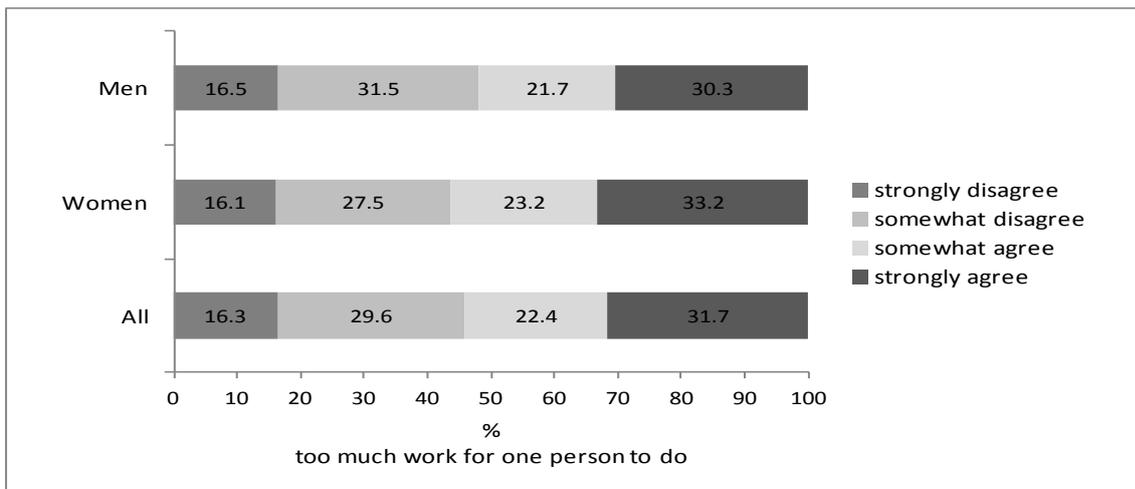


Figure 23 Work overload (have too much work for one person to do) by gender (per cent)

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Employment characteristics

As would be expected, the experience of work intensification varies in different types of work, as defined by work hours, size of firm, type of employment contract, occupation and industry. We also compare the experiences of men and women if the sample sizes are sufficient to support these analyses (Table 10, Table 11, Table 12).

Work hours

Full-time workers are more likely to report working intensively (at high speed, tight deadlines, too much work) than part-timers. Those working long full-time hours (48+) are most likely to work intensively for three quarters or more of the time, and to report having too much work for one person to do.

There are gender differences in these patterns. Men who work long full-time hours are more likely to say they work intensively than the average for all men. Women's perception of working intensively is above the average for all women amongst those who work full-time or long full-time hours.

Women are more likely than men to report that they are working at speed and have too much work to do both part-time and full-time work. Women are more likely to say they are working to tight deadlines than men when working long part-time or long full-time hours. Full-time women in 2012 are more likely to have too much work for one person to do (70.5 per cent) than in 2008 (60.5 per cent).

Size of firm

Working at speed, having too much work to do and working to tight deadlines is more likely for workers in medium and large firms.

Table 10 Work at very high speed $\frac{3}{4}$ or more of the time by work hours, employment sector and size of firm and gender (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
All	-	-	-
Full-time	-	48.0	-
35 – 47 hours	-	46.6	-
48+ hours	39.8	53.5	43.1
Part-time	-	-	-
1 – 15 hours	-	-	-
16 – 34 hours	-	-	-
Size of firm	-	-	-
Up to 19 workers	-	-	-
20 – 99 workers	-	44.8	-
100+ workers	-	43.3	-

Note. Data provided only where group estimate is higher than the average for all employee respondents. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Table 11 Work to tight deadlines 3/4 or more of the time by work hours, employment sector and size of firm and gender (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
All	-	-	-
Full-time	-	45.6	45.5
35 – 47 hours	-	43.0	-
48+ hours	51.8	56.1	52.8
Part-time	-	-	-
1 – 15 hours	-	-	-
16 – 34 hours	-	-	-
Size of firm	-	-	-
Up to 19 workers	-	-	-
20 – 99 workers	44.3	44.7	44.5
100+ workers	48.3	45.8	47.2

Note. Data provided only where group estimate is higher than the average for all employee respondents. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Table 12 Somewhat/strongly agree that 'have too much work for one person to do' by work hours, employment sector and size of firm and gender (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
All	-	-	-
Full-time	-	70.5	-
35 – 47 hours	-	67.8	-
48+ hours	67.4	81.4	70.8
Part-time	-	-	-
1 – 15 hours	-	-	-
16 – 34 hours	-	-	-
Size of firm	-	-	-
Up to 19 workers	-	-	-
20 – 99 workers	-	60.3	-
100+ workers	-	63.0	-

Note. Data provided only where group estimate is higher than the average for the whole Australian workforce. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Employment contract

Working at very high speed or to tight deadlines three quarters or more of the time is most common amongst those on permanent/ongoing (37.6 per cent; 42.3 per cent) or fixed term (41.4 per cent; 44.0 per cent) contracts, and is less common for casuals (31.2 per cent; 31.7 per cent). Similarly, those on permanent/ongoing or fixed-term contracts are most likely to strongly agree they have too much work for one person to do (35.7 and 31.3 per cent, respectively) compared to casuals (16.0 per cent).

Men and women report similar levels of intensification in each employment type with the exception of permanent employees. Working at very high speed is more likely for women (41.5 per cent) than men (34.6 per cent), as is having too much work for one person (38.9 per cent of women and 33.0 per cent of men strongly agree).

Occupation and industry

Here we focus on those groups that report intensive work practices above the average for all employee respondents. We do not report on gender differences as for most groups there were

no significant differences, or sample size restrictions did not support statistical analysis by gender.

As Table 13 shows, reports of work intensity vary across employment groups, depending on the particular dimension of intensity. Working at high speed is most common in industries that involve service provision, whether this involves retail goods, food and accommodation or professional goods such as finance or technical services. Working to tight deadlines is more common for those in managerial/professional and technical occupations and industries. Tight deadlines are a demand not just restricted to white-collars workers: they are also a common experience for machinery operators and drivers and workers in manufacturing and arts/recreation.

Some groups have higher than average levels of work intensity across more than one dimension. Those in the professional/scientific/technical industries are above average on all three work intensity measures. Other groups have a different combination of intensity demands.

Workers on permanent/ongoing or fixed-term contracts are likely to work to tight deadlines, and this is combined with high speed for fixed-term workers and too much work for permanent/ongoing employees.

Those in health care and social assistance are most likely to work at very high speed and have too much work for one person. A combination of tight deadlines and too much work is most likely for managers and professionals. Working at speed and to tight deadlines is common for those providing professional services (finance, insurance, etc). (See Web Appendix Table A8 for a more detailed breakdown of work intensity by all occupations and industries).

Table 13 Employment groups whose work intensity is higher than the average (per cent)

	Very high speed ($\frac{3}{4}$ or more time)	Tight deadlines ($\frac{3}{4}$ or more time)	Too much work (strongly agree)
All	36.8	40.6	31.7
Contract type			
Permanent/ongoing contract	-	42.3	35.7
Fixed-term contract	41.4	44.0	-
Occupation			
Managers	-	47.2	45.7
Professionals	-	43.8	35.7
Technicians and trades workers	-	45.8	
Machinery operators/drivers	-	47.8	
Industry			
Agriculture/forestry and fishing	-	-	40.0
Manufacturing		52.8	
Electricity/gas/water and waste	-	-	39.4
Retail trade	40.1	-	
Accommodation and food services	45.4	-	
Transport/postal and warehousing		45.2	
Financial and insurance services	44.9	46.1	
Professional/scientific/technical	46.6	50.9	38.3
Administrative and support services			41.0
Health care and social assistance	43.8	-	38.6
Arts and recreation	-	56.0	

Note. Data provided only where group estimate is higher than the average for all employee respondents. Too much work – per cent ‘agree or strongly agree’ that have too much work for one person to do. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

How does Australia compare to Europe?

Our analysis so far indicates that working intensively is a common experience for a substantial proportion of the Australian workforce – around 30 to 40 per cent of workers say that they work intensively (measured by the factors of speed, deadline or workload) for most of their time at work.

When we compare the Australian experience to Europe, there is further evidence that Australians are working very intensively. Data from the 5th European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2012) measures perceived intensive working for at least one quarter of the time. As Table 14 shows, Australians are much more likely to report work intensively – at very high speed and to tight deadlines – than their European counterparts. Indeed, on this measure around 90 per cent of Australians report that they work intensively for at least a quarter of their time, compared to around 60 per cent of those in Europe. This is a substantial gap and suggests that Australians may be much more at risk of the negative health consequences of working intensively indicated in the research literature than workers in other similar industrialised countries.

Table 14 Work at very high speed or tight deadlines at least a quarter of the time, AWALI 2012 and EWCS 2010

	Australia	EU27
Work at very high speed		
Men	90.0	61.8
Women	93.0	56.0
All	91.4	59.2
Work to tight deadlines		
Men	90.6	67.0
Women	89.1	56.0
All	89.9	62.0

Note. EWCS: 5th European Working Conditions Survey (2010) (Eurofound, 2012).

Work intensification and work-life outcomes

As Figure 24 shows, there is a clear link between perceived work intensity and higher work-life interference on each of the work intensity measures. Indeed, working at high speed, to tight deadlines or having too much work each have similar effects on work-life outcomes, with work-life index scores around 50 for those working intensively. In contrast, index scores are substantially lower - around 35 (well below the national average) – for those who are not subject to intensive working conditions. These patterns are similar for men and women (see Web Appendix Table A9).

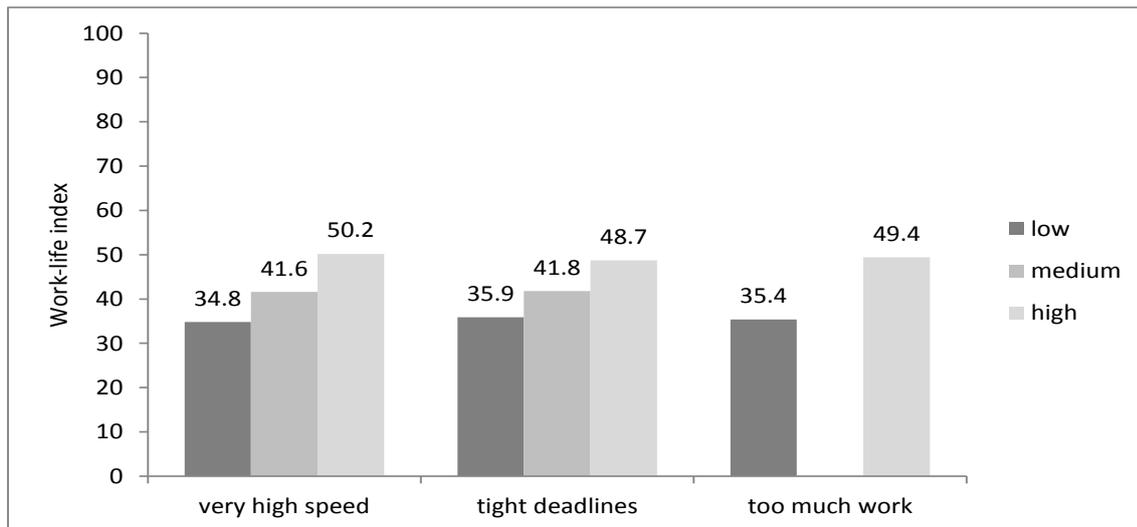


Figure 24 Work-life index scores by intensive working conditions – high speed, tight deadlines and too much work

Note. Low intensity represents response options ‘never’, ‘almost never’ and ‘around ¼ of the time’ on speed and deadlines items, and ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘somewhat disagree’ on the work overload item. Medium intensity represents response option ‘around half of the time’ on the speed and deadline items. There is no medium option available on the work overload measure. High intensity represents response options ‘around ¾ of the time’, ‘almost all of the time’ and ‘all of the time’ on the speed and intensity measures, and ‘somewhat agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ on the work overload item. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Summary

- Much of the policy, research and public discussion on work-life issues focuses on the length of working time. A second important dimension of work that can affect the capacity to meet other life commitments and activities is work intensity. This section has focused on three key aspects of work intensity: working at high speed, working to tight deadlines and having too much work for one person to do (work overload);
- Working intensively is a common experience for Australian workers. Around 30 to 40 per cent report that they:
 - Work at very high speed for most of the time (3/4 quarters of the time or more)
 - Work to tight deadlines for most of the time
 - Have too much work for one person to do;
- Overall, there has been little change in perceptions of work overload (too much work for one person to do) since 2008, with one exception: women working full-time are more likely to report work overload in 2012 than in 2008;
- Intensive work seems to be more common in Australia than in other comparable countries, for example in the European Union;
- These patterns are similar for Australian men and women, and for workers from different types of households, with two exceptions:
 - Women are more likely to work at very high speed for most of the time
 - Workers with children, and sole-parents in particular, are most likely to report having to work at very high speed for most of their time at work;
- Intensive work is also more common in particular types of employment:
 - Working full-time, especially long full-time hours
 - In medium and large firms, compared to small firms (less than 20 workers)
 - On permanent/ongoing or fixed-term contracts compared to casuals

- In industries involving service provision (i.e. retail, hospitality, professional or technical services) – particularly for working at very high speed
 - In managerial or professional work – particularly for working to tight deadlines
 - In non-white collar occupations/industries – machinery operators/drivers, manufacturing and arts/recreation;
-
- Workers in the professional/scientific/technical industries are most likely to work intensively: they report above average scores on all three measures;
 - There is a clear association between working more intensively and higher work-life interference, with the three measures of intensity showing similar sized negative effects on work-life outcomes.

Section 8: Requests for flexible work arrangements in 2009 and 2012

From 1 January 2010 as part of the National Employment Standards (NES) in the *Fair Work Act 2009*, some Australian employees gained a ‘right to request’ (RTR) flexibility from their employer. The RTR gives working parents of pre-schoolers, or children under 18 with a disability, the right to request flexibility and creates a duty for employers to reasonably consider such a request. Only employees with more than a year’s service, and only casuals with long term and a ‘reasonable expectation’ of continuing employment on a regular and systemic basis, are eligible to exercise this right. Requests must be in writing, give details of the change sought and reasons for the request. In turn employers must respond in writing within 21 days, formally granting or refusing the request. They are able to refuse requests on ‘reasonable business grounds’.

As our AWALI survey of 2009 showed, many employees had already made such requests prior to the enactment of this new provision. Just over a fifth of respondents had made such requests – twice as many women as men - and most requests were fully granted by employers. The work-life outcomes of those who were granted their requests were – not surprisingly – better than those whose requests were refused. A sizeable group of employees did not make such requests despite being dissatisfied with their current employment arrangements. Many of these employees were men and working in male-dominated industries. This suggests that a number of employees might benefit from a new legislative right and stronger legislative support for flexibility to meet their needs. Those who already make such requests are likely to be in workplaces that are not hostile to flexibility requests, and where relationships between employees and their supervisors enable effective communication and negotiation of requests. Such workplaces are also likely to be those covered by collective bargaining agreements and/or policies that enable and support such negotiations and requests (in the public sector and some larger workplaces for example).

We speculated in our 2009 analysis of request-making prior to the enactment of the formal RTR provision, that pre-existing flexibility activities may represent ‘low hanging’ flexibility fruit. That is, pre-legislative request-making by around one in five workers probably occurred in workplaces where flexibility was not unusual and managers and workers accepted the need for flexibility as normal rather than exceptional (Skinner & Pocock, 2011). Workplace culture and first line supervision have been shown to significantly affect work-life conflict (Skinner and Pocock, 2008: p.10). Increasing the rate of request-making and widening its availability to new categories of workers and workplaces beyond those where prevailing organisational workplace culture and first line supervision are supportive – to higher hanging fruit – may not be an easy or simple task. It is likely to rely on a number of factors: worker and management knowledge of the new right, a commitment to genuinely enact the right, a desire by workers for flexibility, worker confidence that they will not be directly or indirectly punished or stigmatised for asking, management’s perception that agreeing to requests is worthwhile and that unreasonable refusal will have negative consequences for them.

The AWALI 2012 survey’s assessment of request-making two years on from the enactment of the legislated RTR allows us to consider some of these factors, including the difference that the new right has made thus far in the prevailing economic circumstances.

Awareness of a legal right to request flexibility

At the time of the AWALI survey in March 2012, the RTR under the *Fair Work Act 2009* had been in existence for just over two years (since 1 January 2010). We asked survey respondents

whether they were aware of this new entitlement¹. As Table 15 shows, the majority of Australian workers are unaware of this entitlement 26 months after its introduction.

This may not be a concern amongst those to whom the right does not apply, for example those without young children. However, the low level of awareness amongst parents of young children is a real concern. Only a third of fathers and a quarter of mothers of pre-schoolers were aware that they had a legal right to request flexible work arrangements.

Table 15 also shows that younger people were less likely to be aware of the RTR – just one in five of those under 25. Awareness increased with age, reaching its peak with older workers aged 65+ – most of whom are not eligible for the right (unless perhaps caring for a pre-school aged grandchild).

Men and women report similar levels of awareness. However, fathers are more likely to be aware of the RTR than mothers. On the other hand, women without children are more likely than men without children to have knowledge of the right. Women without children under 16 years old have a higher level of awareness (34.5 per cent) than women with children under 16 (25.0 per cent). These findings appear to create a good case for increasing publicity about the RTR, and targeting mothers with young children in particular.

Table 15 Aware of right to request flexible work arrangements (per cent)

	Aware	Not aware
All	30.2	69.8
Men	29.6	70.4
Women	30.8	69.2
Age		
18 – 24 years	20.4	79.6
25 – 44 years	28.8	71.2
45 – 54 years	32.1	67.9
55 - 64 years	39.8	60.2
65+ years	44.1	55.9
With children under 16 years	28.7	71.3
Fathers	32.1	67.9
Mothers	25.0	75.0
With pre-school children (< 5 years)	29.6	70.4
Fathers	34.0	66.0
Mothers	23.5	76.5
No children under 16 years	31.1	68.9
Men	28.0	72.0
Women	34.5	65.5

Note: Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Awareness about the RTR also differs across different employment types. In general, awareness is higher for middle income households and for those in permanent employment.

Those most likely to be aware of the right to request were employees in the government sector (40.3 per cent), white-collar workers (managers 35.7 per cent, professionals, 33.2 per cent and clerical and administrative workers 33.1 per cent), workers in firms with 100+ employees (36.0 per cent), and employees in public administration and safety (42.9 per cent), financial and

¹ The relevant question read as follows: ‘The Australian government has introduced a flexible work arrangement scheme that gives parents or carers of children under school age, or disabled children under 18 years of age, the right to request flexible work arrangements. Have you heard of this flexible work arrangement scheme before today?’

insurance services (38.3 per cent), and electricity and other services or transport/postal and warehousing (35.8 per cent).

Those least likely to be aware were employed in the private sector (25.9 per cent) or in smaller firms (10 to 19 persons) (24.2 per cent), labourers (20.2 per cent) and employees in the agriculture/forestry/fishing, manufacturing, retail trade, accommodation and food services and professional/scientific/technical services (between 22 to 25 per cent in these industry groups). Detailed data is provided in Web Appendix (see Tables A10 and A11).

Requesting flexibility: 2009-2012

Given the low level of awareness of the RTR, it is perhaps not surprising that we see very little change in the rate of request-making between March 2009 and March 2012 when the legal RTR had been in place for 26 months.

In 2012, 20.6 per cent of Australian workers had made a request for a change to their work arrangements in the past 12 months, just below the level of 22.4 per cent recorded in 2009. We do not know what proportion of employees' requests in 2012 relied upon the formal RTR as opposed to being made without reference to it (as with the 22.4 per cent of employees who made requests in the 2009 survey).

Table 16 Made a request to change work arrangements by gender, age and parenting, 2009 and 2012 (per cent)

	2009	2012
All	22.4	20.6
Men	16.3	17.3
Women	29.1	24.2
Age		
18 – 24 years	29.8	31.3
25 – 44 years	23.9	23.3
45 – 54 years	18.4	13.7
55 - 64 years	14.4	13.8
65+ years	8.6*	**
Parenting responsibilities		
With preschool children (< 5 years)	30.0	29.6
Men	17.1	19.8
Women	47.8	43.0
With children under 16 years	25.1	24.8
Men	16.2	19.2
Women	34.7	31.0
No children under 16 years	20.6	17.8
Men	16.4	16.0
Women	25.3	19.7

Note: *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. **Data not provided due to small sample size. Table excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 2307; 2012 N = 2500.

Requests were more likely to be made by women, by younger and middle-aged workers and parents (Table 16). Not surprisingly, women with pre-school children were most likely to make a request (43.0 per cent). Clearly many of these did not rely upon the RTR as a basis for their request as only 23.5 per cent of all mothers of pre-schoolers reported that they were aware of the right. Overall, 31.0 per cent of women with children have requested a change in their work arrangements, compared to 19.7 per cent of women without children. Men's requests showed little variation by parenting status. These patterns were similar to those observed in 2009.

Surprisingly, women's rate of request-making in 2012 is slightly lower than in 2009. This difference is statistically significant for women overall, and for women without children aged under 16. Although this trend is also apparent for women with children (pre-school or older), these contrasts are not statistically significant. There is no significant change in men's rate of request-making between 2009 and 2012. Overall, the gender gap in request-making has narrowed: while women's request-making was almost twice that of men in 2009, in 2012 men's request-making rate was closer to women's. This reflects a decline in request-making by women, rather than a significant growth in men's request-making.

Amongst parents of pre-schoolers, the rate of request-making fell for mothers (from 47.8 per cent to 43.0 per cent) but showed a small increase for fathers of pre-schoolers (from 17.1 per cent to 19.8 per cent). These contrasts did not reach statistical significance, possibly due to the relatively small sample sizes (< 100) in each group.

The absence of an increase in request-making following the enactment of the new RTR is unexpected and disappointing. It suggests that the existing right as currently drafted, publicised and administered, is not making very much difference to the flexibility available to parents of young children. Several explanations for this may exist. It may be that fewer employees are discontent with their current work arrangements and therefore fewer are seeking to change them. We find some evidence of this, along with an increase in the proportion of workers who believe that flexibility is simply not possible in their jobs (because they are not convinced their 'employer would allow it', 'their job does not allow it' or 'flexibility is not possible or available' (see Table 23 below). Greater uncertainty about economic circumstances might also help explain why fewer employees made requests for flexibility in the year up to March 2012. Economic conditions were slightly weaker in 2012 than in 2009 (unemployment, for example, was a half a percentage point higher in the latter period).

It may also be that extending flexibility beyond those who currently exercise it (those who work in workplaces that already comfortably accommodate flexibility) is challenging. That is, workplaces with inflexible cultures and management styles present significant barriers to a relatively modest and unenforced right (Charlesworth & Heron, 2012).

Whatever the explanation – beyond improving knowledge of the RTR - policy makers who want to increase flexibility in the workplace may need to consider whether the current legislated vehicle has the necessary strength to create real behavioural change in workplaces where flexibility is not already available.

Requests and type of employment contract

Overall, there is little variation in requesting behaviour by type of employment (Table 17), with one exception. Men in permanent/ongoing employment are less likely to make a request than women with similar employment status or men on fixed-term or casual contracts. There is no significant difference in requesting behaviour by employment type for women. It may be that many men in ongoing employment are particularly affected by inflexible supervisors and workplace cultures, strongly established workplace norms, and high levels of flexibility 'stigma' – that is penalties that attach to requesting or using flexibility and being a 'non-standard' worker (Williams, 2012).

There is little change in these patterns between the 2009 and 2012 AWALI surveys, with the exception of women in permanent/ongoing work. These women are considerably less likely to request a change in their work arrangements in 2012 (23.8 per cent) compared to 2009 (30.4 per cent). This is a significant decline in the incidence of request-making and runs counter to expectations in a post-RTR environment. It may be that effective policy reform requires a much more effective RTR vehicle, one that improves knowledge of the right, and reassures workers that their requests will be treated reasonably and not meet with arbitrary refusal or negative

consequences. Broader eligibility for the right is also recommended given the equivalent negative work-life interference shared by both parents of young children and other carers more broadly.

Table 17 Requests to change work arrangements by employment type, 2012 (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
Permanent/ongoing	15.7	23.8	19.2
Fixed-term	21.6	23.2	22.5
Casual	23.6	26.4	25.2

Note: Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Requests and hours of work

Part-time workers are more likely to request a change to work arrangements (Table 18). Nearly 30 per cent made a request in 2012, compared to less than 20 per cent of full-time workers.

The contrast between part-timers' and full-timers' request-making is most pronounced for men, and the gender difference in request-making is only evident for full-time workers.

Men's and women's requests also differ within part-time and full-time employment. Men working short part-time hours are more likely to make a request compared to men working longer part-time hours, whereas women's request-making does not differ by length of part-time hours. In contrast, women working long full-time hours (48+) are more likely to make a request compared to women working 35 to 47 hours, while men's request-making does not vary with length of full-time hours.

Table 18 Requests to change work arrangements by work hours, 2012 (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
Short part-time (1-15 hours)	35.1	28.1	30.6
Long part-time (16 – 34 hours)	22.1	27.8	26.2
All part-time	27.5	27.9	27.8
Full-time (35 – 47 hours)	14.9	19.4	16.7
Long full-time (48+ hours)	14.6	23.7	16.7
All full-time	14.8	20.3	16.7

Note: Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2500.

Very similar patterns were observed in 2009 with one exception. Rates of requests have declined significantly for women working full-time from 26.4 per cent in 2009 to 20.3 per cent in 2012. This downward trend is statistically significant for women working 35–47 hours (24.9 per cent in 2009; 19.4 per cent in 2012).

The above analysis raises some important issues. Wider knowledge about the RTR is necessary. Increasing flexibility in such circumstances – against strong cultures and norms - relies on more than a relatively modest RTR without enforcement mechanisms. It may also be the case that employer/supervisor resistance to flexibility in such workplaces is strong and requires the prospect of stronger penalties if it is to become more widespread.

Requests by occupation

As Table 19 shows, workers in sales and community and personal service occupations were most likely to make a request to change work arrangements, which is not unexpected given the high proportions of women working in these occupations. Conversely, requests are least common in the more male-dominated occupations of machinery operation/driving and labouring.

Compared to 2009, rates of request-making were only significantly different in two occupations – professionals and clerical and administrative workers. In these occupations request-making has declined from 2009 to 2012 by five and eight percentage points, respectively.

Table 19 Requests to change work arrangements by occupation, 2009 and 2012 (per cent)

	2009	2012
Managers	14.7	17.4
Professionals	25.1	20.0
Technicians and trades workers	14.3	18.8
Community and personal service workers	23.0	25.1
Clerical and administrative workers	29.2	21.2
Sales workers	33.2	28.9
Machinery operators and drivers	13.2	11.0
Labourers	13.7	15.4

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 2237; 2012 N = 2500.

Requests by industry

As in 2009, rates of request-making are highest in the retail industry (32.4 per cent), accommodation and food services (27.9), administrative and support services (25.8) and health care and social assistance (23.8). These industries are more female-dominated with more part-time jobs than others where rates of request-making are lower.

There are no significant differences in requesting behaviours by size of firm or employment sector (private, NGO, public) in 2012, and this is the case for men and women.

Reasons for requesting a change to work arrangements

As in 2009, the two most common reasons for seeking a change to work arrangements are study or to meet childcare needs: each accounting for around 15 per cent of requests (Figure 25). Nearly 12 per cent of workers want to increase their work hours (and hence income), whereas around nine per cent make a request to reduce job demands. Ten per cent of workers make a request to change their work arrangements to accommodate health problems.

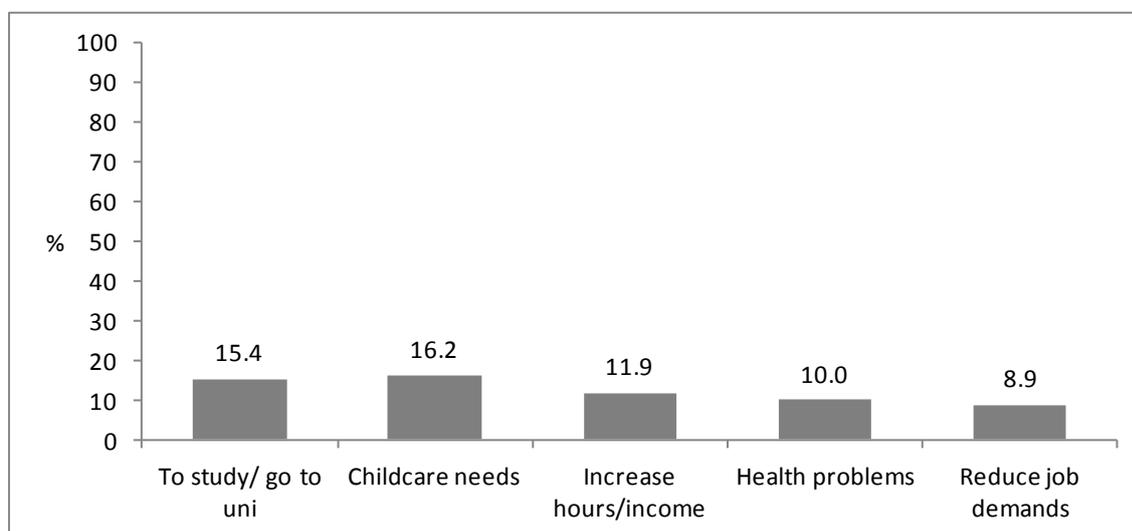


Figure 25 Top five reasons for requesting a change to work arrangements, 2012 (per cent)

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N=508.

There are some differences between men and women in the reasons for requests. As Table 20 shows, 20.3 per cent of women make a request to meet childcare needs, compared to 11 per cent of men. In contrast, men are more likely to cite work-related reasons for making a request, particularly to obtain more interesting or challenging work. These patterns were also observed in 2009, with little change in the reasons why workers requested flexibility.

These gender differences are also apparent for working parents. Mothers are much more likely to request flexibility to meet childcare needs (34.1 per cent compared to 20.7 per cent of fathers). Mothers of pre-schoolers are particularly in need of flexibility: 65.6 per cent of their requests were made because of childcare responsibilities. Fathers are more likely to request flexibility for other reasons besides providing care, such as obtaining more ‘interesting/challenging’ work.

The main difference between workers with or without children is the predominance of flexibility requests to accommodate study. This is the most common reason for workers without children to request flexibility (20.5 per cent), compared to 11.2 per cent of parents.

Table 20 Main reasons for request to change work arrangements by gender, 2012 (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
Childcare needs	11.0	20.3	16.2
To reduce demands of the job	7.0*	10.5	8.9
More time with family	6.6*	8.0	7.4
Health problems	10.2	9.8	10.0
To study /go to university	16.4	14.7	15.4
Increase hours/income	10.6	12.9	11.9
More interesting/challenging role	13.2	4.5*	8.4

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Not all response options reported due to inadequate sample sizes. Multiple responses possible on this question. Table excludes self-employed persons. N=508.

The reasons for requesting flexibility also differ for full-time and part-time workers. Table 21 shows the five most common reasons for requests by these workers. Regardless of whether they work full-time or part-time, around 20 per cent of women request flexibility for childcare reasons. Around 14 per cent of men working full-time are motivated by the same reason, whereas childcare is not a driver of flexibility requests for men working part-time. Instead, requesting flexibility to accommodate study is common for male part-time workers: 40 per cent give this as their reason for seeking flexibility. This is a much less common reason for part-time women: they are almost as likely to request flexibility for childcare (20.2 per cent) as for study (23.7 per cent).

Table 21 Top five reasons to change work arrangement by gender and work hours, 2012

	Men		Women		All	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
Childcare needs	14.3	**	19.7	20.2	16.6	15.4
To reduce demands of the job	9.2*	**	12.8	8.9*	10.7	7.1*
To study/go to university	**	39.7	**	23.7	4.1*	28.5
Increase hours/income	7.1*	17.8*	**	17.9	6.6*	17.8
More interesting/challenging role	15.7	**	9.4*	**	13.0	**

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. **Data not provided due to small sample size. Not all response options reported due to inadequate sample sizes. Multiple responses possible on this question. Table excludes self-employed persons FT = Full-time. PT = part-time. N=508.

Type of change to work arrangement requested

As Table 22 shows, workers request a range of changes to their work arrangements. Working reduced hours is a common request – around a third of workers requested a change of hours to part-time and a quarter asked to reduce their hours for a limited period. Whilst women are more likely to request part-time work than men, there are no significant gender differences in the rates of other types of requests.

These patterns are similar to those observed in 2009. Clearly workers seek flexibility options that are very diverse. In this light it makes sense to have a right to request flexibility that is open to a

wide variety of flexibility options (as the RTR legal provision in the *Fair Work Act 2009* allows), rather than confine it to a specific range of types of flexibility.

Table 22 Type of change requested by gender, 2009 and 2012 (per cent)

	2009			2012		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Job share	6.5*	6.5*	6.5	5.3*	8.4	7.0
Compressed working week	16.9	10.5	13.0	10.1	10.1	10.1
Annualised hours	8.5*	7.1	7.6	8.8	4.5*	6.4
Flexi-time	23.4	16.4	19.0	15.0	13.3	14.0
Work from home	6.0*	9.9	8.4	7.1*	11.2	9.4
Work part-time	21.8	27.8	25.5	22.1	39.9	32.0
Reduced hours for a limited time	20.4	25.6	23.6	25.2	25.1	25.1
Work school terms only	10.9	7.7	9.0	7.1*	10.8	9.2
Work more hours	-	-	-	11.5	10.8	11.1
Other arrangement	49.3	46.9	47.8	46.7	40.1	43.0

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. **Data not provided due to small sample size Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Multiple responses possible on this question (i.e. respondents could choose more than one reason). – Code not used in 2009 survey. 2009 N=525; 2012 N = 512. The 2009 data in this table is correct. It differs from that reported in the 2009 AWALI report as there were some errors in reporting.

Outcome of request: granted or declined

The majority of requests for flexibility (61.9 per cent) were fully granted (Figure 26), with a further 19.1 per cent of requests partly granted. Only a small proportion of requests (13.2 per cent) were refused. This suggests that many workers carefully consider their request and the probability of it being granted before asking, and that many supervisors readily accommodate requests.

Men are more likely to have their request declined than women: 17.4 per cent of men's requests were declined compared to 9.8 per cent of women's requests.

Although there appear to be some differences in request outcomes between 2009 and 2012 (for example, the rate of refusal for men was higher in 2012 than in 2009), none of these differences reached statistical significance for the whole sample, or for men and women considered separately.

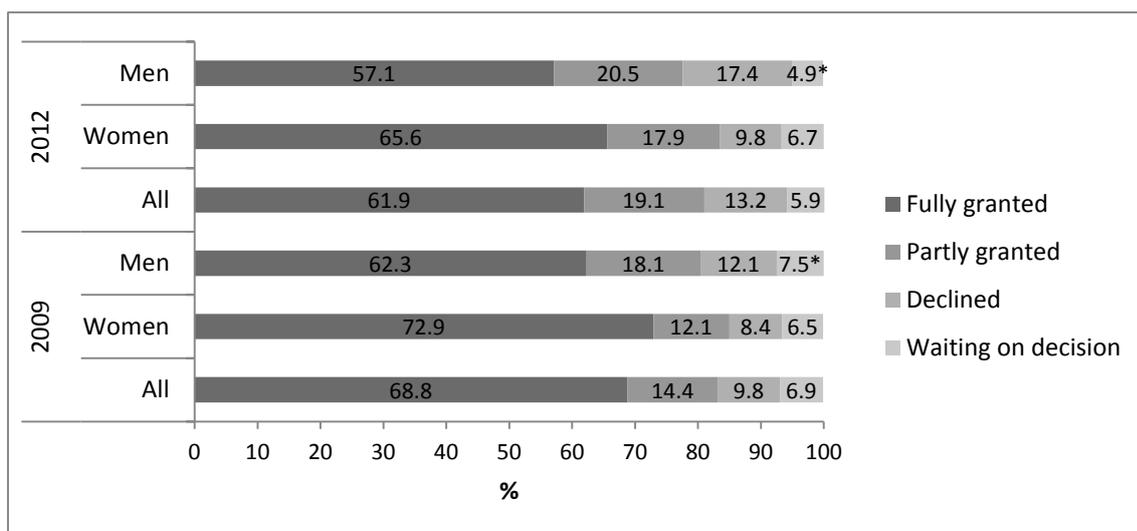


Figure 26 Request outcomes by gender, 2009 and 2012 (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N= 482; 2012 N= 509.

The likelihood of a request being granted also differs according to length of work hours, with part-timers more likely to have their requests granted than full-time workers. Whilst this trend is evident for all groups (see Figure 27), the contrast is only statistically significant for all employees and for men.

While part-time and full-time women are more likely than men to have their requests fully granted, this contrast is not statistical significant. For part-time workers, this may be due to the small sample size of part-time men who made a request.

Similar trends were evident in the 2009 survey. There was only one statistically significant contrast between 2009 and 2012: part-time women in 2009 were more likely to have their requests fully granted (81.1 per cent) than in 2012 (70.2).

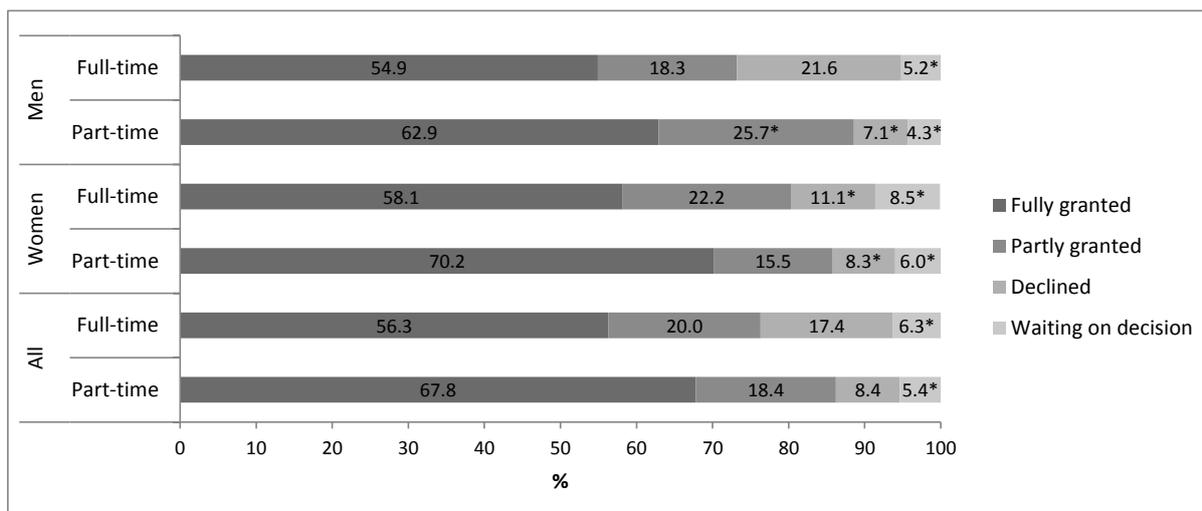


Figure 27 Request outcomes by gender and work hours, 2012 (per cent)

Note. *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 509.

Reasons requests are declined

The reasons for refusal of requests were diverse, as perceived by the 67 survey respondents in 2012 who had their requests refused. The most common reasons for refusal are related to business-related constraints, such as negative impacts on cost, performance or quality, or difficulties re-organising work amongst staff. The current RTR legislation allows employers to decline requests on this basis with no onus on them to prove their claims and no right on the part of the worker to refute them.

Reasons for not making a request

In 2012 the majority of respondents - 79.4 per cent - have not made a request for flexibility. Of these non-requesters, the majority (70.5 per cent) are content with their current work arrangements. This is higher than in 2009 when only 58.3 per cent of employees were content with current arrangements. This change is quite sizeable and holds for both women and men. It may reflect workers' perceptions of weaker economic conditions that mean they do not want to risk altering their current work arrangements, and so indicate that they are content with them.

A further 15.0 per cent report that flexibility is not possible or available in their job (i.e. the employer would not allow flexibility or that flexibility is not possible/suitable in the job) (Table 23). The proportion of men and women who believe that flexibility is simply not possible in their jobs has increased since 2009 although the difference is not statistically significant.

Table 23 Reasons request not made, by gender, 2009 and 2012 (per cent)

	2009			2012		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Content with arrangements	56.1	61.8	58.5	70.1	71.0	70.5
Flexibility not possible ^a	12.7	11.4	12.1	14.8	15.2	15.0

Note. Proportion of respondents who did not make a request to change work arrangements. Multiple responses possible on this question (i.e. respondents could choose more than one reason). ^aFlexibility not possible' collated from response options 'not convinced employer would allow it', 'job does not allow it' and 'flexibility not possible or available'. This data reported in 2009 as two separate items 'employer not allow' and 'job not suitable'. Table excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N=1793; 2012 N= 1961.

As observed in 2009, full-time workers who have not requested flexibility are much less likely to report that they are content with their current work arrangements compared to part-timers (Table 24). Around a third of full-timers who have not made a flexibility request are also not content with their work arrangements: thus the population of 'discontent non-requesters' (Skinner & Pocock, 2011) is particularly concentrated amongst full-time workers. Identifying the reasons for this group not making requests might be usefully pursued through qualitative research.

Table 24 Reasons request not made by gender and work hours, 2012

	Men		Women		All	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Content with arrangements	67.4	83.3	64.1	78.4	66.3	79.9
Flexibility not possible ^a	17.1	**	20.4	9.7	18.2	8.1

Note. ^{*}Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. ^{**}Data not provided due to small sample size. Proportion of respondents who did not make a request to change work arrangements. Multiple responses possible on this question (i.e. respondents could choose more than one reason). ^aFlexibility not possible' collated from response options 'not convinced employer would allow it', 'job does not allow it' and 'flexibility not possible or available'. Table excludes self-employed persons. N=1782.

Of the total sample of 2012 survey respondents, 23.4 per cent are not content with their current work arrangements but have not made a request for a change. More men (24.8 per cent) than women (21.9 per cent) are in this category of discontent non-requesters (Table 25).

Compared to 2009, there has been a fall in the proportion of these discontent non-requesters from 32.2 per cent to 23.4 per cent. This fall is evident for both men and women, but only reached statistical significance for men.

Table 25 Proportion requesting flexibility by gender and whether content with current arrangements (per cent)

	2009			2012		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Requested flexibility	16.3	29.1	22.4	17.3	24.2	20.6
No request – content with current arrangements	46.9	43.8	45.4	57.9	53.6	55.9
No request – not content with current arrangements	37.0	27.1	32.2	24.8	21.9	23.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note. N = 2500.

In 2012, full-timers are more likely to be discontent non-requesters (28.0 per cent) than part-timers (14.4 per cent), and this is the case for men and women (Table 26). For full-timers, men are also more likely to be contented non-requesters (57.5 per cent) than women (50.9 per cent), whereas women are more likely to have made a request. There are no significant gender differences for part-time workers.

We have commented on the significant fall in requesting between 2009 and 2012 amongst full-time women. These women are more likely to be ‘contented non-requesters’ in 2012 (50.9 per cent) than 2009 (42.0 per cent), with no significant differences in discontented non-requesters. Similarly, part-time women in 2012 are more likely to be contented non-requesters than in 2009, with no difference in discontented non-requesters. Full-time men in 2012 are more likely to be contented non-requesters (57.5 per cent) than in 2009 (46.6 per cent), and are less likely to be discontented non-requesters (39.7 per cent in 2009; 27.8 per cent in 2012). Similar patterns are evident for part-time men, although the sample size was not sufficient to support statistical comparisons.

Table 26 Proportion requesting or not requesting flexibility by gender, work hours and whether content or not with current arrangements (per cent)

	2009			2012		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Full-time						
Requested flexibility	13.7	26.4	18.4	14.8	20.3	16.7
No request – content with current arrangements	46.6	42.0	44.9	57.5	50.9	55.1
No request – not content with current arrangements	39.7	31.6	36.8	27.8	28.5	28.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Part-time						
Requested flexibility	28.2	31.9	30.8	27.5	28.3	27.8
No request – content with current arrangements	48.4	46.1	46.8	60.4	56.2	57.5
No request – not content with current arrangements	23.3	22.0	22.4	12.1	15.5	14.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

N = 2500.

Outcome of requests and work-life interference

As Figure 28 shows, having a request fully granted is associated with the best work-life outcomes.

For women, work-life interference is lowest when requests are fully granted: poorer outcomes arise for women whether their requests are partly granted or declined. A different pattern is evident for men: work-life interference is not significantly different for men who have their requests fully or partly granted. It is only with a declined request that men's work-life interference worsens.

The only significant difference between men and women was amongst those whose requests were partly granted. Women's work-life interference was much higher than men's when requests were partially granted.

Taken together, these findings indicate that having a request refused *or* partially granted is detrimental to women's work-life outcomes, while having a request fully granted is very positive.

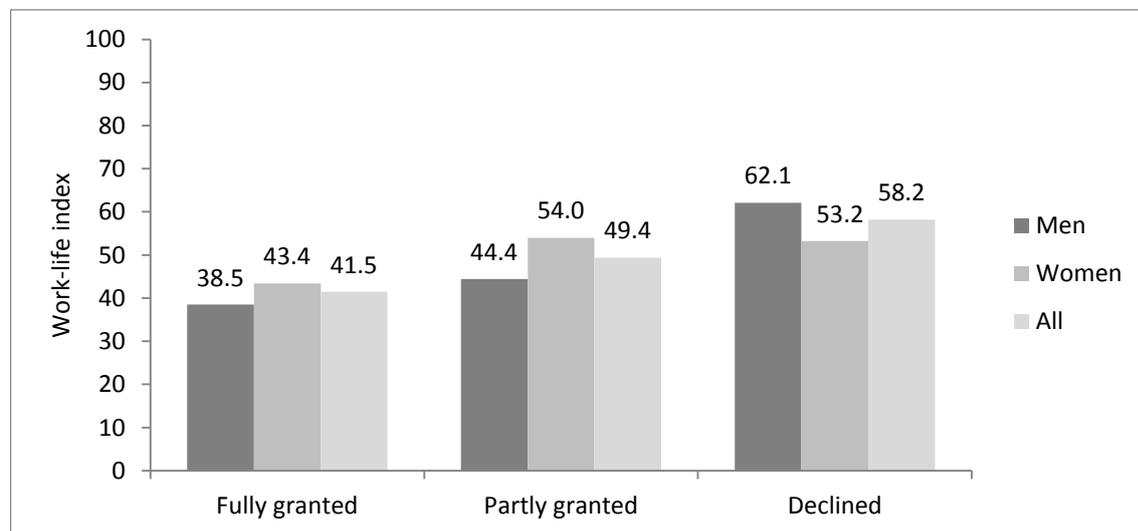


Figure 28 Work-life index scores by request outcome, 2012

Note. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 558.

Summary

- Having some say over working time is important for employees, supporting their health, wellbeing and a good work-life relationship. The introduction of a formal Right to Request (RTR) through the *Fair Work Act 2009* represents an effort to increase access to flexibility, while minimising inconvenience and cost for business;
- Our findings show that more than two years after its introduction, the majority of employees are not aware of the RTR. Particular groups of workers are less informed about the right than others. Low levels of knowledge exist amongst:
 - Parents of pre-school aged children, particularly mothers
 - Younger people – especially those aged under 25
 - Lower paid workers
 - Workers employed in the private sector, or in smaller firms;

- The rate of request-making does not appear to have increased since 2009, 26 months after the RTR came into effect:
 - A fifth of respondents made requests for flexibility, slightly less than the proportion prior to the introduction of the RTR in 2009;
 - There has been a decline in full-time women's request-making in particular between 2009 and 2012 (from 26.4 per cent to 20.3 per cent);
- Despite low rates of knowledge about the formal RTR 43.0 per cent of mothers with pre-schoolers have made a flexibility request, compared to only 19.8 per cent of fathers of pre-schoolers;
- Other groups most likely to make a request are:
 - Women
 - Part-time workers
 - Sales and community and personal service workers;
- The two most common reasons for making a request are for childcare or for study (cited by 15 per cent of requesters respectively);
- Women are more likely to request flexibility to meet childcare needs, whereas men are more likely to cite work-related reasons (e.g. to obtain more interesting or challenging work);
- The most common kinds of requests are to work part-time and to reduce hours;
- The majority of requests in 2012 (61.9 per cent) were granted, which is comparable to 2009, prior to implementation of the formal RTR;
- The majority of workers, around 80 per cent, who have not made a request said they are content with their current work arrangements, which is a higher level than in 2009;
- 15 per cent of respondents said flexibility was not possible or available in their jobs;
- Having a flexibility request granted is associated with lower work-life interference for men and women. However, for men a *partially granted* request is associated with some reduction in work-life interference whereas this is not the case for women. Only *fully granted* requests result in lower work-life interference for women.

Section 9: Working from home and work-life interference

Access to flexibility in the timing, scheduling and location of work is an important resource to support healthy work-life interactions. There is a substantial body of research literature in Australia and internationally showing that access to flexible work practices has a number of benefits for workers and employers, including increased productivity (Eaton, 2003; Konrad and Mangel, 2000; Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000), reduced absenteeism and turnover intention (Bailyn et al, 1996; Meyer and Allen, 1997), the ability to attract and retain valued employees (Branine, 2003; Rau and Hyland, 2002), reduced worker stress (Kelloway and Gottlieb, 1998) and increased job satisfaction (Hill et al., 1998; Hyman and Summers, 2004).

In this section we refer to employee-centred flexibility, that is, flexible work practices that are designed to support workers' capacity to effectively engage in paid work and activities outside work. Such activities may include providing care to others, engaging in social, family, community and personal pursuits and having the time and capacity for self-care such as rest, relaxation and exercise.

Here we analyse Australian workers' current flexible work practices, how common flexible working practices are in Australia, and what types of flexibility workers are currently using.

Flexibility can also be thought of as a safety net – something that is not needed by all workers at a particular time - but a resource that is available when personal circumstances or preferences change. Workers' confidence in flexibility being available if needed, is an indicator of whether workplace culture is supportive of workers' wellbeing and positive work-life outcomes.

This section includes a more detailed examination of one particular type of flexibility: working from home. Technological innovations have weakened the spatial and temporal boundaries around where and when workers engage in paid work. Here we examine patterns of working from home (WFH), with a particular focus on the paid and unpaid hours that Australians contribute via working from home and how this affects work-life outcomes.

What flexibilities have workers used in the past 12 months?

We start by examining the types of flexible work practices that respondents have used over the past year, excluding working from home, which we address in greater depth below.

The most common form of flexibility in use is part-time work: nearly 60 per cent of female AWALI respondents and around one quarter of male respondents worked part-time in the preceding 12 months (Table 27). Interestingly, of those who were working full-time when surveyed, 17.2 per cent (13.6 per cent of men and 23.7 per cent of women) had worked part-time at some point in the past 12 months. Moving between part-time and full-time work involves a substantial change in work arrangements.

Changes to working time on a lesser scale are also common. These include reducing hours for a limited period, working only school term times or working a compressed working week. Around a quarter of workers had used these types of time flexibilities in the preceding 12 months. Flexi-time, where there is flexibility in the scheduling of work around a set of core hours, is also common, with 26 per cent of workers using flexi-time in the preceding year.

There are some gender differences in the types of flexibilities used. Women are more likely to work part-time than men. They are also more likely to work school term time only and to job share. Men are more likely to work a compressed working week.

Some flexible work practices are more likely to be used by parents compared to those without children, and this pattern is most evident for women. Mothers more commonly use flexible work arrangements such as working part-time, working school term time only and job sharing. Flexi-

time and working from home are also more common for fathers and mothers than those without children.

Table 27 Types of flexible work arrangements used in the 12 months to March 2012 by gender (per cent)

	Men	Women	All
Worked part-time	27.6	57.9	42.0
Worked flexi-time	26.9	25.0	26.0
Reduced hours for limited period	22.1	23.2	22.6
Work school term-time only	15.6	23.9	19.6
Compressed working week	19.6	15.0	17.4
Annualised hours	14.2	14.3	14.2
Job share	6.6	14.4	10.3
Other arrangement	1.5*	2.0	1.7

Note: *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2492.

Part-time work is very common for mothers, with the majority reporting that they have worked part-time over the past 12 months (68.4 per cent; compared to 48.9 per cent of women without children). In contrast, part-time work is more common for men without children (32.0 per cent) than fathers (22.1 per cent).

Working school terms is also relatively common for mothers: nearly 29.3 per cent have used this type of flexibility within the past 12 months, compared to 19.5 per cent for women without children. This type of flexibility is only used by around 15 per cent of men (Table 27).

Another common work practice for parents is flexi-time (29.5 per cent of fathers; 28.0 per cent of mothers), which is less commonly used by workers without children (24.6 per cent of these men; 22.5 per cent of these women).

A smaller proportion of mothers engage in job sharing (16.5 per cent; 12.3 per cent of women without children). These arrangements are rare for men, regardless of their parenting responsibilities.

Flexible work arrangements and work-life interference

When we compare the work-life index scores of employees who have used these flexible work arrangements in the past 12 months with those who have not, only three flexibilities were associated with work-life interference. As Table 28 shows, men and women who had worked part-time, job shared or worked reduced hours for a limited period, had lower work-life interference than those who had not used these flexible work arrangements. None of the other flexible work arrangements listed in Table 27 were associated with differences in work-life outcomes.

Table 28 Work-life index scores by flexible work arrangements used in the past 12 months and gender

	Men		Women		All	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Part-time (in past 12 months)	39.0	44.3	39.3	48.5	39.2	45.7
Job share	37.5	43.2	38.7	43.9	38.3	43.5
Reduced hours limited time	40.2	43.6	41.4	43.7	40.8	43.6

Note: higher work-life scores imply worse work-life interference. N = 2613.

Working from home

Working some of the time from home (or another location) is becoming more common for many workers. Professional, service and technical jobs are increasing as a share of employment,

with fewer Australians employed in manual and blue collar jobs that are more likely to be bound to a workplace (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Use of technologies such as smart phones and home computers is increasing, supported by improvements to technological infrastructure such as faster internet services.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2008, 13 per cent of Australians worked at least some hours at home and the most common reason to work from home was to catch up on work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). These findings demonstrate the potential for working from home to be a ‘double-edged sword’: a practice that can enable workers to do their job more flexibly, but perhaps – where the job is too big to be completed in formal working hours – to expand work into unpaid time away from the workplace.

The benefits of working some hours from home can include reduced commuting time, a change of working environment and greater ease in integrating work and non-work activities. On the other hand, having the capacity to work from home can blur the boundaries between work and non-work time in a way that contributes to longer hours and allows work to expand into personal, family and social time. This is especially a risk where there are no formal controls on working hours and where jobs are demanding and ‘greedy’ (Coser, 1974), poorly designed and too big to fit within nominal working hours.

In AWALI 2012 we asked a series of questions about why Australians work from home, with a particular focus on distinguishing between hours worked at home that are paid and unpaid. We also distinguish between working from home on a regular basis, and the practice of taking work home when needed, which is more irregular or unscheduled.

As Table 29 shows, working from home *on a regular basis* was not common for Australian workers in the twelve months prior to the survey: only 16 per cent report doing so, with little difference by gender, parenting status or work hours.

In contrast, *taking work home* on occasion was a common behaviour in the preceding year, reported by around 40 per cent of workers. Parents are most likely to report taking work home, with fathers slightly more likely to do so; however this difference between mothers and fathers is not statistically significant. Women without children are more likely to take work home than their male counterparts. It is interesting to note that many part-time workers take work home: almost a third of women and just over a fifth of men.

Amongst both full-time and part-time workers, women are more likely to take work home than men. Just over half of full-time women report taking work home. Full-time men without children are less likely to take work home (34.8 per cent) compared to around 53 per cent of full-timers who are fathers, mothers or women without children.

We asked workers who either work from home regularly or take work home to estimate how many paid and unpaid hours they had worked from home in the last month. We focus on three issues:

- (1) how many paid and unpaid hours were worked at home;
- (2) why these hours were worked from home; and
- (3) how these hours affected work-life outcomes.

Table 29 Working from home over past 12 months by gender (per cent) and work hours

	Men	Women	All
Worked from home on regular basis			
All	16.1	15.9	16.0
Parenting status			
With child(ren) < 17 years	19.0	19.3	19.1
No children	13.6	13.1	13.4
Work hours			
Full-time	16.5	17.0	16.7
Part-time	13.6	14.9	14.5
Taken work home			
All	39.7	42.6	41.1
Parenting status			
With child(ren) < 17 years	48.9	44.5	46.8
No children	31.9	40.9	36.2
Work hours			
Full-time	44.2	53.4	47.5
Part-time	21.5	32.2	28.9

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2492.

Who works paid and unpaid hours from home?

Those workers who work from home either on a regular basis and/or take work home (44.2 per cent of workers) report working around 22.3 hours per month – or about three days - from home (12.7 paid hours, 11.8 unpaid hours). In other words about half the hours that workers work at home, are unpaid and they amount to about a day and a half a month or 17 days a year.

There is very little variation in these hours between men and women or workers with or without children. Surprisingly, there is also a relatively small difference in paid hours worked from home between full-time and part-time workers. Full-time workers work more unpaid hours at home per month (12.9 hours, 8.5 hours for part-timers), and women work more unpaid hours at home (15.2) than men (11.5) when working full-time.

There are some differences across occupational and industry categories; however these are not statistically significant most likely due to small sample sizes for some groups. Therefore we focus on the groups who report working longer hours from home than the average for the workforce in general. (Detailed data is provided in the Web Appendix Table A12).

The longest paid work hours from home are reported by managers (17.8 hours per month) and technicians and trades workers (15.5 hours), and those in the industries of rental/hiring and real-estate (41.2 hours), agriculture/forestry and fishing (32.7 hours), professional, scientific and technical services (23.6 hours), construction (18.5 hours) and electricity/gas/water and waste services (16.8 hours). Employees in small firms (less than 19 persons) work the longest paid hours from home (18.1 hours), followed by workers in large firms (100+ employees: 11.2 hours), with workers in medium-sized firms (20-99 workers) working 9.0 hours per month from home. Working paid hours from home is also more common for workers in the private sector (13.9 hours) than the public sector (7.5 hours).

The longest unpaid hours worked from home are reported by professionals (15.3 hours), and those working in the industries of education and training (21.4 hours), wholesale trade (19.2 hours) and agriculture/forestry and fishing (16.3 hours). Although workers in medium sized

firms do not work as many paid hours from home, they work longer unpaid hours (14.7 hours) compared to their counterparts in the smallest and largest firms (10.4 and 10.8 respectively). In contrast to paid hours, workers in the public sector work longer unpaid hours from home (15.1 hours) than those in the private sector (10.4 hours).

Why work from home?

Employees report a range of reasons for working from home, and these differ for paid and unpaid hours. As Figure 29 shows, paid work hours at home are often used to facilitate better work outcomes (productivity, quiet work environment) or – less frequently - to meet personal needs (for flexibility, childcare/family). A third of those who work from home, report that they work paid hours from home to reduce travel time.

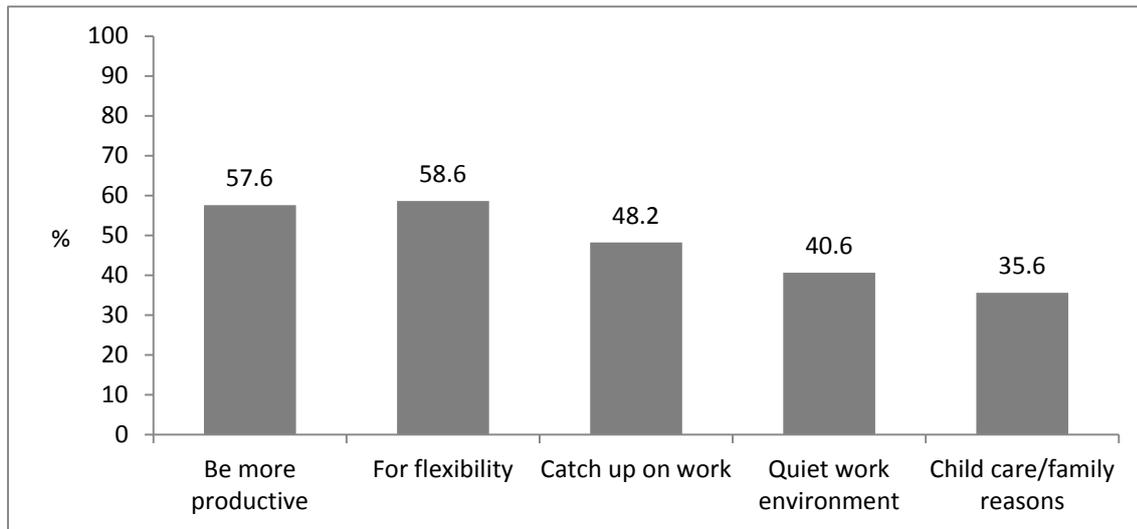


Figure 29 Top five reasons for working paid hours at home (per cent)

Note. Multiple responses possible on this question. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 382.

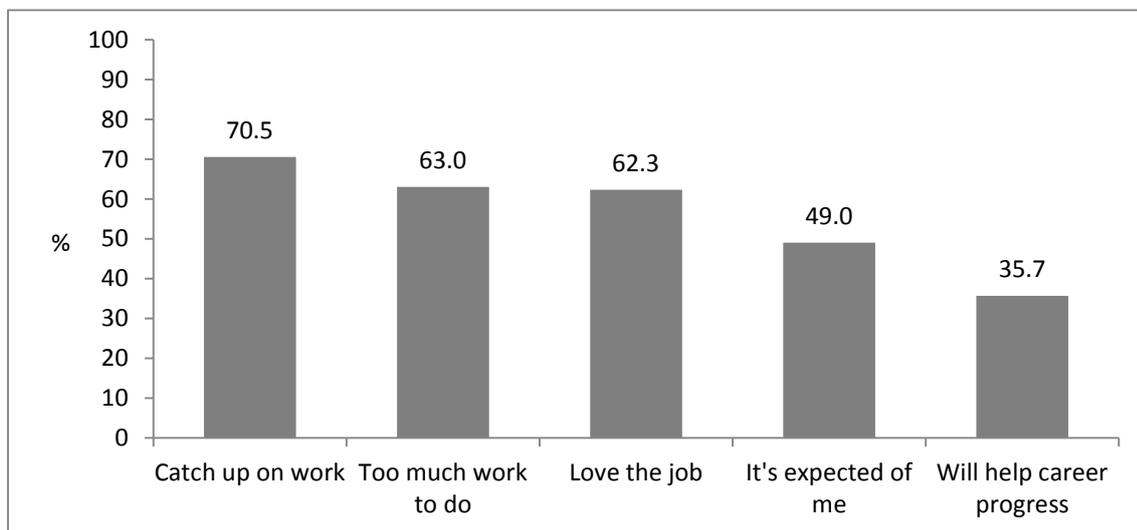


Figure 30 Top five reasons for working unpaid hours at home (per cent)

Note. Multiple responses possible on this question. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 689.

Nearly half of those who work from home use paid hours to ‘catch up’ on work. This increases to 70 per cent of those who work unpaid hours from home (Figure 30). Indeed, explicit (workload) and implicit (expectations) job demands are amongst the most common reasons why employees work unpaid hours at home: they are driven by demands that they cannot meet in normal working hours. This finding raises important questions about job design, staffing levels

and workload allocations amongst those employees – more than 40 per cent – who do unpaid hours at home. Catching up on work is the most common reason for working unpaid hours at home, followed by having too much to do. There are also positive inducements: just over 60 per cent of workers say they are motivated to work unpaid hours because they enjoy their job, and just over a third believe that additional unpaid hours will assist their career development.

There are very few gender differences in the reasons for working paid or unpaid hours from home. Men are more likely to perceive that working unpaid hours will help their career (40.3 per cent; 30.9 per cent of women) and to work unpaid hours to respond to an emergency or crisis (26.1 per cent; 17.2 per cent of women). Women are more likely to report working unpaid hours because of workplace culture (35.0 per cent; 27.8 per cent of men). (See Web Appendix Tables A13 and A14 provide further detail).

Work-life outcomes associated with working from home

These findings suggest that the practice of working from home is motivated by a range of factors, but most common amongst them is work overload. Such practices can be regularly scheduled or on an ‘as required’ basis, and can involve paid or unpaid hours, or both. However, unpaid hours are most commonly worked to meet excessive work demands and these are also stimulated by enjoyment of the job for many workers.

Turning now to work-life outcomes, there is further evidence that working from home, as currently practiced, is predominately a response to high work demands and pressures. As Figure 31 shows, taking work home is consistently associated with worse work-life interference. This effect is the same for men and women. Full-time workers who take work home experience worse work-life interference. For those who work longer hours - whether full-timers, fathers, or women without children - working from home on a regular basis is associated with worse work-life outcomes (detailed data is provided in Web Appendix Tables A15 and A16). However, there is no measurable difference in work-life outcomes amongst part-timers whether they take work home or not, perhaps reflecting their lower work-life interference overall which may protect them from an ‘overload’ arising from extra work at home.

	Men		Women	
	Children	No children	Children	No children
Work from home regularly	↑	-	-	↑
Taken work home	↑	↑	↑	↑
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Work from home regularly	↑	-	↑	-
Taken work home	↑	-	↑	-

Figure 31 Overview of associations between regular working from home and taking work home and work-life interference, gender and work hours

Note. ↓ = statistically significant decrease in work-life interference; ↑ = statistically significant increase in work-life interference; - = no effect on work-life interference. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2492.

Working from home regularly (as a flexible work arrangement) has a neutral effect on work-life outcomes: these employees report equivalent work-life interference to workers who do not work from home at all (index score of 39.9 and 38.7, respectively). In contrast, those who take work home, whether combined with regular working from home or as their only home-working practice, have significantly higher work-life interference (index scores 48.8 for both groups).

A similar picture is evident when considering work-life outcomes associated with working paid and unpaid hours from home (Figure 32). The worst work-life outcomes occur for those

working *both* paid and unpaid hours at home. Interestingly, just working paid hours at home is associated with significantly less work-life interference than doing both paid and unpaid hours at home. This may reflect the possibility that such work is scheduled at home with an overall eye to total workload and a clear understanding by workers and their managers that this work is part of ‘normal’ hours, rather than extra, informal catching up or as the means to cope with overload.

These patterns are consistent for men and women with or without children, and for part-time and full-time workers with one exception. For part-timers there is no difference in work-life outcomes between paid hours only and no hours at home, whereas full-timers’ work-life interference is best when no hours are worked from home. Once again, it seems that part-timers have some protection arising from their fewer hours and lower overall work-life interference, and this is consistent whether they do some work from home or not.

Whilst working from home offers the potential to support and improve workers’ capacity to reduce time pressures (e.g. from commuting) and improve the fit between work and non-work activities, this potential is not being realised for the majority at present. In fact the reverse is true: working from home, especially unpaid hours, is associated with worse – not better – work-life outcomes. There is clearly much more progress to be made to ensure that the practice of working from home enables better work-life outcomes, rather than encouraging longer working hours and responding to the demands of ‘greedy’ jobs and workplaces.

Providing workers with stronger protections against unpaid working hours through regulation is an appropriate policy to consider. The regulation and management of work needs to evolve in response to changing work practices and the shift to more professional and service sector jobs that are unbounded in the places and hours of work. In addition, workplace cultures and practices that are supportive of good work-life integration, respectful of the boundaries between work and non-work domains and have reasonable work demands, are also necessary to ensure flexibilities such as working from home are used to support - rather than erode – good work-life outcomes.

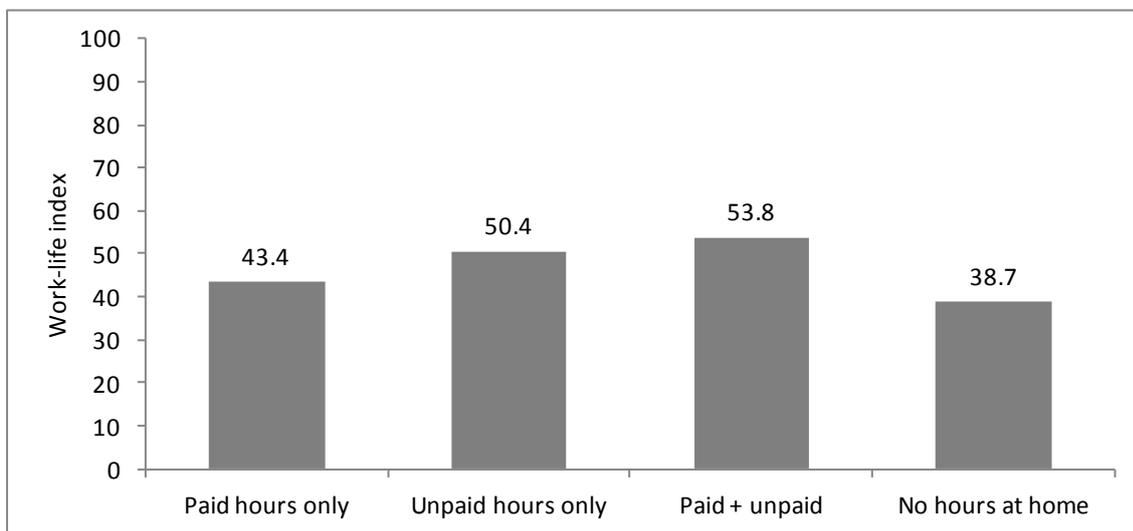


Figure 32 Work-life index scores by paid and unpaid hours worked from home

Note. N = 2488

Availability of flexibility if needed

So far we have focused on the use of flexible work arrangements. In reality, not everybody needs or desires flexibility all of the time. Personal and work circumstances, needs and preferences vary between individuals, and across time as we move through different life stages and circumstances.

There are also occasions when a change to work arrangements is needed for a limited time, for example to care for a sick relative or to pursue study.

In the AWALI 2012 survey we asked respondents whether they could access flexible work arrangements if they needed them. The majority - over 70 per cent - believed that they could. This was consistent for men and women, regardless of work hours, parenting status, employment contract, firm size, occupation, industry and employment sector.

It seems that access to flexibility *if needed* is an important resource for a healthy work-life relationship as those workers who are confident they can access flexibility if needed, have significantly lower work-life interference (index score = 40.8) than those who are not confident of this (51.0).

Summary

- Access to flexible work arrangements, i.e. being able to change the hours, location and scheduling of work, is important to supporting a healthy work-life relationship;
- Flexible work practices are relatively common in Australia. In the 12 months up to March 2012:
 - 60 per cent of women and 28 per cent of men worked part-time for some period
 - A quarter of workers reduced their work hours or changed work scheduling (for example, worked a compressed working week or school term times only)
 - And a quarter used flexi-time to vary their start and finish times;
- Three flexible work practices are associated with lower work-life interference: part-time hours, working reduced hours and job sharing. A range of other flexible work practices are not associated with significantly different work-life outcomes;
- Even if flexibility is not used or needed by workers at a particular time, knowing that this resource is available if needed is associated with lower work-life interference. This may reflect workplace cultures and resources to support workers' needs and preferences;
- This section has focused on working from home, a flexible work practice likely to increase over time with changes in technology and the nature of work (i.e. the rise of professional, service and technical jobs). Whilst only 16 per cent of Australians work from home on a regular basis, around 40 per cent take work home when needed or required. Those most likely to take work home are fathers and mothers, and full-time workers;
- Many workers are donating their unpaid time working at home to their workplaces and organisations. On average, those who work from home work about 22 hours per month there, with similar amounts of paid and unpaid hours reported;
- The longest *paid* hours from home are worked by managers and technicians/trades workers and workers in the industries of rental/hiring/real estate, agriculture/forestry/fishing, professional/scientific services, construction and electricity/water/waste services;
- The longest *unpaid* hours are worked by professionals and workers in the education/training, wholesale trade and agriculture/forestry/fishing industries;
- Whilst workers report mixed motives for working paid and unpaid hours at home, paid

hours are more likely to be worked to obtain better work outcomes or meet personal needs/preferences. Unpaid hours are more likely to be worked to meet excessive job demands or workloads. While job enjoyment also drives working from home, the greatest motivations arise from the simple fact of having too much to do. Unwillingly worked unpaid working hours constitute a form of labour theft. This raises some important challenges for management of workers, the design of jobs and appropriate staffing levels. These need to ensure that workers do not work very long hours or unwillingly work to catch up on things that cannot be done in formal, contracted working time;

- It is not surprising that working unpaid hours from home is associated with worse work-life outcomes (compared to working only paid hours or no hours from home). Taking work home is also consistently associated with worse work-life interference, especially for full-timers;
- Whilst work from home can reduce worker's time pressures and improve the fit before work and non-work activities, this is not the case for the majority of those who take work home at present. Both stronger protections and supportive workplace cultures are needed to support good work-life integration when workers work from home.

Section 10: Paid parental leave

Opportunity for time away from paid work at the time of birth and while caring for infants has been recognised for over a century as a primary need of workers (International Labour Organization, 1998). This is especially true for women, as they carry, give birth to and usually have primary care of babies. It is also increasingly seen as an important issue for fathers. Paid parental leave has been demonstrated as positive for babies, for mothers and fathers, as well as for workforce participation and labour market attachment (Productivity Commission, 2009).

Access to paid parental leave contributes to diverse aspirations and outcomes. In an era in which Australian governments, like many others, are focused on increasing employment participation, providing effective supports for women and men to combine work and care is essential. This is particularly the case with regard to women, who are most likely to transition in and out of paid employment, particularly when caring for babies, very young children and other dependents.

Maintaining both employment participation and rates of fertility are twin policy objectives for many countries including Australia. Whilst the factors that impact on reproductive decisions are multi-faceted and complex, there is evidence to suggest that economic incentives and supports around the birth and ongoing care of children have a positive impact on fertility, although there is substantial variation depending on the characteristics of particular policies and schemes (Thévenon & Gauthier, 2011). Providing economic resources to help men and women to combine work and care also contributes to gender equity, as it supports women's capacity to maintain their employment participation and career development (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). Good parental policies also improve the health and wellbeing of infants and young children.

The Australian Government introduced a national system of Paid Parental Leave (PPL) to parents of children born or adopted after 1 January 2011. The scheme provides 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the minimum wage for the primary carer. Most employees, contractors and the self-employed who meet tests for labour market attachment prior to birth are eligible for PPL. In its description of the aims of the scheme the Australian Government recognises that PPL contributes to a range of valuable outcomes such as child and maternal health, supports women's labour force participation and contributes to broader social goals of gender equity and work-life balance (Australian Government, 2009).

In the AWALI 2012 survey we asked respondents who were eligible to take parental leave about their use of this leave. We asked them to estimate the number of weeks of paid leave (including government and employer-provided leave) and unpaid leave they had taken. Here we describe the patterns of paid and unpaid leave, and examine how the use of parental leave is associated with work-life outcomes.

Although men and women are eligible for PPL, it is women who tend to be the primary carers of children, especially infants. In AWALI 2012, of the 341 respondents with a child 0-4 years old, 40 women and 15 men had used the Government's new PPL scheme. Considering all forms of paid parental leave (employer and government provided), 52 women and 40 men had used some type of paid parental leave. While 41 women and 28 men had taken some unpaid parental leave.

Given the small number of AWALI respondents who had used parental leave, the following findings regarding uptake of paid parental leave should be interpreted with caution.

Awareness of Paid Parental Leave

What is the level of awareness of this important new entitlement in the general Australian workforce? As Table 30 shows, most employed Australians (76.6 per cent) are aware of the Australian Government's PPL scheme. This contrasts with the level of knowledge about the right to request flexibility – which most employees did not know about. Those more likely to be aware of the PPL scheme are women (regardless of their parenting status), workers aged 25 or older and those with pre-school children.

Table 30 Aware of Australian Government's Paid Parental Leave scheme, AWALI 2012 (per cent)

	Aware	Not aware
All	76.6	23.4
Men	73.8	26.2
Women	80.0	20.0
Age		
18 – 24 years	58.7	41.3
25 – 34 years	75.6	24.4
35-44 years	80.3	19.7
45 – 54 years	81.1	18.9
55 - 64 years	81.9	18.1
65+ years	83.9	16.1*
Children under 18 years	77.5	22.5
Men	74.7	25.3
Women	80.9	19.1
Pre-school children (< 5 years)	86.2	13.8
Men	82.8	17.2
Women	91.2	8.8*
No children under 18 years	75.8	24.2
Men	73.0	27.0
Women	79.1	20.9

Note: *Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Table includes all employed persons, self-employed and employees. N = 2876.

As Table 31 shows that women who took parental leave averaged 18 weeks' paid leave and around the same amount of unpaid leave. Men took substantially less leave – around 3 weeks of paid leave and 3 weeks of unpaid leave on average.

Table 31 Number of weeks of paid and unpaid parental leave

	Men	Women	All
Paid parental leave	3.3	18.1	11.7
Unpaid parental leave	3.6	17.6	11.5
Total (paid + unpaid)	3.8	24.3	14.2

N=159.

How does length of parental leave affect work-life outcomes?

How does the length of parental leave relate to work-life outcomes? There is a clear association between more weeks of paid or unpaid leave and lower work-life interference. The strength of the association is slightly stronger for paid leave ($r = -.27$) than unpaid leave ($r = -.25$).

The association between longer weeks of paid parental leave and reduced work-life interference is only evident for women ($r = -.25$). This is not surprising given the small number of men taking leave in the sample, and the short periods of leave that most take.

Summary

- A higher level of awareness of the provision was evident amongst employed Australians (76.6 per cent) compared to awareness of the RTR (30.2 per cent);
- While women on average took 18 weeks' paid leave and 18 weeks' unpaid leave, men on average took only 3 weeks of each;
- Taking paid and unpaid leave is associated with lower work-life interference; this association is stronger for paid leave than unpaid leave.

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