

*The Australian Work and Life Index 2009*

# **Work, Life** — | a n d | — **Workplace Flexibility**

# AWALI

**Barbara Pocock  
Natalie Skinner  
and Reina Ichii**



**University of South Australia**  
[unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl](http://unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl)



# Work, Life — | a n d | — Workplace Flexibility

*The Australian Work and Life Index 2009*

AWALI

**Barbara Pocock  
Natalie Skinner  
and Reina Ichii**

**CENTRE FOR WORK + LIFE**

University of South Australia  
[unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl](http://unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl)

INDUSTRY PARTNERS:



Government of South Australia  
SafeWork SA



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Health

 NCVER



© July 2009

Published by the Centre for Work + Life  
University of South Australia  
<http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/default.asp>

STREET ADDRESS

St Bernards Road  
Magill SA 5072  
Adelaide

POSTAL ADDRESS

GPO Box 2471  
Adelaide, SA 5001 Australia

**Authors: Barbara Pocock, Natalie Skinner and Reina Ichii**

**Title: Work, Life and Workplace Flexibility: The Australian Work and Life Index 2009**

**ISBN 978-0-9803799-2-1**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AWALI 2009 was funded through an Australian Research Council Linkage grant in partnership with the South Australian (through Safework SA) and Western Australian Governments (through the State Department of Health). In 2009 the sample size for AWALI was doubled and the survey expanded to include an education and training component with the support of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. We acknowledge the generous support and practical assistance of these bodies.

**We thank Professor David Peetz, Dr Brigid van Wanrooy and Dr Damian Oliver for their comments on an earlier draft. Of course, responsibility for the final text rests with the authors.**

# Contents

---

<b>Tables</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Figures</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
AWALI 2009.....	9
Theorising about work-life interference.....	10
What AWALI measures.....	11
The AWALI 2009 sample and methodology.....	13
Statistical conventions in this report.....	13
The work-life index .....	14
What we know from previous AWALI surveys.....	14
Structure of this report.....	14
<b>Section 2: The AWALI 2009 sample</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Section 3: Work-life interference: a gendered analysis of AWALI 2009</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Work-life interference in 2009: analysis of individual work-life index items.....	18
Work interferes with activities outside work.....	19
Time with family and friends .....	20
Community engagement.....	21
Time pressure.....	23
Satisfaction with work-life balance.....	24
The work-life index .....	25
Australians' work-life interference in 2007, 2008 and 2009.....	25
Summary .....	27
<b>Section 4: Working hours and the fit between actual and preferred hours</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Employees' work hours .....	28
Gender and working hours .....	28
The relationship between actual and preferred work hours .....	29
The gap between actual and preferred hours.....	30
Household type and work hours 'fit' .....	32
Full-time workers' preference to shift to part-time hours.....	33
Personal income and hours 'fit' .....	34
Work-life interference and hours 'fit'.....	34
Summary .....	35
<b>Section 5: International comparisons</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Comparing Australia and Europe.....	36
Australia in comparison with 31 European countries .....	37
Occupation and industry .....	38
Summary .....	40
<b>Section 6: Personal and household characteristics, location and work-life interference</b> .....	<b>41</b>
Age.....	41
Parenting responsibilities and work-life interference.....	41
Household type and work-life interference.....	43
Income .....	44
Location .....	46
Rural/regional and urban workers' work-life interference.....	46
Summary .....	47
<b>Section 7: Employment characteristics and work-life interference</b> .....	<b>48</b>
Self-employment.....	48
Occupation .....	49
Industry.....	49
Type of employment contract.....	50
Summary .....	51

<b>Section 8: Flexible work arrangements .....</b>	<b>52</b>
Employee requests for flexibility .....	52
Requesting flexibility: baseline data .....	53
The incidence of requests for flexibility: gender matters .....	54
Comparing Australia and the UK.....	55
Requests and casual/permanent employment .....	55
Requests and hours of work.....	56
Requests by occupation .....	56
Requests by industry.....	56
Requests by income.....	58
Reasons for requesting changing work arrangements .....	58
Type of work arrangement requested .....	61
Outcome of request: granted or declined.....	62
Reasons for not making a request .....	64
Flexibility and work-life interference .....	66
Summary .....	67
<b>Section 9: Education and training.....</b>	<b>69</b>
Work-life interference and level of education.....	69
Work-life barriers to participation in vocational education and training .....	70
Summary .....	71
<b>References.....</b>	<b>73</b>

## Tables

Table 1 Overview of the (weighted) AWALI 2009 sample (per cent).....	16
Table 2 Household structure, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	17
Table 3 Work–life interference by gender, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	19
Table 4 Actual and preferred work hours by gender, AWALI 2009.....	30
Table 5 Actual and preferred work hours by household type and gender, AWALI 2009 .....	32
Table 6 Work fits in with family and social commitments well or very well by gender, employment type and age, AWALI 2009 & 4 <sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey (per cent).....	36
Table 7 Work fits in with family and social commitments well or very well by parental status, AWALI 2009 & 4 <sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey (per cent).....	37
Table 8 Work fits in well/very well with family and social commitments by occupation and industry, AWALI 2009 and 4 <sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey 2005 (per cent).....	39
Table 9 Work hours and work-life index scores of employees and self-employed workers by gender, AWALI 2009 .....	42
Table 10 Work-life index scores by personal and household income, AWALI 2009.....	45
Table 11 Work-life index scores by geographic location, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	46
Table 12 Work-life index scores of rural/regional and urban employees by gender, AWALI 2009.....	47
Table 13 Work hours and work-life index scores of employees and self-employed workers by gender, AWALI 2009 .....	49
Table 14 Work-life index scores adjusted and unadjusted for work hours by industry, AWALI 2009 .....	50
Table 15 Requests to change work arrangements by gender, age and parenting, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent).....	54
Table 16 Requests to change work arrangements by employment type, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	55
Table 17 Requests to change work arrangements by employment type, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	56
Table 18 Requests to change work arrangements by occupation, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent) .....	57
Table 19 Requests to change work arrangements by industry, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	57
Table 20 Requests to change work arrangements by personal income, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	58
Table 21 Reasons to change work arrangements by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent) .....	59
Table 22 Reasons to change work arrangements by parenting responsibilities, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI flexible working employee survey 2003/2004 (per cent) .....	60
Table 23 Reasons to change work arrangement by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009.....	60
Table 24 Reasons to change work arrangements by personal income, AWALI 2009.....	61
Table 25 Type of change requested by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent) .....	62
Table 26 Reasons request not made by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent) .....	65
Table 27 Reasons request not made by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009 .....	66
Table 28 Barriers and supports to participation in vocational education and training reported by employees not in education or training and unlikely to participate in the next 12 months, by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009 .....	71

## Figures

Figure 1 Participation rate, by gender, February 1978 to May 2009 .....	8
Figure 2 Unemployment rate, Persons, Seasonally Adjusted 2006-2009.....	9
Figure 3 A model of the main factors shaping work-life interference, and their components .....	10
Figure 4 Work interferes with activities outside work reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	20
Figure 5 Work interferes with activities outside work reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	20
Figure 6 Work restricts time with family/friends reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009.....	21
Figure 7 Work restricts time with family/friends reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009.....	21
Figure 8 Work interferes with community connections reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	22
Figure 9 Work interferes with community connections reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	22
Figure 10 Feeling rushed or pressed for time reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	23
Figure 11 Feeling rushed or pressed for time reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	24
Figure 12 Somewhat/very satisfied with work-life balance reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2007 & 2009.....	24
Figure 13 Somewhat/very satisfied with work-life balance reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	25
Figure 14 Work-life index scores (unadjusted and adjusted for work hours) for all employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009 .....	26
Figure 15 Work-life index scores for full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009.....	26
Figure 16 Work-life index scores for part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009.....	27
Figure 17 Short and long work hours by gender, AWALI 2009 .....	28
Figure 18 Work-life index scores by short and long work hours and gender, AWALI 2009.....	29
Figure 19 Work hours fit with preferences by gender, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	31
Figure 20 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	31
Figure 21 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and family structure, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	33
Figure 22 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and personal income, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	34
Figure 23 Work-life index scores by work hours fit, AWALI 2009.....	35
Figure 24 Work fits in well/very well with family and social commitments, AWALI 2009 and 4 <sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey 2005 (per cent).....	38
Figure 25 Work-life index scores by age and gender, AWALI 2009.....	41
Figure 26 Work hours by household structure and gender, AWALI 2009.....	43
Figure 27 Work-life index scores by household structure and gender, AWALI 2009.....	44
Figure 28 Work-life index scores by personal income.....	45
Figure 29 Work-life index scores by occupation, AWALI 2009 .....	49
Figure 30 Top five reasons for requesting a change to work arrangements, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	58
Figure 31 Top five work arrangements requested, AWALI 2009.....	61
Figure 32 Request outcomes by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent) .....	63
Figure 33 Request outcomes by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009 (per cent).....	63
Figure 34 Request outcomes by personal income, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	64
Figure 35 Request outcome by employment type, AWALI 2009 (per cent) .....	64
Figure 36 Top five reasons why request not made to change work arrangements, AWALI 2009.....	65
Figure 37 Work-life index scores by request to change work arrangements and gender, AWALI 2009.....	66
Figure 38 Work-life index scores by request outcome, AWALI 2009.....	67
Figure 39 Work-life index scores by education and gender, AWALI 2009 .....	69

## Executive summary

---

This report summarises findings from the third Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI) survey of work-life interference in Australia. It builds on the findings of the 2007 and 2008 surveys.

The 2009 survey includes 2691 workers (2307 employees and 384 self-employed), providing a robust, national, stratified random sample of the Australian workforce. The survey provides good representation by gender, state, age, part-time/full-time work hours, and employee/self-employed work arrangements. However, it somewhat over-represents those with university degrees and professional workers and somewhat under-represents casual workers.

Each AWALI survey takes a particular focus: in 2007 it was on working time, in 2008 workplace culture and in 2009 we focus on requests for flexibility and their outcomes, undertake some international comparisons and consider how work-life pressures affect participation in education and training.

### *The 2009 context*

AWALI survey data was collected in March 2009 against the background of the global economic crisis of 2008/09 and a significant economic downturn in Australia, and a year and a half after the election of the Rudd Labor Government.

AWALI 2009 provides base line data on a particular aspect of the Government's new industrial relations law, the *Fair Work Act 2009*: that is, the extent and outcomes of employee requests for flexibility in their work arrangements.

### *The AWALI work-life index*

The summary index of work-life interference, AWALI, averages responses on five items assessing different aspects of work-life interference. The minimum score on the index is 0 (indicating the best possible work-life interference) and the maximum score is 100 (the worst possible work-life interference).

### *Overall work-life interference*

Compared to 2008, employees' average working hours fell a little in 2009: from 38.2 to 37.1 hours, perhaps reflecting the economic slowdown. As we know from previous AWALI surveys, shorter working hours are associated with better work-life interference.

However, there has been little change in the overall work-life situation of Australian workers between 2007 and 2009. Remembering that higher scores represent worse work-life interference, the overall score has shown little change from 42.2 in 2007 to 42.6 in 2008 and 43.3 in 2009. There is no statistically significant difference in the index scores between any of the data collection years. However, as discussed below, when men and women are considered separately, there is evidence of a worsening of work-life interference for women.

Three years of data about work-life interference in Australia tell us that many employees experience frequent interference from work in their personal, home and community lives, many feel overloaded at work and feelings of time pressure are also common and growing.

However, work-life interference does not fall evenly across the population. While two-thirds of working Australians say they are broadly satisfied with their work-life balance, some groups such as women working full-time are especially negatively affected.

### *Gender differences*

Men's scores on the AWALI work-life index suggest that their work-life interference is worse than women's. This reflects, to a large extent, their longer hours at work. When we statistically control for differences in work hours, women's work-life situation is worse than men's.

If we control for differences in working hours, men's work-life interference has not changed over the past three years, while women's has worsened significantly.

Women are much more likely than men to feel rushed and pressed for time, and these feelings of time pressure appear to be becoming more common for women.

### *Women working full-time are feeling the pressure*

A quarter of full-time employees report frequent work interference with activities outside work and the incidence of this interference has grown quite significantly amongst full-time women between 2007 and 2009. Many full-time working women – 29.1 per cent – are feeling under pressure in Australia at present, with work often or almost always interfering with their activities outside work.

Time with family and friends is especially squeezed for full-time working women: a third say they often or almost always find that work restricts their time with family and friends, which has increased from a quarter in 2007. Many full-time men are similarly affected.

AWALI also continues to confirm that work affects the community engagement of many Australian workers: a fifth of full-timers say that work often or almost always interferes with community engagement.

### *Time pressures*

In 2009, more women are reporting that they are often or almost always rushed or pressed for time. Two-thirds of full-time working women say so, up from 59.4 per cent in 2007. Many part-timers share this sense of time pressure, with 58.0 per cent of part-time women saying they are often or almost always rushed or pressed for time, compared with 51.0 per cent in 2007. While many full-time working men are also affected by feelings of time pressure (51.4 per cent in 2009), part-time work protects men from time pressures more than it does women.

The overall work-life index, adjusted for differences in work hours, suggests that while men's work-life situation has changed little in the past three years (and may have improved a little), women's has deteriorated somewhat. This deterioration is evident for part-time as well as full-time women. However, it is most marked for full-time women who appear to be showing signs of significant negative change in their work-life situation, with many suffering from very persistent feelings of time pressure. The economic downturn appears to have intensified pressures on women.

### *International comparisons*

How does work-life interference in Australia compare with other places? In AWALI 2009 we ask a question that has been asked in 31 European countries about how well work fits with household and community life. Australia ranks ninth out of 32 when countries are ranked from best to worst. Just under one in five Australian workers believe that work doesn't fit well with their family and social commitments, very close to outcomes in the Netherlands, the UK, and Germany, and four percentage points below Norway, where the most positive work-life fit assessments are reported.

The Australian pattern of work-life fit by gender, parental status, industry and occupation is similar to the European pattern, with women, parents, private sector workers, managers and those working in accommodation and food services and transport, postal and warehousing perceiving the poorest work-life fit.

There are also some differences between the two regions, with more variation by age in Europe and more negative assessments of work-life fit in Europe than Australia amongst sales and service workers, plant and machinery operators and drivers, and community and personal service workers.

#### *Personal and household characteristics and work-life interference in Australia*

A number of personal and household characteristics have significant associations with work-life interference. Where longer hours are worked, work-life interference is consistently worse and this effect prevails regardless of many other factors.

Setting aside differences associated with different working hours, those in middle age, those with dependent children, single mothers, mothers living in couples and those on high and low incomes have significantly worse work-life interference than others.

While state differences are not significant, it seems that mothers in rural/regional areas are particularly at risk of poor work-life interference, especially when compared to rural/regional fathers. This risk has increased in 2009. Given the lack of research on rural/regional households and their work-life interference, these findings suggest that rural/regional mothers should be a priority for future work-life research and action.

#### *Employment characteristics and work-life interference*

When we control for the effects of differences in work hours, employees and those in non-professional and non-managerial occupations report better work-life interference than the self-employed and those in other occupations.

#### *Casual workers and the self-employed and work-life interference*

Over a quarter of Australian employees are casuals. Casual work is associated with lower work-life conflict, but this is explained by the effects of their shorter hours. Casual work is not – beyond this work hours effect – associated with better work-life interference, and neither is self-employment.

Workers may seek out casual work or self-employment as a strategy to reduce their time commitment to paid work. However, our findings suggest that they are likely to get the same work-life benefits just by working shorter hours as a permanent or fixed-term employee. Unfortunately, finding part-time work in the current Australian labour market often requires a shift to casual work – with effects on the quality of work, income, careers, retirement savings and so on. Our 2007 AWALI survey (Pocock, Skinner and Williams 2007) showed how poorer job quality is associated with worse work-life interference.

#### *Working hours and work-life interference*

Work hours are central to work-life interference. AWALI 2009 confirms findings from earlier AWALI surveys about the importance to work-life interference of the length of hours, and the fit between actual and preferred hours. Both longer hours and working more hours than preferred are associated with poorer work-life interference.

Many Australians are a long way from their preferred working hours and the 2008/09 economic downturn has not made any difference to the incidence of this mismatch. Just over half of all employees in 2008 and 2009 have a gap of at least four hours between their actual and preferred work hours. While the incidence of this gap has not changed, compared to 2008, the average size of the gap between actual and preferred hours has narrowed by an hour to 2.6 hours.

### *The fit between actual and preferred working hours*

Most people who have a poor fit of actual and preferred hours are working longer than they want, and this is associated with significantly poorer work-life interference.

Women are more negatively affected by longer hours than men, and many want to work less, whether they have children or not. Men are more likely to be involuntarily working part-time. However, many men working long hours share women's dislike of them, and they also share in the poorer work-life interference which accompanies them. A poor fit of actual and preferred hours especially affects higher income compared to lower income employees. However, even amongst lower paid workers, four in ten are not working hours that are close to their preferences. These lower paid workers are most likely to want to work more. While many parents are affected by a mismatch of their preferred and actual working hours, so are a significant proportion of those without children.

These results all point to the value of assisting employees, whether parents or not, to get a better fit between their actual and preferred hours.

### *Requesting flexibility: who asks and how many?*

Employee-centred flexibility matters to work-life interference. It matters a great deal to parents, but many workers without parenting responsibilities also seek more say over where, how and when they work.

Over the past year, prior to implementation of the new formal 'right to request' enacted through the *Fair Work Act 2009* from 1 Jan 2010, just over one in five Australian employees had made a request for a change in work arrangements for a sustained period of time (ie longer than a month).

Those making requests had significantly worse work-life interference than those who have not.

Almost twice as many women as men made such requests: 29.1 per cent compared to 16.3 per cent of men. Almost one in two mothers of preschoolers made such requests, one in three mothers of children under 16 years, and a quarter of women without children. Thus, many workers without parenting responsibilities seek flexibility, especially women.

Younger workers and those with parenting responsibilities are more likely to make flexibility requests. Casuals and permanents have similar rates of request, and feminised industries and occupations have much higher rates of request than male-dominated industries and occupations.

The incidence of request making is consistent for women regardless of their personal income. However, higher income men are less likely to make a request for flexibility than lower income men.

The rate of request making appears to be higher in Australia than in the UK. However, this may reflect differences in methods of data collection.

### *Why workers ask: what they want*

People seek flexibility for diverse reasons. Most common amongst Australian women are childcare needs, although accommodating study is an important driver for both women and men. Men are more likely to be motivated by the quest for a change of job or to find more interesting work. Childcare is a much stronger motivator for requests in the UK than in Australia, perhaps reflecting the UK's less developed childcare system.

Employees are seeking very diverse kinds of flexibility arrangements in Australia, while part-time work is more commonly sought in the UK. It is important, therefore, that in Australia the definition of the kinds of flexibility that can form the legal basis for a request remains as open as possible.

### *The outcome of requests*

Just over two-thirds of requests made in Australia (68.8 per cent) were fully granted. This is lower than in the UK where around three-quarters were fully granted. The rate of refusal is around one in ten in both countries. The remainder of requests were partially granted or still under consideration.

Women's, part-timers' and mothers' requests are more likely to be granted than men's, full-timers' or non-parents' and – reflecting these factors – those on lower incomes are more likely to have their requests agreed.

### *How much does request making matter to work-life interference?*

Having a request fully granted is significantly associated with lower work-life interference. There is no significant difference in the work-life interference between those whose requests were refused compared to those whose requests were partially granted.

This analysis suggests that the new legislated 'right to request' might not make much difference to the fifth of workers who already make such requests, two-thirds of whom get what they want. However, many others who have never made such requests might be encouraged to do so by the new legislative right, and – if the UK experience is any guide – the rate of agreement to requests may increase as the new law takes effect. If this occurs, it will have a positive impact upon the work-life interference of those who seek and get more flexibility. Finally, having a right to request, and getting requests granted, matters to more workers than just parents of preschoolers: many parents of school-aged children – especially mothers – also seek flexibility, as do many workers – especially women – who are not parents. For instance, carers of sick or frail adults would benefit significantly from flexible work arrangements.

Many parents – and most mothers – are likely to take advantage of such opportunities, and one in four women who do not have children are also likely to see benefits, to seek flexibility and – where it is granted – to benefit from its provision. This creates plenty of scope and good arguments for expansion in the right to request to a wider range of Australian workers in the future.

### *Work-life and participation in education or training*

AWALI 2009 examines the relationship between work-life interference and participation in education and training. We find a clear relationship between education and training and work-life interference. Those with higher levels of qualifications, particularly university qualifications, are more likely to have high levels of work-life interference. This is particularly the case for women. Much of this effect is most likely due to the close association between educational qualifications and occupational status, with the majority of those with a university education engaged in managerial or professional work which is associated with worse work-life interference.

### *What stands in the way of participation in education or training?*

The majority of employees who were not in education or training at the time of the survey, around 60 per cent, agree that education and training can bring benefits and that their employer would support their participation. Yet work-life issues appear to be significant barriers to their participation in education and training. This is particularly the case for women. Nearly 80 per cent of full-time women who are not in education or training say they do not have sufficient time to take on education or training, and two-thirds of their part-time counterparts agree. Nearly 60 per cent of full-time women say that education and training would not fit in with their other work and life commitments.

### *Policy implications for education and training*

Work-life fit issues prevent a significant proportion of employees from engaging in education and training and gaining the associated personal and employment benefits, even when workers agree that participation would bring such rewards and that their employer would support their participation. Time constraints are a major barrier; there is not much room in many workers' lives to add another activity or commitment. The challenge for employers and training providers is to develop realistic strategies for participation that enable workers to manage all of their work, life and family commitments.

Shifting to part-time work is not likely to be sufficient, especially for women: nearly 70 per cent of part-time women not in education or training say they don't have time to study. Options such as paid study leave or integrating education and training into paid work time would help.

These findings suggest that women face greater work-life barriers in relation to attaining higher qualifications. Work-life fit issues make their pursuit of education and training more difficult than for men. Given that human capital considerations continue to play a role in explaining the gender pay gap in Australia, reducing work-life barriers to education and training is an important policy aspiration.

### *Demands and resources: what matters to better work-life interference?*

AWALI surveys from 2007 to 2009 tell us that work-life spillover affects many Australian workers and that such spillover is much more significant than the reverse effect of life-to-work spillover. Particular personal, household and workplace circumstances create demands and deny resources to workers, resulting in high levels of work-life interference. These include - on the personal and home front - more caring responsibilities, longer commutes, being middle aged (34-55 years), and having higher levels of education. On the work front, circumstances that increase demands include:

- having an unsupportive supervisor or workplace culture
- feeling overloaded
- working longer hours
- having a poor quality job with little control
- having little flexibility about when and how one works
- having a poor fit between actual and preferred hours of work
- being insecure at work
- being a manager or professional.

Casual workers, the self-employed or those working in the public sector do not have better work-life interference than permanent workers, employees or those in the private sector when they work similar hours.

### *Working time matters*

Many aspects of working time show up in our analysis as important in driving poorer work-life interference. It is surprising how many Australian workers feel overloaded, frequently rushed or pressed for time, or do not have a reasonable fit between their preferred and actual hours of work: more than half in each case. Each of these is associated with worse work-life interference, as is working unsocial hours at weekends or at night.

### *Job quality also matters*

Workers in poorer quality jobs (ie those characterised by poor job security, work overload, low levels of time and task autonomy, low flexibility and low job satisfaction) have worse work-life interference than those in better quality jobs. Managers and professionals usually have the worst work-life interference and this is a particular concern in view of their pivotal role in modeling workplace standards and managing staff. The work of managers and professional is often characterised as boundary-less; it can be done in many locations at any time of the day (or night, or weekend), often assisted by new technologies. In addition to the tendency of managers and professionals to work longer work hours than those in other occupations, the lack of temporal or physical boundaries to their work may increase their risk of work-life interference. It is important to note, however, that previous AWALI surveys have shown that many workers, not just managers and professionals, feel overloaded at work. This is strongly associated with worse work-life interference, as is an unsupportive organisational culture. This is consistent with research in other countries (Higgins, Duxbury & Johnson, 2004).

### *The economic slowdown and work-life interference*

AWALI 2009 shows that the economic slowdown is not associated with less negative spillover from work to the rest of life for most workers: indeed for women in particular it is associated with worse work-life interference, especially for full-time women. It may be that women are feeling under pressure to increase their attachment to paid work in view of the rising insecurity in the labour market, and to up their work rate to keep their jobs – against the background of little change in their ongoing responsibility for the great bulk of unpaid work and care on the home front. The high levels of pressure and time strain felt by working women – whether full-time or part-time – as well as by those working long hours or with a poor fit between their actual and preferred hours, suggest that there is much that can be done to improve the work-life outcomes experienced by working Australians. AWALI 2009 shows that getting a positive answer to a request for flexibility can very significantly reduce work-life interference, making new rights on this front of importance. However, many workers want to reduce their working hours and helping them find a better fit between their actual and preferred hours – and avoiding long hours of work – are also likely to improve work-life outcomes.

Given the long term ageing of the Australian workforce it is a concern that so many workers especially women seem to be responding to feelings of time stress by wanting to work less, even taking account of the impact on their earnings. This suggests that increasing the overall participation rate in Australia is going to require changes in the pace, configuration and pressures of work, and the way that work fits with the rest of life.

### *What is to be done?*

Our AWALI reports over the past three years suggest that employers and public policy makers can help workers deal with work-life pressures. This involves improving the quality of supervision and workplace culture, controlling workloads, designing ‘do-able’ jobs, reducing long working hours and work-related commuting, increasing employee-centered flexibility and options for permanent part-time work, improving the fit between actual and preferred hours and increasing care supports.

## Section 1: Introduction

Australians are increasing their engagement with paid work. This trend has been consistent since the middle of last century. Figure 1 shows how the participation rate of all persons has been increasing since 1978, underpinned by the increase in female participation, while men's has steadily declined. The economic slowdown underway since late 2008 has not dented this trend with labour market participation rates remaining steady at 65.5 per cent for persons for the twelve months to May 2009.

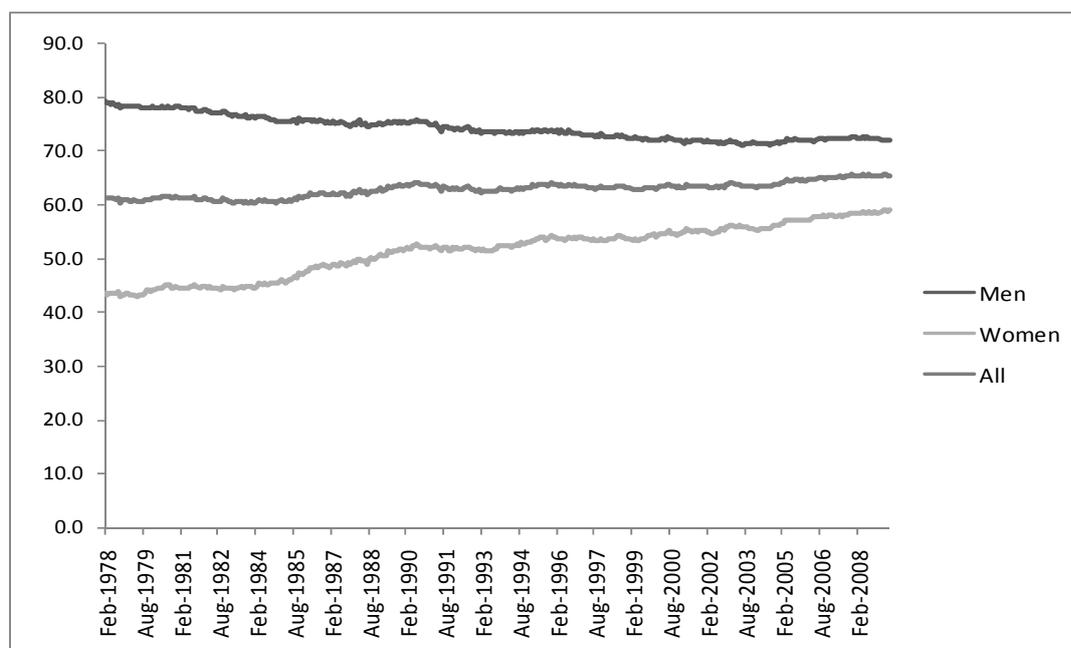


Figure 1 Participation rate, by gender, February 1978 to May 2009

Note: Includes persons aged 15 years and over. Source: ABS Cat No 6202.0.

Thus, work matters to many Australians. The changing gender composition of the workforce makes the combination of work with other life activities of growing interest both to workers, their families and households, and to governments and policy makers, given women's greater responsibilities for the care of others and for domestic work. The growth in women's participation means that a growing proportion of workers have significant care responsibilities while at work. This makes the reconciliation of work and family a serious household concern for many, especially women and those they care for. The nature of such reconciliations changes over the life-cycle. Of course parenting is associated with particular pressures, especially for mothers given the lack of reallocation of domestic work and care to men over the past two decades (ABS Cat No 4153.0). However, previous AWALI surveys suggest that the reconciliation of work with other life activities affects many workers who do not have parenting responsibilities. This highlights the importance of understanding how work intersects with a broad range of life activities beyond work, across the whole population, not just for parents.

Australia faces the prospect of an ageing population, and a growing need to care for the ageing working self, as well as aged friends and family. This prospect has led the Australian Government in 2009 to announce its intention to increase the eligible age for pensions. Significant demographic changes makes the reconciliation of work with life – or what we term 'work-life interference' – into a policy issue that is likely to increase in significance in coming years, and one that reaches well beyond the focus of 'work and family' which traditionally focuses on the care of young children.

The serious international economic crisis of 2008/09 means that work and life issues have been over-shadowed by concern about unemployment, under-employment and prospects for future employment. However, the economic downturn has not yet affected the participation rate of Australians, and work-life issues are likely to continue to be of policy interest well into the future: while unemployment is generally a cyclical concern, better reconciliation of work with other life activities is likely to be a significant issue over the next several decades. This is reflected in changes to industrial relations policy and law in 2009 which give stronger emphasis to work and family issues in labour law, and in the Australian Government's 2009 announcement of a new national system of paid parental leave.

### *AWALI 2009*

This report summarises findings from the third Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI) survey of work-life interference in Australia. It builds on the findings of the 2007 and 2008 surveys (Pocock, Skinner and Williams 2007; Skinner and Pocock 2008).

The 2009 survey includes 2691 workers (2307 employees and 384 self-employed), providing a robust, national, stratified random sample of the Australian workforce. The survey provides good representation by gender, State/Territory, age and employee/self-employed.

Each AWALI survey takes a particular focus. In 2007 it was on working time, in 2008 workplace culture and in 2009 we focus on requests for flexibility, international comparisons and the relationship between participation in education and training and work-life interference.

AWALI was collected in March 2009 against the background of the global economic crisis of 2008/09 and a significant economic downturn in Australia, and some 18 months after the Rudd Labor Government took office. While Australia has to date avoided a technical recession, the economy recorded negative growth in the last quarter of 2008 and very modest growth in the opening quarter of 2009. Unemployment has risen strongly. When AWALI 2009 was collected in March 2009, seasonally adjusted unemployment was 5.4 per cent, up from four per cent at the time of the previous year's AWALI survey (ABS, 2009; see Figure 2).

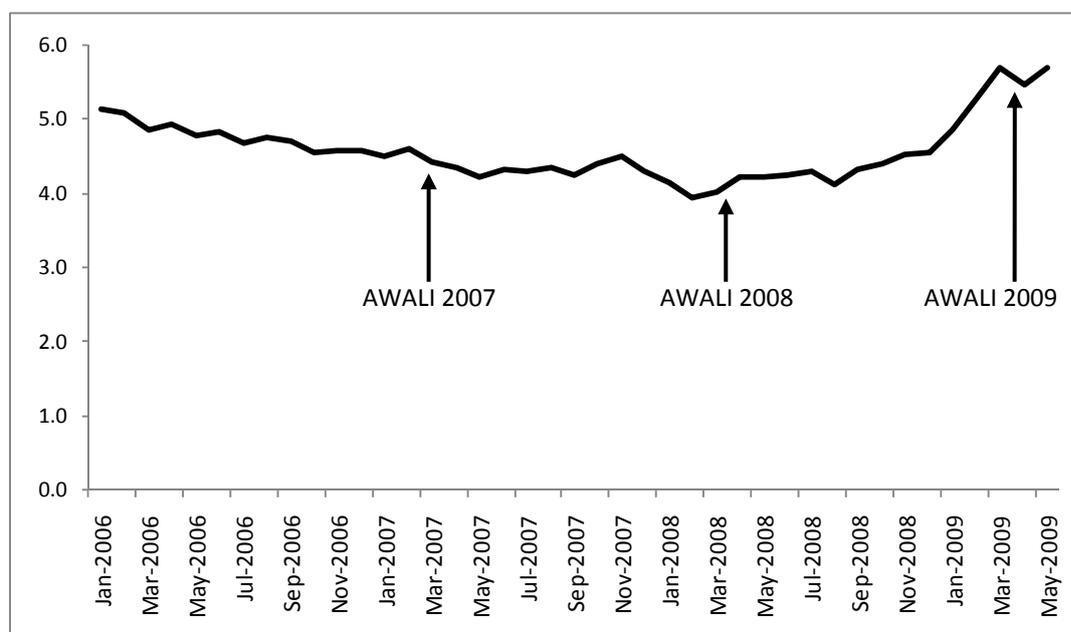


Figure 2 Unemployment rate, Persons, Seasonally Adjusted 2006-2009

Source ABS Cat No 6202.0, June 2009.

Labour under-utilisation – a broader measure of under-employment – has also risen very strongly with many more employed Australians seeking more hours of work. The economic downturn has seen significant growth in part-time work offset by loss of full-time jobs. This background of economic slowdown might be expected to affect work-life interference in several ways. Reduced hours of work and/or overtime may mean less work-life stress. However, anxiety about job security might encourage the pursuit of more work to both insure against the risk of redundancy and save money, increasing work-life stress. We know from previous surveys that a poor fit between preferred and actual working hours is associated with worse work-life interference.

The Rudd Government’s repeal of the main elements of the Howard Government’s *WorkChoices* legislation and its replacement with the *Fair Work Act 2009* changes the legislative environment of work. The *Fair Work Act 2009* was proclaimed on 14 May 2009 and will be enacted over the coming year. The objects of the new Act include ‘assisting employees to balance their work and family responsibilities by providing for flexible working arrangements’. As the new Act takes effect, it is likely to affect work-life interference in several ways, given its strengthening of the safety net through provision of National Employment Standards (NES), increasing the role of industry and occupational awards and its removal of statutory individual contracts. The NES include a right for employees to request changes in working arrangements. This report collects baseline data on such requests prior to the implementation of the new legislation.

*Theorising about work-life interference*

A large set of factors affect work-life relationships which can broadly be classified as characteristics of the workplace, household, geography (spatial characteristics) and community. These spheres and some of their components are set out in Figure 3.

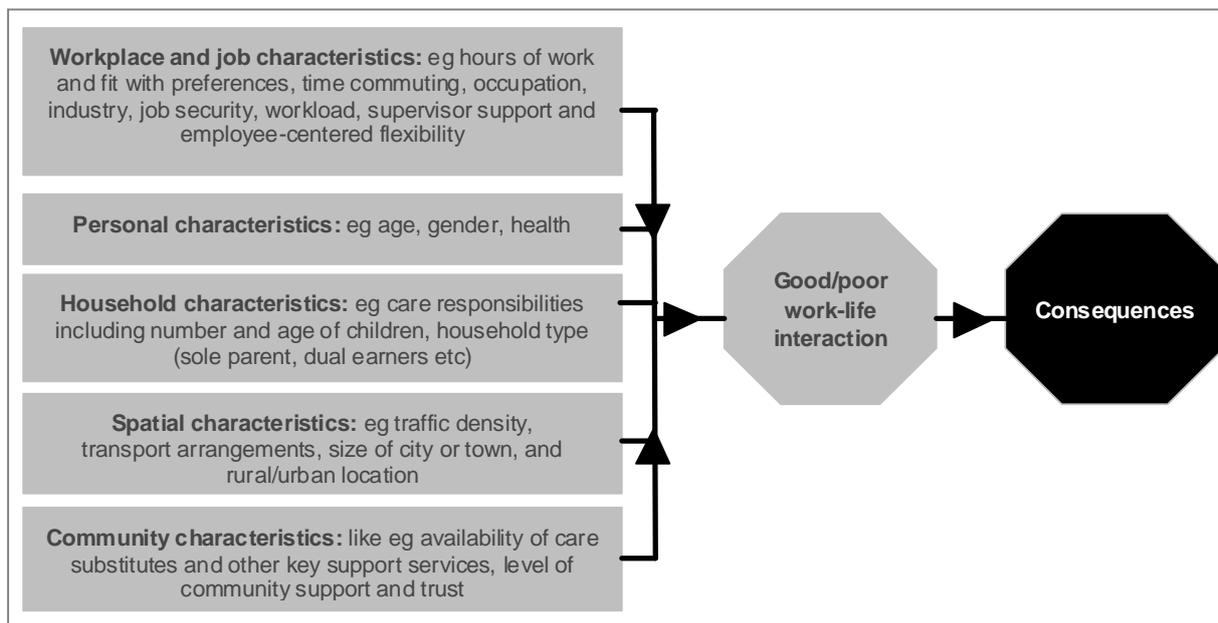


Figure 3 A model of the main factors shaping work-life interference, and their components

At the Centre for Work + Life we find it useful to employ ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) to analytically locate workers within the interdependent contexts of work, households, community and the wider society (see for example Williams, Pocock and Bridge 2009). Ecological systems theory encourages a holistic examination of the lives of workers by acknowledging the influence of multiple ecological systems and the relationships between them.

The ecological systems theory conceived by Bronfenbrenner can be adapted to the circumstances of workers in the following way. The microsystem refers to the worker's immediate setting, for example their home, work and local community. The mesosystem refers to the interrelationships among a set of microsystems which are relevant to the worker's situation at a given time, for example the interrelations between home, the workplace and local community. The exosystem refers to contexts that the worker is not directly part of but which influence their situation, for example the local circumstances of the industry or firm in which they work. Finally, the macrosystem refers to larger societal structures such as culture and norms, macro-institutions such as government, legal and economic structures, the industrial relations system and public policy. The worker is located within these ecological systems and their access to various life opportunities, and the quality of their work-life interference, is a function of the interaction of these systems and their independent effects.

A demand–resources model is also useful, in combination with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, to illuminate the characteristics of work, home and community and how they influence the lives of workers. Demand–resource models consider the degree to which structural, social and psychological characteristics of a particular context place demands (both physical and mental) on an individual or group, as well as the extent to which they create resources (structural or psychological) for an individual or group (Demerouti et al 2001).

A demand–resource model has been discussed in relation to work, family and community fit (Voydanoff 2005, 2008). The demands and resources associated with work directly affect an individual's role performance in the family domain and vice versa (Greenhouse and Parasuraman 1999; Hass 1999; Edwards and Rothbard 2000). Voydanoff builds on this research to explore the ways in which community demands and resources influence the relationships between work and family.

Conceptualising home, community and work as interrelated domains, characterised by demands and resources that combine in complex ways to either facilitate or inhibit work–family fit is a model which illuminates the relationship between work and activities beyond work. For example, job security, access to flexibility, close extended family, a supportive workplace culture, a good fit between actual and preferred hours and quality, affordable, accessible childcare may all constitute vital resources for a working mother to maintain a healthy work-life relationship. On the other hand, workers with young children, a sick partner, poor personal health, a demanding job and poor control over working hours may face excessive demands which contribute to a poor or strained work-life relationship.

Analysis of demands and resources across the three intersecting domains of work, home and community, taking into account the local workplace and household microsystems as well as macro-institutions like labour law and gender cultures, creates a complex but comprehensive analytical frame for work-life research in our view.

Our analysis of work-life interference in this and our earlier AWALI reports suggests that particular groups of workers have access to more (or less) resources and demands which affect their work-life interference. Better analysis of these and the influence of the larger ecological context of work, home and community will help inform our understanding of the fit between work and other life activities, including care, informing new policy responses.

#### *What AWALI measures*

As described in our 2007 report (Pocock, Williams & Skinner 2007), AWALI contains a number of questions which directly assess respondents' perceptions of work-life interference. Given that our 2007 survey revealed that work-to-life spillover is much greater than life-to-work spillover, we refined AWALI in 2008 to focus only on work-to-life spillover. 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 measures work-life interference that includes, but is not confined to, work-family issues. Those without children also experience spillover from their working lives onto their relationships, recreation, households, health and well-being, family life and care responsibilities.

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 (feeling rushed or pressed for time) in daily life, which is an indirect measure of work-life fit. Finally, AWALI includes a general assessment of satisfaction with work-life balance.

In sum, AWALI measures perceptions of work-life interference focussing on:

- 'general interference' (ie the frequency that work interferes with responsibilities or activities outside work)
- 'time strain' (ie the frequency that work restricts time with family or friends)
- work-to-community interference, measuring 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.

We bring together these five measures of work-life interference to arrive at an overall work-life index that is scaled from 0 (best work-life interference) to 100 (worst work-life interference). The index provides an easily understood general measure of work-life interference.

While we recognise that work-to-life and life-to-work interferences have both positive and negative effects, AWALI concentrates upon negative interactions given that these are of most immediate policy interest, and that limited resources constrain what we can measure.

AWALI makes a new and useful contribution to the literature and policy in five ways:

- It includes a random sample of working Australians, permitting analysis of work and family issues, but extending more broadly to work-life issues as they affect all Australian workers across the life-cycle
- It is annual in nature, allowing analysis of change over time, based on a representative cross-section of working Australians
- It includes work-to-community effects
- Across the annual data collections it analyses a wide range of 'life' issues (including, care responsibilities, relationships and health outcomes) with a wide range of 'work' effects (including hours of work, job quality, forms of employment, industry, occupation, unionisation). This analysis is set in the context of spatial, personal and household factors (including gender, age, education, location and commuting time)
- Each annual AWALI data collection 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 of work (caring responsibilities, domestic work, volunteer work). The 2008 data collection featured items on unsocial work hours (weekends and evenings/nights) and organisational culture. The 2009 data collection features a comparison with Europe, analysis of employee requests for flexibility and their outcomes, and participation in education. The latter issue is pursued in greater depth in a separate report.

#### *The AWALI 2009 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, 50.6 per cent participated in the 2009 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 as a survey conducted annually it allows us to compare results over time.

AWALI 2007 surveyed 1435 Australians. In 2008 and 2009 we doubled the survey sample.

AWALI 2009 is a national stratified sample of interviews conducted over four weekends in March and April 2009. As in previous years, Newspoll conducted the survey. In accord 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 includes 2691 workers (2307 employees and 384 self-employed).

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 callbacks 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 specified otherwise.

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 (ie not likely to be due to chance) at  $p < .05$  unless stated otherwise. The Dunn-Bonferroni correction was applied to multiple comparisons.

Work hours have a clear and consistent impact on work-life interference: as hours increase negative 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 (eg 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 (eg 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 life 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 7 examines differences between the self-employed and employees.

As a sample drawn from a much larger population, the estimates presented in this report like all survey data, 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 address this issue. 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 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 (ie 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 this figure should be interpreted with caution.

### *The work-life index*

To arrive at the AWALI summary work-life index we average and standardise the five measures of work-life interference described above. The minimum score on the index is 0 (indicating the best possible work-life interference) and the maximum score is 100 (the worst possible work-life interference).

The five-item work-life index has satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

In the 2009 survey the average (mean) score on the index is 43.3, and the median is 40.0 (the middle score of which 50 per cent of respondents' scores fall above, and fifty per cent fall below). Therefore, scores above the average score 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.

### *What we know from previous AWALI surveys*

Previous AWALI surveys have shown that work-life spillover affects many Australian workers and that such spillover is much more significant than the reverse life-to-work spillover effect. Poor work-life interference is associated with longer hours, more caring responsibilities, longer commutes, middle age (34-55 years), higher levels of education, worse physical and mental health and social well-being and more use of prescription medications, more stress and more dissatisfaction with close personal relationships. Casual workers, the self-employed or those working in the public sector do not have a better work-life relationship than permanent workers, employees or those in the private sector. Most workers do not have a very good fit between their preferred and actual hours of work, and this is associated with worse work-life interference, as is working unsocial hours at weekends or at night. Poorer quality jobs (ie those characterised by poor job security, work overload, low levels of time and task autonomy, low flexibility and low job satisfaction) have worse work-life interference than better quality jobs. Managers and professionals usually have the worst work-life interference. Many workers feel overloaded at work and this is strongly associated with worse work-life interference, as is an unsupportive organisational culture.

### *Structure of this report*

This report falls into nine 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 2009, considering the component parts of the AWALI index and its summary measure, comparing it to previous years. Given the significance of working hours to

work-life interference, Section 4 focuses on work hours and their fit with preferences. Section 5 compares work-life outcomes in Australia with those in Europe. Section 6 analyses the personal and household characteristics of respondents and their work-life interference. Section 7 considers employment characteristics and work-life interference. Section 8 takes up the issue of workers' requests for flexibility just prior to the enactment of new Australian rights to make such requests. This section compares the incidence of requests amongst different groups of workers, and the outcomes of these requests, comparing these to similar UK surveys. The final section of the report, Section 9, analyses the intersection between work-life interference and participation in education and training.

## Section 2: The AWALI 2009 sample

This section provides an overview of AWALI 2009 respondents and their general characteristics. The total sample consisted of 2691 workers (1480 men and 1211 women), of which the majority were employees (2307 employees and 384 self-employed) (Table 1).

Table 1 Overview of the (weighted) AWALI 2009 sample (per cent)

	Men	Women	All	ABS survey
All	54.8	45.2	100.0	Men: 54.4; Women: 45.6
State				
SA	7.2	8.1	7.6	7.3
WA	10.3	10.6	10.4	10.8
QLD	20.7	20.4	20.6	20.7
NSW	32.4	30.1	31.4	31.4
VIC	25.2	26.6	25.8	24.6
TAS	2.3	2.1	2.2	2.2
ACT	1.9	2.0	2.0	1.8
Age group				
18–24	15.2	16.6	15.8	17.3
25–34	24.0	21.1	22.7	21.6
35–44	23.5	24.6	24.0	23.0
45–54	21.2	24.2	22.6	22.2
55–64	11.8	11.4	11.6	13.4
65+	4.3	2.1	3.3	2.5
Highest level of education				
University degree	28.3	37.3	32.3	24.0
TAFE/college	41.4	33.7	37.9	34.3
Secondary school	30.3	29.0	29.8	40.9
Occupation				
Manager	15.2	7.2	11.6	12.8
Professional	20.2	32.0	25.5	20.7
Technician/trade	25.2	4.4	15.7	15.4
Community/personal service	5.2	12.4	8.5	9.0
Clerical and administrative	5.1	24.4	13.9	15.5
Sales	6.9	12.7	9.5	9.3
Machinery operators	12.6	0.7	7.2	6.6
Labourers	9.7	6.2	8.1	10.7
Type of employment				
Employee	83.7	91.5	87.2	80.9
Self-employed	16.3	8.5	12.8	19.1
Work status				
Full-time (35+ hours per week)	81.0	50.5	67.2	71.1
Part-time (< 35 hours per week)	19.0	49.5	32.8	28.9

Note. ABS Cat. No. 6105.0, Australian Labour Market Statistics, April 2009, ABS Cat. No. 6227.0 Education and Work Australia, May 2007 and ABS Cat. No. 6359.0 Forms of Employment, Nov 2008. ABS data includes those aged 15 years and older.

As Table 1 shows, the AWALI 2009 sample on the whole provides a good representation of the Australian labour market at the time of the survey with respect to gender, State/Territory of residence, employment arrangements and age. The sample is fairly representative by occupation, although there is an over-representation of professionals and those with a university qualification. Full-timers are slightly under-represented in the surveyed group, while part-timers are slightly over-represented. Within the survey sample of employees 16.8 per cent were employed casually, 8.6 per cent were on fixed term contracts and 74.6 per cent were employed as ongoing or permanent employees. This compares with 22.8 per cent casuals (ie without paid leave entitlements), 3.6 per cent fixed term and 73.5 per cent permanents in the Australian workforce in November 2008 (ABS Cat No 6359.0). Thus the AWALI survey somewhat under-represents casual workers and over-represents fixed term employees. However, the ABS survey data includes workers aged 15 to 17 years for whom casual work is very common. Workers aged less than 18 years were not included in the AWALI sample, and this probably accounts for the under-representation of casual workers.

With regard to household and family structure Table 2 shows that – as in previous years - most respondents were living in a household with two or more adults, and 44.8 per cent of households contained one or more children. In households with children, most children were of school age. Of those respondents who had children, 34.5 per cent had a child aged four years or under.

Table 2 Household structure, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

	Persons
Adults in household	
1 adult	18.1
2 or more adults	81.9
Marital status	
Married/de facto	62.1
Divorced, separated, never married or widowed	37.9
Children in household	
No children	55.2
1 child	16.6
2–3 children	25.9
4 or more children	2.3
Ages of children <sup>1,2</sup> (parents only)	
≤ 4	34.5
5–12	53.4
13–17	44.5
Type of household	
Single parent	4.4
Couple with children	36.5
Single no children	30.0
Couple no children	29.1

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

### Section 3: Work-life interference: a gendered analysis of AWALI 2009

---

This section examines the patterns of work-life interference across the Australian workforce, analysing the component measures that make up AWALI. We particularly focus on gender differences as gender is a major factor influencing work and life outcomes: both AWALI 2007 and 2008 showed that women's and men's work-life relationships differ. For example, men's longer hours and women's greater responsibilities for work in the private sphere, especially domestic and caring work, shape their capacities to reconcile work and activities beyond work.

Most analyses in this section exclude self-employed persons given that self-employment is a qualitatively different working arrangement compared to being an employee.

#### *Work-life interference in 2009: analysis of individual work-life index items*

As Table 3 shows, over the three years of AWALI data collection to date we find that many employees experience frequent interference from work in their personal, home and community lives, and feelings of time pressure are also common. In 2009 around one quarter of employees feel work 'often or almost always' interferes with both activities outside work and time spent with family and friends. Just over half (54.2 per cent) of employees frequently feel rushed or pressed for time. In general, the majority of employees in 2009 (67.5 per cent) are broadly satisfied with their work-life balance, with little change from 2008 (68.3 per cent satisfied).

This raises some questions about the differences in the nature of questions about perceived behaviours and perceived satisfaction. The process by which people arrive at a satisfaction judgment are subject to ongoing debate (Veenhoven, 1996). One argument is that judgements of 'satisfaction' are made in relation to the way a person thinks things should be. From this perspective, our levels of satisfaction are in relation to our expectations about an ideal state or situation (Veenhoven, 1996). This makes such questions rather more ephemeral than more concrete behavioural questions like 'how often do you feel rushed or pressed for time?'. The nature of this difference may explain the different outcomes we observe.

When we consider employees overall, there is very little difference in the reported frequency of work-life interference between 2007 and 2009. However, when we consider men and women separately some interesting differences are evident.

As in previous years, women are much more likely to report feeling rushed or pressed for time (62.0 per cent) compared to men (47.1 per cent). Looking over the three years of AWALI data collection there is also some indication that feelings of time pressure are becoming more common for women. In contrast, men in 2009 are slightly less likely to report frequent time pressure than in previous years. However, these changes across the three years are not statistically significant.

There is also evidence of the intensification of work-life pressures for women when we examine other items on the work-life index. In 2007 and 2008 we found that men were slightly more likely to report frequent interference of work with activities outside of work, time with family and friends and community connections. These gender differences have narrowed in 2009. Women are increasingly reporting frequent levels of work-life interference at a similar level to that reported by men. This is despite the shorter working hours, on average, that women work compared to men (average hours for men in 2009 were 41.6 and 31.8 for women). Their satisfaction with work-life balance is also now on a par.

We now turn to a more in-depth analysis of responses on each of the work-life items shown in Table 3. As described below, when gender and work hours (part-time, full-time) are considered, we find that women working full-time are most likely to report frequent work-life pressures and higher work-life interference on each of the work-life index items.

Table 3 Work–life interference by gender, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

	2007 Often/ almost always	2008 Often/ almost always	2009 Often/ almost always	2009 Never/rarely
<b>Work interferes with activities outside work</b>				
Men	22.7	23.7	24.8	42.2
Women	16.2	19.6	22.3	45.4
<b>All</b>	19.8	21.8	23.6	43.7
<b>Work interferes with enough time with family or friends</b>				
Men	27.3	27.8	26.9	41.7
Women	20.7	23.7	24.1	43.8
<b>All</b>	24.3	25.9	25.6	42.7
<b>Work interferes with community connections</b>				
Men	20.7	21.9	17.8	59.5
Women	17.0	16.4	16.7	59.2
<b>All</b>	19.0	19.3	17.3	59.4
<b>Feel rushed or pressed for time</b>				
Men	49.9	50.2	47.1	20.8
Women	55.6	60.2	62.0	9.9
<b>All</b>	52.5	54.9	54.2	15.6
<b>Satisfaction with work-life balance</b>		2008 Satisfied	2009 Satisfied	
Men		69.0	67.2	
Women		67.5	67.7	
<b>All</b>		68.3	67.5	

Note. 'Satisfaction with work-life balance' for 2007 not reported because of a change in scale between 2007 and 2008. Response scale on all items except satisfaction scale was never, rarely, sometimes, often, almost always. Data in table is combined responses of often and almost always responses. Table excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 2306, 2008 N = 2383, 2007 N = 1431.

#### *Work interferes with activities outside work*

Around one quarter of full-time employees report frequent work interference with activities outside of work (Figure 4). Full-time women are slightly more likely to report frequent interference than men in 2009 (29.1 per cent of women; 27.1 per cent of men). Compared to 2008, full-time employees in 2009 are more likely to report frequent work-life interference (27.8 per cent; 24.1 per cent in 2008). This increase in negative work-life spillover from 2008 to 2009 is particularly evident for full-time women. The proportion of full-time women who agreed that work often or almost always interfered with activities outside work has increased from 18.4 per cent in 2007 to 23.2 per cent in 2008 to 29.1 per cent in 2009.

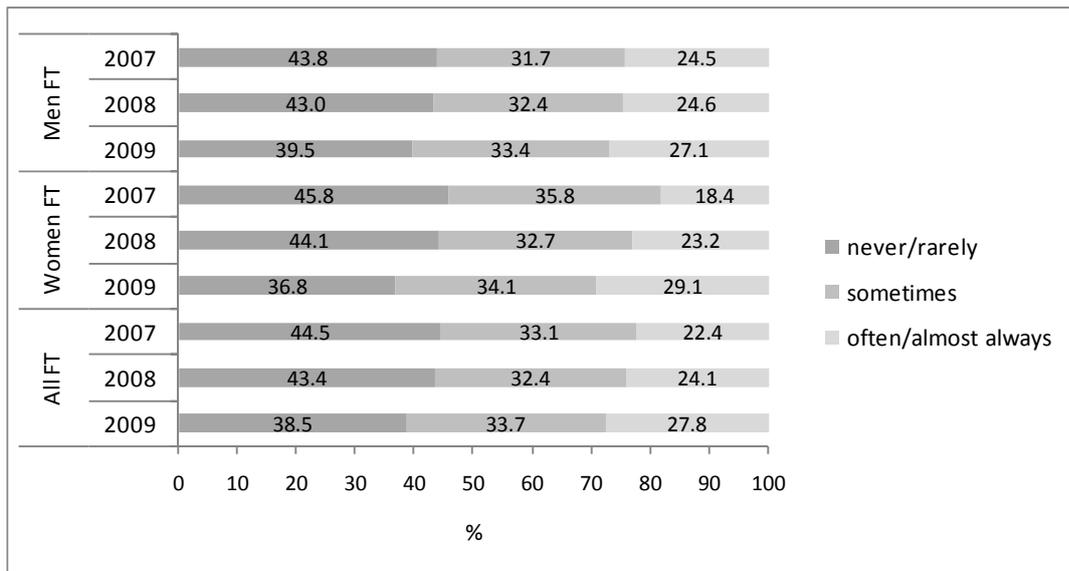


Figure 4 Work interferes with activities outside work reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 1539, 2008 N= 1715 & 2007 N = 875.

Part-time employees are less likely to report work ‘often or almost always’ interferes with activities outside work compared to full-time employees, and gender differences are small (Figure 5). In the past three years of AWALI surveys around 15 per cent of part-time employees report frequent interference of work on activities outside of work.

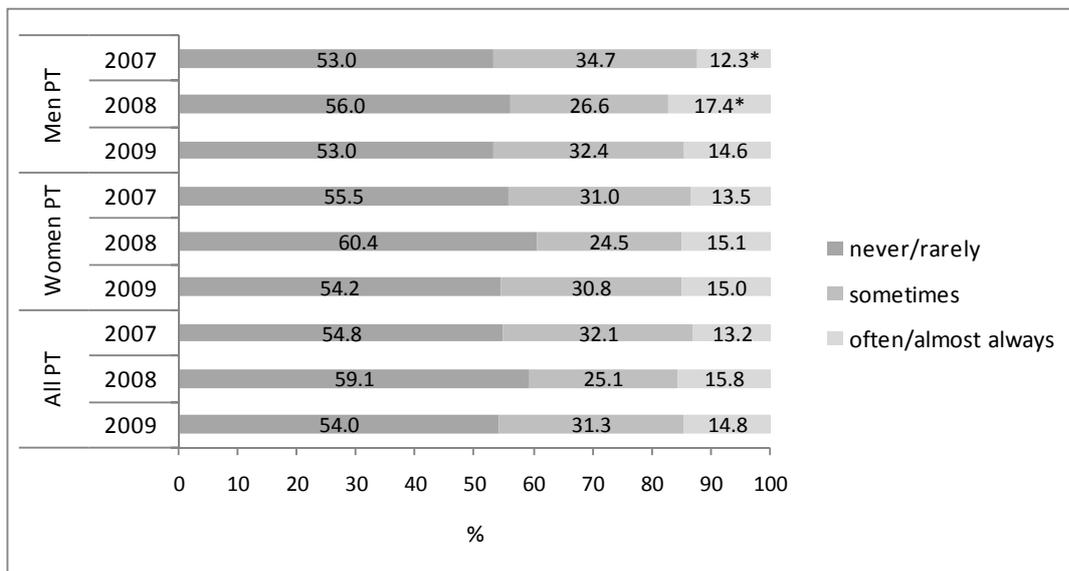


Figure 5 Work interferes with activities outside work reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 746, 2008 N= 664 & 2007 N = 746.

### *Time with family and friends*

Nearly one third of full-time employees in 2009 say that work frequently restricts time with family and friends, and this is a more common perception for full-time women than men (Figure 6). Full-time women in 2009 are more likely to report frequent time restrictions (32.9 per cent) compared to 2008 (28.1 per cent) or 2007 (25.4 per cent).

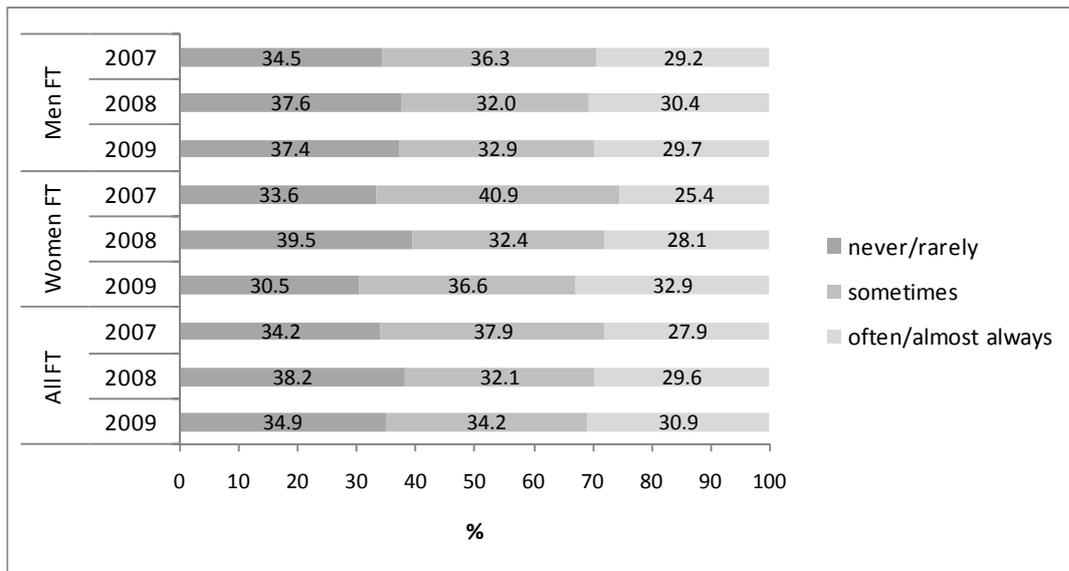


Figure 6 Work restricts time with family/friends reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 1542, 2008 N = 1717 & 2007 N = 873.

Compared to full-timers, part-time employees are less likely to report time constraints (Figure 7). Around 15 per cent of part-timers report work frequently restricts their social and family time in 2009. However, part-time women are slightly less likely to report frequent time restrictions in 2009 compared to 2008.

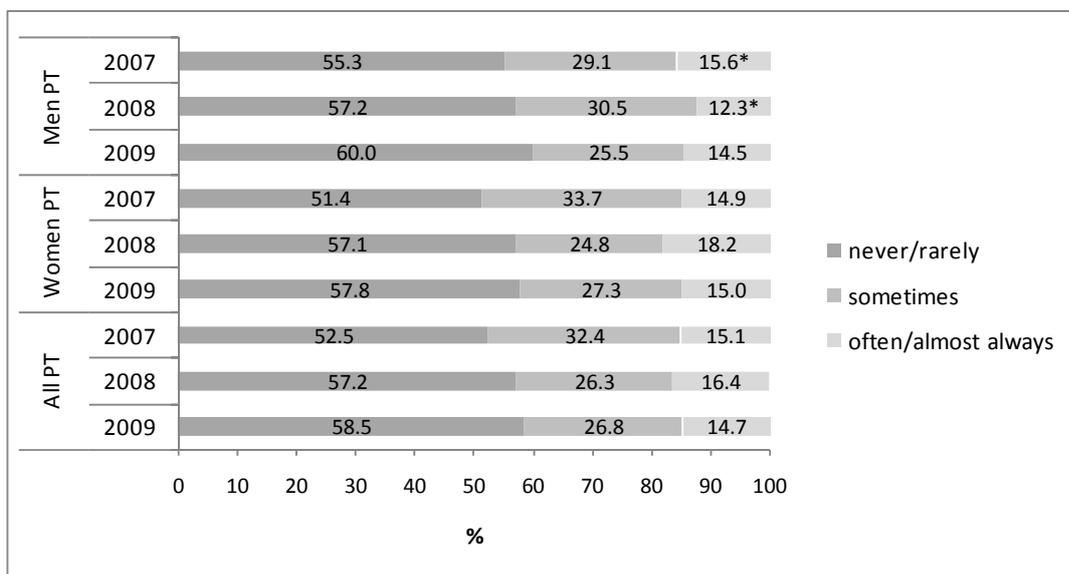


Figure 7 Work restricts time with family/friends reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 748, 2008 N = 664, 2007 N = 329.

### Community engagement

Full-time work also continues to have a negative impact on employees' capacity to be connected and engaged with their communities. Figure 8 shows that around one-fifth of full-time employees report that work frequently interferes with their community connections. Full-time women are slightly more likely to report frequent interference than full-time men (22.2 per cent; 20.5 per cent of men). Women were slightly more likely to report that work frequently interferes

with their community connections in 2009 compared to 2008, whereas the opposite pattern is evident for full-time men. However, the change over years was only statistically significant for men, but not women.

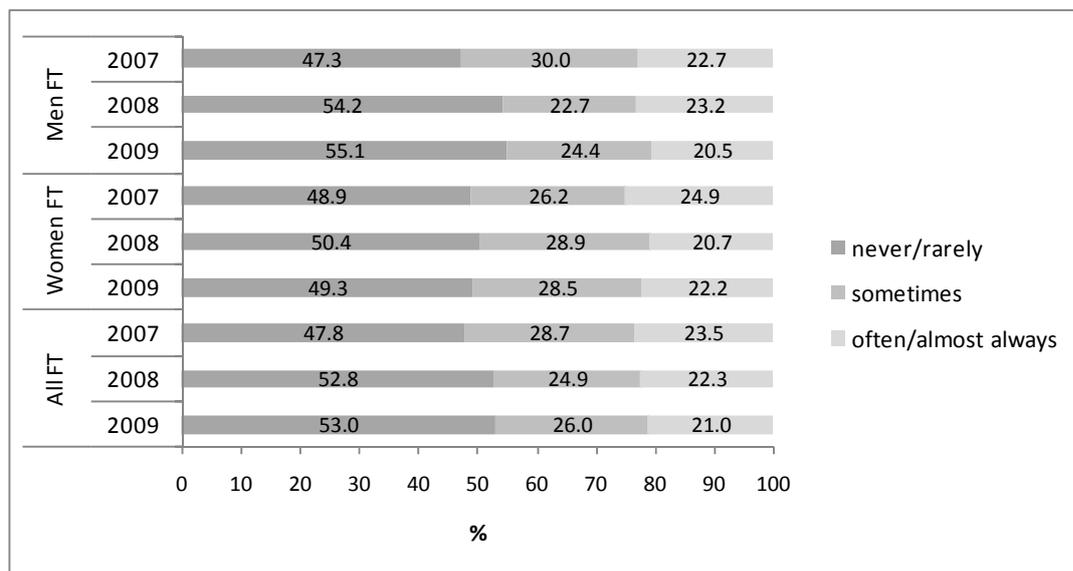


Figure 8 Work interferes with community connections reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 1542, 2008 N = 1717 & 2007 N = 871.

As seen with the other items on work-life interference, part-time employees are less likely to report frequent work interference with their community connections (Figure 9). Just under ten per cent of part-time employees report frequent work interference with community connections, with little change from 2008 (11.8 per cent). Part-time women are more likely to report frequent interference compared to part-time men (11.0 per cent; 6.4 per cent of men).

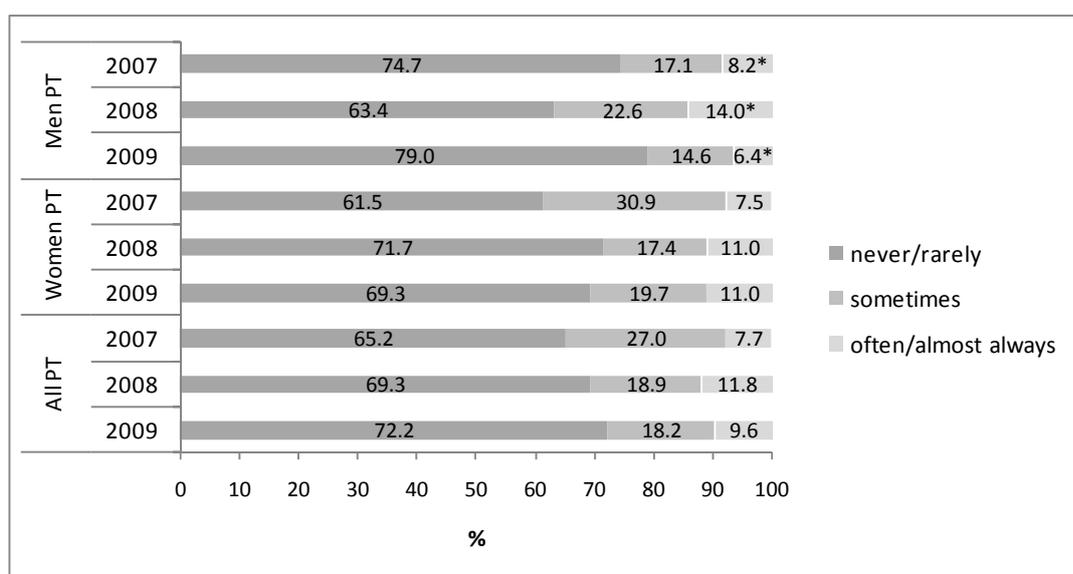


Figure 9 Work interferes with community connections reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 748, 2008 N = 664 & 2007 N = 328.

### Time pressure

Time pressure continues to be a major issue for full-time workers. As Figure 10 shows 57.0 per cent of full-time employees frequently feel rushed and pressed for time in 2009. Full-time women are more likely to report time pressure than men in 2009 (66.6 per cent; 51.4 per cent of men). Furthermore, the proportion of full-time women reporting frequent time pressure has increased from 59.4 per cent in 2007 to 63.4 per cent in 2008 and 66.6 per cent in 2009. Time pressures seem to be affecting more full-time women over this relatively short period. In contrast, there has been a slight decrease in the past 12 months in the proportion of full-time men experiencing frequent time pressure, although this change is not statistically significant.

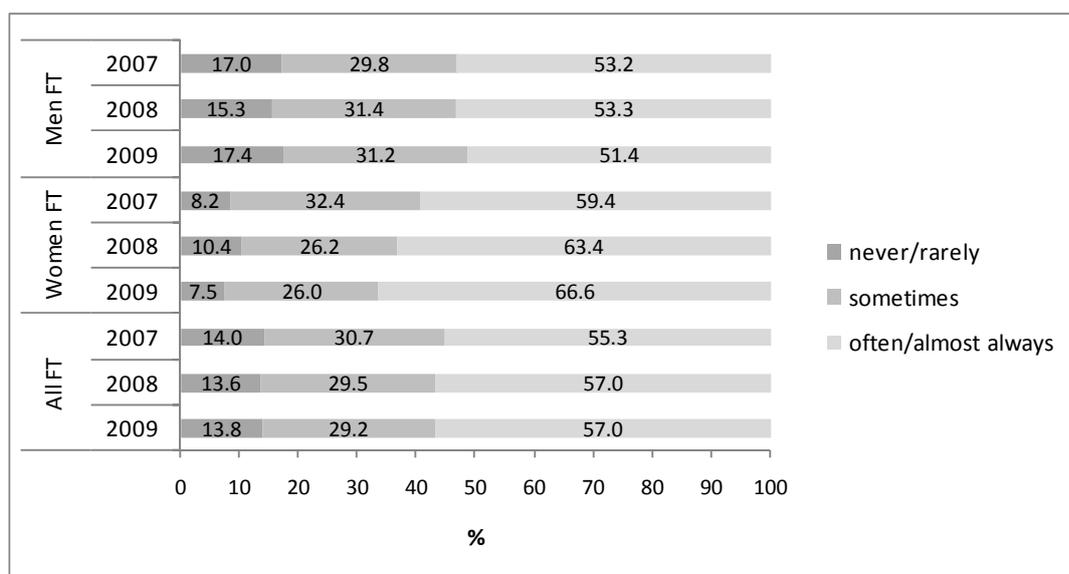


Figure 10 Feeling rushed or pressed for time reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 1543, 2008 N = 1718 & 2007 N = 877.

Figure 11 shows that time pressure is also a significant issue for part-time employees: nearly 50 per cent of part-time employees report frequently feeling rushed or pressed for time. As with full-time employees, women are more likely to report time pressure. The proportion of part-time women reporting frequent time pressure is nearly double that of part-time men in 2009 (58.0 per cent of women; 27.9 per cent of men). There is also a slight increase in reports of time pressure amongst part-time women in 2009 compared to previous years, whereas part-time men in 2009 are less likely to report feelings of frequent time pressure than in 2008. However neither of these changes is statistically significant.

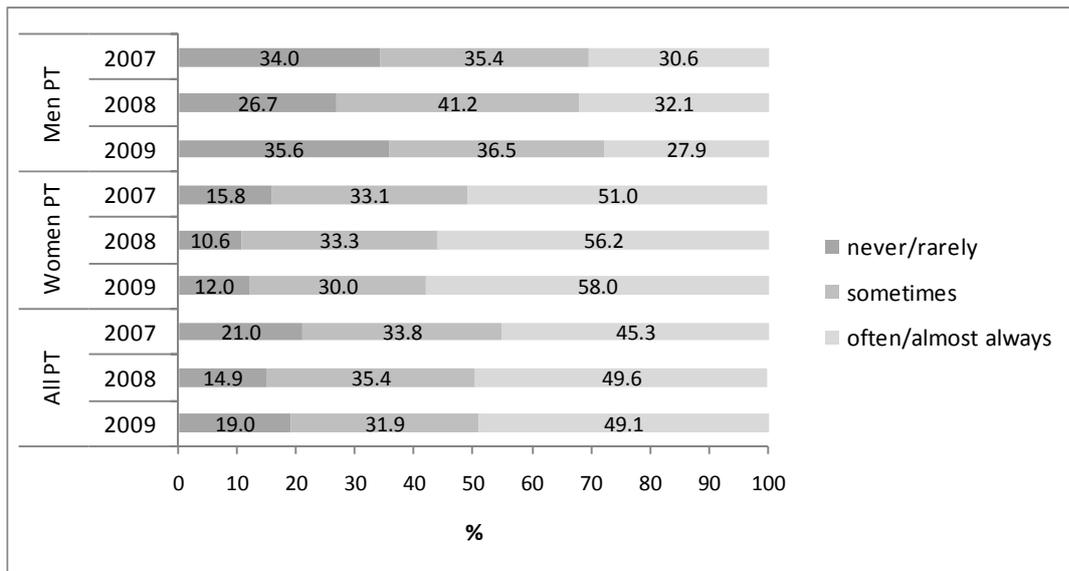


Figure 11 Feeling rushed or pressed for time reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 747, 2008 N = 665 & 2007 N = 330.

### *Satisfaction with work-life balance*

The majority of full-time employees report feeling satisfied with their overall work-life balance, (Figure 12). However, the proportion of those who are not satisfied with their work-life balance has increased between 2008 and 2009, amongst both men and women, and full-time and part-timers.

Full-time men are more likely to be satisfied with their work-life balance than full-time women (65.5 per cent; 59.9 per cent of women), although this difference is not statistically different.

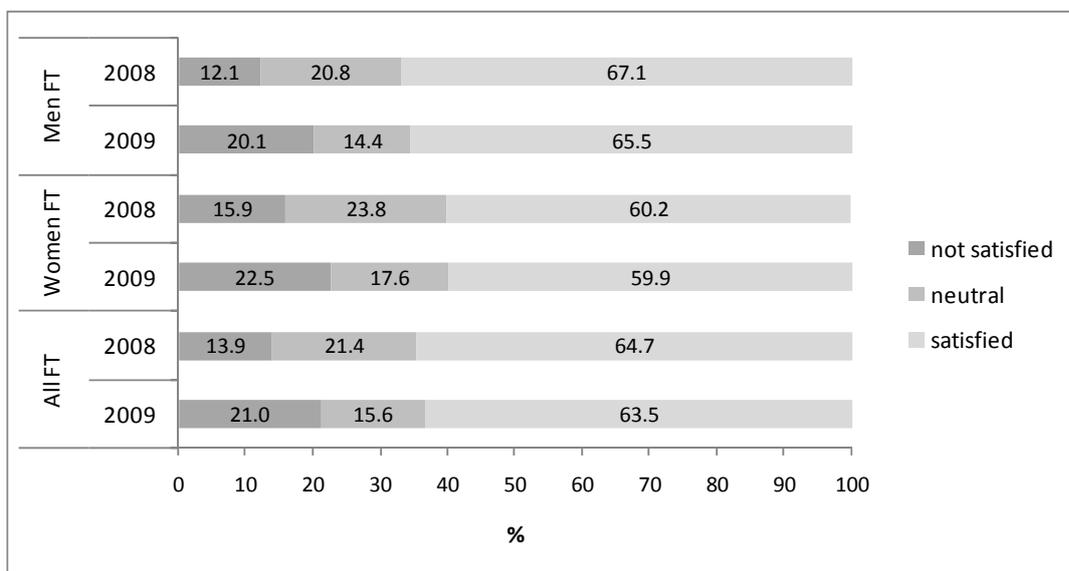


Figure 12 Somewhat/very satisfied with work-life balance reported by full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2007 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 1537, 2008 N = 1718 & 2007 N = 877.

Figure 13 shows that the majority of part-time employees (75.7 per cent) are also satisfied with their work-life balance, with very little difference between part-time men and women. Compared to 2008, part-time men in 2009 are less likely to be satisfied with their work-life balance (80.4 per cent in 2008; 74.9 per cent; in 2009). There has been little change in part-time women's satisfaction with their work-life balance.

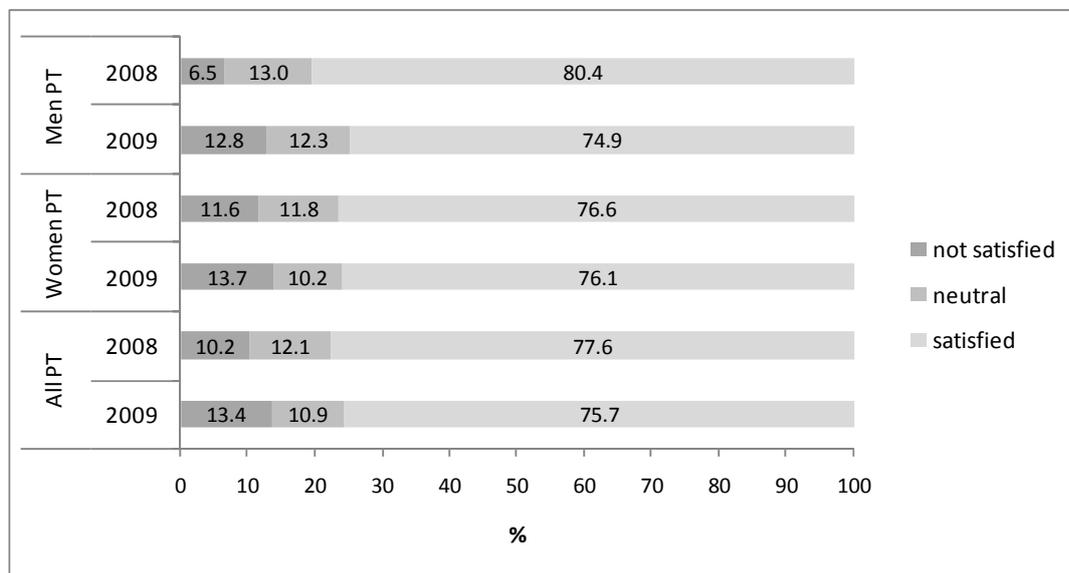


Figure 13 Somewhat/very satisfied with work-life balance reported by part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 747, 2008 N = 665 & 2007 N = 330.

### *The work-life index*

We now turn to consider Australians' work-life interference using the work-life index, a measure that represents the combined average score of workers' responses on each of the five work-life questions discussed previously. The work-life index 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).

When we report on the work-life index we often report scores that have been statistically adjusted for differences in work hours between the groups that are being compared (eg men and women, or the self-employed compared to employees). As we discuss in Section 4, the length of work hours has a substantial effect on work-life interference. Therefore, to identify the unique contribution (independent of work hours) that gender, employment type or other such factors have on work-life interference, we statistically control for work hours.

### *Australians' work-life interference in 2007, 2008 and 2009*

Figure 14 shows work-life index scores unadjusted and adjusted for work hours for employees. Looking at index scores unadjusted for work hours, we see that changes across the three years of AWALI data collection are small, although women's unadjusted index score slightly increases from 2008 to 2009. A different picture emerges when we examine the data adjusted for work hours. When we remove the effect of work hours on index scores, we see a slight (but not statistically significant) decline in men's index scores over the three years. In contrast, women's index scores increase from 2007/2008 to 2009 indicating worsening work-life interference due to factors beyond the number of working hours. Given that the economic downturn is the most significant change in the labour market in the period, it may be that the slowdown is contributing in some way to women's worsening work-life situation.

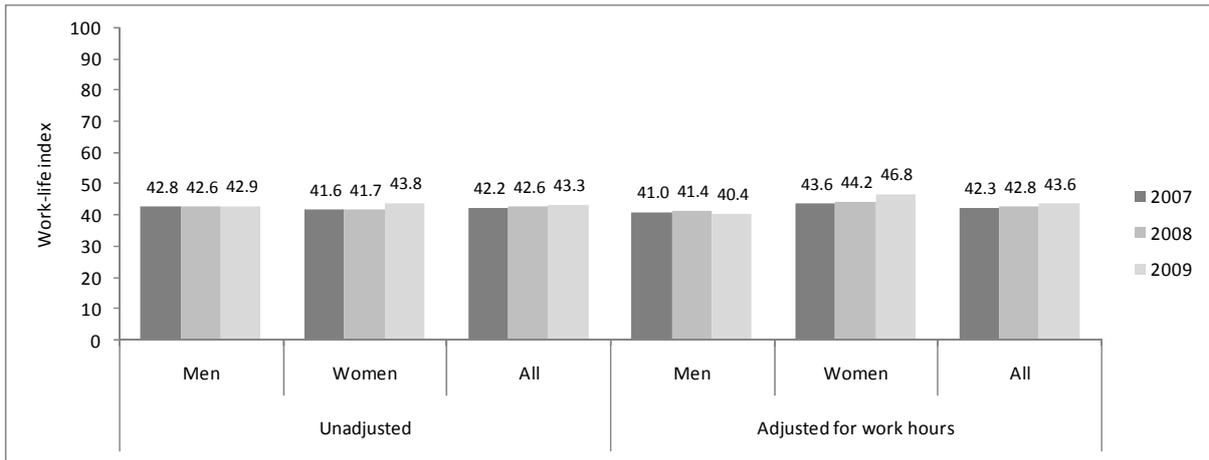


Figure 14 Work-life index scores (unadjusted and adjusted for work hours) for all employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. 2009 N = 2276. 2008 N = 2361. 2007 N = 1192.

As expected, there are significant differences on the work-life index between part-time and full-time employees, and also between men and women working these hours. As shown in Figure 15, full-time employees have a work-life index score of 46.4 in 2009, which is only slightly higher than in previous years. Work-life interference has worsened for full-time women in 2009, with index scores increasing by 3.3 points from 2008. This is a significant change. In contrast, there is little change in full-time men's index scores.

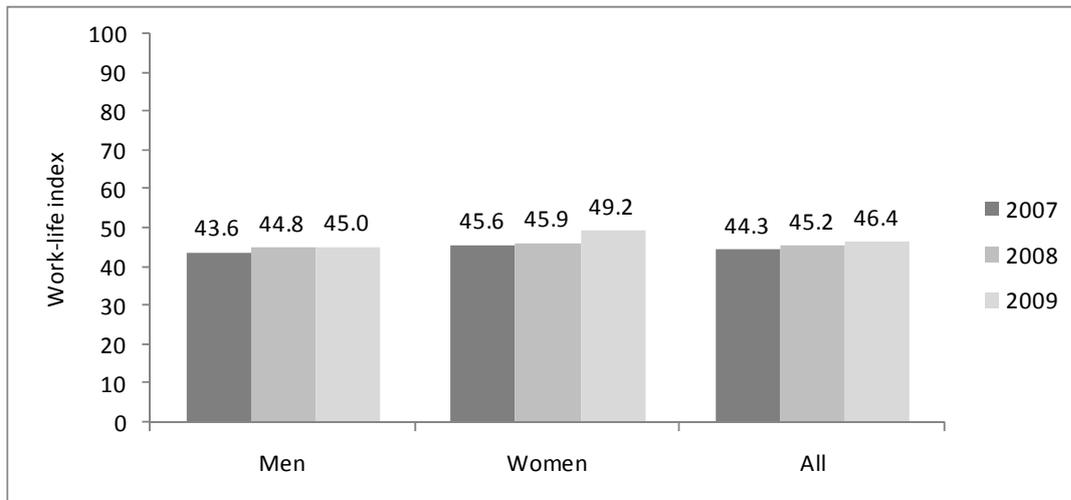


Figure 15 Work-life index scores for full-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 1531, 2008 N = 1705 & 2007 N = 865.

The work-life index scores for full-time employees are much higher than their part-time counterparts (46.4 for full-time employees; 36.4 for part-time employees). As with full-timers, women working part-time report higher work-life index scores (ie worse work-life interference) compared to part-time men (38.1 for part-time women; 32.6 for part-time men) (Figure 16). Compared to 2008, the work-life index score for part-time women has increased by nearly two points in 2009, while part-time men's index score has decreased by nearly three points. However, these changes are not statistically significant.

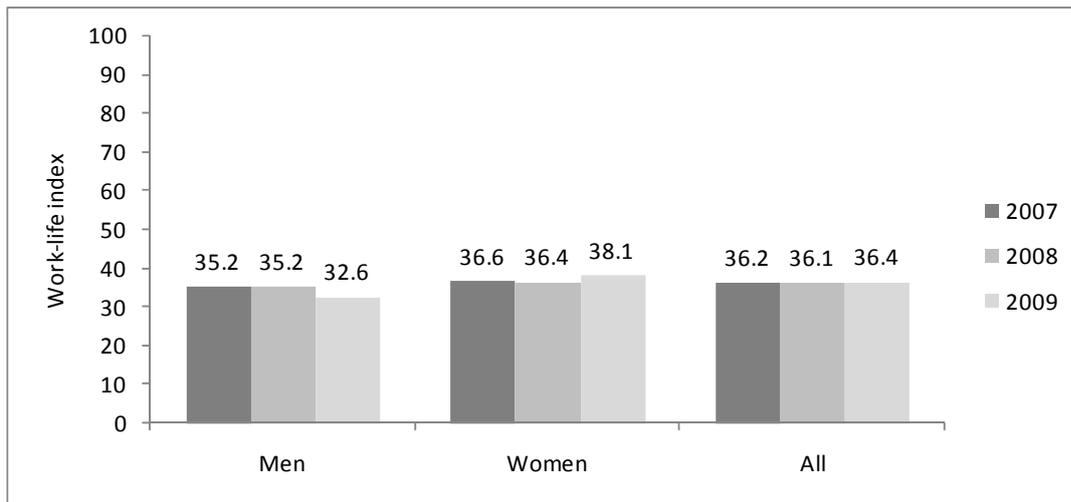


Figure 16 Work-life index scores for part-time employees by gender, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009  
 Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 745, 2008 N = 656 & 2007 N = 327.

### Summary

Three years of data about work-life interference in Australia tell us that many employees experience frequent interference from work in their personal, home and community lives, and feelings of time pressure are also common and growing, especially for women.

However, work-life interference does not fall evenly across the population. While two-thirds of working Australians say they are broadly satisfied with their work-life balance, some groups are especially negatively affected by work-life conflict.

While men report more work-life interference than women, the gender gap appears to have narrowed in 2009 and men's and women's satisfaction with their work-life situation is on a par.

Men's worse work-life interference is largely explained by their longer hours. When we control for these, women have worse work-life interference than men.

More women are reporting feeling often or almost always rushed or pressed for time, whether they are working part-time or full-time. While many full-time working men are also affected by feelings of time pressure, part-time work protects men from time pressures more than it does women.

Most Australian workers are satisfied with their work-life balance, although there are some signs that the group who are not satisfied has increased a little in 2009.

The overall work-life index, adjusted for differences in work hours, suggests that while men's situation has shown little change in the past three years (and may have improved a little), women's has deteriorated somewhat. This deterioration is evident for part-time as well as full-time women. It is most marked for full-time women who appear to be showing signs of significant negative change in their work-life situations, with many suffering from very persistent feelings of time pressure.

## Section 4: Working hours and the fit between actual and preferred hours

Previous AWALI surveys have shown that working hours are significant in shaping an individual's work-life relationship (Pocock, Skinner and Williams 2007; Skinner and Pocock 2008). The results of AWALI 2009 confirm that shorter hours, and a better fit between actual and preferred hours are associated with less work-life interference. Self-employed workers tend to work more hours on average than employees; therefore, in the remainder of this section we analyse the situation of employees with respect to work hours and work-life interference, excluding the self-employed.

### *Employees' work hours*

In 2009, male employees in the AWALI survey worked 41.6 hours a week, women 31.8 and all employees worked 37.1 hours. Beneath these averages lies great diversity. Less than half of all employees worked a full-time week of 35 to 47 hours. Almost a third of men (31.4 per cent) worked long hours (48+ a week) and 12.7 per cent of women joined them (Figure 17). Almost a third of all employees worked part-time, most of them women: 47.8 per cent of women worked less than 34 hours a week, most of them doing long part-time hours of between 16–34 hours a week.

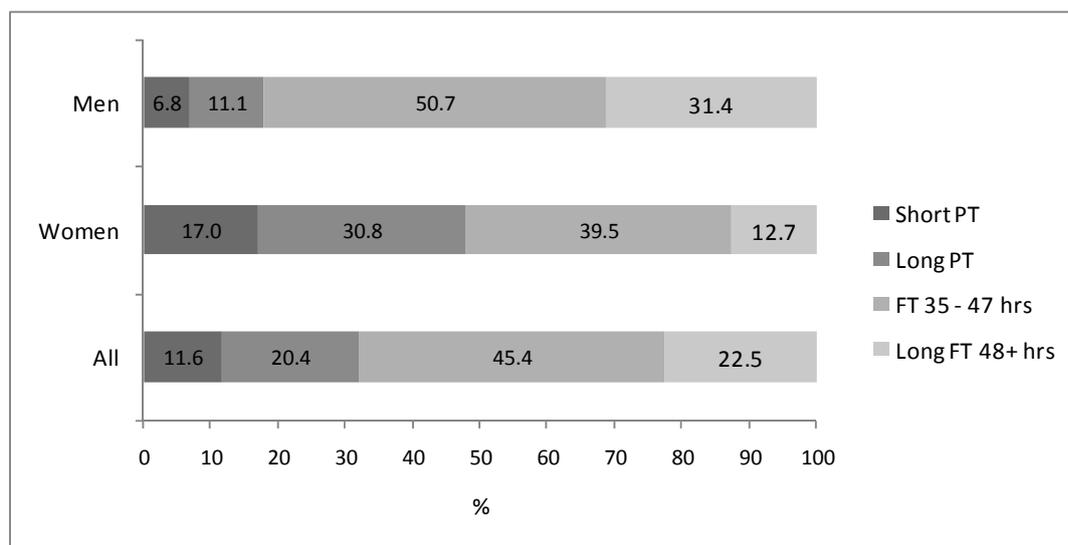


Figure 17 Short and long work hours by gender, AWALI 2009

Note. PT = part-time, FT = full-time. Hours usually worked per week used to categorise short part-time (1-15 hours), long part-time (16-34 hours), full-time (35-47 hours) and long full-time (48+) hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2291.

How do work-life index scores vary by hours worked? Figure 18 shows how work-life interference significantly worsens as hours increase. Long hours workers have relatively high work-life scores of 54.8, compared to 33.7 amongst those working short part-time hours. Each of the group differences shown in Figure 18 is statistically significant. The biggest leap in scores occurs as workers move from 35 to 47 to longer full-time hours (48+) – a 12 point increase in the work-life index, compared to a four point increase from short to long part-time hours, and from long part-time to full-time (35–47) hours. This suggests that reducing long hours of work is of particular significance in reducing work-life interference.

### *Gender and working hours*

In each category of work hours shown in Figure 18 women have a higher score on the work-life index (ie worse work-life interference) compared to men. These gender differences are all statistically significant with the exception of employees working short part-time (1–14) hours where the index scores are not significantly different between men and women.

Figure 18 also shows that long hours are associated with particularly negative outcomes for women. Work-life index scores reach 61.1 for women working more than 48 hours a week, compared to 52.7 for men working these hours. Long hours are thus particularly bad for women’s work-life interference.

At the other end of the spectrum, women are less protected by working shorter hours than men: their work-life index scores are not as low as those of men who work long part-time hours (33.2 compared with 39.9 for women). Amongst all part-time workers, men’s work-life score is 32.6, while women’s is 38.1 (Table 4 below). Thus the protective effect of part-time hours compared to full-time (35–47) hours is stronger for men than women. This may reflect different motivations for working part-time. Men are more likely to work part-time to study, whereas women are more likely to work part-time to provide care (eg child or elder care) (van Wanrooy et al, 2008).

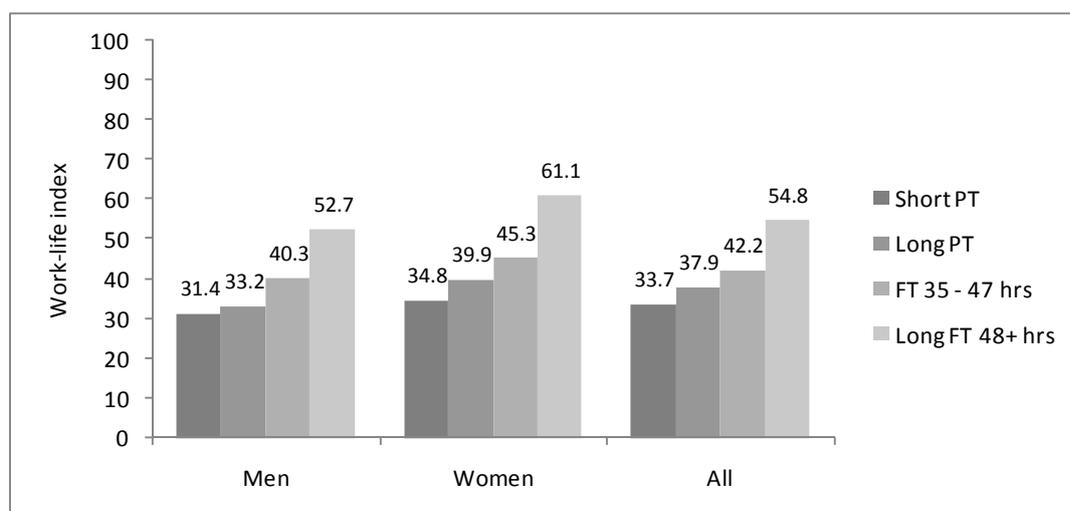


Figure 18 Work-life index scores by short and long work hours and gender, AWALI 2009

Note. PT = part-time, FT = full-time. Hours usually worked per week used to categorise short part-time (1-15 hours), long part-time (16-34 hours), standard full-time (35-47 hours) and long full-time (48+) hours. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N =2276.

### *The relationship between actual and preferred work hours*

Many Australian workers are some distance from their preferred work hours, with significant numbers working more than they would prefer and many working less. There is no easy or precise equilibrium between labour supply and demand when it comes to the length of hours worked.

As in previous years, we asked employees about their preferred hours, taking into account how a change in work hours would affect their income. Table 4 shows the actual and preferred working hours of employees. On average, part-timers would like to work an extra 4.2 hours a week. While male and female part-timers work very similar hours (just under 20 hours a week on average), part-time men are looking for more extra hours than women: they would like an extra 6.8 hours a week, compared to less than half this amongst women (3.1 extra hours).

The opposite mismatch occurs amongst full-timers: they want to reduce their work hours. The average preferred working week for full-time employees is 39.4 hours. This is 5.8 hours less than they actually work. Amongst full-timers, men’s average actual hours are longer than women’s: 46.2 hours compared to 43.2 hours. However, it is women who are looking for the greatest reduction in their full-time hours: from 43.2 hours to 36.3 hours (6.9 hours – almost a full day less at work). This is a larger gap than for full-time men who would prefer a reduction of 5.2 hours from their current level of 46.2 hours per week.

Even given the effect of reduced work hours on income, on average full-timers would like to work almost a full day less.

Regardless of whether women are part-time or full-time, or under or over-employed relative to their preferred hours, they have worse work-life interference than men. Even though men's work hours in full-time work make them more at risk of work-life conflict, full-time women report higher levels of conflict perhaps arising from their higher levels of over-employment relative to their preferences.

Table 4 Actual and preferred work hours by gender, AWALI 2009

	Actual work hours	Preferred work hours	Work hours mismatch	Work-life index
Men				
Full-time	46.2	41.0	5.1	45.0
Part-time	19.7	26.4	-6.8	32.6
Total	41.6	38.5	3.1	42.8
Women				
Full-time	43.2	36.3	6.8	49.2
Part-time	19.4	22.5	-3.1	38.1
Total	31.8	29.7	2.1	43.6
All				
Full-time	45.2	39.4	5.7	46.4
Part-time	19.5	23.7	-4.2	36.4
Total	37.1	34.5	2.6	43.1

Note. The work hour gap for those who prefer more hours is negative reflecting the number of extra hours desired to work (ie actual hours minus preferred hours). Table excludes self-employed persons. Index scores not adjusted for work hours. N = 2276.

#### *The gap between actual and preferred hours*

We find almost exactly the same proportion of all workers have a mismatch between their actual and preferred working hours in 2009 as in 2008. The onset of the economic downturn has not changed this proportion, which is higher than reflected in ABS labour force surveys (ABS, 2007), perhaps reflecting the higher proportion of managers and professionals amongst AWALI respondents. In 2008 just over half (51.6 per cent) of those surveyed did not have a good hours match, applying a fairly generous definition of a 'match' as within four hours – or half a day – of preferred hours. In 2009, the proportion of workers with a mismatch of at least four hours is 51.8 per cent (50.6 per cent of women, and 52.8 per cent of men).

Figure 19 shows that of those who want to change their work hours, the majority want to work less, as in 2008. While there are some gender differences, large proportions of both women and men would like to work less: a third of all women and 38.6 per cent of all men. A smaller proportion of women (17.0 per cent) and men (14.2 per cent) would like to work more hours.

The economic downturn has continued to be accompanied by a large proportion of workers working more hours than they would prefer. However, the size of the hours gap is less than last year: on average in the 2008 AWALI survey workers were working 3.6 hours more than they wanted. In March 2009, the gap was 2.6 hours. This reflects a fall in the actual hours worked while the preferred length of the working week has remained stable across the two years (34.6 hours in 2008 and 34.5 in 2009).

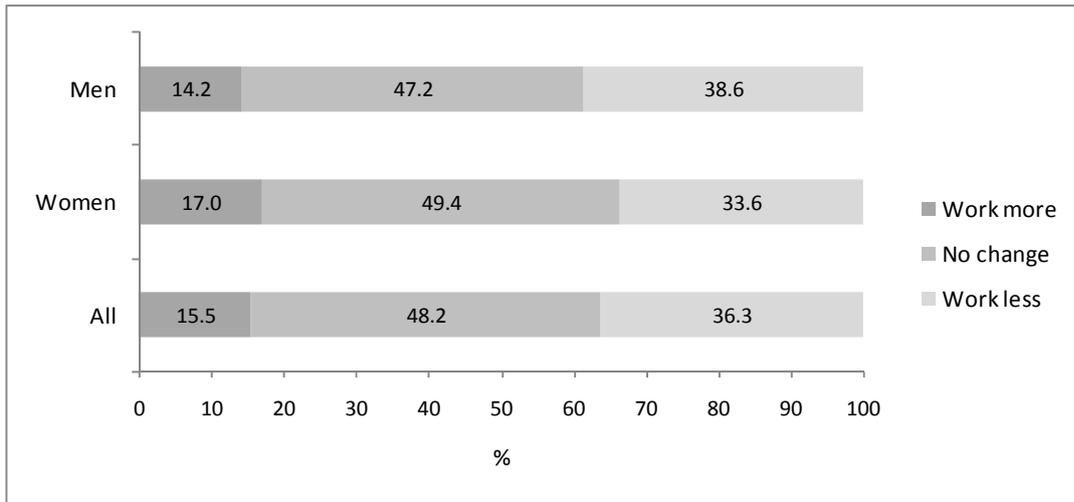


Figure 19 Work hours fit with preferences by gender, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

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 = 2276.

Figure 20 shows how the fit between actual and preferred working hours varies for men and women in part-time and full-time employment. Not surprisingly, part-timers are more likely to want more hours, especially part-time men. Involuntary under-employment is much more prevalent amongst men than women. Overall more than a third of all part-timers would like more work.

The preference for fewer hours is very strong amongst long hours workers. Three-quarters of women working more than 48 hours a week would like to work less, along with two thirds per cent of men working long hours. However, even amongst those working 35 to 47 hours there is a widespread preference to work less – 38.8 per cent of those working 35 to 47 hours would like to work fewer hours. Almost half of all full-time women would like to work fewer hours, and around a third of full-time men would like to join them.

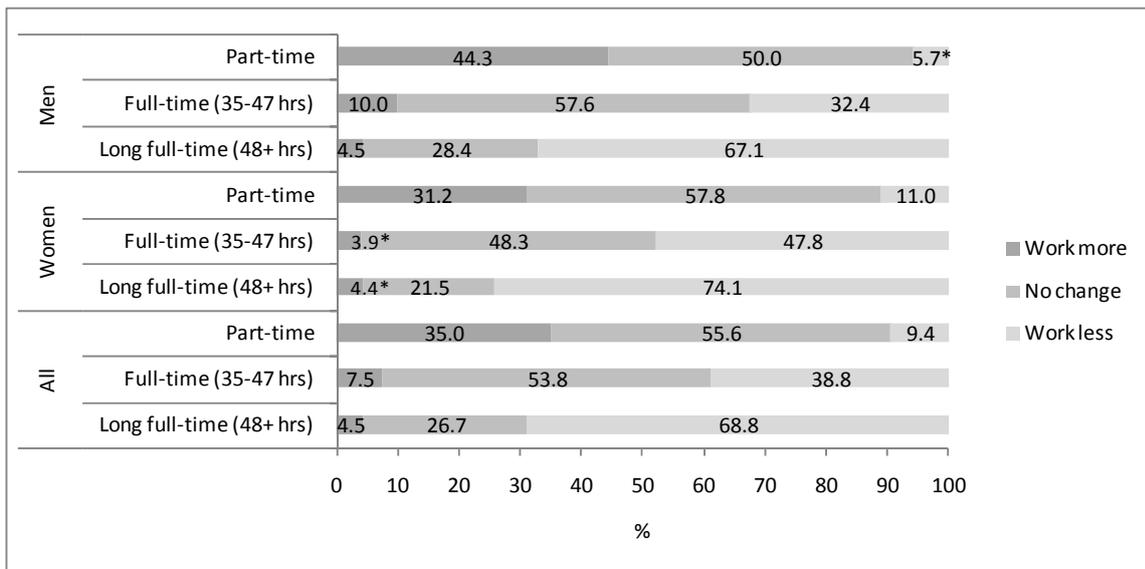


Figure 20 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

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 = 2276.

### *Household type and work hours 'fit'*

How do preferences vary by household type? Table 5 shows that employees living in couple households, whether they have children or not, have wider gaps between actual and preferred hours than those living in single households whether with children or not. However, fathers living in couple households have the worst work hours fit: on average they would like to reduce their 45.7 hour weeks to 40.8 hours, a reduction of five hours. Similarly, mothers in couple households with children would like to reduce their hours by around three hours a week. A poor hours fit particularly afflicts parents.

However, parenting responsibilities are not the sole driver of this desire to reduce work hours: men and women in couples who do not have parenting responsibilities would also like to reduce their weekly hours (by 3.1 and 3.6 hours respectively). This suggests that flexibility supports – like the right to request a change to working hours – will be valued and meaningful to many parents as well as many who are not parents.

Table 5 Actual and preferred work hours by household type and gender, AWALI 2009

	Actual work hours	Preferred work hours	Work hours mismatch
Men			
Single with children	41.4	39.5	1.9
Couple with children	45.7	40.8	5.0
Couple without children	41.6	38.6	3.1
Single without children	37.5	36.5	1.2
Women			
Single with children	31.0	30.9	0.0
Couple with children	29.1	26.2	2.9
Couple without children	35.8	32.9	3.6
Single without children	33.3	32.0	1.3
All			
Single with children	33.1	32.7	0.3
Couple with children	38.9	34.7	4.1
Couple without children	39.3	36.3	3.3
Single without children	35.5	34.3	1.3

Note. The work hour gap for those who prefer more hours is negative reflecting the number of extra hours desired to work (ie actual hours minus preferred hours). Unadjusted (Unadj) index scores are the original scores not controlling for work hours. Adjusted data provides the index score controlling for work hours. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2166.

Overall, slightly more parents (whether living in a couple or single parents) than those without children would prefer to reduce their work time by four or more hours per week. However, there are some gender differences (Figure 21). Just over half of mothers living in couples or single mothers would like to work different hours, of these two-thirds would prefer to work less. A similar pattern can be observed for men: fathers are more likely to prefer fewer hours than men without parenting responsibilities.

Figure 21 shows the proportion of workers who desire a change to their hours, and Table 5 which shows the average size of the discrepancy between actual and preferred work hours. Workers in single households have the lowest average gap between their actual and preferred work hours: 0.3 hours for single persons with children and 1.3 hours for singles without children. However, as shown in Figure 21, around 32 per cent of workers in both of these groups would

prefer to reduce their work time by four or more hours. Around 40 per cent of workers with children would prefer to reduce their work time by four or more hours, and the average size of this gap is around three to four hours (Table 5). The smaller average gap between actual and preferred hours for single persons is therefore explained by the higher proportion, around 20 per cent, of these workers who would prefer to increase their work time by four or more hours. In contrast, only 11 per cent of workers in couple households would prefer to work four or more hours. Hence the average discrepancy between actual and preferred hours is smaller for single persons.

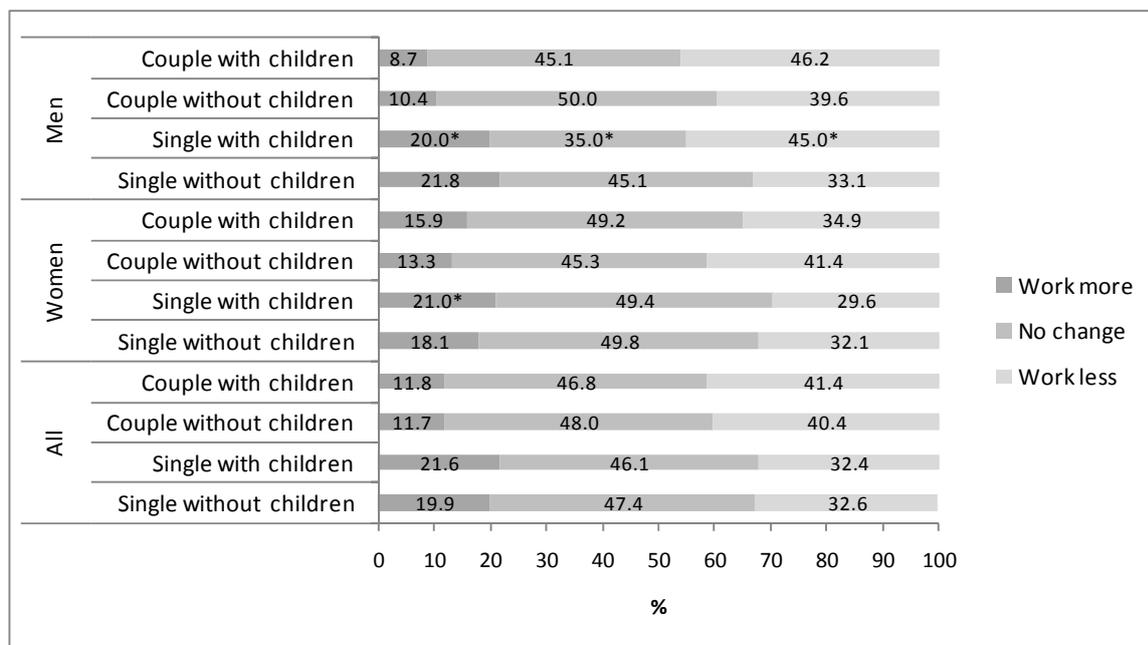


Figure 21 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and family structure, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

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 = 2103.

### *Full-time workers' preference to shift to part-time hours*

In this section we have considered the size of the gap between actual and preferred work hours, and the workers most likely to desire a reduction of half a day or more (ie 4+ hours) in their work hours. Here we take a slightly different approach and examine full-time workers' preference to work part-time hours (34 hours or less per week).

In 2009 we find that many women who currently work full-time would like to reduce their work hours to part-time. A third of all full-time women would like to do so (taking into account the effect on their income). This preference is stronger amongst full-timers who are mothers: 38.7 per cent of all mothers working full-time would like to work part-time (very similar to the result in 2008 when 36.7 per cent wanted to work part-time). Over a quarter (27.7 per cent) of women without children also wanted to shift to part-time hours.

The proportion of men who would like to make this shift is much smaller: 12.2 per cent of all full-time men would like to work part-time (8.9 per cent of fathers, and 15.2 per cent of men without parenting responsibilities).

These findings further highlight the impact of work hours on women, and mothers in particular. Nearly forty per cent of mothers working full-time would prefer to work part-time, a clear

indication of the work-life challenges many women face in combining full-time work and parenthood.

### *Personal income and hours 'fit'*

How does the fit between actual and preferred hours differ by income? Large proportions of all income groups would prefer different hours. However, Figure 22 shows that higher income employees are less satisfied with their hours than lower paid workers: 65.4 per cent of those earning more than \$90,000 and 57.9 per cent of those earning \$60,000 - \$89,999 would prefer different hours (at least half a day or four hours), compared to 44.1 per cent of those earning less than \$15,000. This no doubt reflects in part the longer hours worked by higher income employees.

As incomes decline, the incidence of hours mismatch reduces, to a low of 40.9 per cent amongst women earning less than \$15,000. At the same time, with lower income workers, the balance between those who want to work more and those who want to work less switches. Not surprisingly, higher income workers are most likely to want to work less, and lower income workers – where most part-timers are concentrated – are most likely to want more work hours.

Almost two-thirds of those earning more than \$90,000 would like to work fewer hours. Over half of those earning between \$60,000- \$89,999 would like to work less. The patterns for men and women are very similar. At the other end of the income spectrum, just over one third (37.3 per cent) of those earning less than \$15,000 would like to work more (44.4 per cent of men and 33.9 per cent of women).

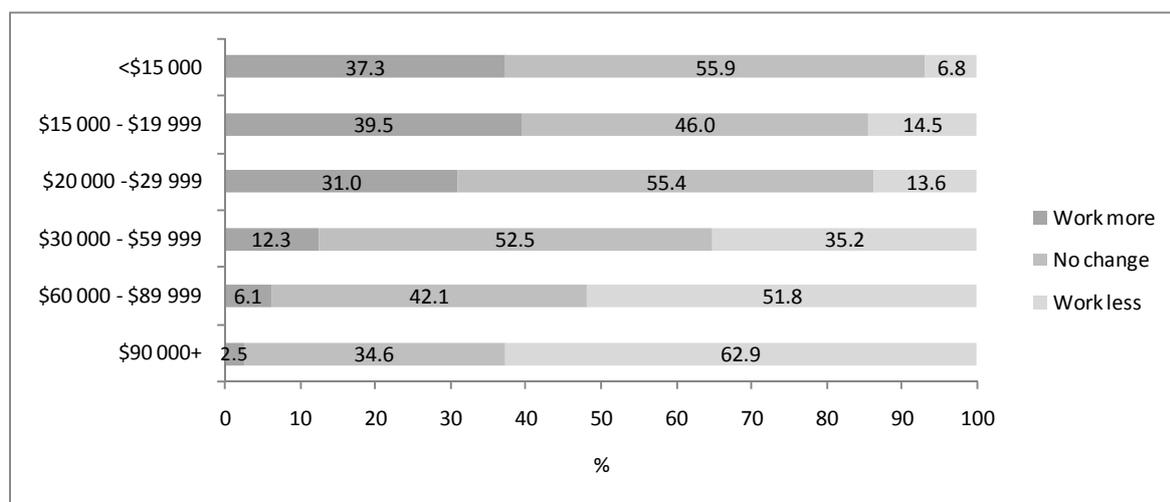


Figure 22 Work hours fit with preferences by gender and personal income, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

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 =2042.

### *Work-life interference and hours 'fit'*

What do the gaps between actual and preferred hours mean for work-life interference? As in 2008, a poor fit between actual and preferred hours is associated with worse work-life interference – but only for those who would like to work less (Figure 23). There is no significant difference in work-life interference between those who want to work more and those who have a match between their actual and preferred hours. It is the overshooting of actual hours relative to preferences that is associated with higher work-life conflict. This pattern prevails for both men and women.

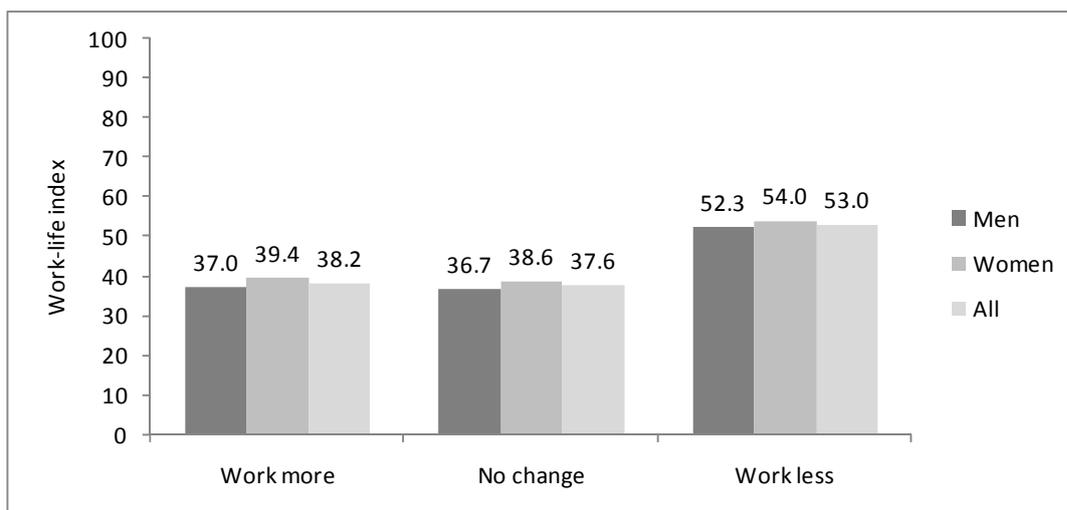


Figure 23 Work-life index scores by work hours fit, AWALI 2009

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 = 2214.

### Summary

In summary, hours matter a great deal to the quality of work-life interference. AWALI 2009 confirms findings from earlier AWALI surveys about the importance to work-life interference of the length of hours, and the fit between actual and preferred hours. Longer hours and working longer hours than preferred are both associated with greater work-life interference.

Many Australians are a long way from their preferred working hours and the 2008/09 economic downturn has not made any difference to the scale of this mismatch. Just over half of all employees in both 2008 and 2009 have a gap of at least four hours between their actual and preferred work hours. Compared to 2008, the average size of the gap between actual and preferred hours has narrowed by an hour to 2.6 hours in March 2009.

It is worth bearing in mind that much of the long hours or extra time worked by Australians is unpaid. We might expect that the economic downturn would reduce overtime and excessive hours, with the effect of reducing the proportion of Australians who are working more than they prefer. However, there are few signs of this. There is, however, evidence, that the size of the ‘overshoot’ has reduced by an hour.

Most people who have a poor fit of actual and preferred hours are working longer than they want, and it is this form of misfit which is associated with significantly higher levels of work-life interference.

Gender, income and family composition all shape the work-life effects of hours and their fit with preferences. Women are more negatively affected than men by longer hours, and many want to work less, whether they have children or not. Men are more likely to be involuntarily working part-time, but many share women’s dislike of long hours, and the greater work-life interference which accompanies them. A poor fit of actual and preferred hours especially affects higher income earners compared to lower income employees. However, even amongst lower paid workers, four in ten are not working hours that are close to their preferences, with most of them wanting to work more. While many parents are affected by a mismatch of their preferred and actual working hours, so are a significant proportion of those without children.

These results all point to the value of assisting employees, whether parents or not, to get a better fit between their actual and preferred hours. It is this issue and the broader issues of flexibility of working arrangements that we consider in Section 8.

## Section 5: International comparisons

### *Comparing Australia and Europe*

In the previous AWALI collections we were not able to compare Australian's work-life interference with international data. However, in 2009 we have replicated a question from a survey conducted in the European Union (EU) which allows us to compare the views of Australian workers with those in 31 European countries (25 EU member states and 6 additional countries). There is a difference in the years in which the data were collected: the 'European Working Conditions Survey' (Parent-Thirion, Macías, Hurley & Vermeulen, 2007) is conducted every five years and the latest data available is for 2005, whereas Australian data was collected in March 2009 during an economic downturn.

Table 6 sets out results, showing that, as in many European countries, most employed Australian men and women feel that work fits well or very well with their family and social commitments. The majority (83.9 per cent) of Australians in employment (including the self-employed) believe that work fits in well or very well with their family and social commitments, compared to 79.4 per cent in 27 European countries. This outcome may reflect the greater proportion of part-time workers in Australia, compared to the OECD average.

Table 6 Work fits in with family and social commitments well or very well by gender, employment type and age, AWALI 2009 & 4<sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey (per cent)

	Men	Women	All	Employees	Self-employed	<= 24 years	25-54 years	55+ years
AWALI 2009	82.8	85.3	83.9	84.0	84.2	84.4	83.3	86.6
4 <sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey 2005	76.6	83.0	79.4	80.8	72.6	79.8	78.4	84.7

Note. For comparability with EU data, AWALI data includes self-employed persons unless otherwise specified. EU Survey contains respondents aged from 15 years and older. AWALI respondents are aged 18 years and older. Separate EU data is provided for age groups 25-39 years (76.7 per cent well/very well) and 40-54 years (80.1 per cent well or very well). The average for these two groups is reported here to match available AWALI age categories. AWALI N = 2736. EU N = 29,680.

Slightly fewer men than women hold positive views of their work-life fit, both in Australia and Europe. The gender gap is wider in Europe than Australia. Whilst there is little difference in views between employees and the self-employed in Australia, in Europe the self-employed are less likely to agree that their work and life commitments fit together well, compared to employees.

Age also makes more of a difference in Europe, with older workers more likely to hold positive views of their work-life fit than younger Europeans. However, in Australia similar high proportions of young, middle aged and older workers hold positive views of their work-life fit.

What difference do children make to work-life interference in Europe and Australia? Table 7 shows, not surprisingly, that those without children are more likely to say that work fits in with family and social commitments very well, compared with parents of children under 16. This is true in both Australia and Europe and for mothers and fathers. The effect of children on work-life fit appears greater for fathers than for mothers in both regions.

Table 7 Work fits in with family and social commitments well or very well by parental status, AWALI 2009 & 4<sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey (per cent)

Work fits in with family/social commitments	Men				Women			
	No children < 16 years		With children < 16 years		No children < 16 years		With children < 16 years	
	AU	EU27	AU	EU27	AU	EU27	AU	EU27
Very well	35.0	31.3	27.8	24.4	38.3	36.6	34.3	32.9
Well	47.2	48.4	55.7	48.7	45.9	47.7	52.6	48.8
Not very well	14.3	15.4	14.3	20.0	14.2	13.1	9.7	14.7
Not at all well	3.4	5.0	2.2*	6.9	1.6*	2.6	3.4*	3.6

Note. For comparability with EU data, AWALI data includes self-employed persons. AWALI N = 2736. EU N = 29,680.

### *Australia in comparison with 31 European countries*

Figure 24 shows how Australia compares to 31 individual European nations on the extent to which work is perceived to fit well or very well with family and social commitments. Australia ranks 9<sup>th</sup> out of the 31 nations (25 EU member countries and six non EU countries) when they are ranked from best to worst.

As this report shows, there has been some deterioration in work-life interference in Australia in the past three years (see Section 3 for an overview). Given that the EU results were collected in 2005 and Australia's in March 2009, several months into an economic downturn, it may be the case that Australia compares better with the EU than the above data suggests.

That said, by this comparison Australian results are worse than those in Norway, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, UK and the Netherlands. However, the differences between the top 14 nations – all of whom had less than one in five saying that work does not fit in well with their other activities – are quite small.

Beneath this group are a set of 15 nations where between 20 and 30 per cent of their workers say that work does not fit well with other activities, and a further three – Latvia, Greece and Turkey – where at least one in three workers do not have a good work-life fit.

Overall, the proportion of workers who say their work fits well or very well with their family and social commitments ranges from at best, 88.1 per cent in Norway, to 83.9 per cent in Australia, down to 57.9 per cent in Greece.

More Australians say that their work fits well or very well with their family and social commitments than citizens of France, Sweden, Spain and Italy amongst many others.

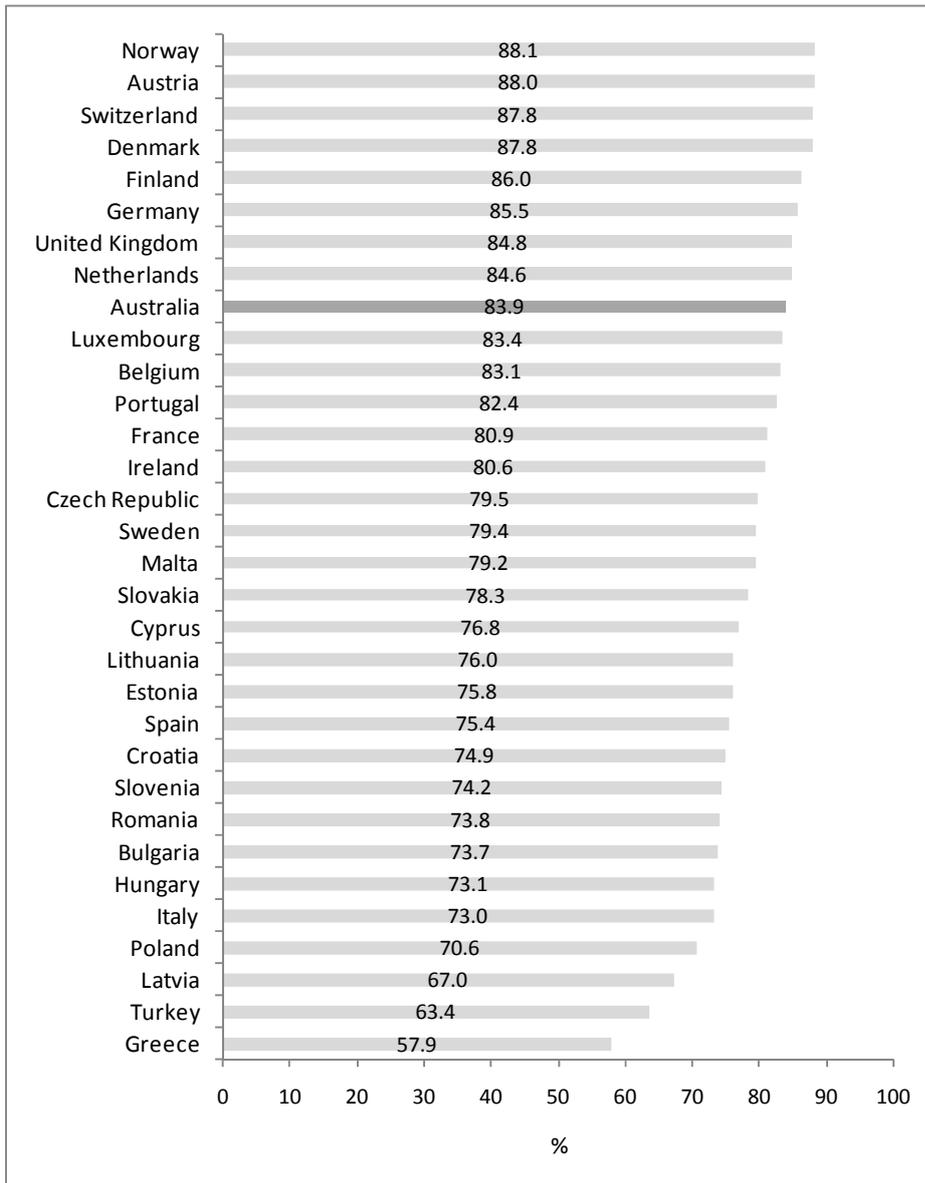


Figure 24 Work fits in well/very well with family and social commitments, AWALI 2009 and 4<sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey 2005 (per cent).

Note: For comparability with EU data, AWALI data includes self-employed persons. AWALI N = 2736. EU N = 29,680.

### *Occupation and industry*

Turning to occupations, and matching as well as possible Australian and European occupation and industry categories, we find that there are significant differences by industry and occupation in Australia and Europe.

Table 8 shows that managers are least likely to say their work fits in well or very well with their family and social commitments in Australia and the EU. That said, around three-quarters of managers in both regions say that their work fits in well with their social and family commitments. Professionals in both regions have relatively positive views on their work-life fit, with 83.5 and 84.2 per cent of Australian and European workers, respectively, saying that work and life fit together well. Clerical workers in both regions report the best work-life fit.

Comparing Australia with the EU, it appears that sales workers, machinery operators and drivers and community and personal service workers, have a much better work-life fit in Australia than in Europe.

Table 8 Work fits in well/very well with family and social commitments by occupation and industry, AWALI 2009 and 4<sup>th</sup> EU Working Conditions Survey 2005 (per cent).

	Australia	EU
<b>Occupation<sup>a</sup></b>		
Managers	78.4	74.5
Professionals	83.5	84.2
Technicians and trades workers	81.9	78.0
Community and personal service workers	82.7	73.3
Clerical and administrative workers	90.2	86.3
Sales workers	85.8	73.3
Machinery operators and drivers	85.3	70.2
Labourers	84.2	81.2
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>83.9</b>	<b>79.4</b>
<b>Industry</b>		
Agriculture/forestry and fishing	88.0	71.3
Mining	84.1	79.2b
Manufacturing	83.2	79.2b
Electricity/gas/water and waste services	92.1	89.0
Construction	84.9	78.1
Wholesale trade	100.0*	76.8c
Retail trade	85.8	76.8c
Accommodation and food services	72.9	70.4
Transport/postal and warehousing	70.3	71.5
Information media and telecommunications	86.5	n/a
Financial and insurance services	88.1	86.4
Rental/hiring and real estate services	88.2	81.7
Professional/scientific and technical services	85.5	n/a
Administrative and support services	92.2	n/a
Public administration and safety	86.1	79.9
Education and training	86.4	90.1
Health care and social assistance	81.6	79.6
Arts and recreation services	85.7	n/a
Other services	85.1	n/a
<b>All industries</b>	<b>83.9</b>	<b>79.4</b>

Note: \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. n/a EU data not available. <sup>b</sup>EU data combines mining and manufacturing into a single category. <sup>c</sup>EU data combines wholesale and retail trade into a single category. For comparability with EU data, AWALI data includes self-employed persons. AWALI N = 2654. EU N = 29,680.

Turning to industry groups, there are some differences that are consistent in both Europe and Australia. In both regions it appears that electricity, gas, water and waste service workers have more positive assessments of work-life fit than those in many other industries, with the worst work-life fit in both regions occurring amongst accommodation and food services workers and those employed in transport, postal and warehousing. Nevertheless, in both of these industry

groups, around 70 per cent of workers report work fits in well or very well with their life outside of work in Australia and the EU.

Public sector areas of employment like education and training have comparatively good work-life fit, although health care and social assistance workers report less positive assessments.

Comparing the two regions, work-life fit in agriculture is worse in Europe than Australia: 28.7 per cent of EU agricultural workers say that work does not fit in well with other activities, compared to 12 per cent of agricultural workers in Australia. It is interesting to note that education and training is the only industry in which EU workers report more positive assessments of their work-life fit than Australian workers: 90.1 per cent of EU education and training professionals report that work fits in well or very well with other life activities, compared to 86.4 per cent of Australian workers in this industry.

### *Summary*

In the 31 countries included in the 4th EU Working Conditions survey, the degree of negative assessments of work-life fit varies from very poor in a few countries, where at least one in three workers find that work does not fit well with family and community activities, to much better outcomes in most countries. Australia ranks 9th out of all 31 countries when they are ranked from best to worst. Just under one in five Australian workers believe that work doesn't fit well with their family and social commitments, very close to outcomes in the Netherlands, the UK, and Germany, and four percentage points below Norway, where the most positive work-life fit assessments are reported.

The pattern of work-life fit by gender, parental status, industry and occupation in Australia is similar to the European pattern, with women, parents, private sector workers, managers and those working in accommodation and food services and transport postal and warehousing perceiving the poorest work-life fit.

There are also some differences between the two regions, with more variation by age in Europe, and more negative assessments of work-life fit in Europe than Australia amongst sales and service workers, machinery operators and drivers and community and personal service workers.

It should be kept in mind that the data being compared in this section is four years more recent for Australia than for Europe. In addition, the European average conceals very significant variations between European countries.

Looking ahead, use of multiple indicators and more precise measures than general levels of satisfaction (like the one used in the EU survey) across a wider range of countries is desirable, facilitating more accurate comparative analysis.

## Section 6: Personal and household characteristics, location and work-life interference

This section considers personal and household characteristics and their associations with work-life interference. We consider age, the effects of parenting (including the differences that hours and self-employment make to parents' work-life interference), household type, income and location.

### *Age*

The nature of participation in work changes over the life cycle. This is reflected in patterns of work hours and work-life interference across age groups. The shortest work hours are reported by younger workers (aged 18 to 24 years), many of whom are full-time or part-time students, and by older workers (65 years and over) who are likely to be moving into retirement. Across all age groups, men on average work longer hours than women. However, this difference is smallest in the youngest and oldest age groups.

When we examine work-life index scores that have not been adjusted for work hours, then a similar pattern emerges, with the best work-life relationship reported by those in the youngest and oldest age groups. However, for younger people this effect is mainly due to their shorter work hours. As Figure 25 shows, when we control for differences in work hours, it is only the older age groups (55 years and older) who have a comparatively better work-life relationship compared to other age groups. Further, when we control for differences in work hours between men and women, the largest gap in work-life interference between men and women occurs in the youngest age group, and also between the ages of 35 to 54 years. This reflects the life stage when care responsibilities for children and young people are often most intense.

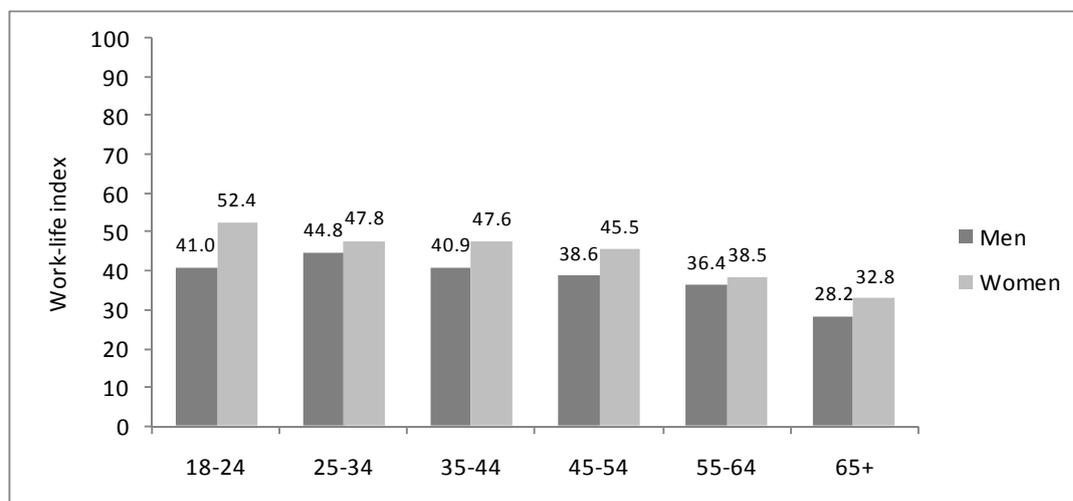


Figure 25 Work-life index scores by age and gender, AWALI 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2276.

### *Parenting responsibilities and work-life interference*

Achieving a good work-life relationship is often more difficult for parents compared to those without caring responsibilities (Craig 2007). This is particularly the case for women, as in most countries including Australia, it is women who are most often the primary care providers for children, especially when the children are very young. Here we compare and contrast the work-life interference of working men and women who have parenting responsibilities for children aged 17 years or under, compared to those who do not have such caring responsibilities. We also

take our analysis one step further by examining differences between parents who are employees and the self-employed (Section 7 includes a full discussion of differences between the self-employed and employees).

In general, women work fewer hours if they have parenting responsibilities, and fathers work more than men without children. Important differences in these patterns can be observed when the type of employment is taken into account. For women who are employees, those with parenting responsibilities work significantly fewer hours than women without parenting responsibilities. However, parenthood is not associated with a significant difference in the work hours of self-employed women. A more consistent pattern is observed for men. Both self-employed and employee fathers work significantly longer hours than those men without parenting responsibilities. The gap is largest for self-employed men.

Some interesting implications emerge for work-life interference when we control for the influence of work hours. As Table 9 shows, in general parents report worse work-life interference compared to those without parenting responsibilities. For women, this pattern is observed for the self-employed and employees on index scores adjusted or unadjusted for work hours. There is no significant difference in the work-life interference of self-employed and employee mothers. So, for women, parenthood is associated with an increase in work-life conflict, which is not alleviated by self-employment. Amongst men, fathers have the worst work-life interference if they are employees or self-employed. However, when we statistically adjust for the effects of work hours we find that it is only self-employed fathers who have worse work-life interference than men without parenting responsibilities. This suggests that self-employment is likely to worsen the work-life interference of fathers, independent of the effect of the longer work hours that are typical of self-employed men. These findings suggest that self-employment does not enable mothers or fathers to achieve a better work-life relationship and this is consistent with our analysis in both 2007 and 2008.

Table 9 Work hours and work-life index scores of employees and self-employed workers by gender, AWALI 2009

	Employee			Self-employed			All employed		
	Work hours	Index unadj.	Index adj.	Work hours	Index unadj.	Index adj.	Work hours	Index unadj.	Index adj.
Men									
Child < 18 years	43.8	45.5	41.8	47.6	52.2	46.4	44.4	46.5	44.1
No child	39.7	40.7	39.4	40.9	42.4	40.4	39.9	41.0	39.9
All	41.6	42.9	40.4	43.8	46.7	43.1	41.9	43.5	41.8
Women									
Child < 18 years	28.7	46.3	51.2	26.2	46.5	52.8	28.5	46.3	52.0
No child	34.4	41.7	43.3	29.7	33.5	37.8	34.0	41.0	40.5
All	31.8	43.8	46.8	28.0	39.8	44.9	31.4	43.5	45.9
All									
Child < 18 years	36.8	45.8	46.5	40.8	50.4	49.6	37.3	46.4	48.1
No child	37.4	41.1	41.3	37.8	39.9	39.1	37.4	41.0	40.2
All	37.1	43.3	43.6	39.2	44.7	44.0	37.4	43.5	43.9

Note. Employee N = 2276. Self-employed N = 365. All employed N = 2641.

### Household type and work-life interference

An examination of how work hours and work-life interference differ according to an individual's parenting responsibilities gives some insight into the work-life effects of parenting. A more comprehensive picture, however, is visible when we broaden our focus to consider the households within which these individuals reside. Here we consider whether an individual is living as a single person or with a partner (married or de facto), and whether they have parenting responsibilities for children under the age of 17 years. In this analysis we focus exclusively on employees, as our sample of self-employed persons is not of sufficient size to support this more detailed analysis.

As Figure 26 shows, work hours vary across household types, and different patterns are evident for men and women. Looking at all employees, single persons with or without children work the shortest hours. Workers living in a couple household work the longest hours, regardless of parenting status. Across all household types, men consistently work longer hours than women, and this gap is largest in couple households with children. Amongst women, the longest hours (35.8) are worked by partnered women without parenting responsibilities, followed by single women without children (although their work hours are not statistically higher than those of single mothers). The shortest work hours are reported by partnered mothers (29.1), although once again their work hours are not statistically different from single mothers.

A different pattern emerges for men: the longest hours are worked by partnered fathers, and the shortest hours by single men without children.

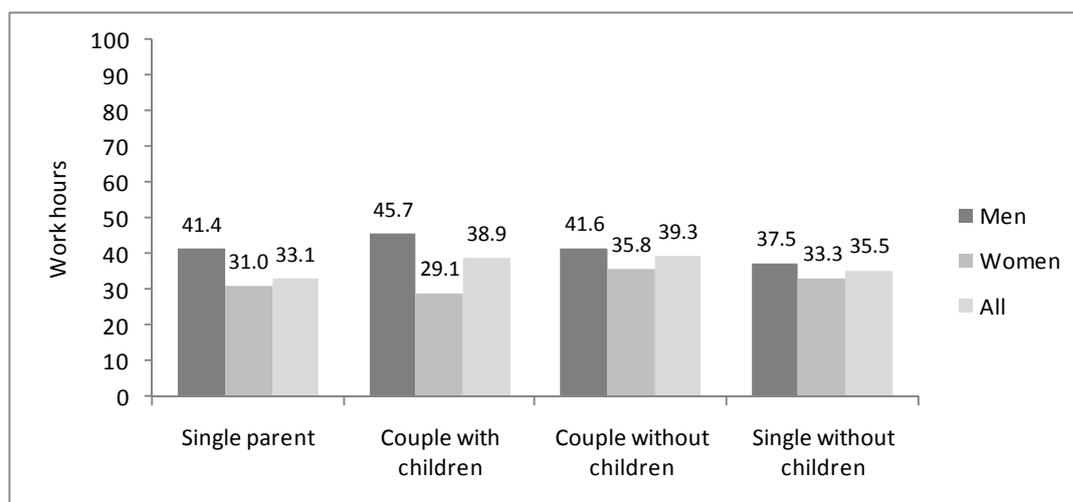


Figure 26 Work hours by household structure and gender, AWALI 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2166 (men n = 1150, women n = 1016).

Gendered gaps in hours of work are widest for men and women with dependent children: this is when men work most and women work the least paid work hours. When we statistically control for these differences in work hours, those workers in couple households with children have the highest work-life index scores (ie worst work-life interference) (Figure 27). However, the only statistically significant difference was between workers in couple households compared to couple households without children. There is no statistically significant difference on the work-life index between any of the other household types.

Considering men and women separately there are some gender differences in this pattern. Household type seems to have less influence on men's work-life interference. Single fathers have the lowest work-life index scores, whereas there is no significant difference in work-life interference between the men in the remaining household types. The findings for single fathers should be interpreted with caution, as the sample size for this group was quite small (n = 25).

For women, there is a clearer association between parenting and work-life conflict. Single and partnered mothers have the worst work-life interference compared to women without parenting responsibilities whether they are single or partnered.

Comparison of men and women within these household types again highlights the effect of parenting on women’s work-life interference: single and partnered mothers have higher work-life conflict compared to their male counterparts in these household types, whereas there is no significant difference on the work-life index between men and women without children who are partnered or single.

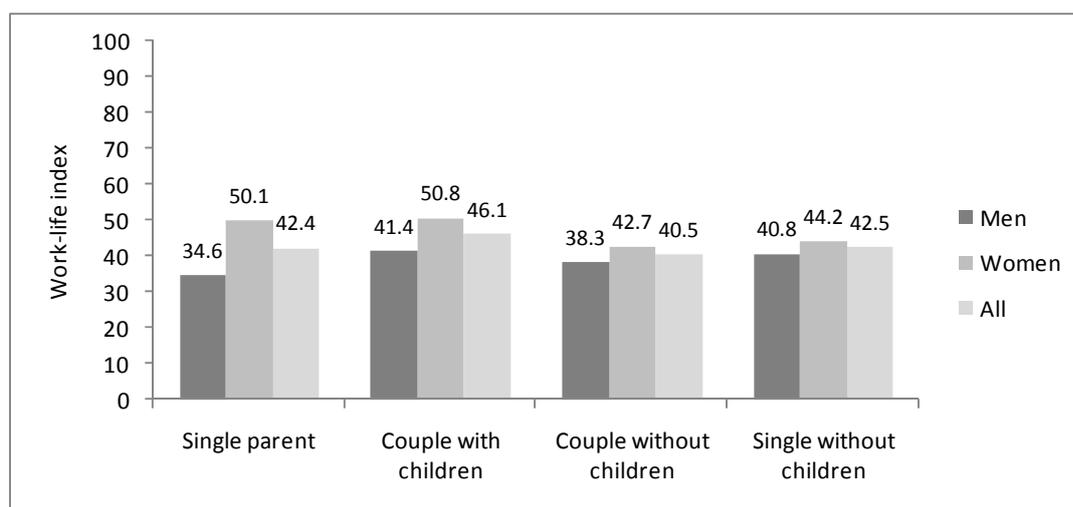


Figure 27 Work-life index scores by household structure and gender, AWALI 2009

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2150.

### *Income*

The income available to individuals and households is an important resource in reconciling work with other activities. Wealthier individuals and households can use their income to purchase supports (eg child care) and time-saving goods and services (eg pre-prepared foods). Those on lower incomes must manage their work-life relationship without access to these supports, and may also have a greater reliance on more time intensive activities such as public transport. Therefore, it is important to consider how personal and household income effects work-life interference.

AWALI 2008 collected data on household income. In 2009 we have also collected data on personal income. Personal income is likely to give us a more precise picture of the relationship between work-life interference and income.

Our 2008 analysis of household income found, not surprisingly, that those living in higher income households tend to work longer hours and have worse work-life interference. Controlling for this hours effect, we found no statistically significant difference in work-life interference between those in higher or lower income households. Those in the lowest income households (\$30,000 or less per year) had an index score similar to those living in higher income households. Those with a household income of \$30,000 – \$59,999 had the lowest index score and thus the best work-life relationship; however, these differences were not statistically significant.

Turning to our 2009 results, personal income reflects an individual’s work hours as well as their occupational status and its pay rate. Higher paid occupations (eg managers and professionals) are typically ‘long hours’ occupations. The average hours of AWALI 2009 respondents personally earning more than \$90,000 were 48.3 a week, compared to 22.8 for those earning less than \$30,000. Not surprisingly, higher income workers had worse work-life interference.

Table 10 shows that when we control for work hours, those with the lowest personal income (< \$15,000) and the highest personal income (\$90,000+) have the worst work-life interference. Women’s work-life interference is worse than men’s in each income group. Low income women have the worse work-life interference. Many single mothers are to be found in this income group.

As shown in Figure 28, when we control for differences in working hours, the relationship between personal income and work-life interference is ‘V’ shaped, with the least interference evident amongst those earning in the range of \$20,000 - \$60,000 and the worst at either end of the income scale. Beyond the beneficial effect of shorter hours, low income is not associated with a better work-life relationship: in fact, it is worse than for those earning mid-range incomes. For each income group, women’s work-life interference is worse than men’s, adjusted for work hours.

Table 10 Work-life index scores by personal and household income, AWALI 2009

	< \$30,000				\$30,000 – \$59,999	\$60,000 – \$89,999	\$90,000+
	Personal income						
	< \$15,000	\$15,000 - \$19,999	\$20,000 - \$29,999	All < \$3,000			
Men	45.5	39.4	37.1	39.7	37.8	41.4	43.3
Women	52.1	47.5	43.5	46.5	46.1	48.2	49.1
<b>All</b>	48.8	43.5	40.3	43.1	41.9	44.8	46.2
	Household income						
Men	-	-	-	38.1	36.7	40.1	42.8
Women	-	-	-	38.9	45.0	48.5	48.6
<b>All</b>	-	-	-	38.5	40.9	44.3	45.7

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2076.

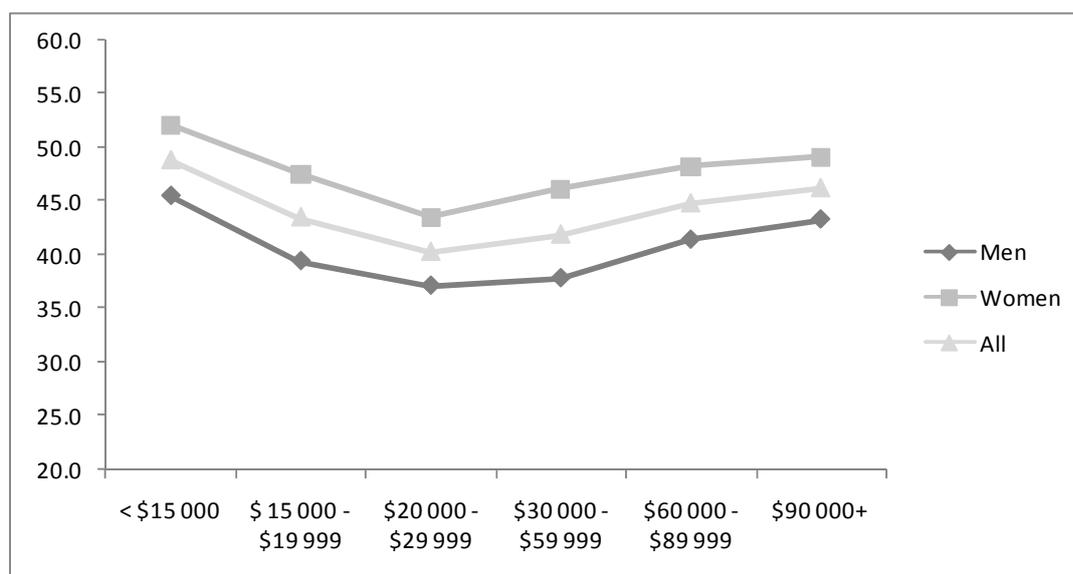


Figure 28 Work-life index scores by personal income

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2076.

Unfortunately, when it comes to analysing household income we cannot disaggregate those earning less than \$30,000 into finer income categories; this is important in view of the above finding of significant differences in work-life outcomes between those on relatively low incomes. However, higher household incomes are associated with the worst work-life interference, and this is particularly evident for women.

### *Location*

In previous years, mainland states and territories on the eastern seaboard (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT) have tended to have slightly worse work-life outcomes than other states though these differences have not been statistically significant. In 2009, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia have slightly better work-life interference, but these differences are not statistically significant.

Table 11 Work-life index scores by geographic location, AWALI 2007, 2008 & 2009

	ACT	NSW	SA	TAS	QLD	VIC	WA
2007	48.3	41.7	42.3	37.8	43.9	42.5	39.9
2008	43.8	43.6	39.3	39.8	44.0	43.0	39.3
2009	44.7	44.7	41.2	43.0	43.6	41.9	41.7

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. 2009 N = 2422. 2008 N = 2276. 2007 N = 1213.

### *Rural/regional and urban workers' work-life interference*

Geographic location can have a major influence on the ease with which work and life commitments and responsibilities can be managed and integrated. For example, those living in rural and regional areas are more likely to have higher transport costs, spend more time travelling, and health, social and educational services may be more limited or difficult to access. On the other hand, people living in smaller communities may experience stronger social networks and community connectedness which can provide important work-life supports.

As we found in the 2008 AWALI survey, there is very little difference in the work-life interference of employees living in rural/regional locations compared to urban areas when we consider employees as a whole. However, when we unpack this analysis by looking at mothers and fathers and those who do not have children then some interesting patterns emerge.

Men and women in the country work similar hours to their city colleagues. However, mothers in the country tend to work longer hours than urban mothers (30.7 compared to 27.6).

Table 12 shows the work-life index scores of employees from rural/regional and urban areas, adjusted for differences in work hours. One of the most interesting findings is the high level of work-life conflict reported by mothers in rural/regional areas in 2009 compared to 2008: their work-life index score has risen significantly from 2008 (44.6) to 2009 (51.3). In 2009 their work-life interference is on a par with urban mothers.

Whilst mothers in rural/regional and urban areas have comparable scores on the work-life index, the gap between mothers' and fathers' scores is much higher for parents living in rural/regional areas. There is a 14.5 point difference on the work-life index between mothers and fathers living in rural/regional areas, compared to a 6.7 point difference between urban men and women's scores. Furthermore, urban fathers' work-life interference is worse (ie a higher index score) than their rural/regional counterparts. These findings suggest that mothers in rural/regional areas are particularly at risk of high levels of work-life interference, especially when compared to their male counterparts – and this risk appears to be increasing.

Table 12 Work-life index scores of rural/regional and urban employees by gender, AWALI 2009

	Rural/regional		Urban		All	
	2008 Index – adjusted	2009 Index – adjusted	2008 Index – adjusted	2009 Index – adjusted	2008 Index – adjusted	2009 Index – adjusted
<b>Men</b>						
Child < 18 years	40.0	36.8	42.1	44.4	41.5	41.8
No child	38.2	37.5	42.2	39.9	41.1	39.4
<b>All</b>	39.1	37.2	42.2	42.1	41.4	40.4
<b>Women</b>						
Child < 18 years	44.6	51.3	49.2	51.1	47.7	51.2
No child	42.5	44.6	41.1	42.5	41.5	43.3
<b>All</b>	43.6	48.0	45.1	46.8	44.2	46.8
<b>All</b>						
Child < 18 years	42.3	44.1	45.7	47.7	44.5	46.5
No child	40.4	41.1	41.6	41.2	41.3	41.3
<b>All</b>	41.4	42.6	43.6	44.5	42.7	43.6

Note. Data excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. Rural/regional N = 830. Urban N = 1446. All N = 2276.

### *Summary*

A number of personal and household characteristics have significant associations with work-life interference. Where longer hours are worked, work-life interference is consistently worse and this effect prevails regardless of many other factors.

Setting aside differences associated with variations in working hours – which we discussed in Section 4 – those in middle age, those with dependent children, single mothers and mothers living in couples and those on high and low incomes – have significantly worse work-life interference than others.

While State/Territory differences are not significant, there are some interesting differences between mothers and fathers in regional/rural locations and urban parents. It seems that mothers in rural/regional areas are particularly at risk of high levels of work-life interference, especially when compared to rural/regional fathers, and that this risk has increased in 2009. Given the lack of research on rural/regional households and their work-life interference, these findings suggest that rural/regional mothers should be a priority for future work-life research, policies and programs.

## Section 7: Employment characteristics and work-life interference

---

In this section we consider the effects of self-employment, occupation, industry and form of employment contract (permanent/ongoing, fixed term or casual) on work-life interference. Unless indicated otherwise, we adjust for differences in working hours allowing us to focus on specific characteristics of work beyond the effects created by different hours; hours effects are analysed in Section 4.

### *Self-employment*

Self-employment creates the possibility for greater control over working arrangements, including the location and timing of work, and this might assist those with caring responsibilities to achieve a better work-life relationship. We did not find this to be the case in 2007 or 2008 and our 2009 results are consistent, even taking into account differences in work hours between employees and the self-employed.

The average hours worked by the self-employed are similar to those worked by employees: 39.2 hours a week, compared to 37.1 hours for employees. Self-employed men work longer weekly hours than employee men (43.8 hours compared with 41.6 hours). In contrast, self-employed women work shorter hours than employee women (28.0 hours compared with 31.8 hours).

It is likely that women seek out self-employment in pursuit of shorter hours (and perhaps more control over when and where they work). Our results confirm that women achieve – on average – shorter hours when they are self-employed: their working weeks are about half a day shorter (3.8 hours) than those of employees. As a result, their work-life relationship is better than that of employees. However, when we control for hours, self-employed women’s work-life scores – while lower – are not significantly different from those of employees. It seems that women might be able to reduce their working time through self-employment, but their work-life relationship is not much better independent of this work hours effect.

Self-employed men have worse work-life interference than male employees. This partly reflects their longer hours: self-employed men work 2.2 hours longer than male employees. When we control for this difference in hours, the difference in work-life interference is not significant.

In Section 3 we observed that employee men and women’s work-life index scores are not significantly different when differences in work hours are *not* taken into account. However, when scores are adjusted for differences in working hours, female employees have significantly worse work-life interference than men. A different pattern is evident for the self-employed. Self-employed women have less work-life interference than self-employed men, but they also work substantially fewer hours (28.0 hours compared to 43.8 for men). When we adjust for differences in work hours, there is no significant difference in the work-life index score of self-employed men and women. These findings suggest that when we control for differences in working hours female employees have relatively high levels of work-life conflict, they fare no better than their self-employed counterparts and they have significantly worse work-life conflict compared to male employees.

In terms of overall satisfaction with work-life balance, there are no significant differences between employees and self-employed as a whole, or for men and women separately.

Table 13 Work hours and work-life index scores of employees and self-employed workers by gender, AWALI 2009

	Employee			Self-employed			All employed		
	Work hours	Index – unadj.	Index – adj.	Work hours	Index – unadj.	Index – adj.	Work hours	Index – unadj.	Index – adj.
Men	41.6	42.9	40.4	43.8	46.7	43.1	41.9	43.5	41.8
Women	31.8	43.6	46.9	28.0	39.8	44.9	31.4	43.5	45.9
<b>All</b>	37.1	43.3	43.7	39.2	44.7	44.0	37.4	43.5	43.9

Note. Employee N = 2276. Self-employed N = 365. All employed N = 2641.

### Occupation

As in 2007 and 2008, managers and professionals have considerably worse work-life interference than other occupations, especially compared to those who are more protected from long hours or unpaid overtime (see Figure 29). When occupational differences in work hours are taken into account, sales workers also have high levels of work-life conflict on par with managers and professionals.

Managers and professionals tend to work the longest hours and hence report the worst work-life interference. When we control for work hours their relatively worse work-life interference, while less pronounced, persists. Figure 29 shows work-life index scores by occupation adjusted for differences in working hours. Outcomes for workers in sales occupations – many of them women – deteriorate significantly when we control for hours, so that in 2009 their work-life scores parallel those of professionals and managers.



Figure 29 Work-life index scores by occupation, AWALI 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2209.

### Industry

Differences in work-life interference by industry are small and not statistically significant, probably because of small numbers in many of the groups. As in 2008 the information, media and telecommunications industry has the worst work-life interference. A number of service-related industries like arts and recreation and administrative and support services have a better work-life relationship, compared to those in professional/scientific and technical services, transport/postal and warehousing and financial and insurance services.

Work hours play a significant role in creating high work-life conflict in some industries, including amongst workers in information media and telecommunications, professional/scientific and technical services, transport/postal and warehousing and, to a lesser extent, financial and insurance services. Table 14 shows work-life index scores by industry, adjusted for differences in work hours.

When we control for work hours the worst work-life interference is reported by employees in the accommodation and food services, professional/scientific and technical services, health care and social assistance, retail trade, information, media and telecommunications and education and training industries.

Table 14 Work-life index scores adjusted and unadjusted for work hours by industry, AWALI 2009

	Index score unadjusted	Index score adjusted
Professional/scientific and technical services	47.6	47.2
Accommodation and food services	44.2	47.2
Health care and social assistance	44.6	46.4
Retail trade	41.3	45.6
Information media and telecommunications	48.4	45.3
Education and training	44.7	45.2
Financial and insurance services	45.3	44.4
Arts and recreation services	37.5	43.8
Transport/postal and warehousing	45.8	42.6
Agriculture/forestry and fishing	43.8	42.1
Public administration and safety	42.4	41.9
Administrative and support services	39.9	41.7
Manufacturing	43.4	41.6
Rental/hiring and real estate services	40.7	41.3
Wholesale trade	42.7*	40.8*
Electricity/gas/water and waste services	42.7	40.1
Other services	37.3	37.7
Construction	41.3	37.2
Mining	43.4	37.0

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 2209.

#### *Type of employment contract*

Amongst our survey group of 2691 employed persons, 2307 were employees. Of these employees 73.9 per cent were employed as ongoing or permanent employees, 8.4 per cent were on fixed term contracts and 17.7 per cent were employed casually. ABS surveys, which include respondents aged 15 years and older while AWALI includes those aged 18 years and over, indicate that across the Australian labour market around 22.8 per cent of all employees were employed casually in November 2008 (ABS cat no 6359.0, November 2008).

Average hours of work vary widely by form of contract. In AWALI 2009 casuals were employed on average 21.1 hours a week, compared to 40.8 for permanent/ongoing employees and 36.4 for those on fixed term contracts.

When we do not adjust index scores for work hours, casuals have a better work-life relationship compared to permanent/ongoing employees. This effect, however, is mainly due to differences in work hours. When we control for the differences in work hours between casual, permanent and fixed term employees, there are no statistically significant differences in the work-life interference of these groups for men, women or all employees.

In 2008, there was a significant gap in work-life interference between permanent and casual workers when work hours were controlled, with casuals having significantly worse work-life interference. A year on, in recession, the gap has narrowed with slight decreases in work-life interference amongst casuals and slight deterioration amongst permanents. Adjusted for working hours, the work-life index score for permanent/ongoing workers in 2009 is 42.8, for fixed term contracts 44.6 and for casuals 44.7. Casuals' better work-life relationship is explained by their shorter work hours. When we control for this effect, casual work is not associated with less work-life interference compared to permanent or fixed term contract workers. This pattern holds for both women and men.

### *Summary*

When we take into account the effects of differing work hours, the best work-life relationship is reported by those who are employees rather than self-employed and those in non-professional and non-managerial occupations.

There are some important gender effects in these effects. Women, on average, work shorter hours and are less likely to work in industries and occupations associated with long hours. The lower work-life conflict associated with casual work is explained by the effects of shorter hours: casual work is not – beyond this – associated with better outcomes, and neither is self-employment.

Workers may seek out casual work or self-employment as a strategy to reduce their time commitment to paid work. However, our findings suggest that they are likely to get the same work-life benefits just by working shorter hours as a permanent or fixed-term employee. Unfortunately, finding shorter hours in the current Australian labour market often requires a shift to casual work – with effects on the quality of work, income, careers, retirement savings and so on. Our 2007 AWALI survey (Pocock, Skinner and Williams 2007) showed how poorer job quality (including more insecure employment) is associated with worse work-life interference.

## Section 8: Flexible work arrangements

---

One of the key predictors of work-life interference is the extent of employee-centred flexibility (Skinner and Pocock 2008, p 61). It is important to distinguish employer-related flexibility and employee-centred flexibility: it is the latter which is important to workers as they attempt to balance the demands of work with the demands of the rest of their lives. The two can occur simultaneously, but there are forms of employer and employee flexibility that are quite independent of – indeed, counter to – each other.

The capacity to control when work is done and the degree to which work time can be flexible to meet personal needs significantly affects work-life interference. AWALI 2008 showed that many workers – almost half - had low flexibility in their jobs (ie they somewhat or strongly disagreed that working time could be flexible to meet their needs and that they had a lot of freedom to decide when they did their work). In the 2008 AWALI survey workers without access to flexible work arrangements had worse work-life interference compared to those with flexibility.

Workers find flexibility by several means. Some seek out jobs that are characterised by flexibility – choosing industries or occupations or sectors (like public over private) that give more flexibility. Beyond this, many seek out particular workplaces that give workers flexibility. For example, some nurses seek out particular wards and supervisors in large hospitals given local differences in responsiveness to employee needs (Auer and Elton 2009). They are smart to do so: AWALI 2008 showed that workplace culture and local supervision are very significant in explaining work-life interference. Good local workplace cultures that support flexibility for workers result in much better work-life relationship.

Other employees don't bother making requests 'in situ': they change employers. A good example of this is the decisions that women make when returning to work after maternity leave. Recognising inflexible work arrangements and unsupportive local workplace cultures, they often change workplaces to find part-time or flexible options. Some change occupations and industries completely. This factor helps explain the persistent gender pay gap in countries like Australia where women have to 'change down' to get the flexibility they need. By switching jobs, workplaces and even occupations they often trade down to lower pay. Or, in pursuing part-time work, many women find that they have to accept casual employment. Ironically, casual work is not necessarily more flexible than fixed-term or ongoing work (Skinner & Pocock, 2008, p. 52), and is often associated with lower base rates of pay, less opportunities for career progression, and poorer conditions (Pocock, Prosser and Bridge 2004).

### *Employee requests for flexibility*

Since 2008 there have been important legislative reforms that may increase access to flexibility for some Australian workers. The *Fair Work Act 2009* was proclaimed on 14 May 2009. The objects of the new Act include 'assisting employees to balance their work and family responsibilities by providing for flexible working arrangements' including changes in the hours of work, changes in the patterns of work and changes in the location of work.

The Act provides new National Employment Standards (NES) which create a right for employees to request changes in working arrangements effective from 1 January 2010. This new right to request (RTR) represents a 'light touch' regulatory measure to support employees seeking flexibility, and it creates a duty for employers to consider such requests 'reasonably'. An employee who is a parent or carer for a child who is less than school aged or a child under 18 with a disability may ask their employer for a change in working arrangements to assist them to care for their child. Examples of such arrangements include changes in patterns of work and its location. Permanent employees (ie not casuals) are only entitled to make a request if they have completed at least 12 months continuous service with their employer immediately before making

their request. Casual workers can only make such requests if they are long term casual employees in their workplace immediately before making their request, and have a reasonable expectation of continuing employment on a regular and systematic basis. The legislation requires that requests be in writing and give details of the change sought and the reasons for it. In response, employers must give employees a written response to their requests within 21 days, saying whether they grant or refuse the request. Employers can refuse requests only on reasonable business grounds. If the request is refused, the written response must include details of the reasons for the refusal.

In some countries RTR law also creates a grievance mechanism and/or a right of appeal to a tribunal or a court where agreement cannot be reached; however, no such mechanism has been introduced in Australia.

This new right is similar in general terms to the UK law, and to provisions in the Netherlands, Germany and most recently New Zealand although there are some important variations between countries (Charlesworth and Campbell 2008). In New Zealand, since mid-2008, *the Employment Relations Act 2000* (NZ) has provided a right to request a variation to hours, days or place of work to employees with children less than five years, with disabled children and/or with dependent relatives. The UK right to request was introduced on 6 April 2003 in relation to young children (Holt and Grainger 2005) and was extended in 2007 to give the right to request to employees with dependent adults.

The UK Government has undertaken several surveys to review the use of the right to request (Holt and Grainger 2005; Palmer 2004) and in this section we compare UK outcomes with Australian workers' requests for flexibility.

The two sets of data have some differences. The UK data was collected in 2004 slightly less than a year after the UK RTR was introduced, while our data relates to March 2009, prior to the operation of the new Australian law. The UK research shows that after the enactment of the right, approval rates increased.

The 2004 UK survey had 3525 respondents (Palmer 2004, p 23), similar to AWALI 2009's 2691. A second 2005 UK survey with 3222 respondents resulted in very similar rates of request and approval, although slightly different questions were used (Holt and Grainger 2005).

The UK survey was conducted using face-to-face interviews, whereas AWALI was conducted as a computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI). In the UK survey, while being shown a list of flexible work arrangements (eg job share, flexi-time), interviewees were asked whether in the nominated period they had 'requested to work any of the following work arrangements for a sustained period of time? Sustained means for longer than 1 month at a time'. In the AWALI survey, respondents were asked 'In the past 12 months have you asked your employer for a change in work arrangements for a sustained period of time, that is for longer than 1 month?'. If they said yes, they were then asked to identify which arrangements they had requested from the list of options used in the UK survey, which were read out. As in the UK, if necessary, AWALI interviewers explained to respondents that 'work arrangements' meant the 'amount of hours you worked, when you work these hours and where you work those hours such as at home'. This question attempts to capture requests for substantive changes, rather than one-off requests for particular circumstances. The AWALI survey method probably captures a larger set of requests than that captured by holding up a card of specific types of changes, even where it includes 'other'. This most likely explains the higher rate of request in the AWALI survey. Therefore, the data comparing UK and Australian rates of requests for flexibility should be used with caution.

#### *Requesting flexibility: baseline data*

AWALI 2009 and its results on the incidence of requests for flexibility and their outcomes, provides a base line for future assessments of the effect of RTR provisions in Australia and will allow us to compare future rates of request and their outcomes, as well as the reasons for request

by a range of demographic and job-related variables (including gender, age, personal income, occupation, industry, permanent/casual status, hours of work and parental responsibilities).

*The incidence of requests for flexibility: gender matters*

Just over one in five Australian employees (22.4 per cent) had made a request for some work flexibility in the past year before the survey. However, the rate of requests is highly gendered: almost twice as many women as men made a request: 29.1 compared to 16.3 per cent (Table 15). The incidence of requests was much higher amongst younger workers, with 29.8 per cent of 18-24 year olds making such a request, compared to only 14.4 per cent of 55-64 year olds. The higher rate of requests by younger people may reflect, to some extent, their participation in education and training, and the need to make requests to accommodate work and study.

Table 15 Requests to change work arrangements by gender, age and parenting, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

	Australia		UK	
	Made a request	No request	Made a request	No request
All	22.4	77.6	13	84
Men	16.3	83.7	10	87
Women	29.1	70.9	16	82
Age <sup>a</sup>				
18 – 24 years	29.8	70.2	17	79
25 – 44 years	23.9	76.1	16	82
45 – 54 years	18.4	81.6	8	89
55 - 64 years	14.4	85.6	7	90
65+ years	8.6*	91.4	**	87
Parenting responsibility				
Preschool children	30.0	70.0	24	74
Men	17.1	82.9	10	87
Women	47.8	52.2	37	62
Children under 16 years	25.1	74.9	20	78
Men	16.2	83.8	11	86
Women	34.7	65.3	27	72
No children under 16 years	20.6	79.4	10	87
Men	16.4	83.6	10	88
Women	25.3	74.7	10	87

Note: \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size. \*UK data includes respondents from 16 years and older. Preschool children are aged 0-4 years in Australia and 0-6 years in the UK. Table excludes self-employed persons. AWALI N = 2307. UK N = 3484. See above explanation of methodological differences between the UK and AWALI surveys which probably explain some of the UK/Australian difference in rate of request making.

Parenting responsibilities are strongly aligned with requests – but only for women. There is no significant difference in men’s requests whether they have preschool children, any children under 16 or no children: about 16 per cent of men in all categories had made a request. However, almost half of women with preschoolers had made requests (47.8 per cent), just over a third of all women with children (34.7 per cent), and a quarter of women without children.

This finding suggests that flexibility is much more important to women than men, and that many more women than men – even where they are not parents – seek flexibility from their employers.

This may reflect women’s greater responsibility for all forms of care including elder care, their responsibility for domestic work and/or a reluctance amongst men to make such requests.

The fact that one in two women with a preschooler, one in three women with any children under 16 years and one in four women without children have sought flexibility, suggests that flexibility matters most for women with children under five years, a lot for any women with children, but also affects many women who do not have children. It seems that Australian law makers have been right to start by supporting the right to request for parents of young children. However, they will assist many other workers if they extend the right to others, beginning with those with any children under 16 and then extending it to all. A process of gradual expansion has been underway in other countries like the UK.

*Comparing Australia and the UK*

The rate of request-making is higher in Australia than the UK. Table 15 shows that only 13 per cent of UK employees made a request in the year or so after the RTR was enacted in the UK, compared to 22.4 per cent in 2009 in Australia in the year before the right to request becomes operational, but as we have pointed out, this difference probably reflects methodological differences.

Data are available from two UK surveys. There were some minor wording and time span differences between the two UK surveys: the 2004 survey referred to ‘since April 2003’ which gave an effective time span of 6-11 months given that the survey was conducted in several waves, and the 2005 survey referred to the previous two years. Despite these differences, the rate of request-making was very similar in the UK in both surveys: 13 per cent had made requests in the 2004 survey and 14 per cent in the 2005 survey (Holt and Grainger 2005, p 29; Palmer 2004).

In both countries it is more often women who are making requests, and the patterns by age and parenting are also similar. In both countries the presence of children makes no difference to men’s rate of request (around ten per cent of all groups of UK men, parents or not, made requests) compared to 37 per cent of UK women with preschoolers, 27 per cent of all mothers, and only ten per cent of women without children.

*Requests and casual/permanent employment*

In Australia casual workers were slightly more likely to make requests than permanent or fixed term workers, but this effect is only statistically significant amongst men: male casual workers were more likely to make requests than permanent or fixed term men, but there was no significant difference between casual and permanent women (Table 16). This suggests that supporting the right of casuals to request flexibility is as important as supporting that right for permanents – and more important in the case of men.

Table 16 Requests to change work arrangements by employment type, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

Employment type	Made a request			No request		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Permanent/ongoing	14.8	30.4	21.7	85.2	69.6	78.3
Fixed term	17.5*	22.0	19.8	82.5	78.0	80.2
Casual	23.9	27.9	26.2	76.1	72.1	73.8

Note: \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2307.

### *Requests and hours of work*

Table 17 shows that part-time men were much more likely to make requests than full-time men: part-time males probably include a sizeable portion of students working casually who are perhaps seeking changes in work schedules around study. While the difference in the rate of request between part-time and full-time women is significant – with part-time women more likely to make requests than full-timers – this difference is much smaller than amongst men.

It is interesting to note how low the rate of request for flexibility is amongst men working long hours: only 13.0 per cent of those working 48 or more hours had sought flexibility, compared to 30.9 per cent of similar women, and 16.3 per cent of all men.

Table 17 Requests to change work arrangements by employment type, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

	Made a request			No request		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Short part-time (1-15 hours)	26.5	31.9	30.3	73.5	68.1	69.7
Long part-time (16 – 34 hours)	29.4	31.9	31.2	70.6	68.1	68.8
<b>All part-time</b>	28.2	31.9	30.8	71.8	68.1	69.2
Full-time (35 – 47 hours)	14.1	24.9	18.6	85.9	75.1	81.4
Long full-time (48+ hours)	13.0	30.9	17.7	87.0	69.1	82.3
<b>All full-time</b>	13.7	26.4	18.4	86.3	73.6	81.6
<b>All employees</b>	16.3	29.1	22.4	83.7	70.9	77.6

Note: Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 2291.

### *Requests by occupation*

In Australia the occupations in which women's employment is concentrated are those where requests were most common – not surprisingly in view of the gender analysis above. Table 18 shows that a third of sales workers have made requests, closely followed by 29.2 per cent of clerical and administrative services workers. A quarter of Australian professionals have made such requests compared to only 11 per cent in the UK. Sales workers are the most likely to have made requests in the UK. The lowest rate of request in Australia is amongst managers, technicians and trades workers, machinery operators and drivers and labourers.

### *Requests by industry*

Turning to industry sector, in Australia requests were most common in the retail trade, accommodation and food services, and public administration (29.0 per cent or more had made requests in each of the three sectors). Requests are much less common in mining, manufacturing, transport, postal and warehousing, professional/scientific and technical services, and particularly low in the construction sector. The UK manufacturing sector shares a relatively low rate of requests with this sector in Australia. As noted previously, comparisons of rates of request between Australia and the UK should be interpreted with caution due to methodological differences between the two surveys.

Table 18 Requests to change work arrangements by occupation, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

	Australia			UK	
	N	Made request	No request	Made request	No request
Managers & senior officials	245	14.7	85.3	11	87
Professionals	639	25.1	74.9	11	87
Technicians and trades workers	279	14.3	85.7	16	85
Community and personal service workers	207	23.0	77.0	15	84
Clerical and administrative workers	337	29.2	70.8	14	84
Sales workers	213	33.2	66.8	19	77
Machinery operators and drivers	153	13.2	86.8	**	89
Labourers	164	13.7	86.3	14	82
All occupations	2237	22.4	77.6	13	84

Note. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size. UK and Australian occupational categories are not precisely aligned. Technicians and trades workers category for the UK is the average of the skilled trades and occupations and associate professional and technical occupations categories. Nurses are categorised as professionals in the Australia classification system, and associate professionals and technical workers in the UK classification system. Table excludes self-employed persons. AWALI N = 2237. UK N = 3484.

Table 19 Requests to change work arrangements by industry, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

	N	Made a request	No request
Agriculture/forestry and fishing	51	**	93.8
Mining	65	18.5*	81.5
Manufacturing	165	19.9	80.1
Electricity/gas/water and waste services	37	**	90.9
Construction	175	8.2*	91.8
Wholesale trade	12	**	78.6*
Retail trade	255	31.2	68.8
Accommodation and food services	111	29.0	71.0
Transport/postal and warehousing	121	15.4	84.6
Information media and telecommunications	63	26.7*	73.3
Financial and insurance services	84	22.4*	77.6
Rental/hiring and real estate services	26	**	84.0*
Professional/scientific and technical services	123	18.9	81.1
Administrative and support services	47	**	83.3
Public administration and safety	221	29.0	71.0
Education and training	294	26.2	73.8
Health care and social assistance	312	26.5	73.5
Arts and recreation services	34	26.3*	73.7
Other services	111	16.1	83.9
All occupations	2307	22.4	77.6

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

### Requests by income

Higher income workers are significantly less likely to request flexibility than lower income workers (Table 20). Only 14.3 per cent of those earning \$90,000 or more sought flexibility, compared to almost a third of those earning less than \$15,000. Most of this difference is explained by the variation amongst men: women's rate of request remains consistently high across the income spectrum, although there is a dip amongst the small proportion of women in the highest income bracket (\$90,000+).

Table 20 Requests to change work arrangements by personal income, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

Personal income	Made a request			No request		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
< \$30,000	25.7	31.0	29.2	74.3	69.0	70.8
<\$15,000	27.3*	33.6	31.5	72.7	66.4	68.5
\$15,000 – 19,999	27.0*	32.6	31.1	73.0	67.4	68.9
\$20,000 - \$29,999	25.0	27.9	26.8	75.0	72.1	73.2
\$30,000 - \$59,999	16.6	28.5	22.4	83.4	71.5	77.6
\$60,000 - \$89,999	15.2	35.1	22.8	84.8	64.9	77.2
\$90,000+	12.2	22.4*	14.3	87.8	77.6	85.7

Note: \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. Table excludes self-employed persons N = 2098.

### Reasons for requesting changing work arrangements

Why do people make requests for flexibility? The top five reasons are set out in Figure 30. Study and going to university, and childcare needs are the most common reasons: each accounts for around 15 per cent of requests.

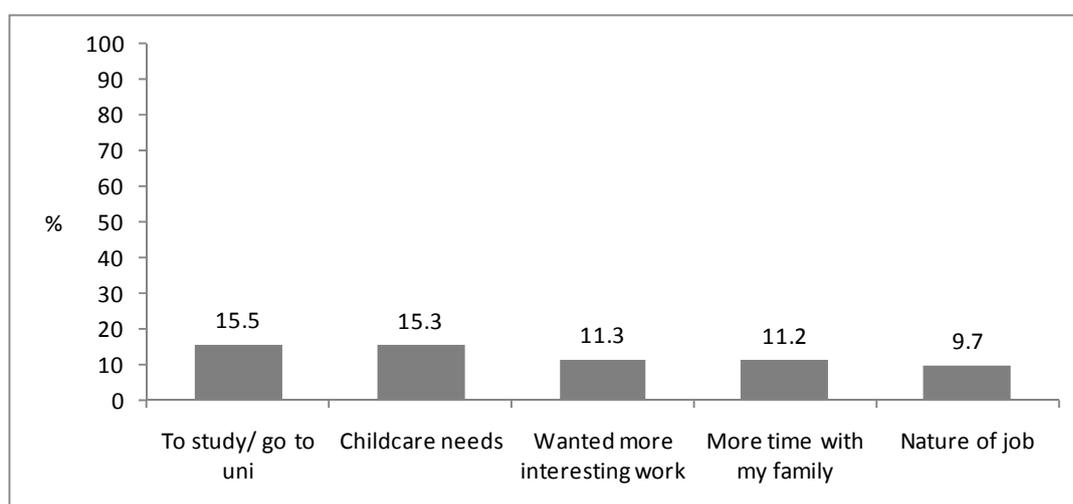


Figure 30 Top five reasons for requesting a change to work arrangements, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. N =474.

Table 21 shows that childcare-related requests are mostly made by women: this reason drives 21.2 per cent of women's requests, compared to only 6.0 per cent of men's requests. Childcare-related requests were more common for women working part-time (25.2 per cent) compared to full-time (16.9 per cent). This indicates that for many women part-time work is not a perfect solution to meet their parenting responsibilities. Even when they are working part-time, mothers still require flexibility to effectively manage their work and family commitments. Women are also

more affected by study, with 17.4 per cent of their requests related to study compared to 12.6 per cent of men. Men on the other hand are most likely to be motivated to make requests because they want more interesting/challenging work or a change in their job role (14.1 per cent of men; 9.5 per cent of women), or to earn more money (12.1 per cent of men; 3.5 per cent of women). More time with the family is also important with 11.3 per cent of women and 13.1 per cent of men mentioning this as a reason for making a request.

To summarise, the motivations for flexibility are most commonly childcare or study. However, these motivations are gendered: women seek flexibility most commonly because of childcare and study needs, while men are more likely to be seeking more interesting work or seeking more pay or more hours.

Table 21 Reasons to change work arrangements by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

	Australia			UK		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Childcare needs	6.0*	21.2	15.3	17	58	43.0
Other caring needs	**	**	1.0*	**	**	7
Demands of the job	5.0*	7.9	6.8	**	**	**
Makes life easier	0.0	**	**	**	12	13
Have more free time	10.1	7.3	8.3	17	**	11
Pursue a hobby	**	**	1.0*	**	**	**
More time with family	13.1	10.1	11.3	**	10	11
Nature of job	11.6	8.5	9.7	**	**	**
Health problems	5.5*	6.3	6.0	**	**	6.0
Fit in better with travel	4.5*	4.4*	4.5	**	**	7.0
To study / go to university	12.6	17.4	15.5	-	-	-
More money/pay rise/more hours	12.1	3.5*	6.8	-	-	-
More interesting/challenging role	14.1	9.5	11.3	-	-	-

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size. '-' response category not included in UK survey. Multiple responses possible on this question. Table excludes self-employed persons. AWALI N =474. UK N=456.

As we see in Table 22, childcare needs especially drive the flexibility requests of parents of preschoolers: 45.9 per cent of parents of preschoolers ask for flexibility because of childcare needs and 27.5 per cent of all parents cite this reason. Childcare is thus important to all parents of children under 16, along with more time with family. Amongst those without parenting responsibilities university study is particularly important: it is cited as a reason for requests by 20 per cent of workers. Around one in ten workers without parenting responsibilities requested a change in order to have more interesting/challenging work or a change in work role, or to have more free time.

It is interesting to note that in the UK childcare is the main reason mentioned by more than 80 per cent of parents who made requests for flexibility, much higher than in Australia. This may reflect the much weaker system of childcare in the UK. Free time and an easier life are mentioned much more frequently by those without parenting responsibilities in the UK compared to Australia.

Table 22 Reasons to change work arrangements by parenting responsibilities, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI flexible working employee survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

	Australia			UK		
	Preschool children	Children < 16 yrs	No child < 16 yrs	Preschool children	Children < 16 yrs	No child < 16 yrs
Childcare needs	45.9	27.5	4.7	98	82	**
Other caring needs	0.0	**	1.8*	**	**	**
Demands of the job	**	4.2	9.0*	**	**	**
Makes life easier	0.0	**	**	**	**	18
Have more free time	4.5*	4.7*	11.8	**	**	19
Pursue a hobby	**	**	**	**	**	**
More time with family	13.5*	15.3	7.9	**	14	**
Nature of job	7.2*	11.0	8.6	**	**	**
Health problems	7.2*	7.6*	4.7*	**	**	**
Fit in better with travel	**	2.1*	6.1*	**	**	**
To study/ go to university	**	10.2	20.1	-	-	-
More money/pay rise/hours	7.2*	5.5*	7.9	-	-	-
Interesting/challenging role	6.3*	8.5	13.6	-	-	-

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size ‘-’ response category not included in UK survey. Multiple responses possible on this question. Table excludes self-employed persons. N=474.

Table 23 shows that reasons related to study at university especially drive the requests of part-time men and women in Australia. This reason is more important for part-time women than even childcare. For full-timers, wanting more interesting/challenging or a change in job roles figure prominently for both women and men, although childcare remains important to full-time women and spending more time with family for men and women.

Table 23 Reasons to change work arrangement by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009

	Men		Women		All	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
Childcare needs	8.1*	**	16.9	25.2	12.6	18.3
Other caring needs	**	0.0	**	**	**	**
Demands of the job	6.7*	**	11.5	4.9*	9.1	3.6*
Makes life easier	0.0	0.0	**	0.0	**	0.0
Have more free time	8.9*	12.9*	8.8*	6.1*	9.1	8.0*
Pursue a hobby	**	**	0.0	**	**	**
More time with family	14.8	9.7*	11.5*	9.2*	13.0	9.4
Nature of job	13.3	8.1*	12.8*	3.7*	13.0	5.4*
Health problems	5.9*	**	6.1*	6.7*	6.0*	6.3*
Fit in better with travel	3.7*	**	5.4*	3.1*	4.6*	4.0*
To study go to university	**	32.3	5.4*	28.8	4.2	29.9
More money/pay rise/more hours	14.1	8.1*	**	5.5*	7.4	6.3
More interesting/challenging role	15.6	9.7*	15.5	4.3*	15.4	5.8

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size. Multiple responses possible on this question. Table excludes self-employed persons FT = Full-time. PT = part-time.. N=470.

Reasons for requesting flexibility vary significantly by income, with middle income employees (\$30,000-\$89,999) most likely to mention childcare (Table 24). Those on lower incomes are especially requesting flexibility so that they can study. This probably reflects the large number of students in university or vocational education who combine studying with employment in low paid jobs and/or part-time work.

Table 24 Reasons to change work arrangements by personal income, AWALI 2009

	< \$30,000	\$30,000 - \$59,999	\$60,000 - \$89,999	\$90,000+
Childcare needs	11.7*	17.5	19.3	14.6*
Other caring needs	0.0	**	**	**
Demands of the job	3.7*	5.8*	12.8*	**
Makes life easier	**	**	0.0	0.0
Have more free time	6.8*	7.0*	11.9*	12.2*
Pursue a hobby	**	**	0.0	0.0
More time with family	6.2*	12.3	11.9*	19.5*
Nature of job	9.3*	8.2*	10.1*	17.1*
Health problems	**	9.4*	5.5*	**
Fit in better with travel	4.3*	3.5*	5.5*	**
To study go to university	37.7	7.6*	**	0.0
More money/pay rise/more hours	6.8*	8.2*	**	**
More interesting/challenging role	7.4*	14.0	15.6*	*

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size. Multiple responses possible on this question. Table excludes self-employed persons. N=448.

#### *Type of work arrangement requested*

Australian employees make very diverse requests for flexibility (Figure 31; Table 25). Only a small number of requests seek part-time work (9.8 per cent), flexi-time (7.3 per cent) or to work from home (6.7 per cent), and even smaller proportions seek compressed work weeks, annualised hours or job sharing. Almost half of requests for some other kind of arrangement, whilst 16.7 per cent of workers seek reduced hours for a limited time.

Part-time work is much more commonly sought in the UK (38 per cent of 2004 requests sought this) or flexitime (25 per cent of UK requests). This may reflect the more limited access to these work arrangements in the UK compared to Australia: for example, 47 per cent of Australian women work part-time, compared to 40 per cent of women in the UK (OECD 2002).

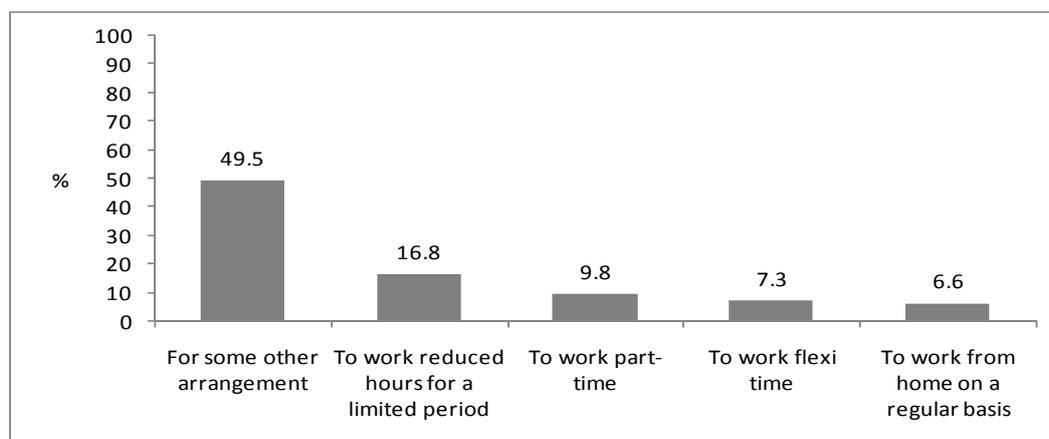


Figure 31 Top five work arrangements requested, AWALI 2009

Note. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 469.

Table 25 Type of change requested by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

	Australia			UK		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Job share	**	2.5*	2.0*	**	**	**
Compressed working week	5.7*	2.5*	3.7*	**	**	8
Annualised hours	4.2*	2.5*	3.1*	**	**	**
Flexi-time	7.8*	6.9	7.3	30	23	25
Work from home	4.7*	7.9	6.7	17	**	10
Part-time	7.8*	11.0	9.8	31	41	38
Reduced hours for a limited time	14.1	18.3	16.7	**	12	13
Work school terms only	3.1*	**	*	**	**	**
Other arrangement	51.6	47.9	49.3	**	**	**

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 (ie respondents could choose more than one reason). AWALI N=506. UK N=456.

#### *Outcome of request: granted or declined*

The majority of requests for flexibility made in Australia (68.8 per cent) were fully granted (Figure 32). A further 14.4 per cent were partly granted so that, overall, 83.2 per cent were granted in part or full. Only 9.8 per cent were refused, whilst 6.9 per cent were awaiting a decision at the time of the survey.

The rate of outright approval is lower in Australia than the UK: in 2004 over three-quarters of UK requests were granted in full compared to just over two-thirds in Australia.

In the UK the majority of employee requests were either fully or partly granted: 86 per cent in 2004 and 81 per cent in 2005 (Holt and Grainger 2005, p 2). This is an increase on the 77 per cent of requests that were granted before the UK right was introduced. This suggests that the introduction of a formal right to request may give rise to a higher rate of approval in Australia.

A refusal rate of about one in ten is common to both countries.

Women's requests are more likely to be granted than men's: 72.9 per cent of Australian women had their requests agreed to fully, compared to 62.3 per cent to men. A similar – though less pronounced – pattern exists in the UK. Thus a right to request might be particularly beneficial for men.

Refusal rates are significantly lower for parents than for those without children in both the UK and Australia. This effect holds for both women and men. This suggests that requests by parents of preschoolers might be viewed as more legitimate than those without parenting responsibilities. Thus it may be the case that the extension of a right to request to those without parenting responsibilities has particular value for those who seek flexibility, given the difficulty some have in getting their requests met at present.

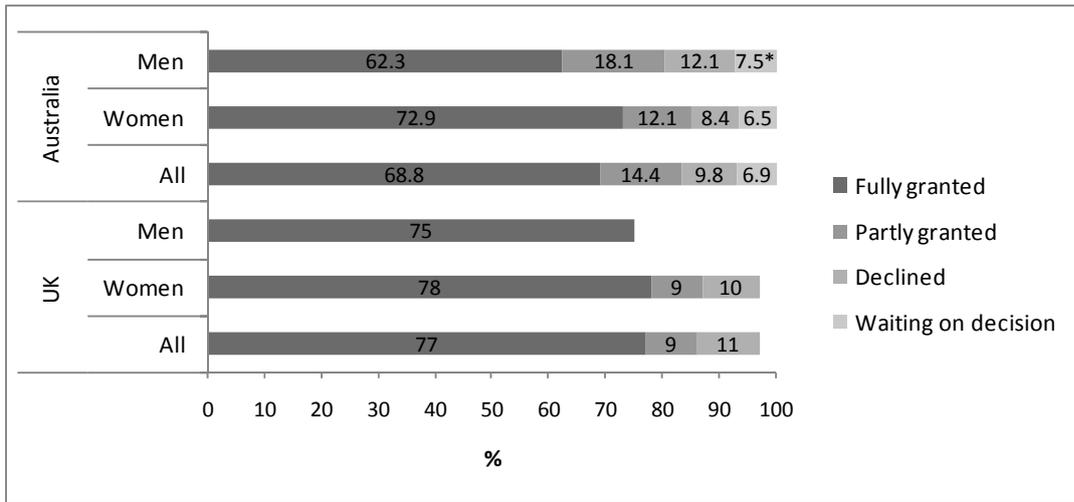


Figure 32 Request outcomes by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

Note. \*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. UK data not available on partly granted/declined for male employees and 'waiting on decision' for all employees. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. AWALI N= 482, UK N= 455.

When we look at request outcomes by work hours it is clear that part-time women are most likely to have their request fully granted (81.1 per cent) compared to full-time women (64.5 per cent) or men working part-time (63.9 per cent) or full-time (61.6 per cent) (Figure 33).

Request outcomes also differ by personal income. As Figure 34 shows, workers in the highest income group (\$90,000+) are least likely to have their request fully granted (61.0 per cent) compared to around 70 per cent of requests fully approved for those on lower incomes.

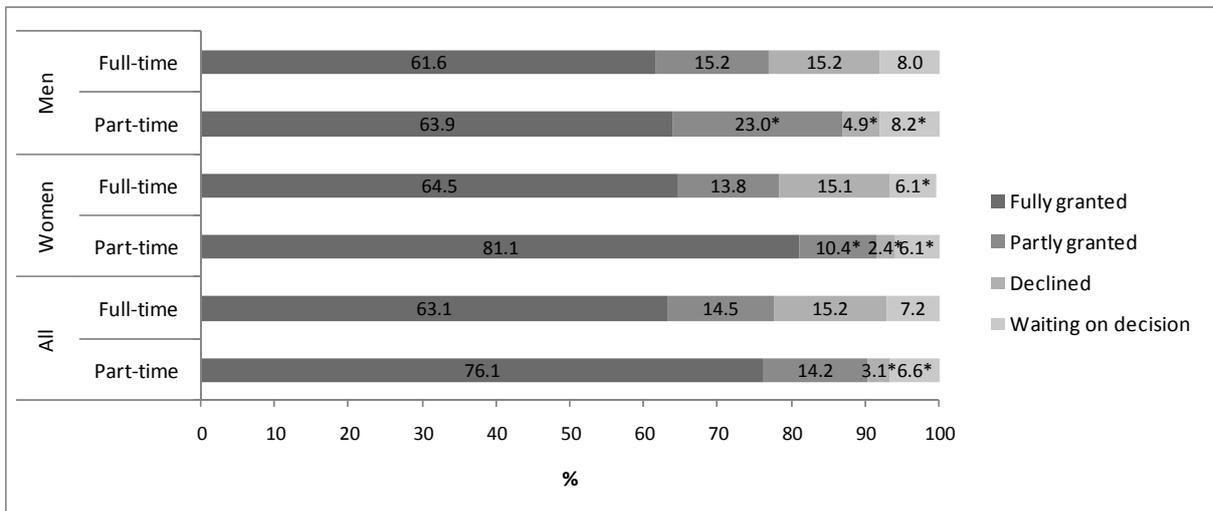


Figure 33 Request outcomes by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

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 = 478.

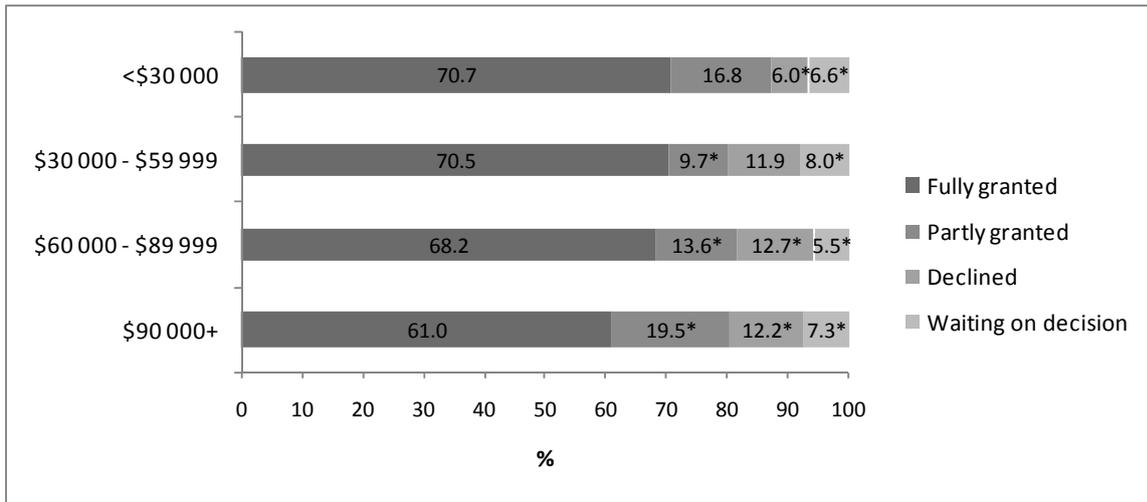


Figure 34 Request outcomes by personal income, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

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 = 456.

How does casual employment status affect the outcome of requests? Figure 35 shows that permanent employees are more likely to have their request fully granted than casuals: 70.1 per cent compared to 65.4 per cent. However, a larger proportion of casuals have their requests partially granted (18.7 per cent compared with 13.9 per cent). Overall, the outright refusal rate for casuals (4.7 per cent) is half the rate of permanents (10.7 per cent). Fixed term contract workers have a higher rate of refusal than either permanents or casuals (15.8 per cent).

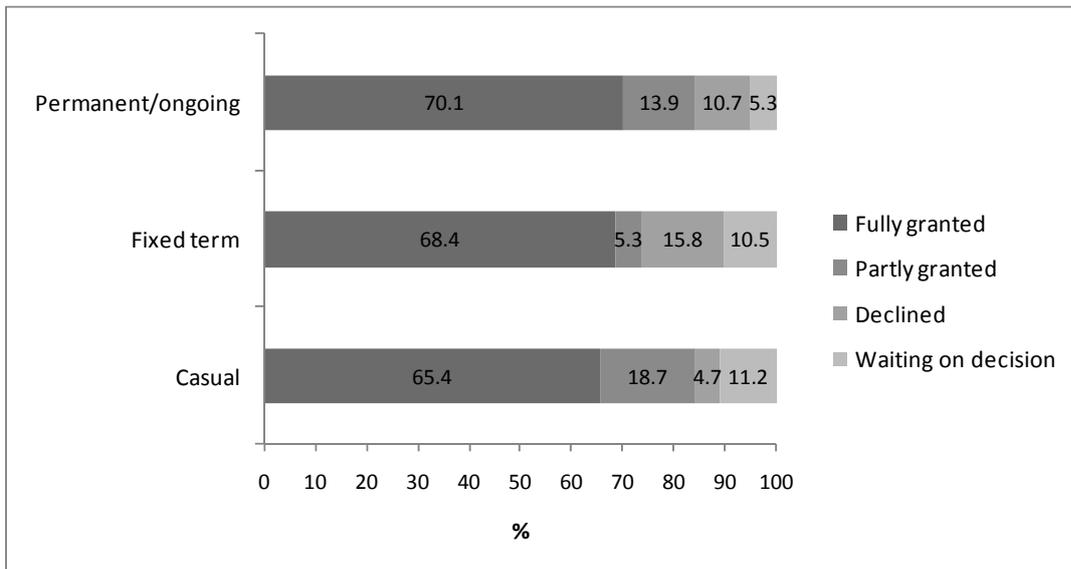


Figure 35 Request outcome by employment type, AWALI 2009 (per cent)

Note. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 482.

### Reasons for not making a request

Just over three-quarters of surveyed employees have not made a request for flexibility. Of these, 58.3 per cent are content with their current arrangements (Figure 36). This is considerably less than the three-quarters in the UK who were satisfied with their work arrangements (Table 26).

In both countries more women were content with their work arrangements than men, and more workers without parenting responsibility were content compared to parents (Table 26).

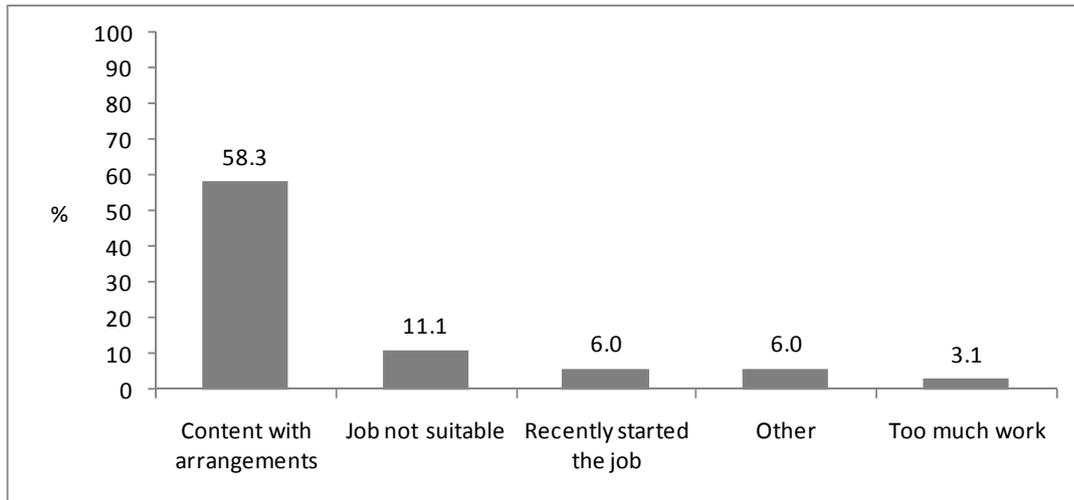


Figure 36 Top five reasons why request not made to change work arrangements, AWALI 2009

Note. Proportion of respondents who did not make a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 1793.

One in ten surveyed Australians believed that their job was not suitable for flexible arrangements (6 per cent in the UK). This belief was more common amongst full-time workers (Table 27), and also those on middle and higher incomes (earning more than \$30,000 a year). Only three per cent refrained from making a request because they had too much work to do or because they were not convinced their employer would allow it. A small proportion of respondents had recently started their jobs and so had not requested changes.

Table 26 Reasons request not made by gender, AWALI 2009 and UK DTI Flexible Working Employee Survey 2003/2004 (per cent)

	Australia			UK		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Content with arrangements	55.7	61.8	58.3	72	78	75
Job not suitable/doesn't allow	11.8	10.2	11.1	7	5	6
Too much work	2.7	3.6	3.1	2	-	1
Concerned extra workload for colleagues	**	**	**	**	**	**
Concerned about career	**	0.0	**	**	**	**
Concerned about job security	3.5	2.2*	2.9	**	**	**
Not convinced employer would allow	3.8	1.8*	3.0	2.0	**	2
Don't feel confident to ask	**	**	0.4*	**	**	**
Couldn't afford income reduction	2.4	3.1	2.7	**	**	1
Doesn't suit domestic arrangements	**	1.0*	0.6*	3	3	3
New job/recently started	6.5	5.4	6.0	-	-	-
Make own arrangements	3.6	1.9*	2.9	-	-	-
On a fixed term contract	1.5*	1.4*	1.5	-	-	-
Work as a casual	1.1*	1.7*	1.3	-	-	-
Other	6.6	5.2	6.0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note. \*\*Estimate unreliable due to insufficient sample size. \*\*Data not provided due to small sample size. n/a UK data not available. \*-' response category not included in UK survey. Proportion of respondents who did not make a request to change work arrangements. Multiple responses possible on this question (ie respondents could choose more than one reason). Table excludes self-employed persons. AWALI N=1793, UK N=2935.

Table 27 Reasons request not made by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009

	Men		Women		All	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Content with arrangements	53.5	68.6	56.3	68.4	54.3	68.2
Job not suitable	12.9	6.5	13.5	6.5	13.1	6.5
Too much work	3.2	0.0	4.3	*	3.5	1.8*
Concerned extra workload for colleagues	**	0.0	0.0	**	**	**
Concerned about career	**	0.0	0.0	0.0	**	0.0
Concerned about job security	3.7	**	2.9	*	3.5	1.6*
Not convinced employer would allow	4.6	0.0	3.1	**	4.0	**
Don't feel confident to ask	**	0.0	**	**	0.5*	**
Couldn't afford income reduction	2.5	**	3.6	*	2.9	2.2*
Doesn't suit domestic arrangements	**	0.0	**	*	0.5*	1.0*
New job/recently started	6.5	5.2	6.0	4.8	6.4	4.9
Make own arrangements	3.4	*	**	2.8	2.6	3.3*
On a fixed term contract	1.5	**	2.2*	**	1.7	1.0*
Work as a casual	**	5.2	**	*	0.5*	3.5*
Other	6.9	*	5.1	5.4	6.4	5.3

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 (ie respondents could choose more than one reason). Table excludes self-employed persons. N=1782.

### *Flexibility and work-life interference*

How does making a request for flexibility relate to work-life interference? In Figure 37 we show work-life interference scores, adjusted for working hours, for those who made a request and those who had not. Work-life interference is significantly worse for those who had made a request and this holds for both women and men.

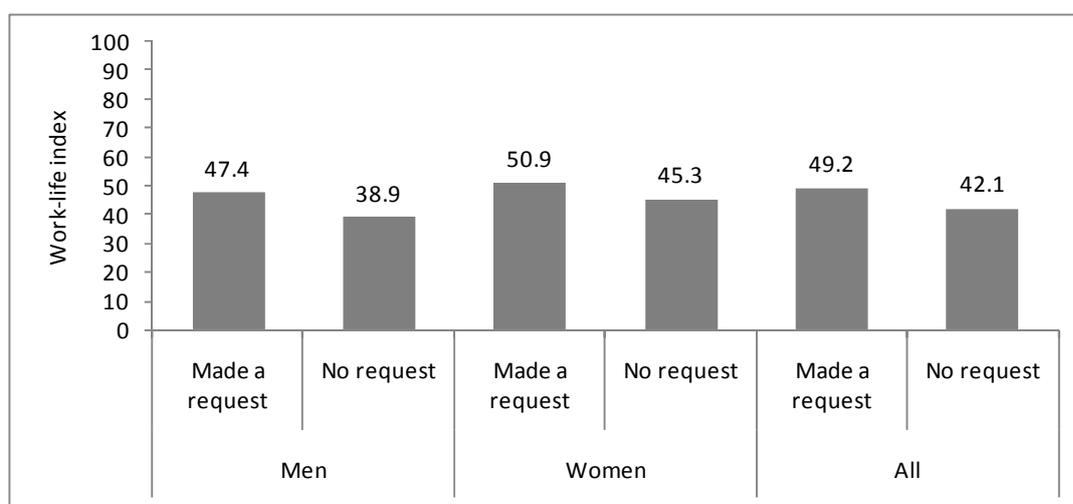


Figure 37 Work-life index scores by request to change work arrangements and gender, AWALI 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2276.

When we consider the effect of outcomes of requests on work-life interference, the difference is also significant: those who have had a request granted have much lower work-life interference, with AWALI scores of 42.9 compared to 62.8 for those whose request was refused (Figure 38). Those who had their requests partially granted have scores lying between these two. In other words, making a request and having it granted is significantly associated with lower work-life interference.

Having a request fully granted rather than partially granted also matters: there is no significant difference between the scores for those whose requests were declined and those whose requests were partially granted. Both have significantly worse work-life interference than those whose requests are fully granted.

Those whose requests are refused have significantly worse work-life interference, and those whose requests are not fully granted share these negative outcomes, though perhaps to a lesser extent. Refusal of a request is associated with important and detrimental work-life effects.

These findings highlight the importance of industrial legislation and protections to support workers' right to request a change to their work arrangements. This capacity to make changes such as adjusting the hours of work, how these hours are arranged or the location of work has a substantial effect on reducing the negative effects that work may have on life outside of work. Therefore, the right to request can be viewed not only as an entitlement that supports fairer and more equitable work arrangements, but also as an important support to quality of life including family, social and personal life. Having a request partially supported brings little benefit. In this case, 'something' is not that much better than 'nothing' (ie a complete refusal). These findings emphasise the importance of a strong legislative system which contains processes to enable request making and ensure that requests are fairly and reasonably treated.

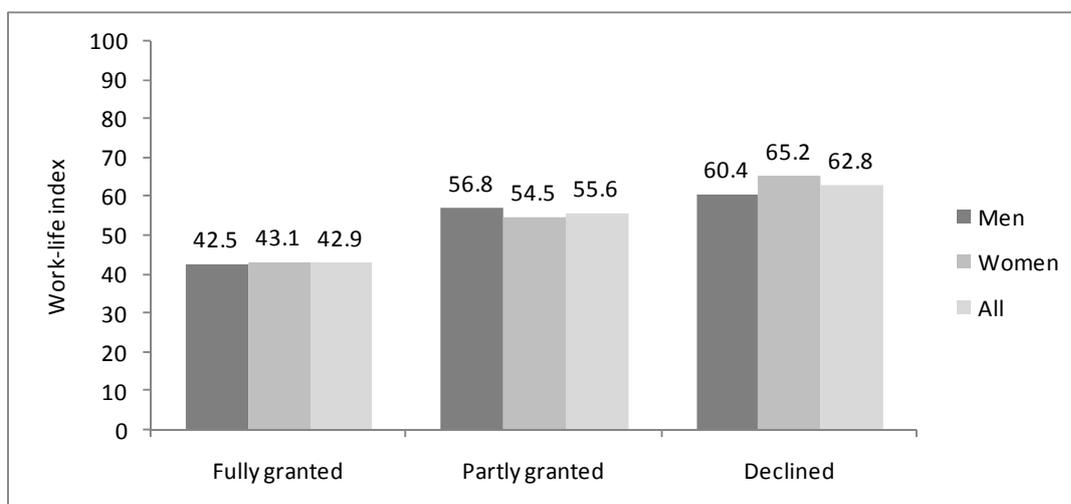


Figure 38 Work-life index scores by request outcome, AWALI 2009

Note. Proportion of respondents who made a request to change work arrangements. Figure excludes self-employed persons. N = 480.

### Summary

Employee-centred flexibility matters to work-life interference. It matters a great deal to parents, but many non-parents also seek more say over where, how and when they work.

Over the past year, prior to implementation of the new formal right to request enacted through the *Fair Work Act 2009*, just over one in five Australian employees had made a request for a change in work arrangements for a sustained period of time (ie longer than a month).

Almost twice as many women than men made such requests: 29.1 per cent compared to 16.3 per cent. Almost one in two mothers of preschoolers made such requests, one in three mothers of

children under 16 years and a quarter of women without children. Many workers without parenting responsibilities seek flexibility, especially women. No doubt many of these have other kinds of caring responsibilities.

Employees with parenting responsibilities and younger employees are more likely to make requests to change their work arrangements. Casuals and permanents had similar rates of request, and feminised industries and occupations have much higher rates of request than male-dominated industries and occupations (eg requests are rare in the construction industry).

The incidence of request making is consistent for women regardless of their personal income. However, higher income men are less likely to ask than lower income men.

According to these results, the rate of request making is higher in Australia than in the UK, but this contrast probably reflects differences in methodological approach.

People seek flexibility for diverse reasons. Most common amongst Australian women are childcare needs, though study is an important driver for both women and men. Men are more likely to be motivated by the quest for a change of job to find more interesting work. Childcare is a much stronger motivator for requests in the UK than in Australia.

Employees are looking for very diverse kinds of arrangements in Australia, while part-time work is more commonly sought in the UK. It is important, therefore, that in Australia the definition of the kinds of flexibility that can be sought remains as open as possible.

Just over two-thirds of requests made in Australia (68.6 per cent) were fully granted. This is lower than in the UK where around three-quarters were fully granted. The rate of refusal is around one in ten in both countries.

Women's, part-timers' and mothers' requests are more likely to be agreed than men's, full-timers' or non-parents', and – reflecting these factors – those on lower incomes are more likely to have their requests agreed.

Finally, our findings suggest that those who make a request have higher work-life interference than those who have not made a request. Alongside this, those whose requests are refused have much worse work-life interference than those whose requests are agreed. Having a request fully granted is associated with a significant reduction in work-life interference. There is no significant difference in the work-life interference between those whose requests are refused or only partially granted. These are important findings.

The right to request, and having a request granted, are clearly important processes for reducing work-life interference, and more broadly contributing to the quality of work, family and personal life.

This analysis suggests that the new legislated right to request embodied in the National Employment Standards might not make much difference to the fifth of workers who already make such requests, two-thirds of whom get what they want. However, many others who have never made such requests might be encouraged to do so, and – if the UK experience is any guide – we can expect the rate of agreement to requests to increase as the new law takes effect. If this occurs, our results suggest that this will have a positive impact upon the work-life relationship of those who seek and get more flexibility. Finally, having a right to request, and getting requests granted, matters to more workers than solely parents of preschoolers.

Many parents – and most mothers – are likely to take advantage of such opportunities, and one in four women who do not have children are also likely to see benefits, to seek flexibility and – where it is granted – to benefit from its provision. This leaves plenty of scope for expansion in the right to request to a wider range of Australian workers in the future.

## Section 9: Education and training

In this section we examine the relationship between education and training and work-life interference from two different perspectives. First, we examine how work-life interference differs according to employees' highest level of education. Second, we explore the extent to which work-life issues are a barrier to participation in work-related education and training. Undertaking vocational education or training can have many personal and employment benefits, including skill development, job promotion and career opportunities. Here we apply a work-life lens to examine the extent to which work-life issues act as barriers to participation in education and training, and hence affect access to the benefits and opportunities that it can provide.

### *Work-life interference and level of education*

As Figure 39 shows, employees with a university education have the worst work-life interference compared to those whose highest level of education is at the TAFE/vocational level or high school. Indeed, for employees overall there is little difference between these latter two groups. The index scores shown in Figure 39 have been adjusted for work hours, as longer hours are worked by those with a university (39.6) or vocational qualification (38.0) compared to those with no post-school qualifications (32.9). However, this pattern is also evident for index scores unadjusted for work hours.

Considering men and women separately, a similar pattern is evident. For men the only statistically significant difference is between men with a university education compared to those with no post-school education. Although women with a university education also have the highest index score compared to women with lower qualifications, this difference is not statistically significant.

Adjusting for differences in work hours, women consistently have higher index scores (ie worse work-life interference) compared to men, and this is evident across all three levels of education, although this difference is not statistically significant for those with a vocational level education.

Much of this effect is most likely due to the close relationship between educational qualifications and occupational status. The majority (73.7 per cent) of employees with a university qualification are in professional or managerial occupations, whereas the majority of those with vocational qualifications (79.5 per cent) or high school qualifications (86.3 per cent) are in other occupations.

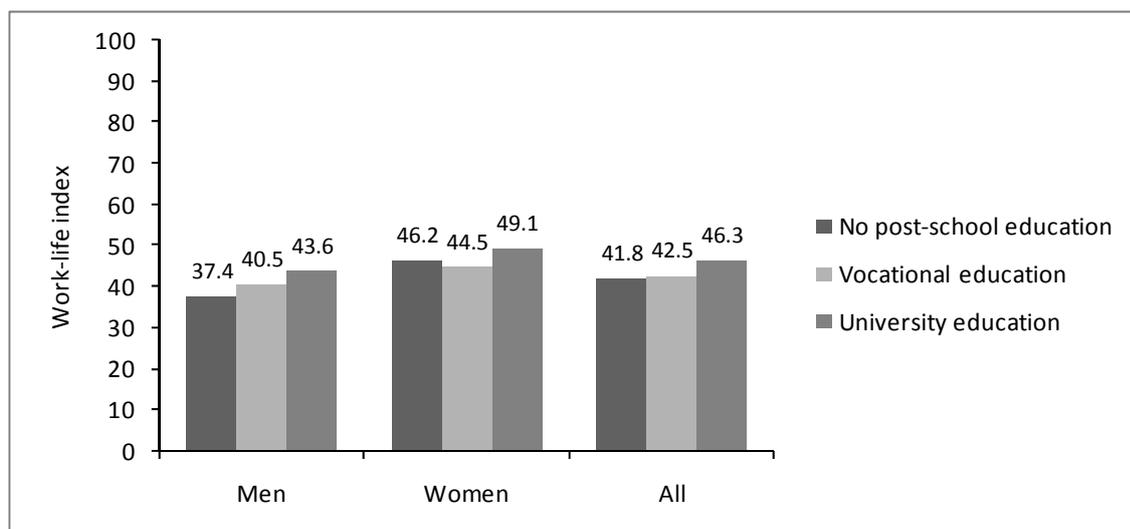


Figure 39 Work-life index scores by education and gender, AWALI 2009

Note. Figure excludes self-employed persons. Index scores adjusted for work hours. N = 2268.

### *Work-life barriers to participation in vocational education and training*

In the previous sections of this report we have seen that work-life pressures are fairly commonplace amongst working Australians, especially for full-time employees. Around one third of full-time employees report that work frequently restricts time with family and friends, and nearly sixty per cent report frequent time pressure (Section 3). These figures alone suggest that many employees will have difficulty fitting additional commitments to education and training into a life that is already characterised by frequent work-life strains.

AWALI 2009 included a set of questions dedicated to participation in education and training at the time of the survey and intentions to participate in the future. Detailed findings from this component of AWALI 2009 will be made available in a separate report from the Centre for Work + Life and National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) websites in late 2009 (Skinner, forthcoming). Here we focus on the extent to which employees identify work-life issues as barriers to their participation in education and training.

A set of questions on barriers and supports for participation in education or training was presented to workers who identified themselves as unlikely to participate in education or training in the next 12 months. In this report we focus on employees who were not in education or training at the time of the survey. Nearly half (51.3 per cent) of these employees reported they were very unlikely to participate. Table 28 shows responses to two items addressing work-life barriers, an item addressing motivational barriers and a separate item on perceptions of employer support.

As Table 28 shows, the barriers most likely to be identified by employees who did not anticipate doing any education or training in the next year were time constraints (67.8 per cent), a lack of interest (47.9 per cent) or difficulties fitting in education/training with family and life commitments (54.9 per cent). Around sixty per cent of employees expected their employer would provide tangible support (financial, time off work) for their participation in education or training.

There are some differences in the barriers identified by men and women, and also between part-time and full-time workers. Overall, women are much more likely to identify time constraints as a barrier (72.7 per cent; 63.6 per cent of men), and are less confident of employer support (57.5 per cent expect employer support; 65.6 per cent of men). Not surprisingly, full-time workers are more likely to identify time constraints as a barrier (71.1 per cent), and this is particularly the case for full-time women (78.2 per cent) compared to men (67.5 per cent). However, nearly sixty per cent of part-time workers (59.3 per cent) report time-related barriers: two thirds of part-time women compared to just over one-third of part-time men. Thus part-time work is much less protective of women's capacity to undertake other activities like education, than it is for men.

Full-time workers are also more likely to be confident of gaining employer support for education or training.

It is interesting that around 55 per cent of employees not in education nor training who do not expect to engage in education or training in the next 12 months identify work-life fit as a barrier to participation. This is the case for both men (53.3 per cent) and women (56.6 per cent), and part-time (54.4 per cent) and full-time (55.0 per cent) workers.

Full-time women are most likely to identify work-life fit as a barrier: nearly 60 per cent (58.4 per cent) cite this reason. In previous sections we observed that part-time workers are less likely to report frequent work-life pressures. What these findings tell us is that although part-timers, especially women, may be coping well with their current configuration of work and life commitments, there is not much room to add any additional activities such as education or training.

The majority of employees, around 60 per cent, agree that education and training is likely to provide opportunities for a promotion, pay rise or more interesting work. It is clear from our findings that work-life interference and a perceived lack of employer support are important barriers for many employees, especially women, to pursue these opportunities.

Table 28 Barriers and supports to participation in vocational education and training reported by employees not in education or training and unlikely to participate in the next 12 months, by gender and work hours, AWALI 2009

	Men per cent agree/ strongly agree	Women per cent agree/ strongly agree	All per cent agree/ strongly agree
Full-time			
Education and training would not fit in with your family and other life commitments	53.3	58.4	55.0
You do not have enough time to undertake education or training	67.5	78.2	71.1
Your employer would provide some support (pay course costs, allow time)	67.4	60.3	64.9
You are just not interested in education or training	47.8	57.5	46.0
Part-time			
Education and training would not fit in with your family and other life commitments	52.2	55.1	54.4
You do not have enough time to undertake education or training	36.5	66.7	59.3
Your employer would provide some support (pay course costs, allow time)	52.4	53.8	53.4
You are just not interested in education or training	59.7	50.8	51.9
All			
Education and training would not fit in with your family and other life commitments	53.3	56.6	54.9
You do not have enough time to undertake education or training	63.6	72.7	67.8
Your employer would provide some support (pay course costs, allow time)	65.6	57.5	61.8
You are just not interested in education or training	49.8	45.7	47.9

Note. Table excludes self-employed persons. N = 942.

### *Summary*

There is a clear relationship between education and training and work-life interference. Those with higher levels of qualifications, particularly university qualifications, are more likely to have higher levels of work-life interference. This is particularly the case for women. Much of this effect is most likely due to the close association between educational qualifications and occupational status, with the majority of those with a university education engaged in managerial or professional work.

On the other hand, it is important not to discourage people from pursuing education and training qualifications, as these can provide a pathway to career opportunities, higher income, promotion opportunities, and higher quality jobs with more autonomy, status, interest and challenge. The majority of employees, around 60 per cent, agree that education and training can bring these benefits. Yet work-life issues, and a lack of confidence in employers to provide tangible financial support and time release, appear to be significant barriers to participation in education and training. This is particularly the case for women. Nearly 80 per cent of full-time women say they don't have sufficient time to take on education or training, and two-thirds of

their part-time counterparts agree. Nearly 60 per cent of full-time women say that education and training would not fit in with their other work and life commitments.

There are clear messages here for both employers and providers of education and training. Work-life barriers are important considerations which prevent a significant proportion of employees from engaging in education and training and gaining the associated personal and employment benefits, even when workers agree that participation would bring such rewards. Time constraints are a major barrier; there is not much room in many workers' lives to add another activity or commitment. The challenge for employers and training providers is to develop realistic strategies for participation that enable workers to manage all of their work, life and family commitments. Reducing work hours is not likely to be sufficient, especially for women: nearly 70 per cent of part-time women say they do not have time to study. Options such as paid study leave or integrating education and training into paid work time should be given serious consideration by employers who wish to encourage and support the education and training of their employees. Training providers should consider providing greater supports to accommodate those with parenting responsibilities, such as onsite childcare or the provision of study spaces and equipment that provide parents with a place outside of the home (and it's commitments) to do coursework.

In summary, these findings suggest that it is women that bear a greater work-life penalty in relation to the work-life outcomes of attaining higher qualifications, and also in the work-life barriers that make the pursuit of education and training more difficult. Given that human capital considerations continue to play a role in entrenching the gender pay gap in Australia, more success in meeting work-life barriers to education and training is an important policy aspiration.

## References

---

- Auer, J. & Elton, J. (2008) *Work, life and health study interim report, 2008*, Centre for Work + Life, Adelaide.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) *Australian labour market statistics*, Cat. no. 6105.0 April 2009, ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) *Labour force, Australia*, Cat. no. 6202.0 June 2009, ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) *Forms of employment, Australia*, Cat. no. 6359.0 Nov 2008, ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) *Education and work, Australia*, Cat. no. 6227.0 May 2007, ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) *Employment arrangements, retirement and superannuation, Australia*, Cat. no. 6361.0 April to June 2007, ABS, Canberra.
- , Cat. no. 6227.0 May 2007, ABS, Canberra.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) *How Australians use their time, 2006*, Cat. no. 4153.0 2006, ABS, Canberra.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Charlesworth, S. & Campbell, I. (2008) Right to request regulation: A panacea for work/family imbalance?, Non-refereed proceedings of the *21st Conference of AIRAANZ*, Melbourne, 6-8 February 2008.
- Craig, L. (2007) *Contemporary motherhood: The impact of children on adult time*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Nachreiner, F. & Schaufeli, W.B. (2001), The job demands-resources model of burnout, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86:499–512.
- Edwards, J.E. and Rothbard, N.P. (2000) Mechanisms linking work and family, *Academy of Management Review*, 25: 178–199.
- Greenhouse, J.H. & Parasuraman, S. (1999) 'Research on work, family and gender: Current status and future directions' in G.N. Powell (ed) *Handbook of gender and work*, Sage, Thousand Oaks CA, 391–412.
- Hass, L. (1999) 'Families and work' in S.K Steinmetz & G.W. Peterson (eds) *Handbook of marriage and the family* (2nd edition), Plenum, New York, 571–611.
- Heady, B., Warren, D. & Harding, G. (2006) *Families, incomes and jobs. A statistical report of the HILDA survey*, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Higgins, C., Duxbury, L., & Johnson, K. (2004) *Exploring the link between work-life conflict and demands on Canada's health system*. Health Canada.
- Holt, H. & Grainger, H. (2005), *Results of the Second Flexible Working Employee Survey*, DTI Employment Relations Research Series no. 39, London.
- OECD (2002) *Employment Outlook 2002*, OECD, Paris.
- Palmer, T. (2004) *Results of the First Flexible Working Employee Survey*, DTI Employment Relations, London.
- Parent-Thirion, A., Macías, E.F., Hurley, J. & Vermeulen, G. (2007) *Fourth European Working Conditions Survey*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.
- Pocock, B., Prosser, R. & Bridge, K. (2004) "Only a Casual...": How casual work affects employees, households and communities in Australia', Paper presented at ACTU Conference, *Work Interrupted*, Melbourne, August 2, 2004.
- Pocock, B, N., Skinner N., and Williams, P. (2007) *Work, life and time: The Australian Work and Life Index 2007*, Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, Adelaide.
- Pocock, B., Williams, P. & Skinner, N. (2007) *The Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI): Concepts, methodology and rationale*, Discussion Paper No 1/07, May 2007, Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, Adelaide.
- Skinner, N. and Pocock, P. (2008) *Work, life and workplace culture: The Australian Work and Life Index 2008*, Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, Adelaide.
- van Wanrooy, B., Jakubauskas, M., Buchanan, J., Wilson, S. & Scalmer, S. (2008) *Working lives: Statistics and stories*. Workplace Research Centre, University of Sydney.
- Veenhoven, H. (2006) Developments in satisfaction research. *Social Indicators Research* 37: 1-46.
- Voydanoff, P. (2005) The effects of community demands, resources, and strategies on the nature and consequences of the work-family interface: An agenda for future research, *Family Relations*, 54:583–595.
- Voydanoff, P. (2008) 'A conceptual model of the work-family interface' in K. Korabik, D.S. Lerio & D.L. Whitehead. (eds) *Handbook of work-family integration*, Academic Press, Boston, 37–56.
- Williams, P., Pocock, B., & Bridge, K. (2009) Kids' lives in adult space and time: How home, community, school and adult work affect opportunity for teenagers in suburban Australia, *Health Sociology Review*, 18: 79–93