Centre for Applied Social Research  
School of Social Science & Planning

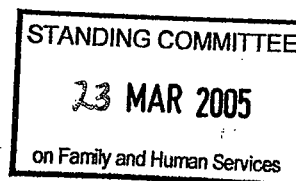
23 March 2005

Hon Bronwyn Bishop, MP  
Chairman,  
Standing Committee on Family & Human Services  
House of Representatives  
Parliament of Australia  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Chairman,

### **Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family**

We wish to make a submission to the above Inquiry. We work at the Centre for Applied Social Research (CASR) at RMIT University and are active researchers in the area of work and family.

Our submission addresses a number of key issues we believe the Committee needs to consider in its Inquiry, particularly in reference to the second term of reference "making it easier for parents who wish to return to the paid workforce". The material in our submission draws directly on a background report we prepared for the ACTU and submitted as part of the Work and Family Test Case before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in 2004. We have also enclosed a copy of the complete report for members of the Committee.

This report traces several major trends in Australia affecting work and family. It traces the changing size and composition of the paid workforce, marked in particular by the increased participation of women. It traces the changes in the structure of families and the changing nature and distribution of caring responsibilities within the family. These changes mean that employees no longer approach the workplace entrance as the 'ideal workers' associated with the earlier 'male breadwinner/ female homemaker' model, who were relatively insulated from all caring responsibilities and appeared freely available to their employers for the prescribed period of their labour. Instead more and more workers bring caring responsibilities with them into the workplace. This is most readily apparent for the many women with dependent children who participate in the workforce, but it is also true of many other workers. At the same time – at least partly as a result of the entry of so many potential carers into paid employment – caring responsibilities within families are themselves changing and becoming more complex and more challenging.

Our focus in the attached submission is on the workplace. Work and family balance is affected by a variety of factors, ranging from personal and household characteristics to the effects of institutional and taxation arrangements (eg the provision of childcare). However, the character of the workplace and the availability of family-friendly policies and practices are undeniably important. Together with the family/household, the workplace is a crucial site where work and family responsibilities are combined. It is a crucial site of intervention in order to improve work and family balance. It is important to examine what can reasonably be accomplished through this site in order to benefit employees (and indeed workplaces and the economy as well).

In summary, we argue that parenting responsibilities entail significant pressures on participation in paid work. How these pressures unfold, and whether they lead to unnecessary costs and penalties for parents, depends very much on the degree of rigidity preserved in workplaces from earlier models of management. Where workplaces reduce 'family-hostile' measures and extend 'family-friendly' measures, the pressures are eased and the costs and penalties of combining caring responsibilities and paid work are reduced. Our submission reviews the availability of family-friendly measures in workplaces in Australia, with particular attention to some of the factors that limit their spread. We conclude that the provision of family-friendly benefits in Australia is differentiated and inadequate, and there are worrying signs about the spread of 'family-hostile' measures. This makes it harder for parents engaged in negotiating the difficult transitions around childbirth and early child rearing.

Yours sincerely,



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## **Submission to Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family**

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Our submission specially addresses the second terms of reference of the Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family; 'making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce'.

The first section of our submission sets out a number of concepts which underpin any consideration of balancing work and family and highlights the difficulties in assessing the adequacy of family-friendly benefits in Australia. The second section of our submission is focused on the workplace. We point out that parenting and other caring responsibilities are associated with pressures that can potentially disrupt participation in paid work. In the third section we argue that the extent to which these pressures lead to negative consequences is dependent in part on the character of the workplace, in particular whether it is able to introduce what we call 'family-friendly' measures and whether it is able to reduce or eliminate what we call 'family-hostile' measures. The fourth section then attempts an assessment, based on the available literature, of the practical access workers have to such family friendly measures. The final section then canvases the costs of parenting associated with the transitions with the withdrawal and re-entry into the workforce.

### **1 Balancing Work & Family: Key Concepts<sup>1</sup>**

This section introduces and discusses some central concepts that appear in our submission (and indeed in much other secondary literature on work and family). We start with 'work' and 'family' itself. We look at the varied notions that seek to grasp the relation between the two spheres, including the familiar idea of work and family 'balance'. Why has work and family balance become an important topic in contemporary societies? This can be related to changes such as the increased participation of women in paid work. But this change itself needs to be situated in terms of a shift away from the older 'male breadwinner/ female homemaker' model of

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws directly on Campbell and Charlesworth (2004) Appendix 1

the relation between work and family. We present a brief outline of this 'male breadwinner/ female homemaker' model. We then look at 'labour market transitions', which is a useful way to think about the new patterns of participation that are affecting both men and women. We also examine the concept of 'family-friendly' benefits, which are widely promoted as a response to the new demands of work and family balance.

### **1.1 Work and Family**

'Work' means paid work, that is employment. The notion of 'family' is not restricted to any one form but instead usually embraces all forms.<sup>2</sup> The implicit stress, however, is on family responsibilities or activities, in particular care of dependent children but also including care for elderly, disabled or ill relatives. This unpaid work of caring within families can be called 'family work' in contrast to 'market work' (Williams, 2001, 1). More broadly, family responsibilities can mean all the activities that make up unpaid work in the family. These activities may not be caring, but often have at least a dimension of caring. According to conventional definitions, for example in time-use surveys, unpaid work includes unpaid caring work, indoor housework (cooking, cleaning, laundry), outdoor housework, household management, and shopping (Bittman and Rice, 2002).

Work/family balance, or – as it sometimes called – work/life balance, is increasingly prominent in Australia and the other industrialised countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). There is now a vast amount of research and policy discussion in many countries, leading to numerous policy initiatives (eg OECD, 2001; Evans, 2001; OECD, 2002; European Foundation, 2002; Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001).

One useful definition of work/family balance is provided by Russell and Bowman (2000, 5), who suggest it is to do with 'the desire to have access to employment opportunities and earn an adequate income while at the same time looking after the caring responsibilities of family life'. For individual workers, the immediate issue is often work and family *imbalance*. The most common term in Australia is 'juggling', conveying a sense of juggling too many disparate activities that are almost, but not quite out of control (Pocock, 2001, 5). There is a judgment that paid work does not fit well with other activities, starting with care of dependents. Paid work is felt to be out of balance, and the remedy is couched in terms of establishing a satisfactory balance.

It is sometimes suggested that the reference to 'balance' is misleading – it puts too much stress on time in its purely quantitative dimensions and it presumes a clash (incompatibility) of the demands of the two spheres. It thereby risks missing the qualitative dimensions of time and the possibility of synergies as well as conflicts between the two spheres of paid work and family. Nor is it entirely clear what a satisfactory balance entails. In addition to 'balance', many researchers and policy

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<sup>2</sup> The Victorian Department of Justice offers a useful definition of the family: 'The term 'family' is defined within its broadest sense and is inclusive of the wide range of lifestyles of staff. 'Family' includes any person dependent upon the staff member for care and support, such as relation by blood (eg. child, sibling, parent, grandparent), marriage (including de facto relationships), adoption, fostering or traditional kinship, without discrimination as to race or sexual preference.' (Department of Justice, 1999).

makers speak of reconciliation (or integration or combination). This is better in that it leaves room to talk about synergies as well as conflicts. However, it lacks the neat antonym ('imbalance') that helps make 'balance' so instantly comprehensible and useful. Moreover, it lacks the important theme of control that is associated with the metaphor of balance. For many workers, work and family 'balance' is to do with taking charge of aspects of their lives that seem to be eluding their control.

Pocock (2003) refers to the important changes in men and women's economic behaviour, including in particular the increased participation of women in paid work. She suggests that this changed behaviour runs up against relatively unchanged institutions such as the workplace and the domestic division of labour, with the result that tensions increase. Following through the metaphor of an 'intersection' between work and family, she speaks of a risk of a *collision* at this intersection. Others speak of a 'care crunch' or squeeze (Hancock, 2002).

Instead of work and family, it is increasingly common for researchers and governments to speak more broadly of work and *life*. For example, the UK government prefers to speak of work/life balance and work/life policies. Work/life balance is defined as 'adjusting work patterns so that everyone regardless of age, race or gender can find a rhythm that enables them more easily to combine work and their other responsibilities and aspirations' (cited in Pillinger, 2001). This broadening of the terminology is sensible (Edgar 1999, 217-218). However, it is important not to lose the focus and a sense of the main priorities for policy action. The central priority should stay with work and caring responsibilities, in particular parenting. This is the site of the main contemporary problems, including the main problems of imbalance and worker dissatisfaction. It is when workers are obliged to juggle paid work with caring responsibilities (care for elderly, sick or disabled relatives or care for dependent children) that the most severe tensions, stresses and sacrifices arise.

### **1.2 *The male breadwinner/ female homemaker model***

Why has the issue of work/family balance become so important? On the one hand, the answer seems straightforward. In numerous OECD countries, many employees are complaining about tensions or conflicts, that is an imbalance, between their work responsibilities (or aspirations) and their family responsibilities (or aspirations) (Thornthwaite, 2003; Bielenski, Bosch and Wagner, 2002). In other words, the issue has become important because of a feeling of discontent amongst many workers, who would prefer a better balance of work and family responsibilities. Discontent may be most intense amongst women, especially those women trying to juggle motherhood, unpaid work in the household and paid work. But it is also evident amongst men, who – perhaps under the prompting of their partners – are seeking a different connection between paid work and family life.

This dissatisfaction is, however, only one aspect of the contemporary scene. Contemporary changes can be usefully viewed against a brief outline of the previously dominant model of the relationship between work and life. This is often called the 'male breadwinner/ female homemaker' model or, more briefly, the 'breadwinner/ homemaker' model (Appelbaum et al, 2002; Pocock, 2003).

This model had a broad application in many advanced capitalist societies, including Australia, beginning from the mid to late nineteenth century and reaching towards the present (Janssens, 1997; Creighton, 1999). It was bolstered and indeed enforced by an extensive range of economic and social policies, starting with discriminatory provisions at the workplace, such as 'marriage bars' and special 'reduced' wages for women, but reaching out to incorporate welfare state taxation and social security arrangements. It was also supported by social norms that were widely shared in the broad population.<sup>3</sup>

In this model, the primary social unit was a couple household, divided according to a strict gender division of labour in which the prime responsibility of the male was to undertake the paid work that brought money into the household while the prime responsibility of the female was to undertake the responsibility for basic household tasks, including the demanding work of caring for children or elderly, ill or disabled relatives. The interplay of paid work and other aspects of life, including in particular unpaid care, was relatively simple and predictable. The two spheres tended to be kept separate, as part of the overall gender division of labour. For most women in such couple households the relationship with paid work was indirect, mediated by the relationship with the employed male. The list of activities that women engaged in was itself gendered, with much domestic work reserved for women and at least some forms of recreation and public activity reserved for men. Men did the bulk of paid work and balanced this activity with a selective engagement in other aspects of life. The spillover from paid work to the rest of life can be described in welfare terms (especially income) and in risk terms (exhaustion, illness, etc.). The work and life relationship for these workers was relatively stable, with life posing few direct threats of disruption to patterns of participation in paid work.

Several points can be noted about this model. First, the composition of the paid workforce was skewed towards men. Employment rates for men were very high, while employment rates for women were low. Most men were in paid work, but they were joined by only a minority of women – either single women or a few married women trying to supplement meagre household earnings through engagement in paid work, often at the margins of the labour market. Second, the forms of participation in paid work were relatively simple and few, primarily patterned according to gender. Men and (most) women entered the paid workforce as full-time workers after completion of their education, generally around 15 years of age, but somewhat later for those who stayed on for technical and further education or tertiary study. Men continued in the workforce until death or disability and retirement (though this was often broken by changes of jobs or even careers and might be interrupted by military service or spells of unemployment). Most women continued in the workforce only until marriage or perhaps the birth of the first child, when they permanently withdrew in order to take up the role of full-time carer in the household (though a minority of women who were in poorer households or were widowed or separated might seek to resume paid work). Third, as noted above, the model pivoted on a strict gender division of labour, which entailed significant gender inequalities in the development of skills, exercise of capabilities, and access to resources. Fourth, though the jobs in

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<sup>3</sup> We are of course presenting a highly stylised picture. Some countries such as Finland or Portugal have never conformed to the model. In other countries, the precise way in which the model operated differed. Moreover, even in the case of countries where this model was dominant, it would be wrong to assume that all households matched the model.

question were differentiated according to skills and status, they seemed relatively homogenous in terms of working hours and the form of the employment contract. Jobs were generally full-time. As a result of trade union and state action, pushed through over decades, full-time waged work came to be protected by guarantees of labour security, including such basic features as a living wage, basic employment security and standardised hours (Standing, 1999). These jobs fell within what has come to be called a 'standard employment relationship' (Mückenberger, 1989).

The traditional 'breadwinner/ homemaker' model was clearly a mixed achievement. It was associated with a degree of prosperity and basic security that supported family life and the participation of workers in many other activities. As such it was important for both men and women. This in turn provided a foundation for a certain enhancement of choice, especially in the private sphere. In the sphere of the workplace, the slow build up of minimum labour standards protected workers against the arbitrary and unfair exercise of management authority and thus preserved some degree of worker discretion in the way paid work was done. However, the degree of worker discretion and choice remained highly restricted. Moreover, we should not overlook the extent to which the 'breadwinner/ homemaker' model enhanced management power. The worker could appear as an 'unencumbered' or even 'ideal' worker (Appelbaum et al, 2002; see Williams, 2000, 1), who worked full-time and long hours, took little or no time off to care for children or other family members and had few domestic responsibilities. It was assumed that workers left their family responsibilities at the office door or factory gate and were therefore readily available, often at short notice, for changes such as compulsory overtime or even relocation. And, most important, the system was riven by fundamental inequalities, including most importantly gender inequality.

The important point is that the traditional 'breadwinner/ homemaker' model has been significantly eroded. One decisive underlying factor has been the steady increase in the workforce participation of women, especially women with dependent children. This has directly contributed to a more diverse workforce and more diverse forms of participation in paid employment. More recently, this process of increasing female participation in paid work, whose origins stretch back several decades, has been joined by other processes such as expanded education, persistent mass unemployment (and under-employment) and labour market deregulation. Some of these processes are benign and others are more malign, but all have added to the erosion of the traditional 'breadwinner/ homemaker' model.

### **1.3 *Labour market transitions***

The dominant patterns of male and female participation in paid work that were linked to the male breadwinner model have now disappeared in most OECD countries. They have been replaced by more complex and varied forms of participation. Full-time employment has been joined by varied forms of part-time work. Full-time employment is itself more varied and is less likely to be continuous, as participation is punctuated by varied interruptions or disruptions. We can see here the emergence of complex new patterns of participation in paid work, with temporary withdrawal(s) and re-entry or re-entries, making up a broad pattern of intermittent participation across the life course for many men and especially for many women.

These new patterns of intermittent participation can be theorised in terms of labour market transitions (Schmid, 1995, 1998; see Watson et al, 2003; Ziguras et al, 2004). Schmid distinguishes four main points of connection between paid work and life in modern societies. These are the points where paid work is linked with: a) education and training; b) unemployment; c) private households; and d) retirement. It is argued that each of these points is increasingly associated with 'transitions' towards or away from full-time paid work.

Each of these connections can be understood as a site of pressure for workers. Each has become a site of tensions and conflicts, which affect large numbers of persons. The tensions may be stable, producing an undercurrent of discontent, or they may be volatile, leading to pressure for employees to withdraw from their current level of involvement in paid work. The most important for our purposes concerns the connection between paid work and what Schmid calls 'private households', where the pressures and tensions are to do with work and family balance.

The new and more complicated patterns of participation can be seen as offering both opportunities and risks. Schmid's schema is very useful for helping to distinguish these, and then for moving on to a policy discussion aimed at seizing the opportunities and forestalling the risks. The work of Schmid and his colleagues is in fact strongly policy-oriented. It stresses the distinction between good and negative transitions. In particular, it points to the dangers that complete withdrawal from paid work in response to pressures may lead to distinctive costs for workers, may be associated with barriers to re-entry, and may unleash a process of cumulative disadvantage. The challenge for government policy is therefore to manage the pressures in order to minimise costs and maximise benefits.

#### **1.4 Family-friendly benefits**

'Family friendly' has become a prominent concept in industrial and social policy. It is an important element in the contemporary discussion of how to remedy 'work and family imbalance', both in Australia (Russell and Bowman, 2000; Buchanan and Thornthwaite, 2001; Charlesworth et al., 2002; Pocock, 2003; Watson et al., 2003, chapter 9) and in other Anglophone countries such as the United States (Appelbaum et al., 2002).

The adjective 'family-friendly' can be applied to different social phenomena. It is often applied to specific *policies* that are seen as facilitating a better work and family balance for individual employees. In addition, it is often used to apply to the specific *practices* or measures that issue from these policies. By extension, the term is often used for outcomes such as specific *employment benefits* for individual employees. Similarly, the term has often been further extended to apply to individual workplaces or enterprises that are seen as offering a special abundance of family-friendly policies, practices and employment benefits.

In this submission we are primarily interested in family-friendly benefits. These can be broadly defined as benefits available to workers in their job for the purpose of helping them to balance paid work and family responsibilities. Family responsibilities centre on caring responsibilities for children and for sick, elderly or disabled relatives.



It can be noted that this definition covers a range of employment benefits, irrespective of how they have come into existence and how they continue to be supported – whether as a result of statute, generalised multi-employer collective bargaining, single-employer bargaining, company policy, or more informal practices. We start from a parent-oriented perspective, which is interested in whether and how employees are supported in their ongoing efforts to balance work and family responsibilities. That is, we are primarily interested in the spread and quality of the benefits, irrespective of where they originate. This broad definition needs to be distinguished from a narrower meaning that would exclude benefits established through external regulation and would confine the notion of ‘family-friendly benefits’ just to voluntary initiatives by individual firms.<sup>4</sup>

## **2 Impact of Parenting Responsibilities on Paid Work<sup>5</sup>**

In this section we examine the impact of parenting responsibilities on paid work and make the point that these caring responsibilities are associated with pressures that can potentially disrupt participation in paid work.

The majority of parents with dependent children are employed. Caring for children is combined with paid work by numerous men and women currently in the workforce. According to standard ABS data, over a third (38.6 percent) of employed men are in families with dependent children (ABS, 2000b). Similarly, over a third (37.9 percent) of employed women come from families with dependent children (ABS, 2000b).<sup>6</sup>

In short, it is clear that a large number of workers have a need and interest in combining parenting responsibilities and paid work. These include both men and women. It is likely that the challenge of combining care and paid work is even more important than these figures suggest. Caring responsibilities are linked to specific stages of the life course. This has two implications. Even those without current caring responsibilities may nevertheless have a strong interest in the issue because they expect to acquire these responsibilities in the future. This is most obviously the case for employed persons who expect to acquire caring obligations for their parents as they grow older. But it also applies to many young workers, who may expect to have children at some point in the future. Another implication is that work and family balance cannot be identified just with a balance that fits current circumstances. It is also to do with looking forward and planning a balance that can accommodate the

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<sup>4</sup> This narrow meaning appears in one recent OECD study, where family-friendly measures are defined as ‘practices, facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life, which firms introduce to complement statutory requirements...’ (OECD 2001, 147; but cf the discussion of ‘family-friendly work practices’ in OECD, 2002). This narrow definition of family-friendly measures as practices above the statutory minimum is confusing when used in cross-national comparisons. The lack of statutory minima may act as a spur on some firms to pursue their own initiatives. This is true in the United States, where there is extensive involvement among some firms in certain family-friendly measures, though the overall spread and quality of the benefits are less and the outcomes for all employees much poorer than in other countries. Indeed, if we adhered to this narrow definition of ‘family friendly benefits’, we would be obliged to conclude that greater involvement in family-friendly measures is associated with worse overall outcomes for all employees (OECD, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> This section draws directly on Campbell and Charlesworth (2004), 33-39.

<sup>6</sup> They are classified as either ‘husband/wife with dependants’ or ‘lone parent with dependants’. ‘Dependants’ are defined as ‘family members under 15 years of age; family members aged 15-19 attending school or aged 15-24 attending a tertiary educational institution full-time...’ (ABS, 2000b).

likely change in circumstances in the future. Improving work and family balance cannot be a question of finding and fixing a stable point of equilibrium, defined according to the immediate needs of individuals or households at one point of time. It is more a question of opening up and securing options for employees to alter their work circumstances in order to respond to changes in caring responsibilities.

For parents who are employed, their caring responsibilities are likely to exert pressures on their paid work. For example, these responsibilities may cause interruptions to their work schedules and may oblige them to take time off at certain points. More broadly, caring responsibilities may make it harder to work long hours, to work at certain times (eg nights and weekends), to work flexibly at short notice, to work extra hours of overtime and to relocate to another workplace in a different geographical location (Glezer and Wolcott, 2000, 46-47).

The orientation of many women with dependent children to part-time employment, can be seen as one broad example of the impact of caring responsibilities on paid work. It reflects a need to reduce hours of paid work in order to free up time for care. Pocock (2003, 159) suggests that part-time work is one of the three main ways of combining care and paid work (together with intermittent work and extended absence or withdrawal).

Other evidence of a direct impact of caring responsibilities can be found in the use of specific ('family-friendly') working arrangements or leave in order to help care. Of the employees in the Queensland survey who provided care, 36.6 percent stated that they had used some form of working arrangement or leave in the previous six months to help care for another person (see Table 2.1). The work arrangements or leave most often cited were paid leave (45.8 percent of those who used a work arrangement), flex-time, rostered day off, time in lieu (39.2 percent), and informal arrangements with employer (27.3 percent) (ABS, 2002b; see also ABS, 2000a; see Wolcott and Glezer, 1995, 40-41). As Table 2.1 indicates, female employees who provided care were more likely to have used a work arrangement or leave (but much of the difference was concentrated in the areas of informal arrangements with employer and unpaid leave).

The use of working arrangements or leave is only an imperfect indicator of the impact of caring responsibilities. These work arrangements or leave can only be used by a select group of employees who both need them *and have practical access to them at their workplaces*. They cannot be used by employees if they are not practically available. We consider the differential availability of such measures in more detail below. However, we can note here that the Queensland survey suggests uneven access and some of the factors that generate this unevenness. Employees in the public sector used work arrangements for care more freely than employees in the private sector. But perhaps the most powerful division was between permanent and casual employees. Employees who provided care were divided between permanent and casual employees in roughly the same proportions as in the workforce as a whole.<sup>7</sup> However, as Table 2.2 indicates, permanent employees who provided care were able to access paid leave to a far greater extent, and they also showed a significantly

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<sup>7</sup> In the Queensland survey, 73.8 percent of carers who were employees were called 'permanent' and 26.2 percent 'casual' (ABS, 2002b). This corresponds closely to the proportions in the workforce as a whole (see ABS, 2002c).

greater likelihood of using flex-time, rostered time off and time off in lieu. Even in respect to informal arrangements with employers, permanent employees boasted a greater use than casual employees. On the other hand, casuals did not use many work or leave arrangements and – in so far as they did use them – they relied primarily on unpaid leave and informal arrangements with employers. These differences are by no means surprising, since casual employment is characterised by a widespread lack of employment rights and benefits (Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell, 2004). These data show that, although casual employees have much the same level of caring responsibilities as permanent employees, they are disadvantaged in their ability to respond to these pressures by using standard work arrangements and leave.

The Queensland survey alludes to other impacts of caring responsibilities on paid work. A small minority of the employees who were carers (about 7.6 percent) stated that they made changes in the past six months in order to fulfil caring responsibilities. The most often cited changes were ‘permanently changed usual start or finish times’ and ‘permanently reduced the total number of hours usually worked’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, a small minority (about 6.3 percent) stated that they had been inhibited from making changes to their employment because of their caring responsibilities.

The State of Victoria Household Survey suggested that almost one in four (22.3 percent) employees had time off in the previous year to care for a sick relative. Around three quarters used paid leave for this purpose, while around a quarter used unpaid leave (Victorian Government, 2003, 9, 21).

Additional information on the impact of parenting responsibilities on paid work can be obtained from surveys that look at caring for children, the most common source of pressure on the workplace. We mention above the finding that about one quarter of Victoria employees took time off in the previous twelve months in order to care for a sick relative. In most cases this was a sick child, and those who took time off were parents. Taking time off was more common amongst mothers than fathers, with almost half (45.3 percent) of all women with dependent children taking time off in the previous year to care for a sick family member, compared to 26.7 percent of men with dependent children (Victorian Government, 2003, 9; see Buchanan and Thornthwaite, 2001, 20-23). Similarly, the ABS Work Arrangements Survey (ABS, 2000c) asks about absences from work (of at least three hours in the past two weeks) as a result of three family reasons: a) caring for an ill child or family member; b) spending time with child or attending school or other reason; and c) difficulty with childcare/ pupil free days/ school vacation. In each case, both men and women had such absences, but they were more common amongst female employees than amongst male employees.

The regular ABS survey on child care (ABS, 2002a) provides a valuable look at changes over time in aspects of the relationship between caring for children and paid work. One major feature that emerges from a comparison of data from 1993 to 2002 is the steady increase in the use of work arrangements by parents (in families with at least one parent employed) in order to assist in caring for children. The increase was sharper for fathers than for mothers, though mothers remained far more likely to use work arrangements to assist in child care (Table 2.3). Thus the increase in families

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<sup>8</sup> This figure does not capture all those who have made changes to their employment. It does not for example capture those who have been obliged to leave a job, eg in order to accept an inferior job elsewhere or to withdraw completely from the workforce.

where the father used work arrangements was from 24.4 percent in 1993 to 30 percent in 2002. The increase in families where the mother used work arrangements was from 68.3 percent in 1993 to 70.4 percent in 2002. The most often cited work arrangement used by fathers and mothers has consistently been 'flexible working hours', and the use of this work arrangement seems to have increased for both fathers and mothers since 1993. Mothers also cited 'permanent part-time work' and 'work at home' as work arrangements that have been used in order to assist with care of children.

### **3 Easing Parenting Pressures through Family-Friendly Measures at the Workplace<sup>9</sup>**

In this section we turn to the important question of the spread of family-friendly benefits in Australia, looking beyond formal eligibility to the more decisive level of practical access. We summarise the main points concerning spread that are widely accepted in the secondary literature, starting with the fact of the patchy and uneven provision of most benefits as a result of a reliance on firm-level initiatives.

#### ***3.1 A typology of parenting pressures***

Parenting responsibilities imply pressures on individual participation in paid work. These pressures can work in different ways. For example they can be stable, exercising a steady influence that is either accommodated in work schedules or simply ignored, or they can be more volatile, exercising a disruptive influence on work schedules. The impact of stable pressures is often evident only indirectly, eg when workers are unable to work at nights and they therefore take up jobs that have no requirements for night work. Where such stable pressures do become more directly evident it is often as a result of an employer-initiated change to work schedules that results in a clash with the employee's caring requirements.

Different pressures are likely to demand different responses (and different remedies). It is therefore important to try to classify the types of pressures associated with caring responsibilities, especially those pressures that are less stable and that threaten disruptions to work schedules. The key dimensions seem to be the *predictability* of the pressures, the *size* of their impact, and the *frequency* with which they recur. We can distinguish pressures according to a rough typology set out in Figure 3.1.

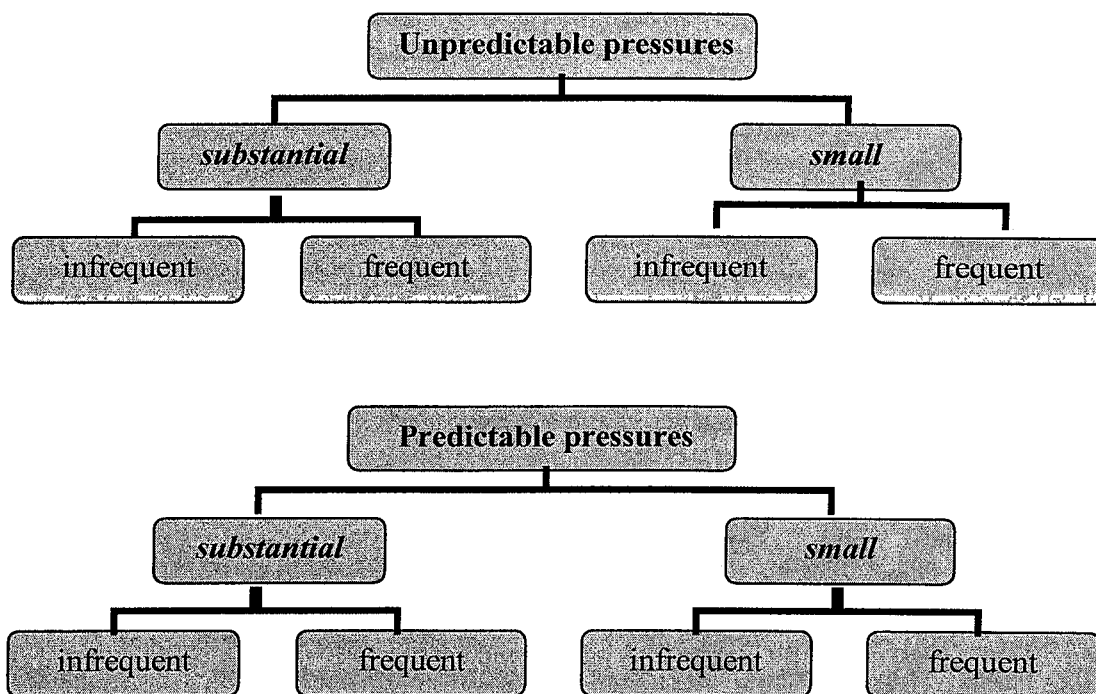
On the basis of this typology, we can distinguish three main types of pressures. The first main type of pressure arises out of unpredictable events such as the illness of a child or a failure of alternative care arrangements. These tend to place sudden pressures on work schedules, and they may lead to a disruption of the work schedule and a need to leave the workplace. These cases are analogous to a sudden illness affecting the worker. As in the case of personal illness, the pressure to disruption can be substantial or small. In the former case, we can speak of emergencies; in the latter it may be more a case of a minor interruption. Similarly, the pressures can be frequent or infrequent (though of course the unpredictability of the pressures means that frequency can only be gauged after the event).

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<sup>9</sup> This section draws directly on Campbell and Charlesworth (2004), 40-50.



**Figure 3.1 Pressures on participation in paid work**



Most pressures associated with caring responsibilities come with longer warning periods and are more easily anticipated. The second main type of pressure occurs when pressures are predictable and substantial. This type can in turn be sub-divided into two sub-types:

- On the one hand, predictable and substantial pressures can be infrequent. A classic example is childbirth, which has a lengthy warning time and is generally limited to a small number of occasions in the lives of women. It places substantial pressure on continuous participation in paid work and necessitates a break of at least several weeks.
- On the other hand, predictable and substantial pressures can be more frequent. An example would be school holidays, which occur several times a year. These often impose severe pressures on the work schedules of parents, depending on their ability to access holiday programs or other forms of care.

The third main type of pressure occurs when pressures are predictable and small. Again this type can be sub-divided according to the frequency of the pressures:

- On the one hand, there are predictable and small pressures that are relatively infrequent. One example is the need to accompany a child to a hospital specialist appointment.
- On the other hand, there are predictable and small pressures that are more frequent, eg occur once a week or once a day. An example could be a caring schedule that requires parents to pick up children from child care before the centre closes at 6 pm.

### *3.2 Family-friendly measures at the workplace can ease the pressures*

The pressures associated with caring have consequences for the workplace, and these consequences can often be negative. Pocock (2003) refers to the risks of collision at the intersection between care and paid work. She defines this in terms of 'a moving vehicle of change in work patterns and in family structures, meeting a solid wall of relatively unchanging labour market institutions, culture and practice' (2003, 2).

The typology in the previous section gives some indication of the nature of the possible problems associated with caring pressures. In responding to such pressures, workers may seek to obtain time off or to adjust their regular work schedules. When, for whatever reason, such adjustments are not possible, the worker must then search for an alternative way of handling the pressures. This can entail much desperate toing and froing. At the extreme, the problem may be so severe that the employee is obliged to leave the particular job and the particular workplace, either directly through dismissal or through some form of voluntary quit. In these cases, there are both short-term and long-term costs. The problems caused by the work/ life collision affect the worker first of all. But they also reverberate back on family life, which is the original site of the caring pressures, and they can spread from there into the community and the broader society (Pocock, 2003). Moreover, there can also be problems at the workplace level. These can include not only the problems associated with disruption or adjustment but also problems of absenteeism, turnover, poor productivity and poor morale (Hallis, 2004; DIR, 1996; DEWRSB, 1997; DFACS/ DEWR, 2002, 50).

The work/ life collision arises when workplaces are rigid. Pocock (2003, 3) refers to 'unchanging norms and institutions', including the model of the 'ideal worker' who is at the disposal of the employer for a regular full-time (or more-than-full-time) shift. This rigidity can be expressed in different ways, eg in the form of insisting on a rigid schedule, with little opportunity for amendment or variation to meet the needs of the employee, or in the form of imposing a schedule that varies freely according to the perceived needs of the employer rather than the needs of the employee.

How to avoid or cushion this collision? There is widespread agreement amongst policy-makers and researchers that one way forward is through 'family-friendly' measures. These have been championed by governments, employer associations and trade unions (Glezer and Wolcott, 2000). Of course family-friendly measures are only one way forward. Moreover, they cannot solve all work and family problems or clashes. Nevertheless family-friendly measures can play a significant part in easing or cushioning the pressures associated with caring. They can thereby play a significant part in ameliorating the problems listed above and in improving work and family balance.

Such family-friendly measures include many of the work and leave arrangements listed above in the Queensland survey on carers, eg paid leave, flex-time, rostered day off, time in lieu (ABS 2002b). These work arrangements represent benefits for employees. Each seems to work well in helping with caring responsibilities, because it provides the employee with the ability to take time off from the paid workplace on those occasions when the pressures of caring responsibilities become particularly insistent.

Family-friendly benefits can be broadly defined as 'benefits available to employees in their jobs for the purpose of helping them to balance paid work and family responsibilities' (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2003). There are different ways of differentiating family-friendly benefits. In a previous study (Charlesworth et al., 2002), we distinguish long-term and short-term leave arrangements, options to move into good quality part-time work, and employee-oriented flexible working-time arrangements. We point out that leave arrangements, such as maternity and paternity leave, parental leave, and family/ carer's leave, allow periods of temporary withdrawal for caring responsibilities while still retaining attachment to the employing organisation (and ideally attachment to the original job). Good quality part-time work frees up more time for regular caring responsibilities. Flexible work schedules allow employee-initiated variations in the duration or timing of work in response to more modest fluctuations in caring responsibilities. These three mechanisms allow interruptions without the worker losing attachment to the paid workforce. They entail partial but not complete withdrawal. In this way they minimise the costs of withdrawal for the employee (and the family and the broader society). The common theme in all these mechanisms is an enhanced capacity of the employee to respond to the constraints in their life by means of variations in their work arrangements.

Workplaces can ease pressures through family-friendly measures. But it is important not to confine the discussion just to the presence or absence of such measures. Many researchers note that workplaces can also compound the pressures associated with caring through what can be called 'family-unfriendly' (Pocock, 2003; Victorian Government, 2003, 8) or 'family-hostile' measures (Bramble, 2001; Charlesworth et al., 2002). In this way they can exacerbate the collision between caring responsibilities and work. Such 'family-hostile' measures include rigid organisational cultures, reliance on long (and lengthening) hours, variable start and finish times under the control of the employer, compulsory overtime at unpredictable intervals and with little notice, unsympathetic supervisors and poor quality part-time schedules.

#### **4 How Much Practical Access do Parents have to Family-Friendly Measures?**

What is the current situation with family-friendly benefits in Australia? More and more workers experience pressures as a result of caring responsibilities. Are the pressures eased by the widespread availability of family-friendly benefits? Or are they compounded by the existence of too many rigid workplaces?

There are some difficulties in finding answers to such questions in Australia. One key question is to do with the spread of family-friendly benefits, where the important issue is not so much the formal entitlement as the practical access of workers to the benefit. Reliable information on the practical access of employees to family-friendly benefits is difficult to obtain. In this submission we limit ourselves to summarising points that are widely accepted in the secondary literature. Similarly, we cannot review the entire gamut of individual family-friendly benefits. Instead, we concentrate on the overall picture (though with particular attention to a few select benefits).



Five points seem to be widely accepted in the literature on family-friendly benefits in Australia:

- Family-friendly benefits in Australia are provided through a patchwork of different methods;
- Though it is difficult to make exact estimates, most family-friendly benefits provided through firm-level initiatives seem to be available only to a minority of employees – predominantly composed of higher-skilled workers in large and public sector enterprises;
- Casual employment represents a significant gap in eligibility for family-friendly benefits;
- There are problems with the quality of part-time employment, thereby limiting its claim to be ‘family-friendly’;
- Even amongst those who are formally eligible for family-friendly benefits, there are substantial difficulties in take up as a result of factors such as unsupportive organisational cultures, long hours and work intensification.

We address each of these points below. While family-friendly benefits can ease or cushion the pressures associated with trying to combine caring responsibilities and paid work, our analysis suggests that most employees in Australia have little access to such family-friendly benefits. Only a few benefits are widely available and most of the remainder are limited to a minority. Evidence suggests that the group of employees who need family-friendly benefits the most are the group least likely to have practical access to such benefits.

Both formal entitlement and take up appear to be problems in Australia. The two problems can be seen as interlinked. Systems with highly selective eligibility requirements tend to have poor take-up rates. They tend to lose transparency and leave a large space for the other limits to come into play. For example, where coverage is only patchy, employees are often unaware of their rights and there is ample room for problems such as evasion or discouragement. In addition to the relative lack of access to family-friendly benefits, there are worrying signs of a growth in ‘family-hostile’ measures such as long hours and work intensification.

#### ***4.1 Family-friendly benefits in Australia are provided through a patchwork of different methods***

Family-friendly benefits are provided through a patchwork of different methods in Australia. There are few statutory minima in Australia, either at federal or state level. The main path for introducing minimum standards in this area has been through trade union action, primarily by means of test cases before the federal industrial tribunal, which aim to insert a standard clause in federal awards. Such test cases often build on successful collective bargaining initiatives in individual industries, and they can be seen as part of a distinctive Australian ‘mechanism of generalisation’ (Campbell and Brosnan, 1999). When successful, these test cases provide a platform of reasonably general coverage. A succession of test cases has established a small number of family-friendly benefits. For example, two test cases led to the provision of 12 months unpaid maternity/ parental leave (subsequently incorporated into legislation and then broadened to include some previously excluded employees) and family/ carers leave, which provides a limited right to access existing forms of paid leave to care for family members (Ministerial Taskforce on Work and Family, 2002).

Family-friendly benefits can also be provided in other ways. They can be defined in individual awards, for example industry or occupational awards. Beneath this level, it comes down to methods of provision oriented to individual workplaces. Thus family-friendly benefits can appear in registered single-employer collective agreements (union or non-union) and registered individual agreements. They may appear as part of company policy, either codified in some sort of document or uncodified. Where company policy is uncodified, it begins to overlap with more informal methods of provision such as custom and practice, informal individual agreement and management grace and favour.

A few family-friendly benefits are broadly available as a result of legislation or previous test cases, but most are available only through firm-level initiatives, either as a result of enterprise bargaining or through voluntary management initiatives. In comparison with most other OECD countries, there is a distinct shift in Australia away from mandatory elements prescribed in general labour regulation and towards a reliance on voluntary firm-level initiatives (OECD, 2002). This shift has grown more prominent in recent years, reflecting the character of much government policy. The current federal government supports the principle of family-friendly benefits. But, in accordance with a commitment to labour market deregulation, the main thrust of its policy aimed at the workplace has been to encourage voluntary employer initiatives to introduce 'family-friendly' measures, either unilaterally or through 'enterprise bargaining' (through formal collective or individual agreements). This is supplemented by some dissemination of information, efforts at promoting the benefits of 'family-friendly' measures to employers, and celebration of good practice (Reith, 1999). This has been well described as an 'enterprise as island mindset' (Buchanan and Thornthwaite, 2001, 9). It relies heavily on an appeal to the 'business case', which focuses on the (potential) advantages of work/ family policies for the short-term financial performance of individual enterprises. In this approach it is suggested that better work/ family policies will mean that businesses find it 'easier to deliver services; easier to recruit, retain and motivate staff; easier to recruit from a wider pool; easier to reduce stress, sick leave, staff turnover and absenteeism; and easier to increase motivation, loyalty and productivity' (DfEE, 2000, 10; see Reith, 1999).

#### ***4.2 Most family-friendly benefits provided through firm-level initiatives are only available to a minority of employees***

As a result of the patchwork of methods, with a strong bias towards firm-level initiatives, the spread of family-friendly benefits to employees is highly uneven. The few benefits provided through general methods are widely available (though by no means universal). However, the majority of family-friendly benefits, which are only available through firm-level initiatives, seem to have a much more limited spread amongst employees.

The literature on the spread of family-friendly benefits in Australia uses a variety of different methods. Though these in turn generate different estimates, the overall verdict is clear. As the OECD (2002, 17, see 200) politely notes in a recent review of

policy in Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands – there is only a ‘low penetration’ of family-friendly work practices in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

Most family-friendly benefits are available only to a minority of employees, primarily composed of higher-skilled workers in large and/or public sector enterprises. We can illustrate the point by picking up the prominent example of paid maternity leave in the private sector.<sup>11</sup> There are varied estimates of the spread of paid maternity leave (HREOC 2002a; b; Baird, 2003; Baird, Brennan and Cutcher, 2002; Baird and Letwin, 2004). Recent figures from an ABS employee survey (ABS 2003) suggest that 27.6 percent of females employed in the private sector claim to be entitled to paid maternity leave. However, regardless of the precise estimate, all agree that only a minority of female employees in the private sector has access to the benefit. The available data (HREOC, 2002a, 103) show a strong pattern of differential access according to occupation. The HREOC report concludes that ‘higher skilled, professional employees are more likely to have access to paid maternity leave than are those in less-skilled and lower paid work’ (HREOC, 2002a, 105).

Trends in provision of family-friendly benefits are hard to estimate. Some prominent benefits such as paid maternity leave seem to have become more generalised in the most recent period. In other cases, such as flexible working arrangements oriented to the employee, we can observe a retreat rather than an advance. Flexitime was a familiar element in the public sector, but it seems to have slowly declined in line with changes in the public sector as a result of privatisation and the introduction of new public sector management techniques. Where it survives, work intensification and changes in workplace culture can impede effective access. Rostered days off (RDOs) were an important achievement of the shorter hours campaigns of the early 1980s, and in some instances they allowed employees to choose when to take a day off. Recent evidence suggests that the spread of the entitlement to RDOs is shrinking (ABS, 2000c; Buchanan and Thornthwaite, 2001, 12). Both flex-time and RDOs figure prominently in the list of flexible work arrangements used by employees to assist with caring (ABS, 2002b, 2002a), but they seem to be slipping out of the control of Australian employees.

The low spread of family-friendly benefits by means of firm-level initiatives confirms the strength of researchers’ cautions about exclusive reliance on the ‘business case’ (Lewis, 1997; Dickens, 1999; Harker and Lewis, 2001; Evans, 2001: 24-26). In contrast to the often-inflated predictions of short-term advantages to firms as a result of the introduction of family-friendly benefits, research suggests that the distribution of costs and benefits is complex, and circumstances that push the balance towards benefits are more likely to be the exception than the rule (Evans, 2001, 25; OECD, 2001, 148). It would be foolish to expect firms to introduce such benefits purely because of their impact on the bottom line. A recent OECD report points out that in countries where there are low levels of legal provision, voluntary arrangements by

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<sup>10</sup> Most attention is focused on the presence or absence of a provision in the text of an award or agreement (or set of work rules). Even at this level, most studies conclude that agreements have a low incidence of genuine ‘family-friendly’ provisions (Whitehouse and Zetlin, 1999; Whitehouse, 2001b; ACIRRT, 2001; cf OECD, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> We focus on the private sector, because paid maternity leave in the government sector is secured through legislation that ensures relatively broad coverage (HREOC, 2002a).

employers do not fill the gap. Voluntary arrangements tend to be patchy, confined to certain firms (large firms, public sector firms) and certain employees (highly skilled) (2001, 133, 153). Most workers – including those most in need of family-friendly measures – miss out. The OECD (2002, 200, see 17) notes the limits of relying on a firm-level approach: ‘Relying on ‘the business case’ as the main way of promoting family-friendly work practices risks the outcome that such provisions are restricted to the public sector and to highly-skilled high paid professionals’.

#### ***4.3 Casual employment represents a significant gap in eligibility for family-friendly benefits***

Most family-friendly benefits in Australia are available to just a minority of employees. One major category of employees to miss out is that of casual employees.

Casual employees lack most rights and benefits, starting with basic entitlements such as paid sick leave and paid annual leave (Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell, 2004). It is by no means surprising that they should also miss out on most family-friendly benefits. As a result of exclusions or exemptions in the rules of formal eligibility, casual employees miss out even on some benefits that are widely available.<sup>12</sup> In addition, they miss out on the benefits offered at a more selective firm level. In our earlier analysis of the Queensland data on work and leave arrangements used by employees to assist with care, we noted the failure of casual employees to use most of these arrangements and the reliance of casual employees on informal arrangements and unpaid leave. Again we can add the example of paid maternity leave. According to unpublished data from the ABS Survey of Employment Arrangements and Superannuation (SEAS) (HREOC, 2002a, 101), a negligible proportion (0.4 percent) of self-identified casual employees responded that they were entitled to paid maternity leave, compared to 53.6 percent of other female employees. It is clear that casual status is a major gap in access to family-friendly benefits.

Casual employment is diverse, but it shares the common feature of a relative lack of rights and benefits. This is true even in the case of so-called ‘permanent casuals’, who resemble employees with an ongoing contract of employment in many other ways and who have often accumulated long periods of service with one employer (Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell, 2004).

The gap associated with casual employment is important, because the number of casual employees is large and growing. The standard ABS estimate, based on the absence of paid annual and sick leave entitlements, was almost two-and-a-quarter million workers, or 27.6 percent of all employees, in Australia in August 2003 (ABS 2003). If we eliminate the somewhat anomalous group of owner-managers of incorporated enterprises, the figure is reduced only slightly to about 25 percent of all employees (ABS, 2003; Campbell and Burgess, 2001). Casual employment is loaded towards part-time hours, with casual employees accounting for 60.4 percent of all part-time employees and 13.8 percent of all full-time employees (ABS, 2003). On the other hand, the importance of casual employment is greater if we take a dynamic

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<sup>12</sup> One partial exception is unpaid parental leave. In the wake of legislative initiatives in Queensland and New South Wales, a test case allowed unpaid parental leave to be extended to casual employees with 12 months continuous service (Watts, 2001).

perspective, since casual work figures in a large number of the flows in and out of employment (Watson et al., 2003, 36).

Casual employment is particularly important for women. Table 4.1 indicates that 31.9 percent of female employees are casual. Other data suggest that the figure is even higher for women with children under 12 who are employees (40 percent of whom are casual – ABS 2000c). In short, casual employment is disproportionately made up of many people who have particularly strong needs for family-friendly benefits. Similarly, Gray (2001, 36-38) uses data from the 1997 Negotiating the Lifecourse (NLC) survey to draw attention to the paradoxical fact that employed women with a child under five, that is, the group of employees who are most likely to need workplace entitlements such as paid leave, are precisely those who are least likely to have access to such entitlements.

It is occasionally suggested that casual employment is beneficial for workers with family responsibilities, in that they can alter their hours to suit their family responsibilities and can even leave at will (for example to be at home during school holidays). Certainly their employment can be highly 'flexible'. However, many casual employees feel that the flexibility of their employment is employer-oriented flexibility and that they have little control over their work schedules. This can play havoc with caring responsibilities. As a result, many complain about the harsh impact of unpredictable and short-term variations in hours on their family life (Smith and Ewer, 1999; Pocock, 2003, 172-176).

#### *4.4 There are problems with the quality of part-time employment*

Casual employment overlaps strongly with part-time employment. Indeed, over 60 percent of all part-time employees in Australia are also casual (Table 4.1). As a result, the gap in access to family-friendly benefits that we noted in relation to casual employment also tends to apply in the case of part-time employment.

The poor conditions associated with casual employment are often particularly evident in part-time casual employment. Part-time casual employees lack employment security. They often lack control over their basic conditions. Many work on a regular roster with steady hours (and pay), but others are subject to irregular, unpredictable hours, where only short notice of variations is provided (Smith and Ewer, 1999). They may lack any guarantee of minimum hours to underpin their irregular hours and earnings. Some part-time employees are vulnerable to high work demands, leading to extra hours of unpaid overtime. They are more likely to be engaged for night work or weekend work. And casual employees enjoy little access to training or career progression (VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1999; Hall, Bretherton and Buchanan, 2000). Even with the boost sometimes provided by a casual loading, the hourly wages of casual part-time employees are well below those of full-time employees. Moreover, the gap has widened markedly in the 1990s (Whitehouse, 2001a, 68-70; Preston, 2001, 170-171; see Mitchell, 1999).

Partly because of the loading to casual status, the proportion of part-time employees with practical access to family-friendly benefits is low. One example is access to paid maternity leave. According to the latest figures, almost half of all female full-time employees have access to paid maternity leave, but the figure for female part-time

employees is only 20.4 percent (ABS 2003). Mothers with dependent children are particularly concentrated in part-time employment. These figures suggest that such mothers will be disadvantaged in getting access to the income support provided by paid maternity leave if they decide to have another child.

Reduced hours of paid work through part-time employment can be an important aid in balancing caring responsibilities and paid work. It can allow workers to take more time for caring while still retaining attachment to the world of paid work. In the case of mothers with dependent children, reduced hours of paid work can free up more time to meet the particularly urgent needs of children when they are small. Some people go on to conclude that part-time work is therefore by definition a 'family-friendly measure'. However, this is too hasty and too narrow. It is necessary to look beyond the number of hours to the other conditions of the job if we are to reach a full assessment of family-friendliness. In short, it is necessary to look at the 'quality' of the part-time work (Rubery, 1998; Fagan and Burchell, 2002).

There is spreading concern amongst researchers about the low (and declining) quality of part-time employment in Australia (eg Buchanan and Thornthwaite, 2001; Charlesworth et al., 2002; Pocock, 2003, chapter 7; Victorian Government, 2003, 10, 22; Watson et al, 2003). Reduced hours seem too often to go hand-in-hand with reduced conditions. This is indicated in varied ways. First, the fact that so much part-time employment is 'casual' is one symptom of a deficiency in quality. But concern is also expressed about the deterioration of conditions associated with 'permanent' part-time work (Whitehouse, Lafferty and Boreham, 1997; Junor, 1998, 2000). Second, there is evidence of poor (and declining) hourly wages relative to full-time employees (Preston, 2001; Whitehouse, 2001a). Third, many part-time jobs are associated with very short hours. Though very short hours may suit employees such as students, they are linked with high levels of underemployment and multiple job-holding, in which workers are obliged to put together two or three part-time jobs in pursuit of satisfactory hours and income (ABS, 1997). Fourth, part-time jobs tend to be segregated from full-time jobs, particularly in female-dominated areas such as retail and hospitality. As a result, part-time employment becomes sheered off from a career structure and offers few attractions to employees concerned to advance their careers (Probert, 1995; Deery and Mahony, 1994).

This analysis points to a complicated assessment of part-time employment. In effect, part-time employment represents a trade-off for many women, whereby in return for the opportunity to work reduced hours, they tolerate poor conditions. This appears as an extra cost of trying to balance work and family responsibilities. When part-time work is predominantly poor quality, it imposes costs such as low employment security, low wages and short, unpredictable hours. From this point of view, part-time work cannot be regarded as unambiguously 'family-friendly' (Pocock, 2003).

#### *4.5 There are substantial difficulties in take up*

Assessment of the spread of family-friendly benefits must dig below the level of formal entitlement to examine the level of practical availability. There is concern that several factors in Australia limit the ability of employees – even when they have a formal entitlement – to take up family-friendly benefits.

Recent studies of teachers and finance sector workers in Australia suggest that, in spite of the presence of an apparent array of family-friendly provisions, these employees are experiencing 'a deterioration in their ability to balance work and life on a daily basis' (Probert, Ewer and Whiting, 2000, 43; see also Probert, Whiting and Ewer, 1999, 2000). The authors point to three main problems for these workers: coverage of provisions is still patchy; employees face continuing difficulties in gaining access to these provisions, and then – most important – such provisions are unequal to the challenge of countering the effects of increased pressure to work long hours and intensification.

Factors that limit take-up can be conceptualised under four main headings (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2003):

- First are *limits associated with the technical process of take up*. In some cases ignorance of the provision and ignorance or uncertainty about the details of the technical process for claiming the benefit can act as a powerful barrier for many employees.
- Second are *limits as a result of management discretion* in granting or refusing a claim. Benefits are not always available automatically, ie when an employee meets the formal criteria for entitlement and has successfully mounted a claim. Instead, they are often subject to conditions applied by supervisors and managers. If there is space for management discretion we have to factor a rate of rejection in to any estimates of spread. Rejection of a claim may be justified by business conditions, or attitude towards the individual employee (or class of employee). This will be most important in cases where informal rather than formal processes guide the distribution of the benefit.
- Third are *limits as a result of employee discouragement*. Several factors may discourage employees from making a claim (or pursuing a claim). Some of the above points already gesture towards such factors. For example, awareness of high rates of rejection may inhibit employees from making a claim. Other more diffuse factors such as fear of attracting the hostility of supervisors and fear of the consequences for promotion can also play a role. More elusive but just as important is the impact of organisational cultures that contain hidden assumptions about the conditions of the job – such as long hours and total commitment. As a result, a benefit can come to appear as a perk rather than as an entitlement. Conversely, it may come to be seen as a symptom of an inability to cope with high work demands, and workers may be reluctant to draw attention to the fact they are falling short of the demands of the 'ideal worker'. Heavy work demands can of course also be a practical barrier to access, when claims for benefits are seen as displacing work on to the shoulders of colleagues or short-changing clients and customers. In some cases, for example where there is a provision for unpaid leave, employees may also be discouraged because they see little advantage in a period of unpaid leave.
- Fourth are *limits as a result of management evasion* of formal requirements. Evasion can occur in varied ways. As well as direct evasion, management can avoid responsibilities by erecting technical barriers to take up, by exploiting the grey areas at the edges of any zone of management discretion, and by subtly discouraging workers from making claims. In this way, evasion can overlap with the other limits cited above.

The case-study evidence cited above points to the deleterious impact of organisational cultures characterised by extended working hours and intense work demands. Certainly, long (and lengthening) hours and intensifying work demands have become more prominent features in many Australian workplaces over recent years (Campbell, 2002a, 2002b; Allan, O'Donnell and Peetz, 1999; Peetz et al., 2003, 2004). As well as the direct effects on the work and family balance of the employees within the workplace, these trends can generate significant indirect effects. For example, they can erect a barrier to female entry into full-time jobs and act as a constraint on household strategies for more equitably combining male and female participation in paid work (Pocock, 2001, 30; Pocock et al., 2001; Pocock, 2003).

Extended working hours has attracted particular attention from researchers and policy-makers in recent years. Table 4.2 shows evidence on the trends in the distribution of employees amongst different bands of weekly working hours. The data demonstrate the polarisation of working-time patterns, with increasing proportions of employees working reduced (part-time) hours and increasing proportions working extended hours. The proportion working 45 hours or more has increased sharply for both men and women. It has been particularly sharp for women, though male employees continue to be much more likely to work extended hours. Extra hours in Australia primarily take the form of unpaid overtime. In this case, the problems associated with long hours are compounded by other factors such as unpredictability of the variations and short notice (Campbell, 2002b). Though unpaid overtime can sometimes appear voluntary, closer inspection reveals a widespread feeling of a lack of control amongst workers subject to pressures for long hours of unpaid overtime (Campbell, 2002b). Long working hours and intense work demands can be linked with other features such the spread of work during 'unsociable' hours, irregular working-time schedules, and casualisation (Peetz et al., 2004). They are often aptly called 'family unfriendly' or 'family hostile' measures (eg Pocock, 2003; Charlesworth et al., 2002).

#### **4 The Costs of Parenting<sup>13</sup>**

In this section we sketch out the way in which the pressures associated with parenting are handled in Australia.

Parenting is a key stage in the lives of many people. It represents the upsurge of intense caring responsibilities, which affect mothers first of all but readily extend to include fathers as well. As noted above, there are a modest number of births each year in Australia (about 250,000 in 2002), only some of which are first births. However, responsibilities for children persist for many years, and the aggregate effect of the onset of parenthood in distributing care responsibilities on citizens and workers is large. As a result, employed mothers and employed fathers with dependent children make up more than a third of the paid workforce.

Responsibilities for care of children entail pressures on participation in paid work. They often entail labour market transitions, especially for women. However, these are rarely the labour market transitions associated with the old 'male breadwinner/

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<sup>13</sup> This section draws directly on Campbell and Charlesworth (2004), 50-52.



female homemaker' model, in which the woman exited permanently from the paid workforce. Instead, the transformation for women today is structured around temporary withdrawal(s) for a longer or shorter period of time at the point of childbirth and the early years of childrearing, followed by re-entry (or re-entries). In place of a single permanent event, there is now a complex set of social processes of withdrawal and re-entry, which can vary in their detail amongst individual women and amongst societies. And the form of re-entry can vary, depending on whether it leads to the same, a similar or an entirely different job (or occupation); the length of time out of the workforce; and the quality of the new job (including hours).

The magnitude of this change away from the male breadwinner model for women tends to be masked in official labour force statistics, since the latter are cross-sectional and miss the dynamics of participation in paid work over the life course. In particular, they fail to capture the new dynamics of women's participation over the parenting phase.

The move away from the old patterns of participation is characteristic of Australia, as well as other OECD countries. Nevertheless, experiences around parenting possess some specific features in Australia. The issue is not so much to do with men, for whom parenthood has little impact on the dominant pattern of continuous participation in full-time employment. Instead it concerns women. We note above that the presence of children has a substantial effect in depressing employment rates for women in Australia and in increasing the number of women with dependent children counted as not-employed. This is accompanied by a very strong orientation to part-time work amongst mothers of dependent children, particularly in the case of mothers with young children but extending out to include many other women with dependent children. Whitehouse (2003) also draws attention to these features of the Australian experience, pointing out that the strength of the effects of children on women in Australia is distinctive in cross-national comparisons.

These comparative data hint at distinctive problems with parenting and paid work in Australia. As in most countries, Australian women follow the new pattern of temporary withdrawal and re-entry. But in Australia, more than in most other OECD countries, this seems to be associated with substantial problems and barriers that make the process more difficult than it should be. The female pattern of participation around childbirth in Australia tends to be more strongly marked by complete withdrawal at childbirth, followed by subsequent re-entry into a different job (often of poor quality, with inferior wages and conditions).

The problem is not so much the fact of withdrawal and re-entry, but rather the (avoidable) costs that are entailed in these transitions. These include the costs of the initial withdrawal and then the costs of the subsequent employment. A substantial literature points to the large direct and indirect costs to mothers in terms of reduced lifetime earnings (eg Gray and Chapman, 2001).

The precise causes of the distinctive pattern in Australia are complex and contested. However, there is general agreement that the poor transitions are linked to the uneven provision of family-friendly benefits that is identified above. This includes the lack of a general entitlement to paid parental leave, which is striking in cross-national comparison (HREOC, 2002a; OECD, 2002). However, the deficit reaches beyond the

phase of childbirth and the initial period of childrearing. It also includes the lack of general entitlements to family-friendly benefits when women seek to return to work. Of particular importance here is the lack of options to take up quality part-time work and the lack of flexible working-time arrangements under the control of the employee. The problems can be linked both the relative absence of benefits that would ease or cushion the pressures of caring responsibilities and the growing presence of family-hostile measures that compound these pressures (Pocock, 2003; Buchanan and Thornthwaite, 2001; Gray and McDonald, 2002).

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## Tables used in Submission

*Table 2.1: Employees who use work arrangements to care, by sex, type of arrangements used, Queensland, October 2002*

	Males	Females	All employees
	'000 employees	'000 employees	'000 employees
Working arrangement			
Paid leave	42.9	43.5	86.4
Flexitime, rostered time off, time off in lieu	34.1	39.8	74.0
Informal arrangements with employer	20.6	30.9	51.4
Unpaid leave	7.4	22.3	29.7
Working from home	14.8	15.2	30.0
Temporarily reduced hours	7.7	22.7	30.3
Any other arrangement	*1.9	*3.2	5.1
Total a)	81.4	107.2	188.6

\* high relative standard error

a) Total represents employees who use work arrangements to care. This is less than the number of arrangements used, as carers could have used more than one type of working arrangement.

Source: ABS Cat. No. 4903.3, *Managing Paid Employment and Unpaid Caring Responsibilities, Queensland*, October 2002, p. 9.



**Table 2.2: Employees who use work arrangements to care by permanent and casual status, type of work arrangements used, Queensland, October 2002**

	Permanent '000 employees	Casual '000 employees	All employees '000 employees
Working arrangement			
Paid leave	85.1	**1.3	86.4
Flextime, rostered time off, time off in lieu	64.2	9.8	74.0
Informal arrangements with employer	38.0	13.4	51.4
Unpaid leave	14.6	15.1	29.7
Working from home	22.3	7.7	30.0
Temporarily reduced hours	19.1	11.2	30.3
Any other arrangement	*3.9	**1.1	5.1
Total a)			188.6

\* high relative standard error

a) Total represents employees who use work arrangements to care. This is less than the number of arrangements used, as carers could have used more than one type of working arrangement.

Source: unpublished data from ABS Cat. No. 4903.3, *Managing Paid Employment and Unpaid Caring Responsibilities, Queensland*, October 2002.

**Table 2.3: Families with at least one parent employed, work arrangements used, 1993-2002 (%)**

	June 1993	March 1996	June 1999	June 2002
	%	%	%	%
<b>FAMILIES WITH EMPLOYED FATHER</b>				
Work arrangements used by father				
Flexible working hours	15.6	16.4	18.0	21.7
Permanent part-time work	0.7	1.3	1.9	2.9
Shiftwork	4.5	5.4	5.3	5.4
Work at home	6.6	6.8	7.4	9.1
Job sharing	0.6	0.8	0.5	0.5
Other	0.8	1.3	1.2	1.5
<i>All families where father used work arrangements (a)</i>	24.4	26.1	26.7	30.0
All families where father did not use work arrangements	75.6	73.9	73.3	70.0
All families with father employed ('000)	1279.7	1306.3	1286.7	1257.8
<b>FAMILIES WITH EMPLOYED MOTHER</b>				
Work arrangements used by mother				
Flexible working hours	29.8	31.3	36.8	38.8
Permanent part-time work	28.2	29.0	33.7	34.9
Shiftwork	6.5	6.4	8.5	7.4
Work at home	18.7	18.3	15.4	18.2
Job sharing	3.0	4.0	3.9	4.2
Other	1.5	2.6	3.5	3.4
<i>All families where mother used work arrangements (a)</i>	68.3	68.7	67.8	70.4
All families where mother did not use work arrangements	31.7	31.3	32.2	29.6
All families with mother employed ('000)	838.3	898.9	925.5	955.2

(a) components do not add to this total as parents could use more than one type of work arrangement.

Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia*, June 2002, ABS Cat. No. 4402.0.

**Table 4.1: Distribution of female and male employees according to employment arrangement, Australia, 1984, 1990, 1997, 2003 (%)**

	Female employees				Male employees			
	1984	1990	1997	2003	1984	1990	1997	2003
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Permanent<sup>a</sup></b>								
Full-time	60.7	57.2	50.0	47.2	88.9	85.8	76.9	72.1
Part-time	13.5	14.6	18.3	20.9	1.8	1.5	2.2	3.9
<b>Casual<sup>a</sup></b>								
Full-time	4.4	4.2	4.9	5.8	5.7	6.9	10.0	13.0
Part-time	21.3	24.0	26.8	26.1	3.7	5.9	10.9	11.0
<b>Total casual (%)</b>	25.7	28.2	31.7	31.9	9.4	12.7	20.9	24.0
<b>Total employees ('000)</b>	2117.8	2823.7	3134.4	3749.6	3240.4	3741.9	3837.8	4354.9

<sup>a</sup> From August 2000, the terms 'permanent' and 'casual' were replaced with new terms: 'with leave entitlements' and 'without leave entitlements' respectively (see ABS, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership*, August 2000, Cat. No. 6310.0, 48).

Source: ABS, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia*, Cat. No. 6310.0.

**Table 4.2: Distribution of actual weekly hours worked, employees, Australia, 1978-2002 (selected years)**

**MALE EMPLOYEES**

	0	1-15	16-29	30-34	35-39	40	41-44	45+	Total
Year (a)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		('000)
1978	4.6	3.0	4.8	5.6	13.9	39.2	7.8	21.3	3173.9
1982	5.4	3.2	5.3	8.1	17.5	32.0	6.8	21.7	3301.2
1988	5.3	4.0	5.2	6.8	18.8	23.5	6.8	29.6	3583.7
1992	4.6	5.6	5.9	7.4	18.9	21.2	6.1	30.3	3542.4
1998	4.5	6.5	6.7	6.3	16.4	18.8	5.9	34.8	3991.8
2000	4.0	6.3	7.3	5.4	16.1	18.6	6.0	36.2	4189.8
2001	4.4	6.7	7.9	6.8	15.7	17.6	6.0	34.9	4228.6
2002	4.5	7.0	8.1	6.4	16.4	17.5	6.3	33.7	4307.5

**FEMALE EMPLOYEES**

	0	1-15	16-29	30-34	35-39	40	41-44	45+	Total
Year (a)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		('000)
1978	4.2	15.3	14.6	8.6	18.0	29.7	4.0	5.6	1882.9
1982	5.4	15.8	16.0	9.3	18.3	25.2	3.9	6.2	2053.0
1988	5.1	16.4	17.9	9.1	20.2	17.4	4.5	9.4	2578.1
1992	4.6	18.9	18.4	9.8	19.0	15.0	4.0	10.4	2803.2
1998	4.7	17.9	19.6	9.8	17.6	13.1	4.1	13.1	3308.9
2000	4.4	17.7	19.8	9.0	17.4	13.0	4.4	14.1	3557.2
2001	5.4	17.2	20.7	10.4	16.7	12.1	4.2	13.4	3617.0
2002	5.1	17.2	21.1	10.8	17.0	11.9	4.1	12.9	3690.4

**ALL EMPLOYEES**

	0	1-15	16-29	30-34	35-39	40	41-44	45+	Total
Year (a)	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		('000)
1978	4.4	7.5	8.4	6.7	15.4	35.6	6.4	15.5	5056.8
1982	5.4	8.0	9.4	8.6	17.8	29.4	5.7	15.7	5354.3
1988	5.2	9.2	10.5	7.8	19.4	20.9	5.9	21.1	6161.8
1992	4.6	11.5	11.5	8.4	18.9	18.5	5.2	21.5	6345.5
1998	4.6	11.7	12.6	7.9	17.0	16.2	5.1	25.0	7300.7
2000	4.2	11.5	13.1	7.1	16.7	16.1	5.3	26.1	7746.9
2001	4.9	11.5	13.8	8.5	16.1	15.1	5.1	25.0	7845.6
2002	4.7	11.7	14.1	8.4	16.7	14.9	5.3	24.1	7997.9

(a) all years are August

Source: ABS Cat. No. 6291.0.40.001 (*Labour Force (WS) Wage and Salary Earners, Australia, Quarterly*), Time Series Spreadsheet, Table 10.