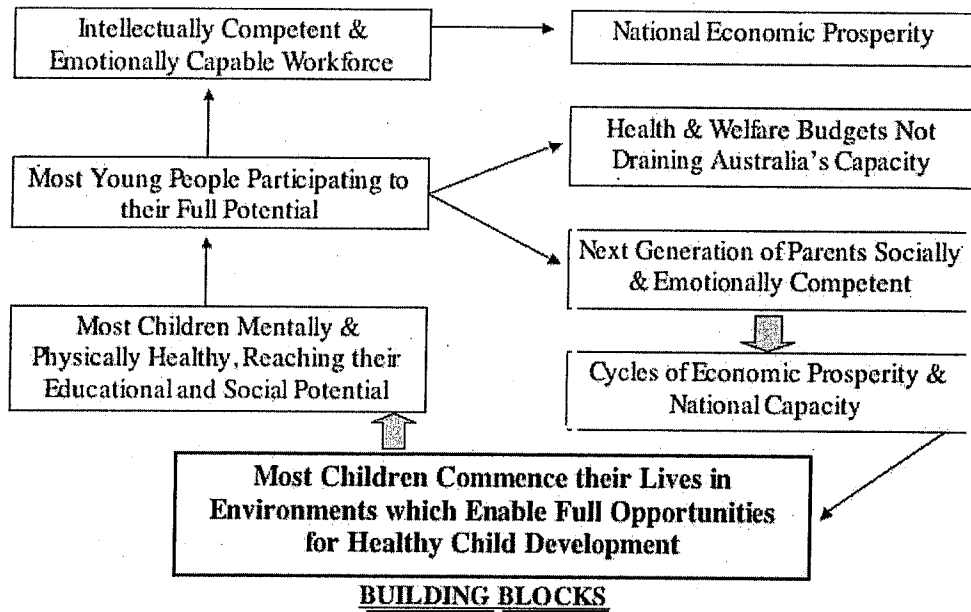
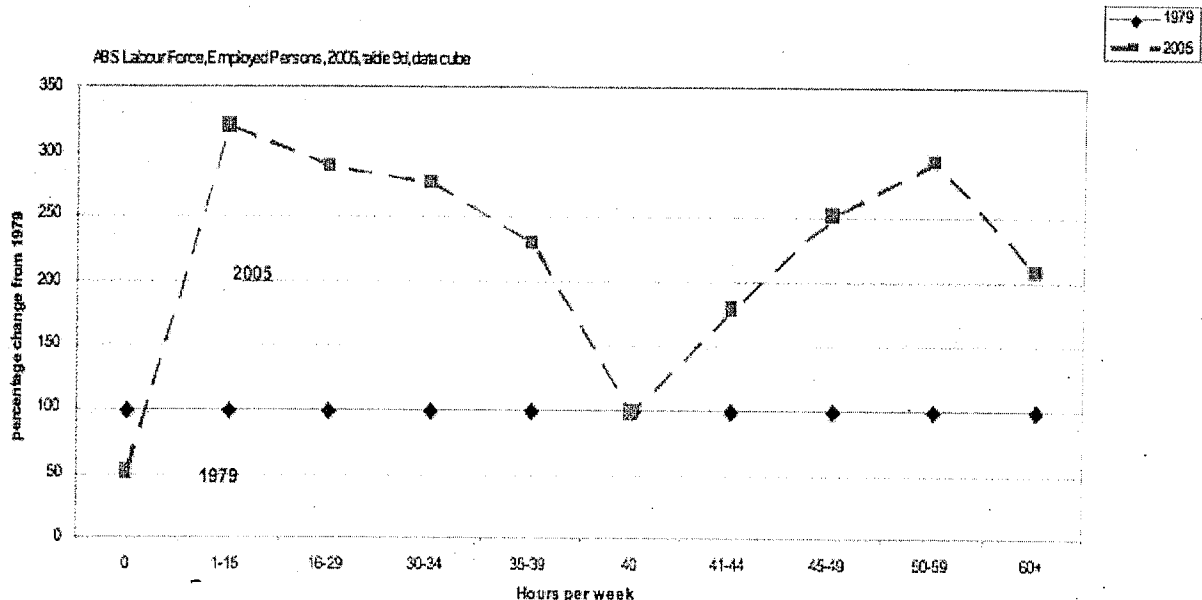


Why is Child Health & Development Crucial for Australia's Future?



Change in the distribution of hours worked, all employed: 1979 to 2005



1. The financial, career and social disincentives to starting families

- Women are having less children (1.7) than 20 – 40 years ago (3.5).
- Women have more choices now than ever before; remain single, get married, have children, don't have children, work full or part time. They have real career possibilities available to them.
- More woman now are having no children (25%) as compared to those born in the 15 years after 1930 (9%). One in five professional women have no children, twice as many as women in clerical or sales positions.
- It costs a graduate woman approximately one third of all her future possible earnings to have a child. This is mainly due to the reduction in paid full time work following the birth and is clearly a disincentive to some women to start a family.
- Women are getting much more education, they are much less likely to stop work completely when they have children, and they return to employment more rapidly if they do stop work.
- It is difficult for women to be both earners and mothers as it is assumed that women will continue to do the bulk of domestic duties as well as be the primary carers of children.
- Even when both parents are employed, the trend for women to do more total hours of paid and unpaid work continues.
- When put in the position where they have to choose between having jobs *or* having children, many women are choosing to have jobs.
- The proportions of men who have both a partner and a fulltime job have fallen dramatically—from 80 to 65 per cent (35-44 age group) and from 70 per cent to under half (25-34 age group). It is likely that this is contributing to the falling birth rate, whatever the cause.
- Inequality in pay: the gap between the high paid and the low paid has grown substantially, especially among men. This growth in the gap between the high paid and the low paid has been aggravated by the disappearance of many full-time manufacturing jobs, and their replacement with low paid part-time service industry jobs.
- When you put low wages together with only part-time work, then you get a really low weekly income that is certainly not enough to support a family, nor are these trends conducive to healthy child development.

2. Making it easier for parents who so wish to return to the paid workforce

What should we do?

If we want more children, and have them grow up as successful future participants in society, we must rethink who it is who provides the 24 hour care that young children need, the nurturing and guidance. Now that they have choices, women are not volunteering to do it all. It must become normal for employers to recognise that their employees have home lives and important work to do in raising their children. And they must take some responsibility for making it possible for their workers to do this well.

- We must limit the claims that the workplace can make on parental time and offer flexibility for working parents (reducing the number of working hours would be good for everyone's health).
- Rich community-based environments for children of various ages must enable appropriate care for children when their parents are at work. Funded by business, governments (including local government) and parents.
- We must listen attentively to what women say they need to support them in their joint work/mother roles.
- The norm needs to shift to one where fathers share more fully in the care of their children.
- Parental leave is vital. Australia is one of only two (with the US) developed nations in not having a universal approach to providing workers with paid time off when they have a baby. Only a quarter of private-sector workplaces and 60% of public-sector workplaces offer paid parental leave. And, women who work in low paid jobs (especially if they are part time and certainly if they are casual) *are much less likely* to get paid maternity leave than those that are better paid.

In the UK, women are entitled to 26 weeks of paid maternity leave. For the first six weeks they receive 90% of their normal pay. For the next 20 weeks they receive the equivalent of A\$258 per week (in 2005). The Blair government proposes to raise this to 52 weeks having won a third time in office. In Sweden, new parents are entitled to at least 15 months of paid leave. This leave can be shared between mother and father, and at least some of it must be taken by the father if the full entitlement is to be taken.

3. The impact of taxation and other matters on families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life

- The economy does not have much direct impact on children while they are young. The main influence of the economy on children is through the impact it has on their parents. When children are older, it also sets the context for their expectations about jobs and financial independence. This in turn influences their approach to and choices about schooling.
- There is clear evidence that living in a poor family is bad for children. But for the large majority of families that are not poor, there is little to suggest that more family income produces better outcomes for children.
- A recent study reports the views of young Australians on the importance of having more income in the family as compared with having more time with their parents. A clear majority would prefer more time with their parents, especially with a parent who works long hours.
- We can be confident that among families with children, the rise in inequality has not been as great as it has among people as workers. This is partly because many families have two earners and the presence of a second earner tends to make family incomes a bit more equal.

- The main reason is government payments to families with children. These have been rising at a rate that has been able to fend off much of the tide of inequality that is coming from the labour market. This is a great triumph of public policy, and clearly demonstrates that
- governments are not helpless in the face of the forces of globalisation. It is important though to look at a family's disposable income when measuring how well off they are – and this is where the increase in inequality between lower income and those on higher income lies.
- Single parents in Australia find that they lose most of any additional income they earn from part-time work, as they start to pay tax and as their benefits are withdrawn. This is a strong discouragement for them to look for work, as most of the jobs they could get are likely to be part-time.
- Australian women are quite unusual in the way they use part-time work to manage the work/family balance. In the US, Canada, Scandinavia and the UK, women are much more likely to work fulltime. In some of the main European countries, such as Germany, they are less likely to be employed at all.
- The workplace has become very hostile to parents, and hence to children. Many men are finding it hard to obtain adequate fulltime work and hence to be breadwinners (or even to find a partner). An increasing numbers of men and women are accepting part-time and casual work because they cannot find fulltime jobs.

4. General observations – children, families and the workplace

- Child development is important for future economic prosperity.
- Parents need to be viewed (and supported) as champions by the workforce (and society generally) if we are to ensure Australia's future capacity.
- Current trends in child and youth outcomes are of major concern both for today's services and society, and into the future.
- Increasing inequalities (not only in income, but in communities, housing, opportunities, health and education) are bad for Australian society.
- Getting it right early is vital.