

**Having a life:
Work, family, fairness and community in 2000**

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Having A Life

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This Research

This research was directed and written by Dr. Barbara Pocock at Adelaide University. Jane Clarke and Robyn Resson assisted with focus groups and interviews and in drafting some sections of this report. Michael Alexander and Dr Alison Preston assisted with the analysis of pay equity. Dr. Lou Wilson assisted with analysis of employment data.

The project started modestly and it grew. It began as a series of focus groups and interviews around three themes: work and family, pay equity and employment security. But women's voices insisted that it grow: conversations about these issues could not be easily confined. They leapt to questions of community, intimacy, relationships, housework, community, children's welfare and fundamental questions about the shape of our society.

The research was supported by several sources, including the Australian Research Council and Adelaide University. The project thrived on voluntary and unpaid, extra hours. Robyn Resson arrived as a student on placement and gave many hours of voluntary – and eventually some paid – work to the project.

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Most significantly, we would like to thank the many women who gave up their time to talk about these issues with each other and us. Their time was the essential resource for this research, and given its precious value in women's lives – as this report shows above all else – we thank them for it. We also thank the smaller number of men who met with us.

Discussion in this report is organised under eighteen main headings. These reflect the most important issues that arose from community discussions. We have not used real names throughout the report, but have used non-identifying information about those who are quoted and their situations, where it is helpful.

Introduction

At the beginning of the new millennium, what do Australians make of their work, lives, families and community? What issues do they think about? What do they enjoy and value? What complicates or adds stress to their lives, and what can be done to improve their situation? This report reflects the thinking of Australians, particularly women, about these issues. Their thinking is set within the context of other evidence about changing patterns of work, pay and employment.

Over the last 20 years, patterns of paid work across Australia have significantly changed. Alongside this, patterns of unpaid work such as volunteering and housework have also altered, though they remain much more traditional. In 1980, 45 per cent of Australian women worked outside the home. By 2000 this had increased by 9 percentage points to 54 percent. This means that more and more of women's hours are spent away from the home and local communities, and more in workplaces, and as many women said during the process of this research, this has profound implications for the way we live now.

At the same time, men's participation in paid work has declined. In Australia 73 per cent of men of working age are now in paid work, down 7 per centage points from 20 years before. Together, these trends represent powerful, longterm forces for change in our patterns of life.

Many women speak positively of their relationships and rewards through paid work. But these rewards are not without complications – for raising children; running homes and schools; for health and well being; and for our most intimate relationships. A great number of women enjoy their paid work, but they also talk of growing pressures to do more and be more. As paid work has become more intense, and employees have had to extend their skills - and in many cases, hours – these pressures have increased. Women have many ideas about how the complexities and difficulties that arise from doing more outside the home, can be reduced. These ideas are relevant to employers, community organisations, governments, families – and to men, women and children as individuals.

***Our
communities
are being
reconfigured***

Our communities are being reconfigured. Whereas 20 or 30 years ago many Australians experienced and recreated their communities at the local street or regional level, now community is increasingly located and created through our workplaces. Our streetscapes have been de-populated by day, and this has implications for those who remain there – mothers, carers and the unemployed. If the workplace is increasingly a place where social webs are created, what are the implications for those outside the web?

As this report reveals, people are increasingly defining themselves through work and their jobs. They gain considerable pleasure from these identities. But many are then shaken when they exit the workplace – to do unpaid work at home, for example – and this has important implications for the quality of home life.

Motherhood is undergoing a paradigm shift – away from a model that placed the woman/mother at the centre of the domestic sphere. Now, mothers sit on unstable terrain. What should they be? What are they? The fact that there are so many ways, now, to be a mother has made society uncertain about mothers, and a profound anxiety frequently attaches to the business of being a mother. This anxiety is expressed through criticism (and self-criticism) of many forms of mothering and mother's decisions – even where these decisions are clearly household and community

decisions, with partners, employers, government all ghosts at the table effectively shaping outcomes. This critique is visited upon women in many ways, on many issues. This is most obviously evident in proper mother, welfare mother, working mother, at-home mother, super mother. Where are the equivalents for fathers?

Women talk of being torn rather more than they talk of ‘balancing’ – the word so dominant in policy and public discussion. They are more likely to talk of juggling. The self sacrificing ideal of traditional motherhood has given away to a much more diverse set of possibilities, but the hangover of the self-sacrificial mother-model means that most of these possibilities are lived out by women amidst an epidemic of guilt, persistent adjustment and readjustment, and internal and external conflict. Amongst other indicators, we can read the costs of these outcomes in divorce statistics.

*Juggling not
balancing*

Many of these experiences are privately felt. But some find social expression in community conflict and controversy – over childcare (to use, or not to use), over paid work (to do, or not to do), and over voluntary work in the community (‘I’m doing yours’).

The pictures that emerge from these stories – while diverse – bear a common theme: our institutions and community expectations lag behind the changes in our lives. The fit is now poor – in terms of the ways that workplaces and community institutions fit with parenting, pregnancy, care of elders, responsibility for households, and the career and income aspirations of women and men. This poor fit affects those in paid work as well as those who want to stay home when their children are small or beyond (making it difficult for them to re-enter work later and imposing a burden of social isolation and an unfair degree of voluntary work on some).

The public policy discussion about the ‘family friendly’ workplace and about men’s changing roles, is revealed as more rhetorical than real. Workplace, domestic and personal rigidities stand unchanged in many locations. Common assumptions about greater ‘family friendliness’ in our institutions and society are quite out of step with many of the experiences revealed in this study. Indeed, growing demands in many workplaces and employment insecurity and unpredictability are making it more difficult for many.

Our lives cannot easily be compartmentalised into ‘work’ and ‘home’. However, our institutions treat individuals as if this were possible and desirable. The cost of this poor fit and institutional compartmentalism is visited, particularly, upon women. As so many women said in this study, it can be measured in guilt, ill-health, lost careers, exhaustion and impoverished relationships. But it also affects their partners, children, parents, employers, schools, and our larger community. These costs can be lowered. And some changes could be made quickly and with minimal cost. However, doing so is perhaps likely to be a long, slow process.

Community expectations are also out of kilter with the changing reality of many women’s lives, so that women at home frequently feel criticised for being there (including by working women), while women in paid work also frequently feel criticised (including by women at home). It is time for greater genuine acceptance of the diversity of options that women are choosing – amongst women, but also more broadly.

And it is also time for our institutions to catch up with the realities that are now women’s lives. Women constitute most of the growth in the paid labour market at present, and most of it predictably into the future. Men’s participation in paid work is

in long term decline. The issue of poor fit between both institutions and community expectations, and our lives, is likely to get bigger, not smaller.

There is a significant shift underway in Australian society. At present this paradigm shift is being met, largely, by the marginal adaptations that women make as individuals (working part-time or shiftwork, for example) and by anxiety or overwork at home when these are inadequate. It is time that the adaptive mechanisms moved to the community's centre-stage, through more widespread and fundamental changes - by men, workplaces, governments and the larger community. A failure to recognise the shift that is underway, and to allow adaptation to it to be privately born by individuals - particularly carers - weakens the fabric of community, and affects the quality of life - not only of women, but also children, the aged, and men. It certainly affects workplaces, productivity and the labour market, and it costs governments money, not least when families disintegrate under pressure.

Exhortations to women to have more children will fall on deaf ears until the practical business of having children is improved

Perhaps one of the most obvious and severe effects of this paradigm shift, and the mismatch between our institutions and the circumstances of our lives, is the declining birth rate in Australia. This decline has important implications for the future of Australian society, its workforce, the dependence of retirees on the future working population and our standard of living.

Women are not fools. The poor circumstances for the combination of caring and paid work in Australia that particularly affect women - the principle decision makers when it comes to reproduction - are directly contributing to women's choices to have smaller numbers of children, to have them later in life, or to have no children at all. Exhortations to women to have more children, or to have them earlier, will fall upon deaf ears until the practical business of leading a full life - with realistic choices, less guilt, better and fairer rewards at work, and more societal support for their decisions - is improved.

Women speak of the sense of identity, independence and community they gain through paid and voluntary work. But they also speak of the continuing inequities they face in their workplaces. While there have been many advances for women, these inequities have not gone away. They include continuing pay inequities between women and men, a career and income penalty for working part-time and for having a family, the segmentation of jobs by sex, and the under-recognition of many of the skills that women have traditionally applied at work. Employment security is also an issue for many women - as well as men - and these affect a growing number of families. These are national issues that affect many families and communities.

This report discusses some of the main ways in which the lives of women and their families have been affected by these changes. It draws on statistics along with the voices of women and a few men. Over 150 women (and a small number of men, only six) discussed their work, home, families and communities during the study. Many did so in focus groups in conversation with others, while a smaller number were individually interviewed. The participants included those living in the country and in the city, from ages 17 to 70, and in a great variety of family structures with diverse work/home experiences. The study included those in senior management positions, or doing clerical, factory, call centre, data processing, or farm work - along with many other occupations. People in both the private and public sector told their stories, as did a number running their own businesses. Volunteers, women who work at home unpaid, also participated, as did casual, contract, permanent, full-time and part-time paid workers; and Aboriginal women, immigrant women, single women without dependents, grandmothers, and mothers, along with fathers.

Participants were selected for focus groups or interview generally by open invitation through specific employers, unions, community groups, health centres, childcare and kindergarten services, country town networks, and professional associations and networks. We aimed for a cross section that included those on different income levels, in different work and family situations, and from a range of industries, occupations and country/city locations. All the focus groups and interviews were held in South Australia in late 2000.

People want to talk about their communities, work and lives. In several places, so many women volunteered to participate, that very large or extra focus groups and interviews were held. In some cases, women organised them themselves, while we were simply unable to include some who wanted to talk. Everywhere, people talked about change – and about the good and bad aspects of that change for society and individuals. Many viewpoints exist. At the same time, some important patterns can be detected. Significant ideas emerged about how the lives of women, men and children, and our communities, can be improved as patterns of work and living change.

This report reflects what individuals think, sets these in the context of relevant statistics, and draws out common patterns, pointing to ideas for improving work and community life into the future. Ideas for further research also emerge. Most obvious amongst the gaps in the study, is more evidence about the experience and thinking of men and the views of children.

Successive governments have indicated their commitment to encouraging continuing employment growth, and to the promotion of family friendly work practices. Movement towards these goals can be strengthened by a wide range of measures that assist women, men, households and workplaces to deal with the complex changes that arise from conversations with women about their lives now. There are roles for government, employers, unions, along with individual men, women and children. It is time for a community-wide conversation about these issues, and action to meet the growing pressures and mis-fits.

*People want to
talk about
their
communities
work and lives*

Having A Life: A Summary of the Key Issues

Reconfiguring our Communities

As women's participation in paid work increases, many report a shift in community and social life from their streets to their workplaces. Alongside this, the mobility of the Australian population means that many families have weak extended family ties living nearby. For some, the workplace has become a kind of family. But it is a different kind of family or community and creates exclusion and loneliness for those outside it. This shift has been little remarked in Australian social commentary. It has important implications for those who do not have a workplace in which to 'build community', and for those who have periods away from it – rearing children, retiring, being unemployed. For some, it makes being at home with young children or other dependents, more isolating. The workplace has de-populated the country town and its surrounds as well as the street. What do we think of this shift, and what are its long term implications?

Domestic and Caring Work

Women's stories of domestic work bear out the statistical evidence: they are doing more of it than men, and they are not happy about it. While some men are doing more, many are not – and most are far from taking an equal share. This is affecting relationships and intimacy. Women are adopting a range of - more or less - successful strategies to reduce their load, frequently finding more success with lowering standards, contracting out, training of children, and use of helpful technologies than with changing their partner's behaviours. Many are angry about this – from factory workers through to professional doctors, managers and lawyers. Others – especially women on farms – are reconciled in view of their partners long hours outdoors.

Guilt

Guilt is widespread amongst Australians who currently carry the main burdens of care, and an increasing share of paid work as well. This guilt mainly falls to women – and it crosses the boundaries of country and city, rich and poor, home and paid workplace, occupations and industries. Those who work because they 'must' – without equivocation – like widows and single mothers are less afflicted. Women whose mothers were in paid work, also seem less affected. However, many women who believe they are making a 'choice' to work are worrying about the impact on their children. They are very prone to guilt, even when logically they can see that they are not really to blame, or know that they *need* to work.

'Proper mothers'

The notion of the tranquil, always available mother at home has deep roots in the minds of many mothers – professional, factory or office workers, and women at home. While only a minority live this model, it contributes to real and perceived critiques of mothers – and to the guilt that so many feel. While there are multiple labels for mothers (good, bad, working, super, at-home, welfare, single, proper), there are no parallel names for fathers. There appears to be a divide between mothers-at-home, and mothers-at-work, with cross-critiques actively aimed across that divide. Women on both sides of it struggle with their internalised ideas of what a 'proper mother' can be. They are looking for liberation from judgement of their choices – whether by their children, community or extended families.

Being at home

Some women enjoy being at home. Others find the experience isolating and difficult – at least some times – or regret things they missed by going back to work. Women talked in many locations of ‘the four walls’ and the de-population of their streets. Women would like to see arrangements that made it easier to stay at home with young children – either through government support, more respect for women who choose to parent full-time, and through workplace arrangements that make it easier to take extended time at home without long term penalties for career.

Why Women Work Outside the Home

More and more women are in paid work and if international patterns are any guide, many more will be in the near future. Women find many rewards in paid work: social, financial, identity, independence. Many women talked of the identity that they establish through their paid work, especially amongst those who had been in paid work for fair periods before becoming mothers and carers. For them, identity as mothers ran a weak second to identity through paid work – in the eyes of some of their friends and communities, and also in their own. Women also notice that part of the price of ‘identity-through-work’ is a further devaluing of motherhood, and the ‘non-person’ status of mothers.

Pressure Points and Work Outside the Home

A lack of time and a constant feeling of juggling were the common experiences of women in paid work. The issue of sick children was identified almost universally as the most stressful and repetitive pressure point in their lives. Despite much talk about the care of sick children, arrangements are primitive in many workplaces, and this causes great stress for working women and their children. The unpredicted sick child emerged as the greatest stressor in working women’s lives. The shrinkage in the geographically-accessible extended family, the weakening in street-based communities, and the greater number of grandmothers, friends and families who are themselves in paid work, makes the issue of sick children an emergency in many working women’s lives. Most made use of their own sick leave to care for children, and partly as a consequence women raised issues related to their own health and exhaustion, resulting from the constant juggle.

The Hidden Costs of Paid Work: Relationships and Intimacy

The effect of work on relationships did not begin as a research question. However, a large number of women are questioning the effects of exhaustion and their continued responsibility for domestic and caring work alongside more paid hours, on their relationships and intimacy. The decline or absence of intimacy was a serious concern to them, and to many of their partners. While some saw this as a consequence of motherhood itself, more commonly women saw it as a result of the combination of paid work and motherhood and the domestic load. What are the implications of this for our quality of life, the sustainability of family structures, and will men do more housework if they think it means more sex and intimacy?

Having Babies

Paid maternity leave is available to only a small proportion of working women in Australia. If we wish to see our birth rate maintained, not to mention the circumstances of early mothering and parenting improved, then paid maternity leave is an important key. It should be a national priority. It is considered well overdue by a wide range of women. A national scheme that offers support both to women in paid work and at home is preferable. This would share the responsibility across the community, with parents, taxpayers and employers contributing. Current arrangements for maternity in Australia are primitive and inadequate.

Childcare

Arrangements for the care of children have not caught up with all the implications arising from women's longer hours in paid work. Individuals have 'made do'. Many gaps exist, and the strain is showing. Some of these gaps have widened in recent years, with women reporting less access to informal care (because grandmothers aren't there or are busy), less access and difficulties with family day care, and lamenting the high cost of centre-based care. Women also have concerns about before and after school care and the poor fit between school hours, and the 'patch up' – or non-existent – arrangements for school-aged children. Several women questioned the belief that teenage kids did not need supervision beyond 13 years: they viewed these years as a vulnerable point requiring supervision. Country women face particular problems: gaps in care, long distances, and high costs. Childcare remains a serious problem for working women. Indeed some women have withdrawn from paid work in view of higher costs and lower quality. These issues particularly affect children in low income households – where women are under economic pressure to work, cannot take the 'nanny' route, and where some are making ad hoc arrangements that sometimes mean their children are unsafe, cared for by siblings and missing out on educational programs. The institutional mis-fit of work and family is nowhere more obvious than in relation to the issue of care of our children. Once again, however, response to it, and management of these issues largely falls to women – women who are already busy with household, paid work, and the practical business of physical and emotional caring.

The Role of Grandmothers and Grandfathers

Grandmothers in particular are doing a lot to support working families. For many women in paid work, grandmothers make the critical difference in a crisis. But grandmothers are in some cases fending off the demands, and fighting for their own time now or doing more caring than they would freely choose. There are many women in the community who are very sympathetic and want to keep decisions about grandparental caring in the hands of guilt-free grandparents themselves, and reserve grandparents for holidays and enjoyment with children. Once again, however, choices are not always freely made but frequently are shaped by the reality of working lives and the demands of working families.

Volunteers

The nature of volunteering in Australia is currently subject to various forces for change. Government policies to 'work for the dole' are swelling the ranks of some forms of volunteering, while creating new types of management issues. In other areas, especially amongst women volunteers in schools there are few people to do the tasks, and some women report a feeling of 'I'm doing yours' in relation to women in paid work. Country volunteers are experiencing the effects of shrinking rural populations and the tasks of voluntary community service are falling to a smaller and smaller group. Many women who volunteer gain the kinds of skills, social rewards, self esteem and identity that many women in paid work say they enjoy. However, managers of community services who are being asked to recruit new volunteer forces, express concern that paid work is shifting to the volunteer sector, with serious implications for employment, quality of service and the complexity of service management. Volunteers want to see their efforts valued – and a greater respect for the important contributions that they make.

Flexibility in the Workplace

Where women in paid work had flexibility in their hours, days, shifts and emergencies, their working lives were immeasurably easier. There are significant examples where this is achieved. But many more women report meeting great inflexibility, including in traditional office, factory and in public and private sector workplaces. A large number of women choose to work part-time in order to have more control. Unfortunately many can achieve this only by becoming 'casual' and accepting a precarious, peripheral place in the labour market – one that frequently fails to confer flexibility onto the employee. In many cases the barriers to more employee-flexible arrangements appear more a matter of culture than cost. Workplaces that are in many respects similar, had very different arrangements with respect to flexibility – and many women talked of changing jobs in pursuit of it. Cultures varied not only between workplaces, but also between supervisors, suggesting that better training and policies will make a difference. Women seek more flexibility in their use of leave – and greater access to paid leave for dependent care. Professional women are critical of the deeply entrenched male model of worker in medicine, management and the law – arguing that it is simply incompatible with serious caring work, for women and men.

The Pressures of Paid Work

Work is becoming more intensive and the average hours worked in Australia are increasing. Many Australians are working long or very long hours. This has squeezed many forms of voluntary work, and is anti-caring. There is more work, in many workplaces, and fewer to do it – and this is affecting managers, professionals and office, clerical, service and factory workers. Jobs are getting 'greedier' for many, and this means that paid work is becoming harder to reconcile with households and caring work.

Finding work

Country women in particular identify their limited job opportunities as a serious problem. The loss of services in the country has diminished job opportunities, and means that women with good skills and a need to earn, lack chances for work. They were concerned, also, that these services were vital to health and welfare in the country, and should be expanded both for their community welfare and job outcomes. Women in the country also lamented the lack of career paths they faced in some jobs. Unemployment remains a major problem for Indigenous women, and for women of non-English speak background. Many wanted to see the under- and over-work that they observed, more evenly distributed.

Part-time Work

Part-time work has expanded rapidly in Australia over the past 20 years. It is the most common means adopted by women to try and fit work to caring. It has expanded even faster in South Australia than nationally – both for men and women. Some women make a clear, if constrained, 'choice' for part-time work over a career. As things stand, they believe they *have* to choose. Some do so more happily than others, but it is widely agreed that being part-time means less access to a wide range of workplace benefits: information, education and development, promotion, particular jobs and rewards, and 'being outside the loop'. Policies to spread benefits to part-time workers make a difference – but even in the best cases, disadvantage exists. Some professional bodies and organisations remain simply opposed to part-time work: it signals the 'not serious' worker and is read as professional death. However, with so many part-time workers, is the 'choice' to take a path of lower lifetime earnings and to miss out on a range of opportunities, fair? And what are its costs for employees, employers and professions in terms of lost skills?

Employment Security

For many women, being part-time means being casual – even where their work is clearly not casual. Some who work part-time believe that the price of being part-time is being casual, although this is not necessarily the case. Many women simply do not distinguish between casual and part-time work. Australia's labour market has rapidly casualised over the past two decades, and in South Australia, the change has been even more dramatic. Thirty per cent of South Australians are now casual workers, most of them women. Instead of flexibility, however, many casual women find themselves 'on tap' rather than in charge of their working hours – a situation that is anathema to caring. Many women want more control over their hours, permanent work, or a shift away from short, limited term contracts – so that they can access financial services and give their families some financial security.

The Pay Gap Between Women and Men

The gender pay gap in Australia remains a significant concern for many women. They observe that their skills and jobs are frequently undervalued – and it rankles. The statistical evidence bears out their concern about this under-valuation. Women also remain concentrated in a narrow range of jobs and workplace types, and this has important consequences for their earnings relative to men's. Unfortunately, the gender pay gap in South Australia has widened in recent times. Having children is associated with lower pay for women (and higher pay for men) holding many other factors constant. Casualness has the same effect, and both effects are more pronounced in South Australia than nationally. Action to break down job segregation, increase the skills and qualifications of women, prevent direct discrimination, and revalue women's traditional jobs, all have a role to play in reducing the gender pay gap. The latter is particularly important to significant, long term change.

1. Reconfiguring our Communities

The changing patterns of women's work – whether paid or voluntary – are resulting in a reconfiguring of our communities. A generation ago, community was frequently locality and street based, with the extended family at its core. While this form of community has not disappeared, our research amongst women with domestic and caring responsibilities suggests that our streets are increasingly dormitories to a growing number of women and men who work. The locus of community has shifted from streetscape towards the workplace. Increasing geographic mobility and changing regional labour markets now mean that extended families are more geographically dispersed.

From Street to Workplace

This shift is reflected in the comments of women who have been at home for years raising their children outside the paid workforce, and in the views of women in paid work. Women said over and over, whether working in a traditional factory on shift work, part-time in a shop, or in management positions on high salaries, that increasingly work was a place where their community was – at least partially – built. Many women and men described their streets as deserted in normal working hours: as a male nurse put it, for example 'Well the streets are deserted 9 to 5'. Not all women saw their streets in this way. For one mother at home the street continued as a place where neighbours knew the local children, and moved between houses easily. But as another mother at home put it 'You have to work at it'.

'The streets are deserted 9 to 5'

The decline of local street community made the business of withdrawal into the home a lonely and disconcerting experience, with sharp isolation for many. Interestingly, this shift of the locus of community, while clearest in the city, extends to the reshaping of country towns and women working off farms. The greater mobility of women, families and households has also fueled this shift, with extended families increasingly scattered geographically and inter-family support often intermittent, infrequent, or 'virtual' by means of the telephone or the net. As one country woman put it 'Many grandparents are now too busy, or now too far away'.

Women with nearby extended family faced the pressure points of work/family life with greater resources. Grandmothers provided the 'give' in crisis, picking up sick kids or doing the spring cleaning that mothers in paid work did not get to. For those that had it, it was a precious resource as we see in the discussion of the role of grandmothers below. However, the extended family was not always a cosy support – it sometimes appears as a source of complex or tense reciprocities.

The Commodification of Support, The Dislocated Family and Geographic Dispersal

Australians are very mobile, and this has important implications for the establishment of community and the fabric of extended family. Between the censuses of 1991 and 1996, 43 per cent of Australians moved house, making us one of the most mobile populations in the world (Bell and Hugo, 2000:22).

For many, therefore, geographically accessible extended family does not exist, and women increasingly look to the market to meet their needs for household support. Our study shows that this strategy was widely adopted by a range of women including those in low income households (in the form of take away food, and occasional domestic support or lawn-mowing). Households with higher incomes made much greater use of

a wide range of contracted services – regular cleaning, ironing, gardening, nannies, pre-prepared food, childcare, and paid babysitting. There were few signs of the dressmaking that occurred in households through women's labour only a generation before. People could no longer 'lean' on community, but instead paid:

People lean less on their community and, increasingly, pay for support.

Now our neighbours work too. It has to be paid! They work too! You can't lean on anybody. Grandmas work too, or they have their own social life. It can work if it's a balanced exchange, but our parents did their work! My priority is to my children. If they are really sick, they want their mum.

Some women clearly preferred the purchase of care, over the emotional exchanges that were implicit in inter-family transfers of labour – whether in the form of grandparent care, food or cleaning. They would rather buy straight out, than 'owe' their mother or friend. These shifts and preferences for market solutions have important implications for communities. Mutual, non-monetary exchanges have embedded within them – indeed create – personal and community relationships. What does the shift to the market mean for the web of local relationships?

Interestingly, women from non-English speaking backgrounds were much more likely to rely upon, and have access to, extended family support, including women in management positions or running their own business, where family support frequently appeared crucial to women's careers. Even here, however, higher income households frequently brought in contracted services – even when retired male partners were now at home.

Aboriginal women were much less inclined in the direction of market solutions for care and support – relying much more upon the extended family and community. Indeed, some were clearly perplexed by the problems they heard of from other non-Aboriginal women in relation to after school care and so on. This may reflect the constraints of lower incomes, but the community fabric appeared considerably more resilient in the lives of these women than those of many non-Indigenous women.

The Workplace as 'Family'

Many women see the paid or volunteer workplace as a place where they had laughs, fun and social life: as one put it 'Your work becomes your support network'. Country women agreed:

'Your work becomes your support network.'

Heidi: For me, work is like a family. I'm lucky. I start at 9 and finish at 3. I have supportive bosses. I am flexible with work and if I want time off I can take it (country woman, mother of 2)

Women in paid work pointed to the difference in socialising patterns between working women and those who did not, emphasising the time constraints that kept them from hanging about the school or childcare centre. This explained at least in part their pattern of 'social life through work'. Once again a country woman says:

Working women don't have time to sit at the kindy and talk to the other mums. I go to the school and I don't have time to pursue it, and try and make friends. I just drop the kids off and get to work.

Women contrasted their own childhood experiences with those of their growing children, and older women compared their situations as mothers in the sixties with those of their daughters now:

We lived in the bush and it was easier. The kids went swimming in the river. Kids were healthy, outdoors. It's harder now. (mother of 2, Port Adelaide)

Yes, we'd be out in the parklands on the river Torrens. Mum worked and we'd come home for a jam sandwich. We had much more freedom. It felt much safer. (mother of 3, Port Adelaide)

Care of kids, whether babies or school aged has tended to move from the street and extended family into institutions and the market sphere – childcare centres, before and after school programs, family day care.

Interviewer: Who can you call on?

There is nobody for some of us. A friend in an emergency for some, in laws for others. We have grandparents just opposite us, but they are at the age where he has dementia and it's not safe. My mother - I have no hesitation (but she's a long way away), But not the mother in law – it's too much hassle. She has her own life.

The contrast in street life for families is strong:

The community has changed: the kids swarmed when my kids were little...I was always in and out of houses. Now, my kids have had a much more structured childhood – with sport etc...The people in my street wouldn't know my kids like I knew the people when I was a kid.

The extraordinary growth in street traffic explains some of the shrinkage of local geographic community:

The level of traffic is so different. The roads are so different. And then you add to it by driving your kids everywhere! (mother, full-time worker)

The shift in community location is not confined to the city. In country towns, women talked of the difficulty of being new in town, with fewer people about, and those in established families being too busy to make new friends. New arrivals described the difficulty they had being accepted, and women who had long lived in the town, concurred, as the following exchange reveals:

I'm new to the region. I went from having lots of support to having nothing. It's been very, very hard...

I wouldn't like to move into a country town now.

It's not easy. Because everyone has got their lives and everyone is busy. I have a lot of trouble keeping up with the friends I have, let alone making any new ones.

I shifted here 10 years ago and I do not have any close friends in this town, because I don't play sport and I don't have children.

My next door neighbour is quite lonely though she has 3 small children.

20 years ago when we shifted in you met people who had time to go out and party. If you move in when you are busy with your children, it doesn't happen.

An older woman with grown children who still lives on the farm reflects:

'I wouldn't like to move into a country town now'

'We are living in a smaller community that is getting smaller and smaller'

Kathie: When I got pregnant I left work. I had 4 children. When the youngest was 8, I decided to go back. I had to do a re-entry course that was 12 months at uni which was jolly hard work. Now I really enjoy my work. Sometimes I find it too much at times because of all the voluntary work that my husband and I do...

Interviewer: When you look at young women on farms now, do they have the same community?

Kathie: I don't think so. Most of them are working and have always worked or gone back to it. There's no childcare, so if you haven't got family support, it's very difficult. The school closed last year too, so there's not as many younger ones. More people are moving off farms. We are living in a smaller community that is getting smaller and smaller - really the community is dying - so you've got our age group trying to keep it together and the next age group they're all busy working, they haven't got the time to put into community things. It's a lot of hard work.

There was wide agreement about this change, across women in different income levels, occupations, ages, generations, whether at home with children or in paid work, and in the city and country. As one mother at home with her two children in the city put it:

I have a social network through the school. A role developed for me as a community liason person. I can't think of any friends who are not in the paid workforce. There is a breakdown in community. It will be women like me who look after our mothers in old age.

Some men agreed. A male nurse describes his family's street, and a clerical co-worker and mother agrees:

David: If I think of the street I live in, we built the house and for the first 6 months none of us had fences and the interaction between the families was amazing. As soon as the fences went up - it was just amazing...But it's not just about fences. You can hear all the cars go off at 7.30 am and all come back at 7.30 pm at night. And you're so buggared that who wants to go and talk to Jo Bloggs next door?

Susan: I was home for 4 years with my children...and you just say hello... People across the street are friendly. They'll look out for your house when you are away. But that's about it. Whereas I remember with my parents they would always go next door, maybe because the wife was home, and they had a bit more time to socialise and the next door neighbour would look after the kids.

Women in part-time work in a call centre/document processing workplace exchanged similar descriptions of their communities, comparing the generations, and explaining why they hungered for the community of their workplaces where they shared support about motherhood and other aspects of their lives, as opposed to neighbours they simply never spoke to:

*If you do stay home, it's not like when we were kids. My mum was home. She stayed home til I was a teenager, but every other mum was home and you were always off next door. There were kids there - you were never home! The mothers did things together, so the mothers got the stimulation. If I stayed home now I could be home all day and not see anyone in my street because everyone is away at work. So you are craving by the next day to get back to work because you need that interaction or with another adult! That's changed hugely. (**mother, part-time call centre worker**)*

*You are terribly isolated if you stay home. That makes it tougher to be at home.
(mother, full-time call centre worker)*

I don't think I have ever had an over-the-back-fence conversation with any of my neighbours. (Grandmother of 5, single mother of 3, now working full-time)

This diminution of street and family community, and the increasingly greedy nature of paid work (that leaves paid workers 'buggared' or working long hours) has important implications for all kinds of caring, including care for the aged. A senior male manager working 100 hours a week in a community service put it like this:

We are all still caring...On and off. But the concept of sacrificing our careers for an older person is something that is now foreign...You have to be very spare in what you can do...You do what you can. You do it differently. You don't spend the whole day with them. You go there and spend quality time, and you look at subcontracting out some of the work.

He went on to describe an example of how the role of aged care agencies, for example, were having to respond:

We got a fax from Tokyo this morning from the daughter of one of our residents telling us that she was too busy to take her mother to the optician – could we do it. From a hotel in Japan! They are taking on the part-time carer role from long distance now.

Clearly, the nature of the caring that can be done by the busy working daughter on an overseas trip, is highly dependent upon paid carers to step into the breach.

A group of women in a relatively new suburb discussed their experiences, contrasting the seventies community of one in Canberra and the apartment block of 2000 where no-one meets your eyes. Once again, people are too tired after work for socialising, so it is little wonder that it happens in the working day when some energy exists:

Mary: I was 20 when I had my first kid and 21 when I had the second in the early 70s. And there wasn't any male figure around at all. And where I lived in Canberra, it was like a commune. Everybody knew everyone else in the street. We used to all mix. We had a babysitting club going. It was all a totally different ball game. I used to play squash three times a week!...and I always made sure I got time like that, because if I didn't I probably would have gone crazy. But I never had any difficulty getting space. I was brought up in the country. We had so much freedom. A lot of kids now don't know how to make that space for themselves. Now, there is no community...everything seems to be sectionalised. We have single mothers here and others over there. We need to get things together.

Tammy: People have their babies later. I had my baby young, and I didn't have anyone around who understood, because they are still doing the yuppie thing, or the career.

Candy: There is so much fear in the community. I've just moved into a block of units. No-one speaks to each other. They have all got their heads down. Everyone in their own little box.

Sally: And everybody's working. I mean my neighbours don't come home until after 5 and I'm too tired. And you don't want your neighbours living in your pocket either.

Edna: There is a lot of fear between generations – older people are really frightened of young people. Young people don't know older people...

For these women, the local community seems fractured into pockets, which has encouraged fear and stifled communication. Sally is too tired for community in her street. However, Edna goes on to argue against the idea that weaker geographical or street community is the price for having more women in the workforce, arguing that it's the nature of work organisation, its lack of flexibility, and the lack of respect for community contributions, that results in this:

I think it's partly the price of the way that work is organised. Such inflexibility – and really stupidity - about workplaces and how work structures are organised. So that there isn't flexibility for people or allowance made for a whole range of other things – your social time, your contribution to your community. That's not seen as valid...

She also pointed out, as a woman without children, how important it was for her to have time with children, but how little that was encouraged:

As a non-parent I feel very strongly - I highly value the time that I have with children, and it's my responsibility to contribute to kids lives – yeah – to be an aunty. That kid of thing is really important and we don't live in a world where that is encouraged.

Generational change

Country women living on farms also contrasted the generational shift in community as the following conversation shows:

Most of our mothers didn't work on the farm, or have anything to do with the books. They stayed home, did the cooking, had the house spotless, made the clothes.

I don't make slices!

My mother went back working when I was 5, (with three kids) because there wasn't enough money on the farm.

The pace seems a lot faster now and there's more pressure to be a super-mum. To be on this committee or that committee.

Material expectations are also very different. Education is more expensive

When women spend time at home with young children, they frequently face a quiet street or town or unit block where they know few people well.

For some women, especially a few at home with children, the street remains an important positive focus for their family and children. For others, the street came alive at the weekend and provided an important social community. But for many more, it seems that this local community is in decline – depopulated by the growth of paid and unpaid work. This means that when women spend time at home with young children, they frequently face a quiet street or town or unit block where they know few people well and where there are many fewer other women in their situation than has been the case in recent memory.

A number of women raised issues of safety and felt that their children were less safe on the street than during their own childhoods. This constrained an easy street, suburban or town social life for children.

What do we think of this shift? What are its long term implications for the growth in the aged population, for example? In the short term at least, this shift creates the need for new forms of community for those who are not in the paid workforce, whether through volunteer activity, facilities for those at home with young children, and so on. Clearly, for many women, paid and voluntary work creates new forms of rewarding community (see sections 6 and 12). And in view of these rewards and new sources of identity, there is no prospect of a return to an old and perhaps romanticised streetscape. Women and men have left the street community for many reasons – some of them very positive. Any impulse to call for women’s return to the suburban home by day, is absurd. However, it seems that some of the longer term implications of this shift for those who still spend their days there – or who may come to rely upon it more in the future when caring, retired, unemployed, or less mobile - are uncertain and less positive.

2. Domestic and Caring Work

Of the many issues covered in conversation in this project, none drew more laughter, anger and sadness than the issue of domestic and caring work in the home. The results of mass surveys tell us that the great majority of unpaid housework is still done by women in Australia (Bittman and Pixley 1997). There has been much more *talk* about change, than real redistribution.

Unpaid work was worth over \$261 billion in 1997 (ABS Cat. 5240.0). This is equivalent to 48 per cent of our gross domestic product, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The value of this work is increasing – by 16 per cent between 1992 and 1997. Most of this unpaid work is housework (91 per cent) and women are doing two-thirds of it, especially in the forms of cooking, cleaning and childcare.

Women's perceptions match these statistics: they know that they are still doing the majority of domestic work. Many find it boring and repetitive, contrasting it with other things they find more rewarding:

I moan and I get sick of it. I feel I am forever cleaning. We have all been trained to clean. I get so bored with it. I have all these things I have to do or want to do but instead I clean and next thing I have to do it again. (woman part-time)

However, as women increasingly take on paid work, many referred to a drop in their standard of domestic maintenance which often lead to feelings of frustration, inadequacy and compromise. Incorporating the family into lifting these standards was frequently unsuccessful. There was widespread resignation, instead of expectation that the rest of the family would pick up the housework load voluntarily.

Some men were frank about their tactics to minimise their domestic work:

Abe: Like most males I do housework that's noisy so it's noticed. Like mowing the lawns, vacuuming, things like that..

Abe, a male nurse in his late 40s, with two small children and wife in full-time work who married in his mid-30s, went on to point out that he never cleaned the toilet. A second man in his workplace concurred:

Michael: I don't clean toilets and showers. But I do everything else.

Abe: I think women think that cleaning the toilets is 70 per cent of the housework! (laughter) Men never clean toilets. Men cleaning toilets!! No!

Jenny: I live in a male household and it's the same thing. Obviously cleaning the toilets is such a pain in the arse job. The vacuuming and mowing the lawn are always more fun.

Susan: I love mowing the lawn!

'I do housework that's noisy, so it's noticed'

Although Abe and Michael do traditionally feminised jobs – nursing – in their paid working lives their home tasks remain sharply segmented by sex, with a clear line drawn around the toilet, which they argue women over-dramatise as a housework task, but refuse to do themselves. On the other hand, Susan loves mowing the lawn and insisted that she be allowed to do it when she married, although her father had refused to teach her. Clearly, the choice between mowing the lawn and cleaning the toilet is simply unavailable to many women, including some who might be married to men who are close to the definition of Sensitive New Age Guy (SNAG). Abe describes himself as ‘semi-housetrained’ – a condition that he traces to his years as a single man:

Abe: I was single until I was 33 so I guess I was semi-housetrained. So I have perpetuated that. I've kept on ironing my own clothes and cooking.

His training does not extend to the toilet however.

Women distinguished between the physical, management and emotional tasks that they undertake at home – all of which they do more than men.

Many women are resentful about the inequitable load. They see a connection between housework and intimacy. Some traced the failure of their marriages to the costs of long term resentment over the domestic sphere. Clearly, the issue of domestic work and how it gets done is no small matter. It affects the quality of family life, and in many cases is a source of friction. Amongst all the institutions that are affected by the growing share of paid work being done by women, the pattern of housework remains perhaps the most unchanging. It is an issue that many women care deeply about.

Who Does It? 'My work, your work'

Three forms of arrangement seemed to exist: ‘equal sharing’, ‘part-sharing’ and ‘not sharing’.

In the first, in some households women said that their partners ‘shared equally’. In these households, women were likely to be working long hours – at least equivalent to their partners, and many had shifted large slices of the work to paid employees. They then shared the rest. These ‘sharing’ couples were few and far between. With contractors to provide meals, clean, garden, iron and care for kids, these households had less to apportion. Women in these households clearly used their greater income to ‘buy’ solutions rather than argue about them. This is supported by the survey results that show that in the face of men’s unwillingness to share this work, women have turned to the market. Many have also turned to their children or mothers, as we discuss below.

Much more common was the situation where working women carried the main burden of housework, despite their part-time or full-time hours in paid work. In these ‘part-sharing’ households women frequently used praise or threats to convince their partners to do more. Many women found the continuing argument over who did what, and the burden of the double day, debilitating. One woman manager who worked night shift in a data processing centre describes her situation – and its costs:

Rita: He stopped doing anything after my daughter was born. He thought that if he minded my daughter when I worked that that was all he had to do. I asked him over and over to talk but he wouldn't and then I got to the end of my tether and I threatened to walk out. This went on for weeks and then he asked me did I think our marriage was on the rocks? I thought 'Am I going through this on my own?'

Doesn't he get it?' Then one night we started talking. He thought I was angry because I was working nights or still had that thing, you know, post natal depression -

Kerin: He would have had an axe through his head if you'd had that! (laughter)

Rita: - but it wasn't that! It was the amount I had to do. He now understands that if he wants a relationship he has to put as much effort in to it as me.

Women in very diverse circumstances who lived in the 'part-sharing' situation did much more of all kinds of domestic work than their partners. Women living alone talked of having solved the problem by walking out.

In the third kind of arrangement, 'not sharing' women simply did most or all of the work, and many were angry about it, including women at home with their children:

Domestic work? I think you mean slavery! (mother at home with children)

Women living in the country also faced the 'not sharing' situation:

Sarah: My husband doesn't do anything. (Hospital worker, rural)

Amanda: Hang on! I'm married to him! (farmer, rural)

One city woman at home with children said that her husband was more houseproud than her and she did not resent doing the housework. Similarly at least some women living on farms were more accepting of their greater domestic load: as one pointed out, her husband worked long hours out of doors and she didn't expect him to help out inside as well. This acceptance of delineated roles (with the woman working in the home, and the man outside on the farm) was associated with less resentment and anger. In these rare cases, 'not sharing' was not seen as an inequitable arrangement but a sensible sharing of the jobs. Not all farm women were so reconciled, however:

Over the past 10 years I have learned to operate most of the machinery on this farm. I can do most things. But he hasn't changed his role at all really.

Women who had increased their hours of paid work while not seeing a compensating shift in unpaid work were much less sanguine. Women in diverse situations were angry at their long hours in paid work, and also at home, and a great majority pointed out their partner's failure to 'see' domestic work, to do it well, or to respond to requests to do more.

Domestic work: Physical, Emotional, Managerial

The most widely recognised form of 'housework' is physical: the straightforward hours of cleaning, washing, ironing, putting away clothes, gardening, cooking, and caring for kids. This was generally undertaken more by women regardless of their hours of work, as the mass surveys confirm. As women described it. Many men relied upon women for their basic self-care and maintenance:

He would wake me up to make his sandwich! (Divorced, Rural woman and mother of 2)

However, women pointed to a range of other forms of housework that also fell to them, and were ignored by many partners: the work of management of the household, and the

emotional work of family maintenance. Women in professional, rural, factory and home situations generally concurred that they managed the household, in terms of seeing what needed to be done and organising it. Men were ‘helpers’ who pitched in (or not) but who left the identification of tasks to women.

Women saw and managed priorities and it frustrated them that men did not:

I live my life according to priorities, feeding the kids, bathing the kids, getting tea on etc, but my partner will come in and sit down and read the mail or the paper. He'll do the lowest priority! (Doctor, mother)

Other women, particularly professional women, referred to the emotional labour that they took control of and did in their households – the work of listening to kids, thinking about their social and friendship needs, helping them sort out their problems, and being alert to individuals’ non-physical needs – through to more basic needs like dentist and eye appointments. They pointed out that these tasks are work, and take time, just like cleaning the toilet.

While men were more likely to take time to play with children, generally the primary caring roles were assumed to lie with women:

I always check with my partner as to his whereabouts but it is assumed that I will always be there. I feel guilty if I go out for say three nights, whereas he will go away for a week without giving it a thought. I am the primary minder, the child minder, the organiser, the pick up, orchestrating everything. (Office worker)

While the Australian Bureau of Statistics counts the physical tasks of housework in its calculations of unpaid work it is harder to count the management and emotional labour that many women identified as also significant, and largely falling to them.

Managing the house versus ‘chipping in’

Some women did not have to ask their partners to do housework, or to direct their efforts:

I don't ask him. There's no language of 'help'. Whoever was at home did it.

Many other women, however, had to ask for ‘help’ and reported the expectation that they should be grateful when they got it:

He'll help out if I blow my top – and then suggest that I should be so grateful. (Factory worker)

My husband does the cooking, cleaning and washing but he always says 'I've done your cooking, cleaning and washing'. I say 'It's not my work. It's our work'. (Call Centre employee)

I do it. I always have. We were always renovating. The words were 'helping'. The men 'helped'. Never the language of sharing. Not 'pull your weight'! Women say 'I'm lucky that so and so helps me'! (call centre employee)

While the distribution of housework had changed a little for some, it quickly reverted when women were ‘there’. Some women responded to this phenomena by making sure that they regularly were not ‘there’, so that their partners had to do it:

Things have changed but there is still a long way to go. My husband is excellent when I am not there, but as soon as I walk in the door I have to do the meals, cleaning, shopping. He does sometimes throw things in the washing machine but then all the colours get mixed up. He does sometimes hang out the washing and he irons his own shirts. He can manage when I am not there and he is good with the kids. (Nurse)

The Cost of 'Doing it All'

Some women blamed themselves when the domestic world faltered, and looked to solutions that did not rely upon their partners:

My abilities to cope are bad, it all gets out of control. I really need to hire someone. I'm presently paying my eldest son to do a couple of hours of housework. Recently I took recreational leave to have a total spring clean. I'm the one who tries to change things and get a system. I'm the one who tries to do it all. (Call centre employee, mother)

Men appeared more reluctant to do some tasks that others – many women mentioned folding and putting away clean clothes as a particular point of contention, as this exchange between professional women shows:

My partner takes the clothes off the line and puts them on the bed..

My partner puts [the washing] on my side of the bed and then gets into his side. If I move it to his side of the bed he gets into my side!

Interestingly, the general issue of the inequitable distribution of home tasks crossed the class divide affecting women in well paid employment and private business, as well as factory and office women on much lower incomes. Professional women didn't agree that their partners always had a more supportive, educated approach to housework. While some identified their partners as being in the 'equal sharing' category in relation to physical house work, others spoke with bitter feeling:

The SNAGS are worse. They know they are doing better than average so they don't allow you to push it!

They have better tactics at protecting their privilege.

Others questioned whether SNAGS really exist. Such professional women were more likely to be using external supports and paying for them, but frequently when the toilet cleaning remained 'in house', they still did more of it:

Interviewer: Who cleans the toilet?

Group: My cleaner, my cleaner, my partner, my cleaner, me or the cleaner, me or the cleaner, me, my partner or me. (Doctors and lawyers)

Contracting out, Short Cuts and Technology

Housework was a high emotion issue for many, but especially for women in heterosexual relationships with small children. Several referred to their partners as an extra child. Single women with one or two children appeared to find the situation easier to manage: 'my daughter and I don't make much mess, and it's not such a problem' and women with older children were less emotional about their situations.

Where the work was greater, women used a range of tactics to meet the demands of the home. Most commonly they contracted housework out, lowered standards, took shortcuts, trained their children or used labour saving technology.

Predictably, contracting out of tasks was much more frequent in higher income households. This was not always the case, however:

I've always had a cleaner, even when I was on scrap money.

It was also more frequent amongst farmer's wives and women in country towns with higher incomes.

Clearly, the contracting out of tasks like meal preparation through the use of prepared and convenience food, and the contracting out of care of elders and children (into aged care and childcare centres) have achieved a high level of community acceptance. Most women felt comfortable about contracting out domestic work and didn't have concerns about paying other women to do 'their' housework. Many intimated they would do so if it was a financial option. Several raised the issue of fair remuneration for domestic work, or talked of the importance of 'sharing the money' around. There was little concern about the creation of a pyramid of women's work – with working women on higher pay, relying on women receiving lower, intermittent or 'cash-in-hand' pay.

Interestingly, the most common task contracted out (after the use of prepared meals and take-aways, and forms of care) was lawn mowing – traditionally a job done by men. For example, a factory woman described that 'to get it done' her solution was to hire a service. Women in this group agreed that it was fatal to do it: 'never mow the lawn – you end up with it for good!'. Many women found it easier to organise a service to do it, than to depend upon their partners.

Women were making decisions about the hire of help as part of their responsibility for overall management of the domestic:

Susan: My husband does a lot of the cooking – about 60 per cent. When it comes to cleaning I just ask him and that's fine. Or I do the cleaning. I'm working full-time this week so I got a housecleaner. I decided why bother give yourself stress, so it works pretty good (clerical worker, mother)

When her job becomes temporarily full-time, Susan decides to go directly to the market solution, beyond asking for specific forms of help from her partner. She does not hesitate.

Short cuts and strategies around domestic work were varied. Take-aways were high on the list to reduce cooking time while some women were training their children to cook. Others would set aside a certain time to do a weekly clean. Some brought white goods such as dish washes etc. to lessen the load and many mentioned that their male partners had initiated this (especially where male partners had responsibility for the washing up). Some women solved the inequalities of these issues by leaving their partners. As one professional put it:

I don't think it is changing, a lot of women aren't in relationships with men - why would they want to be if they don't get help? I don't hear blokes say 'I can't cope with the housework'. It seems incredibly inequitable. (Journalist, mother of toddler)

**'It seems
incredibly
inequitable'**

Lowering standards

A very common strategy amongst women was to lower their domestic standards, although some found this easier to do than others:

I have lowered my standards, and we eat out more at Hungry Jacks and so on - things I thought I would never do but I am so tired and I just want to feed the kid and feed myself. Every now and then we have a mass clean up which takes all day. (full-time worker)

Many women struggled with the reality of falling standards: ‘why should I have to put up with things badly done, or the fact that he just doesn’t see dust?’

A nurse reflected upon the generational shift in standards that means that women now stand at a moment when the ‘clean-freak’ standards of the fifties are perhaps giving away to the earlier, less fussy standards of our grandparents’ and great grandparents’ times.

I had this conversation the other day with an 88 year old. When she grew up they bathed once a week and washed the sheets every 3 weeks. She actually described it. It must be that the women that were the housewives in the 50s, with the white goods - they were the clean freaks. The generation before didn’t have the access to it, and I don’t think they were quite as fastidious about it. It’s generational. And we are more relaxed than our parents. But our grandparents probably weren’t as fussy about it as our parents.

‘Dull women have immaculate houses. I live by that.’

This moment of change is painful for those who must give up what they grew up with. Some women were able to go with the shift that their busy lives demanded and certainly appeared to suffer less anxiety.

Candy: I have a poster up on the wall that says dull women have immaculate houses. I live by that.

They also recognised the generational shift and were pleased to say goodbye to their mother’s over-immaculate houses:

I’m a lot more indulgent than my mum. We never had any pocket money. I have a different attitude to money than my mum. Mum places no value on having fun. I spend a lot of time playing. Whereas with her, she was very house-proud. Her house was more like a showplace than a home. And I’m too much the other way – the house is a dump. And I’m not very good at tidying up because I place value on other things – I’ll lie down and read a book or do something with my son. I place more importance on doing things for me - not worrying about how things look.

Whereas women still attempting the weekly fresh sheets and home made cakes for their children’s parties, struggled, as one country woman put it ‘constantly proving yourself’.

Control: Trapped by the Female Standard?

Some women were loath to hand over domestic work totally to either outside help or their families, insisting that either they did it better, they enjoyed it (at times), or their own high standards dictated their over-riding involvement. A preoccupation with standards and control stood in the way of delegating the work for a number of women despite the realisation of the rod that this created for their own backs. This affected

women in a wide range of jobs, and in both the city and rural areas, and whether they were at home full-time with kids or not:

We make a rod for our own backs because we are so capable and usually do it better. We virtually bring it on ourselves. (Part-time worker, mother at home with children)

My husband has always been a great support. I found it difficult to relinquish some of the hold on the household chores, it took at least seven years of work to let go. (Teacher, rural area, full-time worker, mother)

I think it is my choice to live in a clean and tidy house so I do it. I clean on Friday nights, sometimes it takes up till 2 in the morning but at least when I wake up on Saturday morning I have a clean house. (Single mother, worker, call centre)

It would be wonderful to live in a world where the bathroom was done and there was no pubic hair on the floor. My husband says I do (live in such a world). Men just don't see what women see. (Call centre worker)

One man spoke of the criticism he received when he did domestic tasks, and how it upset him:

She likes to get it right. If you don't do it right, one little thing, she comments; 'I hope you don't mind, you won't get upset but you should put the sauce in after'. I don't say that to her. She likes to be in control – it's upsetting me. (man at home with children)

Concern about control and standards also meant some women would not think of paying others to do housework, because they simply would have done it again, to their standards:

Cath: If I had someone come in, I'd only do it again. Because that's me. I'm a very organised person – I like to do it myself.

Cath's male colleague encouraged her to get over it:

David: You owe it to yourself to get someone in. It's time. You need the time.

Kids and Housework

Interestingly, it seems that many women have had more luck training their children to pull their weight, than their partners. The standards issue also arose again:

I get the boys to help but it has to be to my satisfaction. (Rural Worker)

Many women were determined to train their children well:

It was hard and tough when they were little. I was really tough on my kids but look what they have got today! They are clean, they can do things. Everything had to be perfect, if you do a job you do it well. (Indigenous community health worker, mother)

Some had done so with considerable success:

My kids are great, they often do the whole thing, the washing and cooking. I can come home and everything is done. (Hospital employee, rural, part-time)

The powerful lessons of the ‘male-model’ were acknowledged:

Generally kids learn from their parents and if my partner doesn’t do it they think they don’t have to do it. (student, mother)

Some confessed to training their daughters better than their sons, and some said they found it easier to teach their daughters about housework.

I did most of it. My daughter complained that I ruined my son (by treating him differently). I fell into the old trap!

I get my son to do the dishes. It is so easy to call on my little girl to come and help in the kitchen and I have to stop myself and I make sure to get the boy in or I will repeat the pattern all over again. He has to see that this is the real world. (professional, manager, mother)

Busy women sometimes supervised their children by phone from work:

I often supervise the housework (being done by the kids) from work. (Call centre employee)

Other women expressed a reticence to teach children domestic tasks because of the time it takes to train. It was quicker to do it themselves:

I have always been in such a rush that I did everything for them just to be quicker. Now they are teenagers I am saying ‘grow up, do your own stuff’. I have not had enough time to teach them things, I haven’t had time to teach them how to cook, or even peel a carrot. (Call centre worker, full-time)

The long term effects of a ‘training failure’ were clear:

My kids can’t even pick up a wet towel. (Office employee, rural hospital, full-time)

The long term significance of good training for sons was well understood, if not always accomplished:

Mothers of sons have a terrific responsibility to our daughters-in-law of the future.

Immigrant and Aboriginal Households

For migrant households especially in older generations, issues around domestic work appeared to entail strong resistance. Women in these communities describe how domestic work is ‘culturally linked’ to being female – just as it is across most cultures. Men suffer loss of status and credibility if they are seen to be either doing ‘women’s work’ or submitting to the woman’s will. There is social stigma and embarrassment if they try to accommodate the changes in their wives lives – ‘They think they have less importance if they do women’s work. If they do women’s work they lose status’ as one immigrant woman described the impact on her husband.

Sometimes in the Chinese or Vietnamese community a man is not employed and the woman is, but he is still the boss and he can’t do the housework. The woman must

do both the housework and the paid work. Sharing domestic work is a problem. (Chinese immigrant woman, mother)

Others agreed, and looked to the help of extended family to make it work:

He thought he was marrying a typical Polish wife and was a bit disappointed when I didn't do all the cooking and socialising. I still try to do the cooking and parties and so on, but it's an added extra to my life. That's where mum helps me out.

Existing arrangements imposed costs on relationships:

In my community the cultural upbringing still means that family roles are divided and it is the woman's role to do the domestic work. This means that a woman is always tired and this impacts on all her relationships, she is too tired for a proper relationship with her husband. Families maintain cultural roles. Also as mother she often feels guilty for working and does extra things for her children which makes them do less to help her. (Polish immigrant woman, mother, divorced)

However, generalisations needed to be made with care:

Domestic tasks are sometimes shared in the Cambodian community but there are still very strong cultural divides. There are some changes. You can't stereotype all families as they are all different. It is changing, yes, but not much. Women still do most of the housework and get too tired and don't have any energy.

Like most others, Aboriginal women were also affected by the dominant pattern:

I took over where his mother left off. I felt that my role was in the home and even though a man goes out to work and I'm working too, his dinner has to be on the table at 5pm. I did everything. I was brought up that way. It has been hard for me to change from the old ways. (Indigenous community health worker)

Strategies: Resentment, Criticism, Praise, Thanks and Leaving Home

The use of praise rather than blame appeared to generate better results in terms of changed male behaviour, though some women resented having to give praise when they received so little themselves. Some women suggested managing rewards through pocket money, or choosing better partners, or making sure that you were simply not there on occasions:

I worked on a merit system with my kids, it was handed down from my parents and it was a natural thing. I needed help as I was on my own. Housework has never been an issue with me, we were brought up by my mother in a hospital like environment and I inflicted that on my kids too. It has never been an issue with me. We've all adopted it naturally. if things weren't done they would lose points and that would affect their pocket money. (Call centre worker)

I think the solution to domestic work is to pick a better partner. (Doctor)

I think it is important to leave your partner with the circumstances, leave him with the baby, that teaches him, he would do all the dramatics when I got home but he did learn in the process. He would initially be a floppy wreck but he did get the drift. (Doctor)

Others offered – or had adopted - more radical solutions.

Sex, Divorce and Housework

Women are constantly torn between providing the necessities of a clean, nurturing and operable environment in the domestic sphere and the time they wanted to spend with their children, spouses and themselves. There is considerable guilt and frustration at not being able to fulfil, to a satisfactory degree, the functions of partner, mother, and domestic worker on an ongoing basis. This has led to widespread and considerable resentment about male partners' failure to help whilst also failing to appreciate what women are doing on a day to day basis to maintain both the emotional and physical balance of the family. This directly affected intimacy – amongst professional, clerical, rural and urban women. As doctors and lawyers discussed it:

I think you build up a resentment but you bury it. Instead of going over well-traveled ground you put it away and I think this impacts on our intimate relationship: 'if you are not there for me, I am not there for you!' It's not enough to leave for, but it's there. (Doctor, mother)

I agree, there are very, very deep feelings of injustice. He can't see things, he'll say he's done the lounge and I can't see a thing has been done. I used to get angry that he can't 'see'. We have had huge arguments and now I have dropped my standards but the resentment is there. (lawyer)

I feel the same way and yet sometimes when my partner does say he does appreciate what I do, I wipe the slate clean of resentment - it has that much effect on me. (doctor)

My partner does do things I don't have to think about and it makes a huge place for the relationship to be better, it feels like a partnership. (doctor)

A now divorced community worker talked about the devaluation she clearly had felt in relation to domestic work:

Candy: When I was married I did the bulk of housework and – it was like my husband didn't value what I was doing, didn't know what I was doing all day, and took it completely for granted. So I felt devalued by that and I think if you work as a partnership and you share stuff, and you share a bit about each others lives and about the problems - that makes a better bond.

Her male and female co-workers agreed:

David: I agree totally. I think it's a measure of respect. (manager, father)

Susan: If you focus and help each other then you have time as a family. It's important to keep the quality between you and your partner. (clerical worker, mother)

Abe: My wife is appalled that at our school, out of our female friends, a 100% of their husbands do nothing! (nurse)

The linkages between housework and divorce were pointed out by women in many locations and circumstances. They took several forms. Some women had divorced their husbands over issues that were focussed around housework. The failure to share it, or to recognise many women's double load, made many women angry, and they very

directly stated that the failure to be 'heard' on this issue contributed to their feelings of being disrespected. They hated nagging, but they hated not being heard more:

I was cleaner and tidier than him, it was a real issue in the relationship - now he has to do it for himself. (Divorced, part-time clerical worker, clerical)

My partner got retrenched. He stayed at home and became a real disciplinarian and he didn't do anything other than cook. I used to have to nag to get anything done. He wasn't willing to give and take. He didn't do anything at home and then used to complain on the weekends when I was doing the housework instead of spending time with him. (Divorced call centre employee)

Other women pointed out that men learned through divorce: several had partners who had been divorced and they saw these events as contributing to their partner's domestication.

Some pointed out a direct linkage between sex and housework: anger and tiredness affected intimacy and in one focus group women laughingly discussed the withdrawal of sex as punishment for the failure to 'help'.

Housework was far from a trivial issue in terms of domestic harmony.

3. Guilt

If the women involved in our focus groups are any indication, Australian motherhood is suffering an epidemic of guilt. Guilt arose spontaneously in the opening round of the first focus group and did not lie down thereafter. It was raised by women in every discussion. It infected women at home with children, women in paid work, and rural and urban women. It was no respecter of income and crossed all the occupational divides. Of the 150 women involved in interviews and focus groups – most of them mothers or carers - only a handful said they felt no guilt.

A couple of these were single mothers who had, as they put it, ‘no choice’ but to work for money; guilt was less of an issue for them, though it affected many other single mothers:

I regret missing out on their early years but I had no choice, my husband died early and I had to work. (Call centre employee, widow, mother and grandmother)

I told my children, ‘I have two lives, one for you and one for me’. I had to have one night a week when I socialised with my friends. Community was important. I didn’t feel guilty, I felt saddened. I was doing the best I could. No I didn’t feel guilty because I knew what I was doing was for the kids anyway. (Health worker, single mother)

Two women had decided that their choices made sense and they were quite comfortable with them. One was a mother who had been at home with her four children and had thoroughly enjoyed her years rearing them. She was now being encouraged by her husband into paid work, but felt no guilt or regrets.

A second young mother in the full-time paid workforce with two young children, also said she felt no guilt:

Tammy: I’ve never felt guilty. (one child, clerical worker)

Tammy said that people would criticise her choices no matter what, and she had decided to just get on with it. She refused to feel guilty:

There is always someone who is going to criticise the way that you live your life...[There are those who say] all mothers should stay at home with their kids and you get other people who say all those single mothers [who stay at home] are bludgers. That’s their problem. You do what you have to do.

Another mother of two had suffered post natal depression; she felt that her ‘time out’ when she was hospitalised and under psychiatric care had helped her sort out her way of parenting. She discussed her situation:

Maggie: I had to do a huge think a few years ago because when my two and a half year old was 2 weeks old I was diagnosed with post-natal depression, and I ended up in hospital for a bit...and then it was a year to climb back, with support. We did a lot of this stuff: what is motherhood? What is a good mother? And as a result I’ve come out stronger and more resolved so I don’t need external measures to feed me, I know what is right for us, and I haven’t had to do it based on my mother’s role model which was wrong for me. I’ve had to create my own parenting and our family life. It might not relate to anyone else’s, but it’s right for us...A lot of post natal depression is about women struggling to come to terms with what their role is

and how they do it, and they all try and do it based on other role models that might not be right for them.

Sarah: I went through a small amount of post natal depression. The thing that really hit me was that it was more related to grief, of what I'd lost, of who I'd lost in becoming mother, in becoming a parent....it's the loss of freedom. I wasn't me, I was bound to that little person.

Maggie had decided to be the kind of mother she wanted to be. (This period of unexpected hospitalisation after the birth of a new baby had also helped her partner adopt an active domestic role – thrust as he was into taking home a newborn on his own.) She felt relatively free of guilt in relation to her choices, and regularly took time to 'selfishly' look after herself and do what she wanted to do: 'My kids have to compromise for me, it's a balance'.

A number of these less guilt afflicted women had been raised in a more working class than middleclass household, and several had relatively low household income. It is hard to tell whether class differences are at work here, or the presence of a working mother, in their own childhood households. Guilt was, however, very widespread amongst other women – whether working in a factory on nightshift, or in a management position. Class and ethnic influences were remarked by one mother, a professional woman, who suggested that perhaps guilt – which was endemic amongst professional women – was partly a function of the way you had been brought up:

Leonie: The thing is the middle class has this thing about kids and 'special' time etc. but other women often have no choice about working and therefore feel no guilt. (Doctor)

Another doctor pointed out that kids were very alert to the guilt that parents felt: 'And kids pick up on the ambivalence'.

Leonie felt relatively guilt-free and wondered if the fact that she was raised working class, and her partner was the son of European migrants (both of whom worked), led to less guilt. She pointed out that her immigrant mother in law, who had always had to do paid work, never questioned her decision to work, while her Australian-born mother was more likely to.

Young women without children did not anticipate feeling guilt, but others warned them to expect it, as this exchange between women in a country town suggests:

I don't think I'll feel guilty because I'll know I'm doing it for them

It doesn't really make any difference!

'No' - the others agree

At the end of the day, it's doing enough that's the thing.

Clearly, changes in paid working patterns have had profound implications for women, children and our communities so that a deep anxiety attaches to motherhood. Feelings of guilt sit heavily on women caught between the roles their mothers played and the expectations and financial demands of society now, and many women – though not all – are affected by them. Most women spoke of the remorse they felt at not being able to do it all – not being there for their kids, torn between their family's financial needs, the expectations of motherhood, and their own ambitions. As one woman put it:

I was always torn between my loyalties to the child and family and work, sending the child off to school when they may not have been well and then getting the phone call later from the school saying my child was ill, trying to have a life and a family. (Teacher, country woman, mother)

Even when their children were grown up, women who had worked reflected on whether their decisions to do paid work, all those years before, were causing problems years later:

My guilt says I am responsible for what is happening in their lives, which are drug related problems at the moment. Was it because I wasn't there, that I didn't make the right decisions? I am beating myself up really well. I can't give to work or my team at the moment. I don't have anymore to give. (Team leader, office)

This woman had never really sought a management position or full-time work, but had found that she was good at her job, and had been promoted and encouraged. Her self-criticism in relation to her sons' current difficulties were painful. Another woman whose children were also older also spoke of her guilt, always wondering when things went wrong for her children, whether it was her fault for working and 'not being there':

Both of my sons are schizophrenics and although I know it is genetic I still think 'did I pull the trigger by not being there?' I feel so guilty. (Call centre employee)

Logical understanding of the roots of her sons' mental illness is no protection from a sad feeling of guilt. Guilt for not doing enough, for not being there with unlimited time, shadowed women and prevented them from taking time for themselves. This contributes to exhaustion:

Legitimising time for yourself is really hard. If I am not doing anything I get guilty and think of what needs to be done. I see empty time as wasted time. I always feel guilty, even my time off is guilty time. (Call centre worker)

Professional women in small business shared these feelings. A successful consultant and private business woman, for example, questioned her earlier choices to work, as her children grew and wanted to have less time with her. They articulated their complaints about lost time with her:

I am finding I want to be with them more, like they have missed out on something. Feelings of guilt are starting to appear. I think that society puts that frame of mind (guilt) on mothers. Even the kids take it from society.

Professional women with small babies talked of the guilt they felt on leaving the house or childcare centre:

She (the baby) is getting easier, not so upset, she sometimes waves and smiles when I leave. That makes me feel better. There are times when I am in tears - it makes me feel so upset, but I can't do it – can't stay at home without being in huge trouble at work.. (journalist and mother of toddler).

Others commented on the fact that their partners did not appear to be affected by these deep feelings:

My partner doesn't understand that pull (from child), especially when I am going out. (Doctor)

But they don't get the pressure at all - they don't cry when he goes out. (Doctor)

These professional women wondered what kind of messages their children were taking from their parent's rushed and very busy lives:

What sort of messages are we building up in our kid ? I am busy working and we don't have time for fun. (Doctor)

Motherhood and Materialism

Women in part-time work in offices, document processing centres and other forms of work talked of the issues that related to guilt. Several discussed how they compensated their children with material things:

A few weeks ago I worked nightshift and next day I took my kids to the supermarket and spent it all, because I felt bad for not being there.

We over-compensate for being at work. We do spoil our kids. That's part of the reason we work. We want them to have the things we didn't have.

Many women spoke of salving their guilt with material objects for their kids. As a group of women in a factory discussed:

My neighbour says I spoil my kids by giving them things to allay my guilt. You supplement money for love and overcompensate. (Factory worker)

We do spoil our kids and that is part of why we work, so that we can spoil them. (Factory worker)

When I said I'd give up work, she (child) said 'no. If you stay we get more'. (Factory worker)

Work is about quality of life. I would have to settle for less and have less life chances. I have explained to my kids that we can all have more if I work. (Call centre employee)

If I lose my job my son is worried that he won't be able to go to private school. (Factory worker).

Some felt that the material pursuit game was unending and unsatisfying – and perhaps unnecessary – though others hotly debated this, arguing that families needed two incomes now:

We don't have a choice - we have to go to work. That is the biggest difference now.

I don't think a lot of women have to go to work. Materialism comes into it far too much. People could survive on a lot less... A lot of kids are brought up to want more. The pressure is put on by society. The first two years of a child's life are very important, and the government should be looking at providing.

Many women talked of the material things that their children now had, because of their jobs, and how they believed that their children would not have been happy without them.

**You
supplement
money for love
and over-
compensate'**

I think if you say to your kids would you rather I stayed at home all the time or would you rather do this because we can afford to, I think the kids are smart enough to make the decision that they would rather you go off to work so that they can afford what they want as well. Mine do that at 6 and 7. No question. (country woman)

Not all women were happy about this – they talked of the absurdity of trying to ‘keep up with the Jones’ and the endless demands of kids for labels and expensive things. Others felt that it was time that children wanted, not things.

Guilt makes you need to be there every second. At the weekends I have two days to clean, shop, cook, play monopoly with the kids, but I do know that in ten years time it won't be the clean house they remember but the time I spent with them. (Office worker, community centre, country)

Clearly, if guilt is resulting in compensating spending patterns it is a fine friend for the retail trade.

However, whether with material things or without them, guilt affected most mothers. Some talked of society's pressures: that society ‘puts that frame of mind (guilt) on mothers’. However, most saw guilt as firmly falling on their shoulders. They attributed behaviours in their adult children - like drug use and schizophrenia - to their mothering choices, while in fact these behaviours might well have been caused by a great variety of things, including absent fathers. Further, they did not see the link between fixed and inflexible work arrangements that leave, for example, lawyers and doctors locked into ‘greedy’ forms of work patterns (see below), or shift working factory employees without the option of part-time work or maternity and parenting leave. Women were much more inclined to blame themselves, than structural, external factors.

What do we think kids think?

What do kids think of their working mothers? Women report a wide range of opinions amongst their children about their mothers paid work. There appeared no sign of a parallel controversy in relation to the paid work of fathers. Women actively engaged in discussion about the costs and benefits of their paid work, encouraging their children to see the financial benefits (‘the stuff’) it brought:

My youngest one actually said thank you! She gets a lot more now. She said you can't leave mum, because we get more.

My youngest has said, she basically wants it all. She wants me there in the evenings, but she wants the stuff as well. I said we can only have one or the other. When I started this shift it was very hard for her and she said I want you to stay at home. I listed all the things that I'd bought for her or done for her in the last 3 or 4 months since I'd started working and its like ‘Oh, OK’. I had to make her understand that it's a means to an end, that you can't have it all.

I have to explain to my daughter that if I don't go to work then I don't get paid, and if I don't get paid then I can't buy her the things she wants.

The wage is what keeps them fed, and clothes on their back, and little things that they want.

Real Money, 'Pin' money

Interestingly, in discussing their wages with their children, some women in part-time work and in full-time factory work referred to their income as being for 'extras' – for paying for the movies, the popcorn, the private school fees, the toys. This suggested that in their minds at least, the notion of the woman's income as 'pin' money still has some relevance, despite the fact that the majority of these women have been in employment for many years. Of course this was not the view of single mothers who say their income as buying essential things 'as well as the movies'.

When we asked men about any differences in their earnings and those of their partners, they saw none. As one said: 'All the money just goes to shopping!'. Others agreed:

Nowadays it's probably different because in the old days you'd get your little pay packet, cash in the hand. Now the money is just electronically transferred into the one bank account. So it's a meaningless difference. It's all the same. (male nurse, father of 2, partner working)

While clear about why they needed to work, country women were not immune:

I do feel guilty though. I feel guilty about what I put them through to get to work, the logistics of it all, but work for me was important. (country woman)

Some women believe that their money is 'different' from their partners, arising from their 'choice' to work and for 'extras'. However, a great number and sometimes the same women, say that in reality they must work, and their partners are perhaps less likely to distinguish their earnings as different.

While some women are confident and sure in their choices, in other cases we can see a confusion of guilt and money. Earnings are used to compensate for guilt, and we see a range of levels of comfort and discomfort with these choices and compensations. These confusions spill over into a discussion about the meaning of motherhood, and its 'proper' shapes today.

4. 'Proper mothers': the 'Choice' of Work versus Family

Allied to the epidemic of guilt – in fact its close twin – is the notion of the 'proper mother'. While we might expect that the changes in society over the past fifty years have unpicked some of the stereotypes of 'mother' in fact our study found some fairly traditional notions of mothering have strong roots in society, giving rise to much of the guilt and over-compensating behaviours that women talked about above.

'Why can't you be like other normal mums?'

While women questioned the idea of a 'proper mother', they agreed that a mythology of 'proper mothering' ran deep in society – and even in their own homes. Clearly, women do their mothering in diverse ways; however there are some entrenched and powerful expectations about 'proper mothers' that shape children's expectations as well as those of extended and close family members, and encourage guilt when they cannot be achieved. The following exchange amongst women working in a factory shows some of these tensions in relation to meeting the demands of children, doing voluntary work in the school, while also meeting the demands of employers:

Marie: My daughter sees all the other mothers [around the school]. Yesterday she said to me 'Why can't you be like other normal mums?' I said 'Well I don't know, love, there's nothing abnormal about me.'

Helen: But it's hurtful when they say that, isn't it?

Marie: I just try to explain that mummy's got to work.

Interviewer: What do the kids think is a 'normal' mum, a proper mum?

Anna: A lot of them, I think, it's the one who is at their beck and call. If the child's sick, they'll ring home, mum will be there. She'll come and get me, no problem, everything will be Jim Dandy. But when we're working here (in the factory), if the kid's are sick at school they ring us, 'Is there someone who can pick up the child?' We can't go. In my case the kids have the keys so they can let themselves in.

Marie: When I was on nightshift I was there when they woke up, and I would take them to school and pick them, and go to work at night. But on morning shift things [are different]. And she doesn't like that... 'Normal' to her is somebody that brings her to school in the morning and picks her up in the afternoon. Like I used to do.

Interviewer: And why did you change [from that shift]?

Marie: Because I had to. The company wanted me to do that. There was no negotiation... We just got moved. All the departments have been restructured with the retrenchments.

'A 'proper mother' is one with a lot of time'

In this exchange a 'proper mother' is one with a lot of time to be available to their children, who does not have employment pitted against the child's needs, or a set of non-negotiable workplace demands. This caricature is alive in women's minds and society despite the fact that few 'live up' to it:

Denise: I know a mother who virtually spends every minute with her kids. She is a really great mother. (full-time worker in the country with 2 children).

Clearly Denise can never be 'a really great mother' by this standard that she sets. This raises the question of whether working mothers can ever achieve the status of 'proper

mothers' (and the idea of 'proper fathers' did not arise). This seemed especially sharp in country towns, as several exchanges reveal:

Heidi: We are perceived as not such good mothers. I think it's a country town thing.

Denise: Because you are not there morning, noon and night, you are perceived as not a proper mum

Of course the conflict between family and work is not new. Older women with grown children also talked about the guilt that they had felt when rearing their children. The difference today is that so many more women are attempting what Christine describes, reporting similar feeling of being 'always torn' and guilty, and facing the questioning of their communities:

I've worked since the kids were little. And its like, what sort of mother are you? I always say it's the quality rather than quantity. And that's proven to be correct. I mean, my kids are great!

Some talked of the ongoing critique of their work colleagues, as this exchange reveals, with fellow-mothers active participants:

Claire: I'm 42 and I've had my children relatively late...I went back to work when the kids were 4 months old and there's only 18 months between them. But I reckon from the time that I had my first child to even now, I get most of the nurses saying, don't you think you ought to be at home? When one of them is sick they say shouldn't you be at home, I say 'what's wrong with Malcolm? He's at home. He was there for the three minutes unskilled labour[at conception], why can't he be there when the child's sick. I mean, the pressure!. I mean Malcolm's very good. But the pressure has been enormous from my working colleagues both senior and junior.

Interviewer: Both men and women?

Claire: Actually the men probably sort of say we don't know how you do it...

Interviewer: Is it mostly people without children?

Claire: No it's mostly women with children. Women without children don't even acknowledge that I'm a mother! Those that know, who are really paternalistic, like to run the guilts over you.

Many women, however, were emphatic that they were better mothers for being working mothers. As women in separate focus groups put it:

Jane: Being a working mother doesn't make you any less a mother.

Margaret: I think I'm a better mother going back into the workforce. There's a lot of resentment being at home. You are not a lesser mother because of it.

Meredith: We are the majority now. But mothers are still coping it. Mother-blame is alive and well. It is still there.

Extended family criticism is also not uncommon, though experience can change this. As one single mother put it, her mother who had never worked outside home, gave up

'Being a working mother doesn't make you any less a mother'

her critique of ‘working mothers’ when she saw how her daughter needed to work to survive:

My mother never worked. Well not since she was 20. She wouldn't work and has never wanted to. Before I had my child she was always coming out with 'working mothers' syndrome: mothers should be with their kids. Now she is very supportive because she has seen what I have to do, and she is more understanding.

As we shall see below, women work for many reasons, including economic necessity, making any sense of ‘choice’ for a significant number, a nonsense.

The Divide: Mothers at Home versus Mothers in Paid Work

Interestingly, women at work felt they were criticised for being working mothers while on the other hand, women at home reported criticism for not working – that it was assumed that they were lazy or incompetent, unable to win a job. Women in each group also aimed criticisms at each other, feeding the conflict.

Both country and city women felt that working women were sometimes set against women at home, and that the representation of ‘the choice’ was false. As one country woman and mother of three put it:

There is a real false representation: If you are home with your kids, you should be out working. If you are out working you should be at home with your kids. And you can't win either way. That's the feeling I get.

I get that all the time: 'Why did you go back teaching?'

From what sort of people?

A whole range.

Others felt that times had changed, though some form of criticism of working mothers was alive and well, especially, from other women. Some had been termed ‘money hungry’.

Denise: I work because of circumstances. Someone said recently it's because I'm money hungry. But it's not that. It's because we are late starters. My husband is 10 years older than me and we need to catch up. We wouldn't survive on one wage. (country town mother of 2, full-time worker)

However, there are some signs of change, as another country woman put it:

Times have changed a little bit. When I came here 9 years ago, people frowned at you if you worked. I found that really difficult...In 9 years that has changed a bit so that it's much more accepted now, that I work, but it was very difficult when I first got here. And in fact most of the people that frowned on it were women. We're our own worst enemies. I find women are the worst supporters of women on it.

City women agreed:

There isn't that option now to be a full-time mum, as what I had or my mother had...Attitudes towards women working have changed and also now all my friends, everyone I know, works. Back in those days, you were only a good mum if you were at home going slowly mad. (mother of two grown up children and five year old)

'I work because of circumstances. Someone said recently it's because I'm money hungry. But it's not that.'

While working mothers felt this criticism of them was unfair, they were themselves in some cases critical of women at home, as this exchange in a country-based focus group shows:

Mary: When they have something on at the school I know that I take time off of work to go there, and most of the mums don't. And its three other mums who are there supporting our kids' class, and we all work, and we have to take time off of work to get there and the other mums don't worry about it. They are probably at home having cups of tea together building their own friendships. I don't know. (mother of small children in small country town).

Janine: When I left my husband...I moved. I worked at the hospital, so I knew a lot of people at the hospital. But most of my friends up and left - left me to it... I was president of the kindy for 12 months and didn't meet any people that were interested in just me. It was really difficult to get them into a conversation and I think it was because I was a working mother, and there is a real stigma against working mothers. It's like: you should be home with your children. That's the way I feel. (Single mother of two young children in country town)

Sonya: I've had comments made to me already about going back to work full-time, My husband said to tell them to stick it. It's none of their business. And I've said well it's our choice and we've made that choice and that's what we want to do. And its probably from older women who haven't worked. You know they have been at home making sure that the food's on the table at lunch time and they dote on their husbands and have a nice clean house and wash windows. But from that angle, those sort of people – I haven't had any comments from younger people. I think it might be more country because people know each other better. In the city you probably wouldn't know what your next door neighbour is doing...In my family everyone is for me going back to work. They just said, I hope you can cope. I've had lots of support from my mum. (mother of young child, about to return to work in country town).

Joan: I had a friend who had kids at the school a few years ago. Monday morning was a religious coffee morning for all the mothers but she never ever went to any of the school things and yes she was sitting at home doing nothing and its used to drive me nuts. Just to sit all day – how do you do that? All the friends that I have that don't work, don't get their ironing up to date and don't seem to do anything, because they have tomorrow to do it. I had one friend whose mother would come out and do her curtains and that kind of stuff for her a couple of times a year, and I'd think, you're kidding me!

Jane: She was going to the wrong house!

Fiona: Maybe they haven't got the guilt driving them like we do.

Anne: Maybe it's a different set of values.

Ironically, women who work and enjoy their social contacts through their work, are sometimes critical of women at home for establishing the same social contacts through 'coffee mornings'.

Women in the city who did not work spoke of feeling guilty for not working – for not 'being professional' - or of being 'looked down upon as a low life':

People think that it is not that we choose, but that we can't get a job. Sometimes its jealousy. (mother of four)

I feel shame about being a mother at home, personally. For that 6 hours when the children are at school, I don't sit down. I feel anxious, I have to be productive. The message is that you have to be superwoman – so I feel guilty. It's complicated. I feel like I'm sponging. I feel anxiety as middle age approaches. How do you break into the workforce? I didn't decide consciously to stay at home with the kids. (mother of 2 with postgraduate qualifications).

They also aimed their own criticisms at women in paid work, speaking of some and their treatment of children 'as an accessory', of 'farming out responsibility'.

Some women who reported criticism for going out to work, contrasted this with the compliments that their male partners received for helping at home. As one mother of three, who worked part-time while also supporting her builder husband put it:

Everyone says to him: 'What a wonderful father!' But I don't get 'What a wonderful mother!'

There is not a parallel debate about 'good' fathers alongside the emotionally laden discussion of 'good' mothering. Some men are aware of the unfair standard and over-scrutiny that applies to women – and resent the assumptions that they are not contributing:

My husband is resentful that people ask how I cope with four children – and says 'Because I put a lot of work into the children too'. He resents not being seen as an equal partner.

The longstanding under-valuation of mothering was expressed by many women:

You get mixed messages about being a mum. It's said that it's held in high regard but the fact is that it isn't because everything in society values what you produce. Not being a mother.

Women at home debated the nature of rewards that they sought, debating money versus respect:

Andy: There should be financial reward to staying at home – bringing up children. Compensation, not just expectation...It should be recognised as another job.

Freda: I totally agree. You choose to do it, and you do it with your heart – produce a person who is well adjusted, supported. It's the best start – instead of farming out the responsibility. (mother of two, studying)

Jodie: I don't know about rewards. I worked at home for my kids benefit. Even though we weren't well off, I wanted respect rather than cash. But you know, my husband really copped it from his mates at work: why was I sponging off him? 'Why doesn't she work?' (mother of four)

Jodie's comment is indicative of the kind of pressure that women at home now face (along with their partners in her case) if they are not 'pulling their weight' by joining paid work, even where they have four children. Others reported active pressure from their partners to do paid work, despite school aged children.

Where is the discussion about 'good fathers'?

Super-mothers

Finally women raised the issue of the ‘super-mum’. Some felt they were striving to achieve super-mother status, and failing, while others rejected the race:

Denise: I try and do everything perfectly, but you can't. You need to admit you are not super-mum. There are real emotional ties with kids below school age and when they are at school, and when there is something special on and you can't be there you feel terrible.

Later she continued:

You need to be organised. We have to do things in an ordered way so that we don't get behind. I always seem to have to prove myself because I am a working mother. I never buy a bought cake for my children's dos. I always cook them myself. You are constantly proving yourself (all nod in agreement). I don't see Lisa Kenny as a super-mum. She has a trainer and a housekeeper and so on. We are the super-mums!

Others in the group encouraged Denise to make greater use of support or to lower her standards: ‘Kids don't notice the difference if you didn't bake the cake. We put so much pressure on ourselves’. But Denise was not alone:

Selina: I work full-time and about 20 hours in our business. I do it all at home. My girls do calisthenics and I would stay up till the small hours of the morning sewing on sequins to get things done so they didn't miss out.

Others raised the growing pressure to be super-mums:

The pace moves a lot faster now. There is more pressure to be a super-mum.

One retired woman with older professional daughters who did voluntary work now, argued that women ‘brought this upon themselves’:

Women are too committed to both family and work. They don't set boundaries. We seem to have more to prove. We get anxious about trying to prove ourselves. I'd like to know why women think they have to do more? Do we need to prove our worth and add the extra stress? For those with smaller children, there are so many difficulties.

The level of discussion about motherhood and the controversy it continues to create in our communities, suggests that ideas about ‘proper mothers’ have deep roots in our society. They affect women, and they provoke criticism of women who are mothers – whether at home, or in paid work. Women are looking for more support to assist them to mother well, regardless of their ‘work’ choices, whether through a variety of childcare arrangements, paid leave, or better appreciation for those who elect to stay at home with their young children.

'I don't see Lisa Kenny as a super-mum. She has a trainer and a housekeeper and so on. We are the super-mums!'

'I'd like to know why women think they have to do more? Do we need to prove our worth?'

5. *Being at Home*

The growing proportion of women in almost every street who do paid work has changed the circumstances of parenting and being at home with smaller children. It has reconfigured our communities as we discuss below. So how are women faring who spend years at home raising their children? Some women clearly love being at home with their babies and children – almost without qualification, while for others the feelings are mixed. For a third group, being at home brought unanticipated isolation. The ambivalence was strongest amongst women who had been in paid work for some time before having children, but it was not confined to them – some women on farms shared the sense of isolation, for example. It affected women from a wide range of work experiences from professional and managerial through to clerical and manufacturing workers.

The Rewards

On the positive side, one woman who had raised her four children on a single wage that she described as basic, said that she loved ‘all of it’ being at home:

Seeing them grow up. Going places with them, school. I never had a day when I felt bad. I spaced my children out so I only had to deal with one baby at a time.

This same mother felt free of guilt about being at home (unlike the majority) and had no qualms about ‘putting my feet up and having a coffee’. She had reluctantly taken on some paid work recently, saying:

I'm not enjoying it...Two kids have left home and government support has fallen for us. We don't have any money. Given the choice, I'd like to stay at home. My husband likes me to work because he feels its is fulfilling for me.

Others talked of the delight of being there for the first steps, the importance of being there when the kids were sick, and of their discomfort with, as one put it ‘the idea of ‘handing over care. I wanted to be their mother! Once they go to school they belong to someone else.’

An older country woman recollected with real pleasure her years at home amidst a supportive community, pointing out that this community – as we discuss below – had now shrunk with farm restructuring and more women going into paid work. Her experience contrasts with that of women thirty years later.

I loved being at home with the kids. I always had lots of support, friends in the area. We'd throw the kids in the car and just go over there for the afternoon, afternoon teas or whatever, any excuse to go out. Mothers and Babies, or whatever. It was not really for the Mothers and Babies, it was for the social aspect.

Her experience is echoed in that of an Italian immigrant woman who had left a rewarding job when she had children and was now an active volunteer:

I enjoyed the time [at home]. It was rewarding and beautiful. A pleasure. I always wanted to enjoy the wonder of young life. But it is important not to hang onto them for fulfillment – to have a separate life as they grow up. I'm not much of a homemaker - at doing housework! I admire people who can make a vocation at home.

Others also felt fulfilled, both in the city and in the country, and on higher and lower household incomes:

It was good being at home. I had 4 kids in 5 years. It was good. The first steps, the first words. Plus I had to be quiet because my husband did night shift. I enjoyed it. (factory worker)

I loved it. (country woman with 2 children)

I would have stayed home forever. (country woman with 2 children)

It was a deliberate choice by my partner and me [for me to stay at home] and I have enjoyed it immensely. There have been difficult times. I've never had the urge to go back into the paid workforce. I try to go out, but I am lucky to have the choice. (full-time mother of 2 at home)

'I have enjoyed it immensely... There have been difficult times.'

The Ambivalence

For others the ambivalence is clear:

When I had my children, I had always worked full-time. I did not like being at home, Now I look back and I wish I had been better, I wish I'd liked it more. Because it was probably my chance, I didn't have to work, but I found I had demands, the kids were demanding, they were close together and I found the days were so long and the nights so short! And I didn't enjoy it, and now I'd love to stay home a bit more because noone's there and I just love it!

'What I missed...'

Women working full-time in a factory setting who had come back to work with small children expressed regret at losing early times with their children:

Day care heard her first words!

Just being with them in that time when they are at home – and the bonding. A lot of people take it for granted but if you don't have it, you miss it, you want it because they are little. We've missed out.

I'm glad I waited. I waited till my youngest was at school...towards the end it was harder [being home], just before she went to school.

Women had regrets not only about the early years, but also later on. For example, a daughter took her concerns and discussion of her first period to her close neighbour, which her mother felt a sense of loss about.

The Four Walls

Women frequently mentioned the isolation of mothering. A new mother in the country, with a wide social network and a well established country town community around her, who might be expected to surf through early mothering, describes her unexpected isolation:

When I first had Kim I had trouble with breastfeeding and all that sort of thing. I persevered and I got very distraught. I just couldn't do it...In the end I decided to put him on the bottle. He's quite demanding...I've felt that I haven't been able to do

*a lot. And that's not me. He's getting really cute now, but I really do want to go back to work. I was itching [to get back] when he was two months old, I said 'I'll come in voluntary' – even though I was on maternity leave! I feel I need that - the people. I'm not used to being home on my own. I felt isolated. I had a caesarian, and I didn't drive. Mum said 'How can you feel isolated? You're in the town and everything!' but I said I'm here but I feel I can't get out. The baby needed me at home. I felt I had noone until Frank got home at night and then I'd say 'Here you are, you have him'. And I didn't cope as well as I thought I'd cope. **(new mother, in the workforce for 17 years before her first baby)***

Others simply hated it. Several women, particularly those now in paid work referred to the four walls: 'I had to escape those walls!'. As a professional woman in a country town put it:

Laura: I hated it. Well I was in a small business of my own, I employed a locum to help and I was breast-feeding for the first 12 months. I chose to go back to work. My mother-in-law said I'll look after the baby, but as soon as I said I was going back to work, all services were withdrawn! Everything, except from my mum who was a long way away. Because I chose to keep my business, and not change my name and return to work. So I employed a nanny and wherever I went Nanny went, and I fed the both of the children for 12 months. So I had to make it work. In private business you can do that, if there's an avenue to do it financially. But here [at the hospital] I can't. It's very different. My children have grown up in my workplace, but now they can't... The work is totally different.

Clearly income conditions the choices available to women, but 'four walls fever' was no respecter of income, or age:

'I was climbing up the walls'

*I was working full-time for 30 years and I was made redundant. I thought that's it, I'll go and do some voluntary work. I wanted to take a break of about a year, but after about 5 months I was climbing up the walls, and a friend of mine was leaving work and she felt bad about leaving them in the lurch and she said 'you'll be great at that'. It was a few hours a week. I needed to be needed and to be out there with people but not to be 8 hours a day. **(casual worker, no children)***

Some women escaped the walls through study. As one said:

Study gives you another focus outside of home – It's good. If it's good for me, then it's good for my boys, I know that!

Women with extensive work experience before becoming mothers were most likely to want to return to work after having children. They spoke of feeling isolated. A man at home also spoke of isolation:

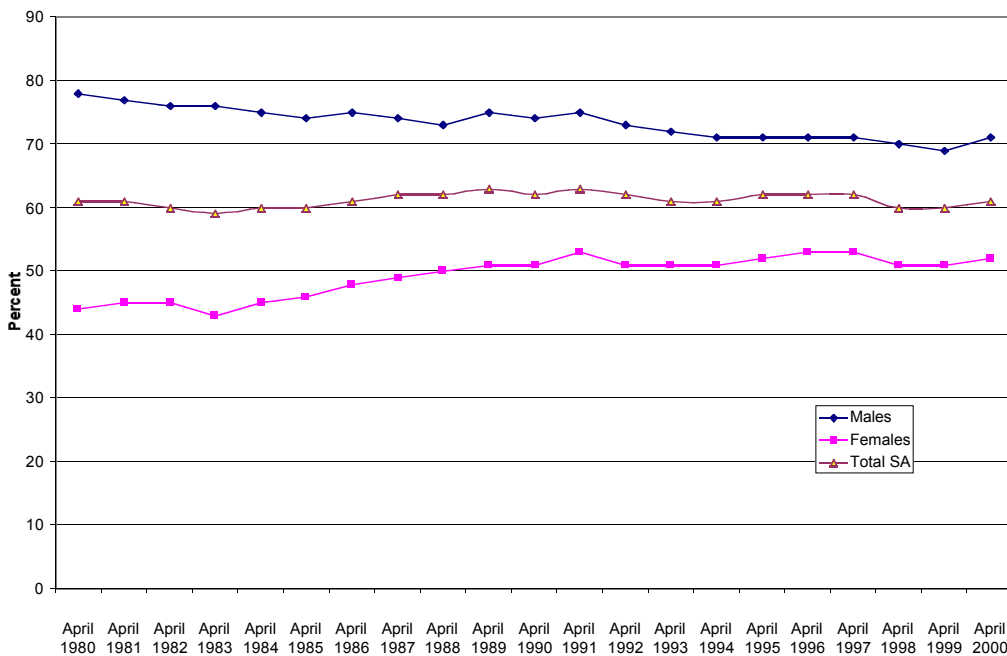
*Men are isolated. Generally women talk to each other. In the eight years I've been at home I have been invited (for coffee) only a couple of times. Women confide and have friendships, there is strong unity, but men don't get that support. Men don't think they need that support – male friends are made in social events with alcohol. Old friends couldn't spend time to chat about children. **(man at home with children)***

6. Why Women Work Outside the Home

Women now make up 44 per cent of all paid employees in South Australia, the same level as nationally, and compared to 37 per cent in 1980.

Figure 6.1 shows a convergence in the participation in the paid labour force rates of South Australian women and men over the last twenty years. Participation includes those in employment or unemployed. In 1980, 44 per cent of women and 78 per cent of men in the state were in the labour market. Twenty years later, the proportion of South Australian women in paid work, or looking for it, had grown by 96,000 to 52 percent. Against this, men’s participation rate had fallen to 71 per cent.

Figure 6.1 Participation in the labour force, South Australia 1980-2000



Source: ABS labour market survey, Cat. 6203.0, various years

The participation rates for South Australian men have fallen over the last twenty years, as has been the case for men in the nation as a whole. Whereas in 1980 South Australian men had a participation rate in the paid labour market at about the national rate, they had fallen below the national figure by the year 2000.

While men's participation rate has been higher than women's throughout the period, this labour market change represents a significant social transformation. The number of households supported by full-time unpaid domestic labour of women has fallen significantly. Many thousands of hours of unpaid domestic labour have disappeared into the paid labour force over the past 20 years (and these domestic tasks have not been redistributed evenly between the sexes.)

These patterns follow the national (and international) trends. However, women's and men's participation rates are lower in South Australia than in the nation as a whole, perhaps reflecting the state of the more depressed labour market, and higher rates of hidden unemployed represented by higher proportions 'not in the labour force'.

Table 6.1 Participation in the labour market SA, Australia, April 2000 by number by percent.

	Men	Women	Total
Adelaide			
'000 persons	305	239	544
%	71	52	61
Balance of State			
'000 persons	112	81	193
%	71	52	61
All SA			
'000 persons	418	319	737
%	71	52	61
Australia			
'000 persons	5431	4233	9664
%	73	55	64

Source: ABS labour market survey, Cat. 6203.0

The number of women employed in the paid labour market in Adelaide has steadily risen over the last twenty years. This has not been the case for women in rural South Australia (that is to say, in the balance of the State). Their numbers in the paid labour market have remained steady. The number of men employed outside of Adelaide has declined over the last twenty years. Clearly the employment story in South Australia is a different one for rural and urban areas.

In the 20 year period, women have increasingly entered paid work in the city, while there has been little change amongst women in the country. Amongst men, country employment has fallen, while it has shown a fairly flat trend amongst men in Adelaide.

Why work? Community and Social Life: 'Work is like a family'

Surprisingly, when asked why they worked many women spoke first of the socially and personally rewarding aspects of work, turning to the financial aspects often only when prompted. These rewards of community, friendship and support were spoken of by women in office-based, document processing, factory, supervisory and more senior

positions. The following exchange between three women working in a factory is indicative, showing the multiple motivations for doing paid work, with the social side to the fore:

I initially went back to work for the social side of it because I was stuck at home and I just looked back over my life and the best friendships I had were through people that I'd met at work, so I figured I'd go back. It was the social side of it. Obviously the money. But it was the social side of it as well.

I mean if you are home on your own the four walls tend to encroach on your living space. There's only so many hand-marks you can scrub off the wall without going nuts.

And getting away from the kids and having something for yourself.

'Obviously it was the money. But it was the social side as well'

A country woman spoke in similar terms:

I actually enjoy working. I'm a better person and a better mother because I work.

This sense of community through paid work also was evident in country towns. Here the workplace was described as 'your support network' especially for women moving to the town and trying to make a network, but even for women in long established community networks who felt very isolated at home when they had children:

I really did feel isolated. All the people that I knew they had different interests and values as me, and so it was very hard. I had always worked, and I needed to go back to work... My husband was saying 'for God's sake go out and get a job. I want you out of the house', and my mum was recognising the same thing.

Necessity

For many women work is a financial necessity. As one woman working in a factory put it, with the general agreement in the group:

I work for money! It's a necessity nowadays One income is just not enough.

Casual workers shared the same motivations – both financial and personal:

It pays the bills. It goes a long way to making life a bit more comfortable. It give satisfaction. You feel like you are worth something.

Yes it's a self-esteem thing...

Its money and the social things...

I don't know what I would do if I was at home. I'd go mad. I'm not a person who can be happy at context only at home with 4 children. It's that balance – fulfillment of yourself of what you have achieved as a professional and as a wife and mother.

If I had a rich benefactor I wouldn't work. Not paid work. I'd work because I see that there's heaps of things in the community that I'd really love to do, but no-one's going to pay me to do it...I'd do all sorts of things. I wouldn't just sit at home. It's about being involved in my community – making a positive difference.

They all agreed that it was now too hard to live on one wage. As one put it ‘One income is for necessities – food, mortgage. The other income is for the extras, which you won’t be able to afford without the second income’:

Leena: If you want to take kids to the movies – the popcorn etc, it costs \$50.

Kate: So it’s for a better quality of life. To afford that car.

Necessity leads to work for many, especially single mothers, but also for couples, and for women in the country as well as the city:

*Janine: It’s not so much whether or not I want to work, or whether I want to stay home with my children, it’s a financial thing these days. Society has made us this way, that we have to go back to work. It’s really not fair when people criticise working mothers, because in our situation when we have children we pay maintenance, we’ve got a housing loan, we physically would not be able to afford for me to not continue to work. I’ll only be able to have a few months off, and that’s only if we save now. I’d love to stay at home with my children. **(country woman without children)***

*Jenny: I think most people would. **(woman without children)***

Annie: Honestly I couldn’t! I know – I can admit to that: I just couldn’t do it!

Country women agreed that work was a necessity, one that some regretted:

Maureen: I worked just to survive.

*Vicki: Before my partner and I separated we were surviving on one wage but now being separated I have to work. *(she cries)**

Enjoying Work

Making a contribution is also a strong motivation;

It’s not so much a need to work as also a want to work. If you’ve been in the workforce, if you’ve been educated, and then get married...you still have that desire to make a contribution to your family unit, being just a mother is not wholly and solely your identity.

And some had to contend with the traditional values of their husbands:

I always liked to work between each child until I had my fourth child and my husband didn’t like me to work. He enjoyed the money but he put these extra pressures on me to do everything but now I’ve had 4.5 years at home before I’ve gone back to work, he’s actually done the full circle and realised that it’s OK, he’s encouraged me to go and work.

Do you think that’s because his mum didn’t work?

*Absolutely! His view was you don’t go and do anything physical because that’s the man’s job: ‘You stay this side of the ramp and make sure that’s toilet’s clean’. Of course I’m really good at that? *(laughs)*...I think he thought I should go out and play bridge and play golf. I mean, this would be his ideal – to make me the*

traditional farmer's wife - where it's a lucrative income and you could afford to go out and do good things.

And then they can have all the say!

So what shifted?

He actually realised I really wasn't very good at cleaning toilets! He actually said 'You're not going to change are you?' I said 'No. This is me. This is how I am.' He hoped deep underneath, right under there, that maybe I'd change. He's accepted that I won't now. Now we have a cleaner!

Whereas my husband's expectation was that I would go barmy if I stayed home, and he was worried about that.

I've got the total opposite My father-in-law said to my husband 'Oh well Sally could perhaps go back to work now...' as well as everything else. My husband brought it up to me...'You know what dad said..' I said 'Oh all right I'll go and look for some part-time work... That's fine. But I won't be able to be there at seeding at harvest'. He said 'No you can't go out and work can you?' When you weigh it up...

You're so hands on, they realised the loss there - that they couldn't afford to let you go.

'He actually realised I really wasn't very good at cleaning toilets!'

The issue of using skills and a sense of professional pride affected many women, including women in earlier eras. Earning an income is of course critical to women who find themselves single parents:

I went back to work in the late 60s and we had moved around a lot. We were in the riverland and they asked me would I come and work in the hospital. There weren't many double certificated nurses about. So my youngest was starting school - I did 2 days a week in school hours so I could handle the kids. My husband asked after a few weeks 'Don't I give you enough money? Why are you going back to work?' I said 'Because its my profession, I'm trained and I enjoy it'. It's the pride. He did agree to me doing it. It gave me personal satisfaction. It kept my registration going and it was very important when my marriage broke up.

'To Escape Home, For Independence, To Avoid being a Cranky Mother'

Many women felt that they would 'go bananas' if they didn't work, that they were more sane because of time away from their kids. Some talk of being housebound: 'I had that terrible feeling of being scared of going outside. I realised that I needed to get out'. Alongside this, the sense of accomplishment from work outside the home including from voluntary work (that Maggie and Sarah clearly describe below) is strong. A sizeable portion of women look for a sense of who they are, and public acknowledgement, for activities outside the home, as the following exchange between city women in a variety of situations, reveals:

Hilda: I work to get away from the kids! (laughter) Honestly, I find it harder at home with him than being at work.

Mollie: I do too.

'I work to get away from the kids'

Maggie: When you go to work there is a measure and a scale of productivity that you can measure yourself against, that you get satisfaction from. Whereas at home there is nothing there to say you've done a good job, you've achieved this.

Sarah: I feel that I've fallen into a bit of a sort of a nebulous life in a way. Because it's not really acknowledged by anybody because I don't go to the workplace. I do my work at home...its not seen by anybody, so none of my friends think that I work...Like Doreen's husband said to me 'What do you do?' I don't feel like I have any external acknowledgement. I haven't realised this until we just talked now. So probably the most acknowledgement I get is through my voluntary work, through this childcare centre, where the relationships I have with these guys and the other voluntary work that I do...I get more self-satisfaction and pleasure with this voluntary work.

Maggie: When you work you get a salary. When you study you get results. But at home...

Doreen: I work in the family business. I enjoy working. You feel like you have accomplished something. Staying at home you clean the house and five minutes later its gone. I've always worked. I think also if you don't earn a wage you feel guilty spending your partner's wage – if I haven't earned it, I'll go without.

Heather: I can't imagine not having my own income. Being totally dependent on somebody else. Having to ask for money. I think that must be the worst...My mother had to ask for money and I think that must be the worst.

Maggie went on to talk about how being away from the home – whether through her work as Chairperson of the childcare centre, or through her study – resulted from her realisation that in order to avoid being 'a cranky mother', she needed some things for herself:

Maggie: I recognised a long time ago that to be happy and content I needed to get a balance in my life, of stimulation mentally and doing the other roles. And I'm not naturally nurturing – I never got that great glow when I had my children. I love my children – but I can't mother them day in, day out. I would be bad for them. So what I've done is adjusted my life so that I have things that I do on my own, and I have family time and relationship time, and I maintain a balance so I am good in all those roles instead of being a cranky mother all the time, and not pursuing my own things. My children have to compromise with not having me around all the time, but when I am there, I am better for them. So I see it as balance for me. I've changed my career, I've been out of work for 2 years (studying to become a nurse), and then I'll go back into full-time work and my husband and I will probably end up doing a role reversal.

Other women shared concern about dependence on their partner's pay, along with the sense of accomplishment.

*You have to prove it to yourself. To accomplish something. It feels so good. My first husband – I had to line up for my husband's pay. It was degrading. The things was 'Army wives didn't work'. Now, I have to prove it to myself, and I enjoy it. At the moment I'm helping. I enjoying showing other workers how to do things (**hospital worker, mother of 3**)*

'Going Bananas'

These women went on to describe their mother's lives, and the frustration that they felt they had seen as children in their mothers, who were described as unhappy:

Maggie: My mother was totally self sacrificing. I rarely remember her being happy, and now she is a bitter and unhappy woman. I don't want to have a life like that. (part-time student, mother)

Hilda: And I agree. My mother had dinner cooked every night. Fresh linen every Saturday. I don't know how she did it. I would have gone bananas. I can remember her complaining and being unhappy about it. She didn't like it. But I think I've got it easy. I don't feel that there is the same expectation that I'll do all of that stuff. I don't feel there is that same expectation from my partner. Like you can buy take away and you can pay somebody to do your ironing. Although my mother still disapproves of me buying take away!

This sense of being cranky when with kids all the time, wasn't confined to the city:

If I had to stay at home all the time – like on the school holidays - I'd kill the poor kids! (country town mother of 2)

While many women at home enjoyed their time at home with small children. Others did not – whether they had easy babies or not:

I found it very frustrating. We had to go down to one wage and I had no family to help; and I found it really hard. I'd have everything done in the house by 9 o'clock and then I'd be wondering what to do. I had lovely easy babies.

Oh mine were just the opposite. I'd do a load of washing and at nine o'clock at night I'd howl because it was still sitting by the door! I had terrible, unsettled babies.

Younger women faced isolation from their friends, as this young woman who has recently moved to the country goes on to suggest:

All my friends worked and I was the first one to have a child. So they were all still at work, and they'd still be going out till 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and ringing me up at 11 o'clock saying 'Hey lets go and see this band' and I'm like 'Oh yeah?' Cause I was up at 5 am.

'Mothers' or 'Workers': Identity and the Value of Mothering

The following exchange between women living on farms shows that while some women wanted to earn to make their own contribution and because it was part of their sense of themselves and their identity, others didn't feel that need:

Kerry: It's not so much a need to work as also a want to work. If you've been in the workforce, if you've been educated, and then get married...you still have that desire to make a contribution to your family unit, being just a mother is not wholly and solely your identity. (senior manager, full-time, document centre, mother of 1)

I personally disagree, because I've chosen not to go back into the full-time workforce. I can understand why people do that. I just feel that while the farm is financially able to support the family, if I'm able to be there for my children at the right time, then I'm quite content to do that. I still want to do that. I still have the option if the school rings me up and wants me (to work) for a week, then OK I'll come out. So I'm happy with what I'm doing. I don't feel as if I need to go (out to

paid work) to prove myself - I can just go and jump on another committee and they'll be grateful for it.

The identity issue seemed more significant for women with qualifications, professional women, and women with pre-motherhood work experience (especially many years of it). It seemed to be less of an issue for women who worked casually or part-time. Women in middle and senior management clearly talked about the way that work contributed to their identity:

Kerry: I strive for the best I can. I am to an extent who I am at work. It defines me. My work is worthwhile, especially when you have responsibilities. It is all tied up with my self worth and who I want to be.

Rita: Yes. Just because I have a child doesn't mean that I have to give up who I am.

Others wanted to use their skills and make a contribution to their family and their communities:

We could survive on the money from the farm but I have the skills so why not work.

The following exchange between farm women illustrates women's awareness of the low valuation of women when they are at home. Some also shared a strong sense of identity through work, common to women in the city and country, and across a range of age groups and levels in the workplace:

What do you get out of work?

Confidence, self esteem, self-satisfaction, motivation.

The farm can be very isolating.

I can't just be a wife. I want to be me. I'm not just someone's wife. Just some appendage.

And then you have children, and you lose that identity and you have to get it back again. And you get treated differently once you have kids.

Jenny: When I was on maternity leave I used to be embarrassed when I would be introduced to someone and they would say what do you do?' And I'd say Oh er...and I'd think I'm just at home with my kids and there's absolutely no value put on that. And then I'd be embarrassed. And then I'd say 'I'm currently on maternity leave', and suddenly, well, that was OK! (laughter) It was OK to say that! It made you equal with them.

Do you mean it was OK in their mind or OK your mind?

Jenny: I think I mean OK in my mind. It may not have mattered to them. But it was just like a value thing that you attach to it.

So what does that mean for the value of mothering?

Yeah. Well, where is it?

It should be valued as a top job!

Jenny: They didn't want to hear me say that I am home looking after my 2 kids. They want to hear me say that I actually do do something. Perhaps it wasn't my value, perhaps I was scared that I wasn't living up to their expectations and say that I'm just at home with my 2 kids.

Describing herself as 'on maternity leave' rather than disappeared into the nether regions and non-identity of 'mother-at-home', retrieved for Jenny a sense of worth and identity that was significant to her community and perhaps to herself as well. The need to be 'on maternity leave' – and still a worker with a workplace attachment - whilst a mother at home, is symptomatic of the increasing 'non-person' status that our community now confers upon mothers – despite occasional rhetoric to the contrary about the value of motherhood.

Those who respect full-time mothering and those who do it, work against the grain of society where so much of our worth, value and self is shaped by our worker identity. The implications of this shift for mothering are to lower its status even further . This leads women like Jenny to rename themselves as 'temporarily away from work' rather than fully occupied raising the next generation.

Women in paid work adopt similar shielding and renaming behaviours: some report avoiding mentioning their breast-feeding or childcare commitments, and their maternal status. The pressure to maintain the appearance of a non-maternal worker is becoming more severe, and it contributes to women's decisions to reduce family size.

7. Pressure Points and Work Outside the Home

There are a number of points at which the pressures of home and paid work particularly hit. Some of these affect health, self-care, emotional balance and, as we shall see, relationships and intimacy. Without doubt, however, the issue of sick or injured children was the major point of pressure for women and households. It threw women into crisis repetitively and the concern that women felt about ‘being there’ for their children was particularly acute around this issue.

Women are much more likely, however, in general to talk about the problem of juggling everything. They talk of ‘balancing’ rather less than imbalance. The feeling of being a little out of control, being stretched or torn, and at times chaotic was there for many. Finally, women felt the lack of time – they report a constant feeling of being in a race to get everything done.

Being Torn: Juggling, not Balancing

Women in all kinds of positions talked about juggling. As one senior woman team leader puts it

Kerin: It’s a matter of priority and we constantly have conversations about our involvement with the kids. My son is the most important thing in my life, but often work takes over and I’m still expected to do it all, so it’s about juggling it all, and not feeling guilty.

This causes real stress, especially for sole parents who must manage the juggle alone. As the following exchange between women in supervisory, team leadership positions shows, this adds more pressure and complication – which is not experienced by the men they work along side:

Joanna: If I don’t leave dead on time at 4.45pm and pick my daughter up, I get nervous and then something else happens and then I am on the phone to find out who else can pick up by daughter, while I am working out a crisis.

Kerrin: our male counterparts don’t have to do this. Or pick up the kids and then cook dinner. Anyway they are so single minded – one thing at a time! – that they couldn’t do it anyway. It’s a boy-o thing. While the expectations for the woman is that you have to be good at everything!

Rita: Yes. We are many things to many people. I am a team leader, a mother, a wife, a sister, and people unload to you and you just can’t walk away. If I do something for someone, someone else is going to miss out. There is nothing left for me!

Joan: We are constantly tired.

Tiredness was a common complaint amongst women who are in paid work. Women in factory and professional employment agreed, frequently talking about exhaustion and the absence of ‘time for me’. As a lawyer and mother of four put it:

When I went full-time I realised that from the moment I started in the morning I did not have 10 minutes for myself.

‘We are constantly tired.’

Men with small children expressed similar feelings of ‘being spent’ and saw the juggling as costly:

Abe: When you have had a really full-on day at work and you're absolutely spent and you just want to go home and do nothing, and you walk in the door and you get this barrage at the door. You want to switch your brain off.

Of course, as we have discussed, Abe and his male co-workers may be ‘spent’ but they are expending much less than the many full-time women they work alongside in terms of the double shift. Some women complained of their partner’s lack of understanding of their lack of time and the endless round of the double day:

When you get home from work and you have to start again! And you work till 9pm and then you go to bed. And they say ‘well you haven’t come and watched TV’ and you say ‘I can’t’.

Grandmothers also talk of being torn when they are part of their working daughter’s support systems:

I was always torn between my loyalties to the child, and the family and work.

‘No Time for Me’

The inability of women in paid work to take time out for themselves was widely lamented: ‘Personal space – I’d love some. It’s very thin on the ground!’. ‘Time! There’s not enough time’ (woman living in a country town). Some women with children managed to organise time out for themselves and one describes her fight to win it (she is now a single parent):

As a single parent I just take it. When they were young I really had to fight for it back then. But I’ve been fighting for it long enough now, that I just take it. I had to fight my partner. I can see that side of it, because men work long hours and want to go off with their mates on the weekend fishing. But they don’t recognise that women are doing equally if not double those hours working part-time and running a household and raising children and cleaning up. It’s a 7 day a week job. I do believe that you get to your mid-30s and you realise something is not right here, and you start to fight for it. A lot of women start to fight for it. You have to be brave enough to get out of it now and then. You have to push and say that you deserve that time out.

Every Mother’s Nightmare: Sick Children and Accidents

In virtually every focus group and interview women identified the times when their kids were sick as the moments when they felt the greatest pressure of being both a parent and a paid worker. In most groups this was the first issue women mentioned, one that they felt strongly about, and where great agreement lay.

If they are sick –

Mine CAN’T be sick! (working mother of 2)

- well, it’s a huge drama and its come to a head this week. When one of my kids is sick I can’t go to work and someone has to cancel all my patients. He had conjunctivitis, so I went to work and took him with me– but it was not well received.

And I've been pushed, so that now I won't come in when they are sick. (Physiotherapist, mother of 2, country town)

Others agreed, including those in supervisory and professional jobs:

The major crisis is when the kids are sick. You can't be in two places at once. My mother is minding mine at the moment! (supervisor, mother of 2, document processing workplace)

Accidents also cause stress and raise issues about children's safety:

More of a worry is when the kids ring up and say he's fallen down and hit his head. That's simply because they are at home unattended. Living a distance away and feeling the pressure. And it's a pressure on the kids as well. They are growing up too quick on that side of things too. (mother of 4 under 10).

Women wondered about their past decisions and the contest between commitment to their kids, and to their jobs:

Well, I look back now and what I went through. I used to try to get to work. And I wish I hadn't gone to work when the kids were sick. The bottom line is that you don't get any thanks for it. And the kids miss out.

Country women shared similar experiences of crisis and pressure around sick children:

They always get sick when you have deadlines at work! They know!

Last week Louis knew I had a day off and would be at home. He came in to me and he said 'I've been sick all week, and the teacher said to me, 'Louis you should go home'. And I said. 'But I can't There's no-one to look after me. And I have a sore throat and a cough, and I think I should stay home!' I said 'I think you should too!'

Many women were uncertain about whether they had access to paid leave to look after their family (and how much), and whether they could use their own sick leave to look after sick children. A great majority were making use of their own sick leave to care for their unwell children – and many had exhausted or foregone it: 'I always use my sick leave to look after her. If I'm a little bit sick I never take a sickie, because I might need it for her.' (woman in factory). Women in a range of jobs agreed, and some made ad hoc arrangements that place young children in positions of responsibility, and perhaps compromise safety:

Kate: My daughter is a chronic asthmatic and when she is really, really sick if I can't find someone to look after her, and I can't leave her in the car, I have to let my son (14 years) stay home to look after her. He uses the nebulizer and all that so my son knows...And I tell her if something is going wrong, just ring the factory and ask to speak to mum or dad and we'll come straight home. Because we don't have anyone to back us up. For three years now, he's been looking after her.

Kelly: I've been really lucky. Both of mine have not been on death's door, really sick. My son has juvenile arthritis. I have to take him to the specialist. They have been really good here. And they've let me take an hour or two off but we try and tee them on my early days so that I don't have to take time off. Otherwise they look after themselves unless they are on death's door...They are teenagers.

'I look back now...and I wish I hadn't gone to work when the kids were sick...you don't get any thanks for it.'

Other parents also raised concerns about children with chronic conditions and the impact upon parents and kids:

When my daughter was little, she was asthmatic. I've had very supportive parents. I had friends who didn't. They helped when she needed to have the nebulizer. When you think that one in four kids is asthmatic – and a lot of schools now will not administer medication. I'm concerned about kids that have asthma or diabetes, what happens to them?

Many would simply forego income to be at home though this option was not always available or acceptable. As a physiotherapist put it:

But I can't afford a week off like that...When the kids had an allergic reaction I had to ring my mum – my parents are in their seventies and had to drive 300 kilometres in the roo-infested dark. I was an absolute wreck when they got there – I didn't even know if they would arrive!

Grandparents and extended families were vitally important – where they were available – in these moments of crisis: 'I have a mother in law who is fantastic. I get help from my extended family when they are sick' (Full-time mother of 3). Others agreed and only used their mothers for emergencies.

Some did not use their own mothers, seeing them as having done their turn:

My mother doesn't want to be involved, as she has had seven kids and spent over 40 years bringing them up. But over and above that, I want to be there when my daughter is sick, noone else. If I have to choose between the boss and my child, I choose my child. I take the time to get her well. (Joan: team supervisor, document processing)

Clearly, such 'choices' create real dilemmas and stress, with many women wanting to prioritise their children. A contest for commitment is underway, and sometimes women make arrangements that are less than ideal. As one mother of two children, 11 and 13 in a senior supervisory position described it:

It is difficult to just get there when you are called to a sick child. I am teaching them more responsibility. I sign them out (of school), take them home, and depending on how sick they are, I stay or go back to work.

Women without extended family in nearby proximity found making emergency arrangements much more difficult, and young women listening to these stories questioned their own capacity to cope. As one country woman put it:

That half puts me off even starting a family. I have no family here. My mum works full-time and she's in Adelaide. Where would I leave my child?

The care of sick children, and the call upon grandparents to help, affects women's capacities to study and certainly to advance in their paid workplaces. A grandmother talks about helping her daughter (who is a new mother), and about being a grandparent with a second 13 year old daughter still at home:

Candice: My daughter was just recently doing some full-time study. And her little one got sick. He's 18 months old. And I had to take him on, because he was in daycare. She missed some of her studies which made it difficult for her to catch up. So it can be very hard to catch up for those who are studying.

This also created dilemmas for Candice as she continues:

It was difficult for me on the days I was meant to be out working, but then the father of the little one took the day off. Because it's not really my place to not go to work because of my grandchild. It wasn't really my problem... You get torn a couple of different ways. You have to be a mum, a worker and a grandparent.

Other grandmothers surrendered their own studies to help their children:

My partner and I actually looked after my granddaughter when she was 4 and 5, and I was at uni studying and working part-time. There was no support, no help if you're doing this as a grandparent. In the end I had to give up – I gave up Uni in honours year because it was just too hard.

While it might be expected that families on farms had more options with respect to care, this is not always the case and sometimes carries safety hazards for children who spend the day around moving machinery and distracted fathers:

You don't get any support when you are on a farm. My husband can sometimes be a bit flexible and I had a family day carer. But the guilt is still there. You try to give all, and then it's you who misses out.

Some saw the need for government action and for more flexible all-in-one leave that gave parents and employees greater say over how they used their leave, rather than be deceitful:

*We use our own sick leave. Or grandparents. So its unfair, its personal leave – you should be able to choose how you use all you leave. So you can be honest. So that governments actually know what you are really using your leave for – and can say 'well look we have a lot of sick kids – mothers who need to be home' (**mother and full-time worker, city**)*

*I would like carer's leave. So you don't have to use your own leave. Some here have nothing in terms of carers leave – it's not in their award. (**nurse in city, mother**)*

'You should be able to choose how you use all your leave. So you can be honest.'

Others found the control that being in their own small business gave them, very liberating. Indeed some women clearly establish their own businesses to be more flexible on their own terms. For example a physiotherapist described how she took her babies to work when they were very small; she then had the funds to hire a nanny. Another woman described taking her babies to work in the small family business with great success. Unfortunately not all small businesses gave such flexibility, especially to their employees, a number of whom reported a lack of flexibility where the number of employees was small.

Issues around caring were not confined to mothers of young children: many women talked of the caring responsibilities they had with respect to aging parents, and grown up children with disabilities:

We are faced now with sickness in my parents. So their role in helping look after the kids is being restricted and we are having to look at our options. One thing that is missing is a nurse in the childcare industry, so that if you have to go to work, you can call upon a nurse or someone specialising in taking care of sick children. You are not allowed to take them to childcare because of infection, and sure you'd like

to be there but if you can't be there and you are risking reputations, jobs, livelihoods. It would be good to have another option. (mother of 2, city)

School holidays and pupil free days were also points of pressure, with working mothers and fathers juggling their holidays and taking them separately to cover the periods:

Lately we work out how one of us can be with the kids so we don't have holiday together.

Travelling

Women in the country talked about the travelling that was required when they entered paid work. This affected women living on farms who in some cases had to drive round trips of many kilometres to drop their children at childcare and then get to work, and back again. Similarly women living in country towns, where childcare facilities in general are thin on the ground, traveled long distances that were costly both in terms of time, money and tired children and parents.

Exhaustion, not Ill Health?

Women in the paid workforce were more likely to talk about exhaustion than sickness as a consequence of work, as this exchange of factory workers suggests:

Interviewer: Does being in paid work affect your health?

All: Not really. Not really.

Katerina: I think its better. I look at my mum who's never worked and she spends all her days at the doctors or talking about things she's going to do at the doctors. She spends more time worrying about her health. Whereas women her age who are working, don't.

All: We don't have time to be sick!

Leena: When you have had a break it is hard to come back.

Kelly: You are exhausted more than sick!

These were not the only women to see some positive outcomes for health for women in paid work. As a new mother and city clerical worker recently returned to paid work put it: 'Coming back to work has been good for me mentally. It's stimulating. It's good.'

However, some saw a link between exhaustion and health issues, as a call centre employees reveals:

I'd like to bring up an issue of stress related illness in the women that are working. I had to have a hysterectomy last year and I really believe that working has exacerbated the symptoms that I had.

For some women, tiredness was so endemic that they did not realise when they were really sick, even when they were medical professionals:

I actually had something wrong with me recently but didn't realise I was sick because I thought it was normal to be so tired! (Doctor, mother)

'I had to have a hysterectomy last year and I really believe that working has exacerbated the symptoms that I had.'

Other women had decided to throw in their jobs to try and find less exhausting alternatives:

Candy: In my own example, I had high blood pressure last year. It all became too much and I had to make some choices, and this year again I get so exhausted. Sometimes I am utterly and utterly exhausted so it is really difficult. I don't get rostered days off because I am only part-time. And that is why I am going to give this job up next year and explore what other alternatives are available. (community service worker, single mother of 1)

Men who were single parents also described exhaustion as a result of the double shift :

Peter: Sometimes I do find I get very exhausted. I get home and I would just like to sit down for that half an hour and just relax, but I have just got to do other things And by 8 o'clock when she is in bed I have really had it and I've got no energy to do anything. So you go to bed and get up and get yourself motivated to do it all over again...It's like working two shifts, one after the other. (maintenance worker, single father of 1)

'You make trade-offs on your health.'

The sacrifice of women's own sick leave to care for their children's health crises was widespread, with consequences for workplace productivity:

I find when I'm unwell, unless I'm dying, I come to work. Being part-time, your sick days are limited. And I take a sick day for my child rather than myself because I have to keep those days for her.

And then everyone around you gets sick!

Yeah – you make trade-offs on your health. How many fathers take the time off like that to look after their sick kids? It's women.

8. The hidden cost of paid work and mothering: relationships and intimacy

Often the most poignant stories collected in this study related to intimate relationships and the difficulty in finding the time or inclination to be with a partner. This did not start as a research issue but arose in our first groups as an aspect of being a working mother. Women wanted to discuss it. While many were shy about talking, a sizeable number were not. They told stories that revealed a close connection between work and intimacy, with large gaps between societal expectations about relationships and their realities. Interestingly, women in more senior or higher paid positions were less likely to openly discuss this aspect of their lives. They were more protective of themselves. Women in lower level, office, or factory jobs were more jocular and open about these issues.

For a significant number, an absence of intimacy, sexual activity and physicality exists in their relationships. For some this was a source of guilt, regret and pessimism. While some women talked about a need for closeness that didn't include sexual intimacy, for many there was a general absence of interest due to tiredness and lack of both personal and relationship 'space' because of the demands of children and work. Some women took purposeful steps regularly to enable intimate communication and connection. Others saw it as a past pre-occupation that had no place or time in busy stressed lives. Many were philosophical or humorous.

It was here more than anywhere else that the 'super woman' image came unstuck. The seductress, the lover, the sexually liberated woman was either too tired, too stressed or totally disinterested.

One woman, a mother of two who worked shifts in a factory and was of non-English speaking background, described with sadness how her husband's expectations of her, after a late shift the previous evening, were quite out of kilter with her self – and led to a small rebellion one morning:

I was in bed and my husband came in and said 'Get up, my friend is coming over and I want you to look beautiful'. I got up and looked in the mirror and thought 'It would take \$200 for me to make myself look beautiful!'. I got dressed, left the house and caught the bus into the city. I had breakfast at McDonald's and read the paper. I had a really nice time. Then I rang my husband and asked him if he wanted to come in for lunch but he said no, so I asked if his friend had gone and he said yes, so then I went home. He was very nice to me after that and offered to take me to work the next day. It was the first time in eighteen years of marriage that I have done such a thing!

Women at home shared feelings of guilt and concern about not 'being there' for their partners. A full-time student and mother described it:

That's what I feel guilty about, not giving my partner enough. I wouldn't blame him if he had an affair, in a way I would understand it. I take time for myself before I give time to him.

Women in private business agreed:

I regret not being with my husband in that way but I really don't want to. Your focus shifts, our relationship has changed. You don't have the physical intimacy so then you don't have sex. I want the physical stuff, warmth, reassurance, but I don't

For many there was a general absence of interest due to tiredness and lack of both personal and relationship 'space' because of the demands of children and work.

always want the sex. I want to go to sleep! (family business, company director, full-time worker)

As the mother of a young child she went on to laugh about the need for more fuel for love:

You subjugate you sexuality, I consider myself an attractive person and if someone came into my life I could be attracted, not that I would probably follow it through, but it is there. It's just not there between my partner and I. I could appreciate other men, but it (intimacy) doesn't seem to have an outlet in our relationship. I heard Margaret Throsby talking about this philosopher who believed that there was this sort of temporary love dust that gets sprinkled on you to get you to fall in love, procreate, have children and after that you just have to get on with the arduous task of bringing them up. Just enough to fuel you into the thing and then leave you. I need more love dust!

'A lot of the time I am emotionally exhausted, I run out.'

The sources of the lack of intimacy were not hard to discern: tiredness, time, multiple demands:

We are too tired to be intimate.

The most romantic thing I have done recently is walk up and down the drive with my husband. (nurse, living on farm, and traveling to do shift work)

Lack of intimacy is the result of being both a worker and a mother, there is just no personal space.

There is no time for me as a woman. So many other people's needs come above mine. It affects us negatively. I find that a lot of the time I am emotionally exhausted, I run out.

Male partners were sometimes disinterested also:

When you are so tied up in the day to day child rearing it is hard to find the time, sometimes I want a little romp and he is not there for me either.

The absence of intimacy was seen as a serious difficulty for some:

My husband is an understanding man and understands that my work affects the time and energy I have for him but I know of a lot of people who don't (understand). I know a lot of people whose lives are falling apart. There is jealousy if the wife is earning more than the husband, loss of understanding and communication between partners, different shifts to accommodate the children. There is no time to communicate.

Geographical separation also affected some families:

It doesn't help having split families. My friend's husband works in Alice Springs and she lives here with the kids. An employer commented that this is what you should expect people to do in this day and age.

For shift workers the stresses were even greater. Three of them describe their experience:

We are like ships in the night.

We sleep in different rooms because we work different shifts.

We have a phone relationship.

Each of these women was working shifts as a means of childcare (ie they worked opposite hours to their partners to be available to care for their children). Others spoke of keeping the flame alive even when the frequency of contact was low:

We play a lot of games, toying is a substitute for the frequency but it maintains the sexuality. (Full-time student, mother, volunteer)

We play games at work sometimes. When he is in a meeting, he can see me through the window but the others have their backs to me and I roll up my top and show him my breasts to tempt him! (Part-time worker in family business, mother)

One young woman, with step children who planned to have her own before long, talked of her formal arrangements to make sure intimacy was kept alive:

We make appointments to see one another and on Thursdays we talk to each other for an hour....Then on Friday afternoons no-one is allowed to visit us! That's our time.

There were many issues around workplace and domestic structures, as well as self worth and powerlessness, that underlie women's difficulties in determining and maintaining boundaries in relation to themselves as mothers, partners, and workers.

In many cases, women are describing working within structures that have been built around the male work place and still caters predominantly for men. While economic and personal considerations now demand that women work, there has been little real response to the issues that primary carers face.

I think the pressures of the world are so great that women can't do it all. I think they (men) have come a distance, but not as far as we would like. Those days of the dad coming home to his TV are over. (Manager, government. agency, permanent casual)

Others felt more optimistic, as women realised that it took two to make relationships work:

Men are responding. They are being made more responsible, they share the role which is good. It's good. Women are realising that it takes two people to make a relationship work. (Indigenous community health worker)

Many women are questioning the basic assumption that a working woman can still be all things to all people without some personal toll on health and well being both to the individual, the family and the community.

These are the hidden costs of our work arrangements now. They are the fruit of the weight of domestic work and reproduction, the growth in paid work amongst women, and the growing pressures in many workplaces. Are we prepared to pay the price of diminished personal relationships, sex and intimacy as a result of these changes?

This question is not even on our community's agenda – mainly because the effects of work arrangements on intimacy and relationships are privately experienced. Guilt,

'We sleep in different rooms because we work different shifts.'

The effects of work and family arrangements on intimacy and relationships are privately experienced.

tiredness, lack of personal space and strained relationships are affecting many. They are partly the price of an idealised vision of motherhood, around which work arrangements – whether domestic or workplace – have inadequately adapted. The necessary accompaniments are absent in many locations – affordable, quality childcare; paid maternity and carers leave; equitable workplaces. Many appear to unconsciously turn their frustrations, perceived shortcomings and inability to be the idealised image, into private concern and guilt with significant consequences for intimacy.

9. Having Babies

Many women work when they are pregnant. Other reports have set out comprehensively, the conditions under which many women work while pregnant, or suffer discrimination while pregnant (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1999). Some women described in the process of focus groups and interviews their strong commitment to keep up their paid work while pregnant. As one woman in a small family business describes it:

I just carried my bucket with me. I was a vomiter. All the way through. I'd go to hospital and be re-hydrated... Life goes on. I was so busy. It wasn't good. I had to keep working – to get everything done (in the family owned small business). It wasn't money. It's the way I was brought up – to just keep going. I've always worked. I don't know any different. It's my fault I guess for needing to work. It was boring at home. It's what you have to get done.

Women were widely supportive of paid maternity leave. Present arrangements leave the vast majority of Australian women without any paid leave at all, when they have babies. Women working in the commonwealth public service, universities and some individual workplaces enjoy some access to paid leave, but even this is well short of the standards that apply in many other countries, including some in the Third World.

As one woman put it:

We need maternity leave. I felt it was great to have 12 months off to have my baby.

Others sought more flexibility in relation to the existing leave that they had access to, or had accumulated:

Paid maternity leave – it would be great. It would be great to also be able to use your sick leave.

The issue of paid maternity leave driving a wedge between those who would use it and those who would not (men and non-pregnant women) led some to suggest greater access to paid leave across the life cycle – for study, care of elders, long service, personal development and so on.

Maternity leave would be great. But wouldn't it discriminate against those who don't want to have children? What I'd like to see is all your leave lumped into one and you take it as you want – for study, to look after older parents or whatever.

Women in small business also suggested that useful support might take more than one form:

Couldn't the government offer a flexible incentive or support for women when they have kids? It should be available to everyone, whether they work in the public or private sector? There are still two different arrangements.

Paid maternity leave is available to only a small proportion of the South Australia's working women. If we wish to see our birth rate maintained, and the circumstances of early mothering and parenting improved, then paid maternity leave is an important key.

Breast-feeding breaks

Some women supported the idea of breast-feeding breaks at work:

It would be good to have breast feeding leave – at home if possible – or getting half an hour off to go the child, or whatever.

However, this was scorned by women in factory environments. It failed to meet their needs, and they resented the community perception that all women worked in tidy, safe offices:

Lynette: A lot of the media and general thinking about women in the workforce - they think we all work in offices. Those of us who work in factories – it's like we don't exist. It's a different set of problems for us. I did an interview on breastfeeding in the workplace recently. It was all directed at women working in offices. I said well what about those of us working in factories? And nobody seems to think of that...The media never seem to focus on women in factories, all 9 to 5... Taking a break for breastfeeding - how can you do that in a factory? – you've got the noise, dust, chemical factors – they weren't even addressed. It's much easier to say to someone 'take over my job answering the phone' rather than 'take over my job running a machine'.

10. Childcare: ‘You have to be 110% happy’

One of the major challenges and dilemmas identified by working women is childcare: its quality, availability and cost.

Patterns of use of formal childcare in South Australia do not appear very different from those nationally. Around a quarter of children are in some form of formal care (a slightly larger proportion in South Australia, than nationally, with slightly less in before and after school care; table 10.1). The most commonly used type of formal care before pre-school age is centre-based long day care affecting about 8 percent of children in Australia. Family day care is used by 2 or 3 percent.

Table 10.1 Percentage of children in formal child care arrangements, SA and Australia

Formal care	SA	Aust
Before and after school care program	6.5	4.9
Long day care program	7.7	7.7
Family day care	3.4	2.8
Occasional care	2.2	1.4
Preschool	8.4	7.4
Other formal care	0.7	0.9
Total children using formal care	25.5	23.5
Total children using formal care only	12.9	14

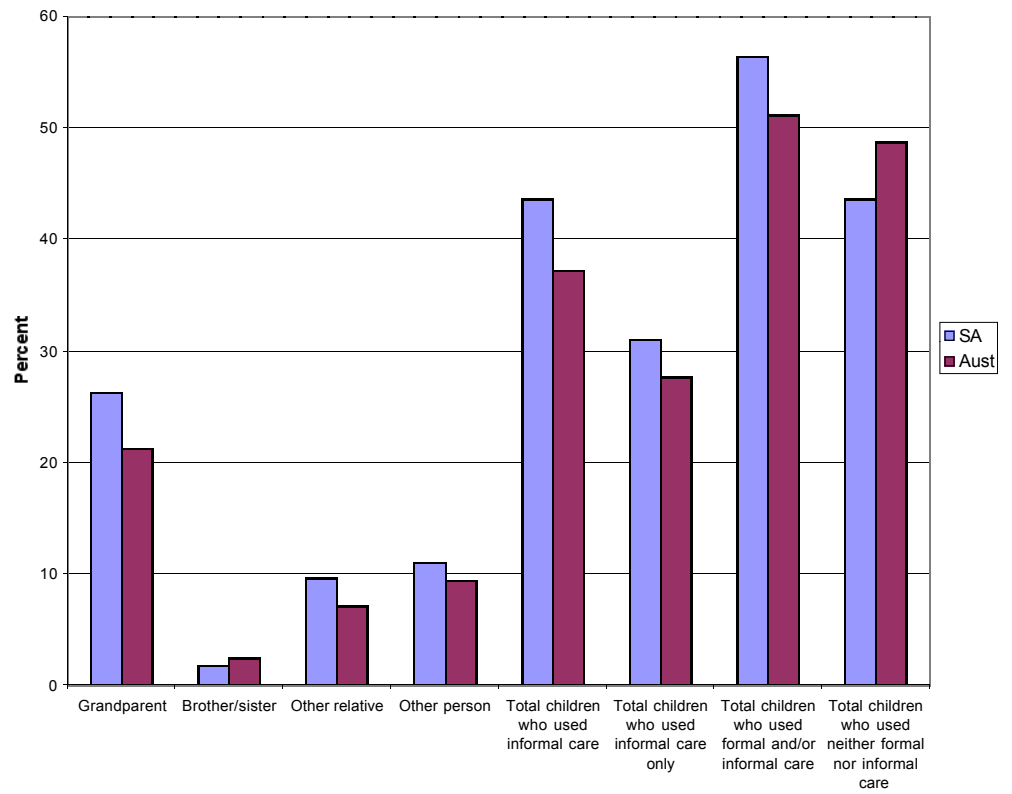
Source: Child care, Australia, ABS

Our study confirms that higher income women are much more likely to make use of formal centre based care, than are lower income households, though these patterns depended on the simple availability of care.

Our children are much more likely to be in informal care – particularly with grandparents – than in formal arrangements. The dominant types of informal care are provided by grandparents (see figure 10.1) with a slightly greater proportion in South Australia than nationally. Many parents are very reliant upon their parents for care – in an ongoing way in many cases, and in the event of sick children in more emergency or occasional basis. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of grandparents in assisting working parents. Their role is discussed specifically in the next section.

Around half of children are in some form of combined formal/informal care arrangements.

Figure 10.1 Informal child care arrangements in South Australia, Australia by percent, June 1999.



Source: ABS catalogue 4402.0

What women care about when they choose childcare

When asked what influences childcare choices, women identified the child’s happiness and specifically: quality, cost, availability (including hours), reliability and location. There was also a significant and distressing discussion around safety. There was a clear correlation between women’s satisfaction with the care their child receives and their ability to pay for quality:

Childcare is important to me but I have found it difficult. You only really get what you pay for. They used to continually sit him in front of the TV.

Family Day Care

Family day care (FDC) had been used by many women. Good family day care was seen as positive care, and for many women more affordable. On the other hand, some women expressed concern about the safety of their children in these situations:

When it was a centre I didn’t feel bad but when I was putting them in another person’s home I was worried ... fortunately that carer became a good friend.

Disturbingly, we heard a number of stories from women in which they felt children had not been safe in the FDC environment:

*I used family day care for 6 months but found out that the woman used the neighbour to care for the child while she went out. Also my son was not allowed to play with the carer's children's toy and was put outside in the rain for three hours. I stopped using her and reported it. **(woman in factory)***

*I left the Family Day Care she had been in because of an incident – I didn't ever go back. I booked her into a centre and then found another Family Day Care provider even though I had to travel extra 15 minutes. I had to do it. My trust had been broken after four years with the carer. I had a lot of guilt but had to move forward. It didn't put me off FDC totally but I became very watchful. **(woman office worker)***

*I used family day care which was good. They had a little girl. Then the woman went back to work at night and was sleeping while she was looking after the children – they would wander around on their own and I also worried about her driving them. **(Nurse)***

Women working in the country, where there was only one childcare centre available and it was many kilometres from many residents, indicated that they were finding it increasingly difficult to access Family Day Care as less and less women were offering it. These women said that the growing regulations and training requirements along with the low pay for carers, were acting as disincentives for women to take up this role.

*FDC providers are only allowed a certain number under a certain age. Why do it? Are you really making a dollar when you've got your own children as well - earning \$3.30 an hour! **(country woman on farm, working part-time)***

*The Government should subsidise so it is paid properly. **(Ex-FDC provider, country)***

*I think family day care is good but we need more incentives. FDC is getting harder and harder - training, regulations - so people are not doing it. **(country, doctor, mother)***

Safety is paramount in women's choices and yet we heard experiences where children were clearly not safe in some FDC settings. At the same time there is a demand for this care, particularly in the country. Given this dilemma there is a need to examine incentives that attract providers without removing measures to ensure safety. Interestingly the issue of safety was not raised in the country where it seemed that women were much more likely to know the providers before placing their child in their care.

Centre Based Care

When identifying why they choose centre based care women saw this care as educationally and resource richer than other options. Many felt that it provided valuable social skills. They also felt it was both reliable and accountable and thus safe. They appreciated the visibility of their children and their carers:

*Quality care at day care makes my child adaptable and fluent in talking. I honestly believe she will achieve so much more than some other kids that don't have it. She is going ahead in leaps and bounds and I believe it is the quality of care they get at day care. **(full-time manager, using workbased childcare)***

I agree. My other friend's kids had such trouble when they started kindly because he has only ever had her and he is finding the changes really stressful. (full-time manager, office)

A number of women expressed this difference in quality of care in terms of a comparison with FDC:

I have used both centre care and FDC. The family day care didn't work out. With centre based care there are less fights and personality clashes, the facilities are better and the kids learn a lot more. In family day care they don't learn a lot.

Accountability or the fact that centres provided a place 'where you would know what was happening' was an important issue for many women in choosing centre based care over Family Day Care:

I wanted a community-based centre that had eyes and ears and wasn't based in somebody's home where you didn't know what was going on. It was run by parents and there were always enough passionate people whose hearts were in the right places. (full-time student, volunteer, mother)

This difference is also captured in the story of a grandmother reflecting on the experiences of grandchildren in the different forms of care:

My daughter didn't want to send her child to day care so she had to find someone with a loose arrangement, that she was comfortable with at their place. They looked around and checked out the vibes, for example one had big dogs. They found somebody but now that she is at kindergarten there are different problems. With my other daughter, I've always believed or heard that boys under three shouldn't be placed in large groups, but it has worked well for her because he has established relationships with more than one person and there is always someone there for him. Even if someone is sick there are other faces the child knows. It's not like family day care – there are lots of programs and activities. It's been really good for my grandson; he is more content and better with others than he was, not so sooky now. (grandmother, country town)

The importance of a mother's sense of confidence in the care being provided is reflected in the following statement from a lawyer who had made use of centre based care:

The best part was being able to breastfeed and therefore being able to observe what was happening in the centre, to see the relationships between the care workers and children. I was reassured about quality. I don't know what I would have done if I had had a problem with childcare. I know of women who have pulled their child out because they were fearful. (lawyer, mother of one)

This woman felt this was because they had not had the opportunity to experience the interaction between the carers and their child.

Whilst many women expressed positive feelings about their child being in child care, and that childcare offered something that they couldn't always get at home, there were still regrets, often expressed in relation to missing such milestones as the first steps or words. Others had a strong sense of guilt:

I still have days when I feel so much guilt and don't want to take her there. I really don't have any choice as we don't have any relatives here but I still feel really guilty. (casual worker, mother)

It creates guilt that you are not there. (woman in country town)

Women also felt that the quality that they valued so highly in centre based care had been undermined by cuts in Government funding. This led some women with higher incomes to feel ambivalent about centres and sometimes make use of nannies:

I don't think there are enough good carers there; there are definite funding issues. But I also think they are really good, there are good responses. They get fed properly, toys, lovely environment. But there is not enough staff for the under two year olds. They need a lot of attention. I think my daughter felt this. We tried to spend time with her there, to get her settled but she would scream when we left. She was so pleased when we picked her up. The feedback was not good. They told me one time, after a while "oh she really is a cheerful child". Yes, I knew she was a cheerful child! It was obvious she wasn't a cheerful child much when she was there though. We called the nanny back. But I would like to keep her there on a part-time basis so that she gets used to it because she will have to be there in the future. (journalist, mother of toddler)

Both Indigenous women and women from a non-English speaking background identified the absence of culturally appropriate care as a major concern, and in the case of Indigenous women, it was seen as a reason for the use of grannies (family) care rather than mainstream centres:

Rather than having our children going into mainstream, the grannies have to do it now. They don't want to lose their kids. So that is an added responsibility for grandmothers of Indigenous people.

Other exchanges reinforced this:

Interviewer: If indigenous care was available would you look at that rather than mainstream?

Indigenous woman: Yes because we look at cultural issues.

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds concurred, including women on higher incomes in the private sector:

How important was it to have culturally diverse care?

Very important, that is why I was involved in setting up (a centre for non-English speaking background children). I wanted them to be bilingual. They respond in English a lot of the time but they understand their second language and when people come around they can understand and speak simple words. I wanted them to know how it felt to be different.

There are not many alternatives?.

No and now even the one we set up is changing back.

Informal Care

For most of the women we spoke to, informal care (including friends, grandparents and other family like older children) was being used to cope with emergencies or to top up other care arrangements. In some cases grandmothers were providing more regular care. Whilst cost was a factor in these decisions it was clear that for some it was their first choice:

I used private arrangements. That is what I felt comfortable with.

Another friend looked after Michael. He went to day care twice and didn't like it. (Nurse)

Using friends to look after children before or after school was not without its dilemmas. Women who were not in paid work and who were often asked to have an extra child, felt put upon. On the other hand women leaving their child felt some guilt in burdening another women.

I don't have extended family and beg and borrow time from friends and use school care. I don't like to use the vacation care because she is in before and after school care as it is. We try and juggle the holidays.

Women expressed concern that they were placing responsibility on older siblings to care for younger members of the family:

I hated it when my older kids had to pick up my younger kids but I couldn't do anything else.

Discussions on using grandparents to provide care provoked a range of different views. Some women felt that there was a growing expectation that grandmothers provide care and others felt that there was break down of traditional family and that this meant grandmothers were playing a smaller role. Some women felt that the childcare provided by the grandparents was positive while other women simply felt it was not the role of a grandparent to care for their grandchildren. Others differentiated between regular and occasional care. One of the main problems identified with reliance on informal care was its lack of reliability:

Grandparents are unreliable – they have their own lives and they get sick. (lawyer, mother)

A more detailed discussion of grandparent's role is included in section 11.

Shiftwork as childcare

In a range of occupations and workplaces including factories, offices, call centres and hospitals, women were choosing to work shifts at different times to their partners to avoid placing their children in childcare. This strategy was being used both because of the cost of childcare and because women saw this as enabling them to be there for their child. For some at least this form of 'tag team' care was costly in terms of disturbed or inadequate sleep, and for intimate relationships:

Doing different shifts, it is a big sacrifice. I do it for the kids because of childcare - it can be expensive and you don't have the hassle of finding someone you trust. (factory worker, mother)

For a nurse in the country working night shift meant I can put them on the bus and get them off the bus. (country nurse)

I don't use childcare – I work earlies so my husband gets the children to school and I race home to get them after school. (nurse)

One of the clear advantages of this strategy is that the issues of care of sick children and school holidays identified by other women as difficulties were not a problem. But again the choice was not seen to be without its costs:

Because I work at night I don't have these issues, but the kids miss out on me at home. I am only there for an hour after school before I leave for my shift. It is easier to balance working at night with sickness and holidays and there is always someone with them because my husband is home in the evening – but they don't get me for five hours at night.

One of the most disturbing problems with this strategy was that often the different shifts left gaps where children were at home by themselves or as this women tells us, in the carpark:

My daughter had to sit in the car in the factory car park for an hour waiting for my husband to finish his shift (He too works at the factory).

There was also a cost for the women in relation to both their own health and the impact on relationships as they passed each other 'like ships in the night'.

We worked opposite shifts to look after kids, working 11pm – 7am then looking after the baby all day. I got 3 or 4 hours sleep – I looked like a ghost. (factory worker, mother)

Availability

Women over and over again identified gaps in childcare that created real stress for them and left them juggling work and care and relying on informal care to fill the gaps.

School Holidays

School holidays were seen as a time of great difficulty and stress for many women. Whilst a number used vacation care, many indicated that they or their children were not happy to use this care because they were in after and before school care already, or in some cases they were not able to access this care.

School holidays are a problem – organising people to look after child. I feel guilt about where they are, are they happy, have you asked that person too often? It would be great not to have to worry about school holidays. (Nurse)

Before and after school care

Where before and after school care was available this was seen as a positive:

I'm quite happy. My daughter usually goes to after school care. I only use mum for emergencies. I am thankful for it as I am mindful of her situation, age, and health problems. (manager, office)

Some women raised the issue of the hours of school, and the usual hours of work: the lack of fit between them greatly complicates the lives of working mothers in particular. In many locations, before and after school care is simply unavailable. In other cases, it sits out on the edge of school in terms of its geography, management, funding and integration with schooling itself. In some cases parents have had to fight hard for the recognition of the need, and then struggle for good before and after school facilities and staffing. The different funding and management systems of school, and before and after school, create complexity and complicate juggling. Other women also raised the issue of cost. No doubt this cost leads some women to use older children to care for younger ones, or to leave children at home without care.

The absence of this care was a problem particularly in country areas, where no before and after school care was available:

My eldest is 12. I know I shouldn't but I let them walk home together – sometimes I have no choice. He's sensible and it is not far. Yes but when they get home there is no one there. (Nurse)

Now my child is at school. We choose x primary school because this is where we socialise. But school finishes at 3.00pm. There is no after school care. My husband or my sister-in-law pick up. But at harvest time he gets distracted, and this is going to be a big call on him – he will have to plan his whole day around picking up my daughter. I will have to ring him. (full-time worker, mother, living on farm)

Sport is used as childcare or they are unsupervised. After school care would be good. (country town, mother, worker)

High school and supervision of older children: A vulnerable gap

Whilst before and after school care was not available to mothers of primary school children in a number of cases, it was not available at all for children in high school and some women were very worried by this gap in care at an age when they felt children were in danger of participating in risky behaviour:

The government gives no support for children over 13 years. That is not old enough for them to be coming home from school and looking after themselves. (office worker)

I used family day care but had to be secret about it because he didn't want his friends to know (call centre worker)

Yes, this is the experimental age. I know if kids in the neighbourhood know my son is home. They all turn up and raid the pantry. (call centre worker)

Professional women shared this concern:

After school care has been great – next year (when she goes to high school) it may be an issue; school keeps its library open until 5.00pm and she can come into city office. She is an only child and I am not happy about the thought of her going home by herself. (lawyer)

Care in the Country

In addition to the absence of family day care providers, lack of before and after school care and limited provision of centre based care, women in the country identified some care issues specifically related to children on farms. The absence of care for children during busy seasons sometimes placed these children at serious risk in terms of their safety. Women from farms identified the need for seasonal care in the following discussion:

We could do with mobile childcare for busy times: shearing, harvesting and seeding – casual childcare. Nothing is available – there is risk of injury for children going with parents. We need a seasonal service – I would use one now!

Women in the country also identified the effect of distance and travel to access childcare:

But that means for you, you have to traipse all the way to (town X) for childcare?

Yep! I've got one child in kindy in one town and one child in school in another...I've been trying to get them used to catching a bus. I travel miles and miles!

Where I live they won't pick up kids. You have to drive to get them picked up.

Some also felt that their children were missing out on pre school, because as it was only half a day it was not worth travelling all the way to town, and then back to pick them up.

Hours

In a number of forums women raised the issue of the hours that childcare centres are open, and that the hours of before and after school care create pressure, given the increasing expectation that workers work longer hours.

I used to travel with a friend who was fined if she was five minutes late. I don't have any trouble here - they are really flexible. (office worker using workbased care)

Before and after care hours are changing from 6.30am – to 6.00pm. It will really put pressure on me. (office worker)

Work-based care

Women at a call centre stated that one of the reasons that they chose their workplace was the childcare centre at the worksite. Whilst most were not using it they felt it demonstrated a commitment to family.

Women in both factories and hospital settings could not understand why there was no work based childcare centres at their large worksites, and many women expressed strong support for work-based childcare. They wanted to be near their children, and could see that this would cut their travelling time. They felt that the chance to be close to where their child is cared for would greatly relieve the stress they experienced in juggling care and work:

Why couldn't they have childcare at the hospital? They have it for the siblings of patients.

Cost, funding and subsidies

The cost of childcare was a major issue for many women.

Childcare was expensive. It was a big bill every week. I don't know how it would have been on a lower income. (lawyer, mother)

For some women it contributes to a decision not to return to the workforce:

Going to work is not worth it with childcare, school holidays. My husband and kids would have to do more. (Mother at home)

There was also a view that it was not flexible and that you had to pay whether you were using it or not:

Childcare could be more flexible - you have to pay even when you aren't using it. (nurse)

There was a recognition by women that quality childcare is expensive to run:

It is harder to maintain quality and price due to staffing costs. Parents don't want relief staff they want continuity through permanent staff. There is an education program from 0 onwards, a lot don't realise the amount childcare staff are expected to do - it is stricter than teaching. (management committee member, childcare centre, mother, part-time worker)

There was however a strong view that government should play a role in ensuring the provision of affordable quality care and that they have reduced the support:

I think the government could be lobbied to bring back the support for childcare. It is a travesty if we have the service taken away that our kids need. (country town)

I like the Swedish principle. No matter how many kids you have you only pay childcare for the first one. This would encourage mothers to return to the work force... (senior manager, retail)

Clearly, women with higher incomes have greater childcare choices and many choose more expensive, centre-based care that they believe to be more educationally rich and open to observation. This pattern of income-based choice, suggests a multi-tiered early childcare system that creates and reinforces disadvantage for children in low income households. That such a multi-tiered system exists in precisely the early years that are recognised as most critical for children's development, is a serious cause for concern.

11. The Role of Grandmothers and Grandfathers

Grandparents have always been important to many families in Australia, in terms of sharing the care of children and assisting parents. Women and men in our research group, along with the available statistical evidence, confirm their continuing importance to working families. We have seen how grandparents are frequently vitally important to working mothers – who take principle care of sick children – when emergencies and sickness hit households. Around a quarter of care of informal care for children is provided by grandparents. This care is primarily provided by grandmothers, although there were examples of grandfathers setting aside their jobs to 'baby sit' children:

We are sharing it more with them. Grandpa is supposed to be paving but he's been baby sitting for the last 3 months. (Grandmother and full-time worker, city).

This role in family support has many very positive sides. Grandmothers report the enjoyment in having a close or regular connection with their grandchildren. And many mothers talk about how wonderful that extended family has been for their children:

My mum is the 'holiday grandmother'. So my kids have had the wonderful experience of farm life through my mother. It was brilliant.

And for the grandmothers themselves:

Selina: When we adopted our child, my mother was going through a bad patch. He gave my mother a reason to live. She had to cook for him, so she started eating again. It was important for her to identify with him.

On the down side, however, is the risk that grandparents, having raised their families, now do more care than they would perhaps freely choose to do. It is not hard to see why many do this: to help their daughters, who they see trying to juggle their demands. Certainly, some grandmothers talk of being torn, and feeling guilty for not doing more, just like their daughters' generation. A number of women observed the growing demands on grandmothers, including from those working casually and part-time:

My mother looked after my brother's kids. Because that allowed by sister-in-law to work. She thought it was something that she should do. I think you see more grandparents taking on the role and I think there is more of an expectation that they should, especially for those who can't afford childcare or who work casually. (Lorraine, no children, casual worker)

With my friends, they seem to have a regular day where they look after their grandchildren and then they may go to childcare on another day. Sometimes I think they like it as they have a permanent relationship with their grandchildren. But several I know also feel restricted and feel they will let their kids down if they stop. (grandmother of 2, casual worker)

Several observed a greater presence of grandparents doing 'pick up' at school and kindy.

Many women and their partners are conscious of the possibility of overload. Women reported decisions to reduce the involvement of their mothers for diverse reasons. One

Grandparents are frequently vitally important to working mothers.

new mother in a country town had cut down on what her mother had offered, speaking of the grandmother's many existing commitments:

'There is definitely pressure to be there. But for the first time in my life, this is my time and I'm not going to give up my fitness class.'

I've had a lot of support from my mother. She was actually going to look after [my new son] five days a week and I said I think it might be a bit much. Because mum's a very busy woman on a lot of committees and things, and I said 'It'll be too much' and she said 'oh no no no'. I said perhaps we'll take him up to the childcare center because I've heard lots of good reports about that...one day a week. Well, then we thought two days a week...and now its worked out really well. And I feel comfortable in that before I do go back to work, that that's going to work.

A city-based mother had reduced her mother's role to reclaim her role as parent:

My kids have spent a lot of time with grandparents. So much so that I had to move to let them know that I was the parent. They were the grandparents, not the parents. I used family day care then, a friend.

Some grandmothers were very conscious of the pressure to do more, and women in their communities supported their right to 'choose' as this exchange suggests:

Veronica: I'm pretty busy and sometimes I feel as though I am in Coventry with my daughter. There is definitely pressure to be there. But for the first time in my life, this is my time and I'm not going to give up my fitness class (which she teaches). (retired mother and grandmother, country town, volunteer)

Christine: I think it's good when you can choose to be a grandparent (country woman, retired, mother)

Betty: It's different to years ago. Grandparents are expected to look after the kids now. Parents need someone to look after them. Grandparents have a bigger role to play nowadays. (grandparent, country town)

Veronica: Though I don't think grandparents are good for looking after them for long stretches.

Betty: You have definitely got to have your own time.

Others working in a nursing home saw the load on older members of the community, with caring responsibilities across the age range as we live longer:

Jackie: There's a generation out there now of people in their 60s and 70s who are looking after an elderly parent and babysitting grandchildren full-time during the week. (nursing home worker)

Some families rely on grandparents to do the before and after school care on a daily basis:

My parents come down and do the before and after school care, and holiday care...They put their hands up to do the care.

However, many others were careful about not imposing, as these individual comments suggest:

I couldn't ask for care. I felt it was imposing to ask my parents. I worked weekends to cope.

I never wanted to ask my parents. I felt it was imposing. (nurse)

It should be a matter of choice for the grandparents.

My mother is in the country. I wouldn't ask my mother to do childcare. – the time for her to do care is over. I wouldn't expect my mother to do it.

We decided we didn't want to impose. We both needed to work for the lifestyle we wanted. And we wanted a professional, doing a professional job. (manager, male)

This comment raises the issue of the outcomes of grandparent 'babysitting', that some mothers spoke of:

My dad has no idea how a three year old thinks...Its like having an extra child! He's not a help at all.

Many felt that 'Grannies' are for magic time – for fun, movies, once a week: that they should be 'special treats, not carers'. Or they saved grandparents' care for 'couple time' and emergencies:

I have a wonderful mother-in-law who is happy to have the kids on the weekend – for our own social time. She helps out, where it gets difficult. This is where a child gets sick and there is that guilt there of women having to perform 110 per cent more than men. Because we have to balance and prove that we can do it all. So there is that guilt there about us having a day off, so that's where I'm lucky to have a mother-in-law who I can ring and ask...I have a back up, I'm very lucky.

In contrast some women elected not to involve their mothers because of differences in values or ideas, or because the expectations of reciprocity were burdensome:

I know I would have a conflict with the way she would do it. I have different views. Whereas with family day care you can say what you want.

When we first came over, mum and dad put their hands up to pick up the kids from school but my husband said these are our kids, this is our responsibility, so he's made that decision himself and he still whinges about having to cut his day short at 3 o'clock, and I just point out the options. I mean I don't have a choice: these are the hours I have to work. And I tell him what he should know. And sometimes the grandparents do pick them up. I mean you just wing it. You do what you have to do.

I hate relying on my mum. I don't like it. Because she acts as if you owe her a favour. Being beholden. And I don't feel good about it.

These concerns were expressed by city women, as well as those in the country:

I'd rather pay for it than feel the guilt.

Absolutely!

And some family members are already very busy

Clearly grandparents are frequently an important component of the extended working families' arrangements. This role is not without its complications, however, in terms of 'limit setting' for the voluntary grandparents, and predictability for working parents.

Some grandparents find a clash between their roles as part of this extended web, and their volunteering interests, as we see in the next section.

12. Volunteers

Who does it?

Voluntary work has always been a significant part of the Australian labour market and community sector. While practitioners argue that the statistics on volunteering effort significantly underestimate the real levels of volunteer work, in South Australia in 1995 25 per cent of women were doing some volunteering compared to 20 per cent of men. Volunteering was highest amongst part-time workers.

The volunteer labour market appears to be segmented by gender, as well as age and in some cases, ethnicity. Women volunteers are more likely to undertake jobs that are 'hands on' in the community sector and schools (like food preparation), while men are more likely to work in management and coaching in sporting and community organisations. In South Australia in 1995 50 per cent of male volunteers did management or committee work, compared to 37 per cent of women volunteers, Forty per cent of women who volunteered prepared or served food, compared to 19 per cent of men who volunteered (ABS, unpublished data, Voluntary Work Survey 1995).

In terms of age, volunteering is thinnest amongst people under 35 years. However, changes in the regulation of social welfare have pushed a new tier of younger people towards voluntary work. This has brought new challenges to volunteering, as the cultures, expectations and desires of young people come up against those of established volunteering services. In many cases, according to volunteering administrators, these young people are drawn to environmental work, rather more than to traditional volunteering in meals and service provision. Where they attempt to enter such traditional services, young people can meet suspicion of their youth, appearance, and so on.

The Rewards

Women undertake a wide range of voluntary jobs, ranging from school-based informal work in relation to their children's classes and activities, through to regular, extensive service provision particularly by older women. Women generally speak very positively about what they get out of voluntary work – and these rewards closely mirror the list that arise for women out of paid work: to escape the house, to meet people and be social. As one put it 'I only stay if I can build friendships and relationships'. Others felt rewarded in their religious beliefs or reminded of their own luck:

It makes me feel good. Sometimes I feel sorry for myself, and it makes me realise there are people worse off.

One mother who 'graduated' to chairing a busy childcare centre committee and taking on a paid management role in it for a short period, describes the process – and its rewards:

Maggie: I was dragged into it and for me it was probably the best thing that could have happened because I was at home, starting to feeling like I was never going to get back into the workforce, that I wasn't worth much, my confidence was just going down the drain. I got called onto a sub-committee here and the next minute they asked me if I wanted to be on the management committee and then next thing I was a Chair and I knew nothing about being chair. And then I became director for a while. And it was the best thing that could have happened because I could

A quarter of women and fifth of men are volunteers.

actually see what I have to offer. I regained my confidence and that just perpetuates more giving...

Others were involved because of the dividend of knowing more about their child's situation, and affecting the quality of care and attention their child received:

Sarah: I thought my involvement might be reciprocated in the care for my child...And to partly allay my guilt and any of my fears I might have had about the type of care that she might have received. I've enjoyed my involvement.

Sarah and her fellow-committee members saw their involvement as generating friendships, community and intimacy:

Sarah: We get a sense of community and intimacy from being on the committee...In becoming a mother your life is changed in other ways so it makes up for possibly other friendships that have changed because you've become a parent and so you have more in common with these people than you have with other people in some ways. Some of my primary relationship – it sounds crazy, and the others on the committee are probably unaware of it – but my primary relationships are here, and with my other voluntary group that I'm very committed to. They are my family. We've done a lot together over 6 or 7 years.

Hollie: Selfish reasons. Seeing what sort of place my child was at. Involvement in decisions. I felt flattered, to be honest. To be asked. (laughs)

'They are my family.'

Women doing voluntary work frequently deal with stresses and conflicting demands that are mentioned by women in paid work – that is, doing their voluntary work as well as meeting the needs of the family, especially the extended family - and the needs of working daughters in the case of the many grandmothers who do volunteer work.

Country women agreed that there were real rewards for volunteer work, but that the costs of volunteering in terms of time and petrol – as well as sometimes family criticism - were affecting people:

You meet others, have a say about things in the school, the satisfaction that you are contributing. It's a progression – kindy, childcare, schools – the same group through all the years.

Some of the women at home are also doing work at home. Some people can't afford to go on committees – the cost of the petrol.

Many women think twice before getting in the car now. This has increased the isolation of women especially a long way from the towns. That isolation is increased by the men's expectation of their wives 'You're never home!' they say.

The Effect of Paid Work on Volunteering

The increasing entry of women to paid work has brought with it several implications for voluntary work. Firstly and most obviously, it has reduced women's availability for volunteering. This is true for women in many different types of jobs – whether in factories or office work. Secondly, women feel regret at this loss – at not being at the school for their children, and they report pressure from their children to be there for them, to be 'proper mothers'. Both of these trends are evident from the following exchange amongst a group of women working in a factory:

Helen: I used to be a guide leader but I actually gave it up to look for work. And then when I got afternoon shift, which was more relevant for the family, then I had to give it up.

Jenny: I used to work at the primary school when the kids first started but that went out the window as soon as I started full-time work.

Marie: I used to do reading. My daughter has been begging me to work as a volunteer in the canteen. But doing morning/afternoon shifts, it is too hard. I tried to explain to her that I can't. She said, even if you do it once a year, please do it. So I am going to ask if I can do it once a year.

Jenny: That's because the kids get pressure at school.

Others felt that volunteering was a matter of personality – some did it and some didn't – or that community values were shifting in relation to participating in the community.

It's hard to find the people. We see lots of 'Yummy Mummies' who hang around the school but who don't get involved in reading or anything at the school. Some people just don't do it. And others do. My sisters don't for example do anything outside their family.

There are a lot less volunteers. Never younger people.

I wonder if there is a lot of introverted focus now. In my family, younger people are more interested in saving their money and going overseas. A lot of people are in a comfort zone, and they'd be showing their weakness and moving outside their comfort zone if they did volunteering.

Others felt that potential volunteers were simply overlooked – not asked – and that established volunteer groups resisted new entrants. However, time was the big issue, for many.

Women at Home: 'I'm doing yours!'

Women who worked in the home were very clear that they were picking up more for women in the workforce, and this caused resentment in some. The following exchange is one example. It occurred between women who are at home with their children, revealing there are less and less people picking up the voluntary work that is associated with schools. This causes resentment amongst that shrinking proportion of mothers who are at home:

I'm annoyed with people in full-time work sometimes. I'm coordinating sports teams after school. There are very few women who do anything. It's left to women who are at home. There is an assumption that you will look after their children. There are not enough people.

I felt put upon. I get asked 'My girls don't want to go to before school care – can they come to you?'

As a result of the effects of paid work, in both the city and country traditional forms of volunteering appear to be in retreat:

These days young mums are not getting involved in hospital auxiliaries as much.

'It's hard to find the people.'

'It's left to women who are at home. There is an assumption that you will look after their children.'

Women in the country also speak of the resentment of much voluntary work falling to the shrinking population of people available to do it in country towns and on farms:

You always get the same people doing things in the school. Volunteers have dropped off considerably.

There are less people there to do the work. It's the pace of life.

The same ones do the work all the time.

Years ago we were all expected to do it, and if you weren't there you were really noticed. Now, a lot of the mums are working and you get those few who will come and do the volunteer stuff. Whereas we probably did it anyway. I mean, in those days, I was busy too!

A small population is trying to do more.

Several times, women said 'If you want something done, ask a busy person!', pointing to the fact that small numbers are doing more, especially in the country:

Denise: Not only do we both work full-time, we also are on every committee going. We are always there. Sport, meetings, and as the kids get older, the more we do. We are in all the clubs around here. If you want something done, ask a busy person.

Betty: We are on committees and it's always the same people, the same ones doing the jobs year after year.

Heidi: We would start at the kindy meeting and then dash to the school for the school meeting, and then somewhere else and we were all the same people at every meeting.

'It's always the same people.'

Others have tried to build the positive returns that arise out of voluntary involvement to encourage participation:

We started up the Women's Network about 2 years ago and we've got over 100 members of that but our philosophy of that is that we have dinner meetings three times a year and come along and have a good time. We only have a very small committee. And a small group will organise a dinner in one particular area and that's all they have to do for the whole year. And we find that that is working well. Because it's something where women can go out, enjoy themselves, hear a good speaker, and have a good time.

'There is a lot of pressure on staff to attract and manage teams of volunteers. Whilst they have their place, it is fraught with problems.'

Some Down Sides of Volunteering Now

A manager of a large community based health service for older people in their homes commented on the complexity of volunteerism, and criticised the entry of inappropriate people to volunteer work, and the pressure to cut costs by using volunteers more, with significant implications for the quality of care:

Andi: In the community sector I've seen a very deliberate push toward encouraging a bigger volunteer force. I have issues with that. In local government and community services there is a lot of pressure on staff to attract and manage teams of volunteers. Whilst they have their place, it is fraught with problems...it is difficult to recruit people who really have the skills required. They often weren't sophisticated to not make value judgements. It required quite a lot of scrutiny –

police checks and so on. Often not enough management time was devoted to managing those people. Very difficult to make sure that you have a really quality service being delivered. And people weren't motivated. Especially with high unemployment we were seeing people come through because they had to. Their commitment wasn't that of the 'lavender ladies' – who had husbands who were supporting them and they were looking for something to do - they were coerced into volunteer roles. Very, very problematic.

A male nurse agreed:

Volunteers are doing people's jobs. They are being used to fill positions that are now unfunded. They are being used to take up the slack of reduced staffing. Volunteers are expected to do far more responsible tasks than they were 20 years ago.

Some women also wanted to move onto more challenging tasks in volunteer work, those that developed their skills:

Now I want to do voluntary work that develops the skills I need – work processing not reading.

Others greatly valued their skill development through volunteer work, and appreciated the opportunity to learn. Those who received extensive training and development, were appreciative of it, and valued their learning. Good management of volunteering services to assist this, ensured a more satisfying experience. One request was widely heard: that the effort of volunteers should be more widely respected in the community, along with recognition of the real costs that it sometimes incurs:

There should be more respect of volunteers.

Sometimes it costs you money to do volunteer work – the costs of travelling.

13. The Workplace: Negotiated Flexibility versus Imposed Inflexibility

There has been much talk in Australia since the mid-80s about ‘family friendly’ workplaces. This study suggests that there has, in fact, been rather more talk than action – and in some cases, the pressures of the restructured workplace at the turn of the century in 2000, are turning things in the opposite direction, with some women describing it as harder, not easier, to negotiate flexible conditions.

Fortunately there are important examples of workplaces where significant change has occurred. Where flexibility is on a *negotiated*, rather than imposed arrangement, it makes a real difference. Workplaces where hours, shifts, days, emergency leave are genuinely negotiable are proving workplaces of choice for highly skilled, stable workers.

Unfortunately much of the ‘flexibility’ in the new workplace is on quite ‘family unfriendly’ terms, with minimal say for women about their days, hours, shifts and conditions of work (see sections 16 and 17 below). Many women seek flexibility through part-time and casual work, only to find that their assumed rights to negotiate over shifts are sharply constrained. Others have traded flexibility for career. They have ‘chosen’ not to take promotion in order to be able to take time off – though their choices are clearly constrained as we see below. They point to management and leadership jobs where the expectations are of a large commitment to the job. The presence of ‘family friendly’ provisions is of no use to these workers, who see their commitment to the job as tested by the use of these provisions, and they will not use them. These ‘commitment testers’ are often used to screen the ‘proper worker’, constructed within the male model of full-time worker without dependents, from the ‘weakly committed’ employee. Unfortunately, it seems that women managers who have made it on the established terms are not above punitive vengeance when it comes to applying these tests to the women who follow them.

Many flexible arrangements that suit employees are more a matter of cultural change, than cost.

Other women reflect on the model of the professional worker – the lawyer or doctor – pointing out that these ‘greedy’ professions require long hours and personal dedication to the job above all else. They argue that this model is simply incompatible with maternity and serious parenting. While the professional expectations are hostile to even minimal adaptations like part-time work, talk of ‘family friendly’ flexibility is a distraction. The male model – with expectation of a ‘wife’ at home – remains alive and well, despite the increasing numbers of women who are becoming lawyers, doctors and managers.

Many of the changes that women would like to see in their workplaces are cheap and easy. They will be of great benefit to men. They will certainly advantage employers who want to see stable workforces. They are more a matter of culture than cost. But it is our established cultures that seem very hostile to flexibility that is negotiated.

Simple things make a difference.

And some changes are more costly: paid maternity and parenting leave are not insignificant issues. However, women have clear ideas about their importance, and to forms of leave that also accommodate the needs of those who want to care for sick relatives, or to study.

Simple things make a difference: negotiated arrangements around hours, shifts, and emergencies. There are powerful examples of employers with arrangements that make an enormous difference to women’s and families’ lives – employers that are no different to the much larger number who make no such allowances.

Unfortunately, the statistical picture about ‘family friendliness’ in South Australian workplaces does not begin from a very positive starting place, compared to the national situation.

Access to family friendly conditions at work

Access to even basic measures to assist workers to accommodate their families is limited for many Australian workers. Around a quarter have access to permanent part-time work, half have access to a phone at work for family reasons, around 12 per cent can work from home, and only 2 per cent have access to employer subsidized childcare.

How do family friendly conditions at work in South Australia compare to those Australia-wide? Table 13.1 arises from AWIRS95 data that surveyed over 20,000 employees in larger workplaces in 1995. It shows that South Australian employees have less access to some family friendly conditions including permanent part-time work. A higher proportion of South Australian workers can use the phone at work for family reasons, and close to the national average have a chance to work from home.

In terms of taking care of sick family, most Australians use their own paid sick or holiday leave, as many women in our focus groups said. Only 13 per cent have access to other forms of paid leave to look after sick children.

A greater proportion of South Australian employees use their own sick or holiday leave to care for their sick dependents, while a much smaller proportion use paid family leave (only 3 per cent). A larger proportion of South Australians take time off and repay it later, than do nationally.

About the same proportion at national and state level can’t take time off for sick family members. Unfortunately overall, however, it seems that South Australian employees have worse access to key family friendly work conditions like access to paid leave, than do nationally.

Women want: security, control, flexibility and understanding.

Focus groups and interviews reinforce the statistical picture. For women, paid work and family impact on each other and create enormous pressure. Because of this, women everywhere - whether in the city or the country, in a factory or office, over and over again - said that they needed flexibility: flexibility to change hours, shifts, and days, in response to emergencies or school events. They need to be able to make up time if late or leave early for appointments. They talk about negotiated flexibility with their employers – not the kind of one-way ‘flexibility’ that they identified is frequently the case in so-called flexible forms of work like part-time jobs and casual work. Many women saw these jobs as extremely inflexible in the hands of their employers, where they were not accompanied by negotiation with employees.

This negotiated flexibility makes an enormous difference to women’s working and family lives. Such flexibility is a top priority for women, and many women are choosing it over careers.

Negotiated flexibility is a top priority for women, and many are choosing it over careers.

Table 13.1: Working conditions, Australia by South Australia, by count by percent, persons.

	Can get permanent part-time work		Can get maternity/ paternity leave		Can get employer subsidised ch'care		Can get phone for family reasorfrom home		Can work from home	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Australia										
Yes	6400	27.6%	9146	39.5%	520	2.2%	11576	50.0%	2853	12.3%
No/don't know	16757	72.4%	14011	60.5%	22637	97.8%	11581	50.0%	20304	87.7%
South Australia										
Yes	17	17.2%	37	37.4%	2	2.0%	54	54.5%	12	12.1%
No/don't know	82	82.8%	62	62.6%	97	98.0%	45	45.5%	87	87.9%

Source: AWIRS 1995 Employee Survey, DEWRSB. Unweighted.

I have left jobs that weren't flexible where bosses were pedantic. (private business woman, mother)

I have flexibility being part-time but no career. (part-time worker, mother)

Of course in many cases there is no choice at all:

In the retail industry there is no flexibility. You are told to choose between your family or 'career'. What career? (full-time worker, city, mother)

Similarly women are making choices not to have children unless they have some control at work; control which ensures the flexibility they need. As a lawyer put it

I wouldn't have had a child unless I was a partner in the firm because I wouldn't have been in control. I take time off because I am the boss. My partners cover or I have asked to adjourn a case.

Flexibility to be able to go quickly and make up time – come late or leave early – the employer has been very good.

In discussions with women there were enormous differences in the levels of flexibility within workplaces, as these stories from four different workplaces demonstrate:

Case One: Document Processing and Call Centre

This private sector call centre and document processing centre employs a large number of women and men as full-time, part-time and casual workers. Work is divided into different sections and teams. There is a childcare centre on the site. The human resources' focus is upon being 'an employer of choice' by skilled, committed employees who will remain with the company over time.

Some of the most positive stories about flexibility came from this workplace, though not all sections of the workplace shared the same levels of flexibility or 'negotiating' managers.

Workers can leave in the event of an emergency: As one part-time mother put it:

Work has been very good for example with falls and emergencies. Flexibility again, able to go quickly and make up time – come late or leave early – the employer has been very good.

Hours and days can be changed by negotiation:

They are pretty good here with flexibility – that is very important. That is what keeps you, flexibility – you can change days.

Days and hours can be changed by negotiation – that is terribly difficult in my previous experience.

Case Two: A large quasi-public sector workplace

This organisation, with a number of women in its senior ranks at the time of interview, had taken a positive approach to parenting, as several comments suggest. Allowing work from home, and part-time return were important to women. Unfortunately, not all public sector bodies were so accommodating, as we see below.

Women returning from maternity leave are accommodated:

We have had a number of women who decided they wanted to come back (after maternity leave). This organisation bent over backwards to accommodate them, they were given a choice about working at home or coming in part-time for office based meetings. (manager)

Working from home is possible:

I can do the same - I can work from home when my partner is not well. They provided me with a laptop, and this is very progressive. (manager)

Change of hours is possible:

If my child is sick I ring up and say I'll be late. The family is my priority and my colleagues respond to this as a given. This is the nature of the workplace and there is not much angst about it. (manager)

A senior male manager only works four hours a day, as he wanted to be with his kids. His team is very supportive. (manager)

Case Three: A large quasi-public sector workplace

In stark contrast a women tells of the inflexibility of her working life at a large public sector organisation.

I got a job interview for my present job when I was 8 months pregnant and they asked me how I was going to manage. The woman manager who asked, also had a child at home. I told them my husband was going to stay at home. I got the job. It was full-time and there was no negotiation. It was a forty hour week with a rostered day off every 3-4 weeks, with 'reasonable amount of overtime' not defined under the award. You can't say 'sorry I don't want to do any overtime' and there is supposed to be time off in lieu of overtime worked. It is fairly rigid. There is no juggling of staff. It is probably the most inflexible job I have worked in. It's a bureaucratic organisation that can't cope with change.

'They look upon family requests as if you are not being professional'

This professional woman went on to describe the difficulty she had in trying to flexibly use her accumulated leave.

I have a lot of holiday pay owing, time off in lieu and so on - 8 weeks owing - and I have asked if I can take Monday or Friday off and chip away at my leave. But the answer is 'No. That would be making a full-time job into a part-time job and it is an occupational health and safety issue'. So I said 'Okay, fine'. I didn't want to push it. They look upon family requests as if you are not being professional. Then they say, 'If you are not coping let us know and we will put a single person in the job' – all this from a woman manager who has a small child also.

This employee is very aware of the signals that are sent by those who want to put their family first: they are not serious about career, and risk losing their job to others assumed to be free of competitive commitments. Interestingly, the woman manager with child of her own is a leader of the 'commitment-testers':

She so far removed. When she saw I was tired one time, she told me that I should go to bed early! She didn't even realise that I was on nights at the time! This was so amazing ...She had no idea who I was or what I wanted. She has a full-time nanny and has taken on the male role.

An unwillingness to make use of existing policies has been identified in large companies in the private sector in other sectors (Wajcman, 1999). As this professional woman puts it:

They may have a family friendly policy but they don't make it known to us and don't make it available. I would love to be flexible and do it part-time. I wouldn't want to give it up but a little less would be good.

Although a skilled professional with some workplace power, she was reluctant to involve the union in her quandry, because she felt she would be punished: 'I would get less interesting work and really bad hours, time no one wants'.

I thought about getting the union involved but I don't feel safe enough.

As a result of this inflexibility she would not continue working full-time if she had another child – though she did not plan to have a second because of the difficulties she faced at present:

I don't plan on having another child. It's too much hard work, but if I did I would resign and go to casual. The shifts are offered and it is much more flexible. You can juggle this as long as when they call you don't say you can't work for family reasons but you are at another venue. You mustn't mention the family. Then they will keep calling you back!

Case four: An Established Factory

Women working shift work in an established factory formed a strong contrast to those in the new-style document processing centre where the employer sought to be the one of choice for its employees. Women faced unyielding inflexibility in relation to shift arrangements, changing their shifts, and in attending to unexpected or entirely predictable family events. Its high level of unionisation did not appear to have resulted in increased capacity to negotiate around 'set in cement' shift arrangements and rosters. Employer prerogative was high, in the eyes of the employees and they contrasted their experiences 'tied to their machines' with the geographic mobility of their male colleagues.

You have to make a real issue to get change

It's hard to get favours – there was the example of someone wanting to change hours who had to bring in the union to get more flexibility.

You can wait for ages to change shifts

You can't change shift here unless you can swap with someone and that's not very likely. Who wants to do night shift? I had to wait 6 months to get a change from night shift.

You don't get a say in the shifts you work

A number of women reported that recent restructuring within the company had resulted in shift changes that had affected their families. Some children had complained, but there little chance to affect things: 'it's just your lot in life'.

In some cases there is some flexibility – and it is greatly appreciated

Where women could gain some flexibility, they greatly appreciated it. This varied by location within the workplace, and on local relations with managers. Clearly flexibility is possible in many settings, and makes a very great difference to women's lives. It is not difficult for employers to implement such flexibility: as much as anything it is a question of attitude and established culture.

The manager makes a difference

Whilst organisations clearly set a tone and there are some examples of good practice alongside some poorer ones, the flexibility experienced by women varied considerably within the above organisations, and individual managers made a considerable difference. In the document processing centre, for example:

My manager, if I ring and say I have an issue he says fine. This is where respect and level playing field happens. Not all areas are the same though – for example, it's much harder if you are in the call centre.

Similarly in the traditional factory setting:

You can make up hours in some parts of the workplace. The attitude of management is important. Rostered days off are not available in all departments.

Women saw it as important to have flexibility ‘across the board’ rather than have it as discretionary. Further they saw it as important that their managers understand them and their need for flexibility:

They are pretty sympathetic. It is a large company and I leave at 5 on the dot. Most of those in management have older kids and know what it is like and understand my situation. (single mother, senior manager, retail)

‘If you treat workers badly they will work badly’.

A women manager reflected on the importance of being flexible. However, she did not find it everywhere amongst her colleagues:

Managerial styles are lacking and need to be changed. They need to be looked at holistically, the whole human being needs to be looked at. If you treat workers badly they will work badly. As a manager I encouraged my part-time employees, if they had a problem, they should go and sort it out and they came back refreshed and grateful. I found as a manager that it was important to be flexible. (manager, retail)

Job Sharing and home-based work

Women are also asking workplaces to change the way work is structured. With the increasing participation of women in paid work we need to re-evaluate the structures we have in place to provide secure but flexible work. A number of women want to be able to job share, and preferred it to part-time and casual work:

They should allow more job sharing and flexibility to work out their own working arrangements. There should be more scope for people’s creativity.

Job sharing is good as there is always back up. It’s a positive experience and people want it. They can work it out themselves, they are more committed.

For some women working from home for at least a part of their work was something they would like:

Society puts a lot of pressure on women to not work, whereas others expect them to work in secondary positions. If they worked from home it might be easier. The thing is, I don’t have two days off. I work all the time, in fact I do less work at work than I do at home.

They should take into consideration, job sharing and part-time and flexible hours so that women can work while the kids are at home. With so many unemployed why can’t we continue without the stress?

Women need extended leave and ‘all-in-one leave’

Even in those workplaces where women felt there was some negotiated flexibility, they could also identify other ways in which their workplaces could better meet their needs. For work to accommodate women’s lives in a meaningful way employers can recognise the range of issues faced at different times, and the variety of “families” and social worlds in which women live. Women widely endorsed the idea of maternity

leave, but they also sought flexibility in relation to other significant life events like long term illness, sick parents and death:

There is maternity leave available for men and women but not for family leave, with the same conditions applying, so that I could have left for five months when my father was dying and then come back. (manager, office)

There is nothing for looking after parents - only carers leave and that comes out of sick leave and that is only for a few days. I think a lot depends on the organisation. There is more flexibility here than anywhere else. (manager, office)

As has been discussed in section 7 above, women continue to struggle with time to care for sick children and tend not to take leave for themselves but use their own sick leave for children. There is a cost for employers in not being flexible in their approach including the loss of goodwill, as this story tells us:

We had a lady, Mary, who had taken a week off when her husband had to elect to turn off his life support and they said 'you can have your two days bereavement' and she got to negotiate a few extra days. And she broke down about 6 months later. And they said 'you can't have any more time off - this bloke's on holidays'. That wasn't acceptable for her. They knew that she was severely depressed. She said 'I dragged myself to come to work'. Her health suffered. She really hates them for what she did to her and then her boss's father died, and everything changed! But it was so hard for her.

This is a good example of the price that inflexible arrangements visits upon women – and in this case the bereaved. It contributes to a strong case for more flexible access to all forms of leave to deal with family crisis. While those in higher paid, managerial or more senior positions might have more latitude to make 'local' or individualised arrangements for themselves or their juniors, many women at the bottom of workplace hierarchies lack that scope. While some women 'choose' to stay at the bottom or avoid promotion because they think that will allow them to meet their family's needs, ironically it also may keep them from positions where real latitude exists to do things more flexibly.

The above story also illustrates the importance of experience in changing management's responses to employee needs: when Mary's boss has his own crisis, he becomes flexible. Perhaps in his next workplace crisis, he will be more understanding. As things stand many women try to choose workplaces that they can fit around their lives.

Women say that they need to have paid leave that is available for the range of emergencies and issues they face in life. Is it reasonable that they use up their own sick leave to accommodate children and that they have only two days to deal with the death of a partner? There are many examples to suggest that it is possible for workplaces to accommodate these needs and they will clearly be rewarded for doing so in terms of employee loyalty and workforce stability.

As the above stories tell, flexibility which gives women scope to manage the responsibilities they have for children and other family members is crucial to removing stress in their working lives. Some employers have started down this road and others have a long way to go. .

Caring and the Professions: 'It just doesn't fit'

A poor fit between work and family was not confined to office, clerical, and factory work. It extended to the basic nature of professional work, and the model of the professional worker.

Women managers, lawyers and doctors talked about the incompatibility of their professions with maternity and caring. Women in private business described the difficulties they encountered in returning to work, when partnership arrangements proved inadequate to dealing with part-time work:

It has been really difficult to extract myself from the partnership when I went part-time. My partners - they hadn't had to deal with it before. The practice agreement had maternity leave, but after that they hadn't thought about part-time. It has been very messy and difficult.

More fundamentally, these professional women questioned the model of the professional worker, and its incompatibility with domestic responsibilities. This incompatibility affected men, also, as their wives looked for more help at home. But it particularly affected women – their decisions to have children, to stay in the profession, and their capacities to influence the reshaping of their professional practices and models. The following exchange between lawyers and doctors illustrates these issues:

The model is too big. Their history of these jobs is too big. The history of the job is that it is a vocation not a job. It is what you are. It's your life. You work all the hours that there are. You live in the hospital. You are perpetually there for everyone but yourself.

It's very much a male model.

Absolutely! And it's incredibly hierarchical and it's incredibly scripted. Very tightly. So when you try to move away from that, and say I don't want to do that, I want to do this, and I can be good at what I do, in this way, then you pay.

And men have trouble too. At work I used to be approached by some of the male lawyers and they would come to me and say I really want to take some additional holidays and I need to help at home, and this and that. In some senses they were very sympathetic but that was only because their partner's life was impacting on them because they were saying 'you've got to help'. So it's not just a male/female thing, it's the model. But it impacts more harshly upon women.

It's a male generated model. It doesn't take account of the fact that there are so many more females in the professions – but there still doesn't seem to be any change of the model, of the way things are done. I don't know why – maybe because a lot of women drop out.

In medicine it's the colleges and senior people at hospitals, and in law it's the senior partners in the big firms, and they are all men – or 90 per cent of them – and they all grew up in that model and its like, 'well this is the way you do it'.

*And women don't want to participate (in that professional networking) – all that jockeying for power. You need a house-husband to take on **that role (in professional bodies)**.*

'It is a vocation not a job. It is what you are. It's your life. You work all the hours that there are. You live in the hospital.'

'The male model has a hold in all kinds of workplaces – from the factory floor to the professional business.'

These women pointed to the absent of women with children from their professional bodies, and the difficulty of getting their perspectives about necessary changes in the patterns of legal and medical practice:

The last thing you want to do is to go out to something else at night.

They observed that younger women in the professions were frequently choosing not to have children, or to have only one, or to have them later.

Clearly, the male model has a hold in all kinds of workplaces – from the factory floor to the professional business. Ironically the impact of the double day on women means that their voice in professional, workplace and union bodies – to push for change in the established models – is inhibited precisely by their responsibility for the domestic. ‘Making it’ to the professional pinnacle means making it to live and work the male model. The spectre of inflexible workplaces haunts many work lives, and stands in strong contradiction to the ‘family friendly’ workplace which has only a mythical status in many circumstances.

14. The Pressures of Paid Work

It is now widely established that in Australia many in employment perceive their paid work as becoming more intense, pressured and demanding (ACIRRT 1998). Certainly, the working day has grown. Between 1989 and 1999, the length of the average working day in Australia grew by 1.6 hours for full-time workers (ABS Cat. No. 4102.0: 108). And many are working increasingly long hours. A quarter of full-time workers now work more than 49 hours per week.

This was universally suggested by those in our group, including those in a great diversity of types of jobs and workplaces. Whether private consultants, factory workers, call centre employees or farm workers – there is a widespread belief that paid work is becoming more demanding.

In this section we consider the intensification of work, the growth in the scope of jobs (job enlargement), and the increase in unpaid hours being worked by a diversity of people. Each of these has important implications for those who must fit their increasingly demanding jobs alongside their responsibilities for children, the aged, and community work. We have already seen how this increase has squeezed voluntary work for many people and the services they assist. For those engaged in caring work – in the majority, women – the pressures are particularly extreme, and they represent a further move against ‘family friendliness’.

Intensification of work

The growing pressures are clearly described by those working in nursing home facilities, where work is now more intensive – with fewer doing more – while the size of the job has also grown with demands for more paper work, meetings, and bureaucratic controls. Many in these forms of care organisations are unconvinced that this job enlargement has done more than add pressure to staff, while not really improving the quality of care:

Susan: Its just non-stop and never finished. You hardly ever go home and think I've done everything. It's just never. It didn't used to be – nursing didn't used to be, aged care didn't used to be. It's just unreal. It's coming to a head. Everywhere. It's just got to change. Nursing is totally stressful and you never feel fulfilled. (nurse)

Abe: I've been in nursing for 25 years now, and I think for me the level of scrutiny that is on nursing now is off its face in terms of accountability, documentation, committees, minutes. To the point that it now encroaches on your ability to be a hands-on nurse. It's just ridiculous, and at the end of the day, my theory is that we have this truck load of documentation to make us better nurses, but it doesn't make us better nurses at all, because the interface between the nurse and the client hasn't essentially changed. I think that what has happened is that the level of scrutiny has put such a load on us as nurses that it has reached breaking point. (male nurse supervisor)

The manager of these nurses agreed with their assessment, pointing out that the political attention being directed at nursing homes placed employees in the services under even greater formal surveillance. Susan and Abe went on to describe the growing difficulty of attracting nurses to aged care work, when shortages are emerging in other areas of nursing that might be more attractive, and wages in countries like the UK – traditionally much lower than in Australia – are now considerably higher.

The same pressures were described in management, housekeeping, maintenance, and other ancillary aspects of caring work, as employees and their managers raced to keep up with change:

This is key issue, there has been so much change for all of us that we haven't developed good systems to cope with it... We are running with so much change that there is no time to evaluate what we do. We are supposed to evaluate as practitioners and yet its almost impossible to sit back and measure the change, and its impact, and work the change through the system. There's no time to assess and discard. And this is the problem with so many businesses now: no time to reassess. (Manager, aged care service, working 100 hours per week, 2 children, male)

Country women agreed. In their various types of paid off-farm work they talked of growing workplace demands – to increase skills, and to do more:

There's more work. There are less hours to do it. Less resources too. (Country woman)

Others talked of diminishing flexibility in some workplaces, as a result of the demands:

I'm not really able to bring children to work if they are not well. It's less flexible. I took my kids to work with me with a nanny. It wouldn't happen here, now.

Women in a factory discussed the changing pressures they face:

The pressure is on to work harder these days because of the limited jobs and because of the demands the employers make...to work that little bit harder than we did 5 years ago.

There have been a lot of cutbacks. They expect us to do nearly twice as much as we used to.

And to go from one department to another, and learn to do something new.

It's the same everywhere – it's just your lot in life.

Many of these women did overtime, which they could refuse but they mentioned that short notice made it difficult to juggle family and unexpected hours.

Supervisors and managers

Most women in senior positions were working long or increasing hours, some of them at home, to cope with a workload that they perceived as increasing:

There is more pressure to get things done to meet deadlines. I bought a computer so I could work at home and get things up to date. (Kerin, mother of small child, manager, working about 50 hours a week in a large office)

Other managers and team leaders agreed:

Each of us is given too much work to do and management is reluctant to listen to concerns that are raised. They just repeat 'you do it'. A lot of people have left because they can't hack the pressure. There has been 100% turnover in the past

few months in my area. (mother of small children, manager, working long hours in a large office)

A number of women mentioned that the traditional response to too much pressure – changing jobs - was now no longer available. Unemployment and limited alternatives kept many in a job that they would happily have traded for one with less pressure:

Also outside influences have changed. Before if you didn't like a job you went out and got another one. Now there are not so many opportunities.

For many the expectation of working long hours, including unpaid overtime was ever-present. While some found these 'expectations' of longer hours difficult, they found themselves replicating them:

There is an expectation that you reach a certain level in an organisation and then you work over and above. I often book a meeting for 5.30pm and expect others to comply. (mother of small children, manager, working long hours in a large office)

Some women managers with family responsibilities were resisting this, and trying to control their working hours:

I'm not doing as much as before but I still put many expectations on myself. If I stick to what I should do the world won't fall apart. I am beginning to take more control and saying not I am sorry, I'm out of here.

Turning to the professional world, as we saw in section 13, women lawyers and doctors had deep critiques of the models of workers in these fields and described the price of parenting for themselves as professionals, whether working full-time or part-time.

In some workplaces, previous arrangements for rostered days off, or education leave now no longer exist, so that employees either had to assert their right to take some restorative leave, or lacked any capacity to juggle their time for study in the face of high work pressure:

Andie: Level 3 nurses used to have these paid days off. Now you no longer get them. A lot of them want the day to be mentally well to do the job...It takes a level of maturity to take that time to recover. Management can be very iffy about it. (nurse in emergency care unit, large hospital, two children, living on a farm).

Tammy: Where I work you couldn't do that! I'm casual. There was one girl who wanted time off to do study and there was no way! (clerical worker, mother of two, casual).

Candy: I work in small business and it's much less flexible. In a retail shop it's much harder to have flexible time. It doesn't work. (single mother of two, full-time worker)

Women also mentioned the requirements on them to increase their skills, to be able to do a broader range of tasks:

Andie: We are now expected to do a lot more with a lot less people. You don't wear one hat anymore. Multi-skilled.

For some, particularly those for whom English was a second language, this was a stressful demand.

Current trends in the workplace, reflected in the results of large surveys and the results of our interviews and focus groups, suggest that in many workplaces it is becoming more difficult to combine work and family. Growing pressures at work with fewer people doing more, the lack of employment opportunities that allow employees to shop around for work that will match family needs to employer demands, and growing pressures for more unpaid overtime (affecting both full- and part-time employees) mean that work is becoming harder to reconcile with households.

Many women spoke of the need to share the paid work more evenly across the community. They spoke of their own, and their partners' overwork, and the unemployment of their children and friends. Others spoke of the costs to their health of paid work and its growing pressures, and the demands on them to train and improve skills.

Rural women point to serious difficulties in finding work.

15. Finding Work

Some women are particularly affected by difficulties in finding paid work, including Indigenous South Australians and those of non-English Speaking background. Rural women also point to serious difficulties in finding work, and a growing number of women working part-time would like to work more hours. The labour market in South Australia follows some national trends in relation to women’s unemployment.

Figure 15.1 shows that South Australian women experienced higher unemployment than men in the early 1980s. However, this situation was reversed by the 1990s when women enjoyed a generally lower rate of unemployment than men. At present women and men in South Australia have the same rate of unemployment, which is about one percentage point higher than in Australia as a whole.

Figure 15.1 Unemployment in South Australia, 1980-2000.



Source: ABS labour market survey, Cat. 6203.0, various years.

Figure 15.2 Underemployed in SA, 1980-2000. Women and men who preferred to work more hours.



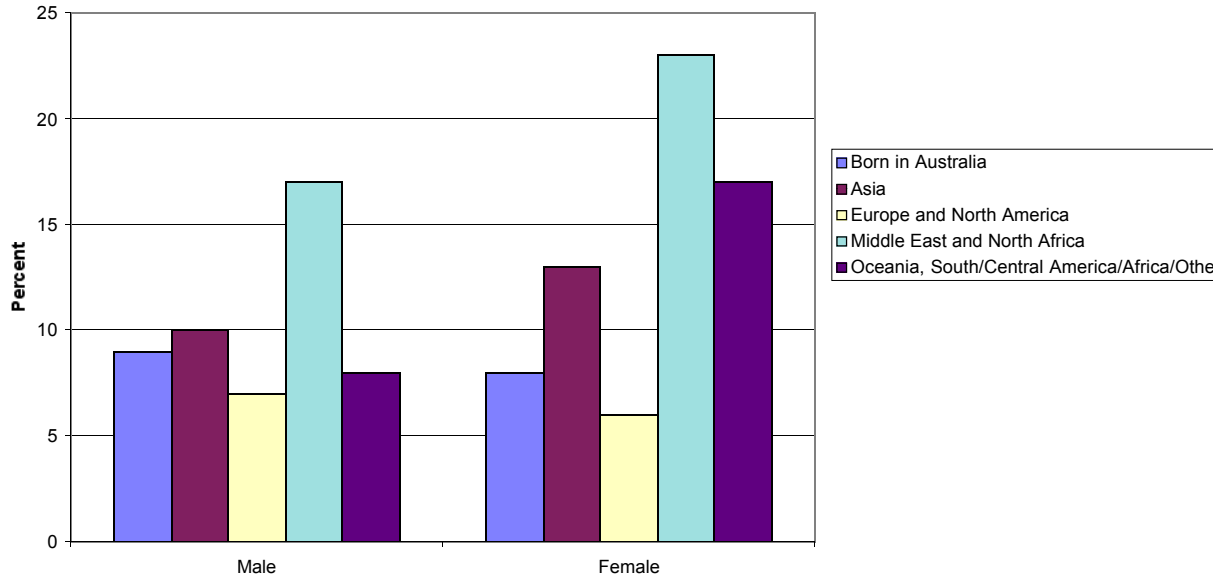
Source: Unpublished ABS data

Figure 15.2 shows the percentage of women and men in South Australia over the last twenty years who would have liked to work more hours. The trajectory for women has increased more steeply than for men, although the percentage of both sexes who would prefer to work more hours has increased steadily for the past two decades. There is a growing problem of under-employment, that particularly affects women in the state.

Unemployment particularly affects women of non-English speaking background. Figure 15.3 indicates the unemployment rate for South Australian women and men by country of birth in April 2000. Women from predominantly non-English speaking countries have much higher rates of unemployment than men from the same backgrounds. Women from the Middle East and North Africa have by far the highest rate of unemployment: above twenty percent.

There is a growing problem of under-employment, that particularly affects women.

Figure 15.3 South Australian unemployment rate by country of birth, women and men in April 2000.

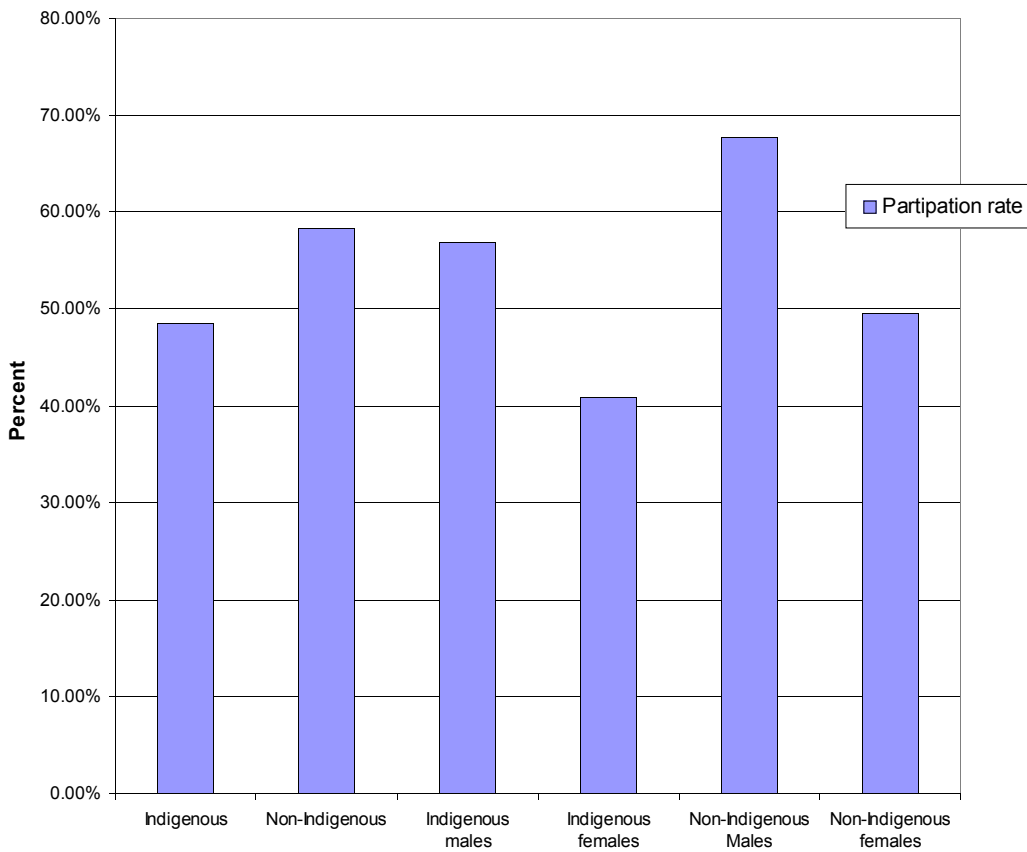


Source: ABS labour market survey, Cat. 6203.0, various years.

As we know, Indigenous Australians suffer much poorer labour market outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians.

In South Australia, both male and female Indigenous Australians have lower participation rates than non-Indigenous (the middle two columns of figure 15.4).

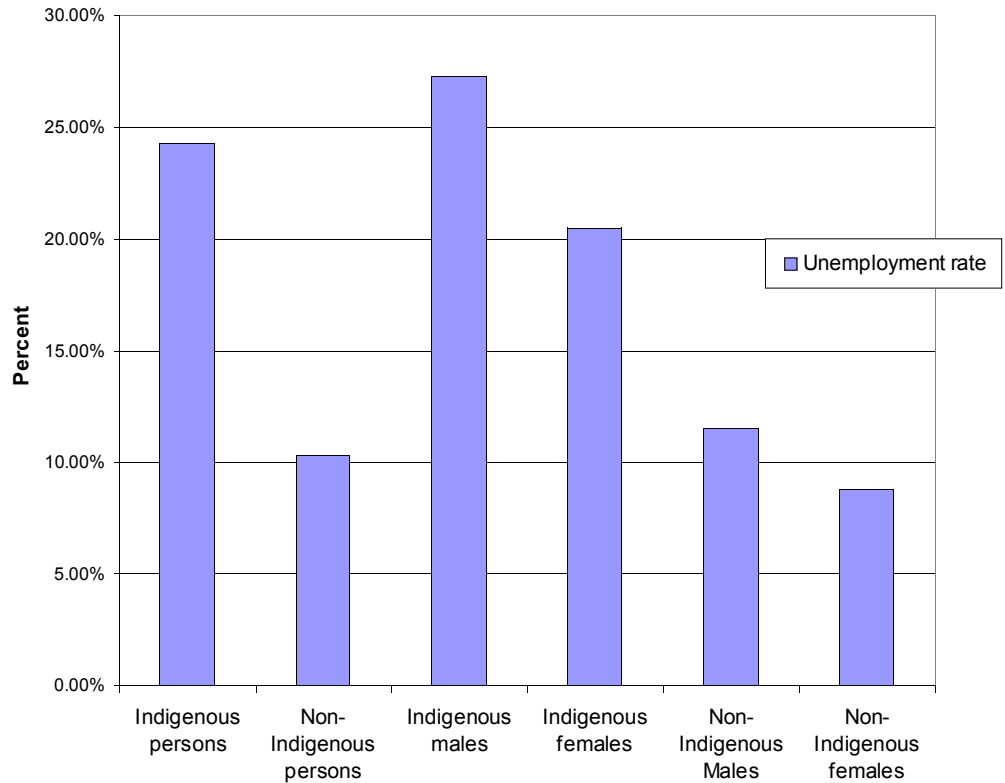
Figure 15.4: South Australian participation in the labour force rate at 1996 census, indigenous/non-indigenous by sex, percent.



Source: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, South Australia, 1996 Census of Population and Housing.

Turning to unemployment, Indigenous men in South Australia have a much higher rate of unemployment than Indigenous women, but for both it is much higher than for non-Indigenous South Australians.

Chart 15.5: South Australian unemployment rate at 1996 census, indigenous by non-indigenous by male by female by percent.



‘Jobs are going every day and small towns are closing down... and then you end up with a community that’s depressed’.

Source: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, South Australia, 1996 Census of Population and Housing.

Indigenous women were very aware of the constraints upon their employment opportunities.

Country women lamented both the loss of employment in their regions, as well as the loss of essential services which affected the quality of community life:

The country is losing a lot of employment opportunities – nursing, teaching, banking. Jobs are going every day and small towns, small communities are closing down, losing shops and then you end up with a community that’s depressed. There are a lot of mental illness issues. What we really need is a lot more community services to cope with these major issues, youth suicide, depression.

Country women were also more likely to talk the difficulties they faced in making use of their skills, and developing them. Some paid a price in limited labour markets for being overqualified or simply facing fewer opportunities:

I’ve lost my qualifications and it’s hard to get back in. (volunteer, mother, living on farm)

Part-time work is hard to find...Hard to negotiate. (rural women, worker, mother)

However, some country women also valued the networking opportunities that existed in some country areas – though these seemed to facilitate volunteering rather more than paid work:

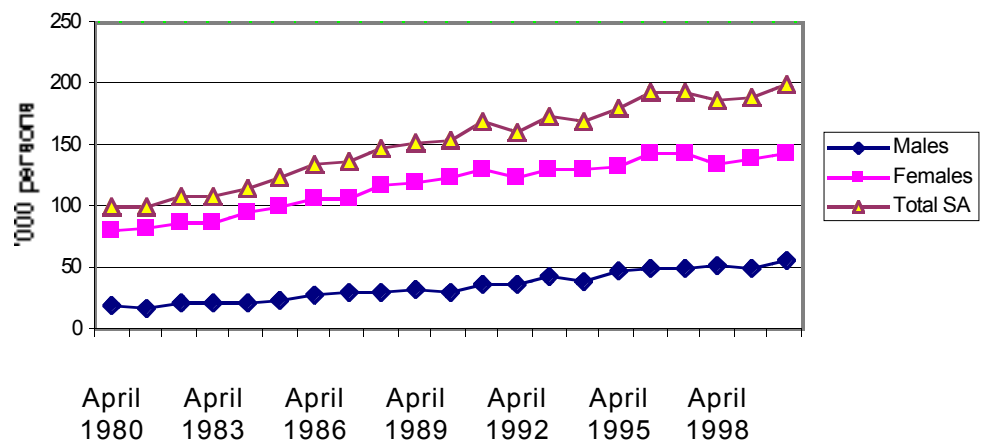
It's obviously limited compared to the city. But being a small community, there are other opportunities like you can volunteer on the local radio station – you wouldn't have that opportunity in the city. You can get into things that are quite different. Here they look for any help they can get. (rural women, worker, mother)

16. Part-time Work

Most of the employment growth across Australia in the past decade has been in part-time work, much of held by women. What are the characteristics of part-time work? And how does it fit with the goals of leading a full life in paid work, as well as meeting personal and family needs?

Figure 16.1 shows the growth in part-time work in South Australia over the past 20 years. This reflects the national trend, but it has been much more pronounced in South Australia.

Figure 16.1 Growth of part-time employment, South Australia 1980-2000 by '000 persons



Source: ABS labour market survey, Cat. 6203.0, various years

In South Australia, there has been a decline of 3,000 full-time male jobs in South Australia over the last twenty years and an increase of 27,000 female full-time jobs. In the same period, the number of women employed in part-time jobs increased by 64,000 and the number of men employed in part-time jobs increased by 37,000. Indeed, total part-time employment doubled between 1980 and 2000 to 201,000 whereas total full-time employment rose by only 24,000 jobs to 476,000.

In the past three years all the net employment growth in South Australia has been in part-time jobs.

Eighty percent of the net employment growth in the past 20 years in the state has been in part-time work. Although the great bulk of part-time workers are women, part-time work has been growing quickly for both sexes – and faster for men than women. Part-time jobs grew by 180 per cent for South Australian women in the 20 years to 2000, and 285 per cent for men.

Compared to Australia as a whole, growth in full-time work has been extremely small in South Australia (see Table 16.1), while growth in part-time work amongst both women and men has been very fast. Thirty percent of all workers in South Australia are now part-time, compared to 27 per cent nationally, and 18 per cent twenty years ago.

In contrast to South Australia, male full-time jobs in Australia as a whole increased in the twenty years from 1980 to 2000. Moreover, full-time employment for women rose at a greater rate in Australia generally than in South Australia between 1980 and 2000.

Table 16.1: Changes in Full-time and part-time employment, Australia, South Australia, 1980-2000

	AUSTRALIA		SOUTH AUSTRALIA	
	Per cent change	Absolute change	Per cent change	Absolute change
Men	17	652,000	-1	-3,000
Women	49	727,000	22	27,000
Total	26	1,379,000	5	24,000
Men	211	452,000	285	37,000
Women	122	949,000	180	64,000
Total	142	1,402,000	201	101,000

Source: ABS Labour Market Survey, Cat. 6203.0, various years.

Many women find that part-time work meets their needs: they want to be available for their families and avoid the stress of full-time paid work. The costs of moving to part-time work are well understood by women. Some have complete acceptance of the circumstance and arrangements that mean that, in working part-time, they are choosing between a career and a growing earnings stream, and caring work. For example, it was accepted by women in part-time work in document processing and call centre work that they did not have a career: they had a 'job not a career'. They saw this 'choice' as between 'greedy', demanding, full-time, career jobs and being the peripheral part-timer. Many part-time workers identified their limited access to a range of workplace possibilities including training, information, development and promotion.

Some who had given up their leadership roles to have children or undertake other caring responsibilities and become part-time, were unhappy with the 'choice'. Vera for example felt a deep sense of loss about making the decision to go part-time to care more for her dependent older relatives and her two sons with disabilities. Her sense of loss was not about income; it was about the lost chance to make a leadership contribution in her workplace, which is a loss not only to her, but also her employer:

Vera: [Being a worker and a carer] is very difficult especially when there are hospital visits. I spend a lot of time trying to organise things. I have taken a lower amount of hours in order to cope with my family and that meant giving up being a leader. I sometimes regret that I have had to make that decision. Being a team member (rather than a leader) is fine. But I only have a job now, instead of a career. (document processing centre, with dependents)

Later, Vera returned to the theme of the costs of moving out of the career stream and her 'great sense of loss':

I have a sense of loss making my decision to give up a leadership position, even though I know I made the right decision. I am reluctant, however, to intervene anymore at work and make a contribution as I am only a team member now. This is really hard because as a team member, if I intervene, it is seen to be interfering. But because I have until recently been in a leadership position there is a great sense of loss now that I can't do it – can't make that contribution.

‘Mother-track’ or Career track?

Country women agreed that there was a stark choice to be made between ‘the mother track’ and ‘the career track’:

Oh Yes! (all agreed)

I think women on a part-time basis have to make that choice, which means a lot of women with young children - if you're on a farm as well - you are over-looked.

It depends on the industry. Over the last 8 years I've worked just to enjoy it – it paid childcare and petrol. But I was happy.

You have to work full-time to climb a ladder. In all occupations.

Senior women in organisations that provided extensive part-time work opportunities agreed.

Other women expressed satisfaction with trading their careers for part-time work. They wanted to avoid higher stress and less flexible jobs, and that meant not having a career. Many wanted to avoid the ‘striving’ and ‘hassle’ that they see exists for full-time workers now:

Jesse: Depends on whether you want a career. I've been doing virtually the same job for 2 and a half years. I'm quite happy doing that. I like my 20 hours. I don't want to have to strive to go somewhere else. Because nobody is going to really take me with 20 hours. And I'm quite happy. I've got my flexibility. I do what I want to do. If I want to work days, nights – it's really quite flexible. To me it's not an issue that there's no progression, because I don't want the progression. I don't want the hassle. Life is easy at the moment. Everything is working fine. Maybe I'd go somewhere else and they're going to put pressure on me to change my hours.

Jesse is happy and believes she will lose what she has – flexibility and part-time work – if she seeks change. She sees only ‘hassle’ and ‘pressure’ if she attempts to better her arrangements. A full-time co-worker of Jesse's agreed with her assessment, and was avoiding promotion, in order to avoid stress:

Margaret: I find the same with full-time. I would like to progress and get more money but I feel like if I progress I'll be put in a more stressful situation that would make me feel that I would not be able to cope so I stay at this level to the detriment of my career so that I can cope.

In Margaret's case, she wants progression but sees that her ‘choices’ are constrained. Progression will increase her stress so she chooses not to be promoted. The test between work and family force a choice that many men simply do not face. The gender pay equity data measure some of the costs of this different set of work options and ‘choices’.

Professional women were particularly clear about the costs they incur through working part-time. They argued that the model of work that exists for professionals like lawyers and doctors – where increasing number of women exist – are simply incompatible with ‘serious caring’. They described co-workers and business partners as viewing part-timers as ‘not serious’ about their work, as this exchange between lawyers and doctors reveals:

Part-time work makes you not very important. You are viewed as not serious. (doctor)

You don't get the information, you don't know what's going on. You get the dummy jobs, the things others don't want to do. (lawyer)

You are stifled. You can get so far and you reach that plateau, and that's it. I feel that I've reached a plateau. I haven't advanced because I'm part-time. (doctor)

There is a sense from some of your colleagues, too, that you should be satisfied with what you've got - that really you are not doing too badly 'for a woman'. (lawyer)

A woman lawyer pointed out that the problems she faced in claiming professional legitimacy were not only to do with going part-time. As a full-time worker, she had experienced 'professional discounting' because her colleagues knew of her four children:

I'd go further. I'd say that I still felt that I was seen as 'the woman with the children'. In terms of any kind of outside activities, any bigger issues, I got the distinct impression that 'Well, we'll leave her out of it, she's got family commitments'. I didn't get to travel, do the interesting things.

Women also returned to discussion of the dominant model of the professional worker – dedicated to the job – and its implications of going part-time. This model, which several of them had internalised, undermined their own professional confidence when they had children or other caring responsibilities:

I've been in full-time general practice, and part-time. It's the way others perceive you but it's even the way you see yourself. I felt that I was always there for everyone, and I felt a loss of professional satisfaction in going part-time. And people don't take you seriously if you're part-time because they think if you are a real GP, then you are there all the time.

Others agreed:

It can have an effect on your self esteem and how you see yourself as a professional. I've had at least one peer question my attitude because I'm not prepared to participate in on-call work. I'm not obliged to – but he said 'I think that is an appalling attitude'. It made me angry, but it also nibbled away quietly at my self-esteem, and how seriously you take yourself. I had another peer say 'Well look, personally, I don't believe you can do what you are doing part-time'. I was angry but meanwhile my brain thought maybe you're right!

It gets at your own ideas of what a good doctor or lawyer is, but it also that they exclude you or punish you in ways for going part-time.

It's as if 'You have made the decision, so you wear it'.

A lawyer who was a partner in her firm, discussed how women with families were leaving the law, and that their loss of contacts cost them dearly, while older women entering law for the first time also encountered barriers:

Interviewer: Are women leaving law?

Yes!

Interviewer: Is it difficult to return?

If you have no contact with the professions, it is difficult. If you are not seen. I have a sense of people leaving and never coming back. They are never heard of. You need to deep tabs on them.

How is it for women becoming lawyers?

Young women and young men are employable. Older women with children find it harder to find a first position.

These professional women attempted to maintain their professional capacities at work, by adopting part-time work. However, they struggled with their own internal sense of how this diminished them as ‘proper doctors’ and ‘proper lawyers’. It also clearly diminished them in the eyes of many colleagues.

Working Part-time to work Full-time not Overtime

Other women used part-time work as a strategy to cut down on the hours they worked from ‘more-than-full-time’, to ‘full-time-though-paid-part-time’. As a manager of a community service put it:

And part-time work isn't really part-time work for women. You are only paid for those hours, but you probably work a lot more. Now I'm working full-time I can't do some of the things with my 5 year old that I'd like to do because I can't be reliable...the demands of the job..You are actually a slave! You are owned by the organisation.

Part-time work certainly reduced the mobility of some into other jobs and careers:

There's not many places to move, being part-time. I've job shared and that's worked well. Males in this workplace that work part-time are predominantly students or they have taken a package – they don't really need to be working. They are quite comfortable – they are supplementing their package.

In contrast, many women part-timers were in it ‘for the long haul’.

The Cost of Being Part-time

At present part-time work is the means by which women *individually* try to reconcile their responsibilities for home and caring. But, as women repeatedly said, part-time work means second-class citizenship in most workplaces. It means less training, being locked out of communication and promotion, a lack of work continuity, lower earnings, less recognition of skills, and frequently unpaid extra hours of work to ‘get the job done’. Frequently, long term part-time employees are casual, with very restricted employment rights.

Not every woman wants promotion and a career. Some writers have argued that women are simply less committed to paid work, and we should not be surprised at their secondary status. But these choices are currently made in an extremely constrained environment, where part-time work is read as a signal of ‘unreliable’: as code for not serious, not promotable, not trainable. Women lawyers and general practitioners, for example, must frequently choose between decent jobs and desirable time with their children or other dependents. These problems are not solved by creating new medical

or legal firms: one group of women GPs had established their own firm and described with surgical precision the inescapable burden that ‘being a GP’ continued to impose on carers.

It is the model of the professional that is unrealisable – at least not on the current terms that in many workplaces imply a devotion to the job that places ‘family’ off the agenda. The contest for commitment is perhaps most obvious in the case of the lawyer partner who lightheartedly describes taking her decision about becoming pregnant to a meeting of her professional partners.

What would have happened should they have said ‘no’? Women with less workplace power must simply accept the terms on offer; Vera must go part-time to look after her sons and parents, and she deeply rejects the move from ‘leader’ to ‘mother-track’.

This cost is clearly evident in pay equity data (as described below). It is also recognised by even the most active advocates of part-time work, who have worked to make their workplaces as positive towards part-time work as possible. A human resources manager in one such company reluctantly concedes that there might be long term costs to career of working part-time:

I hope you don't pay a price for taking time out – for going part-time. It makes no difference, has been my belief. Certainly part-timers have different desires in their career. Many part-timers are prepared to put their career on hold. I'm pretty positive about this company and we have created opportunities for part-timers to do equally. All of our policies are equal, but they are not always applied equally.

In the broader workforce is there is a price for being part-timer? Realistically I'd say it slows you down because you are not there as often. You probably have to be a little more forceful to get your point across, that you can do it, don't forget me, I'm here. You need to be flexible. We have a lot of part-timers who are not flexible, but if you can change your days that you can come in on, be available day or night, then your chances are greater. It shouldn't make any difference, but in reality it does.

Why do the choices around career versus work continue to be so narrow in the face of what can only be described as a massive expansion in part-time work? A high proportion of part-time employees are also casual, as we see below. Many of them are not genuinely casual, but a great number of women who work casually do not distinguish between the two states, or believe that the only way they can access part-time work is by being casual.

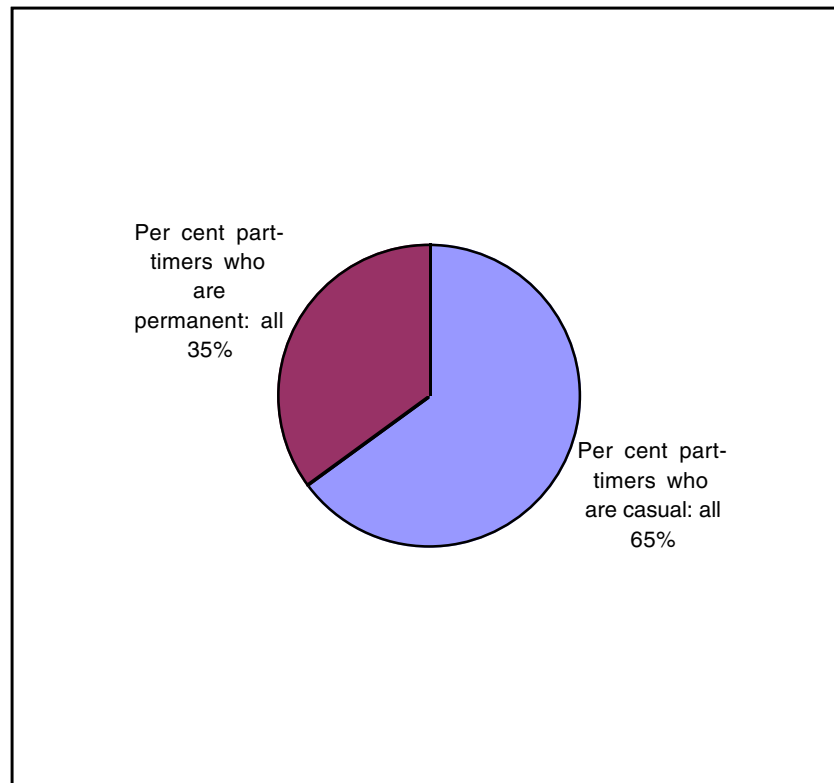
It is time to revalue part-time work, to separate genuinely casual work from ongoing part-time work, and to find ways to better integrate the many – and growing – thousands of Australian women and men who work part-time.

17. Employment Security – Pay and Predictability

Accompanying the growth in part-time employment has been a sharp growth in casual employment. This has been a national trend, but the increase is particularly pronounced amongst South Australian women, especially those who work full-time.

Around two-thirds of part-time workers are also casual, and the remainder are permanent. A much smaller proportion of full-timers are casual (11 per cent of men, 13 per cent of women). A greater proportion of male part-timers are casual, than amongst women, while the reverse is true amongst full-timers

Figure 17.1: Proportion of Australian part-timers and full-timers who are casual



Source: ABS Cat No 6310.0

Table 17.1 shows that 31 per cent of South Australian employees are now casual, compared to 26 per cent nationally. A quarter of men in South Australia are casual, compared to 22 per cent across Australia. However, women are especially affected by casual work in South Australia: almost a third (31 per cent) are casual now, compared to a quarter of women nationally. Most of this difference is concentrated amongst full-time women in the state where 15 per cent are casual compared to only 9 per cent nationally.

Female casual workers in South Australia were much more likely to be in families with children under 15 years of age (29 per cent), than male casual workers (19 per cent). Moreover female part-time workers (33 per cent) were more likely to be in families with children under 15 than female full-time workers (ABS Cat. 4102.0)

Women are especially affected by casual work in South Australia: 31 per cent are casual now, compared to a quarter of women nationally.

The vast majority of casual workers work in the private sector (93 per cent in South Australia) and over a third are employed in small workplaces (35 per cent in South Australia in workplaces of less than 10, the largest category by size of workplace for casuals). However there are also a large number of women who are full-time casual workers in large workplaces: 25 per cent of female full-time casual employees were in workplaces of 100 or more, compared with only 15 per cent of male full-time casuals.

Across Australia, casual workers are concentrated in the two occupations where over half of all women are employed: basic and intermediate clerical, sales and service workers. Half of *all* women in basic clerical, sales and service jobs are casual. In the retail trade, 45 per cent of all jobs are casual, and 55 of those in accommodation, cafes and restaurants are also casual. The phenomena of casualisation in the Australian labour market is feminised.

The precariousness of employment, along with part-timeness, are significant features that distinguish the South Australian labour market. This particularly affects women.

Table 17.1: Casual and Permanent Employment, Australia, South Australia, 2000

	AUSTRALIA	SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Per cent of all workers who are casual		
Per cent men casual	22%	24%
Per cent women casual	32%	38%
Per cent total casual	26%	31%
Percent full-timers that are casual		
Men	12%	12%
Women	9%	15%
Total	11%	13%
Per cent of part-timers that are casual		
Men	80%	80%
Women	59%	60%
Total	65%	66%

Source: ABS Cat No. 6310.0

The Pay Price for Being Casual

Australia-wide, analysis of AWIRS95 indicates a significant pay penalty for both women and men who work casually. Holding a wide range of other personal and workplace characteristics constant, casually employed men are paid 18 per cent less than men who are not casual, while the effect on casual women is a fall of 15 per cent. This is despite the award provisions for greater hourly rates for casual workers to compensate them for their loss of sick, holiday leave and so on (see Appendix 2).

In South Australia, the depressive effect of casual work appears to be even greater: casual women's pay is 25 per cent lower than non-casual women, while casual men's pay is 21 per cent lower, holding many other characteristics constant. In contrast to the national story, in South Australia the negative effect is larger for women than men.

Casual Work: Whose Choice?

Very few women in this study indicated that casual work was their preference. Where they did so this was usually linked to a view that they could be more flexible as casual workers. There was often an assumption that the only form of part-time work was as a casual.

Overwhelmingly, women indicated that they would prefer to be permanent. For example:

I'd rather be permanent for the security. I do full-time work but I'm paid as a casual. (factory, casual, mother)

It is very important for me to be permanent part-time worker. I was a casual in the previous job and I hated not being paid adequately, not knowing how long the job was for. There is no security. You can't plan. It affects holidays, mortgages. You need to be there all the time. (full-time worker)

'They assume that casuals don't do other things when they are not working'.

'On tap' or in charge of your own hours?

The last comment undermines the pervasive misconception of casual work as flexible on the employee's terms. Casual workers were more likely to view themselves as 'on tap' than in charge of their working time.

For those women who were not full-time casuals or on a regular roster there was a sense that they were at the beck and call of the employer:

As a casual I don't get sickies, no holiday pay. At my old factory, the (labour hire company) would ring you up and say 'Go now!' I'd go, and then there is a machine breakdown and you have to go home. Or when you get there they want to know why you are there, and send you home! So you have traveled all the way there and back for no pay. (factory casual, labour hire)

There is an expectation of many casuals that they can do anything at any time:

They assume that casuals don't do other things when they are not working. (casual worker, mother)

As the following conversation between women in the metropolitan area reveals, the capacity to negotiate varies widely by company:

Joanna: My rosters constantly change. The expectations are that I can drop everything and be available. The supervisor gets shitty if I can't be instantly available. But I feel guilty towards the kids. All the flexibility is on the supervisor's side. He has no compassion for my life. You work around the work. Your roster is without notice. It doesn't work both ways. It should. They manipulate your hours to keep you casual. You've got to be cunning – you have to conceal your plans. They know you have kids. Half of the staff have kids. School holidays are a nightmare...the span of hours that they can call you in for has increased. So for working mothers it's very hard. (casual, part-time cashier in security firm, mother)

Karen: My casual work was in education and training. I had more power than you to negotiate. I could organise my work on my own terms. When I worked out that

'The expectations are that I can drop everything and be available.... It doesn't work both ways. It should'.

my skills were worth more, I got more leverage. It took two years doing anything to establish my credentials and negotiate.

Joanna's and Karen's comments suggest a diversity of arrangements that are affected by the employee's skills and power, and the employer's 'compassion'. In other settings, employers felt that casuals chose to remain casual in order to increase their control of hours, and as employers they recognised and respected this:

*Our workers have the choice and none have chosen to go permanent part-time. Because they like the loading and their freedom. They can take leave whenever they want to. I have a very open attitude to people taking leave – they dictate what they do. But we have a very dedicated team who are dedicated to the clients. I understand the dangers of casual work but in this setting it works. And it's mostly women...It's very much a negotiated outcome. **(manager, community based service for the aged)***

In this example, the employer's emphasis is upon 'negotiated' rather than dictated arrangements and her desire to keep her 'dedicated' team together gives the casual employees some bargaining security. In the next example, the (un-unionised) employee's willingness to 'stand up and organise' things – to actively advocate – has resulted in things being negotiated. A woman working in a contract cleaning company in the health sector described her experience:

The boss that I work for says 'let us know when you want to work'...We workers got together and worked out what would work. It's worked really well. Because you've got people who will stand up and organise things and make things better. I'm an advocate. We have three shifts operating and we all do it together.

Once again the idea of a negotiated outcome was critical to the satisfaction reported amongst employees – and in some cases their avoidance of guilt:

*Being casual means they can ask for every school holiday off and they don't have to feel guilty. **(manager, community based service for the aged)***

Others opted to become permanent when their jobs appeared at risk:

*In the nursing home many of our casuals become permanent. We have some people who have been casual for 10 years, and they have finally come onto permanent part-time, mainly when there is major change and uncertainty. **(manager, nursing home)***

Others pointed to management problems that arose from employing 'casuals' long term:

*With one long term casual, I realised after many years that she hasn't taking any holidays. Then I realised she was taking sick leave off – she was using sick leave to have a break. So from the management point of view there are management issues about how you manage the way that casuals take time out and have breaks. **(manager, nurse)***

The casual loading

Some managers believed that employees wanted the leave loading in hand:

There often is no point for people being casual. They are permanent for all purposes. But some want the money in the hand.

However, very few women identified a casual loading as reason to be a casual, recognising that it does not fully compensate for other conditions:

You get loading as a casual but it is not a lot more. I look on it as getting your leave money paid in advance. (factory worker, casual)

When women were asked about the growth in the use of casual employment it was not only seen as a method of employer's control over employee numbers, but also as a direct result of cuts to permanent staff positions:

My husband works in a hospital and if someone is away the casuals come in. They need training and orientation and he often spends half the day getting them ready. Funding is so tight that the cut backs have taken staff members and then they have to stop and train casuals when they are already under so much pressure.

Why is there reliance on labour hire by the government? Because they got rid of too many staff, outsourced too many staff.

A CEO in a rural hospital recognised the pressure on casuals:

We use casual workers in our busy times but they feel the pressure – they don't like to say no. (country hospital manager)

Being employed as a casual was also seen to limit any chances for a career:

I can't apply for any positions where I work unless they are advertised in the paper, although I go through all the training internally.

What did women think should be happening?

Many women felt that the current use of casual employment was inappropriate and that permanent part-time work should be available:

Casual work should be just that. If a person is working in an ongoing part-time job they should get offered permanent part-time.

A preference for job sharing arrangements rather than casual work was also identified:

I think that it is definitely better to have two people sharing than have a fractured arrangement. My co-worker and I used to share and we would overlap our own time to maintain ease of job. As workers we aren't recognised as being able to run things ourselves. The system is too rigid and inflexible. They should give people credit to work out their own relationships.

Caught Between Contracts

In 1998 5.0 per cent of men and 5.3 per cent of women workers were employed in 'restricted tenure jobs' – or jobs with a pre-set period of employment (ABS, cat. 4102.0:116). As with casual workers, many women employed on such fixed term contracts felt a lack of security and an inability to make plans.

Many women identified the feeling of being ‘caught between contracts’ as they were placed under a lot of stress not knowing if they have a job or when their contract came up for renewal. They reported that they ‘usually can’t take holidays, don’t get holiday pay’.

There was also a sense that a system had built up around contract work in the community services area:

In the community services sector that I work in, it’s often short term funding that the agencies get to run that project. They are limited in the ability to offer more. They don’t have much choice. It is the system that has developed around that whole sector.

However workers are being placed under increasing pressure as contracts become shorter and shorter:

I work on fixed term contracts that get shorter and shorter. This concerns me. I used to get 3 year contracts but now I get 6 months Even if the contract rolls over there is a lot of pressure beforehand and loss of permanency, funding issues, annual leave. You can’t take leave when you want and there is pressure not to take it and get paid out at the end.

Women clearly felt contract work placed them under great stress:

Any job now is stressful: performing to full capacity, proving yourself all the time because you are only on contract work. And until such time as you get permanency you will be stressed out. (Indigenous woman)

The nature of contract work means that for many workers there are periods of time without work, which has drastic effects on the household income and no flexibility in the responses available through social security:

Often my partner and I are unemployed at the same time, which drastically reduces the household income and we definitely can’t consider buying a house under these circumstances, as we are not secure.

There is no system to cover contract workers. If you lose your job you can’t have any money in the bank or they won’t give you any unemployment benefits, if you don’t have any money in the bank you can’t pay the car, health insurance etc that you get when you are employed. The system is set up to treat you as a cheat. It is disgusting. There is no flexibility in the system or recognition of the type of work that people do.

Conclusion: employment security

In sum, the South Australian labour market is increasingly characterised by less security. This is a national trend.

This has particularly affected the large number of women who are employed as casuals. Many believe that this is their only road to part-time work. They do not distinguish between permanent part-time work and genuinely casual work, which is in the main part-time. Neither do their employers. However, the law does. It seems that ‘genuinely casual’ work forms only a portion of the total number of jobs that are now casually paid.

‘If you lose your job you can’t have any money in the bank or they won’t give you any unemployment benefits’.

Many women employees would prefer permanent part-time work for the security of their pay and employment. However, they pay the price of precariousness in order to be part-time – and in some cases to avoid guilt when they ask for time off. This is a big price.

It is a price that is not necessarily a saving for their employers, though it does give them greater numerical control of their workforce, and it may increase their power over employees where they must stay ‘on-side’ to keep their shifts.

The growth in contract employment has also affected South Australian employees, and many report unpredictability in their earnings especially in sectors like community services.

These forms of employment are assumed to give employees greater control over their hours of work. For some women this works out. However, a significant portion report the opposite – that they must be ‘on call’ rather than in control. Rather than facilitate their caring and household responsibilities, it complicates them in its unpredictability and insecurity.

18. The Pay Gap Between Women and Men

Women in a great diversity of circumstances are aware that their earnings lag behind men's. Many women earn the same rate as the men that sit directly along side them, who are in the same classification. However, they point to systematic inequities *between* workplaces (with men being paid more in other workplaces):

With regards to equal pay for equal work, you don't get paid the same amount as a man that does the same work as you do. I don't get paid the same as my husband does, though we do exactly the same sort of work, he just works for another company. (woman working in document processing centre)

They also point to the higher pay that seems to flow to jobs that are traditionally men's, even where the skills and scope of comparable 'women's' jobs are very similar.

Women also point to the greater control than men often have to move around the workplace – away from their machines, doing maintenance, or supervising for example.

Women see some movement of women into more senior positions, but they recognise that these women have to fight for their place, and to retain it – and they suffer a lower level of pay and a higher level of scrutiny and criticism (including by women), as this exchange between women working in the city reveals:

Maxine: I used to work at Kodak in Melbourne in the eighties and it was a very male dominated workforce – and there were many more men in CEO positions, more so than women. It is just starting to change now and there's starting to be a few women coming up into CEO positions but they are still not getting as much money under contractual agreements as the men are. Those women have to fight like shit to get there, no matter what field they are in.

Edna: It's changing now. It used to be incredibly marked (even in the public health system) that the managers were men and the juniors were women. Absolutely. (middle manager, public sector)

Bonnie: What I have sensed amongst other managers is that the senior women work really hard...It is a bit of a boys' club – the men are sort of a bit of a club and you do feel a bit out of it...Women have to perform better. There is much more criticism of them. You are under the microscope. So if something goes wrong it comes down on top of you. Whereas what I have noticed with men, if something goes wrong it's OK, it's smoothed out...Women do it too, women can be incredibly critical and there is often a lot more proving to do with them. (manager, health organisation)

These women felt that women's careers were often truncated, and that perhaps this was not always improving for the better. Further, women's contributions are still taken less seriously as this exchange shows:

Edna: I think it's a lot more difficult for women to reach their potential in the workforce, to go as far as you want to go. Or to explore realms that you'd like to go into. I find it hard. I think that's because workplaces are reflecting society and becoming somewhat conservative at the moment and that's had a big impact on the way that I feel I can work. There's much less encouragement. In terms of management, the middle management positions are very isolated. Unless you set up

'I don't get paid the same as my husband does, though we do exactly the same sort of work.'

systems of support it's a bloody awful job and who would want to be in it? (middle manager, public sector)

Tammy: When a women says something it is not take as seriously as when a man says something. At my work my supervisor can say something but then if the marketing manager, who's a man, says the same my boss will take notice. He just thinks women have no idea. I've noticed that with lots of people. Even working in big organisations, like Citibank, a male manager is taken more seriously than a female.

Many women also talked of the under-valuation of their work, relative to men's, whether working in pharmacies, retail, hospitals, or clerical work. A nurse describes what she has observed amongst senior managers:

It's amazing that the CEO and a few of those others high up in the hospital administration are paid much more, compared to the Director of Nursing who has a much greater and increasing span of control. The sheer numbers of who she looks after outweigh the rest of their departments put together. Her span of control is enormous. But her pay does not reflect the same standard. The same at the hospital I used to work at. The matron there – her span of control was much greater than the top dog at the health Commission and he was getting twice her level of pay! Twice! And the formula that they have worked out now is exactly the same. (nurse)

Women expressed strong emotions about their under-valuation. They also pointed out that the nature of the South Australian labour market gave them less flexibility to move between jobs in pursuit of better recognition:

It's not fair. I work in pharmacy. We have to know everything about everything. And I'm paid on the same wage as someone selling fruit and veg. or working in the supermarket. So for the amount of knowledge we are required to know, we are not paid right. It's hard to get into because you have to have the knowledge to get in, but when you get into it, its crappy pay. (pharmacy worker)

It's the same in women's health. All the workers are being paid well below what they actually should be... we are stuck in these classifications and there is this really rigid system – it wouldn't be any different in other places. There are brilliant people doing brilliant things being paid crappy wages. (manager of health service)

Changes in security of work also make is harder to move from where you are - (administrator)

Particularly in South Australia! In Sydney I could drop a job and go into the next job easily, but not here. (clerical worker)

Women working in the country, some living on farms, shared the sense of under-payment for their skills, relative to the rewards available to 'men's jobs'. Their jobs were labeled differently if done by a woman, and they felt a strong sense of the injustice of this. Two country women shared their similar experiences:

I work within a man's world. Recognition for the work that you do isn't there when you are a woman. I mean, I am a regional coordinator. I'm not allowed to be called a Regional Manager. I'm the only employed person for this whole thing. But it's a case of 'you can't be called a manager! You can't be equal to me!'

**'It's a case of
'you can't be
called a
manager!
You can't be
equal to me!'**

Yes. I worked for an agri-business for 9 years and I was the South Australian communication manager at one point - trying to that with 2 little kids from home! I wasn't allowed to be the Communications Manager I was the Communications Officer and I didn't get a pay rise for 5 years until I said I'm not prepared to do this job anymore and they put on somebody else to help me, who ended up being called the 'Communications Manager'.

Women argued that the skills that they developed and applied through voluntary work needed greater recognition. As one farmer put it:

There are so many people doing voluntary work who have so many amazing skills and they are not recognised. It's about time that volunteer groups were recognised – all those fantastic skills – were recognised.

Are these inequities born out by the statistical evidence? Or are they the occasional exception affecting a small number of women? Unfortunately, the data show that women's pay has actually declined relative to men's in South Australia over the last decade, and that much of the gap is explained by the kinds of systematic undervaluations of women's work that these women are describing.

The Statistical Evidence: The Overall Gender Pay Gap

In the past 10 years, South Australia has lost its lead as the state with the narrowest gap between men's and women's earnings.

Table 18.1 Gender pay gap, by state, 1991-1999

	1991	1999	Change	
	Feb.	Nov.		
NSW	82.5	82.5	0	
Victoria	84.5	89.0	+4.5	(ie gap better)
Queensland	84.4	82.8	-1.5	(ie gap worse)
South Australia	86.0	85.2	-0.8	"
Western Australia	81.1	78.0	-3.1	"
Tasmania	83.8	84.4	-0.6	"
Australia	83.5	84.2	+0.7	

However, the gap in South Australia is still less than in most other states. Only in Victoria is the gap narrower. Unfortunately, that is one of the few positive notes in the pay equity story in the state over the past decade.

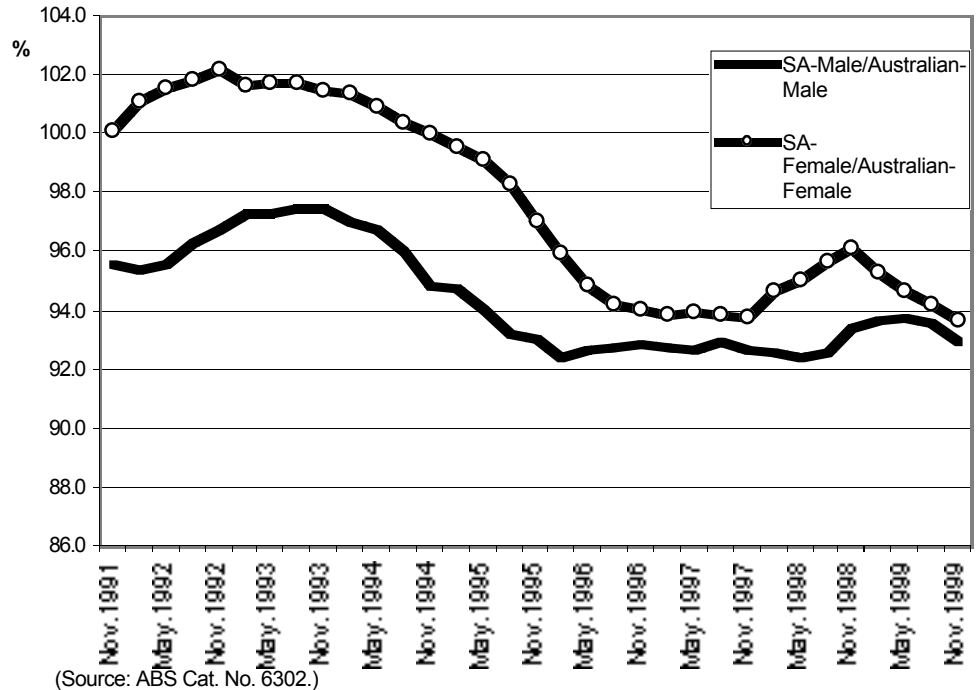
South Australian women's pay has fallen significantly relative to men's over the past 10 years. In the 1990s, the SA gender wage gap grew by 3.1 percentage points, from 11.8 to 14.8 percentage points. Only Western Australia and Queensland show a greater deterioration. Women's earnings in South Australia are currently about 85 per cent of men's (counting only full-time, average weekly, ordinary time earnings).

South Australian women's pay has also deteriorated when compared with women nationally. In 1991, women in South Australia were on par with their national counterparts. By 1999, the average SA female wage had fallen to 93.7 per cent of the national female weekly age (see figure 18.1).

Both males and females in South Australia have experienced a growing gap in their earnings against the national average over the decade, though the change is only statistically significant for females.

South Australian women's pay has fallen significantly relative to men's over the past 10 years.

Figure 18.1
Male and Female SA/Australia Wage Relativities, 1991 to 1999



The Explanations of the Gender Pay Gap

We have explored the South Australian situation using econometric analysis of two data sources. The first source is the Income Distribution Survey (IDS), analysed by Alison Preston of Curtin University, using 1989/90 and 1995/96 data with a sample size of 9068 in SA in the latter year. The second source is the Australia Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS95), analysed by Michael Alexander of Griffith University, using 1995 data with a sample size of 1288 in 1995 in SA.

We use two data sources because they offer us different strengths. The IDS data has a larger SA sample size than AWIRS95, but the latter allows us to examine a larger number of factors, including some that are significant in South Australia. In the following discussion of the pay gap in South Australia, we consider first the main points arising from the IDS analysis and then the main points arising from the AWIRS analysis.

Key Findings: Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap in SA using IDS Data

Pay gaps between men and women are conventionally explained by human capital differences (like education and experience), demographic factors, and industry and occupation. When allowance is made for changes in these factors, we find that over the six year period 1989/90 to 1995/6 the SA-females/NSW-females wage gap has deteriorated by 5 percentage points, independent of other factors: that is, the pay of women in South Australia has fallen by 5 percentage points relative to women in NSW, and the deterioration is not explained by human capital, demographic, industry or occupation changes amongst women in the two states. This change is significant.

The pay of women in South Australia has fallen by 5 percentage points relative to women in NSW.

Amongst men, however, the change was positive for South Australian men, relative to those in NSW, though it was not statistically significant.

Women's earnings in South Australia rise with higher levels of education, as is usually found. However the return on education is lower for women (and men) in the state, relative to national returns. (The AWIRS results are different for men in particular, but given the smaller AWIRS95 sample size, we find the IDS result more convincing).

The same result emerges with respect to experience: while each extra year of experience at work is associated with higher earnings, the increase is less in South Australia for both sexes. (The AWIRS results are in general agreement with this result.)

At the national level, both women and men who work longer hours (ie more than 40) earn significantly more than those who work 35-39 hours. In South Australia, this holds true for men. However, South Australian women who work more than 40 hours do not have significantly higher earnings than those who do not.

There is a more positive state result for migrant employees. Nationally, migrants earn less than their Australian-born workers, while there is no difference in South Australia.

The pay gap between rural and urban employees – both women and men - is wider in South Australia than it is nationally. This difference was well recognised by women in the country, and it rankled that women in rural areas were frequently paid less than similarly skilled workers in the city.

It seems that much of the pay gap that exists between women and men in South Australia can be explained by differences in overtime distribution (ie differences in access to overtime between women and men).

The second major source of the gap lies in the distribution of women and men across low and high paying industries, respectively. This may reflect the under-valuation of feminised jobs in these industries which other research suggests is a very significant source of the continuing pay gap between women and men nationally (Pocock and Alexander 1999).

Differences in education and experience explain only a small part of the gap, as do differences in demographic factors, and differences in men's and women's distribution across high and low paying occupations. This result is substantially reinforced by national data and by the AWIRS95 analysis.

Overall, more of the pay gap in South Australia can be explained by these factors as a group than in Australia as a whole.

The size of the portion of the pay gap that cannot be explained by these factors is often attributed to *either* direct discrimination against women employees or gaps in the data (ie there are significant factors shaping pay inequities that we cannot capture in data, or our existing measures are inadequate).

Interestingly, the unexplained portion of the pay gap in SA appears to be *smaller* in SA than in Australia as a whole. (It is 3.5 per cent of the 12.2 per cent total gap in the state, compared to 11.1 in Australia for the same period.)

This may mean that – relative to the national situation - direct discrimination is less of a contributor to pay inequity in South Australia than structural factors that show up in the IDS study as very significant, like women's concentration in low paying industries and in jobs where they do not have access to overtime.

This does not mean, however, that direct discrimination is not important in South Australia, as over a quarter of the gap remains unexplained and perhaps attributable to the effects of direct discrimination.

Overall, we might speculate from the IDS analysis that under-valuation of women's jobs in the industries in which they are concentrated, their concentration in such low paying industries, their lack of access to overtime, along with possibly direct discrimination, may be more important factors to address in removing pay inequities, than are changes in human capital (like increased qualifications for women).

Key Findings: Analysis of the Gender Pay Gap in South Australia using AWIRS Data

AWIRS95 allows us to examine a wider range of personal, job and workplace characteristics in understanding the gender pay gap.

As with IDS data, nationally, it seems that only a small portion of the overall gender pay gap is explainable, even with a larger set of possible explanatory variables included in the model. A substantial 11.5 percentage points of the national pay gap of 14.7 per cent cannot be explained by the differential endowments of women and men.

In terms of what can be explained, as in the IDS data, human capital differences account for only a small part of the gap in earnings between women and men. The AWIRS95 analysis suggests that if Australian women had the same education and experience as men, the gender way gap would be 4 percentage points smaller at the national level.

A much larger proportion – 9.4 percentage points – is explained by differences in the nature of workplaces at which women and men work. These factors include industry, the workplace size, unionisation, degree of feminisation, access to overtime and shift work, the occupational mix, degree of overseas ownership and competition, amongst others.

Much of the Gender Pay gap is Explained by Structural Factors, Rather than Differences in Education and Experience

There is, it seems, substantial agreement about the causes of the gender pay gap between the AWIRS95 and IDS analyses. Both find that the main explanations lie in structural factors like the different industry and workplace locations of women and men and their differential access to things like overtime, more than in their different education and experience profiles.

In South Australia, women without children earn less than men without children, holding a wide range of other factors that might affect earnings constant. This effect is slightly greater in South Australia, than nationally.

The Effect of Having Children: Bad for Women's Pay, Good for Men's

Analysis of the pay gap in South Australia also reveals that the presence of school-aged children carries a heavy earnings penalty for South Australian women, one that is shared nationally, though at a lower rate. South Australian women with children in the 5-12 year age group suffer a high wage penalty relative to those women without, holding a wide range of possible other explanatory factors, constant. Each additional child increases the pay penalty. The discount is three times greater in South Australia - 12 per cent per child - compared to the national discount of 4 percent per child.

In the case of men, however, the reverse is true. The presence of children for men is associated with higher hourly wages (holding everything else constant), for all age groups of children and for each successive child. Once again, the effect is even greater in South Australia.

Taken together, these results reveal a greater penalty suffered by women with children in SA than the already high penalty that exists Australia-wide. This penalty reflects the many decisions women make to accommodate their parenting – by working part-time, intermittently, casually, by taking long career breaks, or refusing high stress, senior jobs. This is well understood by women and their families, as this exchange between women in a country town suggests:

Veronica: some women are now choosing to be at home with their children until they go to school then go to work.

Christine: I don't completely agree that women can make the same choices. My daughters are professionals. One of them wants to stay at home. She works for the government. You have a six year option to drop out for your kids in the Territory before resuming work, but the thing is, she would be so far behind when she rejoined, so she is torn between a career and wanting a family.

The cost of falling 'so far behind' is clearly understood in the minds of Christine and her mother. Her daughter is being 'torn' by the 'choice', despite the provisions being made by her employer to assist her to take leave. Her daughter understands that if she steps off the career ladder, she loses her place and the pay price for being a mother will be high, as the statistical evidence demonstrates. Christine continues by comparing the situation of her second daughter in the private sector, who does not want to stay at home, but faces a much more difficult, inflexible work environment:

My other daughter would go bananas if she didn't work and she works for a private company. The difference between the private and public jobs is amazing with the private being much more demanding and stressful, not as many incentives, bonuses or flexibility. So both are being affected by their workplaces in relation to career and family.

The Effect of Being Casual

Australia-wide, analysis of AWIRS95 indicates a significant pay penalty for both women and men who work casually. Casually employed men, nationally, are paid 18 per cent less than men who are not casual, while the effect on casual women is a fall of 15 per cent. This is despite the award provisions for greater hourly rates for casual workers to compensate them for their loss of sick, holiday leave and so on.

In South Australia, the depressive effect of casual work appears to be even greater: casual women's pay is 25 per cent lower than non-casual women, while casual men's pay is 21 per cent lower. In contrast to the national story, in South Australia the negative effect is larger for women than men.

Careers, Promotion and Mobility

The pay gap between women and men is partly shaped by the career prospects that women face in their workplaces and occupations. Women spoke of the very variable career prospects that shape their earnings. These vary from country to city, and from occupation to occupation- and according to the compromises they made to be with their children, given current work/family arrangements in their jobs. The following exchange amongst women working in a country town illustrates the complexity of issues. Some women feel that their jobs simply offer no career path, and that it is 'frowned upon' to be looking for advancement, or they attribute their lack of career to their country location. Others have a clear sense of a career, and they want one with some don't want to 'climb the ladder' as long as they see stark sacrifices in terms of their children:

Do you think of yourselves as having a career?

I don't. (clerical worker)

I did until I took this job!

I do. (administrative worker in hospital)

I don't look at mine as a career. I look at it as somewhere to go, to earn some money, to meet some nice people. I see career as climbing ladder.

Interviewer: 'Getting on' is what a career is about?

You have to be working on it all the time. I work with IT. I have to keep at it.

In the public health service here there's nothing. There's no career. There's nowhere to go. In Adelaide I could move up and move into different branches. (data analyst in health system)

In admin. its almost frowned on to go on, to better yourself. (clerical worker)

The wage gap data clearly reflect the push and pull of these complex and varied forces. For a range of reasons, women have lesser access to advancement and pay rises in many locations, and this depresses their pay relative to men's. Pharmacists, retail workers, receptionists, women in professional jobs in the public sector, felt that in relation to their skills, they were underpaid, and had limited access to promotion.

Occupational and Industry Segmentation

The wage gap data also reveals the price of the continuing segmentation of jobs by sex. This has many effects. Women referred to the great mobility that men enjoyed in their jobs, particularly in a factory setting where sex-segmentation of jobs is very fixed – and as this exchange reveals - unchanging:

I think women work harder. The men spend too much time talking. They spend half their time out in the smoko hut!

They are allowed to and the women are not?

That's right. They have longer breaks. Because we look after the machines - you have to be there. They don't. They just disappear!

They wander!

There are not many men in some areas.

We have one man in our department. He's hard to track down!

If you are in the same level job, you get the same level pay. Mechanics get more. We did have two women mechanics in one area.

They got rid of them quick-smart!

They were better. It was very hard for them – the men would niggle.

The women did a better job and the men didn't like being shown up by the women.

The two women mechanics arrive, are trained, do their jobs well and then disappear, observed by the lower paid women operators on machines. It seems that men's monitoring and protection of their space and jobs continues in at least some workplace settings.

'Men's jobs' are different in their pay and career and promotional prospects, and also in the control that men have over their movements at work, and the limited access women have to such skilled work.

Australia's labour market has long been recognised as amongst the most sex-segmented in the OECD area. Tables 18.2 and 18.3 below suggest that they remain very sex-segmented by industry, with 59 per cent of all South Australian women concentrated in only four industries (retail trade, property and business services, education and health). This compares to 57 per cent nationally.

In terms of occupation, almost half of all women working in South Australia are in two occupational categories: elementary, clerical sales and service workers, and intermediate clerical sales and service workers. Only 2 per cent of all working women were trades persons (compared to 3 per cent nationally) and a similarly small proportion were managers and administrators. It seems that women's industry and occupational choices remain very limited. The analysis of wage gap data suggest that this segmentation remains an important contributor to women's lower wages in the state, and policy responses that broaden women's occupational and industry employment will assist, along with initiative to improve the wages in female dominated industries, occupations and workplaces.

Table 18.2 Percentage of female employees by industry, SA, Australia, August 1999

	South %	Australia %
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2	1.3
Mining	0	0.01
Manufacturing	9	7
Electricity, gas and water	1	0.01
Construction	1	1.3
Wholesale trade	4	4
Retail trade	16	17
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	6	6
Transport and storage	2	3
Communication services	1	1.3
Finance and insurance	5	5
Property and business services	12	11
Government administration and defence	4	5
Education	11	12
Health and community services	20	17
Cultural and recreational services	2	5
Personal and other services	4	3

Source: Employee earnings, benefits and trade union membership, ABS cat. 6310.0

Table 18.2 Percentage of female employees by occupation, SA, Australia, August 1999

	Australia %	SA %
Managers and administrators	2	2
Professionals	21	19
Associate professionals	9	10
Tradespersons and related workers	2	3
Advanced clerical and service workers	8	7
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	30.00	28
Intermediate production and transport workers	3	3
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	16	16
Labourers and related workers	8	11

Source: Employee earnings, benefits and trade union membership, ABS cat. 6310.

What Should Be Done to Narrow the Gender Pay Gap?

Analysis of average weekly ordinary time earnings shows that the pay gap has widened in the past ten years, so that on average South Australian women now earn 85 per cent of men's pay (excluding overtime and part-time effects). A small part of the gap between the sexes is explained by women's lower qualifications than men's, so that greater education for women will make a positive difference. This makes action to encourage women to increase their qualifications and skills a useful response.

But even if women achieve the same level of formal qualifications as men, *most* of the current gap will remain, because it is the result of women's lesser access to overtime, and of women's concentration in lower paying jobs – jobs that are not necessarily lower *skilled*, but are lower *paid* by tradition. Women's jobs pay less for many reasons, but important amongst these is the traditional under-valuing of 'women's' work – whether in hospitals, schools, child-care centres or factories. This undervaluation is embedded in our industrial relations systems and wage fixing practice. Women's comments show that they are well aware of this, across the state and across the widest range of occupations, levels, and geographic areas.

Analysis of the explanations of the pay gap in South Australia suggests that correcting this under-valuation is essential. This task has been taken up in other states through pay equity inquiries and their recommendations for systemic, accelerated change (Industrial Relations Commission of NSW 1998). Women's individual efforts to increase their qualifications, to assertively project themselves in the workplace, and to claim the full value of their skills, will leave many deeply structured sources of the pay gap unchallenged without such systemic change. Alongside this, direct discrimination against women is still present in South Australia (though it is perhaps less significant than in other states). Most importantly, women's concentration in low paying jobs, industries and workplaces, and their lesser access to overtime, are very important in explaining the gender pay gap. It is important that ways be found to better value and pay traditionally female jobs, and to encourage women into a broader range of occupations and industries. A pay equity inquiry which directly addresses these issues at state level will assist this process.

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