

FIFTY FAMILIES

**What unreasonable hours are doing to Australians,
their families and their communities**

A report commissioned by the Australian Council of Trade Unions

By

Barbara Pocock Centre for Labour Research, Adelaide University

Brigid van Wanrooy Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training

Stefani Strazzari Centre for Labour Research, Adelaide University

Ken Bridge Centre for Labour Research, Adelaide University

July 2001

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS	8
REPORT STRUCTURE	10
METHODOLOGY.....	10
CONDUCT OF INTERVIEWS	10
SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES	11
THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF INTERVIEWEES.....	13
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	13
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND THE USE OF INTERVIEW MATERIALS.....	15
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	16

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW: UNREASONABLE HOURS AND WHAT THEY DO TO US.....	17
WHAT KINDS OF UNREASONABLE HOURS DO PEOPLE WORK?	17
NOT ALL 'TIME' IS THE SAME	19
<i>Work Intensity: 'It's not just the hours – it's what you do in them too'</i>	19
WHY DO PEOPLE WORK LONG HOURS?.....	20
<i>Money</i>	20
<i>Under-staffing: 'There just aren't enough people here to do the job anymore'</i>	21
<i>'Why don't we spread the work around? Why do I have to do so much?'</i>	21
<i>Loving your job and 'commitment'</i>	22
<i>Job protection: Doing extra hours to out of fear.....</i>	22
<i>The 'choice' of long hours.....</i>	22
<i>Long hours and workplace power: 'I feel powerless to say no'</i>	23
<i>Increasing Expectations of unpaid extra hours: 'compulsory voluntary work'</i>	23
WHAT LONG HOURS DO TO INDIVIDUALS.....	24
<i>Working long hours – under pressure: Frank's story.....</i>	24
<i>Pushed to the limit</i>	24
<i>'A man can only do so much'</i>	25
<i>The work/eat/sleep cycle.....</i>	27
<i>The 'over-time junkie' becomes the benchmark.....</i>	28
<i>The effect of long hours on the individual: health, fatigue and a narrow life.....</i>	29
SAFETY: ZOMBIES AT WORK.....	31
WORK BECOMES LIFE – OR THREATENS IT.....	32
<i>Natasha and Thomas: 'Gee I've got no friends'</i>	32
ACCLIMATISING TO LONG HOURS: THE BOILED FROG SYNDROME	33
THE EFFECT ON FAMILIES: TIME POVERTY	34
<i>'Long hours' families are starved for time</i>	34
<i>The unstable money/care imbalance.....</i>	35
<i>The quality of time at home: 'He's moody, grumpy and thinking about work'</i>	36
<i>Living with long hours: 'I'm a single parent'</i>	36
<i>A return to the 1950s family: 'Leave it to Beaver?'</i>	37
HOW LONG HOURS AFFECT CHILDREN AND PARENTS	37
<i>Young children under five.....</i>	38
<i>School aged children: 'the hurry up kids'</i>	39
<i>Adolescent children</i>	40

WHAT LONG/UNREASONABLE HOURS DO TO INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS	41
<i>Casey's story: 'It creates a strain'.....</i>	42
<i>Unpredictable hours and 'missing him'</i>	42
<i>Intimacy: your sex life doesn't exist'</i>	43
<i>The double day</i>	44
THE PRICE OF LONG HOURS FOR CARERS	45
<i>Maggie and Con</i>	45
FITTING IN AROUND LONG HOURS: THE RESIDUAL PARTNER.....	46
<i>Tricia's adaption.....</i>	46
<i>'It puts the burden on me'</i>	47
<i>The effect on women's careers: accommodating partner's long hours.....</i>	47
<i>Fitting in around Phillip</i>	47
WORKING PART-TIME - TO WORK 'NORMAL HOURS' AND AVOID LONG HOURS	48
YOU ARE 'FAMILY' OR YOU ARE 'WORKER': MUMMY AND DADDY TRACKS.....	48
<i>Long hours foster the Mummy-track</i>	49
<i>A 'daddy track'</i>	49
<i>Sonya and Gerard and the mummy and daddy tracks</i>	49
<i>Bob and Abby: 'there's a sense of danger'</i>	50
LONG HOURS: EMBEDDING SYSTEMIC DISADVANTAGE FOR WOMEN	50
LONG HOURS PARTNERSHIPS	51
<i>Two long hours jobs: Natasha and Thomas</i>	52
THE EFFECT ON EXTENDED FAMILIES	52
<i>Pat: A grandmother's story</i>	53
THE CHOICE TO GO 'DOWNWARD'	53
SPORT AND HOBBIES	53
VOLUNTARY WORK	54
THE EFFECT ON COMMUNITIES	54
PRODUCTIVITY AND UNREASONABLE HOURS	54
<i>Tired workers adopt behaviours that protect them from more work and they lack creativity</i>	55
NEW TECHNOLOGY AND UNREASONABLE HOURS	55
WHAT WOULD HELP?	56
<i>Ideal hours?</i>	57
THE GROWING GRIP OF A 'LONG HOURS' CULTURE.....	57
A LEGAL STANDARD: THE ARGUMENT FOR GOING BEYOND LOCAL AGREEMENTS	58
LONG HOURS CORRODE COMMUNITY AND FAMILY LIFE – IN PRIVATISED WAYS	59
ENTER THE NEO-'IRON WORKER'? THE ROLE FOR SOCIAL AND STATUTORY POLICY	60

CHAPTER 3

ENGINEERS AND THEIR FAMILIES	61
<i>What were their motivations?.....</i>	62
<i>The long hours culture: power, powerlessness and negotiating hours</i>	62
<i>Will long hours continue?</i>	63
<i>Long unreasonable engineer's days</i>	64
<i>Extended hours: working on the phone</i>	65
<i>The effect on individuals of working long, unreasonable hours</i>	66
<i>Hobbies and sport.....</i>	67

<i>The effect on families of engineers 'You get used to it'</i>	67
<i>Effect on relationships</i>	69
<i>'You understand – but it doesn't make it better'</i>	71
<i>Live to work: 'I have to force them to have holidays'</i>	71

CHAPTER 4**STRAPPERS OR STABLE HANDS IN THE RACING INDUSTRY 73**

<i>'The industry runs on passion'</i>	73
<i>Strapper's hours</i>	74
<i>The effect on the individual</i>	75
<i>The effect on relationships</i>	75
<i>Doing things outside work</i>	76
<i>'Becoming acclimatised'</i>	76

CHAPTER 5**FLIGHT ATTENDANTS: TIME ZONES, RECOVERY TIME AND ROSTERS 78**

<i>Not all 'time' is the same</i>	79
<i>The hours force a choice between work and family</i>	79
<i>The effects on flight attendants individually</i>	80
<i>The effects on families of flight attendants</i>	81
<i>The effects on children</i>	81
<i>Relationships</i>	83
<i>'I call myself a flight attendant widow... I'm a single parent when he's away'</i>	86
<i>Social life</i>	87
<i>What would help?</i>	87

CHAPTER 6**THE POSTAL INDUSTRY 88**

<i>Why work long hours? It's the unpaid labour that gets the job done</i>	89
<i>The effects of unreasonable hours on the individual postal worker</i>	90
<i>The effects on postal workers and their families</i>	91
<i>The effect on couple relationships</i>	92
<i>The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children</i>	93
<i>The effect on communities and on social life</i>	94

CHAPTER 7**TEACHING 95**

<i>A 'professional' culture that is greedy for unpaid hours</i>	96
<i>Burn-out</i>	96
<i>The pleasures of working long hours</i>	97

<i>Unpaid Overtime: 'It's just assumed you'll do it'</i>	98
<i>The effect on the individual</i>	100
<i>A culture of long hours expectation</i>	101
<i>Effects on productivity of individuals</i>	103
<i>'The workload was too much and I couldn't cope'</i>	105
<i>The committed professional: embedded expectations</i>	105
<i>'It's not just the hours you work, it's also the condition you're in when you come home'</i>	105
<i>The effect on couple relationships</i>	106
<i>Effect on family life</i>	107
<i>The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children</i>	108
<i>'Do we have a parent this week?... Or do we have to go out and rent one?'</i>	108
<i>The effect on physical activity, sport and hobbies</i>	110
<i>The effect on extended families</i>	110

CHAPTER 8

SUPERVISORS IN MANUFACTURING	112
<i>Long hours and 'averaged hours' agreements</i>	112
<i>You work the long hours 'to do the right thing' – and keep your job</i>	112
<i>What long hours do to families of supervisors and skilled workers</i>	113
<i>The subtle pressure to work long hours: 'I had a commitment'</i>	114
<i>Social life</i>	115
<i>I don't live to work, I work to live.</i>	115
<i>The effect on relationships:</i>	
<i>'It's not worth our marriage, it's not worth what it's doing to us'</i>	116
<i>'Why don't you show us as much attention as you do to your work?'</i>	117
<i>What would help?</i>	119

CHAPTER 9

PUBLIC SERVICE	120
<i>The long hours of public service</i>	120
<i>Why work long hours?</i>	122
<i>Staffing levels are crucial</i>	122
<i>The Personal Impact of Long Working Hours</i>	123
<i>Impact on family: 'Please don't go to work on Sunday Mum'</i>	125
<i>Effect on Relationships</i>	127
<i>Domestic work: the one at home does more</i>	129
<i>Impact on partners: their support is essential to the survival and maintenance of the long hours worker</i>	129
<i>Effects on grandparents and grandchildren</i>	130
<i>Effects on spending patterns</i>	131
<i>Long hours and social participation</i>	131
<i>Going part-time: pleasures and the price</i>	131
<i>The Family Tag: the 'mummy' track, the 'daddy' track</i>	132
<i>It's hard to be family friendly when your job needs more</i>	134
<i>The impact of long hours on those without children: 'I'm doing yours!'</i>	134
<i>'Fitting in' around long hours partners</i>	134

<i>Long hours are part of being a manager</i>	135
<i>The culture of long hours: a badge of honor</i>	135
<i>Productivity</i>	136
<i>Keeping up long hours: the boiled frog syndrome</i>	137
<i>What would help</i>	138

CHAPTER 10

TECHNICIANS IN RESEARCH FACILITIES	140
<i>Technicians: the price of professionalism</i>	141
<i>The effect on individual technicians</i>	141
<i>The effect on couple relationships</i>	141
<i>The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children</i>	142
<i>What is 'reasonable overtime'</i> ?	143
<i>What would help?</i>	144

CHAPTER 11

PARAMEDICS: LONG SHIFTS, NIGHT WORK AND UNEXPECTED SHIFT EXTENSIONS.....	145
<i>Current Hours: a typical pattern</i>	147
<i>The effect on the individual</i>	147
<i>Emotional recovery</i>	148
<i>Health and safety</i>	149
<i>Meal breaks: A window of opportunity?</i>	150
<i>The effect on the family</i>	151
<i>'14 hour shifts are for the young and childless'</i>	153
<i>'Tag team parenting'</i>	153
<i>The effect on relationships</i>	154
<i>Social life</i>	154

CHAPTER 12

MINERS: LONG HOURS SHIFTS	155
<i>Day/night 12 hour shifts</i>	155
<i>The work/eat/sleep cycle dominates life</i>	156
<i>Effects on health: fatigue, backs and pills</i>	156
<i>Fatigue and safety</i>	157
<i>Effects on community</i>	158
<i>Effects on relationships</i>	159
<i>Effects on women: 'I'm the mother and the father'</i>	161

CHAPTER 13

DOCTORS	162
WORKING HOURS.....	162
<i>Long hours</i>	162
<i>The unpredictability of hours</i>	163
<i>Mix/combination of shifts</i>	163
THE IMPACT OF WORKING HOURS	164
<i>Exhaustion</i>	164
THEIR EXTRA-CURRICULAR LIFE	164
PERSONAL PROBLEMS AS A RESULT OF WORKING HOURS	165
EFFECT ON PARTNERS.....	166
EFFECT ON CHILDREN.....	166
<i>Chalking up a 'time debt' to your partner</i>	167
IMPACT ON FAMILY AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	168
<i>'We hadn't actually seen each other for 26 nights out of the month'</i>	169
<i>Bargaining for more control over hours.....</i>	171
PATIENT SAFETY	171
THE CAUSES OF LONG HOURS	172
<i>The needs of patients</i>	172
<i>The need for training.....</i>	173
<i>'We are told not to take our leave'</i>	173
<i>Competition for training places.....</i>	173
<i>'Keep your nose clean and your mouth shut!'</i>	173
<i>Covering for your peers.....</i>	174
<i>Professional culture</i>	175
<i>The ideology of professional dedication?</i>	175
<i>Budget pressure:</i>	175
<i>'You don't take your sick leave'</i>	175
FIXING THE PROBLEM?	176
<i>Reduced hours?</i>	176
<i>After hours work/on call hours:.....</i>	176
<i>More flexible arrangement of hours?</i>	176
THE CULTURE OF MEDICINE.....	177
FAMILY Vs WORK:	178
SERVICE Vs TRAINING:.....	178
THE IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN.....	178

CHAPTER 14

ELECTRICIANS AND THE REDUCTION IN WORKING HOURS.....	181
<i>What long hours do to individual electricians.....</i>	181
<i>'His kid doesn't want to see him'</i>	182
<i>'You basically became a zombie'</i>	182
<i>What long hours do the families of electricians</i>	184
<i>The effect on electrician's relationships</i>	187
<i>The effect on electrician's social life.....</i>	188
<i>Employer pressure: the 'choice' to work overtime in the construction industry.....</i>	189

<i>Control over hours and work</i>	191
'It's the nature of construction industry'	191
<i>Changing a long hours culture: it's possible</i>	192
<i>What capped overtime has meant for electricians</i>	192
'Spreading the work around'	194
<i>What would help?</i>	195
REFERENCES	196
APPENDIX: RESEARCH PROTOCOLS	197

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

There are few studies of how long or unreasonable hours affect Australians, especially studies that include the ways in which individuals, families, relationships and households are affected. Yet in many households, at least one adult is working unreasonable hours. Little is known about how these hours affect the quality of life, and how the long term working of such hours is likely to affect our families, communities and children. This study undertakes close, qualitative analysis of personal experience and the effects of unreasonable hours on the web of personal, household and community relationships.

The absence of studies like this is a serious gap in Australian research in that it leaves unexplored the real effects of long hours on individuals, their households and their communities. We might reasonably guess that long hours affect family life both positively where they generate significant income, and negatively where they wear people out. However, in a research sense we know little about these relative effects and their true nature in Australia.

This study makes a first analysis of just over 50 (54 to be precise) families who experience long hours or hours that are ‘unreasonable’ like very long hours, changes in time zones, irregular shift work, unpredictable hours, or combinations of these. Our study includes individuals and, in almost two-thirds of cases, their partners. It suggests that the majority of employees and their families are negatively affected by unreasonable hours, and that the individuals who work long hours, or unpredictable long hours and shifts, suffer serious effects from such hours. Many of these workers receive no real increase in income for their hours: they work ‘unpaid-unreasonable’ hours. Some are hoping for a long term financial benefit – through promotion. Others are working long hours in the hope that their jobs will be protected, and their security will be assured – as ‘good’ workers they will be rewarded by keeping their jobs.

Others find great personal reward in doing a good job; they enjoy their work. Many feel a commitment to the people they look after, the children they teach, the lives they save, the work they supervise or complete, or the animals they love. Many who work long hours enjoy aspects of their jobs: indeed some talk of loving their jobs. However, the story is often very different for their partners and children – some of whom *do not* love their partner’s or parent’s jobs. While some are paid well for their unreasonable hours, many are not - either because their pay is low or because their long hours are unpaid – or both.

In the twelve industries we examined, these long or unreasonable hours – whether paid or unpaid - affect the quality of workers’ relationships with partners, children and families; and they constrain their participation in communities and as citizens.

Some workers – or their employers - are suffering serious consequences or risking them – in relation to health, safety, family stability, and the quality of relationships. Many talked about the negative productivity impact of their hours of work.

This research finds many points of agreement with international findings. It is not just the hours of work that matter to workers, but the fact that many ‘long-hours jobs’ are also high stress jobs where workers do multiple tasks, frequently feel that their jobs are ‘never done’ and have elements of unpredictability about their time at work. ‘Long hours jobs’ are often demanding jobs. Where employees work shifts in combination with long hours, the pressure and effects are more extreme.

As the international literature tells us – along with common sense - time with partners and children matters. It affects the quality of relationships. This research shows that many who work long hours feel anxious or regretful about inadequate time with their partners and children. They are often concerned about the impact of their hours on themselves and on their intimate relationships. While many factors shape the health of these relationships, this study shows that family members are affected by long-hours-workers’ bad moods and ‘grumpiness’, and that tiredness, limited time for family, and exhaustion take a toll on relationships.

This research also finds widespread evidence of a culture of long hours in many industries. This culture makes resistance to long hours problematic. New standards of the ‘proper worker’ raise the ‘hours bar’ for workers, especially those with caring responsibilities. In industry after industry in this study, long hours are named as unfriendly to caring. In many jobs, interviewees say that women with children find great difficulty in doing them. Fathers who want to be involved with their children are forced down a ‘daddy track’ which resembles that identified for ‘mummies’ in the literature. For both sexes the decision to cut back hours, to take a demotion, or to work part-time are frequently read as a turning away from career. The penalties for the long term equality at work for women are obvious. So are real costs for men who are carers. The culture of long hours can be successfully challenged – as the electrician’s case shows us – but it requires concerted effort and enforceable and enforced statutory standards.

This study also shows that new technologies are changing work/time relationships. The telephone has long been a means of extending work into the home. However, new technologies like the mobile phone are extending work into the car, and – along with laptops and computer technologies - into the home in new ways that lengthen working days and intensify work. They pull work further into the family setting.

Long hours are not a problem only for those in traditional families. This study shows that people with other kinds of dependents are also affected by long hours. Beyond them, single workers are also affected because some find themselves being ‘leaned on’ to work longer hours where those with families are, in some circumstances, ‘protected’ by their family responsibilities. What is more, *all* women are affected by a new standard that lengthens expectations about hours *alongside* entrenched expectations that all women will be affected by maternity/family. In this way, long hours affect not just those with children and families: they affect many workers.

Report Structure

This report falls into fourteen chapters. In chapter two, we provide an overview of the effects of long hours on individuals, families and communities. We stand back from the detailed data and set out some general themes that arise from the overall picture. This summary arises from the twelve sectoral studies which form the remaining chapters. In these we describe the main effects of long/unreasonable hours for individuals and families, on a sector by sector basis. We conducted only one interview in the finance sector, and so no overall sectoral review is provided.

In the remainder of this chapter we set out our methodology and describe the set of interviews and sources of other data we use in this report. We also consider the limitations of our study.

Methodology

This study analyses the effects of unreasonable hours of work amongst 54 employees who work unreasonable hours, based on interviews with each employee and where possible, separate interviews with their partners.

The protocol for the research is included as an attachment. This includes an outline of the purpose and approach of the study, and a list of the questions asked. The protocol gave participants a guarantee of the confidentiality of their interviews to the research team.

The research team consisted of five members. The study was managed and developed by Dr Barbara Pocock, Director of the Centre for Labour Research (CLR), Adelaide University, with Dr John Buchanan Deputy Director at the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching (ACIRRT). Most of the interviews were conducted and analysed by Stefani Strazzari, Brigid van Wanrooy and Barbara Pocock, (the former two are Research Associates at the CLR and ACIRRT, and they hold Honours degrees in Sociology and Social Science respectively). Barbara Pocock drafted this report except for the doctor's chapter. Ken Bridge of the CLR conducted the interviews of doctors and summarised the results. The original idea for the study was John Buchanan's. The study was funded by the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Conduct of interviews

In total 89 interviews were conducted over a two month period in May and June 2001; 54 of these were with workers identified as working unreasonable hours; 35 of these were with partners, some of whom also worked unreasonable hours.

Table 1 summarises details of interviewees. The interviews were mostly conducted in person either in employee's homes or a convenient office, or if suitable in a workplace. Where the location of employees made personal interview impossible, telephone interviews were conducted and taped either by Telstra or by means of a teleconference facility. Almost all of the interviews were recorded with the written (or taped) permission of the interviewee, except in a few cases where interviewees did not agree to taping. These records were used to

supplement written notes taken in the process of interviews. Where interviews were not taped, extensive notes were kept.

In view of the requirement that these interviews be kept confidential, all research materials are kept in a locked facility available only to the research group of this project and pseudonyms have been used throughout this study. In some cases, details of workplaces, families or individuals have been modified so that employees cannot be identified.

Separate sets of interview questions were devised for employees and for their partners. These questions were designed to elicit general information about the subject's hours of work and jobs, the effects of these hours on individuals, families and communities, and their ideas about ideal hours of work in their households. Questions were carefully constructed to be non-directive and to ensure a relatively unstructured conversation (Crotty 1998:7). In a few cases, couples were interviewed together where separate interviews were not convenient. On average interviews lasted an hour.

In all cases the interview questions were used only as a general guide. We aimed to pursue issues of interest to the interviewee in the context of a general discussion about long/unreasonable hours of work and family and community life. All questions were open ended, and final questions asked for 'further thoughts' or 'anything else you would like to say about working long hours'.

Full interview transcripts were not made, although full tapes of almost all interviews were made. This report uses blocks of quotes from these interviews. These quotes have been culled and organised in a thematic way to illustrate points.

The report is very long to provide a fulsome representation of the content of these interviews. While full interview transcripts are not provided in this report, quotes have been used in full except where [...] appears within a quote. These gaps mean one of four things: the missing words might have identified the interviewee, they interfered with the sense of the paragraph, they repeated what has appeared elsewhere, or they were not relevant.

In some cases, details of interviewees' lives have been changed to ensure that they cannot easily be identified.

These interviews were then analysed from tapes. Each interview was listened to several times and key sections transcribed. Each interview was thus individually analysed, then each industry group of interviews (workers and partners) was written up as a sectoral case. The overview section was then written, drawing on the sectoral analysis.

Selection of Interviewees

Our group of interviewees was generated in the following way. Union organisers were asked to generate a list of names of employees working long/unreasonable hours in the areas of employment covered by the ACTU award vehicles. We defined long/unreasonable hours as those in excess of approximately 48 per week in a 12-week cycle, or of longer hours for shorter periods of time, or hours that created unsafe work or significant loss of amenity to employees. In general, we asked and were supplied with, a list of around a dozen names of

employees in each industry or occupational area. In a number of cases, union organisers sent out email messages to members seeking the names of employees working long hours. In other cases, organisers spoke at member's and delegate's meetings, asking members and delegates to nominate the names of co-workers (or themselves) who worked long hours. In some cases committee members of professional associations were invited to participate.

We sought a mix of employees by occupational area: for example, in the post office area, we sought employees managing post offices, and delivering and sorting mail. In the Commonwealth public sector we sought employees at executive and non-executive level. We aimed for a mixture of men and women, and a sample that included in each industry group, at least some with family responsibilities. We then selected randomly from the lists supplied and worked from the list until we had agreement from, in general, three or four employees in each award area who were willing to be interviewed. We asked each of these employees that were in a relationship for permission to approach their partner's for interview. In general we then approached their partners for permission. Around 10 workers or partners refused these second interviews; other interviewees did not have partners or their partners could not easily be interviewed.

Setting up interviews of workers working long hours, along with interviews of their partners, confronts a number of logistical problems. Most importantly, by definition, these workers are short of time. Their partners are often also very busy with a large domestic and family load. Further, we found a number of workers were very concerned about the confidentiality of their interviews. They felt at risk in their industries or workplaces, should their employer or supervisor hear of their participation in this study, or of what they had said. Their access to overtime, would in some cases be at risk they felt, and in some cases, their jobs. Indeed, one interviewee reported that providing a witness statement in a previous industrial case had resulted in victimisation: he held the firm view that he had been made redundant because of his supervisor's hostility to his provision of a witness statement. Some of those invited to participate were afraid to be interviewed about their hours, as Gerry pointed out:

*Even our conversation that we're having tonight, a lot of people feared whole-heartedly, no way in the world do I want to get involved in that, just in case, you know.
My personal thoughts are that you have a right of speech and you should have the freedom to speak what you feel. And if you're asking for what you're entitled to no one should be able to pull the blanket over you or muffle you and say 'no, you're not going to say that, 'cause we don't agree with it'.*

In other cases, employees were reluctant to agree to us approaching their partners, knowing that our research was seeking discussion of personal and family issues. Nonetheless we were able to conduct 89 interviews in total, 54 with employees, and 35 with their partners. Some partners were also working long hours of work.

Unfortunately we did not interview children in this project, partly because of limited time (this would have meant at least one extra visit to homes, when we had already made two in some cases), and partly because of ethical issues relating to the interview of minors. There are important pieces of research that have in recent years sought the views of children about aspects of their parents work (See Galinsky 1999 for example). The impact of long hours

upon children certainly emerged as a key issue of concern to families included in this study. However, research upon this issue from the point of view of children is sparse in Australia and internationally (see Pocock 2001 for a summary). It was beyond the resources and timelines of our study.

The representativeness of interviewees

The selected group of interviewees represents those who work paid or unpaid long hours, erratic shift hours, unpredictable hours, long shifts of continuous work and night work. Our group includes a wide range of incomes from low paid strappers in the racing industry through to higher paid doctors and senior executives.

The majority of workers, or 68.5 per cent, were male while 31.5 per cent of the workers were women. Conversely, three-quarters of the partners were women.

About 40 per cent of interviewees worked unpaid overtime while the remainder received some form of payment for their overtime or unreasonable hours. Overall, men and women were about equally represented in the sample group. Overall, 44 per cent of interviewees were in the age group 35-44 years, with about a quarter younger than this, and about a quarter older.

The majority lived in couple households with children (68 per cent of the sample group), while 15 per cent lived in couple-only households and 9 per cent lived singly.

Limitations of the study

An ideal way of collecting qualitative data about the effect of unreasonable hours on households is by means of extended interviews of a large group of randomly selected employees working long hours, along with interviews of their other household and community members, over some years. This 'rolls royce' method would allow longitudinal analysis of the effects of long hours, and – through a large enough randomised sample – permit extended analysis across a wide diversity of employees. Unfortunately, such a study would require very considerable resources over some years, and has never been carried out in Australia – or internationally to our knowledge.

A longitudinal study of the effect of long working hours on family life was not possible within the time span and resources of this research.

We investigated the possibility of generating a randomly selected group of employees working long hours as the basis of our interview group. However, for two reasons we decided against this method in favour of selecting from union lists of employees working long hours.

Firstly, our group of interviewees needed to bear some relationship to the awards which are the vehicles of the ACTU's test claim on unreasonable hours so that our results could illuminate the experiences of the groups of workers that the claim will affect: union generated lists were the quickest and most accessible means available to us. There was no guarantee that a randomly selected group of interviews would relate to the areas of the claim before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

Table 1. Characteristics of interviewees

Occupation	Workers	Partners	Total	Percent
Postal workers	5	1	6	7%
Public service	6	5	11	12%
Teachers	4	4	8	9%
Strappers	2	1	3	3%
Engineers	3	3	6	7%
Electricians	6	1	7	8%
Supervisors, manufacturing	4	3	7	8%
Flight attendants	4	4	8	9%
Paramedics	7	4	11	12%
Miners	5	5	10	11%
Doctors	5	3	8	9%
Bankers	1	0	1	1%
Technicians	2	1	3	3%
Total	54	35	89	100%
Sex				
Men	37	9	46	52%
Women	17	26	43	48%
Total	54	35	89	100%
Age				
25-34 years	12	9	21	24%
35-44	24	15	39	44%
45-54	12	10	22	25%
55-64	1	0	1	1%
Age not given	0	0	6	6%
Total	49	34	89	100%
Household structure				
Single	4	1	5	9%
Couple only	6	2	8	15%
Couple with children	24	12	36	68%
Other/not known	1	1	4	8%
Total			53	100%

Secondly, our attempts to generate a random group of interviewees from other sources met with practical difficulties. For example, we investigated the possibility of generating randomised sub-study populations from existing longitudinal survey populations in two other studies. For practical reasons above all else it was not possible to quickly generate sub-study interview groups for our purposes, especially in view of rounds of surveys that were underway in relation to these projects (see for example the conditions and implicit timelines for sub-studies of the Women's Health Australia population, 'Protocol for conducting a sub-study with participants in the Australian longitudinal study on women's health (ALSWH)' (29 July 1998). Not surprisingly, the managers of ongoing survey populations are concerned that any sub-studies that draw on their population are carefully structured so that participants are not over-surveyed, or subject to too many research requests in a short time span, 'burning out' participants. What is more, setting up such sub-studies is a time consuming exercise that could not be accomplished within our short time frame.

Qualitative Research and the Use of Interview Materials

Social scientists have long debated the relative merits of different methodologies in researching social science problems, frequently pitting qualitative against quantitative methods as superior/inferior roads to truth. More recently some social scientists have argued that this dichotomy is a phony distraction and the key questions for good research relate to the appropriateness of chosen methods, and the quality of their application (Oakley 2000, Babbie 2001).

In this study we elected to rely primarily upon the qualitative method of interviews as our main source of data, supplemented by some more general quantitative data. This is because our primary purpose was to undertake an extended, open-ended conversation with those affected by unreasonable hours about their various impacts, some of which we expected we could not predict in advance. The interview method is superior to closed question survey methods for this purpose. As Babbie puts it:

Survey research can seldom deal with the context of social life. Although questionnaires can provide information in this area, the survey researcher rarely develops the feel for the total life situation in which respondents are thinking and acting that, say the participant observer can (2001:268).

Surveys frequently foreclose outcomes through their reliance upon closed questions. By contrast relatively unstructured interviews allow a more open-ended investigation of effects. However, their resource intensity generally means that the number of subjects involved in such studies is lesser than in questionnaire methods. Whether using quantitative questionnaire methods with large populations or interviews of smaller populations, there is potential for the researcher's bias to come into play. We have attempted to avoid this by asking open-ended questions that were non-directive, and by working carefully from the taped records to develop our analysis. While we don't consider our selection method for interviewees ideal, the group is sizeable and, while initially selected by union officials, was not controlled by them, either in relation to the employees we interviewed, or their partners.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the fifty-four workers, their thirty-five partners, and their families, for their participation in this study. Many traveled outside their normal routines to participate or allowed us into their homes. We thank them for their time and their willingness to share their experiences and ideas.

CHAPTER 2 Overview: unreasonable hours and what they do to us

What kinds of unreasonable hours do people work?

In the paper, you know, in the 'On This Day 100 Years Ago', I read a thing the other day that said 'South Australian coal workers celebrate a 10-hour day'. And here we are doing 12 and a half hours a hundred years later! So it's not saying much is it? We're going back. (Laughlin, miner, working 12-hour day/night shifts)

Unreasonable hours take many forms. A key issue is the length of hours for many people, but it is a far from adequate description of 'unreasonableness'. Many in this study work consistently long hours – over 50 per week for long periods. Others work even longer hours. The length of hours is an important component of unreasonableness: people working *long* hours often felt that these hours were unreasonable and/or experienced significant effects on their lives arising from their hours.

Some worked these long hours on a paid basis, but many did not, while others were paid for some and not others. Those who worked their long hours unpaid, felt their contributions – frequently motivated by a commitment to the job, or supervisory pressure or understaffing or a combination of these forces – were unreasonable in that they weren't paid and often led to exhaustion and diminished productivity.

For those who worked long hours with *paid* overtime, the key issue was *control* over the extra hours: the capacity to say yes or no to them. Many worked long hours without real control over their hours, and the issue of control affected both those who worked unpaid and paid overtime. Strappers in the horse racing industry, for example, feel that they cannot refuse their regular unpaid long hours, while those on building sites often feel under pressure to take paid hours or lose this job – or the next one. Doctors fear a loss of training opportunities if they refuse hours.

In some cases 'unreasonableness' arose after relatively short *hours* but very pressured *conditions*. The paramedic who has just resuscitated a small child at a crash site with multiple victims may reasonably want to end their working day well short of their 12 or 14 hour shift. The issue of *work pressure* was a very important factor in determining unreasonableness for many in this study. In the great majority of cases, work that is long in terms of hours is often *intense*. It is performed under pressure, it is frequently unfinished at the end of the day, and many workers described a sense of 'never getting to the end of it'. A number of workers worked to tight timelines. Many participants in this study identified the relationships between the *activities underway* and the *hours worked* as critical to constituting unreasonableness.

Further, the nature of life outside the workplace also shaped the impact of long hours: the worker coping with a sick partner or child or a new baby may find his or her 'normal' long working day unreasonable.

The predictability of the end of the working day (or night) also affected workers' notion of 'unreasonableness': some workers in this study find their working day unexpectedly balloons out at its end by an hour or two or three, and this – after a long shift – was a serious hours problem. Predictability was an important component of unreasonableness.

Health and safety issues also arose in many industries. There were numerous stories of partner's worried about the drive home, of workers who drive machinery, 'nodding off at the wheel', of needlestick injuries at the end of long shifts. Situations that create unsafe journeys home, or *unsafe* consciousness at work, are unreasonable by any reasonable definition.

Shift workers who work long hours also found particular aspects of their work unreasonable, namely shifts that allowed inadequate physical recovery between shifts, that alternated night and day, and that combined 12 hour shifts with round the clock work. Workers also disliked *changes* in shift regimes that required wholesale domestic and personal adaption. Some workers were critical of arrangements that allowed workers to work hours that are obviously unsafe – like extra 12 hour night shifts on their 'days off', putting at risk the safety of themselves and their co-workers. These accounts suggest that workers who are 'overtime junkies' - for whatever reason - need some protection from themselves – as do their co-workers.

In other cases the nature of unreasonableness was shaped by the effect of multiple changes in time zones while at work. For flight attendants, this affected their recovery from frequent long work shifts and constituted unreasonable hours that needed attention. What is more, many found the hours of recovery in their 'home port' superior to the type of recovery they experienced while overseas.

In sum, the 'unreasonableness' of hours is shaped by many factors. In this study there are many workers who simply work very long hours. They find this unreasonable. Some who do this are affected by other factors as well. Others find their hours unreasonable because of very intense work, poor breaks between shifts, poor break times during shifts, inadequate or unpredictable meal times, unpredictable end times, lack of control over refusing overtime, family reasons, health and safety factors, and changes in time zones. There are examples of each of these kinds of 'unreasonableness' in this study.

Overall this study reveals that long hours are an entrenched and widespread experience at least in the 12 industry sectors we researched. Many interviewees feel that little real choice is attached to their hours. Some have tried to take control by changing jobs, going part-time, taking demotions or changing employers - and sometimes these strategies work. However, many feel that they have little power to control or reduce their long hours – hours that are increasingly entrenched in a culture of long working days across a range of Australian workplaces. These hours have created, *de facto*, a kind of new hours standard for many workers in workplaces that are hungry for their contribution. They raise the 'hours bar' for all in some occupational groups or workplaces or industries that have been permeated by a new long hours culture.

Not all 'time' is the same

The different aspects of 'unreasonableness' suggest that not all time at work is the same, and that some hours are more costly in terms of worker effort and fatigue than others. For example, truck drivers in coal mines compared their 12 hours shifts of driving with more physically active jobs, arguing that fatigue and safety risks arose from inactive long hours – as did long term fitness affects. Flight attendants said that working across time zones created serious effects that require different recovery times and affect health, concentration and moods. Teachers pointed out that not all teaching is the same: teaching Form 6B full of 16 year old boys with behavioural problems, is a long way from teaching Form 6A full of focused, high performing students. Most importantly, workers spoke of the intensity of their jobs as affecting the impact of hours.

Work Intensity: 'It's not just the hours – it's what you do in them too'

In considering the effects of long hours, it is important to consider the nature of the job, the intensity of work, the opportunity for breaks, travel requirements, and the shift arrangements. Together these different factors combine in different ways so that an examination of narrowly defined hours does not, alone, capture the effects of working patterns on personal, family and social life. In particular, the growing intensity of work in many different occupations was repetitively mentioned by interviewees.

From remote research stations and the work of technicians, to strappers in the racing industry, to post office managers and teachers in classrooms, to doctors in operating theatres, there was widespread commentary on the intensification of all forms of work: of having to get more done in any single working hour. As the partner of one engineer put it 'I just think they ask more and more and more and more of them.' Many interviewees drew attention to the linkage between the changing nature of their jobs – the fact that there are fewer people to do them – and their unreasonable hours: the combined effect was a 'double whammy' for some. These intensification effects made working long hours more difficult for many. Employees reported being required to do a broader range of tasks, to do more things at once, and to take on multiple jobs (for example managing a post office while also having a full load as a counter staff person; handling insurance claims whilst also managing records). These requirements meant that 'an hour of work now, is not the same as an hour of work ten years ago'. There are fewer to do the jobs, and so employees perceive that they now work harder, and their hours of work make them more tired. This combined with long hours of work, means that many employees are affected by tiredness and exhaustion with particular effects upon their safety and family relationships.

Intensification took different forms in different industries. The research technicians pointed to the loss of various sets of skills at their research station alongside general staff cuts, which meant they had to be able to do a broader range of tasks, to carry their own equipment, to work harder, and to be individually available for more unpredictable emergencies and repairs. Paramedics pointed to the greater share of acute cases that now formed their workload.

In teaching, interviewees report having more tasks to do both inside and outside the classroom, as well as larger class sizes. Chris contrasted his classroom teaching experience

overseas with his experience now back in Australia: 'All I had to be there was a good classroom teacher. Now I am back I have to be an administrator'. One describes the effects of growing class sizes on the quality of her work, and its outcomes for the community:

When there were twenty, you always felt you could manage the whole lot. Because you could always see everybody in a single glance and you very quickly knew each kid individually and in 50 minutes you got to spend a bit of time with each kid. But with 27, it's an extra third and you've always got this feeling that there's this one third that you're not directing much attention to. The good girls like the naughty boys will always demand your attention, the smart girls will be good too because you'll interact with them. But you usually find there are 5 or 6 girls who are mediocre, your dead-set C+ B-type kids, and you've hardly learnt their names. They've become invisible in the bigger group, because you're dealing with the more demanding, both intellectually and naughty kids so you miss a third of the class. And I think it's a real shame that those kids miss out on your time.

Chris describes how the nature of teaching – its intensity – significantly affects the impact upon teachers:

[Some think that] a class is a class is a class – but any teacher will tell you that that is utter bullshit. There are classes that are immensely more difficult than others...For a teacher to talk about reasonable working hours, it depends on whom you are teaching.

Why do people work long hours?

Money

Those who were paid for their overtime found positive benefits for themselves and their households from increased earnings.

No one really likes doing the seven days, but then you've got to look at the positive side of it. The money – what you do with the money. (Ada, electrician's partner)

Some tried not to think of their overtime earnings as integral to the family budget – so that they avoided dependency on them. Others were dependent on their overtime earnings for their basic household spending and were well established in an hours/spend cycle. In the electrician's case, where long hours of overtime had been eradicated on the large metropolitan building sites where our interviewees worked, there had been resistance from some who were accustomed to long hours and high earnings.

There's a 10-hour overtime limit. There were grumblings in the early days about restricting their overtime, because they're used to the money, but now I think you'll find, conservatively speaking about 95 per cent are very happy with it, and you'll get the odd grumble. But the concept has changed, the views of people have changed over the last 3 or 4 years, they've just loved the idea of the time off, so they can plan their life...I think if you can't survive on our rate now with the 10 hour limit in place, something's wrong. You're overstepping the mark. And there's no need for it. (Cam, electrician)

A rising plane of wages underpinned the cut back in electrician's hours, and helped cushion the effect of the overtime cap on hours. Each of our five interviewees was positive about the impact of reduced hours on themselves, their families and the industry. They pointed out that some had understandable reasons for wanting to work very long hours: one man was saving for his grandchild's kidney operation. Others were described as greedy, as needing to be protected from themselves – and from the prospect of injury that arose with tired electricians working 60 plus hours a week.

For many of the workers in our study, however, wages had little to do with their long hours. Their motivations lay in 'doing a decent job' – or trying to avoid penalty for refusing long hours.

Under-staffing: 'There just aren't enough people here to do the job anymore'.

The majority of workplaces in this study appear to have been affected, one-way or another, by the two decades of workplace and industry restructuring in Australia. We heard many accounts of fewer people doing more, as rounds of redundancy and restructuring have shrunk workforces – in the manufacturing, construction, education, public service, postal, scientific, engineering, paramedical, health and airline industries. Some form of under-staffing affected the great majority of workplaces. This made under-staffing the primary cause of long hours in workplaces in this study.

Skilled workers described how the loss of groups of workers with specific skills in recent years, meant that those who remained must now be able to do more across a range of skill areas. Postal workers described new management systems that finely tuned staffing levels to business load and managed these to workers and managers 'stress' levels. That is, people and services were de-staffed to stress point. Similar stories emerged in the public sector where many workers work unpaid overtime, and described program design that minimised worker allocations until 'the system screamed'. People in these work situations were managed to high levels of stress, and they in turn 'managed' by working long hours. Teachers described growing class sizes, new administrative and curriculum demands and long hours to manage, and provide quality education. The impression across these workplaces is of fewer people picking up workloads that demand different staffing levels, if long hours are to be avoided.

'Why don't we spread the work around? Why do I have to do so much?'

A number of interviewees mused on the work patterns that see so many working long hours, often reluctantly, in a labour market with high unemployment and under-employment. Indeed one of the main motivations for capping overtime amongst electricians in our study was the desire to 'spread the work around' and even those who had lost money through the cap supported the logic of this. Ian, for example, had experienced unemployment when his apprenticeship ended while electricians around him were 'working 16 hours a day – and I thought that was just ridiculous'. Following the capping over overtime, electricians describe how the work is spread over a larger group of employees – and the revival in their lives is powerful evidence in support of reigning in hours that some described as 'relentless' and 'incredible' or simply, 'dangerous'.

Loving your job and 'commitment'

Many employees agree to work long hours because they love their jobs. As one paramedic whose young children were in childcare from 7.30am-4.30pm on her work days put it 'I absolutely love it'. She enjoyed using her skills, helping people and making a contribution. Some flight attendants also spoke of really enjoying their jobs. Love of horses contributed to the long hours worked by strappers: 'the industry runs on passion' as one put it. *Commitment* to their work explained the long hours of many workers. Commitment to students, patients and the public contributed to the unreasonable hours worked by teachers, doctors, paramedics, postal workers and public servants. Commitment was an important part of the reason for hours patterns that in many cases exacted high personal tolls.

Job protection: Doing extra hours to out of fear

A significant group of interviewees worked long hours because they felt their jobs were 'on the line' if they didn't agree to them. For example, strappers felt that their continued employment was dependent on the uncritical acceptance of long hours, split shifts, and other unreasonable hours. Others felt that their chances of promotion depended on their long hours of unpaid overtime. Some had seen those who did not work overtime be removed to undesirable jobs and sidelined. Even quite powerful, skilled employees spoke of their concern about the impact on their future in their organisations of their refusal to work long, unreasonable hours. For some the risk of an impact from refusal lay in the future: lack of promotion (for engineers, teachers and public servants), risk of redundancy (in manufacturing) or the chance to specialise (for doctors).

The 'choice' of long hours

Analysis of the cause of unreasonable hours reveals much about workplace power relations. This report includes many examples of employees who do not have the power to resist the pressure to work long hours, whether that 'requirement' is a direct request or arises – very commonly – in an indirect way as a result of staffing levels and/or client, student, or patient expectations and needs. For example, paramedics in small stations with reduced employee numbers felt under pressure to accept extra hours to cover emergencies, while electricians described straightforward victimisation of those that did not accept overtime:

I've seen it many times where the guys were feeling pressured to working overtime, purely to protect their jobs. Because, come the end of that particular construction job, they would be the first ones out the gate if they didn't do what the boss wanted basically. (Cam, electrician)

Long working hours emerge in the context of complex relations at work. In many cases, the mechanics of this power relation are veiled from view. They are created by the demands of job deadlines, staff formulas, complex teaching demands, or deeply ingrained workplace cultures. In many workplaces, employees work long hours *not* because someone asks them to do them, but because 'it is just expected' – with the clear implication that people who do not do the long hours will suffer disadvantage if they refuse. In some cases, that expectation takes the form of loss of the chance to specialise, or be promoted, or being sidelined to undesirable

jobs. In other cases, it carries very serious consequences: the sack, failure to be re-employed on future jobs, or placing the safety of co-workers at risk.

The supervisors in manufacturing in this study work under a contract that pays a bonus if they work more than an average of 50 hours per week over six months. Their case illustrates the dangers of this approach: once past the 50 hours average, it is in their employer's interest to push for a high level of extra overtime – and the costs of this to the health, safety, temperament and families of these workers is very high.

Long hours and workplace power: 'I feel powerless to say no'

Hours outcomes arise within a set of workplace relations where even highly paid, highly skilled workers like doctors, engineers, electricians, teachers, technicians and middle managers – many with long term employment records and highly developed skills in their field – are not able to control their hours, and do not feel able to refuse long hours. It can only be described as startling that employees with such high skills and experience cannot contain their hours of work. Doctors provide telling examples. One worker describes his partner's frustration over his inability to 'stand up for himself':

I felt I was doing a reasonable job standing up to the system and saying "No it's unrealistic for me to work 7 days a week every week; I need a day off" - (but) my partner felt I wasn't doing enough and I was caving in to the system; and there was tension and conflict over that - her thinking I should stand up more and just refuse to do it and that sort of thing.

Another doctor is explicit about the pressure to work long hours:

To say - before you get on the training program - that "I think 96 rostered hours and then an extra 30 or 40 hours a fortnight is unreasonable", well that would be career suicide, probably ... If you want to get into a training program you need to keep your nose clean and your mouth shut! (David)

In some cases these pressures undermine the value of employees to their employers since they burn out. Further, they burn up commitment. Several employees describe how long hours take them from loving their jobs to hating them. There are a number of examples in this study of employees who, having worked long hours, decide to 'drop back' to lesser skilled jobs, and take demotions to try to cut their hours. They give up the use of their skills. Many do not see the rates of pay, for working such hours, as adequate compensation for their efforts, and of course those who work unpaid overtime receive little or no pay for their extra efforts. Their benefits are almost entirely anticipatory: 'Maybe I'll get a promotion' or 'Maybe this means I will hang onto my job'.

Increasing Expectations of unpaid extra hours: 'compulsory voluntary work'

For some, unpaid overtime has become an entrenched and non-voluntary part of the work contract. For example, work beyond the job description of their teaching role, has always been an accepted aspect of teaching work. The expectation comes both from the school culture, but also from the teachers themselves who value this aspect of their work.

To be valued within the school community you have to be contributing beyond the actual classroom. And I think for most of us that's where most of the satisfaction comes from too. You get a better bond with the kids and you enjoy the things, whether it's the camp program, or the footy team, or a musical in my case. You actually enjoy the kids in that case, because you're actually creating a thing together. But there is certainly an expectation from the administrations within schools that ... teachers who leave when the buses leave are almost frowned upon by their colleagues... they're not really doing their bit.

Expectations surrounding unpaid 'voluntary' work have increased over time.

What long hours do to individuals

Long hours had many impacts on individuals. Many of the individuals who were paid for their long hours, appreciated the money. Others felt that the money was poor compensation for the effects on them, especially where they had worked these hours for long periods, or had families. Others found satisfaction in getting their jobs done, or seeing their clients' appreciation. In some cases, the negative effects on the individual were hard to separate from family effects. In others, the impact on the person, their body and their general condition was clear. For example, workers like doctors describe chronic sleep deprivation, 'incredible stress' and 'total exhaustion'.

Working long hours – under pressure: Frank's story

In Frank's case, the factors forcing long hours – and their impact upon him - are clearly exposed. Frank lives with his wife Bronwyn¹ and they have young children. Frank's case also exposes the effect of work pressure that frequently accompanies long hours. In Frank's case long hours arise because his employer faces deadlines that are very tight, and are met by long hours from the existing group of employees. This means that employees like Frank frequently have close supervision, tension about job completion, and in some cases, face bullying management styles in order to meet deadlines. This intensifies the effect of long hours on individuals, their families and their communities. Frank's case also illustrates the pressures that can be repetitively applied to highly skilled workers in the context of work deadlines.

Pushed to the limit

Frank has worked 50-60 hour weeks for long periods. He is on a contract that annualises salary, building in his overtime. He is expected to exercise his own skills as well as supervise others. Over a year ago Frank buckled under the pressure of working around 60 hours a week for extended periods.

¹ Their stories are not reflected in the sectoral accounts in this study to protect their identities.

I used to spend an 8 hour day with the men, and then an hour before work and an hour after work of paper work, so that was making it a 9, 10 hour day 5 days a week, and a half a day Saturday, or all day Saturday... We were working extremely long hours, sometimes from 6 o'clock in the morning through to 8 o'clock at night. Often I wouldn't have my lunch break because if you did it would be a cup of coffee and a sandwich at your desk while you were doing more paperwork. And it just got progressively more and more and more, just keeping on adding to our jobs... and then one morning...bang!

...I actually went to work, and it was a really, really hot day and we had a seminar on H and S for some reason. And I got home at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, got away early, and I came in and I was really hot, really stinky, and my wife was on the phone with a friend. I came in - and the kids were just playing – well one was just born and the little bloke was just three and was playing, and I did my block. And I told my wife off. Had a go at my kid and then realised I was just tearing the hair out of my head.

And it was all because I'd just had enough of it... I'd started to bring work home - mentally – for months before that. Like on the weekend I'd come home from work on Saturday or whatever it might be and just lie in front of the TV and didn't want to talk to nobody, just wanted to be left alone. At night I'd be dreaming. Like you'd be in bed and all you'd be doing is dreaming about work...

Interviewer: It sounds like that was a really tough time.

Oh extremely. I ended up, once I had got to the point where I brought my work home and realised that there was just too much, I was virtually suffering from severe panic attacks, during work, at home. Every little thing was upsetting me. If I saw something which I thought wasn't right, it'd create this panic attack where I'd feel hot and sweaty, very, very nervous, or agitated and it might last for anything from 20 minutes to an hour or two hours. And it got to the point I saw a doctor about it and he wanted me to go on medication, antidepressants or whatever. I wasn't interested in it.

But then that day when I came home and blasted my wife, and had a go at my kid - my wife, she rang the doctor and made an appointment and sent me down. And I remember breaking down and crying and going into the doctor's surgery and telling him what was going on and he gave me time off work immediately and I ended up having x weeks off. That turned into burnout – I went into depression, and I ended up having the full-scale mental breakdown.

And I went through stages there of complete memory loss where my wife would send me up the street to buy stuff and I'd get to the shopping centre and have absolutely no idea what I'm doing here. I knew I had to buy something, but forgot what I had to buy...

'A man can only do so much'

Frank had something of a relapse a few months later: 'Ended up arguing again at home. Had a very, very bad 8 to 12 months and had suicidal thoughts before being put onto anti-

depressant medication'. Despite this severe experience, his employer shortly afterwards began asking Frank to extend his hours once more, and once again he broke down.

But over the last say 6 months I've been seeing a psychiatrist and my GP, and taking my medication, I've been feeling better. Up to possibly a week or two ago they put me under [pressure again]. So it got to the point where I virtually did a breakdown at work in the manager's office. I went in there to tell him, 'look, it's just too much for me.' And I actually broke down and he's since - I've got a track record I guess - so he's cut down. I think he now realises that a man can only do so much.

I actually said to this manager, I said, 'Every person's got a bucket of water they've got to carry it around' and I said, 'I had too much water in that bucket - it overflows' and I actually asked that certain manager, a while ago to get someone to give me a hand because work was starting to increase and they wouldn't give me no one to help me, they just said, 'no, no, you just keep on going the way you're going and we'll see what happens, we'll see what happens'... Until I virtually broke down again. It's only been the last two or three weeks where I thought 'Buggar them, I'm not going to go through that again'.

Frank's first break down had resulted in a successful worker's compensation claim where it had been recognised that his long hours and the pressures placed on him at work had directly contributed to his breakdown. Despite this 'track record' as Frank calls it, he returns to work and faces a renewed set of pressures that result in long hours and a repeat cycle of panic attacks and mental collapse.

But they are still pushing me to do extra hours. And I feel strongly about not doing them... I don't think they know they are actually playing with people's lives.

Frank's commitment to producing quality work, and his employer's reliance on his skills and experience are clear. He is finding this more difficult to achieve with an increasing workload and very long hours. However, the company was resistant to recognising the problem – despite having received medical reports from its own sources that established that Frank's problem lay - at least partly - in his long hours of work:

One of the things I was very disappointed about - I've always felt I've put in and done my part, to what I feel was my 100 per cent and my best, and when I asked for help, but the company went straight into their dispute mode and disputed the claims, 'no, no, couldn't be true, couldn't happen'. Had investigators come [to my] home, I was sent off to see a psychiatrist. I've since received those report... and those reports were damning of the company in terms of unrealistic work hours etcetera.

Both his GP and psychiatrist support his claim that he should not work longer hours than he already is doing and they offer to mediate between Frank and his employer to try to keep his hours under control. He feels he may need to call on them to ward off a new breakdown:

I spoke to my GP several weeks ago, and I told him, 'look, they've been pushing me to work 6 days a week again and I don't want to. I feel I'm doing 45 hours which is ample'. And he said to me straight off, 'look, if they push you, give them my number,

get them to contact me'. I also spoke with my psychiatrist. I told him the same thing and he also said, 'the company wants you to work more than 40 hours a week, let me know and I'll deal with it'. So last Friday week it was when I went into the manager, I was pretty emotional, pretty tired. I tried to explain to him, but I couldn't, I was pretty, I broke down, upset. So I organised a meeting later on that week, the following week, and I said to him on that day, I said, 'look, if you think I'm mucking around, either the HR division or yourself can ring up my GP and you talk to them. Because this isn't a Mickey mouse issue. It's fair dinkum. You're playing with my life insisting I do these hours'. Some people can work 10, 12 hours a day 6 days a week and just do a hobby on Sunday and just come back to work on Monday. But other people can't.

Frank contributes important skills in his workplace, has traditionally been a 'good' worker. He believes that employers like his 'use' people – that they find people who will do the long hours and get them to work long hours until they are 'scrapped':

The way I feel, and the way a lot of people feel, we're more or less used, put on the scrap heap and then put aside. And then the next person will just come along and fill your place... They've got no life. They only live to work. They expect you to be like them... I look at it: I work so I can live. I work so I can enjoy myself, not live so that I can just continually go to work.

The work/eat/sleep cycle

Frank – like many long hours workers in this study - described his life when he worked long hours as a repetitive work/eat/sleep cycle. This meant that his hobbies fell away:

It was a very long day. And most nights you'd come home, have your dinner, have a shower and go to bed. And if you weren't sleeping, you were traveling to or from work, or having your tea... Most Sundays were off, but if you were required to come in you'd have to come in... To an extent if the guys wanted to work and the work was there, we had no choice but to come in.

...My social life, put it this way... before [changing jobs and increasing hours] I used to play tennis once or twice a week. I'm interested in fishing. I go fishing as a sport and keep a boat. The day I stood down from being a supervisor I went to see my doctor, he said... 'okay, I want you to go home. Stop all your activities that you're doing, everything that you do and just do nothing.' His exact words were, 'be dumb for a week. Do nothing.' I got home and I recall lying on the floor and I'm thinking, 'what should I stop?' and I had nothing left to stop because I no longer played tennis. I no longer went fishing. I no longer ran my boat. I had no interest to do the gardening, 'cause I had no time for it.

So all I was doing was virtually living and working. And so all interests I had in the past were gone. I had no time to do them. When I come home at half past 6, 7 o'clock after doing a full day you couldn't be bothered having a game of tennis. Weekends were the time I'd going hunting or go away camping and I couldn't get the weekends off... I really enjoy bike sports as well. And like I used to come home from work...get an old bomb of a bike and do it up... it was a hobby and I used to enjoy it and found it

relaxing. I might be in the shed until 11 o'clock at night, fixing it up... but I had no time, or even interest to do that. A lot of the interests I had were gone....

Having made the decision to cut back on his work hours, despite the constant pressures of his employers, he has started to regain his interest in, and his ability to engage in outside interests:

Yeah, I'm starting. I wouldn't say I'm 100 per cent to what I was three or four years ago... Like I enjoy mucking around in the garden... I'm finding time to spend with the kids. Like laugh with them, I took them to a show. Just little things like that. Taking the kids for a walk, down the park. You can fly a kite. Those things, where if you don't do them when your kid is little, when they grow up they don't want to do that. 'Cause I remember when I was 15, 16 I didn't want to fly a kite with my dad. I wanted go round the street and play. It was when I was little I wanted to do those things and that's when my dad did those things with me... I even feel guilty to the extent that when I come home from work realising all that time I didn't spend with my kids, say 12, 18 months ago, washing the dishes after tea, I feel like that's a waste of time. I'd rather be rolling around on the floor with the kids having a play.

Frank's experience is severe. He comes close to suicide and he tries to get his employer to understand that 'his life is on the line'. He experiences panic attacks, a break down, suicidal thoughts, and goes onto anti-depressants. His health, wife and two young children suffer. His hobbies drop off, and he loses interest in life. He finds that after all the years of long hours, his interests have dried up. But his employer remains insistent on a return to long hours.

Unfortunately Frank's experience is not isolated. He recalls three other people who faced similar health effects of stressful work and long hours, including for example, a co-worker who stood down at the same time as him for the same issues:

He said to me he actually got to the point he was feeling ill and unable to cope with what was going on. The [guy in my job] before me, after three months experienced the same anxiety attacks as me, stood down and went back to [his old lower level job]. Another actually finished up and left... Because he found it too difficult to continue doing what they were asking of us.

The 'over-time junkie' becomes the benchmark

Some workers accept long hours in Frank's workplace. In his view this in turn puts pressure on every one else:

The company uses those people as a benchmark. So, 'so-and-so's doing x amount of work. Why can't you?'. They use that scenario on me. When I first hit my manager with the hours and needing a hand several months ago, he said 'it's a bit difficult when Andrew who is working beside you is working half a day Saturday. Why can't you come in? How are you going to explain it to him?' So they try and put the guilt factor onto you. I said to him, 'Well if he can carry two buckets of water good luck to him. But I can't'.

Frank has decided to stand up for his family life:

I was actually booked for annual leave on a Friday to go away for the weekend and I was called into the manager's office on the Thursday and he asked me if I could come in on the Saturday to do someone else's job, they were falling behind. So not only do my own work, but do somebody else's work. And I said to him, 'but I'm going away for the weekend', and he goes, 'what do you mean?' and I said, 'I won't be in tomorrow, and I'm going away for a weekend'. And he said, 'who okayed the annual leave?' and I said, 'you did' and he said, 'oh' and he was actually going to revoke my annual leave so I couldn't go away. And I just said 'I don't care if you're going to take the annual leave off me or not, I'm going away and I won't be in this weekend'. This is the attitude of these people... Your life has to revolve around work. There's no time for leisure.

The effect of long hours on the individual: health, fatigue and a narrow life

For many workers in this study the health effects of unreasonable hours were a serious and primary concern. They were also a serious concern to partners. Many spoke of 'utter exhaustion'.

You get absolutely exhausted... You get to the point where you are really struggling to get out of bed in the morning to get there on time. And in the racing game, you are running the whole day – it's run, it's not just walking at normal pace – you are in a hurry to do everything. There is nothing called slow. You get extremely tired, very ratty, very irritable, you obviously don't eat properly because of the funny hours you work.

Sometimes you come home and you are so tired you can't eat. It affects your moods, really ratty, really bad tempered and short tempered and you really run on a short wick. (Sue, Strapper)

These concerns included physical effects like high blood pressure, long-term fatigue, constant tiredness, and poor sleeping patterns. Several interviewees listed depression as an outcome of their hours, along with moodiness, 'being grumpy' and being short tempered. A wide range of workers identified vulnerability to illness as an effect of long hours: doctors, postal workers, paramedics, teachers and flight attendants all felt that their immunity was compromised by tiredness: 'If you work the hours long term, you'll get sick.' (Keith, Postal worker).

My primary concern is about the long-term effects on his health. He eats really late. We rarely sit down to a family meal. [That] is really missing. I eat with the children so he doesn't eat til 8-9pm, he rarely eats breakfast, and he has lost his relaxation skills...he is constantly stressed. He has physically aged, he has put on weight. If he doesn't take lunch with him, he doesn't normally have lunch, and even then he doesn't break – he eats at the desk. I mean, we have spoken about all these things and I guess I am pretty hard on him in that I hammer him and say you know nobody else can change this but you...you should take lunch, it is part of your award. (Tricia, partner of public service worker)

Stress was also a frequently mentioned effect of long hours – and not only for the worker:

[My] stress levels do go up and I suffer migraine headaches. (pause) I'm trying to think how does that affect me doing what I am doing. It makes it more stressful, that's all. I just keep doing it, keep taking the kids to their events and whatever. (Irwin, doctor's partner)

'Every postal manager I know suffers from it [stress]'. (Keith, Postal worker). The effects of this stress affect people at work and at home.

I feel tired from time to time, get headaches – I'm pretty sure that's because I'm either not getting enough sleep or not getting enough time away from work. Because you're sort of on the go all the time, hop in the car and driving so that's concentrating, get to work and all the crap starts, um... go for a brief walk and eat lunch, come back with the crap still ticking over, drive again still concentrating and get home and ah, I guess, you'd like to unwind but you know you can't because you've got to still be civil and reasonable with the family when you get home and do those things – washing up or... whether it be making dinner or doing the washing up or bathing the little boy and feeding and all that sort of stuff. (David, engineer)

I guess stress sort of waxes and wanes. I'd have to say, yeah, I think I'm probably under stress for a reasonable amount of time. I try not to let it get to me but you can only try as much as you can, you can't stop the effect of stress, it's there isn't it? (David, engineer)

Your stress levels are enormously high. If I wasn't at work or doing work at home, I was thinking about work and what needed to be done. And I got to the stage where I couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel. (Sonya, public service worker)

I've been incredibly stressed, I have not enjoyed my job, I've not enjoyed life, I haven't been able to participate in my regular activities. (Carol, doctor)

For paramedics, unexpected extensions to very long shifts through the night, while dealing with complex clinical situations under emergency conditions, added extreme stress as the partner of a paramedic describes:

I really honestly think...when you're doing a 14-hour night shift and some of the jobs you do are quite upsetting - I think it can take its toll emotionally. I've seen Lucy come home some nights, or some mornings, and I've stayed home, I haven't gone to work because she's just too upset. Because I think you get to that fatigue, tired stage and then you start becoming emotionally upset. Now if you get to that stage earlier in the night because you're tired through shift work and you make an emotional decision, well it could be detrimental to someone's life or health... She did a job where [describes horrific accident involving children]. And that was overtime after night shift and she didn't get home til nearly 11 o'clock that day... She came home an emotional wreck. Now I don't think that anybody should be put through that. I can understand that you're going to come across these situations but if you hadn't already worked already 14 hours flat on your feet, you'd be emotionally stable and able to handle the situation. (Larry, partner of Lucy who is a paramedic)

'Time for themselves' was a casualty of their hours for many, especially those with children or on shifts where pursuit of sleep overrode other activities. Others found their sleep patterns very disturbed:

I couldn't sleep. I'd be thinking about the job all night. And that's where the fatigue comes into it too. And I just wasn't happy with it. I felt worn out and run down. (Larry, supervisor)

Many individuals had let their hobbies, sport and social lives decline and this affected their health. Once again, the time poverty arising from long hours was not visited on the worker alone but transmitted to their partners:

I have done nothing of my own since 1994, and I've now got a car to rebuild as of two weeks ago. But that's going to take a long time because I can't ... guarantee to get myself time, like four hours at a stretch, I can never guarantee that. I always do whatever I can by sneaking in an hour or two usually, (Irwin, doctor's partner)

The majority missed lunch or ate 'on the run'. This contributed to poor eating habits and some felt that this contributed to them being overweight or underweight. Food and eating issues especially affected shift workers and those whose meals were erratic like flight attendants, doctors and paramedics.

Safety: Zombies at work

There were several accounts of life threatening events that occurred when fatigued workers were at work. These included doctors, paramedics and mining truck drivers falling asleep at the wheel, other vehicle accidents, horse riding falls, electricians that took dangerous 'shortcuts', a paramedic being pierced by a patient's needle, near misses on building sites. The partner of an engineer suggested that serious disasters like train accidents could be traced to the culture of long hours: 'the powers that be are not doing maintenance on the track, they're not giving their workers breaks, they're working them 7 days a week'. Doctors had concerns for patient safety and one pointed to prolonged operations because of declining productivity:

Actually it is to the detriment of patients and staff to do long shifts ... the research has been done which shows that if you work more than 13 hours that's equivalent to driving with a blood alcohol (level) of 0.5; the hours stack up. I can't say it's ever happened, that someone has performed the wrong operation. But I can say that an operation that would normally take an hour, or an hour and a half at four o'clock in the afternoon - if you're doing it at 3 o'clock in the morning it might take you two hours to three hours. And so there's increased risk to patients during anesthetic time, and just all the other things that go with that because of the slow down - you're just not as good. (David, doctor)

Several interviewees used the word 'zombie' to describe themselves or their co-workers when they had worked unreasonable hours, including flight attendants, miners and electricians.

People were working twelve-hour days. Saturday. Sunday...and after the first two weeks, if that ...they were sort of walking zombies by about Wednesday, Thursday of fatigue, and you could just see that they were slowing down. And they were doing it for months. And you could see they were wrecked. (Tim, electrician)

In the mining industry, Laughlin described how he 'should be dead but I'm not' after missing a detour when he had worked an extra four hours overtime on top of his normal 12 hour shift: 'I headed straight down the rock'.

Clearly, long hours place worker's lives in jeopardy – both the lives of those who are 'zombies' and those who work with them. Many partners were very concerned about their partner's drive home from work when they are very tired. Given the accounts of 'nodding off at the wheel', they are right to be. These hours also place children at home at risk: one young worker described sleeping for 'a day' while her 2 and 4 year olds were in her exclusive care.

Work becomes life – or threatens it

While some workers enjoyed their demanding jobs, others spoke of coming to hate their jobs and fearing that they would be killed by them. Many also mentioned of how their lives had narrowed to work, as a result of spending so much time there; they felt they could talk about little else and went to sleep and woke up thinking about work problems. Becoming accustomed to long hours creates serious problems for those whose lives have become constructed around them. Long hours impoverish larger life – hobbies, friendships, the extended family – so that long hours workers become embedded in a cycle of all-consuming work *versus* an impoverished non-work life. This feeds the long hours culture, as Ian describes:

We were doing 10-12 hours a day and you just get home and by the time you shower up and have something to eat, it was time to go to bed and then go back to work again. It was just this vicious cycle where, when you actually do get to the Sunday when you don't work, you actually sleep it off... and you lose your social life and your friends, it just goes out the window, just quality of life goes out the window.

Turning away from long hours to a world where friendships have atrophied, hobbies have been set aside, and one's pleasures and routine are built around work, creates a challenge. For some it encourages them to stick with long hours.

Natasha and Thomas: 'Gee I've got no friends'

Natasha and Thomas both work long hours, she in the finance sector, and he in his own small business:

I suppose it's just that I've been doing it for so long. It's gone past that [question] – 'the happy or not happy?' - where it's just become part of my life and it's just routine...It's terrible. I don't think about it anymore. I get up – you know, I'm up at 5.30am every morning and that's Monday to Saturday and I'm in here and it's dark when I get here and it's dark when I leave during winter. It's part of life.

Well my best friend has taken it really bad because I'm godmother to her child, that I hardly ever see...I've broken a couple of appointments due to work commitments... and with my godson, I missed his first birthday because we were doing x here [at work]. So...I missed his birthday...The thing is that we'll always be close but, yeah, it is hard...To make it worse she used to work here until she had her baby. I use to see her everyday and stuff like that so. But it is hard, you do lose contact with people which is a shame.

It does upset me because sometimes you sit back and think 'Gee, I've got no friends'. But you know it's only because of work. It's like, I think last year was the first New Year that we sat back and went 'Oh God. We've got nowhere to go'. So we spent New Year at home because we hadn't planned to do anything because of work. (Natasha, finance sector)

Just to get home while it's still daylight and scrub the kids and take them to the park, let them have a run around, or take them to the shops or take them to friends, go visit family. There was none of that. You end up like a hermit, a recluse... People go, 'oh, and what have you been up to?' and it's just work, that's all you can say, 'what have you been up to?', 'work' and it just becomes depressing and day in day out, and just builds up, builds up and you don't know it 'cause you're just at work the whole time. (Ian, electrician)

In this way, long hours create a vicious cycle. As they erode individual's communities, they create a dependence upon long hours and paid work. This entrenches long hours cultures - with significant and detrimental effects upon the larger community fabric.

Many mentioned their inability to plan as a result of the dominance of work in their lives, or the unpredictability of hours of work. This especially affected electricians, strappers, manufacturing workers, doctors, flight attendants and supervisors.

You can't plan anything. You can't go out on weekends because you've got to work or go to the races...Like last weekend, I just slept. You don't want to go out to the movies or anything. You are too tired. (Eileen, strapper)

Acclimatising to long hours: the boiled frog syndrome

Both workers and their partners described a process of acclimatising to long hours. One couple used the 'boiled frog' analogy to describe how they had become accustomed to long hours in their household.

It's what we like to refer to as the "boiled frog syndrome", which is you put a frog in cold water and gradually heat it up. It doesn't know it's being boiled but if you throw a frog into boiling hot water it tries to jump out. It's the idea that over time it's getting hotter and hotter but you know, it's happening gradually enough that you're not, in as sense, you become habituated to working long hours – spending part of every weekend at work – so that other people who don't work that think 'Urg! How could you do that?!' because if they were to have to jump right into that situation it would be unpleasant and... you can tell... you can feel the stresses and strains but, yeah, but

what we do is accommodate them rather than try and do something about them. (Abby, public service worker)

Similarly, Suzanne a postal manager, was asked how she thought her hours affected her personally she replied, 'I don't know. I've done it for so long!' She describes being very tired and stressed about not completing everything she has to and that she 'can't walk away from it'.

When you cut back your hours it takes a while to get used to. You think 'Oh. What will I do now?' And then it takes you a couple of months to get back into a normal type of life. You have to revive your life. Because you haven't had any social outlet. (Sue, strapper)

While many partners in particular felt that they were 'used' to their partner's hours, they were nonetheless generally not happy with them. They used the language of adaption, accommodation and habit rather than acceptance.

Others found that when they did take time off they were bored because they had let friendships, hobbies and relationships atrophy. Some point out that their work-based social circle is also working long hours. Suzanne's husband, who is self-employed, works approximately 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. She also works long hours. Most of her friends work in the postal industry like her and so she says she 'wouldn't have much to do' if she took time off. Several interviewees were at a loss for things to do when they were not at work: work had become life.

If I was home anymore I'd have nothing to do...I'm bored [when I'm home] because I don't know what to do with myself. [Work] has probably created my lifestyle - the lifestyle that I have, and we work around that. As I said, all my friends work. (Suzanne, postmanager)

I think [work's] become a part – almost of the fabric – of what we do. Most of my good mates aren't teachers. Most are in the building industry...they live around me. And they'll tell you that they are working their bottoms off. They get home at 8 at night and you have to keep doing it while the work is there, there is definitely this presumption that you have to do it, to keep working, to work longer and longer. (Chris, teacher)

The effect on families: time poverty

Long hours had many effects on families. Some of these were positive. For those who were paid while working their long hours, bigger earnings helped families 'get ahead' or cut down their mortgages. Some employees had specific goals in mind – holidays, housing, school fees.

'Long hours' families are starved for time

But overwhelmingly, when asked about the impact of their hours on their families, most named negative effects. First and most obviously, long hours meant less time for home. This affected single people (though there were only a small number in the study), but it was very strong amongst those with families. Limited time at home affected intimate relationships, and relationships with children. These time effects were different depending upon the age of

children, but absences in relation to children in age groups from 0 to 18 were remarked. These absences resulted in a serious sense of loss amongst many workers who felt that they could never get that time back again – and in some cases their relationships with their children were compromised – perhaps irreparably.

For some, their time at home was unpredictable and workers were called away from home with little notice, or came home unexpectedly late. Others found their time at home was still time at work, with frequent calls from the office, or extra hours worked at home to finish tasks. Some parents did not see their children for long periods – for days at a time in some cases. One paramedic and mother of young children avoided coming home for the 30 minutes before her children went off to childcare (and she went to sleep) because ‘it upset them too much’. Instead she stayed at work slightly longer at the end of her 14 hour night shift, her husband took the kids to childcare on his way to work, then she came home and slept before going back to work for her second 14 hour shift. She did not see her children for 48 hours each time she worked these shifts. She and her husband worked ‘tag team’ shifts.

Workers, partners and children – by their parent’s reports - felt that they were missing out.

The unstable money/care imbalance

The household patterns that evolved around long hours workers showed signs of persistent imbalance. To generalise, frequently the long hours worker earned the majority of household income, and the partner at home built their more peripheral paid work hours around the long hours worker while performing long hours of unpaid work at home. This meant they were dependent on their partner for money – both immediately and over the life cycle. On the other hand, long hours workers were dependent upon their partners at home for care – not only of themselves - but also their offspring. This pattern was evident across a wide range of occupations - amongst miners, electricians, public service workers, teachers, and paramedics for example.

This might be seen as a balanced reciprocation of money for care. But it might also be seen as a precarious imbalance: many long hours workers had very limited relationships with their children. Some long hours workers describe an estrangement of children from their long hours parents. An electrician describes an example:

I know this one particular person who works every [overtime] amount there is and he's I the first there, last to go sort of thing. He's a carpenter, and there's another carpenter I know and he leaves 3.30pm - goes home. And they were talking about their kids. And the guy who leaves early was saying when he gets home, his kid can't wait to see him, you know. And the other guy who's never at home said, he was amazed, because when he gets home, the kid runs away. But he's, I guess, so far with the work he doesn't realise - doesn't twig - his kid doesn't want to see him. He probably says to his mum, 'Who's that guy who comes here every night?' (Tim, electrician)

A number of carers described their partners (who were mostly, but not always, fathers) as having remote relationships with their sons and daughters, as having ‘visiting rights’ to the family as Cheryl described it, so that ‘the children end up being dependent on the parent who is around’ as Maggie puts it.

This pattern of money/care imbalance, introduces particular vulnerabilities into relationships. This vulnerability exacts high costs when relationships become unstable. In such a situation, the divorced worker is at risk of losing any relationship with his children given their closeness to the main carer. The cost can be a poverty of relationships – for parent and children. On the other hand, the divorced carer may be deprived of earning capacity and risks a poverty of income.

The quality of time at home: 'He's moody, grumpy and thinking about work'

But the effects of long hours reached well beyond a simple time drought at home. Many felt that the *quality* of time at home and with family was also compromised. It was frequently contaminated by bad moods, tiredness, short tempers and the effects of general exhaustion. Some workers found it hard to set their work aside when they came home. Many made significant efforts to overcome these effects. 'Moodiness' and 'grumpiness' were repetitive complaints amongst interviewees, and they were supported by partners. Those who combined long hours with shift work in particular felt that their households were affected in their temperaments. As one doctor put it 'The whole environment within the house is very tense'.

Some attributed marital breakdowns to the effects of long hours and a number of marriages were described as being under severe pressure. Others felt that it wasn't possible to, for example, have a young family and do unreasonable hours: 'you can't have kids *and* manage a post office'. A medical specialist described how doctors in specialist training had no real choice: to do their training and work long hours they must 'abdicate' their families.

Living with long hours: 'I'm a single parent'

Many in high pressure, long hours jobs were entirely dependent upon their partners to rear their children and run the household. Predictably, it was women who generally took on the traditional role at home. A number of women described themselves as single parents in effect. They did all the cooking, cleaning, care of children, chauffeuring, bill paying and financial and emotional work of parenting alone.

I'm the mother and the father. They depend on me... I wash the car, I do all the stuff that you normally think that the man that - you know like the normal, traditional things. So I do the house and all that. Take the kids to where they should be. And the lawns. It's like being a single mother and you've got someone who comes in at different times, isn't it? (Sharon, miner's partner)

I just wander in when I feel like it! [laughs] (Laughlin, miner):

I was just gonna say that you feel like it's just you and that's it. Like there's no one else to do it.

Several men who worked long hours could not remember their children's ages, and many working long hours – whether men or women – missed significant family events. One father had been home for 4 Christmases in the past 22 years.

I have no social life, virtually none. I can't make plans for the future. It's very difficult...I do get very stressed because I have to deal with so much on my own. I'm raising 3 children as a single parent who gets support occasionally – that's how I see my role. Jason doesn't see that at all. He sees himself as an equal member of the partnership and that in itself is a source of conflict, but earlier days it wasn't as difficult. Our children were younger, the problems were smaller, I now have an adolescent son... (Geraldine, teacher and partner of flight attendant)

Another partner said of herself 'I call myself a flight attendant widow [laughs] when he's away! But you know, yeah, you do, you do feel like a single mum at times.' Another describes her partner as having 'visitation rights' – he comes and then he goes, but she runs everything around him.

It's like he has visiting rights! [laughs] That's what it's like! That he can come and he can have dinner here for 3 or 4 nights [laughs] – visiting rights, play with the children, see them and then he's gone again, you know. ... I think it is a big impact because of the fact of just doing what you have to do when they're away and not having support. I mean in my case we don't have that much support outside of us. So we work it – we've got to be flexible but we try and keep the family together.

There is definitely a strain in regards to the one at home and definitely to the one who comes home, you know, because the flyer misses out a lot on what goes on at home as well'. (Cheryl, partner of flight attendant)

A return to the 1950s family: 'Leave it to Beaver?'

Tricia describes the effects of her partner's long hours as turning her into 'a 1950s wife'. Prior to giving up paid work before the birth of their latest child, she had the higher earning and more senior job. She is the one now at home fulltime with the three children, while Abe works very long hours and regularly travels for his job:

What it reminds me of is a nice neat 1950s family. Sometimes I think all I need to do is go and buy a pinny. Because when I look at my peer group, that is what things seem to have returned to. Mum at home. Dad going away and Dad walking in the door of the perfect house with three scrubbed kids on the lounge and the car parked in the drive way. (partner of public service worker).

Interviewer: Like 'Leave it to Beaver'?

Yeah but Dad actually doesn't have time to kick a football. And it's almost unreal. But it is a reality and it seems to be a reality everywhere. And the women make the adjustment. (Tricia, partner of public service worker)

How long hours affect children and parents

While this study did not include direct interviews with children, parents had views about the impact of their hours – and this research had led some to discuss the issue with their children. The general impact of long working hours on children was seen as negative for the great

majority of parents. This sometimes reached extremes with one father saying 'It got to the point where I could not handle my own kids' he spent so little time with them. This creates a large burden for the parent who becomes the main – or almost exclusive - carer. The effect s of long hours appeared to affect children in different age groups, differently in the view of parents.

Young children under five

Interestingly a number of parents of young children said that they didn't think that their long hours were 'a huge deal' (as Gerard put it) for their young children. They felt that their early age meant that they weren't negatively affected, that their children were unaware of their absence. This appears to be at odds with the child development literature that places such emphasis upon the early years as formative for children. A number of mothers of young children felt that the problems would be harder as their children became older and looked for their fathers at school and sporting events.

Others felt that their young children were affected by their father's or mother's long absences or their need to sleep when at home. Bad moods also had an effect on their assessments of the effect on small children.

Almost universally, however, parents felt that *they* were missing out on their young children and this was a source of great regret. A supervisor reflects on how his changing hours have affected his closeness to his children and his confidence as a parent:

With my youngest child, I've probably lost 12 months, her first 12 months, because my wife had to raise her. [It got to the point] where if she was to go out say for a swim after work and leave me with the kids, if one of them was crying and one of them wanted to be fed or whatever, I could not handle it... It got to the point, I could not handle my own kids. And I really feel sorry because I lost the first 12 months of raising my second child. Whereas my first one, for the first 12 months we did everything together... It's really only been since Christmas that I've really enjoyed both my children. To the extent I will actually now get home from work and roll around on the floor and play with them, whereas 12 months ago when I come home from work I didn't want to know about the kids. Shut them up, leave me alone, I don't want to think.
(supervisor)

Many long hours workers had missed out on both time and key events in their children's early lives, and they regretted this.

Thank heavens for the video camera or he would have missed everything! (flight attendant's partner)

[My son]’s off to bed at 7.30pm and you might not see him at all. You’re gone before he gets up in the morning and see him for about 20 minutes when you get home. ... I don’t like it much at all. I’d rather spend more time with him. (Ross, engineer)

Some parents felt that they were missing out on their partner's support around decisions about their young children, and support in their parenting.

School aged children: 'the hurry up kids'

Most parents who worked long hours were concerned about the number of significant events they missed out on: performances, school events, reading at school and sporting events. The great majority reported complaints from their children about not being there, or resignation and sadness that their parents would be missing.

*My youngest son he says 'I just wish you could come to school and be in the canteen'.
... I explained to them that if I didn't work we couldn't have nice things and we couldn't go on nice holidays. So they accept it but I think they get jealous of other kids who get picked up from school by their mums and stuff like that. (Wanda, postal manager)*

Some described being 'mobbed' by their children who fought for their attention when they came home, or seeing 'needy, clingy', or 'acting out' behaviours. Young children responded positively when their parents cut back hours:

With the older ones they get introspective I think. ... So they just love it, now, the current [lower hours] regime. (Sonya, public service worker)

While some reported that days off in compensation for shift work, for example, meant that they could get to some school events they might have missed on a 9-5 roster, their children also missed their availability for significant events. Others felt a general time shortage, that meant they were always telling their children to hurry up, and that this created stress for children.

Generally speaking, as you can tell from those hours [that we are working] ...we only see them for about 2 and a half hours a day and not good times of the day - we are getting them up, getting them going or putting them to bed. (Abby, public service worker)

What's that term? It was in an article - children growing up now are called the 'hurry up generation' and it's true! Because we spend a whole morning rushing them... getting dressed and so on. We spend most of the day saying 'Hurry up! Hurry up!' And that's what we spend a little bit of the night-time saying. We're basically saying 'Hurry up, tie your shoes. Hurry up, brush your teeth' and so it's - pretty much - stress right through. Which again is something that you become so habituated to, you actually don't notice after a while. (Bob, public service worker, Abby's partner)

Oh yeah, definitely [it affects them]. Even at this young age (4 and 2). They get disappointed a hell of a lot because they want to bounce all over you, and I'm usually – my fuses are a lot shorter in those circumstances because I'm that tired and I just physically can't do what they want me to do so they notice it directly.

They're extremely disappointed and they tend to shy away from me to a certain extent and I notice when I come back from trips as well, there's the initial 'hello daddy, how are you' you know, kiss and a cuddle and what not, but then they alienate me to a certain extent, everything goes towards mum. Then, especially my daughter, she's the

oldest, I have to win her confidence back and I notice a huge difference, for instance when I'm on annual leave. (Steven, flight attendant)

Electricians who had cut back their hours felt that their relationships with their children had improved in ways that no overtime pay could compensate for:

Yeah, especially with the little boy. The little girl, she's just a happy chappie, but the little boy, I found he wasn't as close to me...now when I come home he just drops everything and runs straight for me, where before - I'd come in at 8, 7, 6pm whatever time - there just wasn't that closeness. Now when I do grab him, when I do come home from work, and go to the park or go to the shops, I mean they can't wait to come up to me and that's worth any money or any amount of overtime, or anything. (Ian, Electrician)

Adolescent children

Several families with adolescent children felt that their children had missed out on their parent's time and were concerned that this contributed to distancing behaviours. Partners also described their concerns in being mostly responsible for their adolescent children:

Oh it's hard. Oh gee this is sad. I think it's had a really negative effect on his relationship with his children, particularly our eldest son, who doesn't expect to have his father around, doesn't expect to talk to dad about his problems and I think their relationship broke down quite strongly for a while, it's rebuilding now but during those very difficult puberty years um... very difficult. They did not like each other at all and I felt that was really sad, so it was as a mother watching somebody not like my son and not like my husband, that was really hard. My daughter misses him a lot. My middle child used to panic a lot, thinking that he was going to crash, really be frightened 'Mum, is Dad all right? How do you know he's alright?' and I used to have to ask Jason to ring him from wherever he was but that died out because he'd be too tired to remember sometimes, you know. So the children have missed out...he hasn't been there for [things] and they see other kids' dads are there for theirs. They see other kids' dads have more time to play in the pool for example or to do stuff and while Jason really tries to do this, so frequently it's Mum and the kids. They miss out on their Dad a lot. They miss out on a lot of time with their Dad. (Geraldine, partner of flight attendant)

Weighing up career and family can at times be emotionally stressful. Jody and Ron have adolescent children and he works long hours. Jodie cried during her interview. She had had an argument with one of her children in the morning about household chores, and her work commitments also emerged as an issue during the interview. Although she wants her adolescent children to accept more responsibility around the home, Ron's work, including its travel requirements, precludes his greater involvement in the day-to-day management of the household. Both articulate the stress of Jodie's dual roles. Ron also puts it in the context of the wider teaching profession:

A sense of guilt among women, particularly in a female-dominated occupation, in relation to how they see their job as against their family is a very significant negative... Generally they've been able to do these activities, but at their own expense. I used

Jodie before as an example but you'll find most women with children in the occupation are seen to spend their whole life in a permanent merry-go round of work, transport, attending things without much a break at all, and it's not something that's sustainable in the long-term, and so you tend to see women periodically trying to withdraw from the cultural demands of the occupation simply because they can't keep up with it.

Phillip's stressful days at work dealing with students mean that Bonnie feels that she is left with the disciplining responsibility with the children:

If Phil's had a particularly full-on day at school and then our kids start harping up and not pulling the line, he's had enough, almost. And so in that respect I often find I'm the one that's left doing most of the disciplining at home... And then I say 'Look, it's not fair, it's always me who's being the baddie about this', and he says, 'Well if you saw what I had to put up with, this is nothing'...

What long/unreasonable hours do to intimate relationships

There were almost no positive comments about the effects of unreasonable hours patterns on relationships. One or two comments were made about 'having time to myself sometimes' but almost all couples felt that long hours negatively affected their intimate relationships. Tiredness emerged as the enemy of intimacy, so that couples struggled for time and energy to talk, and to spend enjoyable time together.

Many described their partners as grumpy and they approached them carefully, choosing their time to talk. 'Grumpiness', irritability, short tempers, and simple unavailability all contributed to a dearth of intimacy in many 'long hours' relationships. In some cases they simply spoiled relationships and had resulted in rocky marriages, and to marriage breakdowns. For some, the choice was between the marriage and their pattern of hours.

Well working in the construction industry, the hours can vary from anything from 10hrs a day to 16hrs a day. Having spent 38yrs in construction I didn't know what a 40 hr week was. You could work seven days a week, year in year out. It was a large contributor to the break up of my first marriage (Charles, partner to public service worker)

I said to him, 'It's not worth our marriage, it's not worth what it's doing to us, just go and speak to someone,' because I said, 'you can't keep this up'. So he did...We decided that wasn't the way we wanted it to go, 'cause my father and Larry's father both worked two jobs or three jobs and we never saw our dads and we said, 'no we don't want that for our kids. Money's not that important if you haven't got a relationship or a marriage that is workable. (Ann, supervisor's partner)

A teaching couple described 'living in survival mode'. Many couples reported arguments. These included arguments 'over who was going to do what', and occurred especially when one of them was tired.

The time poverty of these households stressed relationships and made communication problematic. Many workers appreciated the tolerance and understanding of their partners.

I have a very understanding spouse, so that's helpful. I do understand that there could be some partnerships where it could place an incredible strain. Then again, my wife is in a fairly high-powered position ... she has a mutual understanding... it's happening to her as well. (Keith, postal worker)

Casey's story: 'It creates a strain'

Casey, a technician, thinks that his long work hours put a lot of strain on his relationship with his wife,

She resents a lot of it, there's no two ways about that and rightly so too. I'm not there to help out with all the domestic chores and duties and all of that sort of thing a lot of the time ... by the time I get home, I basically have something to eat and go to bed and then I'm up again in the morning before everyone else and gone to work. Yeah that gets tiresome on the relationship.

Casey doesn't want to put up with this situation for an indefinite amount of time and will start looking for another job. He thinks that his relationship with his partner and children would be different if he was working more reasonable hours, although he is worried that they have adapted to the amount of overtime money he earns. Casey feels that he has to make the choice between earning extra money that his family needs or spending time with them instead.

A number of those working long hours – and their partners – pointed out that they bought work home, and frequently thought about it while with their family, then dreamed about it.

Unpredictable hours and 'missing him'

The unpredictability of hours also contributed to stress: when workers were unexpectedly called in for extra hours or phoned at home. Partners lay awake worrying about the long drive home. Many found their social lives as a family sharply constricted. 'Being out of sync' affected relationships and contributed to anger in the household.

I miss him. I miss him very much and I get very angry about that. To the point that I don't want him home anymore because it's – sometimes I don't know what's worse: to have him leave or having him come back. Yep I think it has definitely affected our relationship in a negative way. In the past, the stay at home was much longer, you used to get 75% of your away time free and we had a chance to rebuild. Now we don't. He's in a constant state of jet lag. His intolerance is very high because he is tired. He has a vision of coming home to a Brady Bunch family because he misses us so much and we can never match that. And because he's tired, he's intolerant and that leads to a lot of conflict and resentment on my part, I think 'I waited all effing week for you to get back and this is what you....' you know and he thinks 'Why am I here? I'm just a visitor in my own home'. So – because there's not enough time for us to rebuild the relationship that breaks down every time he goes away, really. It has had a lot of negative impacts and I think it's more the hours he works, than anything else. I don't believe you can fix this with money. Money's not going to make any difference. It's the time. He needs more time. If Jason was home more often, 'I think we would be a stronger family unit.'

We would do more things as a family. We would go out to dinner as a family, we never do that. (Geraldine, partner of flight attendant).

Gerry physically collapsed and was taken to hospital from work. This led to his wife's demand that he take a serious look at how his hours and work were affecting their relationship:

I know I was the guilty party. It just got that any minor thing that my wife or kids had, you'd take it out on them by maybe not talking to them or isolating yourself... Maybe I'm one of the lucky ones that woke up to the reality of what the important ingredient is and it's not work, it's the people that you're home with... When I was in hospital she came in that particular night [after I had collapsed] and she said to me, 'look you either get something that doesn't take the hours, or you leave the job you're doing' and like she said, 'it has affected the marriage, it has affected the children, and you're obligated not only to yourself, but to us, to look after you're health'. I think it was mainly the collapse I had and the hospitalisation that brought it to a head. (Gerry, supervisor)

Intimacy: 'your sex life doesn't exist'

Not surprisingly, the presence of tiredness, lack of time, occasional moodiness and the existence of some tension around hours in many households affected sexual intimacy. Some grabbed their chances when they came, with 'sex on the run' as one partner described her situation with a laugh. Some described exhaustion that means, as one put it, that 'we're so tired...we just go to sleep'. A male supervisor commented 'It got the point where physically I wasn't interested to the point where I used to come to bed and go to sleep more or less'.

Others described the difficulties of finding time to be together and create intimacy:

I was doing a lot of nights in obstetric anesthesia - we hadn't actually seen each other for 26 nights out of the month. And that's when we start finding things becoming disruptive, because we can't organise social functions, there are a whole lot of things we can't manage to do because of the schedules not matching up. (Karen, doctor)

Yeah it affects your relationship. Like your sex life doesn't exist. (Sue, Strapper)

Well I don't see a lot of my husband. I don't see a lot of my mum. My mum lives like two blocks away from me, from where we are at the moment. I don't get to see a lot of friends. Because I'm stressed and I don't see a lot of my husband, we do fight a lot more. Yeah and it's over little things like the rubbish hasn't been put out, you know, meaningless things. So I know that's happening and basically your sex life goes. Yeah because you're just so tired, you just don't feel like it (Natasha, Finance sector)

The work/eat/sleep cycle creates a drought of intimacy. Electricians and miners describes similar experiences while working long hours:

You didn't have any leisure time. You were basically going home, eating, having a shower and going to sleep. That was your leisure time. Have a bit of a chat and you're too tired to do anything else. (Cam, electrician)

I come home, I'll have a drink, have a shower and then go straight to bed. (Steve, miner)

Even newly married couples were not immune where their hours were difficult.

We had to get it straight right from the beginning that it wasn't going to be a normal relationship. For a start, I'd be home, probably, 3 or 4 days and then I'd be gone up to 9 or 10, possibly more and therefore the few days that I am home, he has to go to work, so we're not getting very much quality time and then I'm packing, preoccupied with getting everything ready, to go again. So he definitely takes a back seat to my life, but for now it's just the way it has to be, so that we can have an income. (Carol, flight attendant, married one year)

Many women in this study identified that running the household fell to them, when their partners worked long hours: 'he doesn't do anything'. However, even when the woman was working long hours, sometimes in partnership with a partner who also worked long hours, the burden of household management and work fell to women, and this also contributed to relationship tension.

When I'm at school I'm fine because you're involved and it's fine. But then I come home I sort of think 'Oh, no'. Cause there's so much [to do] at home and I find I expect the boys to do more and more to help and they're getting to the age where they want to do less and less...I get enormous satisfaction out of it when I'm [at work]. It's just when I get home and look at the mess and there's no dinner cooked and there's clothes that need washing and people need to be taken to basketball, soccer or whatever, and you sort of feel you're being pulled in many directions...So I go through this endless thing, 'Will I employ a cleaner?' [laugh], 'No I won't', because it's forty dollars a week or whatever that I could easily do myself if I could find the time to do it. And then I don't do it, and then I get cross with everybody because the house is still a mess and so it becomes a vicious cycle. (Jodie, teacher)

Women are especially affected by the domestic workload, as national studies show (Bittman and Pixley 1997). The tensions created for the domestic load by long hours affected women in this study.

The double day

Those who were both caring for dependents and doing long hours found the lives very demanding. An outline of their average day explained why.

I've had fairly heavy health problems in the last 2 years and I think it is because of ... because if you take a typical day for me... I'm getting up at 5.30-6am, getting lunches ready, getting the kids ready, I've got a bed wetter at home... I do that all before I get here... I've got 20 staff here, I'm looking after them all day... I pick the kids up say

around 6-6.30pm and then it starts again, got to get the tea ready, empty the lunch boxes, sit down with them with their homework... the first time I sit down at night at dinner at 7 which is quick... I don't actually sit down to relax until 9. A lot of friends of mine they just shake their heads, they don't know how I do it.

If you can get a happy balance between work and personal life you're pretty lucky I think - it doesn't happen in real world... I suppose if you had a supportive partner and someone who would take the pressure off at home it would be so different. That's probably the worst thing you can do – is learn to live with it... Mine's just a chaotic life. (Wanda, postal manager, with partner and young children)

There are over 30 people at postal manager level in Wanda's region and only a very few manage the job and the hours with small children.

The price of long hours for carers

Long hours mean long days for carers at home. Many full-time parents at home talked about the loneliness they felt with long days while partners were away, and their need for adult company. Partners were often sympathetic: Ian, an electrician, describes how his wife nearly 'cracked' doing it all on her own:

I think a lot of the pressure went on her cooped up in the house with two kids... Sometimes all she needed was a half an hour to leave the kids with me, just to get out and not have them in her ear, 'cause as little kids, they're, 'mum, mum, mum, mum,' and that's non-stop from when they wake up, til when they go to bed. I found that she was going around the bend when I was doing all those hours. I could see she was close to breaking point.

Maggie and Con

Con is a technician in a scientific facility and he regularly works long stints of unreasonable hours with night work and long shifts.

I think it impacts on my wife Maggie because I come here to work and then she's got to run the kids around.

Con usually does the cooking at home, so when he is working overtime Mary has to take over that as well as whatever else she does. Maggie works two part-time jobs, 5 days a week:

It's not as bad now, the kids are getting older they can look after themselves. When they were a little bit smaller, we'd have to get babysitters in. It's not as much as a problem now, as it was.

Con thinks that his work sometimes affects his marriage:

When you're tired, you just come home and flop. ... I wasn't aware of it but Maggie says I'm a bit of a grump if I've done a night.

Maggie finds Con's long hours stressful. She distinguishes between the times when Con works overtime on a 'one-off' basis, which she doesn't mind at all, and between the long stints of overtime, which she feels do affect her. Maggie said she finds it hard to adjust to Con's periods of long hours and feels, like others in this study, she has to adjust to 'becoming a single parent' for that period of time.

Most of those at home with partners at work in jobs with unreasonable hours were women. The effect of long hours patterns, against the background of gendered patterns of work and caring, have particular effects on women which appear to contribute to systemic disadvantage, or to indirect discrimination, against women. These effects sit alongside the personal effects for women and men.

Fitting in around long hours: the residual partner

A consistent pattern of 'residualness' was noticeable amongst the partners of long hours workers. Their lives were frequently – though not always – built around their partner's, in terms of paid work in particular but also in patterns of household activity, parenting and family activities. The hours of the worker assumed a kind of automatic priority in households and 'drove' them. As a result, partners and children fitted around these hours – in terms of meals, leisure, family time, and the nature of activity around sleeping and recovering workers.

In particular, partners' paid work activities assumed a residual pattern around the 'main' workers. This affected whether they took a paid job at all, their hours, the type of job they took, whether that job was casual or permanent. It also sharply constrained their careers: some had given up their jobs while others had foregone promotion, or other opportunities in order to take over the domestic sphere and support the 'main' worker. Many long hours workers relied upon the full-time support of a worker at home, especially where dependents were present. Others relied on a part-time support person at home, or one who did their work flexibly around the long hours worker, by running a small business for example, or holding a very flexible job. (In a few cases, households supported two long hours workers, and these strained under the burden.)

This had varying effects. Some carers loved being at home and taking on that role. Some of these nonetheless found their *de facto* conversion into 'single parents' difficult or undesirable. Some speculated on why they were rearing the children, despite in some cases their own career ambitions or history.

Tricia's adaption

While she has had a senior job herself, Tricia is determined not to go back to a 'big job' (she now does some family day care) because the strain on the family would be too great and the balancing act would be too difficult. She has made the major adaption while Abe's job has grown. He has been promoted and now leaves the house before 7 am and returns after 7 pm with fairly regular interstate travel.

'It puts the burden on me'

Even for women whose hours are not much different from their partners continue to carry the disproportionate load of home duties.

[His long hours] probably puts all the burden of everything on me... And that's sort of become cumulative over the years. Because initially when they were tiny kids and I was only .4, it was actually quite easy to fit in shopping, everything else around it. As my hours have increased, which has been entirely up to me, like I've done that deliberately, no one's forced me into that. The burden of everything has ended up being mine. Particularly the running round after the kids to sport. Because Ron obviously works in here in the city, he's not on hand to do any of the obvious day to day stuff, like shopping and cleaning, but he can't do the kid ferrying stuff and that's been one of the, over the years, not bone of contention because you can't do anything about it, but that responsibility. (Jody, teacher's partner)

The effect on women's careers: accommodating partner's long hours

The careers of carers – mainly women – along with their lifetime earnings are particularly affected by this accommodation. Casey's partner does part-time work 'whenever she can get it' and because of their kids, she has to work around his hours 'she doesn't have a lot of choice in that regard'. Further, their partner's long hours reshaped some women's life cycle of work, with some women deferring their involvement in challenging paid work to late in their working lives. Both Pat in the public service and Jenny in teaching can see their careers advancing relatively late in their life cycle just as their partners are tending to wind down. Similarly, Maggie made a career change so that her work hours would be more suited to Con's work hours in a scientific facility, and their family life.

In the four teaching couples interviewed, the women partners generally had the primary responsibility for juggling family and work responsibilities whether they were teachers themselves or not. This was managed usually by creating a level of flexibility by working part-time, or by changing teaching jobs in the case of Lorraine – who had decided to change schools and her teaching load in order to take more of the burden at home.

Fitting in around Phillip

Phillip and Bonnie's decisions illustrate the ways in which women are more likely to cut their hours. Phillip is a full-time teacher. Bonnie is a part-time physiotherapist working 19 hours a week. They have young children. For periods during the school year, Bonnie has come to accept Phillip will be rarely available to the family. During these times she has full responsibility of the household, alters her work schedule to accommodate and makes different social arrangements. Fitting in around Phillip, Bonnie has decided to work part-time. However, going part-time is less than optimal in her view because it means less of a role in more interesting aspects of the job (e.g. decision-making). However, she feels working part-time is preferable for the family. Phillip has also made compromises: they have discussed the possibility of Phillip's promotion to Deputy Principal and decided this must be deferred while the children are young and for them to 'maintain a family life'. He also makes time to spend

with the children so he works later at night. While both have made concessions in their working life, Bonnie's career opportunities have taken a back seat in the relationship.

For Bonnie choosing her family has been at the expense of job satisfaction. Her choice to work part-time is a constrained, sub-optimal choice, with penalties for the rewards from her job:

Now because I'm working part-time I have less responsibility but I also have less say, less autonomy. I mean all those things that make work feel useful and make you feel part of the system. You can't have everything in life. And at the moment I'm working to fit in with my family. Not probably for job satisfaction. (Bonnie, teacher's partner)

Working part-time - to work 'normal hours' and avoid long hours

A number of workers in this study elected to work part-time – at least in theory – so that they could avoid working the kinds of excessive hours that full-time workers worked around them. Some found that working part-time in fact meant working full-time. What it did accomplish, however, was liberation from an expectation that they work *overtime*. Jody for example, bought 'flexibility' through a .4 pay cut, in order to be available to her children, run the household, and do the extra-curricula activities expected of a music teacher, while avoiding very long hours in a school. Ron describes his wife's long hours – despite her theoretically part-time .6 teaching job:

Essentially the .6 really only meant flexibility as to when she went to school because she was actually working at the place for the full five days, and often on weekends, particularly on the middle two terms of the year... There's a federal award provision. It sets a 76-hour fortnight. The reality of the occupation is that it has never been able to tick over like that. And that's the time people are actually legally required to be at the workplace. But the workload of a teacher if you compare it to that of a salesperson might be that they may be selling for 15 hours and preparing for 30 hours. So generally the time at school is if not the tip of the iceberg only a substantial but not total part of that iceberg. The essence of her value to the school is although she's been part-time her involvement in the broader life has been well above full-time.

While Jenny had children living at home, she restricted her extra school activities as well as worked part-time. Working part-time actually gave her the flexibility to put in the extra hours required as well as leaving time for her family:

I found when I worked part-time, I was really working four days a week at school, but I was actually taking the fifth day to do a lot of the work for school, so that I could have the evenings and time with my children.

You are 'family' or you are 'worker': Mummy and Daddy tracks

The tendency for women to take 'the mummy track' when they try to combine work and family has been documented in previous research (Schwartz 1989 and Hochschild 1997). This study affirms the widespread presence of the 'mummy track' for many women in this study who put their caring responsibilities squarely alongside their paid work. This track is a

second-class career track, in that women drop back into lower status, lower paid jobs with poorer career prospects in order to secure conditions that accommodate their motherhood.

Many step back from their careers or current jobs when they become carers, and the widespread pattern of long hours for many women in these occupational groups enforces this choice vigorously. ‘Ordinary careers’ are hard enough for mothers. Jobs that demand long hours are much harder and many simply give them up, while others take a ‘mummy track’ and drop back to part-time work, change fields, swap jobs or take a demotion.

Flight attendants, postal managers, public service workers, teachers, strappers, paramedics and doctors all struggled with this ‘choice’. While some managed to work long hours and maintain careers as well as be active parents – in most of these occupations - most did it at considerable cost. This cost was to their health, their relationships and to their time with their children. Each had a partner. While this partner’s contribution varied widely – from equal sharing through to little help - no women in our study managed to combine long hours with family, without a partner’s presence. Male partner’s who stepped into the kind of ‘equal or more’ sharing role that many female partners undertook, managed best.

Long hours foster the Mummy-track

The mummy track was well in evidence through this study, and did not easily intersect with long hours jobs. The greater the proportion of long hours jobs in any labour market, the more carers are forced into ‘mummy tracks’ that keep them away from long hours and lock them into second class jobs. Further, when their male *partners* hold long hours jobs, women are more strongly pushed into ‘accommodation’ strategies in the labour market – taking casual work, short term jobs, and lower status jobs that give them ‘flexible’ availability to work around their partners, remembering that many of their hours are unpredictable. There are, therefore, multiple factors arising from long hours that foster and embed the secondary labour status of mothers, and push them towards a ‘mummy track’.

A ‘daddy track’

Interestingly the study also found evidence of a ‘daddy track’ for men who refused to work long hours in workplaces that were frequently imbued with a long hours culture. Men who refused extra hours, tried to restrict their working week, asked to work part-time or refused promotion because of its implicit long hours, found themselves viewed with suspicion in their workplaces – or simply disbelieved. Some felt they were then viewed as not serious about their work, and thus in danger of disappearing down a ‘daddy track’.

Sonya and Gerard and the mummy and daddy tracks

Sonya and Gerard work in the public sector and have several children. Gerard works at a less senior level than Sonya and with access to flextime arrangements. Sonya describes her feeling of being ‘compartmentalised’ for having cut back her hours, and the need to go back to long hours to get her career ‘back on track’:

Having gone part-time, made the statement that I couldn’t keep working that way, that now it’s like I’m in a certain compartment. ... But there is certainly a change towards

me ... 'she's focused on her family and not her career'...I'm aware that if I wanted to get my career back on track I'd have to go full-time again. There's absolutely no way around that.

Her partner has a very similar assessment of the price he has paid for being 'a family person' or taking the 'daddy track':

I have had bosses say to me 'You're a family person'. I've got a tag, yeah. It certainly affects me. When I was thinking of applying for [another post] the Branch Head said to me 'Well you know you couldn't be a family person like you are now'.

Gerard believes that the 'family tag' has negative connotations:

It's tolerated because I mean, we do have family policies and things like that in our certified agreement. ... I think if I decided now that I did want to get a promotion or go for a posting or anything like that, I'd have to put in some serious time trying to reverse my image.

Bob and Abby: 'there's a sense of danger'

A senior officer in his workplace, Bob describes his experience of flirting with part-time work and the 'dangers' he felt it posed in terms of organisational perception that he had become one of the 'stuck' employees, rather than a 'winner'. The father of young children and partner of another senior officer, he found that his idea of perhaps going part-time just 'didn't compute' with senior managers. Because of this reaction he decided not to pursue part-time work, confirming his belief that people who move 'downward' or go part-time are perceived negatively:

I think that anyone who thinks of dropping a level...there's a sense of danger about them, a sense of question marks about their competency...There's a culture of people move up – so there's people who move up or there are people who are stuck where they are, and that can have implications – sometimes a bad thing. But the idea of someone going down [sounds] alarm bells.

In this account, signs of a limitation on time commitment or a desire to work part-time are read as a 'bad sign'. This difficulty creates a barrier for couples like Bob and Abby, where either or both would like to work less hours, but neither feels they can do good, rewarding jobs that maintain seniority and serious treatment *and* come be active parents. Their case also illustrates the practical contradiction that exists between 'family friendly' policies and entrenched long hours cultures. The presence of family friendly policies is no sure antidote to the real hold of long hours culture and the archetype of the 'proper, long hours' worker who fits them best.

Long hours: Embedding systemic disadvantage for women

It is widely recognised in labour market analysis, that women's larger responsibility for the domestic sphere shapes their paid labour market status. If that responsibility grows through taking on a larger caring role in relation to the long hours of male partners, the possibility of a

contribution to increased disadvantage for women in the labour market through long hours exists. This contribution is possible through two means.

Firstly, long hours increase carers' responsibilities at home: the time that they must spend on childcare, domestic work and household administration, management and work compensating for the absence of their generally male partner increases in ways that weaken their foothold in the labour market. While there are examples of men in this study who take up the greater role at home, much more commonly women do so. As their domestic burden grows in support of their long hours partners, so does their labour market situation weaken. This is illustrated by the situation of Tricia for example, who gives up her job, then works around Abe, recognising that the long term implications for her career are negative. Applied on a much wider canvass, the cumulative effect of these decisions negatively affects women's paid labour market status.

Secondly, a growth in hours standards in some workplaces means that those with more responsibility for care – traditionally mothers and daughters – are increasingly unable to meet the standard of the 'long hours' workplace. Many drop back to part-time work, change jobs, or leave the labour market, as this study documents. While some men took these choices as well – or at least tried to – it was much more common amongst women. This means, that in the presence of socially gendered patterns of caring and work, long hours embed a workforce pattern that further disadvantages women who make up the majority of carers. While not all women will elect to make such decisions, for example work part-time or take a demotion, frequently women are tainted by the expectation that they will. This means that a gendered hours-of-work/caring regime may contribute to increased indirect discrimination against women.

Long hours partnerships

Many couple in our study were grateful for their understanding partners. In a number of cases this understanding arose from experience of long hours themselves. For example, Keith a postal manager considers himself fortunate as he has an understanding spouse and this is because she is required to work similar hours. His wife is a nursing manager who works long hours.

I have a very understanding spouse, so that's helpful. I do understand that there could be some partnerships where it could place an incredible strain. Then again, my wife is in a fairly high-powered position ... she has a mutual understanding... it's happening to her as well. (Keith)

While a shared experience led to a happy understanding in some cases, this was generally in circumstances where the partner was no longer working long hours themselves. In Pat's case, Charles was no longer working his long hours job in construction. Tricia had given up her senior public service job to support Abe. Things were more difficult in households where both worked long hours. The strains of coordination of childcare in the household of a paramedic whose husband worked almost 50 hours a week himself, were obvious:

He starts work at 7.30am. I finish work at 7.00am. Which means the kids are at crèche from approximately half past 7am til 4.30pm. So if I tried to get home before 7.30am -

because we're only a 1 car family - I'd see the kids probably for five minutes and then they're off to crèche. I go to sleep, I've gone to work by 4.30pm which is the time they get home, again we may see each other for five minutes and that's it. Which is pretty mean on them... I feel so guilty. (Lucy, paramedic)

Two long hours jobs: Natasha and Thomas

In another, where a finance industry worker's partner worked long hours in his small business, the hours took a toll. Natasha describes how she sees little of her husband who is in small business and that their stress – arising from demanding jobs - contributes to 'a lot' of fighting, and to the collapse of their sexual intimacy.

Natasha believes that her work (of 50-60 hours a week on a regular basis), as well as her husband's similar hours, has a big impact on their relationship. She hopes it is going to get better, 'I hope so. I mean, if not there's always counseling, or me leaving my job'. Her partners long hours also contributed to the situation:

He will mostly do 60 to 70 hours a week. Especially at the end of the month...and then basically this weekend, he'll be working all weekend due to the fact that it's the end of the financial year, so he'll have to get all his paperwork done for the end of the financial year, for the tax man.

Natasha would like to see the hours of paid work in her household organized differently, in that she would like her and her husband to start and finish work at the same time so that they are at home together. Their patterns of long hours feed each other's:

I started working more Saturdays when he started working more Saturdays himself...I started working Saturdays because we were getting paid overtime, when I started working, and he thought 'oh well I'll leave all my bookwork and stuff to the weekend' and then it's just habit. He now leaves all his bookwork to the end of the week and I work Saturdays.

They are annoyed with each other's hours and as a result it causes arguments:

Heaps. ... Well the core problem is working hours but we find little things on the surface to pick about more than the working hours.

The effect on extended families

The time famine in long hours households had significant effects on the fabric of the extended family. Some workers felt that they did not see grandparents or grandchildren enough, and that they frequently missed family events. Further, many felt that their contact was built around asking for help – for childcare or other support. Some felt guilty that their hours, or those of their partner, precluded offering help to their extended families. Some grandparents saw requests for help coming – and headed them off. A flight attendant, for example, who planned to have children had been told by her parents that there was 'no way' they would be looking after her children, well in advance of their arrival.

Many regretted the loss of time with their extended family, and some felt that it was a very important part of life, which a reduction in their hours had allowed them to reclaim. Tricia describes her pleasure in having more time so that her three young children see their grandparents more. When she and her partner had both worked long hours this had not been possible.

Pat: A grandmother's story

Pat, a busy public service worker and keen grandmother explains the effects she notices for her grandchildren of her regular overtime:

If I worked 38 hours I would have more time for the grandchildren [she has 6]. My grandson is at the age - he is 4 - he'll pick me up from the train sometimes with granddad and he will say 'I waited to see you cos I haven't seen you for such a long time because you've been at work again!'. I'd definitely like to see a lot more of them. I'd like to have a day just for the grandchildren. My kids say we need to see more of you... Grandparents are an essential part of the child's growing up because they can have a relationship with the child that it can't have with your parents and you lose out a lot by not having grandparents. I took my children away from their grandparents when they were [young] and it did impact on them dramatically. My 8 year old admitted later that she hated me for the first two years after we moved because I took her away from her nanny and granddad. And from the reactions I am getting from my grandchildren, they need their grandparents just as much as the grandparents need them.

The choice to go 'downward'

'Going downward' was a strategy that a number of workers in this study had adopted in an attempt to reduce their working hours. Those who wanted to reduce hours often felt that they needed to take fairly radical action to get a change: to swap jobs, change industries, go part-time or take a demotion. Several teachers had, for example, decided not to try for promotion, or had changed schools or jobs in order to reduce hours, as had a number of public service workers. Strappers took some care in trying to find an employer who paid for extra hours and did not require truly excessive hours – although each strapper worked long hours, most of the 'extra ones' unpaid.

It is interesting that in occupations or workplaces where long hours are well established, it is extremely difficult to go from long hours to shorter ones by means of individual negotiation – even where, as Frank's story shows us, severe personal effects of long hours are in evidence – and have cost the employer money. In this situation many workers are forced into trying to find their own individual ways of moving downward. For some this means a loss of pay, status, and interest. And for some of their employers, it may mean the loss of employee ability and enthusiasm.

Sport and hobbies

It is striking that so many working unreasonable hours had given up hobbies and sport. Frank has eloquently described in Chapter two the loss of his hobbies and larger life as his long

hours took over. Their hours also affect partner's abilities to 'take time for themselves' and maintain fitness and hobbies.

Phillip, a teacher, does martial arts on a Monday, but his partner is careful not to take on extra things for herself:

I must admit this year I haven't done anything for myself because basically I think that if I start doing things we won't see each other. 'Cause I can guarantee that a couple of nights a week he'll be busy doing whatever he is doing.

A doctor described losing touch with his hobbies and interests: 'I have done nothing of my own since 1994'. Interviewees in each occupational group described giving up forms of sport, and/or hobbies because of lack of time, they came home from work exhausted, or they could not predict when they would be available. This had significant effects in some communities. Miners described the decline of their local football club and golf club as a result of the widespread shift work in their town. The implications for community fabric, for friendships and for community are obvious.

Voluntary work

Voluntary work like social clubs, charity work and participation in the army reserve was constrained for a number who described giving up these activities as result of their lack of time, tiredness and lack of predictable participation.

The effect on communities

Alongside the impact of diminished activity within the family, the extended family, sporting clubs and voluntary work, many families affected by unreasonable hours described a closing in of their social circle. Those with families found that much of their non-work time was spent together, or trying to be together. When asked about their friendships, several long hours workers said 'what friends?' and described how work commitments affected these. Others worked hard to maintain their community of friendships which they saw as invaluable to the maintenance of their life style: being able to easily call on neighbours when called to work, for example, relied on a good community of neighbours and friends.

Natasha describes her social time:

Interviewer: Do you get much time to socialize?

No not really. ... I mean, we hardly – I mean the only correspondence I have with friends is over the phone, from work and the only time I really ever see them is if it's a birthday, an engagement party. Other than that it's like it's too much of an effort to see them because it's like, let's just sit at home and watch a video or you know.

Productivity and unreasonable hours

Unreasonable hours not only erode the social fabric of families and the communities in which they live, but many workers mentioned their impact upon productivity. Most long hours

workers want to get their jobs done efficiently. There were however, many examples of negative impacts of long hours on productivity. Public service workers pointed to the impact of serious errors that arose when long hours were worked. Miners and paramedics recounted expensive – indeed, life threatening - events that occurred at the end of long shifts. Paramedics were concerned about the quality of their judgment in demanding emergency situations after they had worked for 14 hours through the night. Teachers explained the added difficulty of finding creative solutions to behavioural and teaching problems when very tired, and pointed out that recovering from a bad teaching choice was very time consuming - and frequently necessary - for tired teachers.

Tired workers adopt behaviours that protect them from more work and they lack creativity

Abe a public service manager pointed out that creativity of thought was a casualty in his workplace, and that the people he managed ‘couldn’t see the wood for the trees’ when they were tired.

You tend to adopt a hard more cynical approach to work and you spend a lot of time actually fending off work rather than getting work done. That’s a survival mechanism in my view.

Interviewer: so there are sort of protective behaviours amongst those overworked workers?

Yes protective of themselves. So as a manager of people working long hours it becomes really difficult when you want to promote creativity in the work environment or you want to grab a few people off line for a few days – ‘go and look at this issue and come back and tell me about it’, and it’s really hard to do that...Therefore they are reluctant to participate because they are too busy protecting themselves, or they don’t see doing something new or creative of value to them. What is of value to them is what they do on a daily basis.

Also people who do long hours often have difficulty in prioritising because they are a bit tired and because they have a large number of things that they need to do and they can’t see the wood for the trees.

New technology and unreasonable hours

We have long lived with technologies that take work into the home and extend the working day beyond its formal and physical boundaries. However, for those working unreasonable hours, the expectation was that they were ‘available’ well beyond their already long hours. This was especially the case for highly skilled workers but it was not confined to them. Strappers living in at stables are expected to put blankets on horses on cold nights outside normal hours, while engineers and technicians are expected to respond to technical problems readily.

A number mentioned the impact of mobile phones and email upon their patterns and hours of work. Some described being expected to have their mobiles on for long periods, for example

one engineer described how he was required to have his phone on ‘from 6am to 6pm everyday...So you haven’t even started work and he’ll be on the phone talking to you and may well do same on the way home’.

Mobile phones added many hours to the long working hours of the engineers. Their stories create a visual picture of a large network of workers driving home still talking about work on their mobiles. The time they leave the office appears to be insignificant in terms of their working hours, as they are still working in their cars and homes, on their mobiles. This had important effects on households as Therese describes it:

The phone is never switched off so even though he’s home early he’ll still gets hundreds of phone calls. He’s laying on the lounge talking on for 2 hours so he’s still at work from my point of view.

What would help?

Many workers had comments to make about what would help them to work more reasonable hours. High on this list was the right – genuinely – to refuse hours that were unreasonable. Also high on the list was the issue of staffing. Improved staffing, some said, was the *only* way to see a reduction in unpaid leave especially in jobs – like health, teaching, postal work, public service – where ‘it is the unpaid hours that get the job done’, as at present.

It really comes down to the organisation having the right number of people do to the work. I think that’s the biggest – I think that’s the biggest contributor to the way we’re needing to work longer hours – we’re just not getting the work done in the day...I think a 35 hour week would be great. (David, engineer)

The occupational change over the last 10 or 12 years – demands up, numbers down. There’s one element of elasticity in the system and that’s the workload of teachers. (Ron, teacher)

It is also important to challenge the stigma and secondary conditions and possibilities that attach to part-time work, to job sharing and to other workplace time strategies that allow workers to reduce their hours without ‘trashing their conditions’ as one put it.

Many workers saw benefit in leave that was taken in blocks, as some felt that a day or two off meant a return to ‘piled up work’ and a new level of pressure. This put them off taking leave. If they took a longer period of leave, and ‘really got away’ this was less likely to happen. Once again, however, the importance of staffing levels is clear. Without adequate staff, workers will never be guaranteed of a return to a clear desk.

For Phillip, a teacher, the key issue is reducing face-to-face teaching hours. Although the Award is meant to restrict hours, resources are simply not available to provide the extra teachers required. He – like many other teachers – sees that addressing practical issues of teacher shortages is essential

A number of employees were skeptical about any remedies that relied on worker-initiated action without strong statutory backing. For example, Ken believed ‘that there is a problem

when [entitlements] fall onto the onus of the employee'. His major concern was that working hours need to be clearly specified and set out so workers 'know exactly when they will be working overtime or weekends'. Ken thought that there should be large overtime payments above, say 176 hours per month so it made it unprofitable for the employer to make the employee work any longer than that.

Many workers looked for flexibility and say over their hours, recognising that many factors contributed to 'unreasonableness'. For a significant number, especially on shift work recovery time was critical, along with appropriate meal and rest breaks.

Ideal hours?

I don't think there's such a thing as ideal hours. What I'd want is the flexibility to, without guilt, if I wasn't busy on a particular afternoon or whatever, take it. As an example of that, I'm entitled to 14 days time in lieu to recognise the night work and so on. I generally finish the year having used one or one and a half days, simply because the diary books up...What would work better for me is a way to be able to decide on a particular day that I'm going...without feeling bad about it. I probably could because my accountability is quite personal rather than institutional. But getting that enshrined in the way we operate would probably help for me (David, engineer)

The growing grip of a 'long hours' culture

The pictures that arise from this study are suggestive of a long hours culture that has taken a strong hold – at least in the twelve industries covered by our 53 workers. There are many forces that combine to establish that hold. Some workers want higher incomes through paid overtime, and there are examples where this income is firmly built into household budgets. For others, their paid overtime is not voluntary – in the building or health industry, for example, where there is extensive evidence of workers feeling under strong pressure to work overtime.

Many workers – about 40 per cent in our group – are not being paid for their overtime. They are pulled into long hours because they want to get the job done or because their supervisors and employers demand it. Teachers want to get their job done well for student's benefits; schools are sites of entrenched patterns of unpaid hours, especially for those with challenging teaching, or extra administrative or leadership responsibility. Doctors feel a strong commitment to their patients, strappers to their horses, paramedics to their patients, public service workers to collecting tax, running employment programs and writing policy and budgets. This commitment provides fertile ground on which to structure staff shortages and run lean budgets. The real dollars that are saved, however, do not come without costs – to the individuals who work them, their families and friends and the larger community.

Many workers described their workplaces, one way or another, as places where long hours are entrenched, where refusing them meant being tainted as a poor worker, as destined for negative treatment, redundancy, undesirable tasks, or the failure to be offered further work. New technologies like the mobile phone enable that culture, and take it into the hidden workplace of the home.

Long hours existed in workplaces where employees knew them to be unsafe – especially in combination with shifts. And they existed in highly unionised workplaces amongst highly skilled workers who might be expected to exercise considerable labour market power. However, these factors did not prevent the acquiescence of even these highly marketable workers to unreasonable hours. This is testament to the powerful effect of long hours cultures which – as in Abby’s boiled frog analogy – are frequently tolerated despite both unrecognised, and recognised levels of discomfort. What is more, these hours persisted in the face of employer’s knowledge of the ‘suicidal thoughts’ of at least one worker, and obvious signs of stress in many more. The pressure to get the job done is a powerful force in Australian workplaces and appears to have taken a firm hold. It exists in workplaces with award clauses that require agreement only to ‘reasonable overtime’ and in others with agreements that require specific meal and rest breaks.

These standards have not been enough to stem a rising culture of unreasonable hours in many workplaces, and they create a strong argument for some kind of circuit breaker that weakens the systemic hold of long hours culture in many workplaces.

A legal standard: The argument for going beyond local agreements

As a supervisor who allocated shifts to a group of technically skilled workers on a 24-hour shift roster, Paul felt that his workplace agreement in the public sector was too weak to restrain real practice:

I need a stronger standard – one that is specific about what can and can’t be done. And one that people understand across and beyond the workplace. Otherwise people just do what they like. All the local standards mean little really, when you have a lot of work on... We need specific strong directions.

At the moment the award that Casey, a technician works under states that the employer can require the worker to work ‘reasonable overtime’. Casey thinks that traveling time should be included in the definition of ‘reasonable hours in his case. Casey believes in the need for a legal guide:

I think we owe it to our kids to try and get these things into the Awards now so that workers aren’t completely manipulated by the employers. I think it is reasonable to expect those sort of arrangements in our society today. (Casey, technician)

Teachers also looked for some guidance. It would help to have an external enforceable standard, especially given that many workers described their difficulties in enforcing standards individually. As one teacher put it:

There has been a culture in some schools where if you are a unionist and you say no to the principal then there are consequences – you are not accepted as a nomination for a promotable position or you are not given the opportunities and some principals are quite vindictive – teachers get taken aside - what are you complaining about –

Interviewer: So it’s pretty hard to deal with as an individual?

Yes. Absolutely. Some [supervisors] take it as a personal attack...and it becomes very difficult, especially when you know that there are repercussions. That's why a lot of people have given up, and just tolerate it, rather than standing up...Teachers should not be put in a position where they feel they HAVE to work 17 nights after school [in a year]. And they should not feel that they are going to be victimised. And there should be some payback. Maybe you should be given some time off in lieu at an appropriate time.

(Chris, teacher)

The case of the electricians establishes the possibility of reducing long hours – and it also illustrates the importance of both enforceable standards and active efforts to ensure enforcement.

Long hours corrode community and family life – in privatised ways

A picture emerges from this study of long hours that feed off several factors. They arise from pursuit of money, understaffing, worker's commitment or love for the job, and fear of reprisal or loss of employment. They are embedded in the culture of some workplaces or occupations. Whatever their source, these hours then encroach upon the individual's life, health, family and community in ways that are corrosive.

These effects are, however, frequently experienced privately. They are the externality costs of unreasonable hours of work. While some corrosive effects reach the public sphere of the health, workers' compensation or social welfare systems, many are privately experienced through the loss of amenity in private time, family life and a diminution of community. These are the corrosive, private effects of long hours. And they reach out to affect many beyond the overworked worker – to their partners, children, parents, friends, social group, and community. They entrench a new standard of work and raise the 'hours bar' in ways that affect many – not just those who manage to work long hours. They have implications for all those who populate the workplace because they create a new standard.

Extended hours at work also clearly undermine relationships and impoverish intimacy. Long hours place extra stress on women with families who must work double shifts in paid work and domestic labour. They exacerbate inequities in the division of household labour where a parent – usually the woman – must step into the 'mother and the father' roles and become a *de facto* single parent. And they threaten to embed second-class mummy and daddy tracks for those workers who want to actively parent, and perhaps work part-time or take parental leave for periods of time.

The erosion of leisure time by long hours in paid work also contributes to family tension as the hours spent in recuperation decrease. The loss of time for restorative activities also has implications for performance in paid work, as does the straightforward fatigue that arises from long hours.

Further, extended hours in paid work undermine human and social capital formation. Social capital building activities, which include the socialisation of children, volunteer activities and civic engagement are affected by longer hours. The decline in social capital that results from these processes also has implications for social cohesion.

Enter the neo-'Iron Worker'? The role for social and statutory policy

A number of work regimes around the world have used the notion of an ideal worker/labour process to set work rates and achieve efficiencies and work intensification. In the industrialised world, Taylorism provides the most well known system example. In the USSR the idea of the 'Iron Worker' (known as a Stakhanovite, after one of the early exemplars Stakhanov) was used – a model worker who through his strength and work commitment established the standard for others to emulate and be measured against. The long hours cultures that are documented in this study create (or re-create) neo-'Iron worker' standards built around a 'new' (more accurately, old) type of long hours 'Iron Worker'. This worker is available to work long hours, and frequently does so under pressure, with limited control over those hours. The Iron worker is male and 'free' of family. Unfortunately, he lives in a system where all his resources go to production and – without other structures and workers – he is not reproduced and his community is denuded. He is perhaps barely capable of sex, leave alone domestic reproduction. For others who live and work around the long hours neo-'Iron worker', while they may not work his hours, they are measured against him, so that the new standard for success involves long hours.

With long hours growing in many workplaces, many employees find themselves either trying to meet the new standard, or failing in comparison to it – carers especially fall into this category. Unreasonable hours injure family life. They debilitate individuals, intimate relationships, children's lives, and our community fabric. There are strong arguments for the re-creation of model worker standards in a new image that allows family life to occur without strain, and without taking on 'exceptionalism' status in the labour force. Workers with families are not exceptions in our labour market. Most workers will have dependents for significant portions of their working lives. This study provides a strong argument for reigning in unreasonable hours cultures and practices that injure healthy individuals, families and communities.

CHAPTER 3 Engineers and their families

We interviewed three engineers who worked long hours, as well as interviewing their three partners. All had children. Their jobs ranged from scheduling and planning, managing other engineers, and asset management. The hours that some had worked in the past, prior to having children were extraordinarily long. They worked long hours most weeks, with long shifts on many weekends during the year, and many extra hours of unpaid overtime alongside their lengthy paid overtime. For example, before his child arrived, David had only 12 days off in one year, as he worked three overtime shifts on most weekends. Ken, who works in a similar position to David, had an hours 'record' of 106 hours in one week. Each interviewee worked very long hours at the time of interview, with an element of unpredictability for many of these hours, and they generally did not take a break during the day: they ate their lunch at their desk. They also faced extended hours beyond the workplace, as the mobile phone and employer demands for their availability extended into the home and car. Clearly new communications technologies are transforming the boundary of the workplace and taking work into home – and into 'time off' for these engineers and their families.

Long hours for these workers brought many rewards: they were devoted to their jobs and felt a strong professional drive to do a good job, to supervise diligently and to do field work alongside those they managed. However, they recognised that their employers relied upon their commitment and that they worked in a 'long hours' culture that cost them as individuals, as fathers and as partners. There was a level of resignation amongst both them and their partners. But this resignation did not prevent family tension around hours, concern about health effects, and worries about the quality of household and family relationships.

In these workplaces, for engineers no real record of actual working hours is kept. Ken believes that they should be recording their actual hours, not necessarily because he expects to get paid for them but because he believes it is important for management to realise the real hours being worked. He is fairly sure that upper-management have no idea of the extent of the working hours issue.

The example of the engineers is also instructive about the nature of power relations that surround the negotiation of hours in workplaces en-cultured to a life of long and unreasonable working time. These highly skilled, experienced senior engineers laughed at the prospect of telling their employer that they were going to knock off on time and stick to reasonable hours. While they certainly felt an internalised commitment to 'getting the job done' that contributed to their long hours, they found the prospect of doing otherwise – of *negotiating* otherwise - laughable. Each felt that a professional cost would result – in terms of promotional opportunities lost, or the prospect of a bad sideways shift. Their partner's spoke of 'the powers that be' and the hours culture that they established, which sharply constrained the decisive power of these relatively powerful workers in shaping their work time regimes.

What were their motivations?

The engineers were very committed to their jobs and wanted to be seen to be doing a good job. This led them to extra unpaid overtime. As David, an asset manager, put it:

The problem is that I still care, that's the problem.

While overtime payments are important to household incomes ('we're both working so we don't have a mortgage hanging over our head when we're in our sixties', as Therese put it), they struggled with three other powerful impulses towards long hours. Firstly their workplace and organisational cultures of long hours and their fear of being sidelined if they stopped working them were strong. Secondly, their own personal impulses to 'finish the job', 'to do a good job' were powerful. Thirdly, they repetitively mention the under-staffing and lack of skill development that contributes to their workloads.

For example, Ken a scheduling and planning manager mentioned the lack of skilled labour arising from a large round of redundancies in 1996. Ross, who supervises a large group of engineers, concurs that a major problem with excessive hours in his workplace is the lack of training:

The amount of individual experts in their own disciplines is diminishing, so we are more and more reliant on the same people all the time and that's where those people get caught up working excessive hours all the time.

The long hours culture: power, powerlessness and negotiating hours

There are a few people in their workplaces who 'only' work their standard hours and don't work overtime. In Ken's view they are not considered to have a commitment to the job and Ken considers they will have no opportunity for advancement in the workplace. He believed that there is an "informal expectation" to work overtime and that his workplace was "running on the bare minimum" of staff. Ken also mentioned responsibility for projects as a factor determining working hours. When he goes home he will leave the project in someone else's hands but if something goes wrong he will have ultimate responsibility, thus leaving work behind is sometimes hard: 'you want to make sure your job doesn't fall over'.

Therese agreed that long hours are part of the work culture and that "you'll never break it". In this industry:

if you can't change the culture, you're not going to change anything. It comes from high up. You've only got to look at the Glenbrook disaster. Now I heard lots of talk from all different workers about Glenbrook and why it happened. It's because the powers that be are not doing maintenance on the track, they're not giving their workers breaks, they're working them 7 days a week. How can you get quality if you're not going to give time for your workers to have a break? And it's got to move from the top, you'll never change the workers from underneath unless the CEO at the top changes his attitude. That's how I see it. Ken would kill me if he heard me say that!

Therese went on to describe the culture of the workplace that caused Ken to override his judgment on how hard to work his people:

Ken will say I can't work these people they've worked too many hours... I hear him say it on the phone. Next thing there are 10 phone calls from the powers that be who are higher up, whoever they may be - I might be presuming wrong, next thing he's got to get people from everywhere. It's just not on.

This comment reflects Therese's perception that the most senior ranks of an organisation are quite critical to the nature of hours regimes. In these workplaces there was no accurate collection of hours data, and a view that penalties flowed from working normal hours or refusing unpaid overtime – to the point that supervisors themselves called others back to work when 'they've worked too many hours' already. In speaking of Ken's failure to take his RDOs, Therese once again refers to 'the top':

Again it comes from the top. Ken's got RDOs... they shouldn't be allowed to accumulate... you don't take them you lose them... He'll say he is on his RDO and he's on the phone for 4 hours, then we do our family thing and then he's on the phone for another 3 hours. The thing that annoys me is the pressure... the lack of workers that they've got for the [job]... it's changing the culture.

Families clearly also paid a cost. David also talks about the culture and that his commitment to his work, was 'his problem':

I guess most of my other colleagues are in the same sort of situation and do the same sort of hours... and in a lot of cases if they don't, it's because it's all got too much and they don't give a crap anymore anyway! [laughs]...The problem is that I still care, that's the problem.

In this established hours culture, Ross's partner does not see the hours as a choice. If he said no to the hours, Joan thinks that it would affect his career in the long run:

I don't think they've got choices. If the boss says, well you've got to do it. If you don't do it you will suffer in the long run. And I mean, who do you go to? Do you go above your boss's head? Not if you're smart. [The boss could] shove you sideways into a job you'd never want in a million years and you just get stuck there. ... You've basically got to do what they say unless your relationship is that good with them that you can say 'no' and there's not necessarily that many that you can do that with. I mean he's worked there long enough to know the system as well as I do. You know how it works.

Will long hours continue?

These families hold little optimism about a reduction of hours in the future. As David put it:

I can't see anything different, the way things are. ... I think it's pretty poor that I can't see anything different. I guess that's an indicator that there's nothing being done to fix it. ... I guess the other thing that can change is that I just say all right 'I'll turn up to work at 7.30 and go home at 4 and take a half an hour for lunch'. As to whether this is

a realistic proposition, I don't think so because you can't tell – you can tell the boss to go bugger off and I'm only doing my eight hours a day and that's it - but I don't think that's accepted as being a valid response to the way you work.

Interviewer: You don't think your family is a valid excuse for your boss?

I think that if you said 'Sorry I've got a life' [laughs]...if you – I don't think it would [work]- if you do it on the odd occasion and say well I've got to go home for whatever reason and you do that, I think because I work the extra hours I think that's accepted.

He agreed that it is more acceptable to work until the job is completed rather than to work to the set hours and that he might be looked down upon if he only worked to his set hours. Few workers stuck to set hours:

Oh... there'd be the odd couple. Not a great deal. Most people tend to do a bit extra till whatever they've got to do is done, but they don't then have them made up at some other point in time...I guess I don't feel as though it's right for me to say 'Hang on, you can't make me work those extra hours'. ... [It's] more that it would be seen to be unprofessional to say something like that. ... Even though there's rules and regulations that say, you know, when there's – I mean I can effectively now say 'See ya boss it's 4 o'clock I'm going home'. I could do that now, but I don't do that because I guess I'm living in this world where it's thought to be unprofessional to do that.

He thought this was the general feeling amongst most workers: 'It's just some strange sort of culture that's developed you know'.

While Kimberly said that ideal hours for herself and her partner would be 9 to 5, Monday to Friday: 'It'll never happen! [laughs] I've been waiting 12 years for it to happen!' Kimberly thinks that the reason for this is that it is the nature of her partner's job, 'things crop up' and overtime is just a part of the job. Alternatively, Kimberly would also like more flexible hours for both herself and David.

Long unreasonable engineer's days

Most engineers did not take their rostered days off and lost them as a consequence. Ken regularly works about 20 hours unpaid overtime during the week.

On average, your day starts 6-6.30am majority of the time and it really depends what you've got on. Some days you finish on time – 4 pm, majority of days you don't finish – it fluctuates – you won't finish til 5, 6, 7pm sometimes I've worked to 9, 10pm at night. ... Majority of days in the past 6 months I've probably worked to between 5 and 7pm at night.

Normally, in our role, you don't have lunch or morning tea. I mean you sort of, sit at your computer or if you're out and about you normally get your lunch out or you grab a bite to eat and you go and just eat it while you're doing something. So you don't get that physical break that normal people are used to I suppose.

He describes his last weekend:

The last weekend...I worked Friday...I tried to finish at about 2 or 3 in the afternoon because I knew I'd have to come back and work Friday night so I tried to finish early but it didn't work out. I finished at about 3.30pm and I came back again at – I left home about 9 o'clock at night to start at 10pm and I finished at 10am the next day and went home, had 7 hours off, came back and worked Saturday night for 8 hours – and then I finished at midnight and came back again at 3pm on Sunday and worked Sunday into Monday and then went home – got home at about 3am, slept from 3 till about 8 and got up again and came back to work on Monday.

David's are even longer, when his travel is considered; he travels about 1 hour and 20 minutes, one-way. He gets up at about 5.30am, leaves home at 6.10am and leaves work at variable times 'sometimes I leave at 4, sometimes 4.30, sometimes 7 or 6 o'clock or whatever'. David leaves work around 7pm at least one day per week. He averaged his hours to about 50 hours per week: 'some weeks it's more, some weeks it's less'.

David also exemplifies dedication to getting his job done – to 'being seen' to get the job done. He has worked some 'shocking days' – which he attributes to under-staffing - where he has started at:

7.30 and go through to 9 or 10pm or something stupid like that. But I mean no one's forcibly asked me to do those hours or anything like that ... I don't want to be seen as doing a bad job. I want to be seen at least as trying to get my things done. I know it's not through my own fault that I'm not getting the things done but it still makes you feel as though you're not doing a good job by not meeting deliverables.

I think the organisation is asking us to do more work, I guess, than can be reasonably allowed for. ... Over time we've increased various types of activities and we haven't brought in additional people to do that stuff. So you end up having not enough time to do things that you need to do properly, so you've got to stretch it and even then you still need more time.

He pointed to the RDO situation where the demands of the job prevented him from taking his leave, and he lost it:

I've currently got two RDOs owing to me at the moment and the third one falls due again next week, so you don't normally get to take them. I mean, there has been occasions where – you can only accumulate 5 RDOs after that if you accumulate them you lose them anyway – but there has been occasions where we've accumulated 8 to 10 RDOs and you just don't get them...you just don't sort of turn your life upside down to take an RDO and not achieve what you're supposed to.

Extended hours: working on the phone

Mobile phones are an important additional factor in the working hours of the engineers. They are still doing work in their cars and homes, on their mobiles. The engineers were often

contacted at home about work and while they were on their RDOs (if they managed to take them).

Engineers and their wives clearly see the mobile phone and the ability to use the phone in the car as a significant way in which hours are extended, with important consequences for families, and for individual workers. As Therese describes it:

The phone is never switched off so even though he's home early he'll still gets hundreds of phone calls. He's laying on the lounge talking on for 2 hours so he's still at work from my point of view. So I can't see it improving.

That's the way the companies are going that's what the expectation is. If you don't do your work and don't answer the phone calls... I mean I hear Ken continually... bosses ringing up saying 'where's this? where's that?' That's at 8 o'clock at night! Just because they're in the office! He's at home, I mean stuff 'em! Hang up... Ring at 8 o'clock in the morning and work it out then.

So I don't see any change. Unless the phone is switched off, [so that] no-one rings through, not even rings our personal phone, then you'd see some change. Even though he's home early it doesn't change anything.

Ross's previous manager made his expectations clear by saying:

'At your level of manager I just expect you to have your phone on from 6am to 6pm everyday.' ... So you haven't even started work and he'll be on the phone talking to you and may well do same on the way home... Being one of the only civil engineer experts on this contract area... [an area where the manager is a signals engineer], if they have any problems they can't handle they ring me... Even on your days off you are expected to have your phone on or be contactable.

The effect on individuals of working long, unreasonable hours

In each case, partners held fears for their partner's health. For example, Therese believes that Ken's working hours will have an impact on his health, and that he is unlikely to change his behaviour.

I reckon if he kept going until in his 40s, he'll have high blood pressure, he'll be crook, just like you see all the other men. And he won't [stop], he'll just keep going. He says he will [slow down] but he won't. He lives for the [industry] and that's what'll he'll do.

David describes a steady feeling of stress and tiredness:

I feel tired from time to time, get headaches – I'm pretty sure that's because I'm either not getting enough sleep or not getting enough time away from work. Because you're sort of on the go all the time, hop in the car and driving so that's concentrating, get to work and all the crap starts, um... go for a brief walk and eat lunch, come back with the crap still ticking over, drive again still concentrating and get home and ah, I guess, you'd like to unwind but you know you can't because you've got to still be civil and

reasonable with the family when you get home and do those things – washing up or... whether it be making dinner or doing the washing up or bathing the little boy and feeding and all that sort of stuff.

I guess stress sort of waxes and wanes. I'd have to say, yeah, I think I'm probably under stress for a reasonable amount of time. I try not to let it get to me but you can only try as much as you can, you can't stop the effect of stress, it's there isn't it?

Hobbies and sport

All the engineers talked about the lack of time for activities outside their jobs - firstly for their families, but also for their hobbies and voluntary work. One had given up his work with the army while Ross and David were missing out on golf and sailing

I certainly don't play golf as much as I'd like to. (Ross)

*I'm starting to cut [sailing] out because I can't afford the time away from the family.
(David)*

The effect on families of engineers 'You get used to it'

The partners of engineers all spoke of becoming resigned to their partner's long hours: 'but that's his job...what's the use of worrying?'. However - beyond resignation - they reflected on how it affected their relationships and their children. When asked how her partner's hours affect her, Therese said:

Nah I'm used to it now...When we first got married I used to hate it because he would be working 7 days a week... but now, you move forward. You do what you want to do and if he goes to work, he goes to work and I still go out. I just keep doing whatever I want to do.

It does affect if you've got a family thing to go to and he's at work, then you get upset but that's his job. I do get cranky sometimes and when he says he's going to be home and he's home 7 hours later!

It's taken her a while to get to this point where it doesn't bother her anymore: 'Probably in the last 4 years I suppose. You just learn to... what's the use of worrying and arguing about it if that's his job? Move forward'.

However, like other partners, Therese believes that Ken's long working hours affect their son:

If Ken goes on the weekend to work then he doesn't want him to go, but he's only four.

As to whether she will think it be a problem in the long term, Therese says:

I'll have to wait and see. I presume that he... hopefully when he gets older he won't be working the hours that he is because it'll impact on him.

Because he is only four he is very attached to Ken and he loves Ken home 24 hours a day. Ken likes to work.... But because of the work he does he has to work the hours so in the future when he is going to school and his dad can't make it to certain school things, probably, yeah it might [impact on their son].

Therese said that she 'ends up' doing all the housework: 'He doesn't do anything. I do the lawns and the pool and the housework and the kid. So I'm probably doing the same amount of hours [as my partner] [laughs].'

Therese notices a positive impact on their son – and their relationship - since Ken cut back his weekend overtime:

You can notice the difference: he's not as tired, he's not as grumpy and he's enjoying being at home. Where as when he was working 7 days a week it was hello, goodbye, kiss, cuddle, whatever, sex on the run [laughs].

She points out that 'with companies today I don't think you'll ever get [to work normal hours] but it'd be good if ...he'd finish at 4 - he still wouldn't get home until 6 anyway'. Ken usually gets home around 7-9pm, so they don't often get a family meal together. It is such a remote possibility, that Therese can hardly imagine what it would be like if Ken worked less hours:

He'd be less stressed and tired [if he worked less hours] and I suppose he would do more around the house and more for Billy I suppose...for me... I don't know, I'm in such a routine that... I'm a rigid person so I'd just continue anyway. I suppose it'd improve. We wouldn't go out anymore. We'd stay home, more for [their son]. He wouldn't be as grumpy I suppose.

Similar issues affected all the engineers' families. Ross, for example doesn't get to see his son some days:

He's off to bed at 7.30pm and you might not see him at all. You're gone before he gets up in the morning and see him for about 20 minutes when you get home. ... I don't like it much at all. I'd rather spend more time with him.

Ross said that when his son gets older he would like to get involved with any of his son's sporting activities, just like his Dad did for him. Would he have time for that?

Well yeah the lifestyle will certainly have to change again there. I certainly won't be... well...would attempt to not work as much... not as many weekends as I am doing now.... I would want to. Yeah! Just so that you can have more free weekends then. At the moment it's not such a big deal, but it will be in a couple of years time.

Basically, Joan finds Ross's hours annoying and sometimes frustrating, especially the times when he doesn't come home until 7-7.30pm and their son has already gone to bed. She is concerned about the affect her husband's hours are having and will have on their son and doesn't see Ross's hours situation will ever improve (she actually thinks it will get worse). She is worried about the impact on his relationship with their son.

Joan definitely thinks Louis notices his dad's long hours:

Oh yeah, he gets up in the morning and says 'Is Dad coming home today, Mum?' ... I don't think he knows any different. [Ross being away on weekends] makes him more clingy to me...he wants [to] kiss and cuddle mummy because he sees mummy all the time and I say 'What about Daddy?' and it's not until you remind him...

As to the future, Joan is also pessimistic about change: 'I don't think it'll get any easier'. Joan believes that Ross's hours will get worse:

I just think they ask more and more and more and more of them. In a way, Ross is very lucky that he's very good at time management... but I do think they will put more and more and more on them and I think that's just the way of industry at the moment. I don't think they're going to back off, they're going to increase. So it could make things worse for him.

However, Joan expects that Louis will notice his Dad's absence a lot more in the future, 'when he starts doing stuff he'll expect his Dad to be there'.

For Joan, the hardest thing about these long hours was their unpredictability. She would be happy if she knew exactly what days on what weekend he had to work (with more than a week's notice) so they could plan around it 'and plan to do more, as well as knowing what nights he was going to be home.' This was especially the case around the care of their son; 'I mean, it's not always really annoying sometimes you just live with it, you don't worry about it. But like if he's [Louis] been really naughty, then you think ARRRGH!'

Joan talks about the 'damn long days' when Ross works 12-hour weekend shifts:

I get annoyed with him and he gets annoyed with me... if he's late a lot it's annoying because he doesn't see Louis... you don't really get a chance to talk... I suppose we just get annoyed with one another.

In terms of their own relationship:

I suppose you just get so used to it... you don't think of it being anything because you're just used to it. We get on really well so it's not a big problem but sometimes you think: 'God, I wish he was home a little bit more'.

A large part of Joan's level of acceptance of Ross's work is due to her level of understanding of what he does at work and what is asked of him. Joan used to work for the railways herself, which means that she understands the demands.

Effect on relationships

While partners were resigned, negative effects on relationships were evident for engineers. For example, Therese said that she never spends quality time with her husband where it is just the two of them. Her work colleague (sitting nearby as the interview is conducted) chips in: 'But that's not good for your marriage'. Therese – reflecting on their general level of tiredness

- replied 'No, but I don't mind it, like, Billy's there [their son] and you can't just dump Billy on the babysitters. When he goes to bed, yeah we'll sit there but we're so tired. I work full-time, he works full-time, we just go to bed'. When asked whether she thought this would happen on the long-term basis and she said she supposes so:

Ken's long hours impact on Therese's life, even when he is at home, especially through his mobile phone. 'If he turns the phone off and he can't be notified, shit hits the fan basically'.

David and Kimberly have a 18 month old son and are expecting another baby in several months time and David sees his son for 'a little bit of time' each day: 'I don't get to see much of him. I get home and he's either been fed or still being fed when I get home. ...We have dinner. I give him a bath ... and pop him into bed and that's about it, so I see him for a little bit of time, but not a great deal':

I don't get to see my wife or my child a great deal or as much as I would like to... You've probably only got 3 hours in a day where you can really see them so it's not a great deal of time – one eighth of your day – that's nothing.

David thinks that not getting to see his family impacts on his relationships with them:

Oh well it does, it does. My wife feels as though we don't have enough time together. I don't feel as though I'm having enough time with my little boy. I guess that also then – because we've hardly any time together we don't do much else throughout the week but I guess that's probably pretty similar to most other people. But it has a compounding effect on I guess other social activities you have with other people as well.

David believes that his hours are affecting his relationship with his wife and that this sometimes results in arguments:

Oh yeah they are... I guess, my wife is frustrated with the fact that I get home late, you know, well later than I could have otherwise done.

And he sees longer-term impacts on his relationship with his son:

He's going to grow up with it. I don't know that he'll know anything different and he may not notice any difference but I think it will make a difference because you're just not having the time with them that you would otherwise have.

Interviewer: So will it have an affect on the quality of your relationship?

Yeah. I guess the development as well, you just don't get the same – whenever you're with them they soak up so much stuff it's not funny and if you're not there for them to soak it up, they're not soaking it up. So I guess they learn at a different pace, they learn different things at a different pace so I'm sure it does – it must have an affect on them.

'You understand – but it doesn't make it better'

Kimberly said that David's hours do affect her personally, 'in terms of not feeling supported in the home'. David's hours have meant that she has spent a lot of time by herself at home. She said she used to get really 'cranky' at David and his hours, especially when she was at home studying, it was 'really bad'. She would have liked to have had him around more often, as she was 'home by myself all the time'.

Kimberly said that even though she knows he has to work overtime and she understands, it still doesn't make it easier to deal with. Kimberly has a better understanding of his overtime and the demands placed on him, now that she works herself. 'It's still hard even though I understand, but it's not pleasant – it doesn't make it better'.

In terms of quality time just for the two of them, Kimberly said 'not anymore, but we didn't really get it before either – just because he was working so much all the time. ... It could be better'.

Kimberly doesn't think that David's long hours are affecting their son at the moment, because he is still very young, 'I don't think he knows. He doesn't get to see David that much', although Kimberly thinks he is too young to realise that this is a bad thing. Their son sometimes misses out on seeing David for a whole weekend. She does think that it could be an issue for their relationship in the future. 'I come from a family like that, where we never saw Dad'. She knows how hard it can be on kids, not having things like family holidays, especially when they see other families aren't like that. 'I think we'll both make sure it won't be like that. ... We do try to be conscious of it'. They make concerted efforts to do things like taking holidays from work at the same time.

If they were both working more ideal hours, she thinks life would be a little more relaxed, they would be able to spend the mornings together, sleep in and have breakfast together on weekends. Also, David could be home at a reasonable time, which would mean that he could help out more and they could also spend some time together. Kimberly said that she 'gets stressed out by everything!'

'Live to work: I have to force them to have holidays'

As in other occupations, long hours appear to create a kind of vacuum in the rest of life, so that people become very focused on their work, with limited social connections, little time at home, and even a reluctance to take holidays – especially if the work simply accumulates to greet them on their return. Ken said that if he has several days off on leave he ends up 'not knowing what to do with himself' and will end up looking forward to going back to work and being busy again. He used to do mentoring for the army (as he used to be in the military) but he no longer has time for it. He rarely plays golf now, instead using his days off to mow the lawn and do domestic jobs.

Well I certainly rather not be doing [these hours]. I'd much rather have my time off and the time off has got to be genuine time off. There is no point having time off if you've got have your phone on all the time. Is that really a day off? When you're still going to be contacted. So the [work] becomes your entire life, you'll never get away from it.

Unless you physically take a holiday and hand your phone in and your car keys in and say 'I'll see you in a couple of weeks time', that's really the only time – that's your four weeks annual leave and some guys aren't even taking their four weeks annual leave.

I'm struggling to force some of my blokes to have their days off. It's simply a case of: well if I'm not here doing it, who is going to do it for me? And that's exactly what happens they go away and the stuff just accumulates until they come back. Is it really worth having the time off when you know you've got twice as much work when you get back?

As well as mobile phones, Phillips thinks that one of the contributing factors is e-mail, which creates new larger time demands.

CHAPTER 4 Strappers or Stable hands in the racing industry

Unfortunately we were able to interview only two workers in this industry and one partner. One interviewee had a number of grown children while the second had none. Both were in relationships. Employees in this industry were extremely concerned to keep their identities confidential, and many were not prepared to be interviewed. Both interviewees were very concerned about keeping their identities confidential. They both worked as stable hands which are commonly referred to as strappers (also as horse handlers). Stable hands/strappers care for, feed, and ride racehorses in the racing industry. While conditions in stables vary widely (depending, for example, on whether it is a pre-racing or full racing stable), this industry represents the low wage end of the long and unreasonable hours story.

For employees in the industry a kind of hierarchy of concerns arose: concern that they were underpaid, that their wages are low (especially with experience and training), and that they were working substantial amounts of unpaid overtime. Many have access to little time off and are not paid penalty rates. The interviewees saw a close link between their current pay levels and long hours: ‘the key issue is to get a decent wage, and get paid properly and then look at the hours’, as one put it. Their view was that the industry could afford decent pay, but ‘they were able to get away with it because they prey on young girls who just *looove* horses’.

If you think about it, the strappers are abused, insomuch as their pay and their hours in an industry that can well afford to pay them properly. And if you think about it, the owners and the trainers wouldn't be able to do without the strappers. The industry can get away with it because every year there is another group of young girls that finish school, and so it goes on. And it is not policed. The strappers are too scared to do anything because as soon as they do, they are out [of a job].

'The industry runs on passion'

Strappers are passionate about horses; as one interviewee put it ‘the industry runs on passion’. Each year large number of young girls, just completing their compulsory schooling, enter the industry. They frequently last as strappers for short periods. They love horses, and according to our interviewees the industry is characterised by very high labour turnover, and employers/supervisors (owners and trainers) who exercise considerable power over young inexperienced workers who care about horses. In this environment employees accept, or must accept, employment conditions and treatment that is sometimes harsh and exploitative. On the other hand, as our interviewees attest, there are employers who treat their employees fairly, give them some parts of weekends off regularly, pay on time and at the right rate. However, it seems that large number of unpaid hours are regularly worked by strappers, even those who feel that there are ‘lucky’ enough to have a good boss, like Sue.

While conditions might vary from region to region, in the process of interviews a number of issues around working conditions arose, including sexual harassment, general harassment, unfair dismissal without adequate notice, under-payment, split shifts, inequities in pay between individuals, an absence of holiday pay, and employer and co-worker bullying. These

are beyond the scope of this report, but the low wages in the industry are a serious concern for employees, and they are closely connected to the hours worked; employees are concerned to keep their jobs and their access even to such low wages, and thus agree to work long hours. Given that extra payments are (sometimes) made to those who take 'their' horses to races, this means that many agree to work very long hours. In weeks that races occur, it is not unusual for strappers to work well over 60 hours. As one put it:

You just show up to work and you take what you're given, more or less and that's the way it is: 'If you don't like it go somewhere else'. The trainers say this is the way it has always been. But we are not in the dark ages anymore.

Strapper's hours

Sue's work pattern is typical. She recently shifted to casual weekend work to cut back her hours and recover from exhaustion. Prior to that, she regularly worked as a permanent from 4.30am to 10.00am (and frequently to 11.00am – 'you work until the job is done'), then 2-5.30pm each day. She took horses to races regularly which meant a long day – frequently starting at the normal time of 4.30am and arriving home at 9pm ('traveling in the back of the wretched horse truck'). 50-60 hour weeks were the common pattern for Sue: 'it's rarely less than 50'. She is paid the 'basic rate of about \$420 a week'. Sue is only paid for her normal hours as a permanent, so she regularly works long hours of unpaid overtime. She has been working with the horse industry for over 20 years. She receives a payment of '\$50 or \$75' on race days and she attends race days '2 or 3 times a week' regularly. She gets half of Saturday and Sundays off, but 'that doesn't apply to most city stables - in most you get to work every weekend...I'm lucky my boss is good, he employs casuals at weekends'.

Similarly Eileen regularly works long hours of between 50 and 60 a week, and longer in race weeks. Eileen has a problem of under-payment and under-recording by her employer of her hours, alongside her problem of unpaid overtime. When she has raised this issue in other stables, she has been sacked. She has every second Sunday off and two afternoons a week. She generally works from 4.30-10am and 2-5.30pm on full days, with longer days – up to 16 hours – on race days. She sometimes receives a payment of \$25 for race day attendance, or no extra payment at all. She has worked many years without success. There are also inequities between women and men doing similar work.

Sue has worked for some good trainers, and her experience has allowed her to carefully choose her bosses:

The trainers I have worked for have been good because I'm older and I've had a lot of experience and I can be a bit choosy, but if you are a fifteen year old and you've just come out of school, life is a bit tough. There is real exploitation. One lass was doing 60 hours a week for a stud, and she was being paid \$320 a week. Another young lass I knew did excessive hours, and she was lucky if she got a day off a fortnight. He was a slave driver.

The effect on the individual

Sue has just changed from full-time permanent to casual weekend work because 'I'm just stuffed'. She now won't have to work any unpaid overtime because on casual pay she is paid for the hours that she works in her current position, and she will be working much fewer hours. She describes her old hours and their effect:

You get absolutely exhausted... You get to the point where you are really struggling to get out of bed in the morning to get there on time. And in the racing game, you are running the whole day – it's run, its not just walking at normal pace – you are in a hurry to do everything. There is nothing called slow. You get extremely tired, very ratty, very irritable, you obviously don't eat properly because of the funny hours you work.

Sometimes you come home and you are so tired you can't eat. It affects your moods, really ratty, really bad tempered and short tempered and you really run on a short wick. Fortunately my partner is very understanding – he knows what I'm like when I'm not working there and when I am working there, and he just wears it. A lot of partners can't put up with it.

The length of work in combination with its *pace*, takes a toll. Unsocial hours are the norm in the industry.

Horses don't take holidays. So you have to be prepared to work weekends in the industry...but the unpaid overtime is unfair. If you work, you should be paid for it. And the youngsters are exploited.

These hours have a widespread effect on those who work in the industry:

People get very demoralised...and they disappear. Because the staff are tired they are ratty. You need to be able to be tough to stick with it. The pace you go at, the number of hours that you do, contributes to everybody being tired, and ratty and snappy.

For Eileen, the long hours meant that she could not plan. She was concerned that pay and hours were connected:

You can't plan anything. You can't go out on weekends because you've got to work or go to the races...Like last weekend, I just slept. You don't want to go out to the movies or anything, you are too tired. But the thing is, if they cut our hours down, they will cut our pay down and that is why the kids get tired...with our hours we really can't do anything until the pay's fixed up because they are going to cut their pay down even more. And that's when you're going to get the kids sneak a lot more hours.

The effect on relationships

Eileen's long hours are the source of serious tension in her relationship with Davey. Indeed we had to terminate our interview with Davey (which occurred in the presence of Eileen) because of his high level of negative feeling about her 'acquiescence' to these hours, and the impact on their relationship. He particularly referred to – not just the hours of 55-60 – but

especially to the underpayment, lack of penalties, split shifts, and poor general conditions. He used the example of the current weekend, which he had off, and couldn't do anything with Eileen because 'she only has one day off a fortnight':

I'm jack of it. My whole life is affected by her life. My whole life is affected by it!

Davey had himself worked very long hours over some years in another industry and he knew the personal costs:

The long hours I used to do, you haven't got time to go to the bank, get the jobs done, so you rely on other people. Your life gets affects, things get cut off, cos you don't have to time to do things... You make a lot of money but you don't get any time to spend it. It can affect a lot of things – like I was grumpy, tired, headaches - the fatigue, injuries. It affected my self, my social ability, being able to socialise.

But this experience did not stop him from feeling very angry – even abusive – with Eileen about 'copping' her hours and the conditions of her job.

Sue's relationship was also affected – in a different way - by her long hours:

Yeah it affects your relationship. Like your sex life doesn't exist (laughs)!

While young people in the industry 'tend to burn the candle at both ends'. The older ones 'a lot of them are single, their marriages break up...The time away just makes tension at home, so they just clear off'.

Doing things outside work

Not surprisingly, these hours mean that non-work activities are very constrained:

You don't have time. You are too tired, When you are home you sleep. I gave up all my [other horse] work, I don't judge now, I don't compete. As far as going out for dinner, even to my mother-in law's-for tea you make sure you are out of there and home by 8.30pm otherwise you don't get up the next morning. (Sue)

Eileen has give up softball and volleyball, and describes falling asleep on the couch when her partner is talking to her. Eileen also describes missing out on social and family events.

'Becoming acclimatised'

Sue describes how going to reduced hours takes a while to get used to, as you have to revitalise your life:

When you cut back your hours it takes a while to get used to. You think 'Oh. What will I do now?' And then it takes you a couple of months to get back into a normal type of life. You have to revive your life. Because you haven't had any social outlet.

Interviewer: What have the long hours done to your friendships?

What *friendships*?

However, Sue finds time to see her four older children and her one grandchild.

CHAPTER 5 Flight attendants: time zones, recovery time and rosters

Flight attendants worked hours that were complicated by movement across (and recovery from) different time zones. While flight attendants accepted that time away from home and that crossing many time zones was part of the job, they all felt that they needed more time off to recover from their hours, and spend time with their family. We interviewed four flight attendants and their four partners, two of whom had also worked in the industry. They worked on long haul international flights and three families had children while one did not.

A common pattern for the long haul flyers was to have 9 days away from home and then 5 nights at home. Attendants described working up to 20 hours on long flights.

For example after a 9 to 10 day trip, Carol will usually get about 4 or 5 days at home. The last trip Carol was on, commenced with signing on about 1.25 hours before the flight leaves, then a 7.5-hour flight to Singapore. They are paid for 30 minutes after the plane lands, and there is usually another half hour of unpaid work. Carol then had 24 hours off. Then she had a trip to Frankfurt, which is for about 12.5 hours (midnight to dawn). Carol then had 3 days off to recuperate and then she did the same trip back before having 5 days off at home.

In the days off in Frankfurt Carol tries to catch up on sleep as well as get into a normal sleeping pattern. By the 3rd day she starts to feel OK but then she has to force herself to nap in the afternoon to be ready to leave that night. All interviewees complained about not only the hours of sleep they managed to get, but the quality of that sleep, its interrupted nature, and the fact that normal sleeping hours were frequently spent in work time. The pattern of work/sleep was also irregular and unpredictable.

However, the nine days away from home include crossing many time zones and extended hours of night work. Most felt that the five days were 'just enough' to recover so that they would 'feel normal again' but not enough time to catch up with the family and spend time with them *while* they were feeling 'normal'. Flight attendants needed more recovery time between trips, not only to recuperate but also to catch up with the family and re-establish relationships. Most of the flight attendants said that the 75% stand down time they had previously worked under was more family friendly in that it allowed for some recovery and sufficient to lead an adequate family life. As one put it:

When I come home I still have to put them on the backburner to a certain extent because I'm so tired. Even though they are jumping all over me, you just say 'Go. Mum take control for another couple of hours. I've just gotta put my head down for a while, you know'. Then you get up and you're walking around like a zombie for the rest of that day. So I don't get – I certainly don't get the time to spend with my wife and kids that I'd like to.

Several interviewees spoke of enjoying their job, especially Carol who does not yet have children. But those with children and more years in the job longed to spend more time at home and with their families. Others criticised the impact of the roster allocation system ('the

wishing well' into which you dropped your preferences) and the unpredictability of the shifts you might 'win' compared to your preferences.

In terms of work patterns, attendants worked around 190-200 hours per roster period. Attendants had to balance a range of factors in trying to minimise their discomfort:

There are a lot of variables that come into play there. Number 1: seniority. Number 2: length of trips. Number 3: the hours associated with the trip and Number 4: your guaranteed time off after the trip.

Like others in this study, flight attendants felt that their hours, and the pattern of their hours, had implications for their relationships. As Geraldine put it:

Yep I think it has definitely affected our relationship in a negative way. In the past, the stay at home was much longer; you used to get 75% of your away time free and we had a chance to rebuild. Now we don't. He's in a constant state of jet lag.

Long hours introduced non-standard patterns into family life, with partners of flight attendants talking about leading a 'double life' – living two lives, one when their partners were home and one when they were away. They also talked about being transformed into single parents. They would adjust to being single parents for more than a week and then have to readjust when partners came back wanting to fully participate in family life again.

Not all 'time' is the same

There were also specific issues about time for flight attendants, as there have been for a number of industry groups in this study. The crossing of time zones created different experiences of time for flight attendants, and affected recovery time. Interviewees felt that there needs to be recognition of this factor in terms of recuperation as well as the night work and sleep deprivation. All flight attendants agreed that time zones affected their experience of unreasonable hours. Rostering is also big issue, especially the use of the seniority system. This system means that a worker's children have frequently grown up before flight attendants have accumulated enough seniority to pick their trips and possibly spend more time at home with dependents.

The hours force a choice between work and family

Being a flight attendant means that you've got to make some clear choices between family and career. Firstly under the seniority system, a high level of seniority will mean that workers can, to some degree, structure their work around home life; however, promotion means forgoing seniority. So those with family responsibilities, will sometimes have to stay at the lower ranks to hold on to seniority and some control over the structure of working time.

Secondly, the overall nature of the work and the limited access to part-time work, mean that flight attendants (especially women) feel that they are faced with the choice between family and career. Both Cheryl and Geraldine had made the decision to quit flight attending for a family, Carol was putting off the difficult decision, and Sunny, because of her seniority, has managed to juggle both flight attending and a family.

The effects on flight attendants individually

Carol who had married an engineer in the industry recently and has no children, complained of the effects on her health, and these were echoed by most other interviewees:

You get sick constantly. Just being run down from sleep deprivation, you seem to be easily catching flus and things because your immunity is constantly strained from time zone and even the climate zone, flying out of Australia at the moment, from Winter into a tropical Summer, half way to another Summer in the Northern Hemisphere and then within 48 hours, turning around and coming back, you just – the sleep deprivation tends to really reduce all resistance to just about every little thing. And obviously injury is another thing, you tend to be a little more accident prone because you are in a state of lag and tiredness.

Each interviewee spoke of being constantly tired, of monitoring their sleep constantly. Lack of sleep affected each of them personally, including moods:

Oh yeah it definitely affects your moods. It's very hard to get interested in getting up and doing a lot of different activities and so consequently - even hearing something nice is being organised for you - it's like 'Oh I wish I didn't have to go to a party or go out for dinner. I just feel like sitting here and lying here asleep'. So you're reacting to things in a different manner because you're just not as up to it as what you would be if you're putting in a normal working day – and being in bed each night...So your mood is constantly in a state of – well it's constantly changing and it's very hard to be easy and happy and you know relaxed about things

Carol estimates that 80 per cent of those in the occupation use something to assist with their sleep though each of our interviewees attempted to avoid doing so. She said that many crew 'will take alcohol to get to sleep': her husband is 'devastated' that she takes sleeping tablets, and it is 'common for partners not to understand'.

Several interviewees felt that their sleep loss was aging them, and several partners also mentioned this issue. They each felt vulnerable to colds and flu, and one described how his immune system was compromised: 'I don't get a chance to recuperate: My Doctor said to me – "If you ever want time off work don't have any qualms about coming in and seeing me because this job is designed to make you sick"'. Another felt that he would die younger because of it:

I'm sure I'll die earlier than I'm supposed to. I'm serious when I say that. It's definitely affected my health, it's affected my moods, it's affected my relationships.

As Jason put it 'there's the fatigue aspect of it. In order to get a life you're got to subject yourself to these constant time zone changes and fighting the body clock to achieve a life'. He felt that better rosters would affect productivity. He describes sleep as a kind of 'occupational quest':

Sleep is the quest. You'll go downstairs and you'll meet the crew for a drink or something and you'll say 'Did you sleep?' It's just a quest. You just live with jet lag.

Jason's partner describes the effects she observes on him:

I think Jason has aged, in persona and physically, although he still looks quite good for his age. I think he has aged, I think he has a much older mentality because he's tired. If you feel tired, you feel old and I'm concerned further down the track how this will impact. ... Jason's smoking a bit now, he didn't use to. He doesn't smoke a lot, but he is.

The effects on families of flight attendants

Steven believes that his absences 'put a big strain on Cheryl. She has to run the household a week at a time if I'm away, a week at a time. I long for my family dearly. I miss them terribly when I'm away and when I come home I still have to put them on the backburner to certain extent because I'm so tired'. Like other attendants, their hours placed a great strain on the parent left at home, who moved between being a single parent, and a member of a couple.

Other point to wide mood swings:

Oh [he's] Dr. Jekyl and Mr Hyde! There are times – God if you could map the stress in his life - as he's getting closer to work, he's unbearable. He's so strung out. He hates the thought of leaving the family. He hates having to go and then the worst time in the world is when he's on standby because he's got no idea and every time that phone rings he jumps because he might have to leave us. He hates leaving us, I know that. He really hates leaving us. (Geraldine)

The effects on children

Steven also observed effects of his absences and exhaustion on his children:

Oh yeah, definitely [it affects them]. Even at this young age (4 and 2). They get disappointed a hell of a lot because they want to bounce all over you, and I'm usually – my fuses are a lot shorter in those circumstances because I'm that tired and I just physically can't do what they want me to do so they notice it directly.

They're extremely disappointed and they tend to shy away from me to a certain extent and I notice when I come back from trips as well, there's the initial 'hello daddy, how are you' you know, kiss and a cuddle and what not, but then they alienate me to a certain extent, everything goes towards mum. Then, especially my daughter, she's the oldest, I have to win her confidence back and I notice a huge difference, for instance when I'm on annual leave.

After I've been home for about a week...she drops her guard again. She lets me back into the fold. Yeah it's a strange situation because I tend to come home and try and help out Cheryl as much as I can with my own way of doing things but it completely disrupts the system that she's developed while I've been away. So...I tend to get in everyone's way more than anything else.

Steven and Cheryl notice that their young children miss Steven when he is away on his long flights:

I think [the 4 year old] definitely, she notices it more. Some - often they wake up at night - she does anyway, and says 'I want my Daddy' and things like this, you know. 'Where's my Daddy? Why does he have to go away?' things like that. They know that he goes and they count the sleeps – the number of sleeps that he'll be away for. So that gives them something to work on. But yeah she does, [the 2 year old is] still, you know, he's still a little bit young yet to understand but he definitely knows when his father's gone and he definitely knows when he come home because of the joy – 'Dad's home!'

Cheryl goes on to describe how his absences mean that:

It's like he has visiting rights! [laughs] That's what it's like! That he can come and he can have dinner here for 3 or 4 nights [laughs] – visiting rights, play with the children, see them and then he's gone again, you know. ... I think it is a big impact because of the fact of just doing what you have to do when they're away and not having support. I mean in my case we don't have that much support outside of us. So we work it – we've got to be flexible but we try and keep the family together.

There is definitely a strain in regards to the one at home and definitely to the one who comes home, you know, because the flyer misses out a lot on what goes on at home as well.

Cheryl believes this has a big impact on Steven:

because I know he'd prefer to be with us, probably every night as well, you know, because he misses the children as well...Thank heavens for video cameras that's all I can say because most of the time that's the only way he gets to see things like that. So he sort of comes in second hand which he doesn't particularly like, and neither do I for that matter. But that's the nature of the job isn't it?

Cheryl believed that the best way to cope with Steven's job would for him to have bigger breaks between trips, 'Oh if he could. It would be wonderful. I think it would be wonderful if he had bigger blocks at home, definitely'. Like other interviewees Cheryl said the problem with the current breaks is that they were only long enough to catch up on sleep and recuperate, and not catch up with the family as well. 'That's all you do. You rest, you recuperate and then by the time that happens, you're packing your bags and then he's gone again'.

Jason and Geraldine are coping with adolescent children. While Jason thinks they are accustomed, he also sees some costs – or his partner tells him about them:

They've grown up with it. My daughter says, you know gives me, very sad looks when I'm leaving and very happy when I'm home. My second son misses me a lot apparently but these are questions that are better asked by my wife because I'm not here and he says 'Oh Dad you're going away again', it's a real 'Ohhhh' you know because I go to the soccer with him and all that sort of caper. And number one son is very independent

because of it. ... But sometimes I wish because of the load, once again, on my wife that I was home to pull his ears for him, you know, because he's at that age.

Jason's absences have resulted in some distance between him and his children that Geraldine is quite concerned about. She is also concerned about the impact that Jason's tiredness and absences have had on the three children – despite her best efforts:

Oh it's hard. Oh gee this is sad. I think it's had a really negative effect on his relationship with his children, particularly our eldest son, who doesn't expect to have his father around, doesn't expect to talk to dad about his problems and I think their relationship broke down quite strongly for a while, it's rebuilding now but during those very difficult puberty years um... very difficult. They did not like each other at all and I felt that was really sad, so it was as a mother watching somebody not like my son and not like my husband, that was really hard. My daughter misses him a lot. My middle child used to panic a lot, thinking that he was going to crash, really be frightened 'Mum, is Dad all right? How do you know he's alright?' and I used to have to ask Jason to ring him from wherever he was but that died out because he'd be too tired to remember sometimes, you know. So the children have missed out...he hasn't been there for [things] and they see other kids' dads are there for theirs. They see other kids' dads have more time to play in the pool for example or to do stuff and while Jason really tries to do this, so frequently it's Mum and the kids. They miss out on their Dad a lot. They miss out on a lot of time with their Dad.

I think that my eldest son has a negative perception of his father in many ways. In that he just doesn't see him as a father figure I think, in lots of ways. I don't think he'd go to Jason easily if he had a problem - his other friends have a more personal relationship with their father. The other two – because I guess we witnessed what happened with [the oldest boy] I put a lot of effort into making sure that they spend a bit more time with him. But I mean I'd like to see Jason put in more time too, to build that relationship with the kids, but because he's so tired, he just can't. I think he would love it and I think he would like to think that the relationships are much more positive than they are but my perceptions aren't the same as his. I think he really is missing out on an awful lot and so are they.

Relationships

While they varied from household to household, each couple mentioned that the industry's hours resulted in tensions in their relationships, as couples had to cope with tiredness, patterns that were out of kilter with each other, and with long periods apart and then back together again. Steven pointed to the high rate of divorces in the occupation 'same as with pilots'. Even newly married couples had concerns:

We had to get it straight right from the beginning that it wasn't going to be a normal relationship. For a start, I'd be home, probably, 3 or 4 days and then I'd be gone up to 9 or 10, possibly more and therefore the few days that I am home, he has to go to work, so we're not getting very much quality time and then I'm packing, preoccupied with getting everything ready to go again. So he definitely takes a back seat to my life, but for now it's just the way it has to be, so that we can have an income.

Carol said that her job greatly impacts on her husband.

Very definitely. Well I come home and just need to unwind for a couple of hours and then I just find that he is either needing to sort of go to bed and I'm not ready you know within five hours of that and he is obviously wanting to go and do things and I'm wanting to stay in bed the next morning and just try and sleep til midday to try and catch up on the rest. So he can't really plan too many things around me until I sort of almost said to the hour whether or not I feel up to it or can make something.

Appointments are constantly crossed out and cancelled and remade further down the track, just to try and fit things in with a state of catch-up. So he doesn't really get a chance at just booking us socially like normal couples would, he always got to say 'Oh I'll have to let you know' and it's always very last moment as to whether we go or don't go.

Carol believes that her husband does not have a good understanding of her work. She thinks that he has a glorified idea of what it involves and doesn't realise it is hard work, especially staying awake at odd times, keeping track on many issues at one time and on your feet for the whole time. 'He thinks he knows about it but he doesn't know what it's like trying to get to sleep in a different city'. This lack of understanding causes tensions in their relationship, and Donald reinforces this in his comments

When Donald and Carol are invited somewhere Donald is usually faced with the option of 'going along as the single guy. ... He hates it'. Like other partners of long hours workers, Donald tends to organise his life around Carol's. He feels that her body is rarely well adjusted to the home time zone, and that she needs more rest:

The first thing I'd like to see for her is that she just gets more rest. I mean, that is the most important thing because I don't want to see her worn down all the time, you know, always with the flu.

He sees the stress on their relationship. If Carol worked more reasonable hours, that is, had more time at home Donald says:

I think it'd be less stress on our relationship. Yeah there are times when she's a bit irritable from it – from the job and - like with me, and I know I haven't done anything wrong, it's just that she's tired and run down and people just are like that when they get run down.

Donald is holding out for the day when Carol will quit her job to raise a family, and Carol agrees that this will be her decision as she sees it as undesirable to have children and keep up this job, as do her immediate larger family, who have said that they won't look after her children, as many in the industry expect. Although, if there were some way Carol could maintain her job, either with a few part-time hours or an extended period of leave without pay until the kids were older, she would take it in a second.

Carol summarises the main effects of the hours on her:

The illnesses, the tiredness, the guilt that you feel that you're leaving your family and your husband and basically any argument you have before you leave you know holds in the air until you can get back home and right any wrongs.

Steven and Cheryl also face pressure in their relationship:

It definitely puts a strain on it. Definitely puts a strain on it, in that I've just got to drop everything to go to work at times and just lumber it all onto Cheryl, which is unfair on her. As I said before, I'm lucky that I've got a strong girl there that can do all that sort of stuff. It certainly stifles the things that you would like to do with your family. It certainly doesn't give you the opportunity to do as much as you would because of family.

Jason and Geraldine are frank about the costs for them:

It's very hard on the relationship, it really is because she has to run the house completely. (Jason)

He mentions that the fact that he has been fatigued for the last 15 years is bound to have had an effect. He thinks that his wife probably doesn't have a really good social life, 'because when I come home I'm knackered and she would love to go out to dinner'. Jason believes that for most flight attendants 'The constant quest is a home, life because it's a very lonely job'.

Geraldine goes further: 'I just think it's been so unhappy for us, as a married couple' given his absences and her need to just get on with things and raise the 3 children. Geraldine herself works long hours as a teacher ('about 55 a week on average') though she fits them around her children's school hours. She also uses the language of single parenthood:

I have no social life, virtually none. I can't make plans for the future. It's very difficult...I do get very stressed because I have to deal with so much on my own. I'm raising 3 children as a single parent who gets support occasionally – that's how I see my role. Jason doesn't see that at all. He sees himself as an equal member of the partnership and that in itself is a source of conflict, but earlier days it wasn't as difficult. Our children were younger, the problems were smaller, I now have an adolescent son...

There are so many instances of stress. Sport Saturdays - we have 3 kids to get to 4 games. I'm always calling on people, that I don't really like to do, but I have to.

Geraldine misses her partner a lot, and sees also that his job has changed and that has affected him:

I miss him. I miss him very much and I get very angry about that. To the point that I don't want him home anymore because it's – sometimes I don't know what's worse: to have him leave or having him come back. Yep I think it has definitely affected our relationship in a negative way. In the past, the stay at home was much longer, you used to get 75% of your away time free and we had a chance to rebuild. Now we don't. He's in a constant state of jet lag. He's intolerance is very high because he is. He has a vision

of coming home to a Brady Bunch family because he misses us so much and we can never match that. And because he's tired, he's intolerant and that leads to a lot of conflict and resentment on my part, I think 'I waited all effing week for you to get back and this is what you....' you know and he thinks 'Why am I here? I'm just a visitor in my own home'. So – because there's not enough time for us to rebuild the relationship that breaks down every time he goes away, really. It has had a lot of negative impacts and I think it's more the hours he works, than anything else. I don't believe you can fix this with money. Money's not going to make any difference. It's the time. He needs more time. If Jason was home more often, I think we would be a stronger family unit. We would do more things as a family. We would go out to dinner as a family, we never do that.

Geraldine describes how she remembers how she loves Jason when he is on holidays: 'When he's on holidays, after 2 weeks, then I remember how much I love him'.

Sunny describes how important it is to have a husband who copes well at home with their two school aged children:

I'm lucky I have a husband who does things like that. We still have arguments because when I come home tired and then the house is not up to my standard of cleanliness and tidiness and I've heard this from a lot of the girls at work. Like for some of them, there's washing in the middle of the floor apparently for when they walk in the door. They literally save up all the washing and all the household cleaning for their wives! And you walk in tired ... well, my husband doesn't do that anymore. ... I just find that when I'm home I rarely have a day where I can sit back and relax.

She describes being 'frequently out of sync' in her partnership with Thomas, and how she works hard at the relationship:

I think going away affects the relationship quite a lot. I think you have to work very hard to make up for the fact that you are going away every week. My husband wanted me to give up after we had the second child but I didn't want to because ...well I didn't want to.

Her partner finds the discontinuity in their lives hardest, though he thinks that the kids are 'quite well adapted to the idea of mum coming and going'. His flexible hours working in a university have meant that the children usually have access to one parent.

'I call myself a flight attendant widow... I'm a single parent when he's away'

Steven thinks that he doesn't get enough quality time with Cheryl. Cheryl concurs, saying that she has to be 'extremely independent and flexible':

They're the two major words I would say because when he's away I have to take the whole responsibility of the family for however long he's gone for – up to nearly 14 days, you know, and run the household without him being there. When he comes home with his hours, it doesn't matter really whether it's a 5 day trip or a 14, he needs to have a sleep when he gets home because most of the flying is through the night and he will

sleep that day. He basically isn't normal probably until the next trip - he's ready to go on the next trip. So he gets tired, I suppose at the same time I get tired because I've been with the kids for however long and I need a break. And it's very hard, that's what I mean, you've got to be so flexible.

I call myself flight attendant widow [laughs] when he's away! But you know, yeah you do, you do feel like a single mum at times but you know I suppose, you always know at the end of however many days they're away for that you've got the company when they come home, you know, you've got the adult to talk to at night, you've got somebody to sit down and have a glass of wine with – the social interaction, you've got that.

Cheryl has to make a conscious effort to 're-integrate' Steven back into the family when he has been away 'and make him feel, you know, as if he's still part of the family':

when he's been away for a while, you know, he has to introduce himself, really, back into the family because the children see him go and it's just us, and the children see him come, he's like a floater.

Social life

For attendants with families, social life was in short supply. Most concentrated on physical and mental recovery and on their families when they were home. However, several mentioned that it was difficult to maintain social contacts with non-flyers (who could not understand their circumstances) or with anyone but very old understanding friends who could plan weeks and months ahead. Each mentioned missing important family events – weddings, birthdays, and one had been home for only 4 out of 22 Christmases in his working life. One managed to maintain participation in his touch football group of very old friends who knew that he would only turn up occasionally.

What would help?

The dominant need amongst interviewees was for more rest time after flights. And many wanted that recuperative time at home:

That is the most important thing, the most. And a lot of people would prefer that recuperative period to be at home.

*It's just the way the nature of the job's gone. Well I think I'm speaking for the majority of the people. I know that all my friends of my seniority, that's the way that they feel. I remember back to when I first started flying and I was young and footloose and fancy free and I enjoyed going away and I didn't care too much about the time at home, you know. But also I did have that time at home as well too. ... But that time has now been compacted right down where [we don't get] that much time in the majority of our ports...I know the majority of people I speak for are people who have been there like 5, 6 years and upwards and certainly have got a family or a relationship back at home. People that want their recuperative time at home rather than while they're away.
(Steven)*

CHAPTER 6 The Postal Industry

Our interviews of postal workers included four employees who manage post offices, one who delivers and sorts mail and one partner of a post office manager. Each of the employees was working more than 48 hours per week on average, and in some cases many more. Most of these employees felt that they worked under constant pressure, did not take a lunch break on a regular basis, and did not always take their rostered days off. For most, the main issue was unpaid overtime. Each was motivated to do a good job, to get the job done. But the costs of doing so in an environment of inadequate staffing as all but one identified, was measured in personal, and family impacts.

It appears that the major issue that is influencing working time issues in the retail sector of the post industry is under-staffing which arise from the staffing formula that is used. The staffing formula – which takes into account factors such as number of customers, type of business and profitability – allocates paid staff hours to post offices. Interviews suggest that this process does not allocate enough staff to enable employees to complete their management duties within their rostered hours. The managers spent lot of their time during opening hours on direct customer service duties that meant they had to complete their management tasks outside their rostered hours.

The other main issue is one that pervades most white collar occupations in this study: employee's commitment to the job and their practice of working until the job is done rather than their nominated and formally remunerated hours of work. A lot of emphasis at the postal manager level is placed upon performance, meeting key performance indicators and "being a good manager". It appears that some of the workers were afraid of being seen as a "bad manager" – that is, not getting the job done - and put in extra hours to achieve a good performance.

For example, a major issue for Suzanne, a post office manager, is how upper management allocate staff. The system allocates staff based on set average times for certain tasks. Her problem is that these allocated times do not take account for unforeseen tasks (such as locating lost parcels) and do not suit the slower staff in her office. The system determines how many staff a store should have based on how much and what types of business they do. Apparently the staff numbers that are determined by the process are negotiable with the upper management but negotiation does not occur in practice. Suzanne wants to be allocated an extra 25 hours of staff time: she says this will help a lot with her and her staff's extra time at work.

According to Suzanne, not many women with young kids make it to manager in the postal industry: the demands are just too high.

A strategy that management in the postal industry has adopted to deal with a constantly varying workload is greater use of part-time workers. Their patterns of hours are closely matched to work peaks and troughs, and some are called in, then go home and are called back later to minimise their presence at work in off-peak times. According to interviewees, this has

intensified the nature of work in post offices, and has led to the substitution of intensified part-time jobs for full-time jobs, which – while they might suit those who want to work part-time – is a concern to employees. What is more, the hours of these part-time workers can be extended from their agreed levels without triggering overtime rates. What is essentially overtime for part-time workers (ie beyond their normal hours of work) does not result in overtime pay, although it may trigger new costs for employees – whether in terms of child-care or other economic and social losses.

For the postal managers, who are in white-collar managerial positions, their main concern is unpaid overtime. All the postal managers said they are doing extra hours to complete their job and reported not taking many of their RDOs in fear of not completing all their work. Dana's experience is illustrative. She is rostered on for a 19 day month. Her hours are 8.30am to 5.14pm Monday to Friday. Roughly, she takes about 3 of her 12 RDOs every year. Dana works from about 8-8.30am and never leaves before 6pm - usually she leaves about 7-7.30pm. Occasionally she will work till 10pm. It takes Dana 1 hour to travel to work. She sometimes works weekends and although it will vary, on average she works 1 or 2 weekends a month. Dana is in a relatively new position and believes that most of her long hours are attributed her to reorganising the shop and setting up more efficient arrangements. Taking into account her previous acting position in another shop that was well organised she expects to get her unpaid overtime down to about 5-10 hours a week (not including the 1 hour lunch break that she hardly ever takes).

Dana said that she is sometimes expected to meet 'unbelievable' deadlines and that her hours increase when she has to complete particular tasks, for example when there is a new promotion (these occur about once a month). The main reasons Dana gives for working long hours are that she wants to 'do well' and that she has no choice sometimes when she has deadlines to meet. Dana was concerned that the long hours were her own fault because she hadn't found the most efficient way of working.

In the area of mail delivery and sorting, the issue is one of unreasonable overtime: Max is regularly working 2 hours overtime on top of normal shifts. He works Monday to Fridays sorting and delivering mail. He starts at 5am or 5.45am every day and because of the overtime ends up working till 3.30 or 4.30pm. This affects his family life.

Why work long hours? It's the unpaid labour that gets the job done

For these workers, working the extra hours is a matter of keeping up with the work each day: 'It is the unpaid labour that gets the job done' (Keith).

Keith said that the only way to meet the management targets is to lessen the labour costs. He feels that the message he gets from management is: 'These are our expectations of you, you manage it and just give us the results'. Keith says that he accepts his long hours as generally, they have become culturally acceptable, but he does believe that he should get paid for all the hours that he works. Keith has watched his real wages decrease, due to the extra unpaid hours he is working.

Max who delivers mail also believes that the extra working hours have resulted from the push to get the workload completed. Each postie is responsible for completing the mail round they

are assigned to. If they want to finish on time it is up to the worker to find a way to do this. The person who was on Max's round before him, started work earlier than the rostered time and worked through his breaks just so he could finish on time to pick his children up from school. Max believes that management indirectly encourages this method of coping with the workload, as they offer no other solutions for the extra overtime required to complete the workload. Max feels that it is assumed that he will do the overtime: management don't always ask him to do it, they just assume he will. Max understands that management will not get extra staff to help because the mail load varies so frequently and the way they deal with this is to increase overtime.

Suzanne works the long hours because 'I can't get the work that needs to be done, in the hours that I've got. I simply just can't do it.' She attributes this to lack of staff. Dana is aware of the costs of extra overtime and the impact it will have on meeting performance indicators so she prefers not to ask her staff to do extra overtime and does not request payment for the overtime she puts in herself. Dana is at a level which means that she can be paid overtime; however, it is only approved 'if you have what is considered to be "reasonable" grounds for the request'. Suzanne feels that it is implied that you are not a good manager if you are requesting overtime to get the job done.

If my manager paid me for the hours I worked he wouldn't let me work the hours because they'd cost too much. Then he might give me another part-timer which costs a lot less!

The effects of unreasonable hours on the individual postal worker

A number of those working more than 48 hours a week identified costs for their health. As Keith said 'if you work the hours long term, you'll get sick'. He believes that the hours he is working are eventually going to start impacting on his health ('if they haven't already'). At the present time he believes that his long hours have led to high levels of stress: 'Every postal manager I know suffers from it [stress], but it's not recognised'. He may be right: when asked about the effects on her, Suzanne says 'I don't know! I've done it for so long!' She recognises that she is 'very tired and stresses about not completing everything she has to'. The combination of intensive work, under pressure, and long hours, is a repetitive theme for these postal managers.

Keith expects that in the future his long hours at work will start having a greater and more obvious impact on his health. He would like to continue to work towards his retirement but he expects that his retirement will be determined by his health and the intensity of his work, rather than when he feels financially secure to retire:

As a self-funded superannuant you sort of have ideals as to when you think you'll work to, but I'm a realist enough to understand and believe that that will be guided and gauged only and totally by my physical ability to maintain [these hours] to a certain age.

Suzanne who works long hours as a manager identified other health and safety risks including 'driving home nearly asleep'.

Aiden also identified health effects for his partner. He thinks Dana's long hours will impact on her health even though 'she mightn't think so'. Aiden said that Dana is always tired and that if she ever gets a sleep-in, she will sleep a lot. He also believes the long amounts of traveling to work takes a toll on her too.

Wanda is one of the few post office managers with young children. Her hours – which combine her paid work and parenting – are extremely long:

I've had fairly heavy health problems in the last 2 years and I think it is because of... because if you take a typical day for me...I'm getting up at 5.30-6am, getting lunches ready, getting the kids ready, I've got a bed wetter at home... I do that all before I get here...I've got 20 staff here, I'm looking after them all day...I pick the kids up say around 6-6.30pm and then it starts again, got to get the tea ready, empty the lunch boxes, sit down with them with their homework...The first time I sit down at night at dinner at 7pm which is quick...I don't actually sit down to relax until 9pm.

Wanda believes that her children accept her demanding job because they don't know any different, but it is far from easy – and that acceptance is not without complaint:

They don't know anything different... it's only now that the kids really... my youngest son he says 'I just wish you could come to school and be in the canteen'. ... I explained to them that if I didn't work we couldn't have nice things and we couldn't go on nice holidays. So they accept it but I think they get jealous of other kids who get picked up from school by their mums and stuff like that. But it's only just now but I'm sure the benefits will outweigh it.

Wanda doesn't believe that 'balance' is possible in the real world in her kind of job. She is trying to learn to live with it – though she sees that being 'acclimatised' to it is a problem in itself:

If you can get a happy balance between work and personal life you're pretty lucky I think - it doesn't happen in the real world...I suppose if you had a supporting partner and someone who would take the pressure off at home it would be so different. That's probably the worst thing you can do – is learn to live with it. Mine's just a chaotic life.

Wanda finds greatest relief through an extended break from her work. She works 48/52 arrangement that increases her block holidays. Short breaks are of limited use to her, as the work just mounts up and adds pressure.

The effects on postal workers and their families

Each of the interviewees described negative effects of unpaid long hours on their families. Some time ago, Suzanne took time out from managing her post office to manage another outlet. After this experience she made the conscious decision to cut her hours. There were positive and negative effects:

I worked 14 hours a day, 7 days a week for 8 weeks! Nearly killed me! ... I loved it.

She said that while she was working she enjoyed it but the effects would hit her when she left the workplace. She nearly fell asleep a couple of times while driving home. While she thoroughly enjoyed the experience she would never put in those hours again, as it was very exhausting. Suzanne said that she came to the realisation that she didn't have to work as hard as she was. After she came back from the temporary posting she said to herself:

'No, I'm not going to kill myself anymore', because I wasn't achieving anything. But I still put in a bit more hours than I should probably, but no, not as much as I did. ... I'm probably just more confident that they're not going to shoot me (laughs).

Clearly there is a level of fear for Suzanne about her performance and her willingness to put in long hours to get the job done.

The effect on couple relationships

The interviewees felt that their relationships frequently suffered from their long hours. While other factors also shaped these relationships, the traditional expectations of male partners for domestic support, meant that working extra unpaid long hours for women created specific hazards for their relationships and increased their total (paid and domestic) loads: 'I'm the sole supporter of my children'.

Aiden, Dana's partner would like her hours to match his better. He felt that Dana's long hours mean that 'she's not at home and if it wasn't for [his older son] being there I would suffer from complete boredom'. He is not happy with Dana's hours and he is unhappy that their hours are very different. He leaves for work before 7 every morning and she usually leaves after him. He would like it so their hours matched up, that is, that they would get home together at the same time. Ideally, Aiden would like his partner to work her rostered hours only. He is aware that Dana wants to do a good job at work, 'she is more career-minded than she was before'. Aiden said that Dana never wants to be seen as 'slack on the job' so she will put in extra hours or go to work on the weekends. Aiden does admit that it would be worse if they had a young family and realises that they don't have to worry about family so Dana can concentrate more on her career.

Aiden believes that Dana's long hours at work do affect him as he has no one to talk to when he gets home and her hours 'stress him out'. Even when Dana does eventually get home, Aiden said that sometimes she will stay up to 1am in the morning to finish paper work. Aiden thinks that the long hours are impacting on their relationship and it is causing tension. By the time Dana gets home Aiden feels tired and is almost ready to go to bed himself and sometimes she is gone before he is. While Aiden is becoming accustomed to Dana's hours, he still finds them difficult and he thinks the situation is wrong: 'I suppose I'm getting used to them – but it shouldn't happen'.

In his job, he does his standard hours and goes home, he doesn't work unpaid overtime and is not very understanding of her hours. Dana agrees that her partner gets frustrated with her hours and refused to talk to her after she had come home late for several nights and wasn't there to prepare his dinner. He doesn't help with the housework. Dana considers her hours to be putting a strain on her relationship. Dana finds that she no longer has time to complete household chores when she comes home at night so she finds now that her weekends are

taken up with the work she would normally have completed during the week. She hasn't visited her daughter and grandchildren (who live 2 hours away) as often as she would like, due to the lack of spare time.

Wanda said her relationship with her partner is not very good and she said she was the sole carer of her children 'because their father doesn't help at all. I do everything for them'. Her mum looks after her kids after school. Wanda leaves for work as soon as her kids are on the school bus:

My kids were in daycare from the time they were 3 months old...I think my partner wants a person tied up to the kitchen all day and there at his beck and call... which you won't find this day and age... but I don't live in a happy relationship at all so I don't think work hurts it anyway. I'm the sole supporter of my children. I'm their future.

As in other industries, where the long hours worker is in a partnership with other long hours workers, the strain can sometimes be less because 'they understand':

I have a very understanding spouse, so that's helpful. I do understand that there could be some partnerships where it could place an incredible strain. Then again, my wife is in a fairly high-powered position ... she has a mutual understanding... it's happening to her as well. (Keith)

The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children

The interviewees felt that it would be very hard to have caring responsibilities and be a post office manager. As Suzanne put it:

I've got a friend who is a manager with young children and that's pretty hard on her, very hard on her actually. ... She's the only manager I know at my level with young children and I know it's hard on her. I didn't manage [a post office] when my kids were young, I couldn't have coped.

Suzanne also said that if she did have young children at school:

Oh I wouldn't manage! No, if I had kids at school I would find it very difficult to do what I do.

Max's extra unpaid overtime of 2 hours on most shifts, creates problems for his child – and costs him money. The later ending time prevents him from picking up his child from school; he now goes to after school care. Max is very upset about this. He said that his son always looked forward to be picked up from school and that this was also placing strain on his relationship with his partner as well as imposing an extra cost for the childcare. Max believes that picking his son up from school is a very important part of his growing up and his relationship with his son.

Max's partner drops their son off at school and as a result starts work later so she also finishes later. They would like the work hours arranged in their household so that one of them can

drop their son off at school and the other can pick him up. If Max worked his normal hours, this would be possible.

The effect on communities and on social life

These long hours create serious social disabilities for employees. Their social worlds have shrunk, their physical activities are reduced, and basic activities – like keeping a dog – are restricted. For example, Keith described his social life as being on a ‘downward spiral’. He found that he was often breaking social engagements because of his work which eventually led him to no longer attempting to make social engagements. Keith used to play squash once a week and used to be a member of a golf club; he attributes the loss of these activities directly to his extensive working hours. He would like a dog, but his hours prohibit it: ‘If I had time to walk the dog, I’d buy one’.

They also used to have friends over to dinner during the week but they found this impossible to keep up. Keith really misses the social interaction, which he is forgoing for the sake of his working hours:

That social interaction is the greatest [loss]... for me, and from what I see from my peers, is the thing that suffers the most. (Keith)

Keith has 3 days off a fortnight. He uses his one day off each week to do household work which leaves him one day a fortnight for ‘me time’. Keith has no doubts that he is suffering because he is missing out on his social time.

Voluntary Work

Keith and his wife used to do volunteer work each week of about 4-8 hours each, but that too is affected by his hours:

We find now we are doing things for ourselves, when before we were doing things for other people. ... There's a real debate, a real conscious issue within yourself over that. It becomes a bit of a struggle and you do get yourself worked up in that sense ... as a consequence of working these unpaid hours. (Keith)

CHAPTER 7 Teaching

We interviewed six teachers. These included two teaching couples. We also interviewed two other non-teaching partners, giving 8 interviews in total. Teachers and their partners identified several main problems with their hours:

- Consistently working long hours, particularly in parts of the year (e.g. exam time, report time, special events)
- Increased class sizes
- Increased face-to-face teaching
- As a result, increased preparation, marking, correction, etc and less free periods to accomplish it
- Extra duties outside actual teaching
- Balancing the dual responsibility of teacher/librarian with other specialisations or management duties.

Essentially it appears there has been an overall intensification of teacher's workload in relation to three aspects of teachers' work. Firstly, there has been an increase in terms of core teaching activities (class teaching and associated tasks of preparation, marking, correction, photocopying etc) via larger class numbers and increased face-to-face teaching. Secondly, necessary and often compulsory management and communication tasks associated with teaching (e.g. parent/teacher nights, on-going training, various staff meetings, meetings with individual staff and students) which may vary from school to school, have remained at least constant. Thirdly, the quality of tasks of education in the wider sense (including for example, linking schools with the wider community, fostering a school community outside the classroom environment, providing extra activities for students, improving quality of teaching programs, and extending assistance to students with further needs) that fall outside the classroom teachers' usual job description, are becoming increasingly expected.

Despite the overall increase in workload there is little acknowledgement of these issues, either through remuneration or time allowance provided by reducing teachers' face-to-face teaching load. Teachers discussed how their workload seemed 'endless'. A number of these teachers had moved 'sideways', or even 'downwards' in career terms, or had put off promotion, in an attempt to reduce their hours; this worked in some but not all cases. Part-time work also served as a means to try to reduce the working day, but – as in the public service example – this strategy might liberate the employee from very long hours, but it frequently meant working much more than the contracted part-time hours.

Those who recognised serious problems for themselves and their families through long hours, appeared to be engaged in a constant process of self-surveillance and ongoing struggle to contain their hours, and to wrestle 'big jobs' and more demanding students into acceptable working days.

This industry highlights the kind of time squeeze that occurs when extra hours are worked on an unpaid basis, and when professional workers are highly committed to the recipients of their work – their students and communities. Society reaps a substantial benefit from the effort that these teachers make – but these efforts in turn exact their own – frequently hidden or privatised - external costs in terms of injury to teacher's health, their relationships, their children and their community involvement.

A 'professional' culture that is greedy for unpaid hours

The pressure to work long hours not only develops from an institutional increase in face-to-face teaching, but also appears at a cultural level. Ron raised the issue of a 'work culture' in schools, and an internalisation of that culture, where teachers are committed to quality education. This was illustrated in all the interviews. It was acknowledged that there was a certain level of personal control over the responsibilities and the time they spent on work to achieve a standard of teaching and wider education they felt increased the value of their work.

Burn-out

While the interviews with teachers suggested that they considered their workload had to be maintained to continue quality teaching, the demands eventually took their toll and forced them to reassess their responsibilities, or alter how they managed their lives.

For example "burn-out", complete exhaustion, simply not being able to face school, and depression were some of the extremes all the interviewees mentioned in this sector as symptoms they, and their colleagues, suffered from. For example:

- Not able to face work. Jodie discussed how she and other teachers would use up their sick leave not necessarily because they were sick as such, but just couldn't face school.
- Recoup. Holiday periods were valued as a time to catch up on work and preparation, to recoup from complete exhaustion and fatigue. Jodie said that it is obvious when people have had a holiday: they look different. Bonnie said that it had reached a point for Phillip that he needed to get away from it all so badly that he is planning to get away from everything (including family) and climb a mountain during the next Christmas holidays. Phillip, Chris and Lorraine also discussed how holidays would involve catching up on sleep or work rather than a quality personal or family time.
- Burn-out. Burn-out or a crisis point was when school and the workload had become unbearable. Depression and the effect on the family were issues for all couples. Chris described how he had decided not to seek promotion because of its cost on his family. Tony discussed how he chose to demote to classroom teacher although he had been in a higher position since 1981:

The workload was too much and I couldn't cope.... I suppose it got to the stage last year where I said, 'Right, that's it'... Last year I decided enough was enough. It wasn't like it was a sudden decision; it was something I had been thinking about for quite some time. And last year I thought, 'right, I'm not going to continue like this. It's not worth

it. The little bit of extra money for the extra work you have to do is not worth it.' And I just decided to demote down to classroom teacher.

- Constant low-grade infections. Jodie and Jenny discussed how people often suffer from lingering colds and flu. Chris and Lorraine described how they frequently fell ill as soon as the holidays arrived, and they spent them recovering, as did many of their colleagues. Jenny also discussed how she had a number of physical problems last year which she could not be sure, but feels were related to work
- Fatigue. The interviewees all discussed fatigue and associated feelings of 'grumpiness', or bad moods, and lack of energy. Phillip discussed how he didn't look forward to socialising and lack of emotional energy. Tony talked about slumping in front of the television and cutting down on community activities. Jodie discussed the 'emotional strain'. Chris described how Lorraine's decision to reduce her hours and responsibilities at work had reduced her 'grumpiness'.
- Stress. This was associated with feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work needing completion, not being able to have a sick day without having to organise materials for the class, not being able to leave work behind at school, and particular times in the school year (sometimes associated with exams and marking or school performances or rehearsals, etc).
- Emotional labour. Associated with fatigue and stress is the emotional labour of teaching. Bonnie, Phillip, Jodie and Ron in particular discussed the intensity of working with children and adolescents, while Chris described the effect of working intensively with kids 'at risk'.

The education industry also provides examples of employees who are part-time but work long hours – well in excess of their paid hours. Take the case of Jodie, who teaches two subject areas now on a .8 basis but who frequently works 12 hours extra in event preparation and regular camp organisation. 'Unreasonable hours' regulation needs to deal with the situation affecting part-time workers who regularly work extended unpaid hours of work, and/or who face unpredictable 'extra' hours demands.

The pleasures of working long hours....

For Jodie, teaching is not just about standing at the front of a class for 40 minutes and marking assignments and tests:

The best satisfaction you get from the job is from doing the extra things... I suppose that it's not the friendships you build up as much, but the satisfaction you see of the kids doing something like exams and going well through it... or the musical thing where after months and months and months of work they finally put on these extravaganzas and they are kings for the day, and they love that. I suppose I do it because I like to see that satisfaction for the kids. Same with the camps. I organise these band tours each year and that means being away from home for the best part of a week I suppose. But again the kids get such enormous fun out of it too. And when I'm on these things it's

great fun. Like I can't say I dislike it. I wouldn't do it. [laugh] So there is that satisfaction of doing them I suppose.

Ron enjoys his work. He works long hours and travels frequently, and his partner also works long hours, though she is in theory part-time. He says that expectations to work long hours emerge both from outside and within him:

I've got a good job that suits me in terms of personality. It's an enormous amount of variety and my technical conditions of employment are good, but the downside is I have to do a lot of contact at the hours when people are actually available...I get a certain amount of satisfaction being perceived as capable of my job, and I wouldn't want it to be said negatively, to have it said he doesn't come to these things or doesn't produce these outlooks so in a sense while we talk about it, neither of us is likely to do anything much about it because it's tied up fairly much with how we see ourselves and what we do.

Unpaid Overtime: 'It's just assumed you'll do it'

Phillip talked about the professionalism of teachers with the constant struggle to provide quality teaching within in the framework of increased face-to-face teaching which usually ignores the other responsibilities teachers have outside of class preparation, teaching, marking and correction. For example, numerous staff meetings (for each year, subject, overall school staff meetings), yard duty, school camps (and the extra preparation required for remaining classes), informal/impromptu meetings with staff and students, extra responsibilities such as year coordination, subject coordination, student report coordination, sports coaching, and school production organising. While other activities are optional, there is also an expectation to be involved in other school activities, and he says, teachers, as idealistic professionals, want to improve the quality of education.

The sports work is optional. But on the other hand what are you teaching for? You're trying to give some extras, for the kids. Some quality of life... There's always been, I think, an unwritten or unspoken pressure, if you like, in education. People put themselves out and do the extras otherwise no one would go on the camps, no one would do the school musical, no one would do sports coaching at lunchtime, no one would go away with sport, do any of those things. There's always been that. And that's fine and people I think have always done that. What has happened over the past couple of years, our actual face-to-face teaching load has gone up.

He has taken on various responsibilities, including sports coaching, report coordination, and an advisory group to principal. While the report coordination provides limited remuneration and time allowance, the other duties are not acknowledged in workload timetables or by remuneration. To complete all these activities requires many hours, often over 50; for a school camp lasting 3 days, it takes in excess of 100 hours.

Despite reviewing his workload, to maintain quality of teaching and a level of professional job satisfaction there seems little he can do to limit his hours.

You almost make mental lists of things you absolutely have to do at work, other things you'd like to do, to improve student learning and unfortunately you wind up throwing the entire second list away of stuff you'd like to do and you just don't get to it and you look at the stuff you absolutely have to do and see how much of that you can actually get through.

These hours are expected. As Jody describes her musical contribution:

... I think this is the eleventh or twelfth consecutive musical. And there's absolutely this expectation that I'll just do it. If I said suddenly next year I'm not going to play, I don't know what the school would do, to be honest. After so long it's just assumed that I'll do it. And there's two of us who do the musical each year and he's had a couple of years off, but I've done it throughout... Although its not part of our job description... we're not employed to do this, there is this absolute expectation that we will and it will happen and we will organise term concerts, and that we will organise high school band trips... And we've created our own monster in a sense... We've more or less created it together, and we've created this bigger and better program... by developing these tours, and these trips and these concerts and the rest of it, the kids want them, the parents expect them and then we provide them, and its got bigger and better and everyone loves it and they all think we're marvelous, but in order to keep it going... we've got to keep on doing. There is an absolute expectation that it will happen. 'An hour's lunch-break isn't something I see'

Jenny – Tony's partner - is also a teacher, with primary responsibilities as a librarian. Her hours, like her husbands', are long and variable. She has recently changed workplace. For 15 years she worked at the same school as her husband, which was useful for travel to and from work together. Now she is the only teacher-librarian for 250 students. Her responsibilities include:

- Manage library and library staff
- Managing collection (including buying, organising its use for curriculum purposes)
- Overview curriculum to make sure resources suitable and ready for staff to use and to help with teaching and using of resources
- Also provide assistance to students
- Teaching some classes
- Meetings.

Jenny's hours are variable. She usually is at work from 8.20am – 4.30pm (often over this), and brings anything from 5 to 20 hours of work home a week. The hours can also be intense, especially since the workplace environment often means there are meetings and work responsibilities during recess and lunch breaks:

The intensity of what you're doing all day – it's very full on. And when you're working to the clock and if you're working a six period day, which most schools are, you're working to six deadlines. So you have to monitor everything you do and finish within that time, and then get to the next one. And even meetings have to be finished up within the time limit because there's something else which has to be done when the bell goes. And then fitting the extra things in, in between it, in our lunch break, in your periods where you're supposed to be doing your preparation and correction. You just come home mentally drained, and physically and quite often you'll be asleep on the couch by five o'clock [laughs].

For Jenny particular difficulties arise in balancing her teaching and library responsibilities. There are too many interruptions during the school day to do marking, preparation or other work for her classes, so she tends to only concentrate on the library while at work.

The effect on the individual

Jodie mentioned toward the end of the interview that her partner, who worked long hours as a teacher in the 1980s, had suffered depression due to unrealistic workload expectations. The impact of long hours had a big impact on his leisure time:

[The long hours] make you tired. Physically one-off tired, like you're tired at the end of the day. Two, you're just mentally knackered when each weekend comes around and you compare notes with other teachers and you find week eight, nine or ten of a term, more people seem to be cruising along, getting everything done almost fed on adrenaline and after that the percentage of teachers, just chatting to people, who spend the first week of their holidays sick, just viral things, coldy things... sick, or sleeping in everyday. My last set of holidays, gone to bed early and slept in most days, five or six days. Instead of your normal seven hours at night you're getting ten or more. And that indicates to me that people are just knackered. (Ron, teacher)

Phillip observes burnout and dissatisfaction among many of his colleagues:

The fifty year olds count down the time until they pull the pin at fifty-three. The young folk sit there thinking, 'hmm, I'll head off to Europe next year'. And people like me are in the position where you just say 'right, I'll do this but I'll be buggered if I'm going to do this to myself in five years time'.

Phillip is also committed to teaching and wants to provide good quality teaching: Bonnie, his partner, comments:

He has ideals, which I suppose is a bit old-fashioned, but I think that keeps him going. And he's often said when it all gets too much he'll just leave. And he would. And I think over the years just seeing his friends in the profession, a lot of good teachers have left... They have gone into industry.

One teacher describes the picture in her school:

We all go along quite evenly and then crack up. We all have a couple of days off here and there to recuperate. Most of us are aware we push ourselves too much. Whenever we take long service leave, or you go away and come back, everyone will go 'Wow! Don't you look good!' and so there's obviously this constant pressure that we obviously work ourselves too hard.

As a result of overwork, people in Jody's school often suffer from mild but regular infections such as colds, take a day off here and there to recover, maybe deal with stress by drinking or smoking. Phillip reports the same in his school.

Lorraine had changed jobs recently in an attempt to reduce her hours of work and spend more time with the family. She observed that the effects of long hours had made her grumpy and she took a significant real pay cut in order to work more reasonable times:

I have in this last week changed from one school to another. And basically it came down to workload and not enough family time. I was a head of faculty and I was involved in a complete curriculum rewrite, I was teaching 2 year 12 subjects and so...in the time before I left, I had been committed – not in a 'you must attend, this is part of your job' kind of way – but more 'if you don't attend we'll probably make your life a misery because we can't officially ask you to do this'.

A culture of long hours expectation

Lorraine described the school culture that drew her into long hours. She described her long hours before spending a year in overseas as a teacher on exchange and then returning to her most recent position as a faculty leader in her school:

I had 17 nights at work – 2 are compulsory, the other 15 were 'gentle requests' – you weren't pulling for the team [if you weren't there]. It was more a guilt type situation. Most staff would attend almost all of the evenings. Many days I would not get a lunch hour, and generally I worked from 8.50-5.30 with at least three nights at school week. Plus the night work.

Now, in my new school, I'm actually working from 8.50am through to 4.00pm, with some extra meetings. Meeting times are far less in this school than the one I used to be at.

I was finding [before my latest move] that although I had fairly generous time allowance, my time in the school day that was unscheduled was being used pretty much in maintaining equipment, doing cross curriculum stuff, maintaining the faculty so I had to do my own preparation in the school hours. So I was coming home after meetings 2 nights a week to 5.30pm and having our faculty meeting at 7.30am one day a week. And because of that, all my prep was at home. Having two VCE units that were new to me, I was spending minimum 4 hours per night on prep. And I have to say I think that's fairly standard.

Lorraine's partner described his view of her hours:

In the last week, with Lorraine having swapped schools...she is a much happier vegemite...Every night it was you get home, chuck down some food, and I'd sit there with the kids and she'd disappear into the study, and eventually she got tireder and grumpier and I think - even the kids would say - she is a much happier vegemite – a bit more energy and bit more time to do things. We cooked sausage rolls the other night together!

Lorraine's view of how long hours in school come about – and how schools systematically rely upon them - was common to several teachers:

School's work on the theory that until you say no or you fall apart they just pile extra responsibilities onto you and its only if you are incompetent of having a mental breakdown that they actually say, well stop that...I got out before I had the mental breakdown.

Similar patterns of 'managing' to the point of severe stress are evident in public service work more generally as that section in this report shows. Lorraine's solution of moving to a normal hours job resulted in new financial costs, but a much improved family life with her children:

By moving [schools] my kids have had to go into after school care. Before I could take them back to work with me. But I felt that I will be able to give my children more time, and that I'm not going to be saying to them all the time – which is a terrible thing that we teachers do – 'I'm sorry kids, you have to go away I have to do this or that – go away'. And you are telling your own kids all the time, that the kids that you teach are far more important than they are.

Lorraine and her partner, both of whom had worked long hours in schools contrasted their experience overseas with Australia. After their time overseas, they decided to cut back on their hours and Chris in particular came back resolved 'not to spend more than 2 hours a night on preparation and three hours on weekends' so he could spend more time with the two kids.

The [overseas] system is really quite different. If you are a classroom teacher that is all you do. There are no middle management type jobs. You are either a teacher or an administrator...And that has certainly got a few advantages...For a year all I worried about was my teaching. And I thought I am actually not bad at this, I came up with a whole pile of things to do. (Chris)

Having had a year [overseas] last year, it was really nice to have that time with the kids. I had preparation time every day so that I could complete all my preparation at work, and then when I got home, 90% of my time was available for my children. It had never happened for me in Australia. So to make the financial sacrifice and the workplace sacrifice [by changing schools recently] - it was worth it. My highest motivation was for the kids...

Lorraine was very aware of the individual and family effects of her decision to work less hours:

I am sure that my children would tell you that even within a week that I am a much nicer person to live with. I'm not brushing them off, I'm not as stressed as I used to be. This week is the first week that I've slept through without waking up and thinking 'Oh I've got to do this or that and where I am I going to find that piece of information for my year 12 classes?'. You get exhausted but your mind's still functioning.

Both Chris and Lorraine described real advantages they observed for their kids when they worked fewer hours. Like a number of parents, they felt that their kids, once accustomed to their parents working long hours, did not complain much about it directly. However, when kids knew how things could be different, their views changed somewhat:

In the process [of working less hours overseas] I managed to see a bit more of the kids. And the kids had got used to having us available at night. Up until then they hadn't complained too much about it, but then having had parents around that would read to them, that would play something at night, that would do something, then they got shitty when we took it away from them.

It brought it home to me that this is not fair and my kids are going to become teenagers shortly and they won't want to know me and I'm wasting this, and I should spend some more time with them. And that's why...I want to set aside some time each night to be with the kids...I remember a couple of years ago [a study]...that said that good schools are schools that have a lot of parental involvement – I draw from that, that having parents involved in education is a good thing. And so I try...and do homework with the kids. The other thing is I'm making myself get my son to read to me... and his reading has improved dramatically and now he wants to read. My daughter gets quite grumpy about us not being around in the school. She wants to show us off – 'my mum showed up too'. She wants me to go running with her.

Lorraine describes the health effects of long hours for teachers:

We NEED those holidays...Most of us in those two-week vacations are ill. The adrenaline keeps you going for the term and then that cold that every kid seems to bring into the school everyday hits you during the holidays and you end up physically drained because of that.

Effects on productivity of individuals

Tony describes the effects he observes on productivity of working long hours:

You certainly don't feel you're performing to an optimum level. There are times when you feel you are not doing the right thing by the students and you know you are not performing particularly well in the classroom. I find now that tiredness, and fed-up and sick of the whole thing, to the stage that you know you're looking – well I mean the example is now people – not just me – come back and within two weeks you feel you just haven't been on a holiday.

Fatigue also has an effect on Tony's life outside work:

I mean you're just listless basically. I mean you come home from work now and you really don't feel like going out and doing things in the community you've done in the past... You just feel completely lethargic and just want to sit down and try and relax and once you've sat down you don't move... It gets to the stage you really feel like pulling back... You just don't do as much. You don't have the energy.

While Tony is still involved in football club committee and bowls with his wife, he has withdrawn from other community activities including: network learning for gifted students, and turning down community activities he is invited to participate in. He has decided to take a demotion rather than continue with an unworkable load.

Lorraine describes the effect on her classroom teaching of being tired:

I realised [overseas] that I'm a bloody good teacher and when I'm given the opportunity to prepare my classes properly and develop engaging material...that I do a really job and I feel proud of the quality of the performance that I am presenting but when I become stressed with report writing or curriculum development...and that starts to be the dominant feature of my day – then I'm not doing the teaching job that I'm actually employed to do.

Chris describes how being tired depletes his creativity as a teacher, and means that poor handling of difficult situations creates further, time consuming problems:

Yesterday the year nines went feral. And I really had to do some serious things. And so last night I was worn out, it was really hard to go in and read with [my son], I just wanted to collapse. It took me a couple of hours to do some marking that should have taken only an hour. If you put long hours on top of that, it's very hard...We have had a few people leave – one of the science teachers just said 'I'm not coming in ...that's it, I've had enough'. It certainly drags people down. At the end of the term people are tired and grumpy – you have to watch out. Your first reaction to [difficult] things with kids isn't always the best and it can take more time to fix it up. [Being tired] makes people grumpy, it makes teaching worse. Teaching is about people management. When you are tired and grumpy you react badly to things, and you make bad decisions about people management. And then you have to go out and clean up the mess that you've made and that creates extra work.

People learn in all kinds of ways... When you are tired your brain doesn't work as well. When you've had a decent nights sleep and you have things under control and your brain is firing up and you think of all kinds of good things to do. When you have a mountain of work to do, and you are tired, then you end up slipping back to 'OK I guess I'm just going to write this up on the board and do a few examples and hope that somebody in there might have a clue about what they are doing'. I've worked up a system of chemistry bingo to teach kids the elements – that takes hours to work up, to find ways to teach better.

'The workload was too much and I couldn't cope'

From 1981 Tony had been in a senior teacher position. This meant he had additional responsibilities for professional development and staff review. He was given five periods off for each 10 days which was not enough for the position. In 1992 he effectively accepted a demotion back to classroom teacher.

In a subsequent interview, Tony's wife raised how her husband suffered depression in the mid-late 80s to the point he had time off work because of the "ridiculous" workload. While Tony had not raised this in his interview, clearly the issue had had a significant family impact and was related to Tony's long hours and workload. Tony's wife was resistant to discussing this episode in greater detail, suggesting that "failure to cope" with expended long hour over time is a source of embarrassment for some family members.

The committed professional: embedded expectations

Jenny acknowledges that it is often her decision to work the long hours:

I could probably walk out earlier than I do but then it'd be there and it would be working properly. It's not something I'm being ordered to do, but the expectation is that things will run properly.

At the same time however, there is an expectation that teachers will accomplish not only the tasks associated with teaching classes (e.g. preparation, presentation, marking, corrections, report writing, communication with teachers and students) but also taking on other responsibilities. Even those teachers who try to avoid taking on the extra tasks usually get "barreled in somehow". "They're not seen very well by their colleagues. They're often frowned upon", even though Jenny feels that different stages in life affect what individual teachers are able to take on. At small schools it is also more difficult to "disappear into the woodwork".

Teachers often are more than willing to take on the extra tasks to improve the facilities and services of the school:

*I've seen a lot of people just drive themselves because they cared and wanted to get things done and do things and end up unwell, very unwell and no one monitors it or even cares. And people come into work sick because it's easier that way because it's easier than having to come back to it, or to organise things for when you're not there...
I've been awake half the night worrying about my class for the next day and all I should be worrying about is getting well.*

'It's not just the hours you work, it's also the condition you're in when you come home'

Jenny has noticed both physical and mental effects of long hours and believes she has suffered from undiagnosed depression:

I don't feel I'm functioning as well mentally as I have. And I know physically, well, last year was a very bad year last year and it's hard to know the causes. Whether it's being run down from fatigue, because you come home exhausted some days. You just collapse... The pressure to be at work even when you're not well. Like if you're sick you wake at 2 o'clock in the morning thinking I have to send work in for my classes and then you get up and do it and send work in and then when you go back to work you have to correct it. And sometimes you go in anyway because it's easier to do it yourself than spend time organising for somebody else.

The effect on couple relationships

After a long week at school Phillip feels he has little energy left over. He prioritises his relationship with his family and deliberately makes the effort, but socialising is seen as a burden. They don't organise activities on Fridays or after school camps. He doesn't even look forward to going to the zoo with the family to visit friends because it means that he will have to do extra work beforehand which makes him too tired for the outing.

Constant tiredness affects his emotional energy:

Tiredness goes hand in hand with grumpiness... So when you wind up going home, you've got less time for the family because you've got to do more correction and stuff at home... and even once that's all done, the amount of energy you've got to invest in you're family and stuff like that, isn't there.

His family is important and so despite fatigue he deliberately sets time aside to spend with family.

You almost have to schedule in 'oh yes, take children swimming for two hours there, walk the dog there', [laugh] 'exchange greetings with wife prior to bedtime' sort of thing...

Later he returned to this issue:

It's not like I'm having an affair or something like that. It's not that extreme, but in terms of time commitments and stuff it doesn't help.

Even if he allows himself a relaxing weekend with the family it means that 'you have to pay for it' with the pile of marking, correcting and preparation that has been left.

He talked about his need to make a "definite commitment" to "force himself" to keep one evening a week free for his martial arts.

One mother of two, whose partner also works long hours, describes the poor quality of attention and care in the house at the end of the day – as one or the other parent frequently is going back out the door to do more work.

[When we are both working the long hours] the children may get an hour of attention at night. Somewhere between 'Yeah, I'm cooking dinner, what do you want for dinner, yeah look I'd love the hug but at the moment I have a pan of boiling peas in my

hands' ...and then not being as sympathetic to their requests for homework help as I should.

She goes on to point to the impact on their relationship:

We are affected by each other's long hours. I used to resent that Chris would come home late...not til 6 or 6.30 and you start to get snakey and it happens too often. I know that Chris would resent the number of hours that I would have to work: 'Yes, look Chris, you're home now, but I have to go to work'. Or I'd be ringing him saying 'Look I have to be out of the door in 10 minutes, where are you?' That's hard. And when we are under stress, like at report writing time, we do fire off each other... I wouldn't say that one of us is going to storm out the door, but certainly we are not the nice people we used to be! I'm hoping by changing jobs that I'll get that back. But it has cost me \$2500 [in foregone pay] and it is now going to cost me childcare. So my net cost is probably about \$4500 to get some kind of quality back into my family life. (Lorraine)

Effect on family life

Work can't be contained within the boundaries of the workplace but spills into family life:

He's actually quite burnt-out. He went back this year and I said 'what's wrong with you?' and this summer he's going to take off and leave us and climb [a mountain] as a way of refueling and basically getting your batteries recharged.

I asked her how she had noticed he was burnt-out:

You're disinterested in things... not depressed, just flat. We actually went away for a weekend and had a friend look after the children and basically sat down and said 'OK, this is life, where are you, what do you think', and basically muted it all out and that's what you don't have time to do if you're both working really hard, you've just gone into survival mode.

In order to organise their family life they discussed at the beginning of the year what her working hours should be given the availability of both and what they can financially live on where their choices are based on living more simply so that they don't have to work as hard.

Many families talked of 'timetabling' their leisure time:

We try to make sure on the weekend that we sort of use the time as wisely as we can and I wouldn't say that we're desperately oppressed by that but it does tend to mean that instead of leisurely days which are more relaxing, that you tend to compartmentalise or timetable activities between things and that probably diminishes the relaxing quality of a weekend. (Ron, teacher)

The 'professionalism' of teaching takes its toll on families, as Ron points out of his partner's commitment:

She's always taken the view, since I've known her, that a teacher in a school has a broad-based commitment to the kids they teach and that's not just appearing in a classroom and delivering lessons. Education is a much more whole of life activity and clearly for Jodie there's a sense of self-worth [that] grows out of being able to participate in a kind of rapport and feedback that develops with the kids. It has its own rewards, but is time-consuming and has its negative family effects.

He feels that the long hours affect his partner more than he, partly because of the intensive nature of working with young people. She has had pneumonia a couple of times and also has a lung complaint which can affect her if she is under pressure for too long. He realises she has a double commitment with work and home life:

Given that Jodie has the major part of the management of the household and the effort she puts into school, I think her hours are constantly excessive in a way... that at the very least she should be compensated in a way that doesn't take place now at all. (Ron)

The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children

Phillip has long hours, and often has to bring work home. During exam or marking time, the family doesn't get to see much of Phillip, but teaching is generally flexible and is able to allow time for his family:

He will stay up late, so he'll make an hour or two in the evening that is the children's time and stay up to midnight to do whatever else he has to do. I 'spose it is a lifestyle choice, isn't it? You've decided yes, you want to put you're children to bed, yes, you want to help read them a bedtime story and things like that.

'Do we have a parent this week?... Or do we have to go out and rent one?'

Hours are a very big issue in many families. A parent working long hours in a household where the other parent also works consistently long hours describes the tensions, particularly between her and her adolescent children. She wants them to help out at home. Her husband seems to largely be unavailable for most household chores because of his work commitments. The tension is constant, exacerbated by her long hours, her teenage children, the absence of her long hours partner, and the fact she alone has to manage it all:

His hours are even longer than mine. So I do talk to him about it. But he frequently works Saturdays and frequently is away at night or late at night and stuff. So he is conscious how much I work and the strain it puts us all under.

Interviewer: So how do you negotiate this together?

He does what he can but the...I suppose that in the end.... (she cries)

...I guess I spend all day being tolerant of other people's teenagers and understanding and giving out great advice. And then you come home and [despite] your best intentions, when they are your own kids, I do all sorts of things I recommend never to do at school. When you come home you instantly

yell, you instantly accuse and pick on. All the things you shouldn't do at school, you should listen, be tolerant, and understanding. And I come in and lose it and go off the planet... You forget the rules when you come home.

Interviewer: Do you talk about it with them?

Yeah I do. Yeah, they can do some wonderful things. Like sometimes it's all my fault and I understand that. Like I'll come home from work all tense and cross and just take it out on them. But other times it's them too. But yeah we do talk about it a lot and kids will cook meals. And sometimes they'll do really great things like I'll come home and they'll have the fire going and they'll say 'Mum, we've made you gin and tonic', and it will be sitting on the table. Really sweet things, knowing that I've obviously had a bad day...

The kids are thoroughly aware of the hours I work. They'll actually make a point of it and ask 'Do we have a parent this week?' Or which parent have we got? Or do we have to go out and rent one for a while?' But they sort of accept that this is normal. I don't think they've got any idea that other people mightn't live that way. Because most of their friends seem to have parents in similar sort of, working similar sort of hours, even if not in the same industry. (Jodie)

Some parents described how their children's extra-curricula activities sometimes fall off the agenda:

So juggling their commitments around what I need to do for school such as corrections, and fitting in walks and such, it gets a bit hard... I really try to make time to make sure I do these things but they have a habit of being put further and further down the track while you fit in the more essential things like washing and feeding people. (Jodie)

Ron, a teacher, notices that women in particular are affected by the changes within schools:

The thing that would seem to be the biggest indicator is the number of people, particularly women who have come back and who in the past generally have been most satisfied with their life as a teacher who are running out of commitment and energy earlier than they used to.

Lorraine describes what she has missed, and her children have missed while she has been working long hours. She feels that the kids she teaches sometimes come before her own:

They get really clingy and nearly knock you over. But there are other times, when you have to go back to work and then they say 'Oh why do you have to go back tonight?' And then there are things like the swimming sports: 'Can you come and watch the swimming sports? You've never ever come. Can you come to assembly?' So you get the guilt trip... I feel like I've missed a bit. I feel terrible as a mother. You want to be out there and support your kids. And it comes back to that, 'Oh no the kids I teach are more important than the kids I am rearing....'

She goes on to discuss how her kids will benefit from having her take a different job so her hours are less demanding. She wants to take to the home front some of the energy she has previously been putting into the kids at school:

The kids are going to have a much nicer mother. I'm not going to be as tense with them. I'll have more time and do things that are fun things. They are really good kids. They help around the place, but it's no good to say to them look go and sit in front of the telly and amuse yourself that way. You want to get out and engage with them, and find out about things that have been bothering them during the day and do the mum things, that you really don't feel you have had the time to do – to sit down and do with them what I do with my [school student] kids in the day. [With your students] you pick things up really quickly and talk them through. You come home and you don't want to do it with your own kids. So I think they will benefit from having someone who has the time.

Chris describes the thinking around his decision to not pursue promotion – which in his view would mean even longer hours and he was very clear about the impact on the children:

My decision not to chase being a principal is a big part about the kids and about how I wasn't happy. I could see I was a miserable old sod when I got home as my kids would happily tell you. And so I wasn't happy, the kids weren't happy, and it probably wasn't getting me a long way anyway...so I had to do something different. There was a real loss there. I just do the stuff now that I'm interested in and the hours are creeping up again. Because you do a job and you have things you want to get out of it, and principals want things out of it, so there is pressure on to get certain things done and then things come out of the blue. For example, the middle years project – Anzac day holiday the kids had a miserable time because I spent the whole of the time writing an action plan which will probably sit in a few filing cabinets before being thrown out...And so you can't presume that you can control [all your work]. You have to have it in your head to try and have some fun, to work less, then it is more likely that you'll get it.

The effect on physical activity, sport and hobbies

Jenny described putting hobbies on hold in the years when her long hours overlapped with young children. While she umpires netball one night a week, on a Saturday she finds little time for other interests, for example her interest in genealogy.

You limit however many things you're going to do each week. So basically you don't feel that the time outside work is all your own.

The effect on extended families

Overworked couples frequently call upon extended family to pick up some of the work – whether picking up children, cooking or washing. As Lorraine describes how she relies on her aged mother – and feels uncomfortable about it:

Interviewer: How does having two of you working pretty long hours affect your household?

Well if you were to walk in here right now, you'd think a bomb had gone off...My mother looks after the children and she does the washing for me. I feel really guilty about it. If she didn't do those things for me, I'm not sure how we would survive. I mean we would, but she certainly has reduced the burden but she is a 74-year-old woman and shouldn't have to do those things.

CHAPTER 8 Supervisors in manufacturing

Long hours and ‘averaged hours’ agreements

Four employees in a large manufacturing site were interviewed along with three of their partners. These employees are supervisors or middle managers in manufacturing. Their experience is shaped by working in a workplace that has seen several large waves of restructuring that have reduced the size of the workforce, which continues to work under tight deadlines and considerable time pressure. That pressure has resulted in very long hours of work for many, especially the staff employees in our interview group most of whom are on a six monthly hours agreement where their normal hours are 40 per week plus ‘reasonable overtime’. If they work more than an average of 50 hours per week over the six months, they receive a financial bonus that they describe as ‘small’.

This averaged hours concept, with its financial bonus in the event that very long hours are worked, resulted in ‘out of control’ hours for many employees, and the cost is evident in family relationships, personal health, and long term effects on social and non-work life generally. Like many others working long hours, these hours are associated with ‘pressure’ creating a double impact on individuals, families and their communities. Health effects included: fatigue, depression, “turns”, collapse, sleeplessness, dreams about work, constantly thinking about work, panic attacks, anger, depression and mood swings. The combination of pressure at work (in view of tight timelines) and long hours meant that employees were very strained, and their personal lives were deeply affected.

Several workers had a sense that they could not do their jobs even in extended hours. A sense of worthlessness appears to develop amongst workers who blamed themselves for not being able to complete their tasks.

Several of those interviewed had worked very long hours (more than 60 a week) for extended periods historically. Their experience of this meant that they now resisted working over 45 hours despite pressures and threats from their employers. They became aware that the stress and fatigue meant they were having no life outside work: they fell asleep or had no motivation, were angry and emotional, had no time to spend with their children, and left their wives to deal with the household and children on their own. Comments were made that those workers without children did not have the same concerns, or that those who had children and still worked weekends, had an impoverished life, one they didn’t want to be forced to have. Several had changed jobs, leaving behind skills and tasks that they enjoyed, in order to avoid working long hours of overtime.

You work the long hours ‘to do the right thing’ – and keep your job

Monty has recently been transferred to a new section:

Yesterday I was informed that I was no longer required in the [x] department and they’d be moving me to [y]. And I believe it was due to the fact that I wasn’t available Saturday due to family commitments, and had a lot to do with the back injury I sustained four weeks ago.

Patterns of work around Monty reflect the penalties that people believe will flow from refusing long hours. In his new area, one person is currently working 60 hours a week: 'He hasn't been there that long and they've only just moved him from the production side of things to staff and he just feels he needs to keep his position so he's trying to do the right hours'. He's also doing the Saturday: 'He is single and doesn't mind putting in the extra time'. A couple of employees are doing 55 hours and working weekends and he says this is because 'they have virtually been threatened into it because they didn't want to risk their position'. He had been told that if he refused to work the Saturday he may well be made redundant. So there is only one person in the group who is not working the 6 days a week and he will soon be moving across with them. 'They retrenched another person last Friday saying it was because of medical reasons, but he had refused to work the Saturdays and he couldn't start any earlier than 7.30 and they wanted him to start at 7am'.

Monty no longer wanted to work Saturdays:

If those 45 hours keep them happy, well [that's OK]. When you know you're there the extra hour every day, or whatever it may take, it doesn't really hurt as much as another full day out of your week. When you look at leaving yourself one day to...live your family life. It's a bit much. It's certainly not something I'm ready to give up.

Monty's children have Guides, art and dog training and competition and he wants to be there and be involved with his three children.

But it was not always easy to refuse the Saturday work, as one of his co-workers discovered:

One of the guys who stood up to [working on Saturdays] all the way, he had the same thing, family commitments and so forth, he ended up resigning 'cause, they took him all the way. He asked for a transfer and he said 'if...I have to work the Saturdays, transfer me to another department where I don't have to work Saturday' and they said 'well there is no position available'. So he ended up resigning and left. That was probably three weeks ago and he was the most experienced in that department. And they came down on me and asked me to work the Saturdays. And I still refused because I said the same thing; because I had family commitments. And that's when the back injury came in. And I think they didn't feel they could touch me because I was [injured] so they transferred me instead, yet this transfer wasn't available for the other bloke...

What long hours do to families of supervisors and skilled workers

Larry works long hours in order to be there to supervise a large team of workers. He described a range of health effects that had affected him personally, including fatigue:

We'd basically be flat out all day. We'd be running around chasing items and it was very physical, climbing ladders.

He found that the health effects spilled over into home life:

I couldn't sleep. I'd be thinking about the job all night. And that's where the fatigue comes into it too. And I just wasn't happy with it. I felt worn out and run down.

I wasn't spending much time with the family. Basically spending an hour with them a night and on Sundays and it basically wasn't enough for me... I've got three kids I like to spend time with them... The job I was doing was very frustrating. You'd be beating your head up against a brick wall most of the day trying to get things done and I'd basically come home and I'd still be shitty from the day and I'd be very angry at night and probably take it out on them at night... Just easy things, like there was a mess from the kids when I came home and I'd fly off the handle for nothing. It just happened too much.

Larry shares a short fuse with other co-workers who describe very similar effects. A number of interviewees mentioned specific health effects arising from long hours. For example, Gerry who was working between 50 and 56 hours a week:

The reason I was doing that was because... there was a lot of pressure [to get the job done]. I actually had a 'turn' if you like. I collapsed in one of the toilets and they had to take me to hospital and I had a week off. And it was obviously just the body rejecting what I was doing... I was worn out... the hours I was doing obviously contributed to what transpired...

But I think that what happened there was that working those long hours, as you'd appreciate, you come home, and when you've got three children, and they want to play and you would like to, but you're that tired, you go and have you're dinner and sit on the lounge and you fall asleep. So I think for the three and a half years I worked in [that job], was probably the hardest three years I've ever worked... No one actually makes you work those hours, but with the structure of the way the place is, it was a matter of having to do it because you were just getting further and further behind and we were always asking for more support in that particular area. Well it never really came. I was doing that particular job on my own. So it got to a stage after three years that I just asked for a change to another area, 'cause I just felt that not only that it affected my health, but most importantly it was affecting my home life.

The subtle pressure to work long hours: 'I had a commitment'

Now Gerry is working 47 to 48 hours a week. He believes that it was his commitment to doing a good job – to getting through the work – that led him to overwork and his eventual collapse.

No one asked me to do that. It was just I felt the need to, because if you went back to work the next day there was a bundle of work that had to be done before you actually did the work for the next day... I used to get in at 6 o'clock and do a fair bit of work for the first hour when no one else was there and you get no remuneration for that... I had a commitment to the people I was working for to get that happening. But in retrospect looking back now at what's happening now, I wish I was a bit more thoughtful and hadn't have put myself in that situation.

Social life

Larry misses a social and home life. He has 3 children less than 8 years. While he doesn't feel that it is unreasonable to 'put in' at work, he thinks it should be 'within reason':

I didn't have a social life. I came home on 4 o'clock, or 5 o'clock on a Saturday, and 6,7 o'clock during the week so I didn't really have a social life... Now I've got time to do things. We've just moved into the house, three years ago, and you know there's a few things I wanted to do and I just didn't have time before. There's only a certain amount of hours in the day you can do things, and if you spend most of your time at work, which is fair enough, you're being paid to do a job, you do the job, but within reason.

I don't live to work, I work to live.

Larry decided the only way he could get reduced hours was by changing jobs. He has moved to a new role and works 45 hour a week, has weekends off, and knocks off at 4 o'clock. His quality of life has improved:

I'm happy with what I'm doing... And I'm happy going into work... In a way the company did look after me in changing my roles because the hours were ridiculous that I was working... I'm spending a lot of time with my family which I'm a big fan of. Basically we do a lot of [racing] and a lot of sports with my kids. I spend a lot more time at home. Going out on the weekends, going away...I'm enjoying the role that I'm doing... It's rewarding..."

Interviewer: It sounds as though you're enjoying when you're home more?

Oh definitely. That's what I live for. That's why I go to work to... I don't live to work, I work to live.

But he is concerned that the company is understaffed and believes that his hours and responsibility may be increased in the future.

In Larry's view:

No one likes to live at work. I like to live at home and spend time with my family. If you spend most of your life working... it doesn't really mean anything, does it?... You don't get much time with your family or catch back up on sleep. See, in my role I've got three kids, one at school, and by the time I come home, help with homework, have showers and baths, you know, I'm just about ready to collapse.

Larry is also concerned about fatigue, since he knows people who have had car accidents on the way home, 'OHS wouldn't be so much of a problem in the workplace' he says if people worked more reasonable hours: personally he would consider 8 to 9 hours a day, 5 days a week reasonable working hours.

Larry's wife Anne has noticed a big difference with his hours. His old long hours 'just weren't working for us', and they affected his moods, energy and eventually their relationship:

[There was] less family time. Less time for him, like the kids have different things going like there's karate and calisthenics and different things like that. He had no time to take them to participate in any of their sports or their interests. And then he had no time for his own interests either. Probably more stress, more up tight, you could tell he was under pressure. Just very snappy and not really having a good time at all.

He sometimes missed seeing the children before they went to bed:

They'd always say, 'where's dad?' ... It was going into the evening and nearly bedtime and, well, dad wasn't there and they didn't see dad til maybe the next day if they were lucky, if they hadn't already gone to bed... He wasn't around a lot and he wasn't always there to take them to their sporting or social activities.

This also affected Anne, and Larry could not always leave work at work, given his hours. Her efforts to fit work around Larry's hours meant that when one clocked in at home, the other clocked out:

Of course it [affects me], because I don't have anyone to look after the kids or to leave them with or anything because they're too young... Just coping with that, I 'spose when they came back [from work], really wound up from that sort of stuff too, you know it's the pressure of it all, it's sometimes difficult to leave it at the door. And sometimes I'd say to Larry, 'Just leave it at work, work's work', but when you put so much time into work it - some of it does come through the door at home of an evening... At the time I was working night shift to fit in work. So he would basically come home Saturday afternoon and I'd go off and do a night shift, because I was just exhausted as well, 'cause that little bit of money helps with things... So there was less time for us as well. There was one in the door and the other out again. And then Sunday would come and before we knew it Sunday was over and we were back to Monday again. It was just like, well very limited family life.

Gerry points out that you can load people up only so far in terms of hours:

You've got to realise people have commitments outside work hours with families and so forth, and they've got to have some sort of compromise that work is work and you do that while you're here obviously, but you can't expect people to work - and I know some staff did - work in excess of 60 hours per week. You can load a camel so far and you just pack in so much.

The effect on relationships: 'It's not worth our marriage, it's not worth what it's doing to us'

Larry and his wife felt they had to choose between his hours and their marriage:

I said to him, 'It's not worth our marriage, it's not worth what it's doing to us, just go and speak to someone,' because I said, 'you can't keep this up'. So he did.

It had got to the stage where they were hardly seeing each other, or together as a family, there was a lot of fighting and arguments because both of them were stressed. There was nobody to help with the childcare. Anne is really happy Larry is now in a different job, as the hours he is currently doing means they can now plan time together.

We decided that wasn't the way we wanted it to go, 'cause like my father and Larry's father both worked two jobs or three jobs and we never saw our dads and we said, 'no we don't want that for our kids. Money's not that important if you haven't got a relationship or a marriage that is workable.

'Why don't you show us as much attention as you do to your work?'

Gerry's situation was very similar. He points to staffing reductions as creating pressure on hours – and how his family pulled him up, along with his collapse at work:

I've always been someone who is pretty committed to whatever role I play and I think the... straw that broke the camels back when I did collapse and went into hospital, my hours, and I must say the manager did come up and say to me, 'you just want to ease up a bit'... There's a lot of people in the same boat. It's a very pressurised situation and I think it's getting worse with the reduction in numbers... It was very easy for people working around you to say, 'oh look, I don't know why you bother', but if you didn't bother at that particular time when everyone's gone home, it just meant you had more and more work and like I said you put up with it... When you come home and you're wife and kids say, 'well why don't you show us as much attention as you do to your work', and I think that puts you back in the reality of the whole process... The collapse I had and the hospital trip I had... maybe woke me up to what I should have woken up to initially.

Gerry regularly left home in the dark and arrived home at dark. He became irritable and argumentative at home like others in this industry who worked long hours:

I know I was the guilty party. It just got that any minor thing that that my wife or kids had, you'd take it out on them by maybe not talking to them or isolating yourself... Maybe I'm one of the lucky ones that woke up to the reality of what the important ingredient is and it's not work, it's the people that you're home with... When I was in hospital she come in that particular night [after I had collapsed] and she said to me, 'look you either get something that doesn't take the hours, or you leave the job you're doing' and like she said, 'it has affected the marriage, it has affected the children, and you're obligated not only to yourself, but to us, to look after you're health'. I think it was mainly the collapse I had and the hospitalisation that brought it to a head.

Gerry and his wife had discussed the long hours he had put in: 'Foolishly I used to laugh it off. I'd say, 'look, it's something I have to do'... and she said to me on a number of occasions, 'Look, work's not everything, if you've got to work those hours, maybe look for

something else.' While he was able to realise the importance of his family in time to do something about it, he doesn't feel everyone is so lucky:

We got a guy who unfortunately he's parted company [with his wife] and... he said, 'it's not just that [long hours], but that's part of the process of why it happened' and I think that when you each start to contemplate it or start to think it... I think in anyone's sacrifice when you do believe that there is some chance, because of the hours you work... I don't think anyone can afford for that to happen.

Bronwyn who had been a full-time teacher prior to having children, described feeling lonely when her partner's hours increased and remaining long for extended periods:

With a young one back then, a little one, it's lonely. And being the first [child], it's hard. I had to do a lot of the things on my own. It's lonely. It's waiting – especially those 6.30, quarter to 7 nights... but you get to do things around the house. You keep yourself busy... and making sure dinner was prepared and things around the house were done. So it was lonely, he'd ring up and I'd say, 'when are you coming home?'

Her husband's long hours were bad for him, her and for the children. When he was working the much longer hours, even when he was home he was too tired and unmotivated to play with the children:

He was just too tired to sit there and even think about pushing the car along the ground. He couldn't do it. He wasn't interested. Whereas now he'll go and play and roll around on the floor and do things with the kids that they need to have done with them.

Their relationship had also become more difficult, and Bronwyn was aware this was because of the pressure and tiredness he was feeling:

He was just always on edge. So he'd be very quick to – he's never been abusive in anyway during this time - but he'd be very quick to lose his temper, not in a bad way, just short-tempered. Unlike himself. Very forgetful... I was constantly reminding him to do things... It was very frustrating... Work was stressing him out so he was coming home and forgetting certain things and that meant it put more pressure on me. I was carrying the workload and doing a lot more and that did affect the relationship... I remember him coming home one night. ...His dinner had been in the oven for god knows how long. I think it was 8.30 when he came in and [eldest son] was already in bed... and he did say he hated his job because the little one had gone to sleep and he hadn't seen him. He'd left home in the morning and [eldest son] was asleep. And he came home and [eldest son] was asleep...

She feels that a recent reduction in her husband's hours has had a beneficial effect on the family and organising her life:

Much easier, because you know there are set hours and you can organise your time... It is more consistent - the hours - and we are able to plan around things. And knowing the weekends are off makes it easier. We can do things with the kids. Like I organised something for the boys to do something on a Saturday and I knew he would be home so

he could go with us and was able to enjoy doing things with the kids on the weekends as well

What would help?

These workers felt that their 'average hours' contract left them very vulnerable to long hours. As one put it, employees needed specific rules about time and hours, and averaging contracts and vague discussion of 'reasonable' hours gave little protection:

I think you should know that you're expected to do x amount of hours a day and after that, be that 40 or 45... you can actually say, 'no, I'm not coming in. I've done my quota of hours and you can't be forced to come in'. And if you do come in past those hours, you should be rewarded for them correctly. And you need to be very black and white about that. You should know exactly what is expected of you. And they should also know what you're willing to give. In our case that's a very, very grey area and no one ever gives you a straight answer... If you're entering a contract and your contract says 40 hours a week plus a reasonable amount of overtime. Well, 40-hour week is an 8-hour day. And reasonable amount of hours. What's that? 4, 5 hours a week?

This supervisor was not alone in feeling that the contract should specify the amount of overtime is expected - that the weekend should be left free: 'Okay you know that you've got to work 9 hours a day and I've still got my weekends off. To have a break. To unwind.' These workers also placed a high value on getting a break from work, and on fair recognition of extra hours worked.

CHAPTER 9 Public Service

Seven public service workers were interviewed. Four of these were partners to each other, and a further 4 partners were interviewed, totaling 11 interviews. The workers undertook a range of different jobs mostly at more senior levels. All worked long hours (over 48 a week). Two were in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and the remainder were mostly at EL1 or EL2 level – that is, at senior levels just below the SES. One was single without children, a further couple had children who had left home, and the remainder lived in households with young children. Four interviewees were Canberra based; the remainder were spread around Australia. One interviewee who worked in a technical supervisory position in the media, worked shifts. This brought particular disruption to his life.

A culture of long hours emerges from these accounts. This culture is becoming more intense: the demand for longer hours is stepping up. The ‘good’ worker works them, unencumbered by family or community – out of commitment, wish for progression, frequently without being paid for them, and - in the process - creates new long hours standards for managers and those with responsibility in the organisations – which all must meet. Failure to meet them means taking the ‘mummy-’ or ‘daddy-track’, marginalisation and acceptance that one’s career will need rehabilitation in the future if it is to get back ‘on track’.

Interestingly, more than half of these families were considering significant changes in their collective hours of work. Bob and Abby were in the middle of trying to make a difficult decision: they realised that probably one of them would have to choose between having a full-time, expanding career and spending more time with their family. Leena had realised that work had almost eliminated her personal life and was looking forward to changing jobs and eventually retirement; work had made it hard for her to look after her aging mother and she felt – as a worker without children - she sometimes picked up when worker-parents went home. Sonya had made the choice to give up full-time work to spend more time with the family, realising that the consequences of being part-time are that she would be considered to be less committed to her career. Tricia had given up her demanding job entirely in order to be at home with the children and support Abe in *his* demanding job. Paul and Mary’s marriage was seriously affected by the combination of long hours and shift work. Together these cases create strong evidence of the non-sustainability of long hours for workers ‘encumbered’ by family – or perhaps more accurately – wanting to have a life.

The long hours of public service

Average hours of 50-60 were common in the group. Pat, for example regularly works 10 hours paid overtime in her job where apart from her own tasks she is something of a ‘trouble shooter’ and her skills and job-tenure pull her into this regular overtime which has been going on, most recently for 12 months. She is level APS3 (acting 4) who is always paid for her overtime. Sonya’s hours and situation illustrate several common aspects of the jobs of public service workers. Until recently Sonya had worked full-time, managing several programs. She has young children, and had decided to go part-time. When working full-time she averaged about 65 hours per week. She would come into the office at about 9am (after dropping her kids off at school) and then work to 6.30/7.30pm. After having dinner at home she would then do about 1.5-3 hours of computer work or reading, ‘unless I had made the conscious decision

“I’m not doing it tonight”. She often worked for 3-4 hours every Saturday and then also did some work at home on Sunday evening:

It was a fairly large workload and I had been doing it for several years, which is why I went part-time. I decided that that was enough and the only way I saw out of it was to say... I'll go part-time.

A breaking point had eventually arrived and Sonya was ready to go part-time:

So I had all those [hours] and I was working weekends, I was working evenings and if I didn't work weekends I would be so stressed on Monday morning that I could just feel the tension rising on Sunday night. I would make a decision: 'I'm not working this weekend. I'm going to go out with my family and we are going to do these things' and then by Sunday night I was so tense because I was thinking about the workload that was facing me during the week that it was counterproductive. It was actually better for me to do the work and at least have a modicum of relaxation. So yeah I did actually say I can't do this anymore.

In another example, Leena is an EL2 working in a policy area. Leena is not on flexitime, but she does try to write her hours down in a diary. She starts work anywhere from 7.30-9am and leaves 6-8pm and frequently misses lunch. Leena said that she works a 10-hour day on average and occasionally a 12-hour day. She takes works home and usually does half a day on the weekend, sometimes longer, ‘I feel guilty if I don’t’. She is single without children. In the senior executive service the hours ranged between long and extremely long. While even though senior officers like Bob and Abby who had children regularly worked very long hours, they thoroughly enjoyed aspects of their jobs: ‘They’re both fabulously interesting jobs’.

A number of these workers also travel for their jobs and this eats into their non-work hours. This affects their hours. Abe for example, with several young children, loses his Sunday on average every 3 weeks for travel interstate. He has been working 45-50 hours per week for 18 months as an EL1 and under his agreement he does not have any flexitime. His supervisor who is ‘very good’ told him to take a day off recently after a long bout of travel. He really enjoyed the days off but the work is all there to greet him when he comes back ‘110 emails when I walked back in!’. Abe supervises a range of workers who also work long hours because of under-staffing but who ‘understate the hours they work on a daily basis so they don’t have me hassling them! - so that they don’t get too far over on their flexitime...It comes down to availability of enough people, and the number of people that have been lost, and the corporate knowledge that went with them. All those things place stress on an organisation’. One of the reasons Abe’s wife chose to live 90 minutes from his job was ‘so that he couldn’t go to work on weekends’.

A number of workers describe the intensity of their work, and point to the impact of electronic document transfer and communication as increasing workloads. Tricia describes her partner’s end of day response:

I will ask him how his day went, and he will say 'Intense'. Rather than busy. That, coupled with the fact that he has lost relaxation skills, means that there is no down time, even mental downtime. The long term effects of that must be unhealthy.

Tricia left her own senior public service job to raise their children. She plans to never go back to it: 'Now I have my chickens. They are easier to manage than staff'. And they don't ask for long hours.

Why work long hours?

Public service workers pointed to three main reasons for working long hours. Inadequate staffing levels were seen as pivotal. Each interviewee identified in one form or another the effects of culture of long hours as creating a demand that they work them: this culture created an entrenched expectation that long hours were 'good', that 'good' workers and managers worked them, and that employment recognition flowed from working them. Finally each interviewee wanted to get their job done and drew satisfaction from their contribution. Pat for example observed that her organisation had a charter of service that it simply could not honour with current staffing levels without overtime: 'the job just can't get done'. For many, work was enjoyable, and provided a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. Pat, who was paid for her overtime - unusually in this group - said that it was 'equally my need for the money [her partner was out of work] and the customers' need an answer. We shouldn't put that off just because we are behind'.

At the same time, several interviewees identified, repetitively, several key problems that arose from long hours, including for individuals, couple relationships, children and extra-curricula activities in the community.

Staffing levels are crucial

In terms of the factors that have led to the extended working hours, the dominant cause in the view of public service workers – regardless of the service they do or in what state - is staffing levels. This is 'a fundamental issue'. Several interviewees named resourcing as the main problem along with inadequate benchmarking of the resources required to do a particular job. People were loaded to their limit and beyond to test the resourcing capacities. For example, in Sonya's experience, she has found that to get a project going, managers start off using less than adequate resources; once they see that employees are coping they are not given adequate resourcing and if anything are expected to do more.

[if you ask for more] you get portrayed as a bit of a whinger. You're always saying 'I need more resources. I need more resources'. ... You just see if they can cope, yes they do, you throw more work their way, they keep coping, throw a bit more their way and eventually they start to crumble.

This is known in the literature of work organisation as 'management by stress' (Slaughter and Parker). It has most commonly been named in relation to factory line work, where the line speed is set at a level that works employees to their stress levels – and beyond. The speed of work is set according to just sustainable levels of employees' stress.

You are always expected to do more with less and that's just become a way of managing things and you just step over the bodies that collapse along the way...It's the infamous bottom line, that you've just got to be always cutting back without any real recognition of what is involved... there is no awareness... well there is lip-service paid

to it, but there is no practical awareness of the toll it takes on staff and the resources required to deal with the issues.

Public service workers with management tasks say that hours will not be reduced until there is more staffing:

It's more a question of how I would like to see resources organized and I'd like to see sufficient resources there so people can work a normal day.

Several managers said that in busy times they would tell their staff to take some time off later but that in many cases staff could not find the time to do so.

The Personal Impact of Long Working Hours

Sonya was feeling the strain on herself personally as well as her family and decided to go part-time which would 'force' a reduction in hours. Sonya now works slightly more than half-time. She tries to make sure that she only works her assigned paid hours, though it is a struggle to contain them.

Sonya has found management's response to the change in her working patterns to be:

incredibly good, very flexible, willing to assist. I mean it's a quid pro quo. They know I'll do the work and produce the goods, so they are quite willing for me to be flexible and I'm fairly conscientious, that I'm making sure that if I do get in late that I'll make up the hours somewhere else.

Sonya said that the result of her long hours is:

Your stress levels are enormously high. If I wasn't at work or doing work at home, I was thinking about work and what needed to be done. And I got to the stage where I couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Sonya said she had lost interest in running the household; she stopped housework and cooking, due to her long hours: 'I just lowered my standards!' They were eating take away food most nights, which she regretted: 'that impacts on your nutrition'. She was also less physically active, and no longer going for walks.

Sonya said that she never hated her job but 'I did often come into work just with a sense of doom hanging over me, because there would just be one crisis after another'. But she found she no longer got excited about her job, she was beginning to think "I'm so over it".

The personal impact of long hours extended beyond those with children. Like Sonya, Leena had tried to cut her hours since she had decided against letting it 'kill' her:

I think I'm trying a whole lot harder to not put in the hours and I'm feeling less driven to put in the hours than I used to...Now I just figure I still do have a contribution to make, but it's not going to kill me...I think the area I'm in has a burn-out factor.

Other factors have also played a part such as caring for her mother. She is aware that some of her staff would not like to be in her position because of the hours she works:

Some of the junior staff have said to me ... 'Why would I want your job? Why would I want to get any more senior than I currently am because if I have to work the way you work it's not worth it' And what can you say? ... A very good attitude to have!

The long hours at work have made Leena feel tired all the time and that she has no room for other interests, for example, just simple things like reading a book or the paper or watching the news. Her friendships have also been constrained:

I am conscious that I am increasingly pushing myself. It feels like I am increasingly pushing myself and that I am tired. I feel tired a lot of the time...Apart from that, there has been a greater fallout, which is being far less involvement with friends and structured outside interests. It's been juggling - which is my priority? Do I stay and work rather than catch up with people and probably until relatively recently I would have stayed and worked.

Leena said that it got to the stage where her friends would say ““Oh, so you’ve got to work” and then they’d stop asking. Or they keep in touch less frequently and then I get guilty”.

Leena can envision what life would be like if she worked more reasonable hours:

I'd be able to get home at a reasonable hour, sit down with a cup of coffee and go through the paper or water the garden or go for a walk. Have my dinner out of the way at a reasonable hour and then do something leisurely after dinner. Instead of feeling as I currently do, I come home, there's nothing defrosted, I throw something together at half past 8 at night, bolt it down, go to bed with indigestion, get up the next morning start all over again!

Leena said that if she was living the former scenario ‘I’d probably be a lot easier to get on with. ... I feel like I have been irritable and that my fuse has been shorter. I may be managing it OK but it’s probably costing me more to manage it’.

Pat had been working long regular hours of overtime (as had her partner) when in 1999 she took a year off ‘because I was about to crack – because of general stress and pressures and hubby was in the same position, so we decided not to have a heart attack but to have a year off’. The combination of long hours and poor management and inadequate technology meant that Pat was placed under a lot of stress: ‘I didn’t have time for my family and to do the stuff that I needed to do. Didn’t have time for me...I was mentally tired. I suppose I got a bit snappy from time to time. My husband was exactly the same [working 12 hours a day as a supervisor pipe fitter]. We just went home and vegetated.’ For Pat a critical part of her overtime work was control over when she worked so that you can ‘balance work and home. If one of the children said there is something coming up, I need you, then you can be there. I have seen people not have control and it creates devastating pressures’.

Paul described ‘walking around in a daze’ as a result of his long hours and shift work: ‘I’m bugged’ whether he was at home, or at work. He managed the shift roster in his workplace

and described how workers often did double shifts or extended shifts which 'led to poor diet' and irregular eating as well as exhaustion and a lack of safety, for example driving home. His wife worried about him driving home after long shifts. Mary felt that Paul was mentally

near exhaustion. It worries me, him driving at home late at night. And I don't think he switches off. It is more of a 24-hour job. Mentally he is still there... Any physically he doesn't get regular good meals. He can't be in the cricket club and things like that.

Abe finds his long hours tiring:

I get pretty tired. It is busy at home (with 3 children) and at work. Plus I live an hour and 10 minutes from work, so I add another 3 hours of travel time..so I am up at 6am, walk back in the front door at ten past 7. The kids are already bathed and sitting up. I only see the kids for half an hour a day.

Abe feels that if he worked more reasonable hours he would be more creative, have 'more bounce in my step' and be healthier all round. He thinks his wife is concerned 'that he doesn't run himself ragged'. He is right; his wife is worried:

My primary concern is about the long term effects on his health. He eats really late. We rarely sit down to a family meal. [That] is really missing. I eat with the children so he doesn't eat till 8-9pm, he rarely eats breakfast, and he has lost his relaxation skills...he is constantly stressed. He has physically aged, he has put on weight. If he doesn't take lunch with him, he doesn't normally have lunch, and even then he doesn't break – he eats at the desk. I mean, we have spoken about all these things and I guess I am pretty hard on him in that I hammer him and say you know nobody else can change this but you...you should take lunch, it is part of your award. (Tricia)

Tricia is concerned that all Abe's energy goes into work. This also has effects on their relationship:

We argue. It does affect us sometimes, sometimes it doesn't, depending on how long it has gone on for...Long hours have affected it. He often says all he does is get up, go to work, come home and eat and then start again and the weekends he catches up on sleep. That's when the arguments come up, and he doesn't have any energy, doesn't want to do anything. And the long term effects of that concern me. It is a very insular life. It's not productive in terms of a life: it is only productive in terms of a cog in a wheel. The kids get ticked off on the weekend - even the 4 year old will complain about how much dad sleeps on the weekend.

Impact on family: 'Please don't go to work on Sunday Mum'

Sonya describes her experience before going part-time:

It made me feel guilty because of my relationship with my family, which, you know, I felt it was suffering. I'd get notes from my daughter saying, 'Please don't go to work on Sunday Mum' which just rips your heartstrings out. I felt guilty about the pressure I was putting on my partner. (Sonya)

The impact on her children of cutting back hours is obvious to her:

I didn't give the children the attention I thought I should be giving them. And I've just noticed this year, [being part-time], they just love having me around, it's lovely. I was always rushing through things with them... never getting out and just playing games with them. The stress was starting to tell on all of them.

Sonya feels that the kids felt stressed because she was always rushing, maintaining a momentum of always being rushed and stressed. As a result, her youngest child, in particular, was displaying naughty and attention seeking behaviour while the older children also showed signs of reaction. "With the older ones they get introspective I think. ... So they just love it, now, the current [lower hours] regime".

Her kids have told Sonya that they really like having her home, 'they notice the difference'.

Sonya's experience and analysis is in accord with the larger research evidence which shows that what children dislike most about their parents work is its effect in creating stressed, tired parents. What is more, Sonya's sense that long hours and parent's lack of 'hang around' time affects children is also borne out in the literature (Galinsky 1999, Pocock 2001).

Sonya's partner Gerard agreed that their children did notice that Sonya was putting in long hours at work, although he doesn't think it was a "huge deal" for them because they were still fairly young. He thinks they are OK as long as there is one parent there for them. When Sonya was working long hours the children would ask where she was, 'particularly if they were going to bed and she wasn't there to say goodnight. They would have a bit of a grumble' (Gerard). Now that Sonya is working part-time he believes they have a much more relaxed household and Sonya is able to take on more activities with the kids, such as sport and music lessons 'they were things that we couldn't always do before'.

Other parents agreed: Abby and Bob felt that their hours caused strain on their relationship with their kids.

Yeah... yeah I think it does. Because generally speaking, as you can tell from those hours [that we are working], is that we only see them for about 2 and a half hours a day and not good times of the day - we are getting them up, getting them going or putting them to bed. (Abby)

What's that term? It was in an article - children growing up now are called the 'hurry up generation' and it's true! Because we spend a whole morning rushing them... getting dressed and so on. We spend most of the day saying 'Hurry up! Hurry up!' And that's what we spend a little bit of the nighttime saying. We're basically saying 'Hurry up, tie your shoes. Hurry up, brush your teeth' and so it's - pretty much - stress right through. Which again is something that you become so habituated to, you actually don't notice after a while. (Bob)

Abe doesn't think his three children 4-10 years mind his hours. On reflection he says that his children have said they would like him to come to school events and 'When I've been away

they clamour for attention, but they don't verbalise dissatisfaction to me'. Tricia, Abe's partner held a job more senior than his until she resigned a few years earlier. When they both worked long hours she says:

We didn't know any different. We just managed. Now I don't do that, I don't think our family could go back to it, I don't think either Abe or I would cope or the children...I'm here all the time now. The children get a parent representative at school activities, the two little ones get what the older ones never got, like mother's little helper. I mean, in those old days things did go wrong. I forgot to pick them up from day care a couple of times and - it sounds horrible doesn't it! – but none of that happens now. And now quiet literally Abe can go to work. He doesn't do anything but go to work. And the kids are doing out of school activities that they have never done before – tennis, music – and they just don't happen when you are in daycare. They are not in holiday care. They have more contact with extended family, they see friends more.

Tricia sees that the new arrangement has strengthened the extended family with more contact with grandparents. She also sees personal benefits for herself:

I'm a lot calmer. [When I had a job] we used to have a cleaner, and ironing lady, the weekends were there for leisure and we were lucky that we had the income to pay for those things...We paid for overnight care so I could go into hospital and have a baby. We were very organised.' When the kids want to do reading I'm more inclined to say 'Yes, I can' rather than 'yeah-yeah-yeah-in-a-minute!'

Tricia feels that the kids miss out on Abe's attention: 'they vie for his attention. They squabble over it when he walks in the door and he has to deal with it...He'd be hard pushed to tell you his actual birthday...He's missing out on their childhood'.

Interestingly, Pat who did not work until her six children were in their late teens, saw some benefits for her older children through her work: it encouraged them to be 'a bit independent – they had been spoiled so it was probably a good thing'. Pat chose being at home with her children throughout their school years. She observed that parents tended to take more carers leave when they worked long hours:

Thankfully we are a fairly professional team, and we don't let it get to us, but I have noticed one person say that it's a bit of a joke that they work overtime and then they take an equal amount of sick leave or carers leave later. It can be a bit of a sore point.

Effect on Relationships

Long hours of work had various effects on the relationships of public sector workers. For some, these hours turned the parent at home into a single parent. For others, long hours caused stress for intimate couple relationships.

Paul, who works long hours in conjunction with shift work, found that his shift work meant that he could sometimes be there for his children's school 'things' because he had a day off during the week. He valued this highly but he missed seeing his children on a regular basis: 'I

kiss them goodnight when I drop them off at school'. However, he felt that this created a very big load for his wife:

My wife becomes a single parent. It affects her career. She has to be available to look after the children 24 hours a day. Because [my hours] are not predictable. Because you can't predict. She has to refuse work to look after everything.

She agreed, and found it a heavy load. Paul's long hours and unpredictable shifts had imposed a large price on their relationship.

It adds a lot of stress to the family. It's very difficult to understand unless you live it... We live as a single parent family. While Paul is a very caring and loving father, he cannot be relied upon, through no fault of his own, to be at any particular function or event... It adds to my stress level. It adds to stress on our marriage and I think obviously it adds to stress for the children. It has built a very strong bond between the kids and myself, and I think that the bond between Paul and the kids could be nonexistent except that he works very hard at it. So the stress doesn't roll onto him as well. I am the sole decision maker in a lot of decisions, even financial decisions. He comes home late. He falls asleep on the lounge and he might be back at work again in 8 hours, and by the time he has eaten and slept there is no time to discuss things. It adds a lot of stress, decision-making stress, financial stress.

Paul's hours had contributed to a crisis in their marriage recently:

12 months ago we went through quite a difficult period of time where we could have easily separated except that we decided to sit down and talk about it and evaluate what was happening to us. That was at a time when Paul was away a lot as well...so yeah it has [affected our relationship]. It is a lot of hard work...we could have easily separated. The incidence of marriage breakups is extremely high in the industry

Interviewer: Do you think that is partly a result of the long hours?

Yes definitely. It's because of the type of people [in the industry] but you can't socialise together, you find it difficult to sit down and have a conversation for any length of time.

Mary felt particular types of women were more likely to 'last' as partners of long hours workers: 'They have to be independent, to be strong'. Further, that Paul's hours had affected the children's 'bond with him': 'They ask him to attend functions, even family functions, and frequently he can't'.

Even going out to dinner socially is hard. Friends don't understand. The girls appear to accept it – they have known nothing different. To have people around for dinner, planning six weeks in advance. It impacts on family and social outings. [If he worked more regular hours] he would see more of the kids things, and we would have more of a social life, join clubs.

Mary has completely restructured her work after children to meet the demands of Paul's job:

I've gone from an income of \$35,000 to a job that is irregular, earning \$6-7000 a year solely because of Paul's job.

Domestic work: the one at home does more

Pat describes being married to 'the second least most domesticated man on earth' who had to be taught everything when he became unemployed and she went back to long hours. Now, Charles does most of the housework while she works. Similarly, Tricia says that Abe 'does nothing except go to work'; Abe's long hours and travel are a barrier to anything but 'visiting the hardware shop on the weekend' and gardening. Mary described herself as a single parent, given Paul's long hours and unpredictable shifts 'Paul actually asks me 'well what are we doing today?' He fits into our routines. The domestic side is all done by me. He helps with the garden.'

Impact on partners: their support is essential to the survival and maintenance of the long hours worker

For many public service workers, their partner's support is critical to their ability to work long and intense working hours. For example, Sonya says if it hadn't been for her partner 'she wouldn't have survived in the job'. Sonya says she has a very equal relationship that has helped.

In terms of her relationship with her partner, Sonya thinks the main thing that suffered was communication because they didn't have much time to talk. Even though they made the conscious effort to have their lunch breaks together when she was at work full-time, these were often filled with Sonya offloading her stresses from work:

I used to be so revved up about work that I spent a lot of the time debriefing or dumping on him about what was going on, so we didn't have a lot of time to discuss family issues or personal issues. My partner is incredibly supportive.

Partners were clear casualties of their public service partner's long hours – and they observed costs for children and for the workers themselves. For example, Gerard said his partner's very long hours put him under pressure as well because he found it hard to do his normal hours of work. Even when Sonya did come home she would be doing work at the computer. 'It did impact a lot on the family life. The kids were really noticing it, saying 'Why does Mum have to work so much?' Gerard said that during this time he was worried for Sonya as he saw how much stress she was under. 'She never had a breakdown or anything but there were times when I thought she was a bit overwhelmed by it all'.

Pat's spouse works in the construction industry and, in her words, in their relationship 'We just get on with it. Unfortunately your relationship might suffer for the sake of work but then we organise time out later to catch up...We make time to do that. And that has been important'. She calls these her 'rest and recovery' strategies that help keep her relationships intact. Her partner Charles who spent 38 years in the construction industry was very clear about what long hours did to marriage:

Well working in the construction industry, the hours can vary from anything from 10 hrs a day to 16hrs a day. Having spent 38yrs in construction I didn't know what a 40 hr week was. You could work seven days a week, year in year out. It was a large contributor to the break up of my first marriage.

While he and Pat used 'rest and recovery' strategies to be together despite her long hours, and while he is accustomed to long hours from his own experience, all was not easy for him:

As a result of the long hours that I have spent away from home in the construction industry I can cope very well with the situation, although it can be frustrating at times especially the late nights that Pat has to work.

He also sees Pat's long hours as 'definitely detrimental as regards to the kids and the grandkids...For the grandkids it's 'why is grandma working all the time?'. He also sees some effect on the 6 grownup children 'None of the kids are at home any longer but they do miss her if they come around and Pat isn't there'.

Charles is currently unemployed and sees important community benefit from sharing the work around: 'The ideal hours for us would be 36-40. We could cope [on that income]. The ideal situation would be to get half of the workforce that are not in employment into the workforce and share the load of the section of industry that is overworked'.

Abe didn't think that his long hours had a negative affect on his partner:

I think sometimes if I return home after a few days, she won't actually want to talk to me again when I come home. I think it is just an adaption. She is from a navy background and she is used to the men being away for long periods.

His wife agrees 'I don't mind if he isn't here. It's harder on the children.'

Effects on grandparents and grandchildren

Pat clearly states the effects she notices for her grandchildren of her regular overtime:

If I worked 38 hours I would have more time for the grandchildren [She has 6]. My grandson is at the age - he is 4 - he'll pick me up from the train sometimes with granddad and he will say 'I waited to see you cos I haven't seen you for such a long time because you've been at work again!'. I'd definitely like to see a lot more of them. I'd like to have a day just for the grandchildren. My kids say we need to see more of you...grandparents are an essential part of the child's growing up because they can have a relationship with the child that it can't have with you parents and you lose out a lot by not having grandparents. I took my children away from their grandparents when they were 6, 8, and 10 and it did impact on them dramatically. My 8 year old admitted later that she hated me for the first two years after we moved because I took her away from her nanny and granddad. And from the reactions I am getting from my grandchildren they need their grandparents just as much as the grandparents need them.

Effects on spending patterns

Pat also points to the effect of overtime on spending patterns:

They buy takeaways because they are too tired to do what they normally would do.

She also pointed to her new desire for a dishwasher that arises from her overtime. She points out that it doesn't always pay to be in paid work and doing extra hours:

We had a couple who both worked full-time...who did a budget and found that if she stopped working they could sell the second car, give up take-aways and childcare and she ended up working half a day a week and they were earning \$12 a week less...People don't think, don't do the sums. Another breast-feeding mum [at work] found it was cheaper to work 4 days a week rather than 5. People get a bit hooked on overtime.

While their income situation is quite different to Pat's, Abby and Bob also talk about their income behaviour where they go out and spend when...

Long hours and social participation

Most of the public service workers who worked long hours were not able to take on 'extra things'. Their fitness and recreational activities suffered, as did their participation in non-work organisations, and community activities. When Sonya went part-time and reduced hours she saw that some of the benefits were 'just catching up on things, just not feeling so stressed and pressured at home ... stepping back a bit and winding down a bit'. Sonya has also been able to take part in school activities. Participating in activities related to her children was something she was unable to do before.

Going part-time: pleasures and the price

Going part-time brings real relief to previously long hours workers – with benefits for the individual and children:

Working part-time is great! It's just such a change and so relaxing, especially when I have time off and it's all to me, all to myself and I don't have any children hanging off me or anything! It just gives you a different perspective on life. I think everyone should just pull back for a little while and see how enjoyable it is. In terms of my family, yeah it would be good if I could have that time to pick them up from school and not put them under such pressure. Because it puts children under a lot of pressure to have to go straight from school to care, it's quite exhausting.

However, when managers go part-time, the work is not always set at part-time levels; instead part-time managers can avoid long hours. However, what Sonya gets when she goes part-time – apart from a halving of salary – is some protection from long hours. She believes that her new job is really work for a full-time position As a result home becomes work:

I'm actually doing a full-time job... and I'm conscious of that and I don't want to impact on my team by them having to pick up the workload when I'm not here, even though to a certain extent they are very obliging about it... But there are things I will do at home. I do have a home computer, with the work network so I will log on and do my e-mails and catch up on a few briefs etc but not to a great extent. I am very careful now, not to do that anymore.

Now that Sonya is being paid to work part-time, her partner wants to see her stick to those hours. He knows from his own experience as he has worked part-time himself, and found that even though he was only working a 4 day week ‘in practice no one ever said “Ok you’ve got a reduced workload”... It was sort of like you’ve got to work out how to deal with your workload within those 4 days’. Gerard was still dealing with the same workload. He said that everyone he knows that has worked part-time has complained that the workload just intensifies, rather than actually being reduced? ‘You have to put up with that because you are getting something that you want’. Observing his partner, he concedes that she will work extra unpaid hours ‘for her own peace of mind’.

This problem extends to those who might try to go to a 9-day fortnight: Leena has seriously considered working part-time or a 9-day fortnight but realised ‘I would be kidding myself. I would be putting in the hours just to get the day off. Rather than a managed process of working a 9-day fortnight.’ Like those who go part-time when swimming in a culture of long hours – one that workers have themselves internalised – it is very difficult to actually work less.

The Family Tag: the ‘mummy’ track, the ‘daddy’ track

Sonya describes her feeling of being ‘compartmentalised’ for having cut back her hours, and the need to go back to long hours to get her career ‘back on track’:

Having gone part-time, made the statement ... that I couldn't keep working that way, that now it's like I'm in a certain compartment. ... But there is certainly a change towards me ... 'she's focused on her family and not her career' ... I'm aware that if I wanted to get my career back on track I'd have to go full-time again. There's absolutely no way around that.

Interestingly, she understands this attitude and believes she would probably have a similar one herself, as someone who goes part-time has basically stated that their family is their main preoccupation. Gerard (Sonya’s partner who also works in the public sector but at a less senior level and with access to flexitime arrangements) has a very similar assessment of the price he has paid for being ‘family’ or taking the ‘daddy track’:

I have had bosses say to me 'You're a family person'. I've got a tag, yeah. It certainly affects me. When I was thinking of applying for an overseas posting the Branch Head said to me 'Well you know you couldn't be a family person like you are now'.

Gerard believes that the ‘family tag’ has negative connotations:

It's tolerated because I mean, we do have family policies and things like that in our certified agreement. ... I think if I decided now that I did want to get a promotion or go for a posting or anything like that, I'd have to put in some serious time trying to reverse my image.

Gerard believes that there is a culture of long hours in his department and that 'it is more important to be seen at your desk at 5.30-6-6.30pm than to be there early in the morning'.

Bob, now a senior officer in his department describes his experience of flirting with part-time work and the 'dangers' he felt it posed in terms of organisational perception that he thus might become one of the 'stuck' employees, rather than a winner. The father of young children and partner of another senior officer, he was playing with the idea of becoming part-time and then:

I got an offer for a job – and so that really forced the question about would I go to a full-time job or could I go part-time? When I went for the initial discussion and when they described it as a full-time job I said, 'Look, I'm not entirely certain about this and I'd be quite interested in balancing things – [maybe] dropping down a level and going virtually part-time'. And it was very interesting. It was as if it didn't compute, they just brushed it aside and they said 'Ah... well yes... OK' and ploughed on with the description of this full-time position... It put me in a fairly difficult position where there was a sense that I needed to be actually very, very delicate and discrete if I was going to keep open the option of this full-time - but also potentially a part-time position. I ended up winning the position and saying would they be interested in taking me on as a part-time [equivalent] and the reaction was very cool, very cool and – well, first of all there was a sense of confusion about well 'why would you want to do that?' it got them thinking it was a very strange option to take.

In the end Bob decided not to pursue part-time work because of the reaction it created. This confirmed Bob's belief that people who move 'downward' or go part-time are perceived negatively:

I think that anyone who thinks of dropping a level...there's a sense of danger about them, a sense of question marks about their competency...There's a culture of people move up – so there's people who move up or there are people who are stuck where they are, and that can have implications – sometimes a bad thing. But the idea of someone going down [sends] alarm bells.

He also felt as a manager that being part-time created constraints upon managers who could not simply expect employees to work through til a job was done: it created exit points in terms of hours, which is of course the basis of its attraction to people like Sonya. Certainly at management level it was seen as not possible to work part-time in almost all cases, and any sign of a limitation on time commitment was read as a bad sign. This difficulty creates a barrier for couples like Bob and Abby, where either or both would like to work less hours, but neither feels they can do good rewarding jobs that maintain seniority and come with family-friendly conditions.

It's hard to be family friendly when your job needs more

When Sonya had first started her full-time position several years ago, she took on the position on the basis of flexible hours so that she could pick her kids up from school, so they didn't have to go to after-school care as often. She did this for a while but felt so stressed because the workload was very large. She ended up coming into work around 7-7.30am because of her early finishing times. So she reverted back to normal working times. But the encroachment of longer and longer hours had made it unsustainable:

I've always been a firm believer... that we should have a life and your family deserves a life too but it just became gradually harder to do that.

The impact of long hours on those without children: 'I'm doing yours!'

The effect of conflict between long hours and family extends beyond those in conventional families. Certainly the conflict affects those looking after elderly relatives like Leena. But Leena, a single woman without children, observed that she sometimes felt under pressure to do the work that those with families to go home to, were excused from:

I think that some of our management are very good and strong on 'oh well he or she has a family so that's fine'. [For me, without children] I wrestle with that in terms of, is it my perception [that I'm being asked to do more]? ...But I think there is sort of a subtle expectation because often it is directed at those of us who don't have children or family ... we're the ones that are relied on.

'Fitting in' around long hours partners

In many cases through this study the female partners of long hours workers fit in around their work patterns. Their own decisions, control over time and personal autonomy become subservient to their partners. In many cases this reinforces and cements women's traditional dependence on men. However, there were exceptions to this gender pattern with some male partners of long hours workers facing the same 'fitting in' constraint.

For example, Gerard reports the relationship of his work with Sonya's:

When I returned to work in 1999 I was thinking at the time that I wanted to make an impact into the new area of work and, you know, maybe go for a promotion. But I quickly abandoned that because Sonya was working such long hours, that really, it had to be me when the kids were sick or when she couldn't get away from work.

Mary is not sure she would have married Paul if she had known what his long hours meant for her:

It restricts me a lot. It certainly is a big ask and it certainly has curtailed my activities and my life in a big way...He gets a lot out of the job. He loves it. He gets a high out of it. But I think a lot of the things he does at work, suffer because of the long hours they work, the sickness is higher, they aren't eating properly He certainly enjoys his work. He is getting his interaction at work. But when you are at home, you don't have that

interaction, you don't get stimulation...the wife and children stay at home. He gets the buzz, but you get to cope.

Long hours are part of being a manager

Public service managers feel that being a manager means doing more.

If you are in a management job there has to be some acceptance about the level of extra responsibility and the fact that you do need to be across things a bit more. You just can't walk out 5 o'clock and you know that when you go into that sort of job. (Sonya)

These managers also feel responsible for the workload and pressure placed on their staff:

I think that sort of adds to your pressure as a manager, you know your team is doing it – staying back and working hard. So you don't delegate as much as you would because you don't want to put more pressure on them, so you keep that back your self.

The culture of long hours: a badge of honor

A culture of long hours is pervasive in the public service: as one put it 'it almost becomes the norm':

There is an expectation [from management], that other people, if they're not doing the same sort of hours then they aren't putting in. There is no awareness anymore of having a standard working week as it was. ... I've had comments made to me about my staff - and I say they are very good and they've been working hard - but [more senior managers] say 'Oh but I don't see them after hours, when I leave at 7.30pm they're not there' ...So it just becomes entrenched. And yet if you challenged them on it they be like 'oh no no no'. (Sonya)

In this workplace, long hours are 'worn like a badge of honor...if you leave before 6-6.30pm, well, really you've gone early'. (Leena)

The long hours culture was intrinsic – indeed essential – to getting on:

[Senior people] they don't know what sort of hours people on the ground are doing. But they are doing them themselves so they would probably think - it's just what has to be done. But these [senior people] are people who have made career choices - whether they have families or not, they've obviously made choices about how they are going to deal with their career versus their family...The expectation – subtle, probably unstated and if challenged they'd deny it – but I think it just becomes expected that you have to make the same sort of sacrifices if you're going to get on ... you're naive if you expect anything else. (Sonya)

Public service workers would prefer to be judged on 'the quality of their work' as one put it, rather than their acquiescence within a culture of excessive hours.

These pervasive cultures were widely recognised as forcing many who work long hours to make a choice against having a family:

If you look at the profile of a lot of people in senior management, they've made sacrifices along the way, they either don't have a family or either a partner in some instances and if they have had a family then they've left a lot the burden of caring for the family on their partner. (Sonya)

Others they felt were choosing not only against family – but against *life*:

If you look around, you do see that people have made a choice between work and life, not necessarily work and family. (Sonya)

When such a culture takes hold, what managers said in terms of containing work hours, meant little against what they did, and what was expected in unwritten codes. For example, Leena's management sends mixed messages about working hours:

*Our management will say 'we don't expect you to put in 12 hours days' ...Having said that there are other occasions when somebody has gone at 5 o'clock or half past 5:
'Well, where are they?!' So there are mixed messages and I think the reality is that we are expected to put in these hours. We're given PCs at home. I was told I had to have one.*

Not surprisingly, Leena has found like many other interviewees, that having a computer at home has increased her hours.

Bob referred directly to the long hours, high commitment culture:

Yeah that's right, it's a kind of culture. It's culture but the expectations are generally sent by people who - by either men who have families but who have a partner who does the majority of caring or, very commonly actually - increasingly common, by women who are childless and who are highly focused. It's not always the case - the last two Division Heads had children and they also gave 110% - but it's common.

Productivity

Abby comments that her long hours, and the hours she perceives around her, affect productivity ('I do...my job better if I'm not exhausted'), but that the potential benefits of arrangement like job sharing that might bring more alert, fresher people into the workplace, are not recognised. Indeed they are resisted:

Because everyone else is equally rooted in...a person being around...not frivolously off having a life 2 days a week or something. Even if in the end if you actually brought more to the workplace... I mean one of the biggest problems is that you never have enough time to really know the issues properly so you're skating along all the time, very reliant on people who do know the issues better. ... But you know you just want more time, and the only time you can do that is in your own time basically.

Pat also pointed to productivity outcomes of long hours:

When you've worked overtime for 3 months sickies treble. Easily. People are not as thorough as they would normally be...They make mistakes...You miss obvious steps, get frustrated.

Abe felt that he tended to be more abrupt with co-workers when he was working long hours 'Good relationships in the workplace save a lot of time in the long run'. He finds that the workers he supervises in contract management make mistakes when they are tired, 'and the consequences can be quite big'. He also points to a loss of creativity and difficulties setting priorities as workers get tired from working long stints of long hours:

You tend to adopt a hard more cynical approach to work and you spend a lot of time actually fending off work rather than getting work done. That's a survival mechanism in my view.

Interviewer: so there are sort of protective behaviours amongst those overworked workers?

Yes, protective of themselves. So as a manager of people working long hours it becomes really difficult when you want to promote creativity in the work environment or you want to grab a few people off line for a few days – 'go and look at this issue and come back and tell me about it', and it's really hard to do that...Therefore they are reluctant to participate because they are too busy protecting themselves, or they don't see doing something new or creative of value to them. What is of value to them is what they do on a daily basis.

Also people who do long hours also often have difficulty in prioritising because they are a bit tired and because they have a large number of things that they need to do and they can't see the wood for the trees.

Keeping up long hours: the boiled frog syndrome

Regimes of over 50-60 hours a week for couples with small children strike many as unworkable, but Abby describes the way in which families become acclimatised to discomfort:

It's what we like to refer to as the "boiled frog syndrome", which is you put a frog in cold water and gradually heat it up. It doesn't know it's being boiled but if you throw a frog into boiling hot water it tries to jump out. It's the idea that over time it's getting hotter and hotter but you know, it's happening gradually enough that you're not, in a sense, you become habituated to working long hours – spending part of every weekend at work – so that other people who don't work that think 'Urg! How could you do that?!' because if they were to have to jump right into that situation it would be unpleasant and... you can tell... you can feel the stresses and strains but, yeah, but what we do is accommodate them rather than try and do something about them. But I guess what we've been trying to do in the last little while is to be conscious of them trying to, you know... be honest about them.

Of course the frog is, in the end, boiled either way, and Abby points out that accommodation to long hours does not eradicate discomfort about them. She and her partner, Bob, describe a range of personal and family effects of their combined hours at senior levels. Bob discusses his cumulative tiredness, and their joint decisions to give up anything ‘that is not compulsory’ such as friends and exercise, which they just let go in intensive work periods. ‘We sort of use the weekends to recover and it is actually enough to keep our lives going’. For Bob who works very intensively in some periods of the year ‘the current short term effects [of those intensive periods] are... things like I wake up at 4.30 or 5 o’clock – it makes me quite tired at nights and you just sort of feel the stress increasing. But the longer term effects actually when... the hours aren’t so bad and you just settle into a rhythm of things, gradually you forget what – what’s involved in that and forget the trade-offs that you make’. Even if he is not in an extreme period, however, Bob’s hours remain very long on average.

What would help

The case of public service and long hours, and the cultural norms in these workplaces in the presence of fairly strong family friendly policies and certified agreements that specify the terms and hours of employment raises important challenges to the task of hours reduction. Clearly, hours need to be reduced to break the increasingly entrenched model of ‘long hours good worker’ model, and to create more family friendly workplaces. Many of these workers felt that general statements about ‘reasonable hours’ would deliver little in a climate of externalised and internalised long hours expectations – where even another worker could be found to step into the long hours. Even extra leave would be problematic in these environments, several felt. Sonya reflected on her periods of frenzied work, and others made similar points:

I don't know that I would have used [extra leave]. At the time I was caught up in a frenzied work area and realised if I had just said 'That's enough I can't do it' then that's it - I would have been cast aside, someone else would have stepped into the role, I just would have been relegated to history [laughs]. So in the interest of doing that job and getting the satisfaction - I guess - out of it, I was prepared to do that.

The key ingredient in the minds of many was the insistence on its enforcement – and the extra staff needed to get the job done. Where would pressure for this arise from?

If this was enshrined in our award or agreement I think there would have to be a general insistence on applying it and that would be from employees themselves. ... People would have to be made aware of it and supported in insisting that they can access it. So managers would have to get out there and say 'we know that it's there and this is why we put it in and we recognize that there's problems and we are prepared to stick with it and encourage employees to avail themselves of it.'

People would also need confidence that they would not be victimised for adhering to new standards: ‘It’s also a matter of confidence on the part of the employee to say:

'Well I think that I'm a valued enough employee that if I stand up for my rights and I'm going to take this then it won't be held against me'. But there is a little chink of doubt in

my mind - that yes it will be held against you somewhere along the line. You're talking about a fundamental shift in management culture. (Sonya)

This case suggests that new enforced statutory standards may be necessary to break the culture and entrenched management practice of reliance upon unpaid extra effort. As Gerard put it:

I'd just make the general observation that superficially most public service departments now have certified agreements that you would think gave you good rights to part-time work and family friendly sort of policies. But it still indicates that access is still regarded as a privilege rather than a right. We're made to feel that it's a privilege.

Abe agreed:

We need more than motherhood statements. It's got to be translated into something that's real. Specific arrangements to compensate for travel hours, for example. It's got to be specific otherwise it just doesn't translate into the reality of the workplace environment. Because at the end of the day, people are really committed to what they do. They want to get the job done. So you have to write it into specifics and change the culture of the team.

As the supervisor of a group of technically skilled workers on a 24 shift roster working long hours in the context of an agreement, Paul sees the need for strong statutory standards:

I need rules that as a supervisor I'm not allowed to break – so that we can put a break on things. It needs to be powerful and specific. Otherwise people just get around things, and there is no break on things.

Abby and Bob pointed to the certified agreements in their workplaces, where senior officers get a day a month in recognition that they work longer than standard hours:

I am not sure that very many people take it actually. I'm not even sure that a number of them know about it. I didn't know about it but now I'll take it from time to time...I think it comes back to a bit of a cultural thing. It's a bit of a thing about attitudes to work and demonstration of commitment and I don't even mean that in a particularly heroic sort of a way. But it's that you get to a certain level where you get a bit or you are supposed to sort of... 'T'll stay til I get things done'...But I have to say, as well, that in an employee survey that was done in our [workplace], it was the senior officers who were very unhappy with their hours they would do at work and it is something that they are trying to address. (Abby)

CHAPTER 10 Technicians in research facilities

We interviewed two specialist maintenance technicians in a 24-hour research facility, and one of their partners. Technicians with specialist maintenance skills in research facilities experienced sporadic extended periods of long hours of around 12 hours a day averaged over three months – for example when extended maintenance and equipment upgrades are underway. Their hours at work are frequently combined with travel of about an hour to and from work, with pickups of co-workers along the way, so that their days are frequently extended. In combination with unpredictable work over a 24 hour cycle and extended call ins to solve technical problems when things go wrong or special exercises are underway, this results in unreasonable hours for long stints in most years for such workers.

For example, a normal day for one worker involves leaving home at 7.15am and getting to work at 8am (including the pick-up of co-workers). He gets home at about 5.20pm. When driving home:

A lot of the time you can be pretty well had it, especially when you've been into the 12 hour shift cycle for a reasonable amount of time... Obviously your reactions are so much slower and it is definitely a potential hazard. (Casey).

The workplace is staffed 24 hours a day and there are shift workers who work 12-hour shifts. Casey has worked 24 hours in a row before, which made him feel:

pretty well stuffed. We're pseudo shift workers, I suppose. They turn us into shift workers when there are big jobs on. That is likely to happen more and more actually. ... The maintenance time is becoming less and less during daylight hours.

Casey will have to work weekends quite regularly in the near future, 'I'm not really impressed about it'. Casey appreciates the money he receives from overtime. However, he would also like some more time with his family, 'lots of times we have been called away from barbecues and football games'. He has a mobile phone that is not part of the job, but management use it to call him out to work: 'they certainly do rely on people's professionalism to support their equipment and they get that support without having to pay for it'. Casey puts this down to the importance of their jobs and workers' dedication.

Like those of many others working long hours, their wives worry. Increasingly, maintenance is done at any time in a 24-hour cycle, so that Casey describes himself as 'a pseudo shift worker'. A shortage of skilled workers and general staffing problems mean that his hours of work are becoming more demanding.

For example, Casey has found that his workload has become larger and more varied, due to fewer people in specialised jobs, which Casey and his colleagues now have to do themselves. For example, they no longer have a diesel fitter and several of the trades assistants have been retrenched. Before, part of the trade assistant's job was to carry the equipment around the facility; Casey now has to do this himself, 'by the time you get your gear up there, you're pretty well stuffed and so then you've got to do your job too'. Casey spends a lot of time working considerable heights above ground.

Casey attributes the long hours to the peak demand times when they don't have enough staff: 'It's only for the expertise that we have here, that we are able to keep up'. In common with many other sectors where long hours have grown, he considers a loss of expertise to be a potential problem, especially in relation to staffing levels.

Technicians: the price of professionalism

There appears to be some tension between the workers' dedication to the job and their own - and their partners' - resentment of the hours they are sometimes expected to work. There was a sense among these workers that they have an important job, which requires dedication and a 'professional' attitude to the hours that were asked of them.

Con attributed his hours to the fact that he thought he had a good work ethic and that he liked his job (even though he found management frustrating at times).

You want to get the job done. ... You're given a deadline and you'd like to think you can perform to that deadline... And you do get paid overtime rates for your trouble. Basically, you've got pride in your work and you want to make sure the job is done properly.

Con seems to get quite a bit of satisfaction from his job, as there is always something new to deal with, 'the nature of the work I find interesting'. However, Con said that he is now doing what were 3 person's jobs 10 years ago.

Both technicians talked about the value of the extra earnings with some households tending toward dependence on the overtime earnings for the weekly budget, and others attempting to see it 'as an extra'. One employee says he doesn't "hang out" for overtime because he doesn't budget around it, but he does enjoy the extra income 'I don't go out looking for it, but if it is there I'll take it'.

The effect on individual technicians

Although Con feels that he doesn't get stressed, he does find that work is always on his mind.

You think about it. When you wake up in the morning your alarm goes off and, bang, straight away you think 'What's happening today?' ... [I am] switched on as soon the alarm goes off. It shouldn't be.

When he gets phoned up in the middle of the night about a problem at work, he will suggest a way to fix the problem, 'and then you lie in bed for 2 hours thinking "I wonder if that worked?" ... You don't sort of wind down from when they ring you up ... You're back on the job when you're at home'. Con gets an hour's pay when he is phoned (although he gets the same amount if it is more than one phone call in the same hour).

The effect on couple relationships

Con sometimes gets calls at 2am in the morning and it causes strain at home:

Maggie hates it. On one occasion we had friends and everyone was having a good time with a few wines and then the phone rings, it's about midnight and I've got to take the call and that sort of kills the mood... party's over.

He feels it affects his wife: 'I think it impacts my wife because I come here to work and then she's got to run the kids around'. Con usually does the cooking at home, so when he is working overtime Maggie has to take over that 'as well as whatever she does'. Maggie works 2 part-time jobs, 5 days a week but 'It's not as bad now, the kids are getting older they can look after themselves. When they were a little bit smaller, we'd have to get babysitters in. It's not as much as a problem now, as it was.'

However, Con thinks that his work sometimes affects his marriage 'when you're tired, you just come home and flop. ... I wasn't aware of it but Maggie says I'm a bit of a grump if I've done a night'. Maggie finds the extended periods of long shifts and the weekend shifts the hardest and that they affect his moods and her tiredness as well. She thinks it takes a lot of adjusting, for both Con and herself, to the nightshifts. When Con works back late at night, Maggie won't be able to sleep until he gets home; she often lies awake worrying about Con driving home at night on the country roads.

Casey thinks that his long work hours definitely does put a lot of strain on his relationship with his wife:

She resents a lot of it, there's no two ways about that and rightly so too. I'm not there to help out with all the domestic chores and duties and all of that sort of thing a lot of the time... By the time I get home, I basically have something to eat and go to bed and then I'm up again in the morning before everyone else and gone to work. Yeah that gets tiresome on the relationship.

Casey doesn't want to put up with this situation for an indefinite amount of time and will start looking for another job.

The effects on children-parent relationships, and on children

Casey finds the physical aspect of his job rather a strain:

We have to climb to the tops of the machines all the time. ... It bugs you, there's no two ways about that. It certainly wears you out. So when you have to get out of bed when the alarm clock goes off you find it pretty difficult.

This impacts on his family life, because it affects his energy and his capacity to get to events for his children, though he felt his kids 'understood', they 'get dirty' about it:

I certainly don't have as much energy now to run around with the kids and kick a football... that side of it definitely does annoy me.

The nine year old certainly gets upset when I'm not there to watch his football... a lot of the time when we are doing jobs I'll go to work before they're awake and I'll come home after they're in bed ... they do get dirty about it yep... There's a fair bit of

explanation required that I've got to do these things. But I guess predominately they understand it too. Kids are very adaptable things.

In terms of Con's work impacting on his children, he says:

Some days you don't see them.... I haven't really, sort of, taken into much consideration how they feel about it. If they are doing something important then you think 'Ah geeze you missed that'. A routine school day - it's nice to sit down with them and say 'What did you at school today...' So you miss out on that.

He feels bad when he misses out on the 'big things' such as a sports carnival or a school performance. But basically he considers that there is nothing much he can do about it.

Con coaches his son's cricket team – when he can: 'On a couple of occasions... it's a mad ring around to tell the team not to come to practice because I've got to work'.

Being on call was a major issue for Con:

Basically, if you have the weekend off and you're sitting there happily having a beer or a barbecue or whatever and then all of a sudden the phone rings and your weekend is basically stuffed.

The children are very aware when Con is working long hours and they ask after him. Maggie said that they rely on him for things like homework, so when he does come home, they inundate him when they do see him and she thinks that Con finds this a bit annoying, especially after a long shift.

Maggie believes that the children end up being dependent on the parent who is around. If the kids want to do something on the weekend she has to do it with them and if it is the oldest child that wants to go somewhere, they all have to go, 'I'm the only one to take them here, there and everywhere'.

If Con didn't work weekends or long periods of overtime, things would be different for Maggie and the children because they would have the flexibility of having two parents available to do things. Maggie considers the other main difference would be that Con wouldn't suffer from tiredness.

What is 'reasonable overtime'?

At the moment the Award Casey is covered by states that the employer can require the worker to work 'reasonable overtime', but he suggests that this is too vague: 'But what actually constitutes reasonable overtime?' Casey considers 2 hours of overtime each day to be reasonable – but 8 hours in a normal day plus 2 hours overtime and 2 hours travel time, means a 12-hour work day for him.

Casey thinks that traveling time should be included in the definition of 'reasonable hours':

Certainly in our job I believe traveling time is a major component of it because, as I say, we are a remote locality, we're out of town, we pick up other members [of staff] and we are under the direction of the company, whether they want to admit that or not. They don't like to admit that because they don't want to pay us.

Casey believes not specifying exactly how many hours are unreasonable gives employers an opportunity to make the definition of 'unreasonable' hours of work:

a cloudy issue. One minute they can say 2 hours is reasonable and the next they can say 2 days overtime,... working weekends is quite reasonable. So what actually does constitute 'reasonable'?...It is a hard question but yeah I guess 2 hours a day overtime is reasonable... 10 hours overtime a week.

Casey would like to see a specific limit in awards:

I think we owe it to our kids to try and get these things into the Awards now so that workers aren't completely manipulated by the employers. I think it is reasonable to expect those sort of arrangements in our society today.

What would help?

In their new agreement, which is yet to be ratified, they have bargained for a 9-day fortnight. Casey is 'looking forward to that'. He considers the extra day off would be a 'huge bonus'. It will be on trial for the first 3 months, as management are concerned about the effects on staffing levels. Con is planning to play golf on his day off, as well as 'be there' for his kids in any school activities, such as watching them participate in sport carnivals. Con currently gets to play golf about twice a month. If Con got the 9-day fortnight he would consider his hours to be fairly ideal. 'I'd have more opportunity to see the kids doing what they do best'.

CHAPTER 11 Paramedics: long shifts, night work and unexpected shift extensions

We interviewed 7 paramedics and four partners. Three households had young children in residence while two had older children who had left home, one had his children to visit and one was a single person living alone.

Paramedic's duties include the treatment of highly complex medical situations, under emergency conditions. Frequently paramedics are working under very high pressure at the roadside and exercising high levels of clinical judgment in time critical and life threatening emergencies. They must often perform complex clinical procedures under very difficult circumstances. They frequently must drive at high speeds under emergency conditions. They are the first line of contact for dying and severely injured people, and administer complex drugs under emergency conditions. This work requires a high level of mental alertness and physical and mental function.

Paramedics work long hours, in shift rosters that include long shifts in each roster cycle (up to 14 hours paid, with some unpaid time quite regularly). Their working time was characterised by intermittent demands that were not predictable and frequently resulted in very long hours. As a result most reported difficulty keeping well rested and well fed. Several described unsafe or dangerous practices or events as a result of being either tired, hungry or both. Paramedics appear to love their jobs and find many rewards in helping people. However, changes in work organisation in recent years have intensified work in many locations, with non-emergency care contracted out in some locations, and a heavy load of high need emergency calls. This was especially the case in metropolitan settings, but other issues affected country paramedics including long drives near the end of long shifts that were not always safe.

The unreasonable aspect of paramedics hours lay especially in the unexpected extension of their shifts. These occurred when new calls came near the end of shifts and prolonged working time for several hours fairly regularly. Extra 'incidental overtime' of this kind was a regular occurrence. Amanda, for example, estimated that this happened approximately 50 per cent of the time. Lucy who had two young children and 'absolutely loves' her job, found that incidental overtime 'can make the shifts extremely long and make you emotionally tired'.

This incidental extra and unpredictable overtime occurs against the background of long shifts with intense work, the lack of regular predictable food breaks, and portions of unpaid hours (that occurred when coming into the workplace early for shifts to allow the previous shift to get home). Workers attempt to limit the unpredicted extension at the end of shifts by coming into work and taking over from the previous shift a little early, but even with this if a call is half an hour before the end of a shift, they could be working 12 hours instead of 10 and still turning up to work at the scheduled time the next day. Several worksites observed a gentleman's agreement to come in early to protect the previous shift from late call outs:

It's just courtesy, a gentlemen's agreement. It's been there for years. Most good branches do it. I'll get to work tonight at a quarter to five, 20 to five, and if they're

there they can go home, and same in the morning. Tend to turn up 20 to 7, some turn up earlier, it's just something you do.

Several paramedics and their partners mentioned the stressful nature of their jobs and the effects of difficult emergency call outs on their recovery time. The problems resulting from these issues included:

- Low blood sugar levels
- Poor decision making at emergencies
- Fatigue
- Falling asleep while driving the ambulance
- Bad moods while at work.

The workers saw a close link between their hours of work, their unexpected extension at the end of shifts, and its shift work nature. This combination is what primarily dictates their social life and family life arrangements, and affects their moods. They also have little flexibility in their shifts. Ambulance paramedics showed a high level of commitment to their work and to providing quality service. Several were engaged in ongoing education activities, while others were involved in unpaid public events including fundraising and education. Team managers particularly put in extra unpaid hours. One pointed to the 'love of the job' as an important contributor to their hours in his description of the previous night's work which had included a resuscitation attempt:

We were the least paid people in that whole room. Everyone else was being paid more than us per hour. [physician, senior nursing staff, theatre nursing staff]... and here we are doing the work, doing the thinking. We're held responsible. Yet we're being paid the least out of the lot. And that's where it comes down, it is the job. We enjoy what we do...It's great, stimulating work. To be thinking on your feet like that...It's stressful, but that's the adrenalin buzz. [Management] know that they've got us. (Andrew)

Some interviewees also undertook supervisory duties, or conducted training or led teams. These interviewees tended to also take work home and complete it in unpaid time. As Andy, a team manager, described:

Like last night we did a job at a quarter past 4 which didn't knock us off until 6 o'clock when we were supposed to knock off at 5. I've got some paperwork I've got to do which I'm in the throws of doing now on my day off, before I go to work. On a semi-regular basis I do certain things at home that if I had more time in the office I could do them at my work.

He accepts that the work has to be done: 'It's a case where the job's got to be done so you do it. I don't think about it in any other light. There's no point harping on these things sometimes otherwise you just get bogged down with it. So just do it and get on with it.'

Current Hours: a typical pattern

Generally a 41-2 hour week is rostered over an 8 week cycle. This cycle includes shifts of:

- For the first 4 days – 2 x 10 hour days, a 14 hour night followed by a 7 hour night, 4 days off; do same shifts again;
- then 5 days on, 3 days off, 3 x 10 hour days, 14 hour night and a 7 hour night;
- 2 x 10 hour day, 2 x 14 hour nights and 1 x 7 hour night; and
- 2 x 10 hour day, 1 x 14 hour night and 2 x 7 hour night.

Of course, unexpected extensions of shift through late call-outs extend these hours unpredictably.

The effect on the individual

In some weeks paramedics were working 55 hours and in some weeks less.

The tendency for shift to lengthen with late call outs is a hazard that several mention:

You could turn that [12 hour shift worked in another system] into a 13-hour day easily, like we turn our 10-hour days into 11-hour days and our 14-hour nights into 15-hour nights. And driving around at 4 o'clock in the morning after you've worked all those hours... it can't be safe and I'm amazed more people don't crash into poles.

Amanda describes the effects of exhaustion on her:

In the 8 week cycle there's only one lot of two 14-hour night shifts followed by a half night and that's the most revolting period I find. Because you've got 10 or 8 hours in between two 14 hour nights. So you're just delirious. If you have two busy nights where you don't get any sleep you have to go back for another 7 hours and that's 3 or 4 days where you're out of action completely. It's like being out of society.

While these shift workers enjoyed having time off when others were at work they also found their exhaustion affected them at work:

Say it's your second night and it's 4 or 5 am and you didn't get any sleep on your first night, and you've come home the next day and you didn't get any sleep - people banging next door or something - you don't sleep properly. So then, I don't know. I feel like I've hit a brick wall and I can't possibly [go on], it's almost dangerous to get in the car and drive. You're dizzy, hungry, and - I don't know why - your decision-making skills are at that point... Everybody agrees that at 6.30 in morning you'd like to tell the public not to get sick. [laugh] Because say you've just had 2 hours sleep... There have been times when I've been woken up and had a job at 6.30 in the morning and thought 'I can't, how can I possibly do it?' But you just go. (Amanda)

Adam describes the fatigue he observes and experiences. He knows the people in his branch very well:

Especially in our branch because we've got over a decade of being together really. We've got a really good core that's been together for a long time and so we've been single, and had the kids all together, and done all that and we've watched everyone. So you do see the effects because you know you're all going through the same thing. Somebody might come in and they didn't get any sleep. They've been fighting with their wife or their kids are sick...so you're constantly seeing, whoever's on the couch with you, through that shift, you can see the effects all right. There's not many times when someone looks fresh and says, 'I feel great. I got a real good sleep', because life gets in the way, doesn't it? People always knock on the door... So sometimes people can be virtually unconscious between every job. Some people fall asleep at the traffic lights. Some people you can't wake up. And while you've got your fitness and you're relatively young you can just push on like that for a long time and because of the family thing and life being busy, it's hard to get that big recovery sleep. It doesn't happen very often.

While Adam likes being around at home more, he finds the tiredness affects his moods, and these in turn affect his family:

You're around a lot more. It's just some times you might be around physically, but you're not around mentally. 'Cause when you're getting up at a different time all the time, you're in different rhythms to people around you. [They say to me] 'What are you so grumpy for? You just got out of bed?'

He describes how on holidays he is 'a new person'.

Andrew works with a mobile intensive care unit that assists other units and finds that exhaustion is a serious problem:

We are chasing our tails all day. And you can get in the car and we can do 3-400 kilometres in day just going from job to job to job...and a lot of our time, being a critical care unit, we're responding with lights and sirens. So just the stress load and driving conditions as a metropolitan ambulance, doing that for 10 to 14 hours, going from job to job, emergency driving - these days no one giving way - you're absolutely exhausted, because you're just exhausted because you're not stopping... even though we're not seeing a patient a lot of the time.

He feels that being hungry and tired probably affects decisions and 'it can be a bit much'.

Emotional recovery

Several mentioned that the work could be emotionally taxing, and that this – in combination with very long hours and shift extensions - contributed to recovery times also:

You've got to deal with all sorts of emergencies. [gives some examples]. You've got to deal with the families. That's emotional for me. Dealing with kids. Seeing kids..in that

situation. There's all that sort of stuff that you've got to switch off... You think about them a good hour after the end of the job... (Lucy)

Lucy's partner describes what he sees as the effects of long hours – and extensions to the end of ordinary shifts - on Lucy's ability to cope with emotionally upsetting events:

I really honestly think...when you're doing a 14-hour night shift and some of the jobs you do are quite upsetting - I think it can take its toll emotionally. I've seen Lucy come home some nights, or some mornings, and I've stayed home, I haven't gone to work because she's just too upset. Because I think you get to that fatigue, tired stage and then you start becoming emotionally upset. Now if you get to that stage earlier in the night because you're tired through shift work and you make an emotional decision, well it could be detrimental to someone's life or health... She did a job where [describes horrific accident involving children]. And that was overtime after night shift and she didn't get home til nearly 11 o'clock that day... She came home an emotional wreck. Now I don't think that anybody should be put through that. I can understand that you're going to come across these situations but if you hadn't already worked already 14 hours flat on your feet, you'd be emotionally stable and able to handle the situation.

Richard describes similar effects and the time it can take to recover:

If I've had a busy shift and we've had a few stressful jobs - a stressful job might be just a very sick child, it may have been, - there's any number of jobs I would consider stressful that other people may not and likewise they may have very stressful situations which I may sort of wade through easily. But you only need a few stressful jobs and you can bring them home and they can be with you for the next few days until you get over them. It's just a matter of how you deal with the stress of the situation. It's a part of my job. We're exposed to stressful situations. I don't think you can get away from it.

Health and safety

Recovery from shift hours is an issue for each of the interviewees: Lucy describes her first day off after two long night shifts as her 'Zombie day'. Others recounted falling asleep on the way home:

Myself and my [work] partner were driving back from the city after doing this long shift. He was so tired he was falling asleep at the wheel. We didn't have an accident. He wasn't exactly driving in a straight line. I volunteered to take over and as soon as I did I regretted it because I was driving, you know - I wasn't asleep - but I was so tired I was having a great deal of difficulty driving. I think that was a danger to both of us. Neither of us were in a fit state to drive a vehicle after what would have been an 18-hour shift...But there was no alternative. We had to get back to the branch to finish and go home and have our rest. (Richard)

Inner city paramedics were especially affected by long intensive shifts with last minute call outs and described how these hours affected their moods, and their decision making capacity.

Richard describes a similar lucky escape:

I remember years ago working in the country. We left [the town] with a patient. It was ... 2 and a half hours to Melbourne, we dropped patient off, jumped back in the car, back up to [the town], got up there, another job to Melbourne. Back down to Melbourne. And this was our second night shift. And driving back I fell asleep at the wheel and we just about ran off the road. Fortunately it was one of those noisy white lines and sort of 'oh, oh,' and back onto the road... You're tired, your eyes hurt. In winter, nighttime driving with the reflection off the road, you do get fatigued driving really quickly.

Ralph who has been in the industry for many years describes the effects on people who work extra overtime shifts:

They don't realise how tired they are getting... I've seen guys work the third night shift...and they'll be getting a cold, the flu and...then calling in sick for their first day on...Some guys try and hold down other jobs as well...and they get so tired they can't function...We've had to swap roles with people too tired to drive...toward the end of a shift. If you're driving back from a long case, you see your partner's nodding off at the wheel, you tend to suggest that they have a break and you'll drive for them or vice versa.... We haven't actually sent anyone home in ages... I had a minor management role within the branch and I had a guy turn up to work with me and he was absolutely shagged and he could not have worked the night to save himself and we sent him home...He was a danger to us and himself.

While extra overtime shifts are not compulsory, in reality, especially in smaller stations some reported considerable pressure to take extra shifts. Staffing shortfalls contribute to this pressure.

Sometimes the shift can be extremely busy and Ralph, like others, describes becoming tired and hungry if they haven't had a break:

When you do have a break you can get something really quickly and that is unhealthy, something at a service station.

Long hours in an emergency clinical setting hold particular dangers. Ralph finds that at the end of a shift 'you have to be extremely careful of what you are doing' and he feels that fatigue contributed to his being pierced by a used needle that had entered a patient's skin. Both he and his partner were 12 hours into a 14-hour shift and fatigue affected them 'especially lack of concentration, easily distracted, not following procedures that we follow all the time'.

Meal breaks: A window of opportunity?

Meal breaks were an issue for all paramedics:

We have a huge problem with getting meal breaks and getting your food. You'll have one mouthful and then have to go and then come back and eat again... Because the work's erratic, you can't have a set meal break obviously. They have what's called 'a window of opportunity'.

Paramedics were expected to eat in 'their window of opportunity'. Unfortunately this window was sometimes late to arrive and several described the effects on their bodies and capacities:

All of us get a little bit hypoglycemic and you get a bit dizzy if you haven't eaten... But you know, how effective am I going to be if I haven't eaten and I'm confused myself? I mean people call ambulances because their blood sugar's low [laugh] but we're out there treating them! I just think it's a bit dangerous... I've worked with guys, one guy in particular, who if it was really busy, just got really aggravated and really aggro and would be very aggressive on the road and so that would make me stressed out because he would be screaming at the cars and swearing, and I'd be thinking, 'oh, my god, I'm not going to get to this job alive, we're going to crash'...

Another described similar effects on himself:

The hours roll by... and you just get angry and mad because you're hungry. Because if you've got something in your tummy... personally if I've eaten and I'm satisfied with feeling I've eaten... It's when you can't get the food, or when you get the food and you get interrupted, which happens all the time. You know, you're in a shop trying to order something and [you get a call]. It's just frustrating... Food's something you just grab when you can. That becomes a priority.

The effect on the family

Like others working unreasonable hours, Lucy described how her family, which included two young children fitted in around her:

Well the family sort of works around my roster. Because that's the reason we've had to put them into full-time crèche... My husband takes them on one of my day shifts so they have a reasonably early start, or late finish on those days. But they know that mummy will be home when they come home.

Lucy stays at work longer between her night shifts because when she returned home just before they went to creche at 7.30am, it unsettled them to see her for such a brief period:

We find they are much more unsettled so we've had to work it where I might stay back at work an extra half hour – it sounds mean – so I don't see the kids and it doesn't upset them, so that for a 48 hour period I don't see the kids. And they know that, they know that is daddy's time and they're a lot more settled. They're in that routine... that's how we've managed to get it to work for us. So far. And it's subject to change as they get older.

Lucy describes her long stint away from the children:

He starts work at 7.30am. I finish work at 7.00am. Which means the kids are at crèche from approximately half past 7am til 4.30pm. So if I tried to get home before 7.30am - because we're only a 1 car family - I'd see the kids probably for five minutes and then they're off to crèche. I go to sleep, I've gone to work by 4.30pm which is the time they get home, again we may see each other for five minutes and that's it. Which is pretty

mean on them... I feel so guilty. But I think it's a fact of life that you've got to work... I feel guilty. They feel guilty. Then, when I am home, all they want is mum. Buggar dad...

Lucy and Larry pay full-time childcare fees although on her days at home, she keeps the children with her generally. She describes the sense of time pressure in the household:

Both of us have noticed that we've got less and less time. The kids have the time. And when it comes to our time, like both kids are in bed by at least 8 o'clock. When it comes to our time, I'm just too tired. And all I want to do is curl up and go to sleep. It's an effort if you want to stay up and have a chat, or our time. We try to make it up on the days off... We don't get that quality time together.

You come home and you're just, physically, mentally everything, you're just so exhausted. I've slept all day. With the kids [4 and 3 years] here [laughs]. I've said 'don't talk to me, don't even look at me, I'm going to bed'. They're normal kids making a noise... I've woken up at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and I still feel really tired, really drained, you're not your normal self. You don't want to engage in any conversation. You've got less tolerance of the kids. And it makes it hard on them. They don't understand. Hard on hubby because by the end of the 4 days, he's sick of the kids [laugh]: 'They're yours. I want a break' [laughs] Come 7 o'clock that night, you're ready to go to bed again. And it takes that whole 4 days to recover. Only to start up again.

Larry felt that the effects of shift work and extensions to his shifts along with his long hours overall were exacerbated by his young family situation. Although previously he had worked 12 hour days, he feels more tired now because the children are young and he is up two or three times during the night for them and then organising them at 5.30am so they get to crèche by 7 o' clock:

It's a lot more of a strain looking after the children than working longer hours. 'Cause once I walked out the door that's work for the day. Now I walk out the door... and I've still got three four hours to do when I get home with the children. I take them home. Bath them. Dress them. Repack their clothes for crèche in the bag. Cook tea. Feed them. Wash them.

He felt that Lucy's work had an impact on the children as they missed her:

When Lucy does her 2 night shifts in a row, she goes for 72 hours without seeing the children or myself. They tend to want mum all the time. I mean when mum's not here they're happy with dad. But they miss mum very much as a three year old and four year old would.

It also had an impact on him when she was understandably 'tired and cranky'.

Richard and Diana with young children also felt that his hours gave him time at home with his children, but that there were both positive and negative effects. The longer hours at home are good, but working shift work means that his and the families hours often don't match: 'When

they want to do something, I might be tired after a shift and not want to do it.' He can't be relied upon to be there for a birthday or a particular event because he may be working. This is generally accepted – if not liked – because Richard has always worked shift work.

Looking back on their years at work and with younger children, Ralph and Pauline felt cheated that they had missed out on family activities. The children also noticed his moods in those days; they would laugh that he had PNT (post night syndrome). They had to have someone to look after the children when they were young because Ralph couldn't reliably be home. Now he feels that he misses out on social activities with his wife, especially with the carry-on overtime.

'14 hour shifts are for the young and childless'

A number of interviewees felt that their recovery times from long shifts impinged upon their non-work hours. Andy described how 'People lose one day off or even two before feeling "normal again" ' as they recovered from long shifts.

Adam felt that this effect became pronounced as people got older:

I think 14-hour night shifts are just outrageous. They're for the young and healthy and people without kids...I mean I was like that at the start, you could get a night shift out of the road, go home, get out of bed at 11.30 because you're young and fit and haven't got much on and go to the beach or something... but as time goes on, and you've done shift work for a while, you don't recover and you sleep all day... If you've got a 14-hour night shift you go home, you've got 10 hours between that to sleep and if you get off late, that starts whittling into your time to sleep... I hate it.

Adam stayed with his job because of the people he worked with:

There's no way I would have stayed there for 17 years if I didn't like the people I was working with. That's the key. I mean I'm willing to put up with it because the people I work with are fantastic.

'Tag team parenting'

Andrew and Maureen work opposite shifts:

Basically what we've tried to do, she'll pick up an extra shift... in between my day shifts and night shifts. She normally tries to get an early on my night shifts. So she'll leave the house at 7 o'clock in the morning and be back by 3 o'clock but then she's out by 5. So I don't sleep before my night shift, because we want to spend time together, it's the only way we can work it... And then she'll try and pick up an afternoon maybe on my first day off. That way I'll be able to sleep in the morning and then be right to look after the kids. And then we get two days off together which is what we aim to try and get. But it's tag-team parenting.

They feel that it is important they look after the children. His wife's roster is more flexible whereas his is static: 'We try to look ahead and see what we've got and use her flexibility to

fit in, so that one of us is always at home to look after the kids.' Under this arrangement they 'don't have any social life' and Maureen has not been able to play her netball.

Andrew finds that it is better for him to take up an extra shift than his wife, both for financial reasons and also because he gets in a bad mood after the night shifts and can take it out on the kids:

I tend to get a bit crankier with the kids. And they certainly put up with me. My son, he'll say, 'and what's wrong with you, cranky head?' he'll says sometimes. You know they are coming to understand it, what shift-work is about. And kids education, that's all Monday to Friday... and when they say, 'oh we want the parents to do this or be involved in this' and you say, 'oh no we can't come and do that. We can't come to the kinder weekend because we're working'. A lot of people have no concept of shift work is about, what night shift is about. They sort of like, 'oh, work, you know, it's a weekend'. And also that impacts on the kids 'cause they're saying, 'oh, mum and dad can't do it because they're working, or they're sleeping' and that sometimes is a bit hard to take... emotionally. You feel like you're letting them down. But you've got to work.

The effect on relationships

Amanda and Adam found that their hours impinged on their new relationship (both work as paramedics). Amanda found it difficult to develop her relationship because he worked opposite shifts, so they had little time together.

There's days on end where we just don't [see each other]. And he's got kids and he sees them. So it's a nightmare. If we were both on 9 to 5 it would be a lot easier.

Social life

Adam finds that his hours mean that he cannot play cricket. Diana cannot plan around Richard's hours so she has given up tennis, and find any routine difficult to maintain.

However, Lucy and Larry use a fitness activity as family time:

I had patient who went berserk in the back of the ambulance with me, in a confined space. And they're very strong and so I joined a martial arts club... And hubby joined it with me. So that's our time together... It keeps me fit for work. It relieves his anxiety because he knows at least if someone goes nuts at you, I've got some knowledge of self-defence, so I can defend myself long enough to run away... And our little fellow is interested in it too, so we make it a family thing. And when I'm not on the night shift, we'll go down and we spend about 2 hours together as a family and train, so it's great. (Lucy)

CHAPTER 12 Miners: long hours shifts

We interviewed five male miners and their female partners. These miners work in an open cut mine in a single town. They each drive large machines, generally on 12-hour shifts. The most common current pattern of shifts is 2 x 12 hour days, 2 x 12 hour nights and then four days off. This amounts to 48 hours work in an eight-day period with alternating night/day shifts within the roster. A number of the interviewees had worked other forms of roster. Several worked overtime in addition to these hours, for example Steve sometimes worked an extra night shift taking his hours in the 8-day period to 60. Their overtime was paid. However, some worked unpaid overtime: Steve, for example always went into work 30 minutes early 'so I can find out what is going on' and become oriented for work. In general this group of workers were explicit about 'doing it for the money'. There was little sign of love for the job. Some had taken on the occupation for what they felt would be short periods, only to find themselves many years later approaching retirement in the same job.

For some of these workers, there was a sense that their children would probably leave home – and the town - soon after finishing school so time with children had a limited horizon. Each worker felt – and each partner agreed – that they had missed out on 'full fathering', in the sense that they had missed important events for their children. While some felt that their relationship would always come first ('we would leave if we felt it was a risk'), each recounted stories of marital breakup in the town and each saw a link between working time arrangements and the pressures on couples. In each household, the women parented and worked around their partner's hours, adopting a residual model of partnership, where the full-time, shift-working pattern of the male breadwinner dominated household life.

The impact of unreasonable hours upon the whole community was very clear in this town. There were positive sides - with one mother having good links with others and moving the kids to the house where the father wasn't sleeping off his shift work during the day. But there were also downsides – for local clubs, sporting groups and the community. While fellow shift workers understood and shared the downsides of the eternal pursuit of a good sleep during the day, neighbours had fallen out with each other as they lived with each other's noisy dogs, lawnmowers, children and boat engines.

Day/night 12 hour shifts

Families and employees found changes in their rosters very unsettling.

Steve: Everybody's settled – and then they go and change it. I don't know why they're like that, but it's every time. You know, a different roster and once everyone is happy with it, then they change it again. It's been like that all the time, you know.

Joanne: They get someone from [overseas] to tell them how to live with a shift!

Steve: Yeah so they're spending a lot of money to tell us about how to cope with these shifts. That was when they wanted to swap our roster round like from 8-hour shifts, we

were doing days, nights, afters and they wanted to swap us around to days, afters, nights. They wanted to swap us around.

Several workers and their partners spoke of the strain of working a mixture of nights and days. Steve and Joanne would prefer hours that were more regular and find it hard doing day shifts mixed with night shifts. The combination of irregularity and long hours took a toll:

Yeah it's the changing that knocks you around. You get tired and you just can't speak. You're knackered once it's over.

Joanne: Like this week, you work Thursday and Friday and then you're back to Saturday nights. On the Friday you come home from the day shift and just go to bed, every night.

The work/eat/sleep cycle dominates life

Like other long hours workers, these describe a tightly circumscribed life of work, eat and sleep. This robbed time from the worker, the relationship and the household:

Joanne: He doesn't get anytime to himself these days.

Steve: Yeah well that's right, you'd have [to have] a bit more time at the end of each day.

Joanne: We don't get a lot of time to enjoy what's going on.

Steve: [When I'm on nights] I come home, I'll have a drink, have a shower and then go straight to bed. ... Same as when I'm on dayshift, I get up go to work and then come home - on a day shift I come home at 7 -

Joanne: ...Shower, tea time, bed time.

Steve: Shower, tea, I might watch an hour of TV and that's it, that's all.

Effects on health: fatigue, backs and pills

These workers did a job that meant they sat all the time, except for their two breaks. They had to signal via a button if they wanted a toilet break and all their activities were monitored 'All the dozers are monitored and you have to press an icon when you want to go to the toilet...They are watching all the time'.

The sitting and immobility meant that workers' fitness was at risk, potentially, and Steve was concerned about deep vein thrombosis 'because you are sitting for so long'. His wife also mentioned his back 'It's does your back in'. Jim also mentioned his concerns about long hours of sitting, and their impact on fitness:

You start to struggle. You know like, you're running yourself down and things like that. It's not only that, like they have fitness programs and that but if you have a look at the people out there [on the job], especially truck drivers, I think it would be very hard to

say that you have people there who haven't got pot guts and starting to go into the fat stage and everything like that. If you're unfit, you'll get tired quicker than a lot of other people. And you'll find out there that just because of the long hours there is - that is where you start to see it...

Jim felt that there wasn't much opportunity to get fit. Whereas more regular hours meant more regular activity and meals:

Well my weight can go anywhere from 92 kilos to 86 - it'll fluctuate. I don't drink much and things like that. A few years ago, your weekends were your own. Have a BBQ on the Friday afternoon after work and on Saturday afternoon and you'd always sit down and have a couple of beers. ... But it's hard on your body.

Like other shift workers (eg flight attendants) these shift workers were very reluctant to take sleeping tablets. Their use, however, was widespread in the mine in the views of the interviewees. Steve takes sleeping pills to be able to manage the long night shifts, as well as dealing with the fact that they change from night to day shifts:

Steve: Before I do the first one, I take a pill so I can get some sleep and the next day I'll take one and then the next day because I can't sleep I have to take one at night to get back round the right way.

Joanne: To get back on the right clock!

Steve believes that most of the workers take pills to cope with the changing shifts. He said that at a union meeting, the workers were asked whether they were taking anything to cope with the hours. He said a large majority put their hand up:

A fair few turned up. And when you ask them a question like that and - if you're honest - if they didn't put their hand up they'd be kidding themselves. It's the changing from one shift to another.

Fatigue and safety

Steve said that there had been a lot of accidents on the site due to fatigue. He was lucky enough to have not been involved in anything serious yet. 'Guys are often falling asleep while working...If you are getting a load, you just fall asleep while getting your load' (Steve).

Others described the effects of fatigue:

The fatigue...the worst part about that is by the time you finish the last night shift, it takes you roughly 3 days to feel good again. I would like to see any person no matter how fit they are... We've got people out there - that are driving - working 5 days overtime on their 6 days off! (Jim)

Jim goes on to describe the struggle to stay awake, and the need to take pills:

Especially in the day shift you do go through fatigue periods, especially after you've had [food] because like you've had a bit of lunch or something like that. It's the same as when you finish your shift and you get in the car and you're driving home you start yawning because I think it's probably the pressure of the job or the stress of the day is gone, when you've got to be alert driving for 12 and a half hours of the night.

You know like we have 2 [breaks] - they're the hardest part. If you haven't had sleep you struggle. Like broken sleep and all that sort of stuff. That's why you probably find that a lot of the truck drivers who work out here are on prescribed sleeping pills and stuff like that. ... Yeah I take [names tablet]. Probably at about 11 o'clock in the day before I go to work I'll just go down and have a lay down and a sleep. I'll get up at say 4 or 5 o'clock ready to go to work and then go all night and I don't feel tired when I do that. I can go the whole shift without being tired - you know you might have a few yawns here and there but other than that you're OK.

Like where we are... you have to keep going all the time. ... But where they are coming out of the pit going up the big ramps where they are only crawling along say 1 or 2 kilometres an hour - I feel sorry for those sort of blokes because that's where you get the ol' nod - it's quite easy to nod off.

Jim does not like taking sleeping pills: 'I'm not a great lover of 'em but it's the pressure of the job where you are and that'. He recounts a recent incident where fatigue had affected a worker:

We had a bloke there the other day who couldn't even remember backing into the shovel. He couldn't remember backing into the shovel! - That only happened in the last couple of weeks. He drove probably about 150 metres after his tire had blown out and was running straight into the dozer. Lucky there was no one in the dozer. ... After he got out he was still asleep! ... Oh no, it happens. A lot of blokes won't speak about it, but it does happen... There is a lot of danger in the job.

Laughlin also describes a near miss after he had been doing some overtime: 'I should be dead but I'm not'. On one occasion he didn't take a detour correctly and 'I headed straight down the rock'. He had been doing 4 hours overtime on top of his normal shift. 'I haven't done that for a couple of months now'.

Effects on community

Steve: We've had problems with our next door neighbours with noise. ... Some nights when I'm on day shifts and vice versa you know -

Joanne: And vice versa we could be doing something and not know he needs sleep. We don't know what roster he is on.

Steve: He works at a different site. Their roster is different. I don't know what roster he's on.

They've had problems with lawn mowers and their next door neighbours boat being turned on. Although it's no longer a major problem, they're no longer on speaking terms with their neighbours.

Jim and Marie believe that long hours and the shift arrangements have had a big impact in the town itself:

You can see the difference in the town that the 12-hours shifts have done. Like sporting, this town has produced some of the best sportsmen... Like we've got good hockey players, good rugby league players, good golfers, cricketers, stuff like that, that have come from here and that. But as soon as the 12-hour shifts started again, it just killed it. Like now they struggle to get a football team, where at one time we were putting three teams on the paddock. They struggle. ... But there's only one club now... I used to play a lot of golf but I don't anymore. Well last year I went up there... You know, like by the time you get home and because the club was struggling, because of the loss of the people, it started to increase its prices – it became too expensive.

Effects on relationships

Workers liked the extra days they had off to be with family. Steve and Joanne said that if it ever got to the point that the work was impacting on their relationship, they would leave. However Joanne finds it hard being at home during Steve's long night shifts:

Joanne: When he's on a night shift I feel alone. We've got a dog. I think I'd be very nervous without the dog. ... Especially when you've had a bit of a fallout with the neighbours. We're not quite sure... for reasons we don't know we've had fish thrown on top of the house, marbles, eggs and we don't know why. We don't think it's kids.

However, the shift work and the long shifts also took its personal toll on relationships. Joanne described how a number of families had split their households: 'You'll find that a lot of families have split up, the wives have left town. ... They're still married with families but they are living in two separate houses. ... A lot of people have done that'.

Marie had given up work in the week of interview, because she found that it had 'got too much, with home and work'. She had suffered from a mild form of a panic attack and felt that responsibility for 'everything' had become too burdensome. Jim and Marie have 3 children who are 12, 10 and 5 (though Jim says they are '13, 11 and 7' and is corrected by Marie). Jim says the long shifts have affected his relationships with the kids and partner, especially as they made him 'moody':

Jim: The length of hours? They make you moody, very moody. Yeah.

Jim admitted that he took it out on his family. Marie said that she copes with this by, 'I just tell him to shut up and go to bed! [laughs]'. As for the girls, Jim says that 'they just look at me and bolt'.

Marie: They sit there and say 'Oh he's tired and grumpy'.

Jim: But that's what it is. It's the length of hours and that. The thing is people just - like when you're isolated by yourself for say those 12 hours of the day, you're sorta - I can't put my finger on it - you're there sitting by yourself, thinking all the time. And then when like you come back - with the girls running around and screaming, you're thinking 'God, the noise!'

Jim's children competed for his attention when he came home and his middle child 'just clings to me'.

Interviewer: Do your kids ever feel pushed away?

Jim: At times yeah. You can see it a mile away. Like even if you go out of your way to try and not do it. But I think it can be habitual style like that because they want Dad's affections and I'm that tired and that and I say 'I'm tired and I've got to get up early'. They must just sit there and think - well they must think... It's an injustice to them because you know like they need us just as much as we need them.

Marie: The five year old – she cannot comprehend night shift at all. She likes her Dad to be home all day, every day. She cries, if he's not there - 'I miss my Dad! Why can't he be home tonight?'

Similarly, Laughlin's long hours mean that Sharon and their two teenagers miss him: 'We don't see him very much. Except for on his 4 days off. Sharon did some casual work and she described the effects of both working on their lives:

Like, with his night shift on Wednesday, I'll work Wednesday afternoon and I won't see him til Friday because he'll be gone when I get home tonight. And he works night shift a lot of the time. I don't work a lot but when I do it'll be - I'm coming home and he's gone to work, you know or he's coming and I'm going. Oh it's awful, you don't see each other. ... You can't do the ordinary stuff. ... You can't have an everyday normal relationship.

As a result Laughlin does not see his children's performances and when he is about they are aware of his moods: before the interview, Sharon had asked her 15-year old daughter what she thought of her Dad's work. 'She said "Well we don't see him very often and when we do he comes home cranky and tired"'. Their daughter is aware that she will move away when she finishes school and so the time is precious: as Sharon puts it 'She actually said "I haven't got long " she's 15, "I haven't got long here and..."'. You know I think she's feeling pressure to make the most of her time here'. Their daughter feels that her Dad isn't around to make the most of it.

Lauhghlin: I know that ... I know that it'd be good to be around more often. The young fella, he plays soccer and I don't get to watch him play or watch him train.

Sharon: He never really gets a chance to join in with sporting teams or anything like that.

Laughlin feels like he has missed out on a lot. And that his daughter often asks him to go to things but he usually has to say no.

Sharon: He's tired when he comes home. And we have tea and so everyone has so much to tell him and he's so tired - it's just not working, you know? And then when he wants to talk, it's too late...

They feel like their family life and the timing is 'all out of sync'.

Effects on women: 'I'm the mother and the father'

Each of the women in this group fitted their lives around their partners, taking casual or part-time work or not working outside the home. They also described their parenting, as being 'around' their partners who were like visitors to the family. The parallel of the single parent also arose in interviews.

For example, Laughlin and Sharon have kids who are involved in activities and they find that, especially on the weekends, they really need two parents to take them places and watch them, etc. But it is usually left to Sharon, which she finds difficult.

Laughlin: It's frustrating. There's the things I want to do and the things I've got to do.

Sharon: It's like that. And he'll say 'Oh what can I do?' Because he knows that - family life suffers.

Laughlin's work has a big impact on Sharon.

Sharon: I'm the mother and the father. They depend on me... I wash the car; I do all the stuff that you normally think that the man that - you know like the normal, traditional things. So I do the house and all that. Take the kids to where they should be. And the lawns. It's like being a single mother and you've got someone who comes in at different times, isn't it?

Laughlin: I just wander in when I feel like it! [laughs]

Sharon: I was just gonna say that you feel like it's just you and that's it. Like there's no-one else to do it.

CHAPTER 13 Doctors

Those who work in medical practice at all levels have to deal with excessive hours of work. Medical students have an exhausting schedule of study, and as hospital interns they can be overwhelmed by a double regime of study and work as they progress through a series of 'rotations' in the medical, surgical, emergency and other wards. Later, as trainee specialist registrars, they must fulfill requirements for hours and exams in the various specialty fields. All of this can take 10 years or more.

Deleted: os

Even when they become senior registrars with a regular (8-5) working week they are to some extent required to be available on call after hours and on weekends. Meanwhile those who escape the hospital system into general practice also face a working life characterised by excessive hours - albeit self-imposed - as they deal with the demands of a busy practice.

This analysis is based on interviews with five hospital doctors - two interns, two early career registrars, and one senior registrar - and the partners of three of these.

Working hours

The hours worked by medical staff depend on a complex range of factors, including the commitment to patient service, training requirements for junior staff, and funding levels. Karen, a senior registrar, describes how the formula for establishing registrar staffing works at one large metropolitan public hospital:

[The hospital] has to have a registrar 24 hours a day to cover the obstetrics service; in addition to that they have an emergency theatre that they run until 10-11 at night, and so there has to be an emergency registrar available to do that - who can't be the same person as the obstetrics person. ... The staffing requirements are dictated by the service commitments that the hospital has.

This is a complex process, based on their waiting lists and how much money they have; Karen refers to another metropolitan hospital that suspended elective surgery for three months due to budget problems.

Three aspects of working hours are seen as problems by doctors - the number of hours worked, the unpredictability of those hours and the mix/combination of shifts.

Long hours

Elinor is enjoying her current hours as an intern in a psychiatric facility, but recognises that longer hours are in store in the next rotation:

Currently I'm doing 50-60 hours/week but in a previous rotation I was doing 70-80 hours, and my next rotation will be back to those sorts of hours. ... Some nights I work late, and the shifts here are until 10pm when you work late; like yesterday I worked 8am till 10pm. And there are weekends here from 1pm to 7pm - so that we don't get our meal allowance - very sneaky!

The structure of weekend shifts varies with the rotation:

So I basically work a 12-day fortnight. I do at least one day on the weekend and a night during the week at the moment [in the psychiatric wards]. Prior to that, when I was working at [the main hospital] I had a full weekend every second weekend and every second weekend I had off. In the next rotation I will be working in respiratory medicine where there's only one intern so I'll probably end up working seven days a week; I won't get any weekends off at all for three months.

Carol, a first year surgical registrar complains about her hours on call (her hospital - unlike some others - doesn't employ a night registrar):

They're terrible. It's an incredibly busy job: an 8 til past 5 o'clock job on most days and when you're on call, even though you're on remote call, often you'll be staying in until at least 9, 10 o'clock at night, if not more often than not until 11.30, midnight, past midnight; and then you can get called back in. And you know, for the last six weeks I've averaged two on-calls a week - which includes one weekend day.

Yes, so it's quite a busy job, and over the last 4-5 weeks I've had between 88-96 ordinary hours - because that included working weekend days - and high 30s and high 40s and some overtime; PLUS call backs - two or three call backs. So, it's been very busy, and that's just because the demand's been there for seeing people in the emergency department or having to take people to theatre or whatever.

The unpredictability of hours

David, an experienced doctor training as a plastic surgical registrar, finds the working hours difficult because of their unpredictability:

The other issue is that if I'm on call one or two nights a week, then my wife has no predictability; some nights I'll say I will be home, and I will be home - and other nights I say I'll be home for tea and I get home at ten or eleven o'clock at night. And obviously on those nights I don't get to see my kids and do the things that people who work from 9-5 would do.

Mix/combination of shifts

Often it is the configuration of shifts - rather than the actual number of hours - that creates the problem, as Carol explains about her own situation:

Because when you do 24 hours on call ... the way the on-calls have worked out for me is that I'm on call on Tuesday - and I may only get three hours sleep - and on Wednesday it's a full day, the day on which I can potentially take my afternoon off to catch up on sleep. And then in the evening I'm expected to go to college tutorials; so you don't recover from your on-call until probably the weekend. And then often you're [on-call] on the weekend. So it's quite a very bad run

The Impact of working hours

These excessive working hours together with dysfunctional shift arrangements have a significant impact on the doctors themselves and their families.

Exhaustion

The problem of excessive hours is compounded by the impact of shift combinations, which do not allow doctors enough time to wind down and/or sleep. Gretel, an RMO in a psychiatric ward, describes the difficulties of working back-to-back shifts:

Sleep deprivation - especially when you get home at 11 o'clock and have to go to work at 8 the next day. ... It's hard to go home from working a 14-15 hour shift and go straight to bed. You get home, you have something to eat, and you unwind and get to bed - it's only 5 or 6 hours before you've got to get up and go to work the next day.

Carol, a first year registrar, describes how a long working shift can ruin the whole weekend:

Definitely, it definitely does. Because, when you do 24 hour shifts, and you get one hour's sleep, like, on a Saturday, that completely obliterates Sunday as a day off work; you know, you're asleep!

The pressure of long working hours is accentuated by the demands of study which extend into their training years as an intern or registrar. Karen, now an experienced registrar, reflects on her experience of those years:

So I certainly found that I became extremely stressed leading up to my exams. ... I was at the ... hospital then - multiple 24 hour shifts where I didn't sleep properly, and then I'd have to be up all the next day because I had to do some work and then I'd be back on day shift the following day. And I found that extremely disruptive to my sleep and that impaired my ability to cope with all of the other commitments that I had. ... An example, I did five on-call shifts - which was three 24 hours and two 13-hour nightshifts - in the ten days before my exam. I was just exhausted.

Their extra-curricular life

Because of their long and dysfunctional working hours, doctors' lives often become truncated and limited, some reporting the lack of time for recreational activity - or the loss of whole aspects of their life. Elinor, a first year intern, comments on her loss of fitness:

I don't think my overall health has changed (but) I'm less physically fit, and that's probably the only difference. I'm probably not doing my heart much good.

(Before) I would have the time to go for a walk and do things; and we used to be able to take the kids hiking and all those sorts of things. That's all completely off the agenda now.

She also talks of the loss of large parts of her personal and family life:

I used to go on a lot of picnics with the children, go on walks and things like that. And there isn't the time for that, so there really isn't the time to socialise together as a family. ... I (used to) read furiously, I did a lot of gardening, a lot of vegie growing, our own chooks and ducks and geese, did our own cooking, sewed the kids clothes and all that sort of thing.

Gretel used to be actively involved in a range of pursuits including volleyball, theatre sports, debating, and social activism but laments: 'now it's work and family'.

David, training as a specialist registrar, laments having to give up rowing and fantasises about other recreation possibilities:

I do very little exercise, and that's just simply because exercise for me, I could fit it in, but it would mean cutting in even more to my family time. And often because doing a cycling day/evening/night type roster, it's almost impossible to do classes at a gym. I used to row and I would very much have liked to have gone back and continue to row with one of the boat clubs here, but I can't, because the nature of a cycling roster, days/nights etc, mean that I can't make a commitment to any sports club, I can't make a commitment to get to training because I have no control over the hours. I have no control over my roster and I have no control over essentially the hours that I work.

If I didn't have family commitments obviously and if I didn't have to work one or two nights a week, then maybe one night a week I would go and do something else. ... Probably going to the gym, the main thing - maintaining some degree of fitness. ... I'm underweight, if anything, but certainly I'm not aerobically fit. Because standing in an operating theatre for ten hours a day you don't get very fit, I don't think!

Personal problems as a result of working hours

The personal impact of excessive working hours is often much more significant than merely the loss of fitness levels. Several doctors reported serious difficulties with their lives and relationships, ranging from simple exhaustion to more complex damage to their social functioning. Gretel, a psychiatric RMO, documents the personal impact of long hours:

... chronic sleep deprivation impacts on your mental health, your physical performance - probably makes you more susceptible to getting infections and stuff. That's a big thing. Also the hours you're away from home impacts - whether you've got kids or not - on your relationships and your family and your life outside medicine. So you have to make sure to have a balanced life.

For Carol (without family obligations) the problems were more individual:

I know that when I'm tired I get more grouchy and I snap more easily. And if the job is affecting your mood, like you're basically unhappy with life, it means that you can't really interact very well with anyone. So I mean I think that it's really terrible and if you don't have the support of people around you it makes it very difficult.

Carol, a first year registrar, feels that her whole life is under stress:

I've been incredibly stressed, I have not enjoyed my job, I've not enjoyed life, I haven't been able to participate in my regular activities - I normally play touch football at a high standard in the state. And when the other registrar went away and it was just two registrars - and at one point there was only one registrar on the ward, because they allowed the other registrar to go on leave - I found it very stressful and I didn't make it out to a single session of touch football, and no exercise. I basically went to work, went home and slept. I hardly ever saw any of my friends or my boyfriend, and it was just really bad.

Karen, an experienced registrar, describes her feelings during her internship exams:

During those few weeks before the exam, I was incredibly dissatisfied with my job, I just hated being at work, and just wanted to leave and finish the job; which was a shame, because under normal circumstances, despite the vagaries of the roster it was a good job.

Gretel describes the impact of a particularly harsh working regime:

I'm a fairly easy person to get on with, but certainly on some of the rotations when I was working for longer hours, I certainly got more stressed out, more snappy, more irritable - probably more so at home than at work; things tended to become unstuck. So I probably became more difficult to live with that time of the year.

Effect on partners

Doctors' working hours also often had a direct effect on the health and well-being of their partners. Irwin complained of the personal impact of his wife's (Elinor) working hours as an intern:

[My] stress levels do go up and I suffer migraine headaches. [pause] I'm trying to think how does that affect me doing what I am doing. It makes it more stressful, that's all. I just keep doing it, keep taking the kids to their events and whatever.

Moreover, he felt had lost touch with his own life:

I have done nothing of my own since 1994, and I've now got a car to rebuild as of two weeks ago. But that's going to take a long time because I can't ... guarantee to get myself time, like four hours at a stretch, I can never guarantee that. I always do whatever I can by sneaking in an hour or two usually.

I was always a walker, and that just takes time, a lot of time, and I can't do that now. Every now and then I can take the kids out for a stroll or something for a couple of hours.

Effect on children

The impact of long working hours on young children is sometimes perceived as less because of their limited awareness of the wider world. Hence, as Gretel recounts, the baby 'doesn't

notice' things and if she has normal working hours she believes that it isn't a problem for her three year old:

If you're just working 8-5 like at the moment, you can drop him at childcare, pick him up from childcare; he knows that I go to work and he goes to childcare, and doesn't really notice.

However, the longer shifts can be a problem - for both the child and the parent - as Gretel goes on to explain:

It's like he's got this internal body clock: about 5 o'clock he's asking for me coming home; if I'm working late and not coming home, he does get quite upset because he wants me to put him to bed. ... Certainly he's noticed me going to work, especially when you're working weekends; well you can't even say to them 'well you know I'll get home on the weekends sort of thing'. ... When you're doing the long shifts, when you're working until 8 or 10 and they're in bed when you get home and you leave work at 6.30 or 7 in the morning, you can actually go for like almost 48 hours with almost not laying eyes on them, which is not good for you or them.

The needs of older children are even more pressing, with negative outcomes for both child and parent. Karen, an experienced registrar, comments on the impact of her hours on her partner's 12 year old:

And again, commitment to family is not something that you can just put on hold and say 'I'm sorry I'm not going to be available'. But things are a bit better now that I've passed my exams. ... I guess he's got used to it. I know that when study got mixed into it as well - he's very good about it, but I know he resents it a bit because he's usually told that he can't have friends over during that 6 months leading up to an exam - and I've done two exams. ... But I think that sometimes he thinks he'd like to be like the other kids, where Dad just works a 9-5 job and is home in the evenings and so on.

Irwin describes the impact of Elinor's long working hours on their three teenage children:

I'm quite sure they would like to see more of Elinor, but this is ameliorated by the fact that they've seen very little of her during her study time. So they are seeing more of her. But I think both she and they would like her to be more involved more in what they're doing, their school-work and things like that. But it has to be erratic. The young one has just had a go at us: 'mum hasn't seen her play a game of basketball at all' - ah - but that just isn't possible with her working hours anyway. And the fact that, being at [hospital] now, if someone turns up just before closing - she stays on a couple more hours.

Chalking up a 'time debt' to your partner

In their case, the issue of Elinor's working hours runs very deep in Irwin's mind, and there are signs of trouble to come as a result of the building up of an unpayable 'debt':

Now once again this is confused by the fact that Elinor has been out of circulation for so long because of study. And I think it's a debt situation again. The ambience of the household is a lot better than it was, but it would be a lot better if Elinor could actually put the time into repairing the damage done while studying. She's doing her best, but it just can't be done because she's got to do this internship. It's better than it was, but it could be better, it certainly could be better.

Overall, then, the impact of long and irregular hours on children (especially when older) can be considerable, while in the case of younger children the costs fall more on parents - in terms of lost parenting.

Impact on family and personal relationships

Not surprisingly, family and personal relationships tend to suffer as a result of doctors' working hours. Even single doctors, who have a need for social life, note its absence. Thus Carol, a first year registrar who lives with her parents, feels that her whole social life was on hold during a particularly busy period, and used her annual leave to reactivate it:

I never saw my parents ... (and) I hardly ever saw my friends or my boyfriend. ... I have lost touch with a lot of people - no time to spend with them. ... This week, which I'm off from work, I'm trying to try to catch up with as many people as possible.

For those with obligations to family members, the difficulties are intensified. David, an experienced specialist registrar describes the impact of his working hours on his family life:

The one year old doesn't know. My three year old sometimes says 'I don't want you to go'; and my wife, well, I think she's given up on me (laughs). That's what we do and we just have to find the time to do things together when we're not actually working. The other issue is that some nights if you're on call overnight one night and the next day you've got a list and for whatever reason the operating list goes late, you might think 'oh next day I'm going to finish at five' or maybe sneak a couple of hours early - and if the list goes overtime you might get home at 7 or 8 o'clock the next night as well - which is a real problem.

Meanwhile Jenny, David's wife, has to do the accommodating to the demands on her husband's time:

Most of the time it's alright; it's just the peak time with little kids is sort of first thing in the morning and after we get home from childcare - if it's been a working day - and when David starts work at half past seven in the morning that sort of limits his abilities to do much in the morning.

She reflects on the matter of this accommodation:

I mean, when you're in your late 20s, early 30s, you have this grandiose idea that it will be a shared responsibility thing, but the reality is that it doesn't end up being that way. And it can't be, depending on what the demands of one career is versus the other one. So yeah, I mean there's always an element of the fact that I think that I shoulder the

larger responsibility for getting people out of bed and washed and showered and fed in the morning and also at night times.

'We hadn't actually seen each other for 26 nights out of the month'

Karen, an experienced registrar, describes the difficulties of managing family life, trying to juggle two working rosters, children and study:

So I certainly found that I became extremely stressed leading up to my exams, just because I didn't feel that I was doing enough study. And the amount that I was working at the time - I was at the [hospital] then - was multiple 24 hour shifts where I didn't sleep properly; and then I'd have to be up all the next day because I had to do some work and then I'd be back on day shift the following day. And I found that extremely disruptive to my sleep and that impaired my ability to cope with all of the other commitments that I had. And again, commitment to family is not something that you can just put on hold and say 'I'm sorry I'm not going to be available'. But things are a bit better now that I've passed my exams...

As far as how it affects our relationship, it depends a little bit not so much on the number of hours themselves but the way in which Stanley's roster and my roster match up. So, for example, if I'm doing nights, they tend to start 7 o'clock at night; and if Stanley has done a week of nights and then in his week off - or in the time of the day that he has off - I'm doing nights, then at one stage - I was doing a lot of nights in obstetric anaesthesia - we hadn't actually seen each other for 26 nights out of the month. And that's when we start finding things becoming disruptive, because we can't organise social functions, there are a whole lot of things we can't manage to do because of the schedules not matching up.

And the other thing I find a problem is going from days to nights, and when I was at the [hospital] we were going days/nights/days/nights, and switching backwards and forwards. And I tended to get run down and cranky and much less able to cope with stress.

Under these circumstances, even small things matter, as Karen explains:

The whole environment within the house is very tense and there's a lot of pressure on getting things done; and not being able to contribute to my full share of chores and shopping and those sorts of things - because I don't have time - becomes really stressful. Just the little things, like finding that you've run out of bread or milk because you've been at work until 8 o'clock at night and then you forgot to stop on the way home because you were trying to get home to study. Or you were trying to get home to make sure that you sorted out stuff for school for a child the next morning. And those sort of little things really build up so that there would be times where things would be very tense here. And Stanley and I would have a big fight because little things hadn't got done - and they hadn't got done because neither of us had the time to do it.

Irwin, the husband of Elinor, describes the unpredictability of her hours as an intern affects their family life:

Because her hours are not necessarily rostered on long, [if] somebody doesn't turn up at the end of the shift or whatever ... what we've found is we can't really plan ... for Elinor to be available at any time whether she's rostered on or not - because things tend to go wrong ... So my time has to be predictable...

That's been another side effect of not having Elinor around, and it's still continuing, because of the volatile nature of her work - that we can't often go out to do things. Because her time, my time, and the kids' time - there's just so much of it, we rarely go out for picnics or stuff like that - not all together, anyway. ... As a family of five, I rarely plan anything in. I see, suddenly we've got four hours, maybe we'll go out to dinner or maybe out on a picnic. And I wouldn't plan it two weeks in advance, usually. ... It wouldn't work.

Irwin is also clearly anxious about his own relationship with Elinor because of her long and unpredictable hours as a first year intern, the notion of a personal 'debt' still looming large:

We're back into the situation of the debt. Our relationship has been greatly stressed during her study time, and she's not able to put in a lot of time with me now, either - partly because, of course, what time she does have she's more likely to spend with the kids. So that stress is still there, we're basically in a debt situation. I don't think it's going to be causing a breakdown of the marriage or anything like that, but I do think that it is unnecessarily stressful, and not helped by the hours she's working.

We can't necessarily plan to do things, so that doesn't help either, that never helps with the relationship, when you never know when you're going to see each other.

Gretel recognises the difficulties of maintaining a good relationship with her partner when working long hours:

Obviously you see less of each other: you're going early in the morning and when you get home late at night your partner's already asleep. I found that if you're working 6 days a week you're trying to get any kind of housework, or cooking or stuff for the week on the other days, it leaves very little time for any social life with your partner or with friends, you know. With having children, it makes things really hard; with all the time you put into family stuff you end up living in this chaos at home because nothing's organised; and your partner takes on more of the load, and becomes resentful and stressed out because of that.

With David working long and unpredictable hours, his wife Jenny expresses her frustration at the impact of these hours on their family life:

I mean essentially we have no hobbies outside of work and children because of several things. One is that David's rosters are never consistent, so I can never predict; I get about 3 weeks notice as a maximum for when he's on call, so it's not like I can think every Wednesday night I can have that night to do something - and neither can he. And then the fact that he works a reasonable [i.e. unreasonable] amount of hours means that he - to his credit, somewhat - he doesn't go off and play golf all Saturday afternoon, because he feels like he should be home spending time with us, which is not

unreasonable. So yeah, I mean it just means essentially that we have no time for hobbies outside.

The weekends when David is on call are worse, perhaps because traditionally the weekend is seen as family and personal - rather than work - time:

And the weekends are definitely worse, and that applies to me being annoyed about it as well. Because you know the weekends we could have him around for up to half the weekend, or essentially we could see him Friday night and then see him (again) Monday morning. Which means social activities we go on our own, we take two cars, all those sorts of things; they're an absolute pain in the neck: the pager goes off all the time, it's just totally disruptive. I guess that's the medical profession.

Domestic tension over working hours is sharpened by partners' perception that their partner is not being forceful enough in standing up to the administrative system. Jenny's frustration at the system is evident:

The other thing is that they have this supposed afternoon off. And if I knew that David had a set afternoon off a week, then I would probably make sure I wasn't working that day and he could come home and the girls could see him. But again, that changes around too. So, yeah, I mean something that's a little bit more organised would be better. ...I can't see why it couldn't be. You know it seems bizarre that you can't have plans more than two weeks ahead for what's coming up. Yes, some of the rostering seems bizarre, to say the least. ...

Bargaining for more control over hours

Jenny is equally frustrated by the weakness of David's bargaining position:

No, and that's the painful part of [it]... he's too junior, and on the verge of applying to get into a training program, so actually his word counts for nothing. And to speak out about any of these sorts of things or to make suggestions is counterproductive, largely - which is pretty pathetic, but that's the way it is. Don't even start me on these things.

Even Gretel, with all her personal strength, was unable to effect the changes she wanted - and to convince her partner that she was trying hard enough!

I felt I was doing a reasonable job standing up to the system and saying "No it's unrealistic for me to work 7 days a week every week; I need a day off" - (but) my partner felt I wasn't doing enough and I was caving in to the system; and there was tension and conflict over that - her thinking I should stand up more and just refuse to do it and that sort of thing.

Patient safety

Given the extraordinary hours and stress that hospital doctors work under, the possibility of resultant harm to patients is an important consideration. Although understandably reluctant to discuss actual medical errors made by themselves or their peers, doctors did outline some of

the risks. Carol speaks of the risk of car accidents to doctors themselves as a result of work exhaustion:

I mean I know of people who have had car accidents on their way home - who've written off their cars - I've had a car accident on my way home from a night shift before. And I've got a friend who - when he was at the hospital he was on until 10 and then he was on remote call after that - he was operating all night and on his way home - and he completely wrote [his car] off.

Karen, an experienced registrar, outlines the indirect risk of harm to patient safety because long hours reduced training opportunities for those who treat them:

I think there's a lot of unhappiness among the registrars at the moment - they're working very hard and they're not getting teaching and they don't feel like they're consolidating their skills and in anaesthetics that can become extremely dangerous.

Meanwhile David, a plastic surgical trainee registrar, speaks of the more direct risks to patient safety from overworked doctors:

Actually it is to the detriment of patients and staff to do long shifts ... the research has been done which shows that if you work more than 13 hours that's equivalent to driving with a blood alcohol (level) of 0.5; the hours stack up. I can't say it's ever happened, that someone has performed the wrong operation. But I can say that an operation that would normally take an hour, or an hour and a half at four o'clock in the afternoon - if you're doing it at 3 o'clock in the morning it might take you two hours to three hours. And so there's increased risk to patients during anaesthetic time, and just all the other things that go with that because of the slow down - you're just not as good.

The causes of long hours

There are several reasons for the extraordinary hours that doctors work, ranging from practical necessity to the existence of a professional culture that resists the reduction of those hours.

The needs of patients

In practical terms, a professional commitment to the needs of patients is the straightforward determining factor: doctors respond to medical necessity. A professional work ethic is universal: the job has to be done and doctors see themselves as the ones who have to do it. However the pressure varies according to the different specialties and particular circumstances, as Karen (the experienced registrar) explains:

The professional work ethic varies with different specialties and it depends on whether there's somebody to cover you. In anaesthetics much less pronounced than in some specialties. I think in surgery there is still unspoken pressure that you will only be paid [for] this many hours, but all your predecessors have worked until the work was finished, and if the work's still there you've go to keep going.

The need for training

Another issue that drives the system of work overload is the ongoing need for medical trainees to secure adequate levels of training. David provides an outline of the hospital-based training system:

To become a consultant surgeon, you have to complete basic training and then 4 years of advanced training in the specialty that you want to become a consultant in - as a training registrar. At the moment, most of the surgeons - 60% - who come out would do at least one or two service years, so effectively you do 6 years of training but only four years are accredited.

'We are told not to take our leave'

Thus there is pressure on junior staff not to take their annual leave entitlements because it would jeopardise the fulfillment of their training requirements, as Elinor discovered:

I mean the award says, actually, that we are entitled to five weeks annual leave. But we've been told quite clearly we are not to take any more than three. So people look at the award and say "oh look they are entitled to all this leave" but we don't get it. We've been told quite clearly we are not to use that amount, because then we can't get registered because you know we have to have x number of weeks of experience and so on. It's a very nice neat little catch; they can say officially we've got five weeks leave, and that's all very good. But in fact, in practicalities, we cannot - because the hospitals won't employ more people, we can't have that extra time.

Competition for training places

Another reason for trainee staff to take on extra workload is that refusal might jeopardise their entry into a subsequent specialty training program. Karen, an experienced registrar, describes how this pressure on junior staff operates:

I think a lot of junior staff feel pressured to work [extra] hours to get themselves into a training program or to get a good report out of their attachment. But if they can't finish [in] their working hours they're paid to do, then it's preferable for them to stay four more hours and get it finished, so that the next morning they're telling the boss that they got the work finished than it is to be honest and say 'I could not possibly have got this amount of work finished in the time available'.

'Keep your nose clean and your mouth shut!'

Even David, with his years of experience in medicine, confessed to succumbing to the pressure to take on extra workload:

The other issue is that I'm not officially on the training program at the moment and I'm applying to get on the program. And to say - before you get on the training program - that "I think 96 rostered hours and then an extra 30 or 40 hours a fortnight is

unreasonable", well that would be career suicide, probably ... If you want to get into a training program you need to keep your nose clean and your mouth shut!

Gretel was one who resisted this workload pressure from senior medical staff in the hospital, but she was in the unusual position of wanting a training place outside of the hospital - in a psychiatric facility - and hence had less need for their support.

I tried very hard to arrange my rosters so I didn't have to work 7 days straight - or tried to get a full weekend off. ...I knew I wanted to specialise in Psych so [there was] not as much pressure for me as for some people. For people who wanted to do physicians' or surgical training that was more of an issue.

Covering for your peers

In addition to their rostered hours, doctors are expected to 'cover' for each other in the case of sickness or other leave. David, a registrar, explains how his on-call demands can escalate because of this customary way of resolving staff shortages:

If another registrar is away, instead of 1 in 5 nights on-call you do 1 in 4. Or if there is a surgical conference and two or three of the registrars are away then you go on to 1 in 2 or 1 in 3.

At one level this can be seen as a straightforward instance of mutual self-interest, since the expectation is that the favour will be repaid at some time. However the other side of this 'cover' arrangement is that there is unspoken pressure not to take sick leave, as Karen explains:

And that unspoken pressure - its not that anybody says to you 'we don't want you to take your sick leave' – it's just the knowledge that - you know what its like when somebody else takes sick leave - if you take sick leave somebody else is going to have to do your work for you, and everybody is going to be stretched and everybody is going to be under more stress, there is a pressure not to take it. So you will often find quite unwell doctors at work, because they don't feel that they are able to take sick leave, because there is no provision in their hours and no provision in the system to cover them.

Sometimes this pressure results in horrific workloads. Karen describes of her experiences as an overworked intern at examination time; the pressures were intense, but the logic was inescapable:

I did five on-call shifts - which was three 24 hours and two 13-hour nightshifts - in the ten days before my exam. I was just exhausted. ... There wasn't any option. We had new people there who couldn't cover night shift, we had consultants who were sick or on annual leave and who weren't available; and it wasn't as if I was the only person in the department working a lot of hours. And there was a lot of dissatisfied people and there was a lot of tension within the dept. And that happens all the time, that hospital departments run so close to the wire in terms of the commitments they have to fulfill, that if there's any pressure put on that or somebody's away or on long-service leave, all

of a sudden you've got less than the minimum number of staff to provide for commitments that don't change.

Professional culture

As in other occupations and industries in this study, this accommodation to budget pressure becomes institutionalised in the professional culture of the medical staff: doctors internalise a philosophy/mindset that allows excessive workloads and ensures that the hospital system actually functions. As David comments:

It's an institutionalised thing in surgery that you do these hours.

The ideology of professional dedication?

Besides these quite practical pressures there is evidence of a culture of overwork amongst doctors that goes beyond the needs of the hospital or its patients. Thus sometimes this culture of accommodation appears to be generalised into a professional self-image by which doctors are characterised as absolutely 'dedicated' to their patients and their profession. They then use this as a moral high ground to pressure more junior doctors to take on work overloads - or risk being labeled as 'not dedicated enough'. As Gretel, a psychiatric RMO observes:

Typically in medicine, medicine is the main focus of your life; so if you are a dedicated doctor, you will want to live, eat & breathe work. And that if you want to have a life outside medicine, that means you're not committed, you're not dedicated. I think it is changing a bit, but certainly that is the feeling from a lot of your consultants and even registrars. Partly, we did it, so you have to do it; and also it meant you're not dedicated. OK you couldn't sort of be wanting to work efficiently and be dedicated the hours you were there, but have a life outside medicine. If that wasn't your life, then you weren't dedicated enough - it was that kind of culture.

Budget pressure:

Clearly these moral pressures on medical staff workload also need to be seen in the context of hospitals' patient numbers and funding (which in the public sector is always a matter of dispute). Thus the custom of doctors 'covering' each other for sick and other absence is itself a cover for the fact that such arrangements would be unnecessary if hospitals were adequately funded, as Karen explains:

And that happens all the time, that hospital departments run so close to the wire in terms of the commitments they have to fulfil, that if there's any pressure put on that or somebody's away or on long-service leave, all of a sudden you've got less than the minimum number of staff to provide for commitments that don't change.

'You don't take your sick leave'

Similarly, the pressure not to take sick leave is also a by-product of budget considerations:

I think there's an unspoken pressure on medical staff not to take sick leave ... and it relates to the fact that if you take sick leave, the people who are still there - and its right across all medical disciplines - the people who are there will be stretched to cover you. There is no release in the system - again because of the money - to cover sick leave; it just means that other people have to work harder.

Fixing the problem?

Reduced hours?

These doctors want to work fewer hours - for themselves and their families. However this should not be at the cost of reduced income, as Elinor points out:

40 hours a week would be fine, but at an intern's pay that's really not a very good income. So it's balancing time and income. ...I think the award should improve the financial remuneration. I mean, I'm earning as much as ... an unskilled labourer, and yet I've done six years of medicine - and I can get struck off if I make a mistake. So that's where a lot of changes need to be made.

The times are certainly unsatisfactory, but if you cut the hours on the current rate of pay, you'd have interns and that on social service benefits!

After hours work/on call hours:

Secondly, as Gretel argues, there has to be some kind of control on on-call hours and shift rosters:

In a big public hospital someone has to be there after hours, so unless you, you know, had a whole lot of interns that just worked those after hours times...

Someone has to work those times and I think it's reasonable for interns to be on that roster some of the time but not as much as they are. If you're working, you work 8-5 and everyone went home and the night doctors didn't come on until 8 or 10, then there are going to be emergencies in those intervening 3 or 5 hours. Someone has to cover; it just has to be done better than it's done now. It's reasonable to do some after hours work but I think it should be rostered in a different way so it's not so frequent and that it's spaced out better. I had times I had a week of after hours work and then within ten days you might do 6 or 7 of the covers of the long shifts; so it's not the hours in the month, but the way they're spaced out as well sometimes it's a bit odd.

More flexible arrangement of hours?

Finally, as David argues, there should be days or mornings off to compensate for working longer hours or being on call:

My issue would be if we are going to work 130 hours a fortnight, we should be able to have days off during the week - and I think that's what the next award will do: we'll actually have the day off after you're on call or the day after that....

And I think rather than I think having 8 hours off I would rather be sort of prefer to be rostered to start at 12 or where you have an afternoon list that starts at 12.30 or one o'clock. And after I've been on call overnight I would much rather I had a morning off and be told don't bother coming in till 12.30 or something like that; then that would give me an opportunity during the week to either take my kids to childcare or - if it was the day when my wife and kids weren't going to work and childcare - then I could be at home.

Overall, then, doctors and their families want four things changed about their working hours - fewer hours, more predictable hours, longer breaks between shifts and compensating leave breaks. Karen speaks for many doctors when she says:

I think if I had a wish list, I'd like to see some hard and fast rules relating to number of days off after night shift and the number of times that you can shift from a day to a night roster and back again in a particular period; because ... clearly evidence shows that those sort of switching rosters and intermittent cycling rosters have a much more significant effect on an individual's ability to cope with stress and maintain their sleep requirements.

The culture of medicine

A change in the way that a professional work ethic compels doctors to fill in the gaps left in the system by inadequate funding is difficult but essential:

The hardest thing is the culture of the workplace ... Towards the end of my surgery rotation [they brought in changes to address the long working hours issue], somebody high up decided that interns didn't have to work on Sundays. ... Even though that happened in theory, there was huge pressure from the registrars who didn't like it all who had that thing "well we did it, you're not dedicated" and basically pressured to come in anyway; and they kicked up, they didn't want to do bloods and do sort of tasks they thought were beneath them. And it became hard, because people initially sort of stood up to it saying ... so I'm not going to do it. And what happened was that the registrars basically didn't do the job properly on the Sunday, so you come to work on the Monday with basically everything in a mess - because the registrars were slack or got pissed off because the interns weren't there. And so some people then thought it's easier to go to work anyway on the Sunday because at least things aren't in so much of a mess on the Monday.

Sometimes, even if the rules or regulations are changed, the culture (of the hospital) is so slow to change there is still pressure coming from the registrars or at times consultants or something who are kicking up a fuss to put the pressure on you - even if the regulations change. Even with the IR regulations and stuff it's still going to be hard, but certainly without that it's not going to change.

Family Vs work:

At the moment, doctors have to make a choice between work and family. Karen puts the issue with clarity:

I think that most trainees find that trying to study fulltime with the demands of their work - particularly if they are in a family setting - means that they've got two choices: either they abdicate their family responsibilities (which a lot of the males will admit that they've done in the past - and they've not seen their kids for a twelve month period, effectively) or they fail their exams; and if you fail your exams you have to do it again, and so the cycle goes on.

Service Vs Training:

Secondly, hospital administrations are forced to make choices between their training and service obligations. As discussed earlier, service needs naturally come first, and the doctors suffer - either from reduced training opportunities or from the extra hours needed to complete training requirements. Karen describes the problem - and the solution:

Also from the anesthetist's perspective, there are also college requirements for levels of training, so at each level in your training (it's a 5 year program) there's a college requirement that you will get a certain amount of teaching - there will still be input from senior people into how you are practicing. Now if the hospital has not enough staff and a lot of service commitments, then in order to fulfill the training requirements the only option is to increase hours. And unfortunately, what that's meant is that over the last five years we've just seen that training's suffered, they've cut back training because they have to provide the service requirements. ...

It's a huge conflict [between service and training provision], because there's very little direct benefit [in training] for the hospital system and for the overall health system. There's no direct benefit by providing training, the benefits are long term, in terms of competence of staff and their ability to provide a service in future. But the fact that there's no direct benefit has meant that it has just been squeezed out.

I think that work patterns should be dictated by individual service and training requirements, and they should be designed to incorporate both.

The implications for women

Lastly, the issue of gender is also central to a resolution of the work/family conflict regarding hours. Some discussion focused on discrimination against women in the medical profession, as Karen points out:

Traditionally - I could list off a number of anecdotal stories of women who found it much harder than their male counterparts to get into various surgical disciplines - there has been an element of distrust by senior colleagues, that 'why should we take on these

women if they're just going to go off and get pregnant and they're not going to be able to fulfill their commitments?

She tells the following story as an illustration of this prejudice against women:

One surgical registrar who was pregnant, during one of her orthopedic rotations, who developed pre-eclampsia at 35 weeks and was told that she basically had to stop work - and she was told by her senior colleagues, that there was absolutely no way that they could tolerate her stopping work, and that they certainly couldn't tolerate her stopping work for five weeks. And then she said she had to stop work because she had pre-eclampsia there was no choice but to stop work, and she was basically told well if she was going to have five weeks off then she could forget having time off after she had had her baby - and that she would be expected to be straight back at work. And she was straight back at work; and there was no question [about it]. She was still trying to get onto a particular surgical training program at the time, and she'd had trouble getting on to that program, and for a whole lot of reasons - that had to do with politics and nothing to do with her - but she had no choice but to play by the rules. ... This would be some years ago, now; she's now finished her training.

However, as Karen herself admitted, this system is slowly changing as the profession is joined by more women - and by men who prioritise their families:

I think there are a lot of people who are now senior colleagues in surgery who have had family responsibilities and who perhaps have a better understanding. I think that some of the problems that traditionally women have had are actually problems that men who want to work in a flexible plus/minus part time environment are also facing. Interestingly, however, the conflict has become more generalised into discriminatory practice against doctors who prioritise their family life - whether male or female. As David describes it, somewhat ironically the prejudice currently tends to be directed against men:

There needs to more provision - not just the female - there's lip service in surgery that you can do part-time advanced training, and I know of a case where a male registrar was told that if he intended to do part-time training or take a year off, then he would need not to bother to come back to training. ... Because one of the girls in his training program had decided she was doing it and he was told there was no way he was doing it. ... My interpretation of that is that we'll let this particular person do part-time training or take a year off because she's a girl, and its not going to be acceptable from a male.

The option of part-time work is clearly one way of resolving the work/family issue, but equally clearly it is difficult for hospitals to organise and for medical trainees to obtain, as Karen points out:

And there a lot of female doctors who are choosing to delay child-bearing because they believe that part time training is bloody difficult to organise.

There is a lot of pressure in the hospital system - and this comes from not the medical people and not the departments themselves, but from the hospital and the actual bureaucratic departments - who refuse to make part-time work easily available. The hoops that you've got to jump through to organise a part-time position are just prohibitive. The hospitals just don't like people who work part time because they're much more difficult to administrate than just the fulltime employees. So they won't go out of their way to facilitate part time employment; if you can find somebody with whom you can job share, then alright, that won't be a problem, but they won't advertise part time positions, they won't make them available and a lot of women - and men who want to work part time - particularly women who perhaps would like to have children and have the option of working part time - just find that it's such a hassle and it's so difficult to organise and takes so long to organise, that it's easier just to say I'll put off having children for five years.

CHAPTER 14 Electricians and the reduction in working hours

Electricians working on large construction sites formed our group of electrician interviewees. We worked from this group because they have changed their working time arrangements over recent years following a union decision and campaign to cap overtime at 10 hours per week. Thus these interviews form a strong contrast with others in this study, in that they report the effects of a shift to controlled, contained working hours, following years of very long hours for many individuals. This case therefore provides some insight into how a reduction in working hours can affect family life. We interviewed six workers and one partner. While several had experience in a range of sectors, most were employed in construction on large sites.

The interviewees are working around 49 hours per week now, compared to much longer working weeks prior to negotiation of new standards. While not accepted initially by all workers in the industry – some of whom wanted to keep earning high levels of overtime income - this change has affected individuals, families and children in positive ways. It represents a ‘good hours story’ for families. However, the interviewees talk about reasonable hours and reasonable pay – and their close connection. They discuss how a reduction in hours would not have been acceptable to at least some in the industry without the background of steadily increasing take home ordinary pay. The ETU has achieved reasonable hours on the back of reasonable pay, so the interviewees were happy to accept the cap. Furthermore, the union is able to ensure adherence to the cap on hours through active membership involvement and education, although there was some initial resistance from some. They also talk about attitudinal change amongst employees. These changes took place in the presence of a strong union with wide membership coverage: once agreed at a general members meeting in late 1999 the union was strongly behind a cap on hours and has assisted members to ensure its implementation. These employees work alongside concreters, carpenters, and other building workers who do not enjoy capped overtime and who continue to regularly work over 56 hours a week.

Both plumbers (who have an 8 hour overtime limit) and electricians have rostered days off, leisure days and flexibility in their annual leave.

What long hours do to individual electricians

Tim describes the effects he witnessed and experienced while working on a large construction project. He worked in a section where they might work an extra four hours a night and Saturday, but not as much as elsewhere where they were doing 12 hour days, and weekends.

Prior to [1997 I worked] at [this site]. That was no holds barred. People were working twelve hour days. Saturday. Sunday...and after the first two weeks, if that ...they were sort of walking zombies by about Wednesday, Thursday of fatigue, and you could just see that they were slowing down. And they were doing it for months. And you could see they were wrecked.

Currently he is working at another large site. The employers obviously still have deadlines to meet within the 10 hours limit so things have to be arranged differently:

They realise now there is an overtime limit and so they've sort of built that in... companies now know they can't cram the job at the end.... They know that there's a limit so they sort of rather than being real dry with guys at the start and having you know 10 trying to do it, they'll put 15 to keep up with things and carry it along. With the limits, when its near the end they can sometimes get an exemption for a Sunday, or a couple of hours, but generally, now they know there's a limit [on overtime] they put in their program.

Tim feels that the hours are more predictable now, that employers have to plan so the workload tends to be more constant and evenly spread out.

Our hours now, you can pretty much assume now that you do the week and Saturday.

'His kid doesn't want to see him'

In past jobs Tim has seen the effects of long hours in fellow workers that lead to safety risks as well as effects on family life:

Toward the end of the day, they are not as alert, and when you are dealing with people working on cranes it is a bit of a hazard... That's work-wise. Home-wise... I know this one particular person who works every [overtime] amount there is and he's the first there, last to go sort of thing. He's a carpenter, and there's another carpenter I know and he leaves 3.30pm - goes home. And they were talking about their kids. And the guy who leaves early was saying when he gets home, his kid can't wait to see him, you know. And the other guy who's never at home said, he was amazed, because when he gets home, the kid runs away. But he's, I guess, so far with the work he doesn't realise - doesn't twig - his kid doesn't want to see him. He probably says to his mum, 'Who's that guy who comes here every night?'... you hear things like that.

'You basically became a zombie'

Cam describes the effect of working long hours over an extended period. For two years he worked on a central city site:

One of the biggest jobs in the city at the time. We were doing some incredible hours there. I was involved in a lot of hours. A lot of Sundays and Saturdays and weeknights, purely because of the way the job was going. It had to be done basically. And you were there to do it. So it did take its toll. Fatigue set in. You basically became a zombie at some stages you know, when you were doing 12 hour days, 6 or 7 days a week, but you wouldn't be 12 hour days everyday. But I know guys who have - and done longer hours, so it just becomes out of control. And that becomes a way of life for you in the end, where it takes over. And I know it's broken up quite a few families.

Like others in this study Cam had been inclined to think that missing out on the early years of his children's lives 'wasn't critical'. However, in retrospect he is not so sure:

It was pretty constant, almost from the word go. So we were putting in some incredible hours. Look, thinking back to the times we did that, as I said the money was really good, but when you look back in retrospect it takes its toll on your life. With losing leisure time, losing family life. My kids were a lot younger then, so it wasn't as critical but they grow up so quickly, that time you can never get back. And it's priceless, I think.

Cam describes how the long hours affected attitudes to safety:

Because of the long hours I think after doing so many, you don't think clearly anymore. You get to a certain stage where you're just there and you're doing a job and you're really not thinking as clearly as you should be. And that's where it becomes dangerous as well on the safety side of things where restrictions were a lot more lenient than as far as working on live components. We've changed now. The safe guards are a lot stricter than what they were back then. And you can imagine the pressure of the job and working longer hours - to get things done, you're going to take short cuts. And when you're working long hours, hazards are going to happen.

He discusses an example:

I guess it would be probably partly laziness and tiredness of working those hours, where instead of going to turn off a [switch] board - and you might have to go up to another area to do it and tag it off - you think, 'oh, I'll do it live', right, instead. So the hazards were always there... That's what I was talking about the zombie state, where I was talking about. You're thinking is diminished and you just don't think clearly when you've worked those sort of hours... it really takes its toll on you.

Ian agrees that productivity is negatively affected by fatigue:

I've been lucky enough not to see any major accidents or anything happen, but I've seen people mope around, or maybe hit their finger with a hammer, or drop something, they're just lethargic. They don't know where they're going, they walk into a room to get something and forget what they need to get. That happens normally, but to them it happens a lot more... So really the productivity isn't there for them, 'cause they're not there. Once you're been at work that long, your mind just isn't there.

In Jake's view, a cap on overtime has brought about a change in employees and the workplace, one that affects depression, productivity and families' capacity to plan:

Yeah, because over a period of time when people do those hours it leads to, well you're knackered all the time, naturally leads to some sort of depression, and even working, 6 days straight it gets to you. Even working 6 days out of 7, it's a lot of time to spend at work. And you can tell with the guys, we've just had the two day weekend, we had the Sunday and Monday, because we had the RDO and the guys are chirpier, refreshed, they've had a good weekend, and they're into it the next week. Now they look forward to not this week, but the following one, where they have five days off... And they get to plan their lives. They know they've got five days off coming and they'll go away, whereas in the past you plan something and if you weren't one to say no you'd have to

cancel your plans if you had to go to work. It sort of gives people the opportunity to plan their lives.

What long hours do the families of electricians

Long hours were a particular problem for those with families. Men spoke about the need to create a relationship with their children or spend time with them, or give their wife a break from constant childcare responsibilities.

Ada, the partner of Raphael, finds that his reduced hours mean that she is able to be more flexible in her own arrangements for paid work. She works part-time about 10 hours a week, working around his hours, like so many other partners of long hours workers. She also notices that Raphael has been able to develop a much better relationship with the children – twins who are now at school and a three year old. She commented that her memory of the long hours time is ‘a blur’ because the children were very young and they were doing ‘so much at the time’. She didn’t like Raphael working 7 days, but ‘it was a means to an end’ in terms of earning an income and getting ahead in terms of the mortgage. ‘We just had to work around it and do it’. Like many other families, when he was working long hours and she was working too, her mother-in-law ‘had to’ help with the childcare.

Raphael leaves for work early but is usually now home at around 4.30pm. His hours are now 7am-3.30pm (Mon-Fri), 6am-1.30pm Saturday. He generally works on Saturdays staying just under the cap of 10 hours overtime a week. In Ada’s view, it is good to have him home on the weekends at least on Sunday’s now so that the family can have time together. If she is working on Sunday it gives him the opportunity to have the children to himself. Now they are able to have family outings, be at home together, and to arrange holidays. When he was working 7 days, with his rostered day off he would usually only want to catch up with sleep and rest. Now he is able to spend time with the children when he comes home, and they are able to spend “good quality time together”.

Raphael is also clear about this improvement. Before the cap took effect, Raphael on his last job worked 12-hour shifts for 7 days a week for 2 months to finish the project. Added to the actual working day was travel time:

When you’ve worked 12 hours, and you’ve got a young family and get home, the last thing you feel like doing is muck around with the kids or on a Saturday afternoon you can’t be bothered doing anything. When you get home you’re always narky with your missus. You’re knackered. You start at 7 o’clock in the morning and we live in the Eastern suburbs, it’s 45 minutes away and your alarm goes off at 5am and you do a 12-hour day. You’re not home before 8.30pm. Your body can only do so much.

Some of the blokes wanted a beer after work, but Raphael went home. If work was close he would get back at 7.30pm but the children would already be in bed – and the long term effects of this pattern of hours could be read in the marital breakups around him:

While money’s good, but you’ve got to weigh up whether having a life or – some guys take the money. That’s how marriages break down. Your wife might have young kids and she can’t look after them while you’re at work all day. They need a bit of a break

as well. I said to my wife, 'let me know if it gets too much and I won't do the hours'. Some blokes don't think about it like that.

Murray believes that the cap was introduced for three reasons: because of 'failing marriages and workplace injuries' and 'to spread the work around': 'It's better to employ 2 blokes for 40 hours a week than 1 bloke for 80.'

Jake points to the marital effects of long hours on his site:

Just on my project I'd say within my work group, we've got about 30-40 electricians that are there, and 6-7 that are divorced or going through divorces, and one of the things they kind of say [affected them] is all the hours they used to work, to pay the mortgage off, to support their kids through school and all that sort of stuff.

Raphael agreed that there were a lot of marriage breakdowns in the industry because of the long hours. These hours tended to really 'get out of hand' toward the end of the job. Nonetheless, 'breaking' the culture of long hours, and the desire for the high earning is not always easy:

There'd be penalties and overtime, 12 hours, 7 days a week and it would be getting out of hand. A lot of other industries still do that where there's fellas working 10 hours a day 6-7 days a week and used to do it and getting the money each week and if you told them you were going to cap them they'd string you up basically. They're used to doing it. They're happy to make that money.

When Raphael was single it was one thing, but he's got twins and a younger child now:

If you're going to miss the kids or miss work, I know which one I'd pick.

Every 4 weeks they now have a long weekend and for Raphael, this means more predictable family time: with the three days off every month the family can go away, for example, to his parent's beach house. He still finds it too difficult to play competitive sports with his regular weekend work.

Ian describes a relentless cycle of work/sleep/eat/work in the period where he worked long hours:

Just to get home while it's still daylight and scrub the kids and take them to the park, let them have a run around, or take them to the shops or take them to friends, go visit family. There was none of that. You end up like a hermit, a recluse... People go, 'oh, and what have you been up to?' and it's just work, that's all you can say, 'what have you been up to?', 'work' and it just becomes depressing and day in day out, and just builds up, builds up and you don't know it 'cause you're just at work the whole time.

And if you're not at work you're either cleaning up, you're doing the basic maintenance you have to do around your home, cutting the grass and doing bits and pieces and... when you actually sit back and see 'what have I been doing?', there's no quality of life. Life goes on, time's is ticking away everyday, day after day, year after year, and you've

got nothing to look forward to. There's no goal, there's no time, there's no interaction with other people, too, you know. You're just stuck in the house, work, home, shower, eat, sleep, wake up, work and it's just like a vicious cycle and it just starts going bad. It just builds up. (Ian, electrician)

Cam describes how life was before for him - in terms that are almost identical to Ian's description of the relentless work cycle:

You didn't have any leisure time. You were basically going home, eating, having a shower and going to sleep. That was your leisure time. Have a bit of a chat and you're too tired to do anything else. So that was life for a while.

Cam supported the cap on hours, for the sake of his family:

Basically I needed a family life. I put the family before anything to be quite honest, and that's where it came about.

It was the effect on his children that really pulled Cam up and encouraged him to rethink his hours of work:

The kids commented at one stage, which is what really caused an awakening for me. They said, they said to me, and their mother, all I ever do is work, and then I thought, 'they're right'. And I had a look at myself, sort of stepped back a bit and reassessed the values. And that's when I started restricting myself and since this limit came in, it's basically done it for everyone.

Interviewer: So what your children said had a big impact on you?

Yeah, for sure. And I could see what they said was right. I wasn't home a great deal, I was always working and before the shit hit the fan I pulled my head in and started looking at my life, so that's where it stood. You've also got to take into account, being on those jobs for a year and a half, two years, or whatever it might be, you were sort of in there for a quick buck so to speak. You get in, you get out, because you don't know what the future might hold. And that's part of the reason as well.

Interviewer: Did you talk with your wife about your hours?

I did. There was a [financial] goal there. A light at the end of the tunnel. But like I said, after the kids said something like that, it sort of changed my view of things and we sort of learned to survive with normal working life, or what I would call normal working life anyway. It's still currently going on anyway with other unions. Pretty much unlimited overtime...

Cam is now able to play golf, go fishing and takes his kids fishing. However, while Cam is pleased about the cap on overtime he points out that he still works long hours that are not ideal in his view:

I'm still working 6 days a week most of the time, which means 8 hours extra, which basically means you're getting one day off a week, which means you're catching up on things around the house, or you get to visit someone which just didn't happen before. But 6 days a week is still too much I reckon. But that's the nature of the beast.

He believes that employers have fixed goals and that employees have to make sure that standards are fair and enforced:

When it comes down to the crunch the boss doesn't give a shit if your family life is affected or not. They want the job done. They want to make their money. The guys want to make their money as well, but it's at a cost, it is at a price. If you are working unreasonable hours you pay the price, somewhere along the line. Family life, social life, fatigue. They could end up dead...

Ian has a similar positive picture of how fewer hours have affected him, his relationship and his kids, and he contrasts what his parents did, and what he wants now:

There were five kids in my family [when I grew up], so there was a fair bit of money that was needed to come in, to feed us, clothe us and do all that. And I thought 'Nah, I want to enjoy my quality of life because my parents didn't have it'. They did it hard so I could have it easy, and I thought, 'Nup, I want to have it a bit easier for my wife and my kids'.

Interviewer: Have you noticed a difference in the family now?

Yeah I have. I come home. The wife is chirpier. She's not stressing out, you know, 'cause a lot got put on her, 'cause I'm not home, I'm always out and about.

Ian's children have also noticed a difference, which he values highly:

Yeah, especially with the little boy. The little girl, she's just a happy chappie, but the little boy, I found he wasn't as close to me, he wouldn't..., now when I come home he just drops everything and runs straight for me, where before - I'd come in at 8, 7, 6, whatever time - there just wasn't that closeness. Now when I do grab him, when I do come home from work, and go to the park or go to the shops, I mean they can't wait to come up to me and that's worth any money or any amount of overtime, or anything.

The effect on electrician's relationships

Ian recognised the stress that his long hours put on his relationship – and in the end he felt he had to choose:

So I was [traveling] all over the place, putting a lot of stress on my family life. And we got to a point, [where if] I'd kept on at that job I wouldn't have had a wife or kids in the same household, so I went back to regular work, you know, now while the children are pretty young.

He understood that his hours also meant long lonely hours for his wife – which took her to breaking point. His hours – and ‘being bugged’ - made even conversation about the situation difficult.

I think a lot of the pressure went on her cooped up in the house with two kids. And ‘cause I wasn’t home I couldn’t do the bits and pieces around the house, go to the bank... Sometimes all she needed was a half an hour to leave the kids with me, just to get out and not have them in her ear, ‘cause as little kids, they’re, ‘mum, mum, mum, mum,’ and that’s non-stop from when they wake up, til when they go to bed. I found that she was going around the bend when I was doing all those hours. I could see she was close to breaking point even.

Interviewer: Did you talk about those things together?

Well I wasn’t home really to talk about it and when I was, I was buggered. And she was buggered ‘cause she was – didn’t really get a chance.

Eventually he took action:

I came home and I said, ‘Hon, I’ve pulled the pin’ and she said, ‘well is that what you wanted to do? You know, you do what you want to do’, and I said, ‘Yeah, that’s my call and that’s it, that’s how its going to be’ and she just laid a big kiss on me lips. So that’s it. She didn’t have to say anything else.

It was not only electricians with families who appreciated less overtime. Jake is single and values his extra time for hobbies:

Interviewer: So why is it important for you not to work those hours?

I always have something better to do! I’ve always been sports oriented. I’d play golf, soccer, all that sort of stuff. Go to the races. Friday night, POET’S afternoon... go for a drink with a few of the guys.

The effect on electrician’s social life

Tim describes the effect on his social life when he was supervising construction of a supermarket. His tiredness after long hours meant that he was glad he wasn’t in a relationship, “Just as well really! [laughs]”:

I was running the job and there wasn’t enough people on the job. So the blokes that were there were expected to work. And I just said to them, ‘look, the boss-man wants this to be done by such and such a date. Work the hours you want, or the hours you feel you can work, and if we get it done we get it done, and if not that’s their bad luck sort of thing’...

I’d leave [home] real early to beat the traffic and be there at six and just set up things and get things ready. And there was probably between 8 and 16 people there at different times. Just keep them going. Make sure they’ve got everything. Make sure

they're doing everything safely. Coordinate everything. And by the time they've finished up, I was probably leaving at 6 o'clock.

When you get home, you have something to eat, takes probably an hour to get home, have something to eat, shower. Wash. Too tired to do anything. Just go to bed. And that was the way it went. Some days on Saturday and Sunday we'd work when there was a problem for 14 hours. Things like that... The only time you had a break was on an RDO, rostered day off, and we wouldn't work, which on that particular job, was every second Monday. So that day was pretty much a waste. Bit of a wreck.

And I remember coming home and friends and a brother was going to another mate's joint to watch a video. And I got there, had something to eat. It was about 8 o'clock, put the video on and I woke up when the credits were finishing and I went home and that was it! Basically for that 6 months it was just - you might see people at night, once or twice a fortnight or something. If you're lucky. Just too busy and too tired.

His hobbies were also set aside:

I race motorbikes... During that period, it didn't happen. Like there's a race once a month. So I just didn't go... I would always do things with my brothers and friends, but it would be 'I'll see, I got to work Saturday, I work Sunday, work back at night'... Which at the time, as I said, I was single and [it was] sort of part of the job. I didn't look at it as though this was complete bullshit. Excuse the French. But it didn't particularly worry me. But from now, looking back, that six months I didn't really [do anything else], I was just working.

Now, he says 'Anything I want to do with family, friends, I've got time to do it...'. Tim now has a partner.

Employer pressure: the 'choice' to work overtime in the construction industry

Each of the interviewees felt that many employees felt pressure to work long hours in the industry. For those who refused, there were consequences - such as losing their job which some had experienced personally. According to Raphael, you do have a choice in theory, 'but only to an extent':

When the work's there, the employer generally expects the work, don't they Murray? The job's got to get done. But if you say to your boss, 'it's got to the stage my wife's going to leave me', then that's a hard case...

Murray agreed that while it isn't compulsory the long hours certainly were expected – and for some created a dependence upon an 'overtime' income:

Some families, while the works there, take it to take out a mortgage, \$150 000 or whatever. They've got to work to meet their commitments whether house or car. When the work dries up, they're buggered if they still have to maintain payments, their standard of living. Or their partner might get shitty.

In Murray's experience, when overtime was worked, it was usually given with a few days notice and the employer would approach and say that a 12-hour day was available, although it was generally expected that the majority would work the time.

Cam reinforced the involuntary nature of much of the overtime work in the industry historically, while pointing out the benefits of working less hours now – despite 'some grumbles':

Construction is a pretty rigorous game and the job was going for whatever it might be - it might be 18 hours a day sometimes. There was shifts, shift work that was done, and you basically had to be there. And if they couldn't get enough labour the foreman would somehow put enough pressure on the guys to actually stay there and do the extra hours. The money was great, but leisure time is worth more... During the period of construction, if the work's being completed, we had to stay with the job, so to speak, with construction going up, walls going in, to make sure the cables were in, so it was a never-ending battle.

So the blokes were being pressured to actually stay there although they didn't want to be a lot of the time. I've seen it. They felt they had to be there, otherwise their job would be in jeopardy. That was the pressure that was put on them by foremen, so since this restriction has come in they just can't do it anymore. There's a 10-hour overtime limit. There were grumblings in the early days about restricting overtime, because they're used to the money, but now I think you'll find, conservatively speaking about 95 per cent are very happy with it, and you'll get the odd grumble. But the concept has changed, the views of people have changed over the last 3 or 4 years, they've just loved the idea of the time off, so they can plan their life.

He has personally observed – and experienced - the consequences of rejecting overtime:

I've seen it many times where the guys were feeling pressured to working overtime, purely to protect their jobs. Because, come the end of that particular construction job, they would be the first ones out the gate if they didn't do what the boss wanted basically.

Interviewer: And is that what your experience was?

[laughs] Yeah, definitely... A foreman wanted me to work back doing an area I was involved in. And basically I told him where to go in no uncertain terms. And I found myself in L. So he was basically trying to use me as an example I suppose, but speaking up at meetings, and stuff like that, voicing your opinion, doesn't do much to lengthen your career with a company and that's what happened. I ended up in L for a while, and then got the bullet from there. So I was out of work for a little while then. That's the sort of pressures that come to bear with a lot of the guys on the job.

Ian also recounted stories of penalties for refusing overtime:

I know that people who don't agree to stay back when they're told to...if they do it two or three times, they'll actually get moved off the job and sent to the yard, and from the

yard they'd say, 'you're no longer needed'. The yard is the stepping stone, that's where they send you to oust you, and everyone knows that, but they'd never admit that, that's just in the industry, everybody knows. You know if you're going to the yard, you haven't got long!

He particularly mentioned workers of non-English speaking background, who he felt were vulnerable to the threat of job loss:

A lot of these people are migrants and all that and their English isn't the best, and they figure, 'well if I say no, where do I go to from here? I can't even fill out a form properly without help'. And that's the majority of people who they do sort of - I wouldn't say stand over, it is actually, it's standing over - they stand over these people because they haven't got the fluent English, they can't read and write properly, you know they figure that... 'these people are giving me the job, I'll just put up and shut up, I'll do whatever it takes'.

By contrast, Jake felt that the cap on overtime had taken some of that pressure off. Nonetheless, some employees in other occupations were still working very long hours:

One of the cultures in the construction industry was [pointing]. 'Okay, you can work this overtime, you can't, you can't, you can't, you can'. They'd [the employer] pick and choose who they wanted, so it was always a certain crew who were not working or working. But these days, with respect to overtime, it's open, up to our overtime limit. If you want to come in you can, if you don't you don't have to. It's changed in that way too. You're no longer being pushed and forced to either come in or not come in....

I'd even go as far as saying that...people find it a lot easier to say no because the excuse is 'there's a cap. We can't do it'. It's actually helped people to come out of their shells and say, 'we can't do it'... Because in the past there's never been an excuse, if you like, for not doing all the overtime. Don't get me wrong. Some jobs they do monster amounts of overtime. I mean, one of the other unions on my project, it feels as though they are pouring concrete 24 hours a day.

Control over hours and work

Prior to the cap on hours, interviewees felt that – in addition to working very long hours especially near the completion of a job – they lacked control over hours. This meant that they couldn't plan their outside life including social engagements, their family events and holidays. They were frequently asked either on the day, or a couple of days ahead, to work a 12-hour day and the expectation was they generally would do so.

'It's the nature of construction industry'

This was a phrase mentioned a few times. It suggests that long hours achieve a naturalised acceptance in industry sectors, as they have in much of construction. However, the electricians experience in imposing a cap shows that there is nothing especially 'natural' about these hours. While it's seen that employers put a certain amount of pressure to finish jobs, there is an acceptance that hours are to some degree beyond anyone's control. For

example, Raphael said that working Saturdays are simply necessary in the construction industry (although other electricians don't work Saturdays). Others also commented that the periodic nature of construction was inherent, ie that there would be a period of overwork followed by unemployment after the end of a job. However the exaggerated affect of that, they felt, was somewhat overcome by the 10 hour cap. Despite this, there remains an acknowledgement that the unpredictability of construction means that there is a tendency to take the work while it is there.

Changing a long hours culture: it's possible

Jake describes how initial worker resistance to fewer hours changed, partly in view of the productivity and fatigue issues:

In the first six months [after the decision to cap overtime] you'd have people saying, 'well, no. I wasn't at that meeting. I didn't vote. I can do whatever I like. You don't tell me. If I want to do 20 hours a day, I'm going to do 20 hours a day.' But it's obviously not in the interests of the company 'cause you won't be working the whole 20. You just won't be there mentally. Physically you'll be tired, you'll be a health and safety risk to everybody there on site. So there's no interest in anyone doing it. And after the initial teething and people getting used to it, I don't think people now would have it any other way. You ask any electrician in Melbourne 'what do you think of the 10 hours', and they'll put their thumbs up.

He agreed that most electricians who had cut back on overtime were 'pretty happy' about it:

You go back even four, five years ago, a lot of our membership as far as the ETU is concerned, would love to do a whole heap of overtime, or wouldn't say no to doing a whole heap of overtime. But today, they're pretty adamant that they're pretty happy to be working from 7.00 to 3.30 and come in on a Saturday to do their 8 hours which keeps them under our 10-hour overtime limit, which is what we voted for at the last EBA. And the guys consider that to be enough and it gives them enough time to spend with family, or do what they want to do. A funny story too, last week I had to ask the guys whether or not some of them wanted to come in on a day to do a change over. When I say a change over, the whole project needs to be turned off, and that means no one else can work. So it's got to be done out of hours if you like. And I was struggling to get six guys to come and do it. 'Cause they feel they don't need to do the overtime, they get paid enough to do what they have to do, and they'd rather be at home. No, it's been a huge change. And that's only happened in the last four, five years...

What capped overtime has meant for electricians

Ian is straightforward in his assessment of how the change affects him – although it took time for him to acclimatise to more time for himself and his family:

I think it's brilliant. It was a bit strange in the beginning with all your free time when you were at home and not doing all that enormous amount of overtime and you'd just feel stressed and you'd come home and the actual long hours would impact on your family life. 'Cause you'd come home and you wouldn't feel in the mood for anything

'cause you'd just done all these hours at work and all you wanted to do was relax, and then the wife wants - she's been in the house with the kids all day - so she wants to hand over the kids and you aren't in the mood and then she gets upset and then that's how the family conflict starts. But like this, I'm at home at a decent hour and I get to spend time with the kids. Now, once they go to school then I won't get to see them as much because they'll have their own friends. So while their still infants or little children I get to enjoy that bit of family life.

Ian describes the industry changes since his apprentice years, reflecting on the cost for his family along with the costs for those who could not get any hours in the industry:

Well I started when I was 16 as an apprentice back in 85 and you'd get a Saturday every now and then. As I went along with my apprenticeship it got busier, busier, they want you to stay back 10 hours, 6 days a week, and obviously that impacted on your home life, your friends. I wasn't married then so it didn't really matter too much. And then there was a lull in the industry, or here there was in Melbourne anyway... where I couldn't even get a job. And there was no over-time limit and the people who did have a job were working all these hours and there was a whole heap of unemployment... So in the mid-90s when it started picking up that's when the movement people said 'well now there's plenty of work out there, let's share it, instead of few doing all those hours and impacting on them'...

Well it wasn't easy in the beginning, they still wanted you to do the hours and they'd say 'well why can't you do it?' and [I'd say] 'oh well, there was this mass meeting of all the electricians in Melbourne, and it was brought up there, and everybody voted on it.' So even the bosses can't say 'can you do more, come on', and also the union's got the right to go through the time and wages records of the companies' in their enterprise bargaining agreement, so there's less companies willing to push people to do those extra hours because they can be caught out very easily.

Ian was very supportive of the cap on hours, not only because of the time for family but especially in light of his own experience of unemployment:

By the time I'd finished my trade there was nothing out there. I knew a few people who were doing 16 hours a day and I thought that was just ridiculous. So I was all for [the cap], and it's actually worked for me. Because I've got two young children and to get home at a normal time of day when they are still awake, you know, can't be nothing but a good thing I think.

He was also aware of the costs for his life, even before he was married:

We were doing 10-12 hours a day and you just get home and by the time you shower up and have something to eat, it was time to go to bed and then go back to work again. It was just this vicious cycle where, when you actually do get to the Sunday when you don't work, you actually sleep it off... and you lose your social life and your friends, it just goes out the window, just quality of life goes out the window.

These effects became more complicated when he had children and a partner and was still working long hours, while in a different job:

Well just the kids go to bed 8, 8.30pm or something, and...you get home and they're in bed and you don't even see your kids, you see them once a week on the Sunday, or on the Saturday. And that puts a lot of stress on the other partner. Because they're cooped up in the house all day with the kids so they can't wait for you to come home. Like I do now at a godly hour, look after the kids, and she can hop in the car and do the shopping or something, or just go out and have a breather.

'Spreading the work around'

While some electricians were inundated with work, others were searching for work. The interviewees feel that the work is now more evenly shared as a result of the overtime cap. Tim described his experience:

With the shorter hours it's created more employment and I know that for a fact on this job...Now that we all work the same 40 hours and a Saturday, there's a lot more people who need to be employed... and because [the employer] knows they can't put a lot of overtime on at the end of the job, they will employ more people and basically you'll get your week and a Saturday. Whereas in the past you might just have you're forty hours, forty hours, forty hours, forty hours, you know, and then they'll sack you and then the last people that are left will get eighty hours a week. So by putting limits on it, you're basically make it so that most people in the industry will have their forty hours, and if they want to work the extra, they can work that extra Saturday...

He points to specific employment effects – which are tested by employers on a regular basis, and require restatement and defence:

So what they've had to do is employ more electricians so instead of there being three electricians there's now five. And that's just one case. And contractors... have said 'is this the overtime limit?' they ...try and bend it and we've said, 'well no, it was voted by the blokes and that's what it is,' you know. And then they said, 'well, we'll have to bring a couple more guys here too, so they can finish the job and keep up to scratch'. So it is working.

Tim's description of the fluctuating patterns of hours suggests that long hours for intermittent unpredictable periods creates a thirst for the long hours 'when you can get them' because of the uncertainty of work into the future. While employers might seek to intensively work small groups of workers to meet completion dates, the costs for workers in terms of shorter periods of very long hours, followed by unemployment are high:

I think that in our industry, depending what job... if you've just started to work on this job and they say to you, 'we need you to work these hours', there's a good chance people will do it 'cause they don't know how long it's going to be. We generally get the sack at the end of jobs if there's not enough work. That's the nature of the industry. So, if the work's there, people will do it, and because the next job they might have to wait three months for the next job to come around.

But as it is now where there is an overtime limit, it's shortened those periods in between where there's no one picking up people. And it's lengthened the job too because they need people. Rather than it being, 'right, everyone get in here. Work 20 hours extra, finish it, now get lost'. Now it's sort of, they realise they've got to structure it better...There's definitely more work around. I don't mean more buildings going up, I mean they need more people employed.

I guess it's changed. How it used to be, was the job would slowly start off, and it would work up, and there'd be say 50 people and it would drop back to 35, and then it would come toward the end of the job and it would sky rocket up to 60 blokes, and then within the next month, there'd be two. So it'd go like that. Whereas now, you get more blokes earlier and it goes along bit more stable, because they know that peak at the end - they would cram all those people in at the end and do overtime, and finish the job off.

What would help?

Jake feels that it would be useful to get a definition of unreasonable hours into the award:

For starters, if it's in the award, it's written in black and white. There's that legal obligation for people to adhere to it and it gives some people the reason not to work all this overtime, because something is there. That's why I feel the cap's helped our people... because there's that reason not to do it.

He also believes that it is important that other issues that impact on unreasonable hours are included, namely the number of hours without a break, time off between breaks, and health and safety standards.

Electricians provide an example, through these experiences of an industry that has long been permeated by long hours – a ‘no holds barred’ hours culture with many working very long weeks. While these threatened life in some situations, they were persistently worked – and still are by many occupational groups. Nonetheless, a change in the hours regime has been possible for a sub-group of workers in the industry. Its success relies on membership involvement in seeing that the new standard is enforced. And overwhelming the stories of workers and partners in this occupational group are positive about the effects upon their lives, their relationships, their children and their participation in their communities – whether through sport, hobbies, friendships or extended families.

References

- Babbie, Earl (2001) *The practice of social research*, Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, Belmont CA.
- Crotty, Michael (1998) *The foundations of social research*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Galinsky, Ellen (1999) *Ask the children. What America's children really think about working parents*, New York, William Morrow and Company.
- Hochschild, Arlie (1997) *The Time bind. When work becomes home and home becomes work*, Metropolitan Books, New York.
- Oakley, Ann (2000) *Experiments in knowing: gender and method in the social sciences*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Pocock, Barbara (2001) *Family unfriendliness' at work: What the literature tells us about the effect of long hours on couples, kids, and community*, Report to the Queensland Department of Industrial Relations. Centre for Labour Research, Adelaide University. Adelaide 5005.
- Slaughter and Parker (1985) *Management by stress*, Labor Notes, Detroit.
- Schwartz. F. (1989) 'Management, women and the new facts of life' *Harvard Business Review*, January 1989, pp 65-76.

APPENDIX: Research Protocols