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# **‘ONLY A CASUAL...’**

**How Casual Work Affects Employees,  
Households and Communities in Australia.**

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*Generally, a lot of [the permanents] had the same attitude, 'well you're just casuals'. I couldn't tell you the amount of times I had said to me, 'you're just a casual'.*

*(Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

*Well I think you are used and abused ... I was always under the impression that casual workers were there for overload situations, emergencies, or whatever but I've been casual for five years now ... 'We'll look at that next year' is the general reply to any request for permanency ... So, yeah, I think used and abused is the best description I can come up with.*

*(Alice, 41, word processor operator, engineering industry)*

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# Summary of Report

## MAIN FINDINGS

- This study reports on the experiences of 55 casual workers. These casual workers were randomly selected from a pool of 136 current or past casual workers who responded to newspaper calls for their participation, to flyers distributed by their employers or in their workplaces or at university, or were drawn from a random sample of members of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, along with ten names offered by four other unions.
- There are three types of casuals in this study, in terms of overall views of casual work: the positive, the ambivalent and the reluctant.
- The majority are reluctant casuals: sixty-five per cent (or 36 of the 55 interviewed) are negative about being casual. Many are *very* negative.
- A quarter are – overall – positive about being casual. Most of these are students, younger people or women with dependents. All are part-time. Most have a back up source of income – a partner, parent or pension – and most are at certain stages in their life cycle. While they are positive about being casual now, they did not want to be when they had kids and a mortgage, or they do not want to be when they finish studying.
- Not all students or mature age carers are positive about their casual terms. Two key conditions drive satisfaction: real say over working time through a 'reciprocal negotiating' relationship with the employer, and a back up source of income. Often both are present amongst positive casuals.
- While flexibility is often taken as the defining characteristic of casual work, it is far from the only criteria taken into account by casual workers when assessing overall experience.
- The experience of casual work is multi-faceted. Issues affecting overall assessments include flexibility for the worker; predictability of pay and hours; respect, say, training and promotion at work; sick and holiday pay; and impacts on health, home and community.
- Some employees find that being casual gives them flexibility. Twenty-three of those we interviewed – or 42 per cent – feel that they had some flexibility and say over their work patterns. Some value it highly.
- The majority do not have flexibility: 32 or fifty-eight per cent see flexibility as something their employers get, but they do not.
- Flexibility has many dimensions including predictability of ongoing work, days of work, total hours, start and finish times and breaks. Many casuals have surprisingly little capacity to influence these aspects of their casual work, despite the promise of casual flexibility. Many feel *on call*, more than *in charge* of their working time.
- Three-quarters of interviewees would prefer to be permanent. Some have tried to become so, without success. Some are in a long-term casual ghetto.
- For many, casual work is not a pathway into permanency.
- A good boss emerges as very important to satisfaction with casual work. A good relationship with this boss is critical to real flexibility for most.
- Depending on a good boss for some employee control and say is seen as a precarious and unreliable means of protection. Many casuals want to see an improved floor of rights, along with their enforcement.

- Many casuals work in fear of dismissal, assuming they do not have rights to contest unfair dismissal. Some do not know when they have been effectively dismissed: they wait for the call for a next shift that does not come.
- The loss of respect and workplace citizenship – voice, communication, training, promotion, inclusion – emerge as *very* important aspects of casual work for workers.
- Casual pay holds many hazards: for many it is variable by the week, and over the year. It is sometimes accompanied by long gaps, lacks minimum call in times and is drained by work expenses.
- Low hourly rates and under-classification mean that many casuals look to the casual loading to get them to a liveable hourly rate. Their hourly rates are often lower than those they work alongside.
- Three-quarters of interviewees receive the casual loading; a quarter did not or do not know what it is.
- Of those who receive it, seventy-one percent feel that the loading did not adequately compensate for the difference between being casual and being permanent.
- Many casuals go to work sick. When they are sick they weigh up ‘how sick, how injured, and how poor’. Illness is a moment of real hazard, putting health at risk and sometimes ongoing employment when they refuse work. Some do not get a second chance.
- Some casuals can take a holiday when they want and value the flexibility highly. Many others have few holidays because they cannot get away, lack funds, or are fearful of not having a job when they return.
- Casual work sometimes has positive effects on health, but more often it is mentioned as a negative: undermining self-esteem and contributing to worry and stress over money and predictable work. Some are depressed and, at the extreme, have suicidal thoughts.
- Casual workers often do not report injuries or find their hours cut if they do.
- Casual work has effects beyond the individual. It affects children, partners, friendships, households and communities. Planning for events is difficult. In some cases it makes relationship formation difficult.
- Trouble with financial planning, borrowing and saving for retirement are amongst the significant financial costs of casual work.
- Casual work leaches commitment to work and affects productivity as some casuals hang back from expressing their views at work or are excluded from contributing.
- Many casuals would like to see better opportunities for conversion to permanency, access to paid sick and holiday leave, protection from repetitive rolling contracts, better protections from arbitrary dismissal, more respect and better terms for those employed through labour hire.

## KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT CASUAL WORK

This study asks – and offers some answers – to five key questions about casual work:

### **1. Are casuals really ongoing employees? Is true insecurity exaggerated?**

It is true that some casuals turn out to be long-term employees under their casual terms. But for many, this is far from permanent work - with equivalent rights - just by another name. For the majority in this study, ongoing casual work is not disguised or *de facto* permanent work. Long-term casuals feel that they work under second rate terms in their workplaces and the injuries of marginal status and low respect are compounded by low pay, poor conditions and lack of access to basic workplace rights. Formal rights – like rights to pursue unfair dismissal – are far from practical rights in the minds of many long-term casuals. Some lack knowledge of these rights, and many lack the practical power to exercise them.

### **2. Are casual jobs ‘good’ jobs or ‘bad’ jobs?**

Many casuals like their jobs. But this does not make them ‘good’ jobs in their minds. The majority want to change the terms of their employment to permanent conditions, seeing these as superior to the unpredictable terms and lack of true flexibility and pay for casuals. In the minds of the majority of those in this study, their casual jobs are not ‘good’ jobs.

### **3. Do casual jobs meet employee preferences for flexibility?**

In some cases, yes - especially for some students and some women with dependents - in particular, those with back-up sources of income and bosses who negotiate with them in a reciprocally flexible relationship. But a majority of those in this study do not feel their jobs are flexible in ways that suit them as employees. Flexibility functions much more for their employers. Where it exists for employees, flexibility is often conferred by the goodwill of local supervisors. They are greatly valued, but this represents a precarious and unstable basis for flexibility for many casuals.

### **4. Are casual jobs a pathway to better jobs and to ongoing work?**

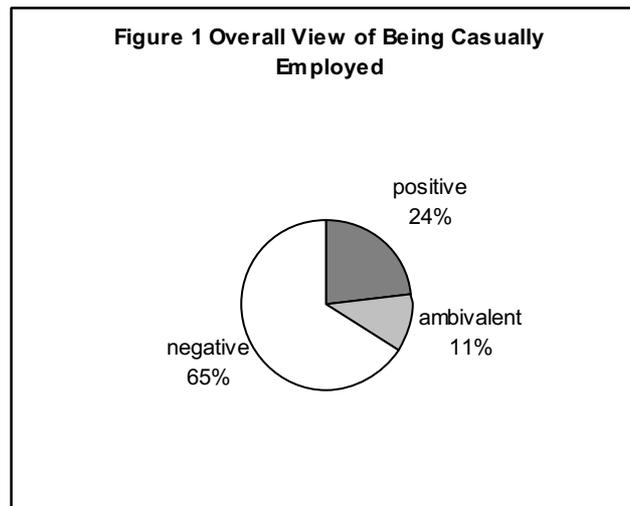
For some this is true, and for others it is irrelevant as their labour market futures lie in other occupations. However, casual work is a dead-end ghetto for many, especially older and more experienced or expensive workers, who are under-priced or ‘out-gunned’ by energetic newcomers from the reservoir of casuals that exists.

### **5. Are casual terms remaking work environments in Australia?**

This question is suggested by this study. The insecurity of casual work drives insecure workplace citizenship for many casuals. It undermines the exercise of their existing rights and makes them very powerless to control critical aspects of their work lives, like working time and pay. In many workplaces they are the ‘shock absorbers’ who absorb the pressure of plans that go wrong, cost-cutting, or overload. The fact that over a quarter of Australian workers now work on these terms has implications for workplaces more generally. A lack of say and insecure work for many casuals means that ongoing workers are also affected where a growing number of their casual workmates have little access to training, feel disrespected, and cannot speak up about injuries or hazards or contribute to work improvements. In this way, a growth in casual work casts a shadow over workplaces more generally, affecting productivity, employers and many ongoing workers.

## OVERALL ASSESSMENTS OF CASUAL JOBS

Three overall views of casual work are evident amongst the 55 interviewees in this study: positive, ambivalent and reluctant. About a quarter are generally positive about being casually employed. A smaller group are ambivalent: they see both good and bad sides. A much larger group are negative. We call these 'reluctant casuals' because they do not like, and some hate, their casual terms of employment. Two-thirds of casuals in this study do not like this form of employment. These three types are set out in figure 1.



This result challenges the assertion that casuals are in this form of employment because they like it and choose to be. Most in our study do not.

The thirteen who are positive about being casual are more likely to be working students or carers with family responsibilities. All of those who are positive are part-time. Only one older man held a positive assessment, while five of the thirteen are relatively young and/or students. Nine of the thirteen live with in a household where their income is not the sole source: either with a parent, partner or pension.

Reluctant casuals can be found in all industries, occupations, age groups, and amongst students as well as mature-aged men and women. Some young students need control over their working patterns as well as older women with dependents, who need predictability of income and hours.

### WHAT UNDERPINS SATISFACTION WITH CASUAL TERMS?

Two factors are strongly associated with positive views about casual terms: firstly, those with other sources of income; secondly, those with a good relationship with their supervisors, that ensures reciprocal negotiation and real say over working time. *Both* of these hold for most casuals who are positive.

Where employees are highly dependent upon their casual earnings, and where they have little effective say over their work patterns, negative assessments are common. One or both of these factors affects most casuals in this study, driving the high level of negative overall assessments.

Satisfaction with casual work is also associated with certain times in the life cycle. Some of those who are positive about their casual work in retirement years, say that this form of employment wouldn't have suited them when they had dependents or a mortgage.

At present, the circumstances of casual work often implicitly require that earnings are either supplementary or fitted to certain life cycle stages. While these situations are sometimes more suited to casual terms (though far from always), these casual terms are increasingly extended to, and imposed upon, workers that they fit very ill. Irregular casual work creates a 'lowest common denominator' labour form, shaped out of very specific life cycle and household circumstances, that do not hold for the increasing number who must accept casual terms or face unemployment. Such terms are increasingly all that is on offer to people who are very far from having back up sources of income, or in temporary life stages that make irregular part-time work a desirable choice.

Based on this study, it is simply not true to say that most casuals prefer to be casual. The reverse is true amongst our sample. The majority do not like their casual terms, many are looking for permanency and those who compare both experiences show a strong preference for ongoing terms of employment.

### **PART-TIME WORK, NOT CASUAL WORK**

Many casuals clearly distinguish between what they are looking for from part-time work, and what they get through casual work. Many want to work part-time hours, but do not necessarily want unpredictable hours and income, no training or communication in the workplace, and to be treated without respect - which they name as some of the significant consequences of being casually employed.

### **ENJOY THE JOB, BUT NOT THE CASUAL TERMS**

Many casuals enjoy their jobs. They prefer work to unemployment. However, they distinguish their assessments of their jobs, from their view of casual terms. The significance of an analytical separation of general job satisfaction measures from views about employment terms is clear.

### **WHAT PEOPLE DON'T LIKE ABOUT BEING CASUAL**

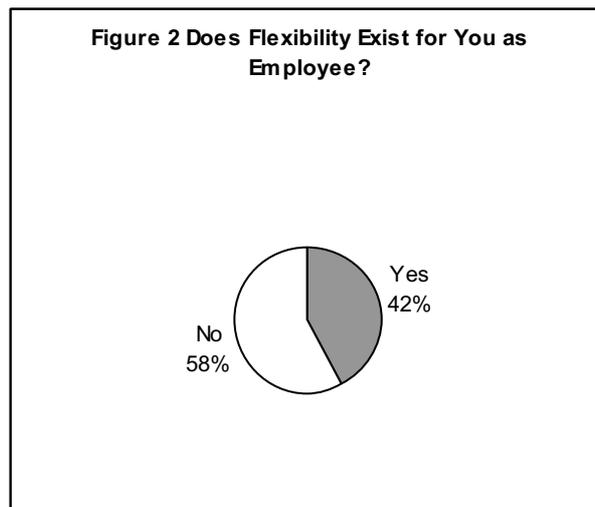
Explanations for negative views are multi-faceted. They include the unpredictable nature of working hours, days and income; the need to be 'on tap'; the ways in which casual work makes people feel 'like a dishrag' or 'a stone being kicked down the road' and peripheral to the workplace and community; the impact on their households and social life; and the fact that they cannot easily take a holiday or be sick. Some feel 'used and abused'. Issues of respect and exclusionary treatment emerge strongly in casual workers' assessments. Long-term casuals are especially negative about being casually employed. They feel it is unfair, and means low earnings and limited opportunities to save for retirement.

### **FLEXIBILITY – FOR WHOM?**

Casual work is flexible. But in this study that flexibility emerges more for the employer than for the casual employee. Forty-two per cent of interviewees (or 23) felt they have some flexibility in their jobs: to ask for holidays or to change their hours for example (see figure 2). Many value it highly.

However, more than half of those in this study (58 per cent or 32) felt that there is no flexibility for them. Employee flexibility is a myth in their experience. Instead, their working lives are determined in many cases at very short notice and they feel they have little true flexibility. Losing shifts or working hours is frequently mentioned as a consequence of knocking back work. Rather than flexible terms, many casuals face very inflexible working arrangements that ask a lot of them as

employees, but confers little control on them. Many are aware of the irony, given the promise commonly assumed of casual terms.



### **THE DIMENSIONS OF FLEXIBILITY**

Flexibility has many dimensions for employees including predictable hours, knowing hours well in advance, having a say about shifts, naming a minimum call in time, known finish time, and control of long hours and unpaid overtime. Some try to get control of work patterns and hours by changing jobs or try to earn enough to live on by holding multiple casual jobs.

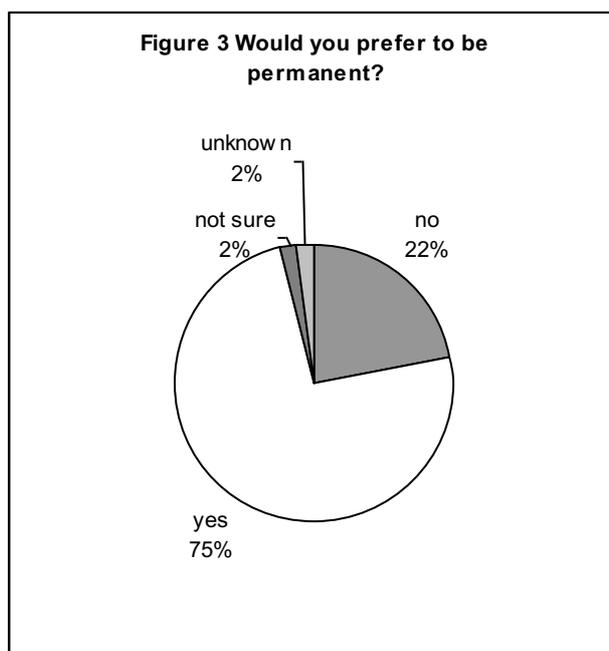
It is clear that the exercise of real say over working time is very variable amongst these casual workers. Some have a lot of say, but the majority do not. These differences are very dependent upon good relationships with supervisors.

### **THE PREFERENCE FOR PERMANENCE**

Most casual employees in this study would prefer to be permanently employed. These results contradict the assertion that casual work meets employee preferences. Twelve, or less than a quarter of those in the group, preferred being casual to being permanent (see figure 3). However, seventy-five per cent of interviewees would prefer ongoing employment. This includes many who have some flexibility and say in their casual work patterns. However, they would prefer permanent work for other reasons: integration in the workplace, the chance for training and promotion, more recognition for what they do, and less vulnerability to arbitrary dismissal or loss of working hours.

The preference for permanence is strong across age groups, industries, occupations and amongst students and non-students as well as those with dependents and without them. Many part-time employees would prefer ongoing part-time work, rather than casual terms.

Many in this study have sought to convert to ongoing conditions, some with success. Others have not been so lucky. Their motivations are varied: to get respect, income predictability, reduce worry about losing hours or the job, avoid instant dismissal, have a paid holiday, be able to be sick without losing income, have better protection if they are injured and accumulate decent superannuation.



### **CASUAL WORK IS NOT A PATHWAY TO PERMANENCY**

For some, their initial casual work has been a way into ongoing casual work or a road to permanent employment. For others, casual work is seen more as a reservoir than a stream forward, and the reverse is true: their ready availability on casual terms has allowed their employers to retain them on casual terms.

In some cases, their growing experience and skill base has made their prospects for permanency less likely, rather than more, as they become more expensive and paid at higher levels of classification (where internal labour markets of this type exist and are available to casuals). This creates a ghetto for some, or a trapdoor into unemployment for others.

In some workplaces the systems for allocating permanent jobs are arbitrary or unfair - like voting by permanent staff to choose which existing casuals should be converted. Many casuals feel under constant surveillance in relation to their work performance, with the carrot of permanence dangled before them, but little real chance of achieving it.

Getting older, speaking up, or contesting aspects of working life can result not just in lack of opportunity for permanency, but loss of working hours and loss of the job completely.

Many casuals support the idea of a right to convert to ongoing terms after a period as a casual so that some kind of secure foothold in the workplace is possible, with rights equivalent to those of permanent employees.

### **RESPECT**

The question of the treatment of casual workers emerges as a very significant aspect of casual experience at work. While a few casuals feel they are treated no differently from others, many are aware of very different treatment. Most commonly, they mention a lack of respect, of being used and abused: of being 'only a casual'. Others describe their situation as degrading, or very variable: 'they either love me like a rash when they want me to work, or they don't even want to talk to me'. A number of interviewees feel that they are abused at work. In some cases this is a general feeling of secondary status, of being left 'out of the loop' and of being ignored. Interviewees feel that they

are bullied, that their workplace injuries are ignored or dismissed, and that they lack voice at work.

## **ONLY A CASUAL**

Being ‘only a casual...’ is mentioned by several interviewees. They are less than proper workers, despite the commitment that they make to their work, in some cases over many years.

## **A GOOD BOSS**

In this situation, having a good boss is seen as very important. Some have very good bosses, who look after them, send them flowers when they are sick and give them compensating shifts when they have been ill. But for many, a feeling of vulnerability to the whim and nature of the local supervisor, is very evident. As a result, casuals work hard to ‘manage upwards’ and keep relationships ‘sweet’. They are careful not to refuse tasks or work when it is offered. Falling out with a permanent co-worker or with a supervisor can have disastrous implications for earnings and employment itself.

## **BULLYING**

Countering workplace bullying is especially problematic when individual power is weak. There are many examples of the exercise of arbitrary power against individual casual workers, and – short of dismissal – the loss of so many hours work that employment is effectively, though not formally, terminated. The threat of repercussions dogs the working day of many casual employees.

## **MARGINALISED AT WORK**

Many casuals, like other employees, enjoy aspects of their work. However, marginalisation of casual workers takes many forms: from not being asked to the Christmas party or picnic day, to missing out on training and promotion and workplace communication. This matters a *great* deal to casual workers.

## **PERFORMANCE**

Many casuals see little difference in the intensity of work of casuals and permanents. However, for others ‘the fear factor’ and surveillance drives intensive work patterns. Different workers in a variety of occupations and industries report pressure to be seen to be working hard, and to actually work hard in a kind of theatre of competitive performance, as one described it. In some cases, casuals do work that ongoing workers do not like. For those in fast food and other sectors, it is important not to stand still, or you may be sent home. In other cases, new casuals are expected to be instantly productive with little support or induction.

## **SURVEILLANCE**

This intensive effort for some is underpinned by a steady sense of surveillance. In some cases, this surveillance is from worker to worker, as they are encouraged to outperform each other, in order to ‘win’ more hours. A sense of expendability affects some casuals who are keen to have a positive reputation (including in relation to labour hire) so they get another chance next time or tomorrow. Some casuals feel that they can ‘never relax’, cannot take a break, and ‘live on a knife edge of uncertainty’.

## **VOICE**

Casual status has the effect of silencing the voice of some at work. The price of speaking up can be very high: a ‘DCM’ as one describes it (‘don’t come Monday’). This fear of speaking up is

mentioned by workers with very different levels of experience and skill: 'you can be gone in a second'. Skills and experience are no protection. Indeed, some experienced and skilled workers are very careful not to offer suggestions about improvements in their workplaces as this is seen as a threat to ongoing workers and supervisors and undermines employment security. Personal confidence overrides these concerns in some cases, but for the majority of workers in this study, loss of voice at work is a significant price of casual terms. It affects individual voice, as well as the capacity to voice views collectively, including through joining and participating in unions. It also imposes costs on productivity as workers hold back from offering ideas about improvements at work. Many casuals feel that permanency confers voice.

## **PAY**

Some casuals are happy with their level of pay. They are glad to have a job, to be off welfare – or to earn 'pocket money' as one put it. However, this gratitude does not stop many from seeing difficulties around pay and inequities in pay systems. A central question around pay for casuals is its predictability. You are 'one day away from bankruptcy'. While some have a high hourly rate, their pay over the year can be either low or very unpredictable. Some casuals have elaborate arrangements to deal with the precarious nature of their pay, the gaps and delays in pay, and the fear of losing it altogether. Beyond this, the question of base rates and classification are also very important

## **LOW HOURLY RATES, UNDERCLASSIFICATION AND THE LOADING**

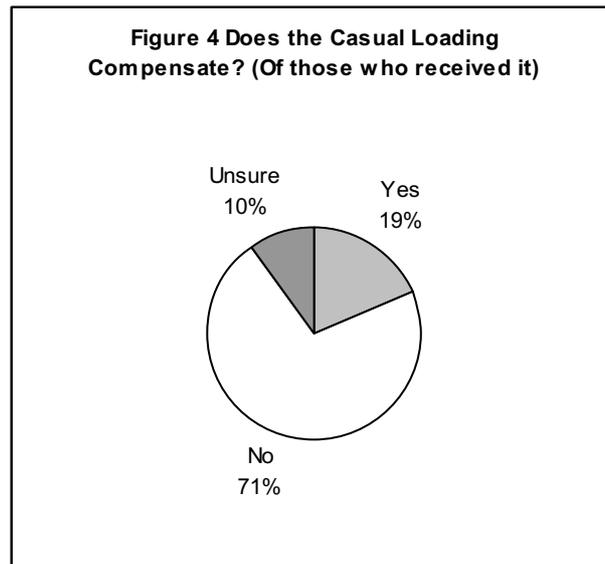
Many casuals are on much lower hourly rates than the ongoing workers they work alongside. Some are paid as labour hire employees, and in other cases, they are simply under-classified. This makes the casual loading (of 15-25 per cent to compensate for paid sick and holiday leave) a vital part of total pay. Many casuals are very dependent upon it to reach a liveable weekly wage. Without the loading, many would be on very low hourly rates, much lower than those they work alongside or appropriate to their level of skill and experience. This is a very sore point.

## **THE CASUAL LOADING: DOES IT COMPENSATE?**

Three-quarters of casual workers in our study receive the casual loading. Nine did not and another four had no knowledge of it or how it worked. Most casual workers in our study do not believe that the loading makes up for what is lost in being casual. Only eight interviewees felt that the loading compensates for the difference between being casual and being permanent. Thirty (or 71 per cent of those who received it) felt that it clearly did not, while four were not sure (see figure 4).

While some want to stay casual in order to get the loading most in this study do not and see the chance of paid leave, along with the other dimensions of workplace rights and citizenship, as more valuable than a 20 per cent wage premium. In some cases, the shift to permanent work made this very obvious to employees who might have been unsure how to weigh up the benefits. In some cases, employees are unclear about the balance of benefits in relation to sick and holiday pay, and did not know their rights. A good boss who explained the difference and options - where they exist - was obviously of great benefit to some.

However, no matter what their preference, a shift to permanent employment was simply not available to most casuals in this study. Some have 'begged for it' without result. The longest serving casual worker in this study had been employed for 16 years as a packer in a meat plant. She had tried to become permanent without success. She had suffered serious injury. On the day she left noone even said goodbye. She tried to get long service leave without success and her superannuation was very poor.



## TRAINING AND PROMOTION

It is well established that casual workers get less access to on-the-job training, as many interviewees in this study can readily attest. This is an important concern to those who want to be trained to do their jobs well and have the chance for greater job security in the future. The loss of training opportunities is seen as an important aspect of lost workplace citizenship.

Similarly, promotion eludes many casual workers. While it is a secondary concern after getting job security, the opportunity for a career is important to some.

## BEING SICK

For some casuals, the lack of paid sick leave is not a serious difficulty. When they are sick they tell their employer and take unpaid leave. For the majority, however, being sick is a real problem. Casual employees carefully weigh up how sick they are in relation to the income they lose if they are ill. They often go to work sick. Sometimes the income they lose is not just the hours they are off sick, but ongoing hours as their employers do not offer more hours to 'the unreliable'.

Sickness is a moment of real hazard for casual workers where they have no income back up. They tend to go to work sick, and their 'presenteeism' represents an uncostered externality of casual work, for both themselves, their long-term health and that of their co-workers. Paid sick leave is a significant reason explaining the majority preference for permanent work.

## HAVING A HOLIDAY

For a few casuals – a minority in the interviewee sample – the lack of paid holidays is not a problem since they enjoy the flexibility to take holidays when they choose, provided they give enough notice. Many rely on back up sources of income. On the negative side, five main issues arise around holidays from the experiences of the casual employees: getting a break, having a job when you get back from a break, having enough money to take a holiday, having enough flexibility in the job to take leave, and fitting holidays around demanding work patterns.

Many casuals have few holidays and in some cases, they are called back from them when work demands. Abby's recall from her honeymoon and her two holidays in four years of casual cleaning are not an unusual pattern. Another long-term casual had never had a holiday with his 13 year old daughter. Inadequate holidays have many effects upon casual workers, including on their own health, on their families, and on their wider relationships.

## **HEALTH**

Some casual workers, enjoy aspects of their jobs, especially the social connections they make, and they find these beneficial for their health and self-esteem. In other cases, the stress of employment insecurity affects mental and physical health, drives long hours or back-to-back shifts, creates health and safety risks at work, and leads to the deferral of health care. Casual status affects the reporting of workplace injuries and recovery from them. Casuals worry about having enough money 'to tide me over'.

The health effects of casual employment range from deferral of proper health care and health checks, to negative effects arising from stress and worry, through to serious mental health and physical problems. The loss of self-esteem, especially – but not exclusively – amongst older men is especially notable. Several mention that they have had suicidal thoughts.

Casual workers are also affected by injuries at work, which are often unreported. Several examples in the study show direct pressure not to report injury, while in other cases, casuals are simply too busy to report injury or fearful of the consequences. This fear is not always misplaced, as several stories show.

## **RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL LIFE AND COMMUNITY**

Casual work has an impact that extends well beyond the individual employee and their health. It sometimes has positive effects upon individuals, family and households, on relationships and relationship formation and upon social life and community involvement. Working part-time means some casuals can maintain their friendships and enjoy community activities and sport. Engagement in these, however, depends upon two factors: predictability of work (including the days and hours of work and finish times) and the opportunity to refuse to work certain times without fear of loss of future work. Some casuals work in these accommodating circumstances, but many do not.

Unpredictable working hours make planning for family events very difficult: 'everything is just a maybe'. Many casual workers are concerned about the impact of their jobs on their partners and upon their children, and they miss key school and family events because of unpredicted work.

The stress and unpredictability of casual work can also affect personal relationships. Interviewees across a range of occupations and ages discussed these effects, which were all negative. Some of these effects are experienced within existing relationships, but a significant number are also experienced in relation to the formation of relationships in the first place.

This study confirms that casual employment contributes to delayed or failure to form relationships. Many young people talk about the need to put work before social time in order to be available 'when the phone rings'. They talk of living 'minute to minute' and the cost of this to their early relationships. Unpredictable work makes social participation difficult. As does low income, and variable shift and finish times. If work comes up, many feel they must take it. In this context, work dominates social life.

Casual terms sometimes suit sporting involvement. In other cases, unpredictable work times, fear of reprisal for refusing shifts, lack of money for participation, and concern about the effects of a

sporting-related injury on earnings constrain sporting activities for casual workers.

## **FINANCIAL PLANNING**

Some casuals with independent sources of income or backup household incomes have few financial worries. However, financial worries are commonly experienced by other casual workers. These relate to three issues: having a low income, having an unpredictable income, and fear of having no income. Many casual workers find it very difficult to plan their finances, to borrow and to save. Accumulation for retirement is very difficult for many, and older casual workers frequently mention their low retirement earnings and worry about their future.

## **WELFARE, TAX AND SUPERANNUATION**

Casual work exists in close relationship with the welfare system. For many it is inter-leaved with unemployment. Negotiating welfare, tax and superannuation with various government agencies is an extra complication for many casual employees – made more difficult because of the irregularity of casual incomes. This shapes the casual work experience for people at both ends of the life cycle. Young students talk about the complex relationship between their earnings and their Centrelink payments. At the other end of the spectrum, the casual earnings of older retired workers are significantly shaped by their intersection with welfare payments and the taxation system. Some describe the tasks of negotiating the family payment, unemployment, and health and transport concession systems as ‘like an extra job’. Even highly skilled mature aged employees find the task challenging, and point to serious problems around the accumulation of superannuation and tax.

## **CASUAL WORK IS REMAKING THE TERMS OF WORK FOR MANY**

Casual work leaches commitment to work. While some casuals love their jobs and give a lot to them, many are cynical because of their treatment and no longer offer ideas and extra effort at work. The price for productivity of pervasive casual work is hard to quantify, but many casuals talk about it. The growing proportion of casual workers in the Australian labour market, with its impact upon working conditions, pay and employee voice, has shifted the terms of power in the Australian workplace affecting not only the casual workers who live under its terms, but the many others who work alongside them, as well as those they live with.

For many workers, the cost of their casual work is measured in their variable pay packets, unpredictable lives, inflexible work patterns and loss of respect and citizenship at work. Beyond casual workers themselves, the presence of a growing proportion of precarious employees in many workplaces has affects well beyond these individuals.

Greater insecurity at work affects many ongoing workers and their workplaces. Precariousness drives a lower training effort, divided workplaces and less individual and collective voice. It imposes costs for productivity, for the health system and across the broader community. It silences workers in workplaces and seriously undermines practical access to collective organisation or even individual voice. This is a high price to pay for flexibility that suits many employers but only a minority of casual workers, based on the results in this study. These costs - not always obvious - affect households, families, children, social life and communities. Some workers in this study see casual work as a return to working conditions – unpredictable pay, no paid sick leave or holidays, fear of reporting injuries – of last century and the century before. They hope that this is not their children’s future – or their own.

# 1. Introduction

This study investigates the experience of casual work from the perspective of workers who do it. Statements about the role and function of casual work in giving employees and employers ‘flexibility’ are common in Australian public life (Abbott 2003, Andrews 2004, Anderson 2004). There is little systematic evidence to support these assertions. This study investigates whether casual workers are happy with being casually employed.

Some large surveys give us a picture about some aspects of casual employment, and employee perspectives about their employment (Wooden and Warren 2003). However, a comprehensive picture of the experience of casual work, from the perspective of employees, cannot be easily gleaned from large surveys asking closed questions. Issues like the nature of preferences, the quality of relationships, the connections between work, health and family welfare and workplace power are difficult to plumb using closed, limited-response survey questions. This qualitative study aims to evaluate the views of casual workers about their jobs and the casual form of employment, explore the impact of this upon them, their households and the larger community. Open-ended interviews allow unanticipated issues to surface, clarification of views with follow-up questions, and the exploration of meaning around preferences, satisfaction and flexibility.

This study is based on interviews with 55 employees who have been recently, or are currently, employed casually. It assesses their overall views of casual work and its impact upon them as individuals. It also sets out their views about the impact of casual work on their households and broader relationships, as well as their participation in community life.

Interviewees include students; young people who are not students; middle-aged and older men and women; a range of occupations and industries; full-time and part-time workers; individuals from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, and from the city and the country; long-term and short term casuals; those undertaking ongoing tasks along with those providing short term relief; people working in less skilled through to highly skilled jobs; those in the formal labour market and some in the ‘black’ labour force; and people living in various household structures, with and without partners and children.

Our method involved the generation of a pool of potential interviewees, from which we randomly selected for interview, with a view to generating a stratified sample of interviews including a fair range of types of casual employees, by sex, age, industry, occupation, student status and so on. Potential interviewees were gathered as a result of newspaper advertisements and newspaper articles about the study, invitations to classes of university students, letters and handbills distributed to employers and community organisations, and names provided by a few unions. Newspaper sources were the largest source of names. When our pool and sample showed up as being under-representative of young people and those in the retail sector, we initiated a second stage of selection, drawing a further group of thirteen from a set of randomly selected names supplied by a large union with a high proportion of young casual workers. The methodology section below sets out the approach in more detail.

## 1.1. Goals of the Study

The goal of this study is to collect accounts of casual employment from different classes of casual workers that are indicative of broad classes of casual workers, allowing us to distinguish, where appropriate, experiences of different casual worker ‘types’. We aim to reveal the lived experience of casual work, analysing its diversity, but focusing upon key questions, including:

- How does casual work affect individuals?
- Is it seen, by and large, as a positive or negative experience?
- Does casual work give employees genuine flexibility?
- Do casual workers seek permanency? If they do, what happens when they request it?
- How does casual work sit in relation to worker preferences for working time, pay and employment form?
- How does casual work affect households, relationships, children, families and communities? Does it affect the ability to form new relationships?
- How does being employed casually affect the experience of work, including relative work intensity, training, promotion, treatment by co-workers and managers, say and voice in the workplace?
- What do casual workers do for holidays and when they are sick?
- Are casual workers happy with their level of pay, and how do they see the casual loading (its availability, adequacy and level of compensation for conditions available to ongoing employees)?
- How does casual work affect planning?
- How does it affect individuals' experience of social service payments?
- What role do unions have in relation to casual workers' experience?

## **1.2. Funding**

The study was supported (to the value of about \$15,000) by the Australian Research Council through the fellowship project 'Theoretical and policy implications of changing work/life patterns and preferences of Australian women, men and children, households and communities'. It was also assisted by a Small Grant from the University of Adelaide of \$6000 and a contribution of \$4500 from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).

## **1.3. Past Research About Casual Workers**

There is a large and growing body of research about casual employment in Australia (Smith and Ewer 1999, Campbell and Burgess 2000, Campbell 2000, Kryger 2004, Wooden and Warren 2003, Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell 2004, Junor 2001). This literature documents the growth in casual employment (along with growth in other forms of non-traditional employment), the industries and occupations in which it is concentrated, and some attributes of casual employees. Smith and Ewer's 1999 study of casual work included a qualitative element of 22 interviews and 3 focus groups. They conclude that whether casual work confers flexibility and meets employee preferences is 'open to question', pointing to the limited labour market options underpinning 'choice' for many casual employees, and the 'close nexus' between casual work and unemployment (1999: v).

A commonly used measure of casual employment includes employees who lack access to paid holiday and sick leave. ABS data show that the proportion of all employees who self-identify as casual workers or who lack paid leave was 27.9 per cent in November 2001 (ABS Cat. No. 6359.0). HILDA survey data collected at the same time gives a similar estimate of employees without leave entitlements of 27.4 per cent. This is more than double the 13.3 per cent level recorded in 1982 (Campbell 2000: 68). The proportion and absolute number of casual employees has grown quickly

in the past two decades, outstripping the growth in ongoing employment<sup>1</sup> (OECD 2002, Campbell and Burgess 2001: 172).

Table 1.1

Comparison of Characteristics of Casuals in Labour Force and in Study		
	Per cent in Labour Force*	Per cent In Interviewed Group
Males	43	35
Females	57	65
Part-time	67	76
Full-time	33	24
Students	34***	25
Industry		
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	4	0
Mining	1	2
Manufacturing	7	11
Elect Gas and water	1	0
Construction	5	5
Wholesale trade	3	2
Retail trade	27	27
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	12	5
Transport and storage	4	2
Communication services	1	4
Finance and insurance	2	0
Property and business services	10	5
Government admin and defence	2	4
Education	7	9
Health and community services	9	15
Cultural and recreational services	4	2
Personal and other services	4	7
Occupation		
Managers and administrators	1	0
Professionals	10	11
Associate professionals	5	5
Tradespersons and related workers	8	11
Advanced clerical, sales and service workers	3	4
Intermediate clerical, sales and services workers	22	22
Intermediate production and transport workers	10	4
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	26	35
Labourers and related workers	17	9

Sources:

\* ABS Cat. No. 6359.0, November 2001, self identified casual employees without paid leave entitlements and other employees without paid leave entitlements.

\*\*\* HILDA data, Wooden and Warren 2003: 12.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showing the current distribution of casuals is set out in Table 1.1. Casual employees are more likely to be women and to be part-time (that is,

<sup>1</sup> We prefer the term 'ongoing' to 'permanent' employment given that much non-casual employment cannot be considered 'permanent', as some interviewees pointed out. While not permanent, it can, however, be distinguished from casual work, in its presumption of being ongoing.

employed less than 35 hours a week). Based on HILDA data around a third of casuals are students at school or at university. They are concentrated in particular industries, especially the retail trade, and accommodation, cafes and restaurants. In terms of occupations they are especially concentrated amongst elementary and intermediate clerical sales and service workers.

Table 1.1 compares the representation of each of these groups in the general population with those in our interviewed group. While there are variations, the interviewee group includes fair representation of men and women, students, and various occupations and industries. The group is over-representative of women, part-timers and it is under-representative of students and labourers.. The study has a good representation by industry and includes a good spread by occupation. The interviewed group is older than the ABS data suggest, with only 10 per cent of the group under 20 compared to 23 per cent according to the ABS (we collected age data in slightly different intervals than the ABS). At the other end of the age spectrum, ABS data suggest that 22 per cent of casual employees (ie self-identified and those without paid leave entitlements) are over 45, while 24 per cent in our interviewed group were over 50

While the age difference is significant, it is also important to note that growth in casual employment in recent years has been strong amongst prime-age and older Australians, especially men. Campbell points to ‘the spreading net’ of casual employment since 1984, affecting larger proportions of prime-age and older men. The growth in labour market participation of students and women is associated with much of the growth in casual employment since 1984, ‘accounting for around 46 per cent of the net increase in casual employees since 1984’. However, Campbell draws attention to the sharp increase in casual employment amongst prime age males (25-54), older men, and young workers who are not students. The density of casual employment amongst each of these groups has increased rapidly since 1984, while the density of casual employment amongst prime age women and young working students has risen less rapidly. Nonetheless these latter groups remaining major sites of casualisation. Many interviewees in our study comment upon the experience of shifting from ongoing employment to casual work later in their working lives, with significant consequences for themselves and their households. Similarly, many young non-students comment upon the effects of living on casual earnings.

#### **1.4. Key Policy Questions Arising From the Literature**

The literature in relation to casual employment is now substantial. Without canvassing its scope and detail here, the current study offers evidence on four key questions emerging from that literature:

##### **1.4.1 Are casuals really ongoing employees? Is ‘true’ insecurity exaggerated?**

Existing data about casualisation in Australian documents the long-term nature of many casual jobs. According to HILDA data the average tenure of casual employees is 2.6 years (Wooden and Warren 2003: 13), and ABS data shows that most casuals have been in their jobs for more than a year: 54.7 per cent of self-identified casual employees and those without leave entitlements in 2001 had been employed for more than a year (ABS Cat. No. 6359.0). This data raises important questions about the experience of being casual. Are casual workers really in ongoing jobs, with benefits and conditions that mean they are, defacto, ‘permanent’ employees? Are these employees really in fact secure in their employment? This debate is important in the consideration of *whether* and *how* to respond to casual employment in Australia (see for example Pocock, Buchanan and Campbell 2004, and Curtain 2004).

##### **1.4.2 Are casual jobs ‘good’ jobs or ‘bad’ jobs?**

A second question relates to the nature of casual jobs. Are casual jobs seen as problematic by those who do them? Are they inferior in terms of conditions of employment, or does – for example - the

cashing out of sick and holiday pay into the casual loading effectively compensate for the loss of holidays and sick leave, so that on balance casual workers see their casual terms as good, rather than inferior. Are casual jobs ‘good’ jobs or ‘bad’ jobs, in terms of their pay and conditions? Are there other aspects of being casually employed that also shape whether they are experienced as good or bad jobs? Apart from the questions of job security, pathways to permanency and employee-preferred flexibility, we know relatively little about casual workers’ evaluations of other aspects of their jobs. The answers to these questions are relevant to the policy issue of whether action is necessary to contain or reduce casual work. Wooden and Warren have argued, based on self-reported HILDA data on job satisfaction, that ‘non standard employment is not necessarily seen as undesirable by workers’ (2003: 26). Interviews in this study raise important issues about the nature of that analysis as well as its conclusions.

1.4.3 Do casual jobs meet employee preferences for flexibility? Are they what workers want, especially what *some* groups of workers want?

It is often asserted that casual workers enjoy the flexibility of their jobs, that their non-traditional hours and terms meet employee preferences. The Minister for Workplace Relations, for example, recently argued that casual workers’ dissatisfaction with their casual work is ‘a myth’ (Andrews 2004)<sup>2</sup>. The previous minister asserted in 2003 that ‘Most people who do casual work are happy to be doing it either because they like the extra pay that casual workers get or they like the freedom and flexibility and the flexible hours that casual work provides’ (2003).

1.4.4 Are casual jobs a pathway to better jobs, and to ongoing work?

Casual work may be a means to ongoing employment. If this is the case, efforts to restrict it or change its regulatory environment may be seen as imposing a penalty upon casual workers by restricting employment growth (Tsumori 2004). Some studies suggest that casual work may provide a means to ongoing employment, although experiences vary significantly between groups (Chalmers and Kalb 2001).

Kryger has recently pointed to the association between various measures of unemployment and the incidence of casual work, finding a consistent relationship between higher levels of casual work and higher levels of unemployment and underemployment. This leads him to suggest that casual work is less a preferred option of employees, and more an alternative to unemployment when no ongoing jobs exist (Kryger 2004). Is this relationship sustained in the minds of casual employees?

## 1.5. Methodology

This study presents a qualitative analysis of casual work, based on interviews with 55 Australians who have been recently, or are currently, employed casually. These interviews were conducted in May-July 2004 by two of the authors (Pocock and Prosser). The instrument used for these interviews is included at Appendix 1. It included an introduction to the project and its purposes, details of its goals, and a request for participation and permission to record interviews. This instrument also sets out a guarantee of the confidentiality of participant identities, and the removal of any identifying information from our discussion of the interview material.

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<sup>2</sup> He relies on research by Professor Kevin Doogan in his public statements (see for example, Andrews, Media Release, 5/1/2004). However, Professor Doogan has stated in response to this misuse of his research that ‘For the record I have never offered any suggestions or provided any evidence to support the view that casual workers are ‘happy with their pay and conditions. Indeed, I have not been concerned with questions of pay and conditions but with labour market attachment and job insecurity’ (Doogan 2004).

The interviews ranged from 20 to 60 minutes in length and were on average 37 minutes long. They were conducted by telephone (with one exception that was conducted in person), digitally recorded with the interviewees' permission, and transcribed. They were then analysed thematically, transcript by transcript. This approach allowed analysis to proceed taking into account the individual, household and workplace context of the interviewee. Our goal was to develop a contextualised analysis of the experience of casual work, in order to assess the nature of that experience and the multiple factors that shape it.

Selection of participants proceeded in two stages. Firstly, a pool of 86 potential interviewees was generated by seven methods (see table 1.2 and the list of methods below).

**Table 1.2: Sources of Pool of Potential Interviewees**

Pool of interviewees	
<b>STAGE 1</b>	
Newspapers	65
Community organisations, canvassing of employers, students, other	11
Unions	10
LHMU 2	
ASU 2	
IEU 5	
LHMU 1	
(sub-total = 86 of which 42 or 48 per cent were interviewed)	
<b>STAGE 2</b>	
50 names randomly drawn from a state branch of Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Union	50
(sub-total = 50 of which 13 or 26 per cent were interviewed)	
Total (pool of 136 of which 55 or 40 per cent were interviewed)	136

Sources in the first stage included:

1. A paid advertisement in *The Age* and *The Advertiser* (see example of text used in invitations to participate in Appendix 2);
2. A news story run in *The Advertiser* about the research;
3. A leaflet distributed to first year and honours social science students at the University of Adelaide, inviting participation;
4. A leaflet mailed to a set of 20 randomly selected employers asking them to distribute a flyer (enclosed with the letter) to their casual employees inviting their participation;
5. A flyer personally distributed to 8 employers in cafes and restaurants in a restaurant strip in a large city;
6. A request to five unions to provide lists of names of casual workers (four responded, with ten names added to the pool from these sources);
7. A flyer distributed to community organisations inviting casual employees in contact with the organisation to participate.

The newspaper advertisements generated the largest number of potential interviewees (65 people). The request for specific names from unions generated a low response of only ten names from four unions. Distribution of materials to community groups, employers, and other means (two by personal contacts with researchers) generated a further 11 names.

The pool of potential interviewees generated by these means was under-representative of both retail sector and young casual workers. We therefore initiated a second stage by requesting a list of 50

casual employees from a state branch of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Union (SDA). This branch randomly selected 50 people from its total membership list of 50,000 members, drawing only on casually employed members. The SDA wrote to all 50 advising them of their potential invitation to participate and inviting them to advise the union if they did not wish to be interviewed. We then randomly selected from this list until we achieved 13 successful interviews. Of the group contacted from this list, only two declined to be interviewed; some others could not be contacted or interviews be organised. This second stage increased the proportion of interviewees from the retail and cafes and accommodation sectors, where most young casual workers are employed.

Overall, we generated an overall list of 136 potential interviewees from all sources, and interviewed 55 in total (or 40 per cent of the total pool).

We have made efforts to include a representative group of different types of casual workers, and have gathered them by means of a range of methods in an attempt to build a sizeable pool of potential interviewees from which we have randomly drawn. However, this study reports on a small sample of casual workers. Its goal is to investigate the quality and nature of views and experiences, and explanations of them. The study is best read in conjunction with quantitative data about the incidence of various aspects and characteristics of casual employment and employees.

Qualitative research has strengths and weaknesses. It is useful for ‘drilling down’ underneath quantitative data to reveal complex issues like motivations, views, contexts, explanations, and for investigating unexpected or unpredictable consequences of social phenomena (Oakley 2001). Many forms of qualitative study are not useful for reliable measurement of the incidence of particular effects or characteristics across the larger population. For example, interviews are not useful for measuring the *incidence* of young students amongst casual employees overall but they are very helpful in revealing what young non-students *think* about their casual work. Qualitative material is helpful for understanding how casual workers deal with the absence of paid sick leave, rather than the incidence of its availability across the total workforce.

Conducting interviews proved a challenging process. Many employees find it difficult to find 30-50 minutes to be available for interview, especially those with young children. Many casual workers cannot predict the hours that they will be at home and available for interview. A number of potential participants were concerned about the implications for their employment if they participated. In several cases, interview arrangements fell through because working hours changed and replacement times could not be found. In the end, 55 interviews were conducted, and the characteristics of these are set out in table 1.1 above.

Many interviewees were concerned that their identities remain confidential (as we promised), for fear of a negative effect on their employment. All interviewees have pseudonyms and some identifying details have been changed in some cases. Quotations have been edited (of pauses, repetition, and fill words such as ‘like’ and ‘you know’), with careful attention to the preservation of meaning. Where words have been edited or are not continuous, this is marked with ‘...’.

## 2. Do Casual Workers Like Being Casual?

*Well, I think that it's really difficult for a lot of people, especially people with families, people that are long-term casuals. They have no leave, no right to sick leave, no holiday leave. Myself, I had quite a few times when I had accidents and so on and I still went to work because I just couldn't take the time off. Financially, it was too difficult. There's got to be a better way for people to earn a living and have the right to take sick leave especially when they need to. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

How do casual workers, on balance, see their casual jobs? Do they make an overall positive assessment of their casual terms, or a negative assessment? An overview of their *form* of employment is distinct from their view of their *jobs* overall, and must be distinguished from the notion of job satisfaction. Many casuals make clear that their judgment about their jobs is very different from their assessment of its casual terms.

### 2.1 Three Views

In terms of employee overall views about their casual terms, three groups exist:

#### Positive Casuals

One group of casuals are, in the main, positive about their casual terms. They like their hours, which are mostly less than full-time and can vary, and they find that their jobs can fit around their other activities, generating useful income and other benefits including pleasure from the job itself. This positive group is especially made up of two sub-groups: students and women who want to work part-time. For this group of positive casuals, three key characteristics consistently emerge as essential to their satisfaction. Firstly, a supportive local manager in a reciprocal negotiating relationship. Secondly, an expectation of a minimal level of work (ie hours and pay) and some predictability and say about their hours and shifts including the chance to say no to work and to take leave. Thirdly, many of these positive casuals have another source of income, so that their casual work is not their primary source of livelihood.

#### Ambivalent Casuals

A group of ambivalent casuals also exists. They can see positive and negative sides of their casual terms. They may like their earnings and their jobs, for example, but find the unpredictability or some other aspect of their casual terms a downside.

#### Reluctant Casuals

Reluctant casuals are mainly or totally negative about their casual jobs and their terms of employment. Most of these accept casual terms because they need the money and/or lack other

options. Casual terms are a long way from the preferences of this group. They are ‘casual conscripts’ who *accept* - rather than *choose* - casual work. They do not like its terms. They would choose ongoing jobs if they could. A significant number - especially middle-aged and older men and women - *hate* aspects of their casual work.

Short biographical portraits of each interviewee are set out in appendix 3, grouped according to whether they are positive, ambivalent or reluctant casuals.

Table 2.1 sets out the incidence of these three types amongst interviewees. A quarter are positive about being casual but the majority are reluctant casuals who are negative.

**Table 2.1 Incidence of Positive, Ambivalent and Reluctant Casuals Amongst Interviewees**

Type	Number	Per cent
Positive	13	24
Ambivalent	6	11
Negative	36	65
Total	55	100

## 2.2 What Positive Casuals Say

Amongst our fifty-five interviewees, thirteen had a positive view of their casual work. They valued things like their earnings, the fact that they have a job, the flexible terms they experience, the chance to work around children or study, and the less than full-time hours. Many say that their supervisors are flexible and negotiate.

Two types of people are most common amongst this group: working students and carers with family responsibilities. All of those who are positive are part-time rather than full-time, and four of them are students. Only one older man held a mostly positive assessment, while five of the thirteen were relatively younger people (under 30) and the remainder were older women living in situations with other sources of income. Nine of the thirteen live with in households where their income is not the sole source: with a parent, partner or pension, for example.

### 2.2.1 Positive Working Students Who Get the Flexibility they Need

Many students (though not all, as discussed below) appreciate their access to casual work. For example, Chelsea is studying human resources and marketing. She does not plan to work at her casual retail job beyond the next 12 months when her course finishes. In the meantime, her two casual jobs help pay her car and living expenses and help her travel to see her boyfriend who lives interstate. Chelsea thinks her casual job is good: she can build her shifts around her study, and knows her basic shifts four weeks in advance:

*It's good and flexible if you have study at the university, things like that. Basically, things change every semester and you're able to adjust when you're working around timetable*

*changes so you don't have to be locked into only be available certain days which a lot of people experience on contracts. However, it is also a pain not knowing sometimes when you're going to be working and sometimes even getting shifts that aren't appropriate for your availability even when you are available. (Chelsea, 20, retail worker)*

Chelsea has good relations with her supervisor, and mostly tries to do the extra shifts that are offered to her partly because 'they'd stop calling you' if you refuse. She has been trained to do 'basically anything in the retail services part of the department'. Her positive assessment is not without qualification. Unpredictable work can be 'a pain' as well and she feels a sense of obligation to agree to work when it is offered out of concern that she could lose future work if she does not. As we shall see, each of these issues emerges as critically important to many casual workers. .

## 2.2.2 Positive Grateful Part-time Carer/Workers Who Get the Flexibility They Need

Older women with children are amongst the positive group, though not all such women are positive, as discussed below, especially where their work is not predictable or easily controlled. Amongst the positives, Donna is 41 with two young children and a 'breadwinning' husband (as she describes him). She loves her part-time casual work as a receptionist which suits her as 'a mother who's there to fill in her time, so to speak, or bring in a little extra income'. Being casual relieves her from guilt when she takes leave to care for her children:

*I'm actually quite grateful to have this job. It's a fantastic job and it gives me time out from my family. So it's like an escape. Everyday at work is like a holiday for me. So I put in the effort because I really enjoy it. I love what I do ... I guess when I was younger, I didn't like being a casual worker. It was too unsettling. But now as a mum with children, I need to do casual work because my children are sick quite a lot and the work that I've got at the moment is two days a week. It's fairly set but it's still on a casual basis. But it means that if my kids are sick and I need to stay home, I won't feel guilty about it. If I was permanent part-time or full-time, a) I'd feel guilty about taking time off for my children and b) I think I'd be more likely to lose my job for doing so. (Donna, 41, reception clerk).*

Like so many mothers, Donna's job gives her enjoyment, variety and relief from care. Donna avoids guilt for taking leave by accepting casual terms. In fact her job is ongoing and good relations with her boss mean her job is predictable and she has negotiating power. As we shall see these also emerge as consistent and significant issues for casual workers. Working mothers mention accepting casual terms as an escape from guilt when they need a break. Similarly, Margaret has chosen casual work as a school assistant because it provides guilt-free flexibility, which is important to her as a mother; however, this comes at the cost of insecurity, financial pressure and stress.

*I don't want any extra responsibility. I just want to go in and do the work and come home basically. ... I grind my teeth a lot because of the insecurity of it. Puts a lot of financial pressure on the family. But then at the same time, because I'm casual I get 20per cent loading and if I can't go to work I don't feel guilty about it. It provides me with flexibility with children. ...It's at the lowest salary and many a time you get to do work which is I know of a higher level but I just want peace of mind. I don't want any extra responsibility.*

*I just want to go in and do the work and come home basically. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

### 2.2.3 Positive casuals also see downsides: 'Swings and Roundabouts'

Even as they appreciate aspects of their casual work as students or as working mothers, both Chelsea and Donna recognise that casual work also sometimes has its down sides. Chelsea feels that many permanents and supervisors look down on casuals, and that her happy situation is very dependent upon a good immediate supervisor. Some of her friends have not fared so well. Some supervisors 'play favourites' and she feels that casual workers often don't know what is going on: 'because you are not there often enough to influence anything or to know what's going on'. She appreciates regular minimal shifts, is careful not to refuse too many shifts, and she is clear that she wants permanent full-time work later when she is 25 or so: 'then [being casual] would be a real pain'.

Although it suits her as mother of young children who are often sick, Donna recognises that 'there is no stability' in casual work - but she sees all forms of employment as increasingly insecure. Her husband's income is vital to her satisfaction with her casual terms. She can take holidays and time off to care for her sick children ('Not for myself [when I am sick]. I save that for my children. I drag myself to work if I'm sick. Any time off that I take is purely for my children'). And her employer can tell her not to come to work when things are quiet: 'That's Okay. That's what being casual is all about. The swings and the roundabouts. You get paid at a higher rate because that's what's expected of you'.

Christine is 55 with two grown up daughters and shares Donna's overall positive perspective. She works casually at peak times in a food manufacturing business, and works the days she wants to, taking time off to spend with her friends and in community activities. Like Donna, her life cycle position is relevant to her positive view of casual work, her opinion is not without qualification, and her casual choice is backed by the reliable earnings of her partner. Being casual would not have suited her when the financial demands on her household were greater and her daughters were younger ('we had certain payments to make and there was pressure to perform'), and she 'would not be able to survive on the income I earn at work', relying on the back up of her husband's income. She feels some ambivalence about casual work which 'does have its disadvantages, I'd have to say that. As a casual worker you're not treated as a permanent employee would be. I've noticed that enormously'. However, she has a good rapport with the factory owners, and can control her days. Her hard working nature and loyalty to them is rewarded with flexibility on her terms. She believes that she must work hard 'to remain casual because I have seen people come and go that haven't been quick with what they do, and they've not been asked back'. Unfortunately, her immediate supervisor is less supportive. Like many casuals, Christine's immediate supervisor exercises considerable power over Christine's working life, emphasising the contingent nature of her situation – dependent upon a supportive owner – and making it hard for her to take sick days without negative feedback.

Ellen is also positive. She has worked casually in real estate for over 30 years as her children have grown up and it has suited her well, backed by her husband's professional income. Her job has been an important 'insurance policy' in the event that that security changed: 'with divorce and separation ... for a woman it can be a disadvantage if you haven't got some skills to retain to

re-enter the workforce'. She has elected to remain casual rather than become permanent part-time:

*Over the years it has suited my family situation quite well, been very convenient. I guess that the pay return is probably higher than what the permanent part-time rate would be. I have been given the option to switch if I so choose to ... Yes there are disadvantages with regard to holiday and sick pay but I guess I'm in an advantageous position where I can choose to work or don't have to work if I don't want to, so we're financially able to cope with that, but I prefer to keep my finger in there and have retained some experience within the work environment so that - situations can change at any moment in your life - and I felt it is an insurance policy to retain employment over the years and I have even throughout the time my children were small through to now they're older and off my hands. (Ellen, 40s, real estate)*

Ellen gave priority to care of her children when they were young ('I think the children need the quantity time not the quality time as such') and her casual part-time job worked well. She believes that 'many people spend far too much time, including my husband, working and not living outside that'. Recently, Ellen's employment has changed as the company has been taken over. Her hours have been reduced and become less predictable: her income can now fluctuate by up to 50 per cent. Her co-workers whose husbands have lost their income must now look for work 'elsewhere' because predictability is essential for them. She does not want to take the offer to become permanent because the maximum hours available then would be 15: 'so it's no real advantage'. She sees that becoming permanent part-time might lock her into inflexible hours where 'they wouldn't allow you to take the time' that she wants. While Ellen is concerned about the under-classification of herself and other staff, the change in security within the new company has kept them from 'rocking the boat'.

Alison is another example of a woman who likes casual terms, backed by independent funds from elsewhere. She works casually some evenings and weekends 'meeting and greeting' as a hostess for corporations. She worked for 35 years as a full-time professional health worker and manager in another country. She has a pension from her country of origin and recently moved to Australia. Over 60, she is 'delighted and thrilled' that no-one for whom she now works has questioned her age. Her work gives her flexibility and enhances her social connections: 'it suits me, the way I am'. It allows her to see her grandchildren: 'at this stage in my life it is absolutely suiting me down to the ground'. She tried two years of not working in retirement but 'was really ready to get back into the workforce and also to mix with a younger crowd of people'. She sees work as a way in which people can 'stay sane' as well as look after their grandchildren and play golf. Alison is not looking for permanent work, and she is unaware about whether she is paid a casual loading.

For Rachel, casual work has been a way to re-enter the workforce, and with more experience she has developed greater expectations:

*To me, it started out as a job, back into the workforce as single parent and I needed the work. I was told at that time it would be ongoing. And I thought however long it goes, it will give me experience. As the time went on ... my experience grew, then I started to want*

*to be able to use that and to go further and to do something more. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

However, she is less positive about her casual job nine years on. Rhys prefers working as a casual security officer because it suits his current lifestyle and he can take time off to go hunting (Rhys, 29, security officer). April finds similar flexibility. With no grandparents available to babysit, and a full-time working husband, April values the flexibility which casual work has given to her to be with her family. Now relatively affluent and with two teenage children, April feels that casual work as a fashion shop supervisor is a good choice at this time because it gives her the freedom to travel with her husband:

*It's given us the flexibility, particularly over the last six, seven years to be with [the children] and to do what I want to do anyway so it's been a bonus I think ... Yeah, maybe it's a different stage in my life ... I'm 45 years of age and my husband and I have worked all our lives and basically it's a time in our life where we can travel, we can do what we please, we can come and go. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Workers like Donna, Christine, Ellen, Alison, Rhys and April find casual work positive in part because their personal or family situation. For others the main motivation is social connection. Mary's casual supermarket work has always been primarily a means of making social contacts as she and her truck-driver husband shifted around a series of rural towns:

*Because I was new and knew nobody, I wholly and solely took the job from the point of view of getting out in the community and meeting people, so I wasn't shut away at home. I didn't have to go to work, I'm 47 years old and I don't plan on working until I'm 60 or something. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

### **2.3 What Ambivalent Casual Workers Say**

Six of the fifty-five interviewees were ambivalent about being casually employed. They saw both up and downsides. For example, Elizabeth is 25 and has been working for nine years as a casual in retail. She feels there are both positive and negative sides of being casual. She likes the flexibility but 'some people tend to take advantage of that 'by calling you up at any time, and giving very low amounts of hours that you can't survive on', as in her previous job. Elizabeth often works long hours and finds it difficult to control her time:

*Most of the time I know my shifts in advance, but a lot of the time, I'm called up quite regularly, saying that they need me to come in straightaway ... It can be quite annoying, because sometimes I have had things planned, and they make you feel guilty if you say no, that you can't come in, and you think ... 'Oh yeah, I should just go in, don't worry about what I already had planned cause I need the money, or I want the money', and because I also work freelance as well, and I've been juggling the two, and once when I was doing my freelance work, they called me up and said, 'Can you come in?' And I said no, I already had this other thing planned, and they were saying 'Are you sure you can't come in? Are you sure you can't? We need you to come in, such and such is sick'. I said, no. And then a week later my hours dropped, and then you think it's because of that, that you said no, that you couldn't come in. (Elizabeth, 24, retail)*

Like many other casual workers Elizabeth finds this lack of control, the fear of saying no, a downside of being casual. In her case this often involves working more hours than she would prefer: ‘sometimes we’re doing seven days in a row, even more, and ... you don’t have any time for yourself’. She doesn’t find that the casual loading compensates for her loss of amenity through long casual hours and no paid leave. At these times, her casual job is far from flexible: ‘I don’t think I’m really getting that much flexibility... you can’t really say, “Oh look I can’t do that” all the time’. She finds that she ‘forgets about friends’ and gets tired when she is doing long hours. She does not see her retail job as ‘her career’: ‘that’s why I’m fine with it at the moment’. However, her casual job means that she is having trouble borrowing money to buy a house: ‘it does impinge on that a bit’ and her ideal job is ‘to be full-time employed, nine to five, not having to work weekends. You know, when you know that you’re definitely going to have at least two days off in a row where you can do whatever you need to do, and relax’.

From Wayne’s point of view, the advantage of casual work is that the loading better enables him to supplement his income, but he is strongly aware of the benefits he misses out on:

*I think casual work has one benefit in that you get that little bit extra money but of course any [other] benefits – well, how can I say! (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

## **2.4 What Reluctant Casuals Say**

Positive and ambivalent casuals like Chelsea, Donna, Christine and Elizabeth are in the minority in the interview group. Thirty-six of the employees in our study (or sixty-five per cent) are not positive about being casual. By and large they have not chosen to be casual, but have instead accepted casual terms as the only ones available to them. Many would prefer other forms of employment: ongoing part-time or full-time employment is the most common, but others would prefer contract employment. Predictable earnings and hours are highly sought after by many of these employees, along with paid holidays and sick leave, as well as other conditions associated with ongoing work like appropriate classification, long service leave and decent superannuation. For many casuals, the key negative aspects of their casual employment relate to their workplace citizenship: they feel they lack respect, training, promotion, voice, or the capacity to deal with bullying or favouritism.

George is at the negative end of the spectrum. Like many, he wants to work permanently and – far from flexibility for himself – his casual terms reduce his flexibility and constrain his time-use. He worries about income security, and misses holidays and sick leave. For George and his family it’s ‘a really hard existence’:

*Casual work has its ups and it’s [downs] ... but for a person in my position that’s married with ... dependents that rely on you as heavily as mine do and as lots of other people’s do, the downside far outweighs the upside and it’s just a really hard existence being a casual employee ... Being employed for over ten years at one particular place, I watch people go on holidays, I hear about their holidays when they come home from their holidays, I see them get paid for their holidays, I see them in the same position with their sick pay and if I’m ever sick I’ve got to go to work absolutely dying because I know if I don’t make it to work I’ll lose a day’s pay and when you’ve got commitments - as I say, I’ve got three children, a car on finance, a washing machine on finance, and a mortgage - you just can’t*

*afford to take time off. Hence no holidays for over ten years and no sick days if they're absolutely avoidable. Yeah, you go to work just about dying. I mean if you've got the worst case of the flu you drag your bones out of bed, if you know what I mean. And, I mean that literally. (George, 40, technician)*

George cannot see positive aspects of his working terms. He is a mature-aged, skilled worker with dependents. His hours and working days are unpredictable. They are set by the employer. He is often called in at short notice, and sent home after four hours (the minimum call in period). He is highly skilled and has been working at his job for over a decade. His employer has invested in his training which is highly specific to the enterprise, and essential to operations. His lack of flexibility has important implications for his annual salary which 'is a bone of contention'. In the week of his interview, George has had two shifts suddenly cancelled 'which means, come Friday which is payday, jack shit in the bank':

*My salary from week to week is definitely unpredictable. On a good year I'll earn \$42,000. That's on a good year when things don't go wrong ... Last year, I almost went under. I almost had to declare bankruptcy and I had to fight like hell to try and make ends meet. I had to sell things like I had to sell a car and I had to sell a boat that I'd worked bloody hard to obtain. Just so I could pay the mortgage until things picked up. So my salary from week to week, although it may be good and my hourly rate is fantastic, it's variable. Like I say if I get two days and those two days get cancelled I've got nothing, my family has nothing. And this year I earnt \$30,000. So I wouldn't consider that to be all that great. (George, 40, technician)*

Later in his interview, George talks about 'being stuck' as a casual, and after 10 years in his current job, lacking the confidence to try his luck as a skilled worker beyond his current job. Rather than flexibility for him, he finds he has time on his hands:

*The flexibility you get is time on your hands which is money not being earned and money not being made so that time is wasted time. Time is money as they say and as a casual employee that time that I've got sitting at home being idle. I'm not earning a dollar so you don't use it to go out and spend money or go fishing or something because you can't afford to spend the money. (George, 40, technician).*

Many older people see little choice in their experience of casual work. They are more likely to describe it as meeting employer needs, while it undermines their sense of self-respect and their loss of a key role as bread winners. They do not see it as giving them flexibility. For example, Don is now a reluctant casual, once a permanent manager. He drives a truck casually, and sees casual work as:

*an easy way for the employers to get away with not actually looking after their workers and [not] doing the right thing. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

For Don, the most marked effect of casual work is upon his sense of self-esteem. He feels he is 'talked down to': 'It makes you feel a little bit degraded and you really don't know how long the casual work's going to last either so it can get you down'. He does not see his casual work as giving him flexibility:

*It doesn't give you any flexibility being casual because there's nothing stable about it. Because being a casual you can get a minute's notice and not get a week's notice and all of a sudden you're left out on a limb and got to find something else to survive. (Don, 46, truck driver).*

Dave is also a typical reluctant casual. He has worked for several years in a market research call centre and he describes casual work as 'good in some ways' especially in that he can say yes or no to shifts around when he is seeing his daughter (who does not live with him), and refuse work when he is sick or wants a holiday. His employer accommodates these requests. However, he would prefer permanent work and is concerned about the uncertainty that casual work creates both for individuals like him (like being unable to get a bank loan) and for the 'big picture' across the workforce as a whole. For him, any 'concept of any obligation owed to employees is almost non-existent. Because you are casual they can just drop you like a hot potato'. He mentions co-workers who have lost their jobs because of work injuries.

#### 2.4.1 Students Who are Reluctant Casuals and Prefer Permanent Part-time Work

Reluctant casuals are not all like George, Don and Dave - mature aged, full-time men. Some students find that their casual terms are difficult to work around. Jayda is a 15 year old school student who has worked in supermarkets. She likes the money (\$8.60/hour), but found that 'they kept trying to give me, I think it was around 30 or 40 hours a week'. She looked for flexibility but did not always find it:

*It gives you the flexibility but then all of the time you are on call. So if you are busy, they ring you and they ask you to work and if you say 'no, sorry, I'm busy', then you might not get many more hours the next week. They just cut your hours down if you say no and so it's always a kind of threat. (Jayda, 15, retail)*

Similarly, Jackie is a 15 year old school student who prefers to work permanent part-time than casual: 'I think [permanent part-time] is definitely good for people of a young age that are at school, so they can get extra money'. At one casual job she did she didn't get enough hours ('four a week if I was lucky') while at her current job in a supermarket 'I work way too much. I think you get kind of exploited - the young people - because I'm on such a small wage and so I'm doing a 40 hour week at school, probably another 25-30 hours on top of that at work'. She is paid \$7.30 an hour. She appreciates the flexibility of being able to swap shifts with other workers.

After many years employed casually, Kate holds similar views. She has worked casually in retail, call centers and now in clothing manufacturing. While her income was initially supplementary to her parent's support, it is not now:

*It's the financial insecurity I think that was always the hardest for me. Especially at that stage when I had only just moved out of home and that was the first time it really hit me that trying to support yourself and be casual with no secure income is a whole different story to being a school student living at home with a bit of extra cash. That was my first experience of going 'Oh my God, I have bills and I have rent to pay and I don't know where I'm going to get the money from'. And that's been going on like that for the last five*

*years now. It's vital, it's not supplementary income that goes on luxuries, it's income that goes on food and bills. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)*

#### 2.4.2 What Reluctant Casual Workers do Not Like About Being Casual: 'Will the Phone Ring?'

The unpredictability of income is the most frequently mentioned downside of casual work. Julie, a nurse, talks about the unpredictability of shifts: 'Will the phone ring or won't the phone ring?' Julie maintains a 'rainy day account... But you still have to really just be a good budgeter, lucky I was ... But it still worries on your mind all the time' (Julie, 53, aged care worker).

Julie distinguishes the experience of having permanent shifts, and having unpredictable shifts as the key difference between bad and better casual work. For her, unpredictable night shifts in aged care drive insecurity of income, time and undermine her financial security. She relies on very careful financial management to deal with gaps in earnings, holidays, and sickness. Like others she has lost shifts because of something she had said to her manager, and once because her employer had learned of her union membership. The security of predictable, guaranteed work however, extended well beyond the pay packet for Julie and went to the question of voice at work: 'When you go permanent part-time you get this bravado or you can actually think, well I can actually say something now'.

Some writers suggest that the ongoing nature of much casual work means that it does have downsides for employees who are, in effect, ongoing (Curtin 2004). This is far from the truth for the majority in this study who find that although their work may turn out in retrospect to be ongoing, this cannot be relied upon with any certainty. Further, while some shifts may be predictable and an employment *relationship* may be ongoing, hours and earnings and shifts are *not* predictable in many cases.

What is more, being casual has downsides unrelated to the predictability of an ongoing job, hours and shifts, but to predictability about finish times and to classification rates, access to non-wage benefits, the lack of paid holiday and sick leave, second rate citizenship at work and marginality in communication. In addition, many keenly feel a lack of respect and differential treatment as casuals that sometimes affects their pay packet and its predictability, but – beyond this – affects other aspects of their lives negatively.

*'Needed But Not Wanted'*

There are many examples. Klaus has now been casual for six years in his earth moving job after ten years in ongoing government employment. He works very long hours and his job is ongoing but he feels 'I can't make plans'. He can't predict his time with family, won't borrow money because of uncertainty about his ongoing work, rarely gets a lunch break and goes to work when he is sick. He works when he recognises that he is very fatigued, has difficulty refusing overtime, must stay on the right side of his boss in order to keep his hours, and has lost 'any sense of belonging to a company or anything like that':

*I've got the ongoing work, but it's still casual. They will never make anybody permanent. As far as we know the company did have permanent employees there at one stage, and when I did start with them, they did promise me permanency. But then there was a*

*restructuring of the company, and everybody got sacked and got hired on again as casuals.  
(Klaus, 40s, plant operator)*

Klaus has asked to go permanent a couple of times but has been refused: [When I became casual] I thought well this is what it's going to be like for the rest of my life. Just a casual employee ... how can I explain it? It makes you feel like you're needed but you're not wanted'.

## **2.5 The Difference between Permanent and Casual Employment**

The difference between casual and permanent employment is well understood and clearly expressed by many who have experienced both. Thus although Wendy recalls enjoying her previous work as a casual, she is now able to appreciate the benefits of permanent employment, especially sick leave and holidays:

*The difference has affected me. I'm getting sick pay. I'm getting all the benefits and that. So that's helped out a lot. I mean the pay isn't as good as when I was casual but it's steady. At least I can put some money away. And I've got all the benefits, which is pretty good ... There's superannuation, which I was getting as a casual, but sick leave is a really good one. Holidays – definitely need holidays. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

Maria finds her present life under a two-year contract a vast improvement over her life as a casual:

*It just takes so much stress off. I've not thought about my CV in 18 months - I've not thought about updating it. I've not thought about keeping any eye on the papers really, really closely. I mean, I do, anyway, but I've just not felt that kind of pressure. I've been able to take on other interests. It's been a completely different life experience because I was never able to do that in [company X] - because I didn't know whether I had work the following year and because I was renting I didn't know whether I'd be able to stay in that particular place or I had to move. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

William appreciates the fact that as a worker on contract he is now entitled to sick and annual leave – although he has discovered that a worker on contract has less leeway for time off:

*It's better in the way that I now actually get annual leave. Actually get holidays and am entitled to sick leave. So rather than ringing in sick, or not taking sick days because I couldn't afford, I've got the opposite, if I actual take time off work if I'm ill, I'll actually be paid for it. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

## **2.6 Is Casual Work Employee's Choice?**

For many, casual employment has the disadvantages of insecurity, unpredictability and pressure and has been not so much a choice as a by-product of the need to earn a living. Thus, because his casual job entails fixing problems that emerge on the work site, Marko's work is unpredictable and he sometimes has to work very long hours:

*I mean, I have had jobs there where I have done a 10 hour day, got back in the yard and no sooner I've got home, I've got a phone call – they have got a breakdown down the field, [over] 200ks away. I have done a 12 your shift, traveled on a dirt road for 3 hours in a crane and worked all through the night. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

While Sarah recalls feeling good about the money she earned in her two jobs, the stress from being abused in both was considerable:

*I was highly strung all the time. I was just depressed and stressed because both these jobs, I was starting out as a waitress and they're telling me how stupid I was. And telemarketing, you know, every single day telling you you're going to lose your job to the whole group and because I've got a really solid work ethic that really crushed me. I thought like if I get sacked I'm going to be devastated you know, that was hard. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Meanwhile, those at the low pay end of casual jobs are poor as well as feeling exploited. Being a single parent with two children Rachel finds it difficult to make ends meet and to be a single mother:

*I've got kids and for the first, say, four or five years of my nine years as a casual, I was a single parent. So it was a struggle. It was really hard to do that and to even have the public holidays off and not get paid. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Like many others, George's story as a long-term , skilled casual worker, illustrates the fallacy of casual work as employee choice. Such choice may be true for some, at particular times in their life cycles, as George recognises but not for most:

*If I was a single man I could be a lot more flexible than I can afford to be as a married man with commitments. So in a single man's world it's not as critical for them to earn a complete week's wage or have this regular work or as steady work as I need ... I'm just an everyday Joe that wants a five day a week job. (George, 40, technician)*

For the majority in this study, casual work *denies* choice and places them 'on call', so that their employers have greatly enhanced choice, while many workers have very little. And even for those who see value in aspects of being casually employed, there are often down-sides, in terms of powerlessness at work, unpredictable earnings, and lack of respect or say at work.

The idea that casual terms of employment are eagerly sought and greatly valued by Australian employees is far from consistently true, based on this evidence. The reverse is more common. Many see casual work as unfair and exploitative, and most would prefer permanent work, whether part-time or full-time. They feel 'used and abused' as Alice says of her five years regular full-time casual employment in an engineering company; George and Don use the same phrase, while some describes it as 'living up in the air' or being like 'a stone kicked down the road'.

Two key categorical differences amongst casual workers drive their satisfaction levels:

- firstly, their location in their life-cycle;
- secondly, their level of dependence upon casual earnings.

## 2.6.1 Choices Change Over the Life Cycle

Where employees are in their life cycle, drives important elements of their assessment of casual work. Evaluation of experiences changes with the life cycle, as many interviewees point out. What is acceptable and welcome as a full-time student becomes onerous or difficult during family formation. This drives important differences in the fit between employee preferences and the circumstances of casual work.

Donna clearly describes how both her life-cycle location are critical to her satisfaction with casual work. She loves her job, including the flexibility it gives her to be with her children when they are sick, ‘without guilt’, but her satisfaction is contingent upon both her point in the life-cycle *and* the earnings of her ‘breadwinner’ husband:

*I think it really does make a difference as to your situation in life. I think when I was a student, being casual was fine. When I had taken on a mortgage, being casual was not an option. Being in a relationship with a full-time breadwinner, being a casual is fantastic and it's an escape from the humdrums of home life. But if I was a casual worker and if I was a single mother and I was dependent on an income, being casual would probably not feel as good as it does now. I think it's completely dependent on your situation in life. (Donna, 41, receptionist clerk).*

In another example, Margaret worked as a permanent part-timer when her children were small; now in her late 50s heading towards retirement, she works casually. Her short unpredictable hours would have presented a major problem when her children were small and the mortgage was large. In those years her permanent part-time work gave her predictable hours and income. Now she can be earn less and cope with less predictable income and hours.

What now suits her would have made life very difficult for her earlier. Casual work now suits her, as she approaches retirement and supplements household earnings towards ‘a retirement nest-egg’. Her current assessment is dependent upon three related circumstances: her household situation (with a full-time partner and no dependents); her age; and her freedom from onerous financial demands.

Julie works in an aged care home and lives alone. While she can see the advantages of casual work for young people, she needs a secure income to survive:

*I'm in my 50s, I have no home. And it doesn't give me at my age the security of knowing what my income would be. I think casual work for some women is a second job [in the household] ... I can see the for and against it ... For certain people, it's good. But for single people in the older age bracket, I don't think it gives us security of the hours that we need to survive. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

Klaus shares her view. He has worked full-time permanent in previous employment and is clear that casual work is difficult at his age:

*I'm not happy being a casual worker, especially when you get to my age in life, I'm 56 years of age. I'm one of the lucky ones, I can operate earthmoving machinery, so again there's no real limit to how old you have to be in the earthmoving game, as long as you can operate an earthmoving machine, they'll employ you. But again it's all the same now, nothing is permanent anymore. You can't plan your life. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Am I going to have a job tomorrow? If I was a permanent employee, if I had a run in with the boss, my boss would have to give me three warnings before he sacked me. But because I'm a casual he doesn't even have to sack me. He just phones up the agency and tells the agency I don't want him back. (Klaus, 56, earth moving)*

Like Klaus, many casually employed workers have experience of working under both casual and ongoing conditions and can make a direct comparison. John was sacked from his position in sales and then put back on as a casual which is not his choice. He compares his previous work situation of full-time permanent to being casual:

*You get no entitlements ... as in sick pay or holiday pay. From the time you work, you work overtime you don't get paid for it. (John, 44, machinery sales)*

Life cycle factors affect others. Dave has found his scope to refuse shifts to look after his daughter has been a valuable aspect of his casual job since he separated. But now, as she starts school, he is looking for permanency and a job with career potential.

Others are happy to work less at certain times in their lives, but still look for predictability through permanent part-time rather than casual work, as their first preference. Widowed and with adult children, Lynn feels she is now able to take on the flexible work pattern of a casual employee – although she would prefer to be permanent:

*I mean for the first time in my life, I actually don't have to consider other people, well I do for major things, of course but you know for day to day living I do as I choose. And so when they would offer me work I mean of course I'd take it. I was willing and I wanted a job. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Margaret prefers casual work as a school assistant while she has dependent children, but wants to find permanent work later; while she feels she is underpaid she is prepared to accept the situation at this stage of her life and career:

*That's my choice, I suppose. I choose that. I'm not ambitious at this stage. I've been there, done that. So I'm quite happy at this stage, yeah ... I'm sure that in years to come, I would be looking for more permanency. I've given myself five years to be casual and if by then I don't get permanency, I'll look elsewhere or go into another area. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Some have very clear plans to leave casual employment in the future. Thus Tony will most probably convert to a permanent carer in the nursing home when he has completed the TAFE Certificate IV, because the qualification will get him a higher salary. While she is doing year 12 at school it suits Kylie to stay on as a casual in a retail chain store but she hopes to convert to permanent part-time when she goes to university:

*Like I said, next year I hope to get [work] on a part-time basis at [companyZ] and then, once I have finished uni I won't be there anymore. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

Monique is prepared to work as a casual while a student, but plans to seek permanent employment when she finishes her studies:

*It's not the ideal work situation but it does suit some people at certain times. It's not the best form of employment. ... I know when I've finished my study I don't want to be a casual worker because that's when I want to be working regular hours and having all the entitlements that come with being full-time or part-time. So in some circumstances it works but I think there are more negatives being a casual worker than there are positives. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Wayne sees his two casual jobs (in gaming and correctional services) as a temporary phenomenon – something he has to do for a time while he gets a qualification:

*Look, I'm not going to work like this forever, no. No, I will change and do something else. ... I'm doing casual work while I'm trying to get a qualification for something else and I found that I was unemployed for some time so ... and my choices have been a bit limited so I've had to accept casual work. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

Like Monique, Wayne clearly states the constrained circumstances that shape his labour market outcomes, which reflects compromise more than preference. Such labour market outcomes cannot be read off as 'choice'. What is more, unemployment over-shadows Wayne's settlement and conditions his acceptance, as it does for many other casuals. William recalls that when he first took a voluntary separation package from a government department he was happy to work as a casual call centre operator but later he changed jobs to become permanent:

*When I took a separation package from my first employer, I was quite happy to work part-time as a casual in the evening because I wasn't actively looking for other work for quite a number of years. When the company management changed I decided, okay, it's time to make your move. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

## 2.6.2 Income dependence and casual work

The experience of casual work is very different according to the level of dependence upon earnings and two groups are obvious:

**Wage-reliant casuals:** These are casual workers who depend upon their casual earnings to live. They may live with others, but their own welfare and often that of their dependents and household members, depends upon their casual earnings. They are the majority of casuals in our study;

**Non-wage reliant casuals:** These have other sources of livelihood. They are more likely to mention the pleasure and social connection that their casual work brings them, while their income is a secondary consideration. Most are 'supplementary' earners whose casual earnings supplement other sources of household income like pensions, parents and partners. They include some – but not all – students who do casual work. They see their

earnings as important, but their main activity is studying. Further, most do not see their future employment in the field in which they currently work or on casual terms.

Student's earnings can also be an essential means of livelihood: 'I need money to cover all of my expenses' as Chelsea puts it. At 15, Jayda's income from her retail job 'was going towards food for my family and things like that'. This means that assumptions about employees' preferences that are 'read off' from their household or student status will be wrong in many cases.

While both April and Rachel are mothers with working partners, one sees her earnings as 'pocket money' and does not need them to be predictable, the other sees them as essential and needs a steady income and paid leave. Some young students depend on their income to assist their families. Most older workers – whether men and women – whose earnings are critical to their livelihood, find being casual very difficult. For example, Don lives with his wife who does family day care and 'works at a loss'. His willingness to work hard has not helped him in the labour market and casual terms do not suit his circumstances:

I'm 46, nearly 47. It's a horrible time to be made into the casual work force. Your age really does play a part against you. And to me, people my age and around my age turn out to work everyday and don't take time off and are very, very punctual. (Don, 46, truck driver)

## 2.7 Being 'used and abused'

The idea that casual terms of employment are eagerly sought and greatly valued by Australian employees is far from consistently true, based on this evidence. Many see casual work as unfair and exploitative, and most would prefer permanent work, whether part-time or full-time. Many of their concerns go beyond the issue of predictability of hours, shifts and income - important as these are. Casual workers feel that they are not treated well, either by supervisors or others in the workplace. They feel 'used and abused' as Alice says of her five years regular full-time casual employment in an engineering company:

*Well I think you are used and abused ... I was always under the impression that casual workers were there for overload situations, emergencies, or whatever but I've been casual for five years now ... 'We'll look at that next year' is the general reply to any request for permanency ... So, yeah, I think used and abused is the best description I can come up with. (Alice, 43, word processor operator, engineering industry)*

George, Kenneth, Klaus and Don also use the word 'abuse' in talking about casual work. Kenneth who has held senior management positions himself and is now working as a casual says that while his current manager is a good employer 'I've seen other instances around the place where they're just totally taken advantage of; underpaid, abused and then disposed of'. He feels that, morally, casual workers deserve better than being an untapped reservoir that is 'worn out and then replaced'.

The treatment of other casuals concerns Genna, an aged care worker, who says of casual work: 'it's the whole thing, of just being ill-treated. You're a casual, you're being used. You're really a nothing to the employee, you're just a number'. She is specific about her current workplace:

*The director is always rubbishing some carer to me and I'm thinking 'what kind of person are you?' because I don't need to hear this because you're doing it to me. A young girl came into work, she'd been at the nursing home for about six weeks, she was quite nice, she was learning. then she turned up to work one night, his main two buddies ... they didn't like her so they told the boss they didn't like her and she was bad at her work and he just crossed her off the roster. She turned up to work wasn't informed by telephone and he said 'no you can't have your job. But you can stay tonight and do three hours and I'll pay you'. (Genna, 60, aged care worker)*

When asked whether casual workers were treated differently by managers and supervisors, Klaus 'identified the different treatment as:

*Abuse ... going back between casual and full-time employment, the group of people that I work with very rarely get a lunch break ... a casual worker hasn't got any rights. (Klaus, 56, plant operator)*

This sense of abuse affects people like Chelsea who are positive, overall, about the flexibility they have in their casual situations:

*I look at how they look at the other people that are there that are casuals like the younger kids — cause there's lots of school-age people that are casuals as well — and they're all 'oh the casuals!' Because I work on a Monday, I hear a lot of the bitching and moaning about what sort of state the recovery of stock was over the weekend when the part-timers and full-timers come back in to do their job during the week ... They always blame — well, not always but generally speaking, many people have a prejudice thinking 'oh the casuals'. (Chelsea, 20, retail worker)*

Seeing other casuals treated poorly affected Julie:

*In a lot of instances, they don't think you're serious. We don't get full-time in our industry. It's very rarely to actually see [full-time] carers - even though they might be doing full-time hours, it's still part-time ... A lot of younger people, [management] don't seem to take them seriously. They don't think they're committed to the role that they're doing, which is so false because half the time, they're casuals because that's all they can pick up.*

While Patti gets on well with her colleagues, she feels bosses treat casuals as 'disposable' employees:

*Oh, I think they have the attitude that we're disposable and if we, you know, if they're not happy with us then they just don't give us another shift. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

### **Different Forms of Casual Employment, Different Employment Instruments The Permanent Casual, 'Independent contractors' and Unwritten Rolling Contracts**

Not all casuals are casual in the same way. Some casuals work as 'permanent casuals', which provides ongoing work but without the genuine security of real permanence. Alice is happy with the security of her present situation, but that has not always been the case:

*The manager where I am at the moment, she's just perfect. I'm what's called a permanent casual and she's fine with everything. You could go to another store and then that manager treats you secondary to other people because you are a casual. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Marko works as a crane operator for mining contractor on a 'permanent casual' basis:

*By the book there, you can't work anywhere as a casual employee for a long period in time without them putting you on permanent staff, but they've got it set up that way there, if they want to get rid of you, they give you a day's notice and you're down the road. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Some casuals work under rolling contracts – not necessarily formalised. In one of her jobs in a private ESL agency Maria worked under an arrangement that was supposed to be a contract but was never clarified in writing:

*The nature of the terms of employment were a bit frustrating because there was just never any kind of security and nothing's ever written down. You'd just be told 'Well, look, for this term – this 10 weeks – you'll have ...' They'd call it a 3-month contract, but there was never anything written down and you knew that it was conducted on a casual basis. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

### **Different Forms of Casual Employment (continued)**

Some casuals work as independent contractors. Maggie's employment relationship is as an 'independent contractor' but she effectively works as a casual – a contradiction which she finds ironic:

*On the one hand you're meant to be operating as a sole trader, yet they determine through the contract the pay, the hours that you work, the roster. And I just sort of think, well it's a joke really, because if you're a sole trader you're meant to be able to determine a whole range of things. Some of the research I've done is that if the person who's employing you starts to determine wages, time, how you work, how you operate, and all that sort of stuff, they then actually become an employer. So there's a really fine line between are you a casual worker, are you a contractor, what are you? I mean, I don't even know what we are any more to tell you the truth. So that's my experiences. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Some casuals work for labour hire companies. William and his casual call centre colleagues worked at a government department but were recruited and employed by a labour hire company. Patti works as a casual for four different employers but is also recruited and employed by a labour hire company.

In some cases, the form of their employment arrangements intersects with pressure to work under particular employment instruments, especially individual workplace agreements. According to Marko and Patti, casual workers are driven by their insecurity into signing employment contracts: the contractor gives them 2 or 3 weeks work in the first instance, then offers Australian Workplace Agreements on a 'take it or leave it' basis:

*And usually that drags out and then they might say 'Well, we want you on our books. Here is your AWA. You have got 5 days to sign it and if you don't sign it, you haven't got a job'. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

*Usually the employer asks on the first day to sign the Australian Workplace Agreement when you first sign up with them. They give you a choice but it's really no choice, you know what I mean? But I won't sign it. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

## 2.8 Love the Job, Don't love the Terms

Analysis of the experiences of casual work demonstrates the importance of separating *general assessments of jobs and work*, from views about the *form of that employment*. Many casual workers enjoy their jobs: they enjoy caring for people, using their skills, making social connections through work, and publicly contributing. However, these assessments are quite independent of their views about the nature of their employment in many cases. For example, George has not a single word to say that is positive about his ten year casual employment: it has seriously affected his health, his household and his life. However, he describes himself as an 'exemplary fault finder' who sees himself as important to the successful operation of his workplace: he takes pride and pleasure in his job. However, its casual terms drive him to suicidal thoughts. Similarly, Bruce loves driving his bus for disabled children. He takes pride in his relationships with the children and his care of them. However, he does not like being casual and sees it as unfair and poorly rewarded. He evaluates his job very positively, but not its terms. Alice has worked for many years as a word process operator, work that she enjoys and does well. However, she has just changed jobs (and given up her casual loading) in order to be better treated and properly classified. Maria recalls that although she disliked her casual conditions she enjoyed her job teaching adults:

*Professionally, I found it really satisfying. I loved the work and I loved the students  
(Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Kenneth enjoys the variety of his casual work after monotonous years as a full-time manager in production sales and marketing management in the printing industry: 'I actually enjoy casual work more because I actually look forward to going in there and contributing and the social aspect of it and because you don't get so much of it, you look forward to it so much more, there's variation in your life'. However, he distinguishes this pleasure from his feelings about other aspects of being casual. He does not like the low pay, and limited unpredictable hours. He would prefer permanent part-time or full-time work: 'it's just subsistence'.

Analysing casual work requires separation of evaluation of the job itself from the form of employment. In another example, Darlene enjoys her job but does not like the hours that she works and the fact that they have changed without any say from her. She became a delicatessen assistant in a large supermarket chain 18 months ago when her youngest child turned 16. She finds paid work has increased her self-esteem and she enjoys work:

*I'm a lot more happy with myself ... I think it's the social interaction of going out and becoming more of a responsible type. You're working. Your self-esteem – it really does help your self-esteem. (Darlene, 47, delicatessen assistant)*

She enjoys her interactions at the delicatessen counter, but she doesn't like the fact that her hours have been reduced 'for cost cutting'. She has worked casually in the past, but now works on monthly part-time 'contracts' for a minimum of 10 hours a week. She also receives requests to work extra hours.

Studies that conflate job satisfaction with satisfaction with casual terms confuse different things. Being casual has many aspects – pay, predictability, flexibility for the employer, flexibility for

the employee, training, communication, say, amongst others. Studies of satisfaction need to distinguish these factors if they are to accurately reflect on aspects of casual work and satisfaction.

## **2.9 Conclusion: Overall Assessments of Casual Work**

Around a quarter of interviewees take a positive view of their casual terms. They appreciate working less than full-time, appreciate having some say over the timing of their work, and many can fit their work around their other activities like studying, parenting, semi-retirement and travel.

A small proportion are ambivalent. However, the majority in this study – 65 per cent – have a negative or very negative view of their casual terms. These consistently mention unpredictable hours, shifts and earnings. Many in long-term casual employment complain of this unpredictability which affects their lives, and their households, negatively. A long-term casual employment relationship is not seen as equivalent to permanent employment. Being ‘a permanent casual’ has many negative effects that include, but go beyond, employment predictability.

Views about casual work are strongly shaped by two factors: the level of income dependence, and location in the life cycle, and often by both at once. Those who have other sources of income, and/or are at a stage in their life-cycle where they especially value being able to take ‘guilt-free’ time off from work, and do not have onerous financial obligations, are much more likely to be positive about their casual form of employment. Those whose livelihoods depend on their wages and those with financial obligations and dependents are much more likely to take a negative view of their casual work.

Many Australians who are responsible for their own (and often others’) livelihood find casual work a very far distance from how they want to work and live. Older workers in particular are more likely to have negative assessments but not all young people are positive. In considering the significance of this, it is important to remember that 58 per cent of all casual employees were over 24 years old in 2001, only a quarter were aged less than 20, and only 19 per cent were dependent students (ABS, Cat. No. 6359.0, November 2001). In other words, most casual employees are not to be found amongst groups who hold more positive views of casual employment: dependent students, the young and those with dependents. Further, much of the growth in casual employment, and the fastest rising levels of casual density, are located amongst older workers, especially prime age and older men. Most of these find dependence upon casual earnings very difficult, as do many women.

While there are significant differences in the experiences of casuals according to their level of income dependence, and such dependence is loosely associated with some life-cycle and student characteristics, such dependence cannot be simply ‘read off’ from such characteristics (such as being a student living at home, or being a mother in a two-income family). Such ‘typing’ will miss very important variances amongst these groups.

It is many years since Australian based employment conditions, such as pay, on factors like household structure, gender, stage in the life cycle or student status. Some aspects of pay are still

set on these bases, such as junior rates. Mostly, our pay system is based on market rates (which reflect bargaining power) and the principle of equity: that is, that pay should be equivalent for like workers (at least those in the same enterprise), regardless of their personal, family and social circumstances or bank balance. Fixing wages around assumptions about income dependency or life cycle location is discriminatory. Invariably, it is based on stereotypes about what certain social and personal conditions (such as being a student or a mother in a dual income household) imply: not all women with husbands have access to their partner's income or can rely on it into the future (as many point out interviews), just as not all students who live with their parents can rely on them for support.

At present, the circumstances of casual work often implicitly require that earnings are either supplementary or fitted to certain life cycle stages. While these situations *may* be more suited to casual terms, casual employment is increasingly extended to, and imposed upon, workers that they fit very ill. Irregular casual work creates a 'lowest common denominator' labour form, shaped out of very specific circumstances, that do not hold for the increasing number who must accept casual terms or face unemployment. Such terms are increasingly all that is on offer to people who are very far from having back up sources of income, or in temporary life stages that make irregular part-time work a desirable choice.

Based on this study, it is simply not true to say that most casuals prefer to be casual. The reverse is true in our sample. The majority do not like their casual terms, many are looking for permanency and those who compare both experiences show a strong preference for ongoing terms of employment. Casuals do not like several aspects of this form of employment: firstly, their unpredictable earnings, hours and shifts; secondly, their lack of other conditions like paid leave; and thirdly, their loss of workplace citizenship through powerlessness at work. The remainder of this report explores many aspects of these.

### 3. Whose Flexibility?

*The basic thing I guess is being called in at a moment's notice. Having absolutely no job security and that sort of stuff hasn't been as much of a problem for me given that I've been a student, mainly when I've been working casual hours and Mum and Dad have always been really supportive financially. So it hasn't been a case of, you know, if I lose this job I won't be able to survive type thing. But Mum has always worked as a casual employee and it's been really bad for her and Dad - like the pressure to have to be there all the time or you're going to get the sack, or you're going to get no more hours. And to live with that for years and years is always pretty difficult. And also when I was working at a restaurant for a while - and the whole idea of casual work, where you miss out on your security, however you're compensated through loading - just wasn't happening. Whether that's just part of the precarious nature of the hospitality industry or whatever, I just thought it was almost like casual employment, they'll lead you along sort of thing. And I wasn't being paid any loading at all for after 6 o'clock or weekends or even public holidays, New Years Eve all that sort of stuff. So it sort of seems it gives them a window, you know, to basically cheat you out of all sorts of other things. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Many casual workers refer to a range of aspects of casualisation in assessing its overall effects on them. One of the most consistently mentioned of these is flexibility, and whether employees have any. Beyond this, issues of pay, conditions, respect, voice at work and health are significant. Each of these is considered in later sections.

Flexibility is often assumed to be the defining aspect of casualness and its primary strength. Exactly what 'flexibility' means, however, is not immediately clear. Flexibility has many dimensions, not least the point of view from which it is exercised. As has long been agreed, the term 'flexibility' needs careful interpretation in relation to work (Nightingale 1995). A key question is flexibility for whom - for the employer, the employee or both? A second question relates to flexibility of what: shifts, start and finish times, total hours, the sequence of hours, the predictability of hours, or all of these? Each of these factors emerges as important to casual workers as they discuss flexibility at work.

In this section we consider how casual workers view flexibility: do they want it, do they have it, what are the dimensions of flexibility, the key factors confer it, and how significant are power and relationships to exercising it?

The evidence suggests that not all casuals are looking for flexibility, a significant proportion of casuals believe they have some say over organization of their working time and they value this. However, they are in a minority, with most casuals in our sample perceiving little true flexibility for themselves: they see their employers gaining much greater flexibility out of casual terms.

### 3.1 Not All Casuals Want Flexibility: Some Want Steady, Predictable Work

For some casuals, flexibility in the timing of their work is irrelevant, especially if they depend on a full-time income. Thus for Mario, the flexibility of his cleaning/care work is irrelevant – he just needs money and to work as many hours as he can:

*It's not a question of flexibility, it's a question of needs. Like I said, this was the only job I could get and the only reason I got the job initially was because it was advertised that they wanted somebody who speaks Italian. So being Italian speaking initially I got a lot of Italian clients to look after. So that was my sort of door to get that job. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

For Rebecca income is most important, and she is not interested in any flexibility that her casual employment in the printing industry might offer:

*I could have it, but I don't exercise it. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Julie, 53 and working in aged care, sees that for second earners in households, casual work that supplements other income sources is very different from self-support:

*If you're a younger person or a person with a second job, it does give them flexibility ... The flexibility part of a job to me is irrelevant because I need the fixed income at my age. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

### 3.2 Do Casual Workers Have the Flexibility They Seek?

Some employees find that being casual gives them flexibility. Twenty-three of those we interviewed – or 42 per cent of the group – feel that they had some flexibility and say over their work patterns. The majority do not: 32 or fifty-eight per cent felt they did not have flexibility. They see flexibility as something their employers get, but they do not.

#### 3.2.1 Employees Who Have and Appreciate Flexibility

Some appreciate the flexibility in their jobs and make use of it (See Box).

For example, James, 21, who works in the retail sector likes the freedom of casual work in his current situation working in a large supermarket. He can take a holiday from his regular Sunday shift when he wants one and has no trouble when he is occasionally sick. He is not paid when he's sick, but he doesn't mind and prefers to receive the casual loading than paid leave. He has a trusting relationship with his managers, and is able to participate in his sport as he wishes. However, he sees his current casual work as a short-term thing: 'I've just been there as a student pretty much'.

Casual workers like James see flexibility as an advantage while students, but not necessarily later in life. When he finishes university 'it would have to be full time permanent' in his chosen profession. Kenneth is a mature student with dependent children. Casual work is his current choice because he shares the care of his children. He says that it:

*has come as a necessity and it leaves a few things lacking: ... the income, of course, that's affected fairly badly and security of tenure, the ability to plan in the future and, sometimes to get the paid break or a holiday or anything like that is, you know, just not really possible. (Kenneth, 40s, retail sales)*

Tony enjoys some control over his casual work. He currently prefers working as a casual carer in a nursing home, rather than permanent part-time, because it combines flexibility with a better income:

*I enjoy actually being a casual at the moment. It gives me the ability to work whatever hours I wish. It gives me slightly higher pay rate which works out at around about two dollars an hour better. And it gives me the flexibility. To be able to move in or move out and take the time off when I really need it. And it doesn't give me that added pressure with bills ... I can take the time off much easier ... At the moment, I can go in and say [to my boss], look, I need next week off for such and such and such, or the week after off for such and such. And she will just roster me off. Save shifts for me for when I come back. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Rhys prefers working as a casual security officer because he wants the flexibility – and he makes more money:

*I think casual work is good in that you get paid a little bit more and for certain people with certain lifestyles you can basically choose when you want to work. That suits me down to a T actually. There's a lot of work going on at work at the moment so I get my 40 hours plus a week but I get paid an extra four dollars an hour compared to the permanent people. Admittedly I don't get sick leave or public holidays. I don't get paid for and I don't get holidays for the year. I think in my circumstances the extra pay more than makes up for those losses in benefits I suppose. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

For some, like Rhys and Tony, flexibility is real for them as employees. Specific features ensure flexibility for workers. On the basis of his experience as a labour hire employee in a call centre William agrees that the flexibility of casual work may be genuine *if* the employer is helpful *and* the worker is financially secure:

*When we were working for labour hire, if you wanted to take two or three hours off during the day to go to the dentist or if you had a sick child and wanted to go home and look after it, management was quite happy to see yep, you can take the time off. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

### 3.2.2 An Amenable Boss: 'It Rests on the Goodwill of Your Employer'

For some, the flexibility of casual work depends on having an amenable boss. April says that being a casual supervisor under her current 'good' boss gives her the flexibility she wants, but that in other stores she might not feel the same way:

*If you were at other stores you don't have that flexibility. They really come down hard on you, they just say well, you're a casual you do what you're told basically. But if you're*

*asking me from my point of view at this store I couldn't fault it at all. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Sarah agrees that in the case of casual work, flexibility depends on the goodwill of the employer:

*I guess generally for a uni student it is a good thing to have that level of flexibility but again it's resting on the goodwill of your employer. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Some workers choose certain jobs specifically because they guarantee certain schedules. Sue's choice of casual nursing work is entirely a result of her desire to avoid night shift:

*I choose to work casual for one reason. I don't have to do night duty. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

However, she is ambivalent as to whether casual work creates flexibility for employees, since permanent staff seem to have the same opportunities to nominate shifts, except that they must do night duty:

*There is flexibility - like if I want to do something I just say I don't want to work such and such a day; but then someone on the permanent roster can do the same anyway. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

### **Flexibility: Some Exercise It**

*I have sat down and discussed with my boss a regular pattern that I work, only because I'm doing Year 12 this year. So when I started this year I sat down and said these are the days I can work, and it would be helpful if I could have shifts only on those days. So that hasn't been a problem this year at all. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

*I get anywhere from four to four plus hours a week. I have a verbal arrangement with my manager that I need to have at least six to eight hours a week work. I mostly discuss it prior. I want to be available for some reason like exams and things like that. Obviously, it changes during times like that. But basically, she me shifts on a Monday which I'm pretty much guaranteed of except for extenuating circumstances. (Chelsea, 20, retail worker)*

*I'm not tied down with a specific roster all the time. I know a couple of part-time friends are. It's good in that sense that I can just sort of have a bit of freedom and over the past few years, I've worked my shift around what I've done outside of school and outside of work, be it socialising or sport or whatever. [The Supermarket] is usually pretty good at working around the requirements that I have to allow me to partake in sport or whatever. So it's pretty easily managed. (James, 21, retail worker)*

*It's really good like that. Because they treat me so well, I try to always do the same shift and not muck them around at all. Yeah, I don't mind so much about the pay because it's such a nice place to work. (Jenny, 20s, ESL teacher)*

*The good side for me was always the flexibility that it gave me around my study in the sense that I could work extra in my holidays, I could work on my weekends and around my study hours and then I could always say look, I'm just not available to work at a particular time because I've got uni. That was definitely the upside for me. That was probably the sum total of the upside though. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)*

### 3.2.3 Give and Take: 'Up to a point'

For some, casual work flexibility works for both employers and employees in a reciprocal exchange. Tony says it works both ways for him:

*It's a two-way street. If she [the boss] needs me to hang back, do such and such, well, I do that too. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

For others, like Sue and Monique, flexibility is a 'two-edged sword'. On the one hand Sue values the fact that she can choose whether or not to take a hospital shift, but on the other hand she recognises that there is little real choice in the matter overall; if she wants casual work she has to take it when it comes:

*When there's work there you're pretty much stupid if you don't take it - because when it's not there you don't get any ... I guess they know from past experience that I will fall out of bed and come to work if I can. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

For Monique, casual work flexibility comes with unpredictability; while she can often arrange hours to suit herself she is also expected to be available where needed. Wendy agrees that casual work gave her flexibility, but only up to a point, since she feels obliged to respond to call-ins out of a sense of duty as well as a need for the money:

It gives the workers flexibility, yes, but then if they called you, you're obligated to go in, you feel obligated. You have to go in when they call you. ... I was born in a country area. Being on a farm and everything, you start work when you're young and you just think, to make a living, you need to be at work. ... Well, I never turned my hours down. I always went in. Always. Even if I had to do something, I'd find a way around it. I never turned any hours down....I just felt obligated and plus I just felt like I needed to be there. I needed the money but it was really not an option for me to turn them down. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)

### **Flexibility: Some Do Not Exercise Any**

*You've got the flexibility of either trying to get a job or being on the dole ... I mean the flexibilities are all with the employer. It's not with the person ... If a casual decides that he wants to take four weeks off there's no guarantee that they're going to have a job when they come back from holidays, whereas if an employer says take four weeks off there's always a good chance that they can still get somebody else in. So it's more flexible for that. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)*

*The pay was good but after a while they don't give you that many hours. They just kind of forget about you really. That's what I think anyway. ... Yeah, I was getting really fantastic hours to start with but then after all the school holidays and Christmas and all that, I went back down to about two days a week, sometimes one day a week. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

*I don't think it gave me any flexibility. I think it limited the choices that I had ... I have heard people say that and say, 'well, as a casual, yeah, I can take my time off when I want to and if I don't want to work, I don't have to'. But I worked for a department that if you did that, you didn't get to hang around for very long. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

*You never know from day to day if you've got a job. They might say you've got a week's work, you turn up four hours later, they send you home because oh something's broken down, or something's happened and we don't need you now. You know, you might go for a couple of days. Fortunately it goes the other way as well, you go for a couple of days and end up doing a few weeks. That's ways fine. But you never know when you're going to work next. I hate it. I really hate it. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

*It's not flexible. ... To me, the whole idea of creating casualisation should mean that you should be able to move around a little bit more. ... [but] because of the imbalance of power that's a totally void argument, like it doesn't stand out because the flexibility is purely one way. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

*They call all the shots like when you can work, when you don't work, whether they decide to take hours away from you. It makes it a little bit vulnerable and slightly powerless. ... No, [laughs] I don't ring the boss and say, 'This is the hours I want to work.' He rings – I just give him the hours I'm available and they decide whether they'll give me the work or not. The flexibility is theirs. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

### 3.2.4 Flexibility for the employer, not the worker

For many casual employees, flexibility is nonexistent. George has never had a proper holiday with his 13 year old child because he is on call for his workplace, and cannot afford to turn down hours, partly because he needs the weekly income, and partly for fear that he will be replaced if he refuses shifts. Far from giving him flexibility, casual work restricts his home life and fixes it firmly around his employer's needs. He is not alone. Some mothers with young children whose income is critical to their households find that unpredictable hours and income add worry to their lives. For many, flexibility for the worker is a mirage. As Jeff puts it: 'If a casual decides that he wants to take four weeks off there's no guarantee that they're going to have a job when they come back from holidays, whereas if an employer says take four weeks off there's always a good chance that they can still get somebody else in'.

Employees like Theresa, George, Jeff, Rachel, Rebecca, Wendy, Marko, Maggie and Sarah – across a wide range of occupations, workplace types and ages - feel that flexibility is something that benefits the employer rather than the worker (See box). Marko, a crane operator in his 20s, is constantly on call for maintenance and breakdowns at the mining company. Wayne, with two jobs in gaming and correctional services, is clear that the flexibility of casual work is something that primarily benefits the employer:

*[Casual work] gives you flexibility if you can afford it ... The flexibility is for the employer, it's not for the worker. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

Maggie, working as an 'independent contractor' for a youth agency, feels that her employers benefit from the flexibility of casual work because they determine the hours:

*If you're the one that's able to come in as a casual, and do contract work, if you can determine your hours and your flexibility, and where you go, that would be great. But when it's determined by somebody else it's different. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Similarly, with her two night jobs Sarah found herself locked into set shifts, without any flexibility at all:

*At the restaurant I remember - because this telemarketing job started up - I had to say them I can't work these nights through the week and that's all there is to it, so I'm only available on the weekends and they agreed to that. But once that had been locked in I had to very consistently work that Friday, Saturday, Sunday and or they'd get shirty or just say no. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

The absence of reciprocal flexibility for employees extends to both the public and private sectors. Dorothy laughs at the notion of flexibility through her full-time research assistant work in a university:

*Flexibility to go to an early grave! (Laughs) No, I don't believe that [casual work gives employees flexibility]. I believe all the flexibility's with the employer. I believe that they*

*way that I'm employed and the way that I've seen other casual people employed, you have no bargaining power so flexibility is all about maximum flexibility for the people who employ you. I mean, that's why the university have every individual researcher employing their own casual research assistant, so that you don't have a job, as such, an ongoing position and that's all on their side. I mean, I can either be unemployed or risk being unemployed or take what's offered. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant)*

Dorothy has a negative view about the possibilities for flexibility through casual work:

*I think this business about the flexibility and this win-wins on both sides, I think that needs to be reviewed because I think it's very dishonest. I know that when I was younger and I needed part-time work when I was a mother of young children, I did need part-time work. I didn't need casual work, I needed part-time work and now I need full-time work and I think it's just dishonest that casual work is of any benefit to the employee. I personally can't think of any because even in the full-time permanent jobs I've had, there's been flexibility. You can work it out with your colleagues or your boss if you need flexibility at times or you can have permanent part-time work but I think casual work is just a big rip-off. I think for big businesses, it pays off obviously because they can put people on and off as they want them and shorten their hours or lengthen their hours and have all sorts of flexibility but I don't see anything in it for workers at all. And the way the rest of society is set up as in getting finance for things or even probably taking your children to school, it's not geared for the worker at all. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

Annadjies felt did not agree that casual work gave her flexibility in her public sector job. Instead she felt that she was often left to clean up after ongoing workers had left:

*I do not agree [that casual work gives workers flexibility]. No ... You don't have any rights, like [permanents] have. They can go for an hour lunch and they can start at 10 in the morning and leave early at night, where we have to start at 9 and you can leave at 5 or later, depending on what work needs to be done ... They like leaving stuff ... You know, whereby if it starts getting to 5 o'clock, [they say] 'oh, can you please finish this off for me, just do this, this, this'. You know, setting up for meetings, for example. When they start a meeting early in the morning, they will ask 'can you please come in and set up the rooms' but they won't come in. (Annadjies, 30s, administrative worker).*

### 3.2.5 Theory Versus Practice

Another young worker, Daniel had worked in a fast food restaurant for three years while studying at university. He enjoyed the social relationships at work, although he worked hard. For him, casual work had 'good things and bad things':

*In theory, it allows us to have flexible work opportunities but, in reality, I think that the hours you get given are very much determined by your boss and they're not necessarily the hours you want. So I don't know whether the theory [really works out] in practice ... The casual aspects of the job was in some ways frustrating, like I didn't always get as much hours as I wanted and then sometimes I'd get more hours than I wanted. Usually when I wanted hours, it was in holidays and that's when there were lots of younger, school-age*

*kids who were able to do the work and they're cheaper and then during exam periods and during assignment times, there were plenty of hours available. (Daniel, 21, fast food worker).*

Alice sees that casual work offers flexibility to her in her work processor job but only in theory – it is a flexibility that she has not used except once (in five years) when she was sick and came back to the ‘full in tray’:

*There is a certain amount of flexibility. At the moment I have a love hate relationship with my casualness. I love being a casual because at any given moment I can say look I'm not available tomorrow, at the same token they can do that to me too. They can say we don't want you tomorrow, but the same way there is that lack of security so it's what they call a double edged sword.*

*Interviewer: If you said 'oh look I want to, I'm not coming in tomorrow', what would happen?*

*I'm not too sure, it hasn't happened yet.*

*Interviewer: You've never said that?*

*No. Oh, once, about two years ago I was off sick and that put a bit of a spanner in the works for the girl that was there, but then when I got back the tray was full. (Alice, 41, work process operator).*

She concludes that ‘I don't need flexibility that's for sure’. For her casual work brings ‘a certain sense of freedom but also a certain sense of not belonging’.

A large proportion of employees in this sample see a one-sided flexibility that assists employers more than employees. Their keenness to keep their jobs underpins their flexible availability to their employers – often extending their employment at short notice, for extra shifts, or truncating their employment through cancelled shifts and hours.

### 3.2.6 The Price of Refusing Hours, Shifts - or Individual Contracts

Flexibility is a myth for those whose jobs or hours are at risk if they refuse a shift or take a break. Working for a range of employers, Kate has found that is deceptive for the worker:

*Yes. It's flexibility but it's deceptive how flexible it is because as much as you can say I'm unavailable to work that day, that does have repercussions. And I've always found that you always know that when you say no for one shift you're probably knocking back three... that you won't be called next time or you'll get yourself out of favour with someone. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)*

Like many others, Jackie's hours were reduced without explanation:

*The reason why I left there because I wasn't getting enough. I'd get about four a week if I was lucky. (Jackie, 15, supermarket)*

Patti feels she misses out on jobs because of her reluctance to work all-night shifts:

*I try and tell the bosses that I'm not over keen on working nights ... But I'm sure I could miss out on some work because of that. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Many casual workers feel they can't refuse any shifts that are offered, a situation fraught with anxiety. As a casual Lynn feels she cannot refuse a shift in case she misses out next time, her fears over-riding family concerns about her health:

*As a casual person I was always reluctant to not say I would work because then I would think, ooh, if I do that then they might not give me any more work, or they'll give me less work and they won't think I'm responsible. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Maggie feels that with only one 8-hour shift a week at the youth agency her hours are 'paltry', and she worries that her unavailability for overnight shifts means she gets less work:

*They reward the fact that you're available, and that you'll do whatever shift they want you to do. ... I mean I'm available, but I'm just not prepared to sleep over, and I don't want to sleep in anybody else's bed but my own right now, because I've done too many years of it (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Jayda finds that she was often pressured to take on extra shifts, despite her year 11 school commitments, and found it difficult to take sick leave or control her hours: when she couldn't accept shifts they 'sort of made me feel like I was a horrible person to say no'. She felt this affected her health:

*Especially with the company not listening to your ideas on rosters. Because I think I specified that I would not be able to work past 8 pm and constantly they put me on shifts until 10:00 pm or 10:30 pm, when I had school the next day and things like that. And yes, it does affect your health, because you don't get a good sleep and then you perform worse the next day and it's just like going downhill. (Jayda, 15, retail)*

Casual workers can be significantly affected by changes in hours that fall just short of being sacked and in some cases are designed, in employees' views, to cause resignation. Sometimes this 'payback' is for industrial activity by casual employees. Patti suspects she is the victim of a subtle payback: her shifts were cut back when she refused to sign an AWA:

*I can't prove this but I was offered AWA with my company that I work for to go on the award and I chose the award wages rather than sign a workplace agreement. And I believe in some circumstances that employers will first roster on the people under the agreement because they're cheaper, but I can't prove that. That's my [theory]. ... Yeah, I only know this because when I talk to my other work mates who have signed it and they seem to be getting more hours. But I can't prove it, it might be, you know, their turn on the roster or whatever. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

In a very similar experience in another state and industry, Abby's hours in one of her casual jobs were reduced from 15-20 a week to 3 when she refused to sign an Australian Workplace Agreement (which would have significantly lowered her hourly pay and penalties) and she fell

out of favour with her employer: 'I was one of their favourites until I didn't sign the AWA form'. She describes the effect on her life:

*When you're so used to bringing home \$350 a week, and then bring home \$40 a week, it's a big drop in pay and I just couldn't live. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)*

### 3.3 The Dimensions of Flexibility

Casual workers views about flexibility suggest that seven aspects are significant:

#### 3.3.1 The Importance of Predictable Hours

The most commonly mentioned problem relating to flexibility is the predictability of working time. Many find unpredictable work stressful. It prevent planning and affects social life and children. Sarah recalls that in a previous casual job she became very anxious about the unpredictability of her hours and the vulnerability of her situation:

*You're either stressed because you're not getting enough and you're scared that they've dropped you because they often don't have the decency even to tell you you're not coming in again, so you go through too long a period without work or you're working flat out, like seven days or seven shifts a week with absolutely no control cause you know you can't go to your employer and say 'look, I'm not coping with this' because they'll just point you to a list of all these other people who are willing to do it. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Some casual workers have no predictable work pattern. Because he is allocated to deal with breakdowns and 'projects' on the work site Marko's work is very unpredictable:

*Well, it is very unpredictable because I don't know what I'm doing from day to day. You get in the yard there and you don't know what you are doing from day to day. You might be out there for 5 hours and you might be out there for 14 hours ...There is not a lot of information unless something is pre-booked. If you get a bit of a breakdown or something - I was in there for Easter, Easter Sunday and they had a breakdown out there - it is understandable enough - I did a 14 hour shift to get the bloody thing on there. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

### **Abby's Honeymoon:**

**'All the times that I covered for them and helped them out and then when I wanted to have a bit of time off...'**

Far from flexibility on her terms, Abby provided flexibility that suited her employer, without reciprocal flexibility for herself. On many occasions she 'covered' for absent workers and stepped into extra hours at her employer's request. Her employer relied upon her to underwrite a flexible cleaning service:

*I've got them out of the poo, if I can say that, many a time ... All the times that I covered for them and helped them out and then when I wanted to have a bit of time off, I couldn't do it because they couldn't get noone else to cover for me ... And they just relied on me and I had just had enough. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)*

Like many others, Abby covered gaps when needed:

*They'd ring me up and [ask me to come in] - sucker me! - would say 'yeah' just to help everyone out ... and [I used to] to think that if I was crook one day, well, then they could possibly help me out. But when it come to that situation it didn't work out ... Like on my honeymoon I wanted to have a few extra days off, and they couldn't find anyone to cover for me and so I ended up having to come back early ... And I was just not impressed.*

When her honeymoon was cut back by three days because her employer phoned and asked her to come back, Abby's husband 'wasn't too impressed because he'd already got the Ok from his work to have time off'. She felt that that employer had 'used her to the max'. She now tries to find employment situations where 'I really know the people really well'.

Wayne also reports erratic hours, ranging from full-time to just a few. Planning a budget around such unpredictability is very difficult:

*I've had sometimes as little work as eight, sometimes four hours in a week and then when there's demands from the employer, you know, I've had 30 or even up to 40 hours in a week. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

Multiple employers further complicate predictable working life for many casuals. Four different employers mean that Patti's work pattern is extremely unpredictable:

*[It's] All over the place. It really depends on whether my employers - and I have four employers - whether they can acquire contracts and then give us work. So it's random. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Rebecca never knows in advance what her hours will be since there is no single roster for her several jobs with the labour hire agency:

*No, we don't really have one. Sometimes, some weeks I might work one hour, one day rather, one or two days and other weeks I might work the whole week, like last week I worked all week. This week, so far, I've worked all week. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

In the absence of a set roster, Lynn feels at the mercy of management, as she waits for calls to 'come in' often at very short notice and for erratic periods:

*They weren't ever able to give me a roster. I could only work when they would ring me and say can you do three days this week, two days this week, four days [next] week. Can you come in this afternoon? ... Sometimes I would not work at all in a week, sometimes I would work a six day roster, sometimes I'd work 13 shifts in a row. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

### **Worrying Needlessly...Living On Call**

The consequences of unpredictable income are significant and affect many in different industries. Kate has worked over nine years in retail, call centres and clothing manufacture, where her unpredictable earnings had caused stress. These effects had become more intensive for her as she moved from being a student living with her parents, to being reliant on her own earnings. Sometimes her worries were unwarranted because the hours came through, but the worry was there nonetheless:

*I've effectively been on call through the bulk of my work. Retail definitely, I used to find a lot of changes and a lot of early morning phone calls when you hear the phone ring and you know that at 7:00 o'clock, the only person who's going to be ringing you is work and so you just don't answer the phone cause you don't want to go to work that day. And that was the same in cleaning, in the nursing home when I worked where I was cleaning... I was often on call there and I would be rostered ... and that was the same with retail, I'd be rostered one shift and I'd work five in a week quite commonly ... It's very stressful. I'd always found it very stressful. I know when there've been several times when I've looked at over the years, lots of times when I looked at my rosters for weeks ahead and gone 'oh my God, I can't live on this money I've got to look for a new job, something's got to happen'. And then it's never eventuated because within a few days someone wants to swap a shift, somebody's sick, you're called in and suddenly your hours are up again. And that also means that all the things that you planned to do with your time go out the window. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)*

#### 3.3.2 The Importance of Knowing Hours in Advance

A lack of advance information about hours makes casual employees anxious, insecure and vulnerable. For example, in her current situation April has the predictability she needs, but in a previous fashion store her timetable was at the mercy of the disorganised manager:

*She was supposed to have her roster posted for all casual staff but because she was so disorganised she never had a chance to post it, and we'd be phoning ... on a Sunday to know what your shifts are for the Monday, whereas [here] I know exactly what I'm doing from week to week to week. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

As the mother of young children this made planning difficult. Casual workers who know their shift times feel more secure and can plan.

### **Bruce's story**

#### **'I've Got to be There When The Job's There'**

Bruce is over 50 and drives a bus carrying disabled children. He loves his job and the children he transports. He works split shifts and has no minimum call in period. He is often called in to find the kids he was planning to collect are sick or the bus is broken down and he is not needed. He is not paid for this time, and must turn around and go home unpaid. He has been unable to find a union that could cover him and while he and his co-workers took their concerns about their pay and lack of minimum call-in to the state ombudsman, nothing has changed, except that the underpayment of their wages was revealed and their pay rates have been updated. Like most casual workers in this study, Bruce would like permanent predictable work and pay. Despite his ten years of service, Bruce has very limited freedom in relation to his hours of work. His time is built around the task, rather than the reverse:

*I've got to be there when the job's there. I've got free time in between because you only pick the children up after school is finished to take them home, you drop them off in the mornings before school starts. But then I've got free time in between that. If I had that as something else, that time could be used as working. Who wants to employ you between ten and two? (Bruce, 50s, bus driver).*

Bruce would like to work full-time and points to other school bus drivers who have grounds jobs during the day rather than being idle and unpaid from 10 to 2 pm. Bruce is also concerned about the lack of sick and holiday pay. He is rarely sick 'but you never know when the time will come'. And he cannot afford to go away for a holiday: 'I'd like to be employed as a permanent person and have holiday pay and sick pay'.

### 3.3.3 The Importance of Say About Shifts

Many casuals are concerned about changes in their hours that involve a move from day shifts to nights. For example, Genna's three years employment in an aged care service has recently been disrupted because her employer has suddenly moved her to night shifts, in reaction, she believes

to her Workcover claim. The shift has traumatised her and she has relied on her union stepping in to protect her from dismissal:

*He just suddenly gets a roster and changes it from one fortnight to another and yet he says that 'you are a casual worker and we have our rights' but yet all the other six to seven people have a set shift roster, but he's mainly doing it to me because I had a WorkCover claim two years ago, not a claim I was on WorkCover for a very short period due to them, making them do something I shouldn't have done and not liking me after because I had two weeks off work ... And because you're casual he can do what he wants ... It has traumatised me actually ... They just want me out. (Genna, 60, aged care worker)*

### 3.3.4 Short Hours and Minimum Call-In Time

Access to minimum call-in periods is very important to many casuals. Without them, they can find themselves making trips to work for trivial periods (see Bruce's story in box). Their lack of power in refusing hours for fear of losing the job, means that some work very short shifts, which they resent. In other cases, rules on minimum call-ins are ignored. For example, as a casual restaurant worker Sarah was rarely given the proper minimum call-in time:

*They'd call me in at say 6 o'clock, you know at 15 minutes notice and then they'd send me home at like quarter to 7. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

### 3.3.5 Controlling Long Hours and Finish Times

Some casuals have little control over their hours and, in order to keep 'sweet' with their employer or hire agency, work hours well beyond their preference. Klaus, for example is a plant operator. He is 56 years of age, his wife works casually and he has one son living at home who is not financially dependent. He works long hours – on average 11 a day, 6 days a week, leaving little time for his wife and family: 'The older I get, the harder I work'. Prior to the casual work he is doing now he was a full-time employee in a state government department. Klaus cannot predict his finishing time, which means he 'cannot make plans with the family ... You don't have much of a social life'. His long hours and unpredictable finish times mean that his health is affected negatively. As a casual he feels he cannot refuse overtime:

*If I was permanent I could refuse a certain amount of overtime. Because you're not worried about your job as such. (Klaus, 56, plant operator)*

### 3.3.6 Unpaid Overtime and 'Finishing The Jobs'

Sometimes these long hours are unpaid. John's situation is similar to Klaus's. John feels he lacks any flexibility: '[Being casual] gives me no flexibility because I'm doing 46 hours a week'. He is concerned not to refuse hours, including unpaid overtime. He is actually working 60 hours a week but being paid for 46 hours: 'to take time off would mean that they would get dirty on me and they jack me up'. The lack of workplace power, meant that to keep his job, he does extended unpaid hours. Far from having flexible control of working hours, casual workers like John and Klaus have little control over their working hours and are working, for example, unpaid hours of overtime that contribute to very long work in weeks, and very long working days on occasions. This issue affects people in a range of employment types and industries.

## Ava's story

### Getting Control of Time in the Sex Industry

Ava works on an adult chat line and has struggled to control her working time. She has changed employers to try to get more control over her working time. Previously, she sometimes worked very extended hours: '18 hours a day actually':

*With two companies I've worked right from 11:00 am through to 8:00 o'clock, then 8:00 o'clock through to 3:00 am and then often I'd get called on by the people in the service who'd say 'Oh, Ava... I'm just slipping off, I've got some function on, do you mind just staying on through again till 11 am?'. Sometimes I actually work through a day and a half. 11:00 to 11:00 plus another through to 3:00 o'clock. And I was doing that at least twice within a week I'd have like no break whatsoever. (Ava, 40s, adult chat line worker).*

Ava spent long hours on call. She has changed jobs to find control over her hours and now she has a say over her hours, and when she can take a break, which she describes as:

*Brilliant, absolute brilliant. It's up to me totally. If I want a break, I log out. No headache whatsoever. It's just like total freedom.*

Previously she could not take breaks and felt under pressure to do long hours, both from her manager, the business owners and other workers. She is paid by the minute at a rate of about \$0.50 a minute, with the possibility of earning a bonus. However, Ava has trouble taking holidays because her 'regulars' 'put pressure on me' to be available. Ava has health problems that mean she had previously been on benefits for many years. Looking to the future, Ava would like to work eight hours and have another relief operator 'take over from me and then I come back and take my clients back again'. Back up so she can have a holiday is important: 'They don't employ enough people obviously. They advertise everywhere. They have the ads but they don't have the employees to back it up' to meet the demands generated by the companies wide national advertising of its adult phone chat services.

Annadjies works in the public sector and is often asked to do tasks at hours that permanents do not want to work – early in the morning or late at night, to clean up after others or meet peak demands. This means she works many hours of unpaid overtime, and under considerable pressure at times. After five years, this had exhausted Annadjies who could not get a paid rest to recover:

*What they don't want to do, you have to do ... They want to just do all the nice things and when it comes to finishing off things, they don't want to do that ... I am tired, I don't get the rest the others get ... Every three months they go on holidays for at least a week, when I can only go once a year. (Annadjies, 30s. administrative officer)*

Kenneth felt it was hard to question doing extra hours of unpaid overtime without placing your employment at risk:

*Theoretically the business closed at 10 p.m., right? And that's when you were paid to. Right, then you had to do the cash up afterwards, in your own time. I reckon that was crap, you know. I mean, totally rubbish ... basically you were doing it for free because it wasn't possible to do it during the open business hours because you can't do a cash up until the business had closed ... I mean, you know, you can see the insinuation there. If you said anything about it, well, you know, 'See you', get another one. (Kenneth, 49, retail)*

### 3.3.7 Getting Control by Changing Jobs

Many casual workers try to get control over their hours and terms of work by changing jobs. They leave a job, rather than attempt to negotiate changes in terms or hours, or to have their legal rights met. For some, this is very difficult to do. Their choices are limited by their labour market options, a point that has been made by Kryger (2004) who has argued that casual work is related more to unemployment and underemployment, than to permanent employment. This point of reference is clearly dominant for many casuals (See 'The Long Shadow of Unemployment' box). Genna changed jobs because of shift losses, uncertainty and bullying. At 60, with 38 years as an aged care worker, she has little time for government plans that older people work longer, and struggles with a sizeable workload:

*The story there was that I got fed up with going from shift to shift and I left and went to this one because it was less residents to look after. At the first one that I mentioned to you they had about 30 people more, that was 60 people and you only had like myself and a Registered Nurse on in the afternoon to look after all these people and I couldn't cope ... The government was saying that us people have to work - we can't get a pension, so we have to work but I couldn't work with so many people and not enough workers to help one another. (Genna, 59, aged care worker)*

Don is unimpressed with the labour hire companies he has worked for and now refuses jobs that lack some kind of predictability. He left one job 'because it was like slave labour'.

### The Long Shadow of Unemployment

Kryger (2004) has pointed out the coincidence of high casualisation and high unemployment, examining their close association by age, education qualification, state of residence, occupation and industry. He argues that casual workers may have more in common with the unemployed than with the ongoing employed, suggesting that casual terms may be involuntary in view of the shadow cast by this coincidental unemployment. HILDA data shows that casual workers 'are much more likely to have had a recent history of unemployment' and that that period is much longer than amongst ongoing employees (Wooden and Warren 2003: 10). Casual workers in our sample often compare their work situation with unemployment. Many have recent experience of redundancy or unemployment. They talk of being grateful that they have a job, and are very conscious of many people around them who lack any work. A consistently recurring point of reference in many minds is unemployment, rather than ongoing work. They are concerned to keep their jobs, and often reluctant to change jobs and risk their existing hours. Many are under-employed, relative to their preferences, but prefer this to unemployment.

For older casuals, in particular, casual terms are preferred to 'living on benefits'. Genna, still working in aged care at 60, hates the thought of 'welfare': 'God, you know at least I'm not on Centrelink. I wouldn't want to be on Centrelink'. Ava working in the sex industry echoes her aversion, and her delight at being off benefits. Bruce says 'Beggars can't be choosers, so what I get – my level of pay – is better than not having any at all ... A little bird in the hand is better than one in the bush' (Bruce, 50-60, bus driver). Jackie, only 15 still at school, loves earning and 'will never give up her job because I need that money'. Her money keeps her car on the road and she is very grateful to have a job at all.

These interviews confirm the close relationship between casual terms and unemployment in the minds of many casual workers. They 'bear in mind' unemployment in evaluating their employment, and are thankful that they have a job when so many do not.

*For many casuals, their satisfaction with their level of pay exists in the shadow of unemployment and no pay at all: 'a little bird in the hand is better than one in the bush' as Bruce puts it.*

As Dave puts it: 'In this day and age, people are just grateful, I suppose for work'. (Dave, 39, market researcher).

### 3.3.8 Getting Enough Hours: Multiple Casual Jobs

Working in more than one job intensifies many problems associated with casual work. Working as a security officer for four different employers means that Patti's work pattern is chaotic:

*All over the place. It really depends on whether my employers - and I have four employers - whether they can acquire contracts and then give us work. So it's random. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire.)*

*When I first began I was working through the week as well, then I got this telemarketing job so just started working [at the restaurant] Friday, Saturday, Sunday and yeah, no loading ever and plus all the other things that go with casual, like I didn't get any leave obviously or sick leave and also I had no job security at all, and yes, that was all very rough. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Dorothy has five different casual contracts which together make up her full-time job as a university research assistant. Overall, her views about casual work are negative:

*Well, before I actually experienced it, I used to believe that it wasn't very good for workers but since I've experienced it, I know it's not good for workers. There's just no stability, there's no security, you can't lend money or plan your life and have a holiday and it encourages a whole set of other working conditions around the fact that the work's casual as well in that you can't really bargain for your best pay rate because it's such insecure work that, I guess, casual workers are getting ripped off. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

She describes her job as 'erratic and hectic' as she juggles her tasks and tries to get them done within time frames that are often not realistic and reflect budget limitations rather than realistic assessments of the task that needs to be done. She is farmed out to various researchers and works full-time although the university employer will not place her employment on a single ongoing basis. She would prefer permanency or a limited term contract to five or six different casual contracts, each of which has a different rate of pay and only one of which reflects her experience and skill.

## 3.4 Key Characteristics of Flexibility from the Perspective of Employees

These accounts illustrate how flexibility in relation to casual work extends to several aspects of working time, including:

- the quantum of hours;
- the days/hours in which they fall
- the length of advance notice;
- the predictability of start and finish times;
- the sequence of hours (ie continuous or non-continuous)
- minimum call in times;
- say over extended hours, and their remuneration.
- the timing of changes in shifts (from days or afternoons to nights, for example) and the chance to swap shifts.

Having some say over one of these aspects does not ensure flexibility at work on terms that suit employees, as any one of them can drive unpredictable work patterns and pay.

#### 3.4.1 Genuine Consultation and Negotiation: 'Reciprocal flexibility'

Turning to what makes a job flexible for employees, casual employees frequently mention a critical condition that is essential to flexibility for them: Genuine employee say over hours, such that the employer adopts a consultative approach to setting and negotiating hours and shifts, giving employees some control. The worker with employer-friendly flexibility has a say and can refuse or accept hours without penalty. This often means a good relationship between the employer and employee. Many in such situations recognise that 'a good boss' is sometimes hard to find, and that casual workers can be hostage to the personality and whim of their employer. Such employees often describe work arrangements that are *reciprocally flexible*, with employees sometimes giving a little and sometimes employers.

For some of these casual workers who have flexibility, the existence of other sources of income also underpins their satisfaction with flexibility. Because of this, changes in shifts or hours initiated by their employers are less traumatic for them and their households.

Where they have no real say, casual work is not flexible in ways that suit employees, as opposed to suiting their employers. This issue affects workers of very different ages and is relevant to the spectrum of industries and occupations. For example, year 12 and university students in the fast food and retail sectors, even where have other significant sources of income in their homes, need to have a say about their hours of work so that they can flexibly accommodate the school year and their classes. The absence of a genuinely consultative approach means that casual work is sometimes not flexible enough to accommodate the study demands of students, and several in our study preferred permanent part-time in order to secure predictable work.

Similarly, some older Australians who are receiving the pension or income from other sources and have a good relationship with their employer speak positively about the flexibility that their casual work confers. They can refuse hours without putting their ongoing jobs at risk, and it does not matter particularly whether they earn \$40 or \$400 this week as they are not depending upon their income.

For those whose income is an essential part of their household survival from week to week, a predictable income is critical. Casual work very often makes this impossible. It is also often essential for working mothers who need predictable hours to organise childcare, as Jenny and Theresa recognise. Casual work is good while studying but when Jenny finishes her degree she would like permanent part-time:

*That way I would be able to organise childcare easily and I will always know when I'm working and if it's part-time also, there will be more time to spend with children and that kind of thing. (Jenny, 20s, ESL teacher)*

Theresa says that the lack of say over shift finishing times – never known in advance in her workplace – complicates the care of children for many of her co-workers.

### 3.5 The Importance of Predictability: Flexibility for Some, Powerlessness for Others

These perspectives emphasise that true flexibility for employees is dependent upon negotiation and consultation. These depend, in turn, upon good relationships between employees and employers. Where this does not exist, the power balance between employers and employees (shaped by labour market circumstances, the legal framework and many other factors) comes into play. Many casuals are clear about where power around the allocation of their work lies: with their employers. Casual workers report bullying, effective dismissal by means of greatly reduced shifts or hours, and some are often directly reminded of their expendability by their employers. These factors are noted by workers in many different kinds of jobs, industries and age groups.

Emma had worked for the past 15 years as a casual, underpinning her study and theatre work. She had 'earned' her flexibility with various employers with whom she now had friendships and established relationships. While she had varying finishing hours, her shifts were predictable because of this relationship. It did not exist with all employers, but the sense of reciprocal relationship is evident:

*Certainly I had to, I guess, earn the flexibility with Restaurant X in the early days, I mean I was sort of 19 or 20 when I started and working in a restaurant there was a whole team of us. You could within reason sort of say, you know in two weeks time I can't work on the Friday or whatever and there usually were enough people to cover you but you always felt a sense of sort of obligation that you would keep your weekends for work, the busiest nights of the week ... Because the relationship has gone on over the years and I've kind of stepped in and helped them out and they've kind of helped me out. I'm getting paid cash at Restaurant B, I'm not on the books, so, and ... I have to nick off every now and again [for theatre work] it's sort of just a given. They know that's what I do and I leave for a couple of weeks at a time and go on a performing tour and stuff, but with my last main kind of chunk of employment, I didn't quite ever sort of build the relationship with my employer that allowed for that, that flexibility. It was a lot harder, I felt it was much harder to say I can't work next week, or with a month's notice I'd put it in the diary at work and then I'd write a note to him and I'd tell him and you know on, he'd kind of look at me gruffly and I'd feel really bad but I'd think 'Oh buggar it, I've worked sixteen weeks in a row, I can take a weekend off, you know'. (Emma, 24, restaurant worker)*

She reflects about power and flexibility over her 15 years:

*I certainly think that the employer has the power. But it has allowed me a certain amount of flexibility to pursue other either job options or just sort of things I want to do. But it's limited flexibility and it's flexibility that comes at a price, like you certainly feel obliged to give up your weekends or and it depends on the employer. (Emma, 24, restaurant worker)*

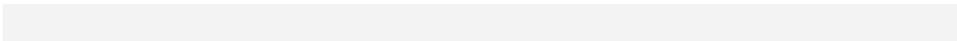
Her opportunities to control her shifts varied widely. One large employer she had worked for over many years would 'send out a letter saying everyone must work these dates, you cannot refuse, you have to work or don't expect to get any more shifts'. The absence of minimum standards, or of their enforcement, means that many employees are dependent upon the vagaries

of local relationships and personalities. While some can ‘prove themselves’ and ‘stay sweet’, their power is weak and unreliable.

Flexibility for employees is valued by most casual workers, who want to be able to take leave or build their jobs around other commitments. Forty-two per cent of those in this study felt they could negotiate in ways that gave them some flexibility. The other fifty-eight per cent could not, and many felt that power over working time – and consequently earnings – is exercised mostly, or exclusively, by their employers. Many of these casuals talk about the gap between theory and practice: while in theory employees are meant to have flexibility, in their experience the practice is otherwise. This lack of real employee flexibility affects workers in very diverse situations, from teenagers to older workers, from building sites to fast food and fashion retailers, and in both the public and private sectors.

These findings expose the proposition that casual workers have flexibility as a myth for most. While this is true for a significant proportion of casuals, it is not so for the majority in this study. The consequences of this lack of flexibility for employees are very significant. They are anxious about their earnings, intimidated at the prospect that their hours are outside their control, and concerned about the impact upon their households. Many work hours that are far from their preferences – either very long or very short or at times when they don’t want to work.

Flexibility is only one aspect of casual work. In the next section we consider how casual workers weight up being permanent compared to being casual. This assessment goes to other aspects of being casual, beyond flexibility – to a predictable life, careers, skill and speaking up.



### **Theresa's Working Holiday in Australia: The Comparison with Spain**

Theresa is visiting Australia from Spain. She is staying for a few months and learning English. She has been working for three months in a manufacturing plant which employees several hundred mostly unskilled workers, many of whom are casual, mostly employed through a labour hire firm. She packs and wraps foodstuffs. She is 28 years old with a degree in sociology and has worked in Spain as a social worker. She is very surprised at the working conditions in her casual job. Every Thursday or Friday she phones the labour hire company to find out what days she is going to work next week – ‘you know how many days you work and what time you start but you don't know exactly how many hours you are going to do’. Theresa usually works from 5 to 8.5 hours a day. Her partner who works in the same place has been called in for night shift with 90 minutes notice. She finds that they cannot plan their activities or budget and would prefer predictable hours:

*You only know what time you will start but never what time you finish. One of my principal critiques about casual work is that if you don't know how many hours you're going to work one day or for a week you can't organise your income and you can't organise your meals, your shopping, pay rent for a house or whatever ... The down-side, the negative side, is that you didn't know your finish time and you didn't know in advance how many hours you would work that day and you didn't know for the next week what shifts you would work ... If you are not available for work they don't call you. You call them maybe the next week and they say “you don't have shifts”, no explanation, nothing. They don't have to give you any explanation if they don't need you and it's very bad for you ... My impression is that you have to be available 24 hours.*

Theresa observes that the uncertainty around hours affects her friends at work with children:

*It's a really big problem because usually their grandma looks after the children but maybe your mum has to stay with your children for two hours, five hours, eight hours and you never know. I think it is very difficult for the extended family.*

She feels that casuals in her workplace are treated very badly: they are not given information about the fact that ten people are going to shortly lose their jobs which they have found out through the grapevine: ‘We don't know anything’.

### **Theresa's Working Holiday in Australia (continued)**

*They don't think you are a worker with rights. They only think today we need to make one million [items] or whatever then we need 50 people but tomorrow we will make only half this and we need half this many workers ... For the company it is perfect ... The flexibility is there for the company. You don't decide. They decide for you ... I think for mental health it is no good. If you don't know what is going on in your life, you are unstable... It's a stress life. We used to think a stressed life is for lawyers and doctors. Now factory workers suffer a stressed life because the insecurity is no good for your health and most of the people, they are looking unhealthy ... You can't be a member of your community, like an active member. You can't study any course, be with your family together on weekends.*

She points out that Spain has a high level of precarious employment as well. But it is underpinned by rights unavailable to Australian casuals - guaranteed breaks and 'you know what time you work: what day, what time, everything, you know your shifts, your hours'. In Spain precarious workers have access to paid sick leave, accumulate paid holidays, are paid for public holidays and get the extra holiday pays due to ongoing workers in July and December. They have access to paid leave to care for sick family, to visit the doctor, and to attend exams: 'I think you have gone back to 200 years ago because you've lost your rights'.

*I don't understand how Australia has developed this kind of system and I think that the government must finish with this. They have to change the way... I think you can find new systems ... Stability, stability means planning of hours and planning of income. And sick pay and holiday pay because these things were our main rights during the last two centuries and now you have lost them. I am sorry but you have lost them!*

## 4. The Preference for Permanence

In this section, we review the question of permanency and the extent of preferences for ongoing employment (sometimes referred to as ‘permanency’).

By far the majority of casuals in our study would prefer to be permanent to being casual. Forty-one of the fifty-five expressed this view, while only twelve (or less than a quarter) preferred to be casual. Some of those who wanted to be casual at present, do not want to remain so when they finish studying. Permanency is highly valued for a range of reasons: for a predictable life, for a decent and dependable income, for better chances at promotion and training, for its paid holiday and sick leave, for the chance to do the better tasks, for better borrowing power and for more respect and self-esteem.

A few casuals don’t want permanence because they value the advantages of flexibility or the loading. For Tony, the argument against going permanent part-time is that he wouldn’t get enough hours:

*The thinking is that if we’re only getting 50 hours, 60 hours a fortnight, something like that, it’s not really up to a full wage. They’ll want to stay casual because they’ll want to get that extra money. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Ellen is one of the minority. After 30 years casual employment in real estate, she sees little advantage in becoming permanent, given that ‘permanency’ means only 15 hours guaranteed work a week (less than she currently works), and for only three weeks ahead. April, a fashion store supervisor, finds it difficult to imagine a better work situation than the one she is currently in, although she would prefer to spread her hours over fewer days of the week.

Workers like Ellen, April and Rhys find that casual work gives them the flexibility they want to have holidays and go hunting. However, Rhys’ ideal is to work permanent part-time:

*Probably permanent part-time will be the ultimate so you’re guaranteed a minimum of 20, 30 hours a week and obviously the better pay rate. We get paid adequately for what we do but like I mentioned before what we have to deal with at work and are responsible for at work I think we should be paid more. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

*‘To know that I can pay that bloody bill when it comes into the letterbox’*

Many other workers share Rhys’ perspective: they want more stable employment such as permanent part-time. This preference is shown by people who are young and old, studying, in various industries and occupations and with and without dependents. They want to be made permanent - in some cases desperately. Theresa is visiting from Europe on a working holiday. She is studying English and working in a factory. While some might think that casual terms would suit her, in fact they do not. Theresa wants to know her days and times of work and have a predictable income, none of which is possible through her current job. George’s reasoning is very clear: he wants to work full-time permanently, so that he knows his annual wage, can have holidays and predictable time off with his young family, and plan ahead:

*I would love to be employed full-time, to know that I have a job Monday to Friday. To have eight hours a day, to have sick pay if I need it, to have holiday pay to be able to plan in a holiday with my little kids and my beautiful wife and to just, to know once a year we can have four weeks of quality time together. And to be stable in employment, to know that I can pay that bloody bill when it comes into the letterbox. And to be able to save so we can perhaps better my family's life and my life... maybe buy another little boat so that our family can go out fishing together, so that we can do things together instead of worrying about whether I'm going to be called in tomorrow or cancelled tomorrow. (George, 40, technician)*

As far as Rebecca is concerned, employment security is the most important thing for everybody:

*Everyone else wants full time [permanent] that I've heard of ... That's all it is. They'd just love to know that next week they've got a job to go to. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Lynn would much prefer to be permanent so she could have her own group of clients to care for:

*In the service for which I work, I don't actually have my own client base and I find that really frustrating. I tend to go outside the square a bit and I'm very innovative with the young people ... Now that's [my] choice, but I like having my own client base because if you don't, you put things in place but you can't follow them through. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Margaret's ideal job would be one much like her present role - working with people - but permanent part-time rather than casual:

*My ideal employment would be definitely the service industry where I'm working with the people whether it's students, teachers, or whatever it is. It's probably, say about 20-25 hours a week. Pay – I think I'm worth more than base grade. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Marko is planning to leave his present casual job and work elsewhere in the construction industry – on contract rather than as a casual.

*Well, I'll keep doing what I'm doing until I'm no longer required, but I've been around the place a bit. I'm looking at a job up at [city] at the moment, going back into construction. That is what a lot of people are waiting for, an avenue out ... No, I won't be permanent. 18 months – 2 years work. But, I'm used to working long hours and that, but I'll be compensated for them hours. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

### Abby's Story

#### Permanency: 'Everything is just that much better for me now'

Many employees can reflect upon the differences between working permanently and working casually. Abby, who works as a cleaner now works permanent part-time, which she prefers because she knows where she is going in terms of work sites, and 'I like to keep to a routine if I can'. She changed employers in order to get permanent part-time hours. Predictability reduces 'harrassment' to work extra shifts. She feels she can be organised, and this has affected her personal relationship:

*[It's] a lot better. Whereas with the other company they might put you at one site for that day and then you could be way down south the next day...Before [as a couple] we used to do a lot of things on the spur of a moment because we couldn't guarantee if we'd get a phone call that I had to work, whereas [now] I know they won't harass me in that way.*

*Interviewer: So when you're on call like that as you used to be, sometimes you felt harassed to go to work?*

*Ninety percent of the time, yes ... They'd just try to put you a bit on the guilt trip, you know. 'Oh it's extra hours for you and ra ra ra', but I like to keep to a routine and just do set hours a week and I'm happy ... You feel more organised, you know when you can go out and come home. With the other company I used to work for I could go out and spend a night out and then come home at 4 am and the next thing I get a phone call at 5.30am: 'Oh can you work at such and such'. Whereas at this place I am now, I know that will never happen... It's just more organised and you can do a lot more in your life than what you could do before.*

*Interviewer: How do you think it affects your relationship with your husband?*

*Oh, it used to be a pain the bum, before – it used to be horrible. Because even my hubby would get angry, aggro ... and I felt like I wasn't there for my husband the majority of the time. Now I feel more than happy. (Abby, 30s, cleaner).*

Abby's children are grown up and her step-children visit once a fortnight. When her children were younger, her casual work was a problem: 'I was always up in the air and angry ... because of the tiredness and the unreliable hours that you get ... everything is just much better for me now. Everything's all falling into place and I'm really happy about it'.

Monique's ideal employment would be permanent full-time – 'No question about it' – for the financial security:

*Because I want that stability and that knowing that everyday I could have a job without just... you know, if something goes wrong they're just going to get rid of me. And a lot of it at this point in my life is because I want financial stability because I've been a student for so long and never like been able to do anything because I've never had the money like cannot get credit ratings. So just things like that, that come with being a permanent full-time worker. Get more flexibility in terms of money. A lot of it's got to do with money. Like it's not my major reason for working or anything but it has a large part in it. Money's not everything, but it helps. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Wendy's ideal kind of employment would be permanent, whether part-time or full-time:

My favourite would be permanent part-time or full-time. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant) Maria's ideal would be to have worked full-time in her previous teaching jobs (to recognise the hours she put in) or at least to get holiday and sick pay:

*I suppose, it would have been great to be full-time, considering, as teachers, the number of hours we put in constituted a full-time load just as any permanent teacher in the Education Department would have. We definitely put in those hours, so it would have been great to be full-time employed. If not full-time employed, then at least holiday and accumulated sick pay. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

#### **4.1 Permanency: The Ideal**

William's ideal would be to be employed in government and/or in a job with security as well as opportunity for advancement:

*Well my ideal way ... what I'd like would be to be employed in government back again like I used to be, or with a permanent job with potential prospects for increase in salary and conditions in promotion. ... job security primarily. And then once that's locked in then you can move up. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Maggie's ideal would be to have permanent part-time work:

*I'd like to be employed permanent part-time, 25-30 hours a week, so I can continue my studies. That would be great. Even 25 hours would be fine ... Once I finish my diploma and my degree, then I can go out as a sole trader but I'd still like to have the security of being employed on a permanent level. Even if it was only 10 or 15 hours a week. Because you're getting contributions for super, you've got access to employee assistance programmes, there's a whole lot more resources. Otherwise you've got to head it up all yourself or have lots and lots of contacts. You need finances to do that, and lots of resources. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Rebecca's ideal would be to work permanently:

*A little bit of self esteem would be nice. ... And you'd have a permanent income, you'd know from week to week what you're getting, how you were going to live. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Don is also looking for full-time permanent work. He dislikes being called in to do work that ongoing workers see as 'their overtime', and being abused. He also dislikes being sent to the worst jobs by labour hire firms, and he refuses to take jobs from them now. Nothing is more important to Don than getting respect at work:

*Full-time for a start, and be accepted as part of their business and, say put it this way, important part of their team. And to be respected the way I've respect them, I'd like the same back.*

*Interviewer: So you consider those things important in a work place?*

*Yes I do because nothing's more important to a person than self esteem, credibility, and to be respected for who you are. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

Jeff a maintenance electrician shares Don's preference for full-time permanent employment, but has only in the last year secured it, after many years casual work through a labour hire company. His three requests to become permanent, over seven years had met with 'all sorts of excuses'. Becoming permanent meant:

*Ease of planning holidays, being able to go on holidays and know that there's still money coming in, being assured that in a further six year's time that I will have approved pro rata long service leave, financial security. I'm more confident in borrowing money to invest it if I wanted to and just generally happier. (Jeff, )*

This happiness flowed on to his wife in his view.

The reality of control for and by the employer drives a preference for permanent part-time work for many employees. When flexibility for employees is ephemeral or exists more in theory than practice as Daniel puts it, they seek to contain employer control by getting permanency and predictable hours.

Many casual workers value the part-time nature of their employment but they do not want to be casual if this means that they cannot influence or predict working time. In this case they mostly prefer permanent part-time employment. For example, Abby has worked as a casual cleaner for five years and prefers the security of being a permanent part-timer, because her casual work has given great flexibility to her employer but little to her:

*As a permanent part-timer, you are a bit more secure ... As a casual they could just ring me up and you've got a job one day, and sacked the next. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)*

## 4.2 The Preference for Permanence Amongst Young People

The preference for permanence is not confined to older workers. Many young people need effective say over their hours of work, and shifts, and value predictable work patterns and study. Brad at 19 has moved from casual to ongoing employment. He has been working for 2.5 years as a produce assistant in a large Melbourne store. He worked casually until recently, when he shifted to a one year contract of permanent part-time work 16 hours a week. This gives him three things he values: predictable hours and income, paid sick leave, and a paid holiday:

*Well, it's a lot better, because I also get benefits for being a part-time too, now, and even though I get paid [less] - well, I turned nineteen so I'm getting paid exactly the same, anyway, if not a little bit more - yeah ... It's good to have sixteen hours ... I get sick leave, annual leave, you know. If I was casual I didn't get any sick leave whatsoever. You know, just call up [and say you are sick], but not get the money. And then, annual leave is good because I can, after a year, I can just take a break when I want. (Brad, 19, produce assistant).*

Like many young people Brad values control over his time and found permanent part-time work suits. He is studying at TAFE, planning to become an electrician. While studying, he values permanency and predictable income, along with the chance to have a say about his hours, especially in relation to study. He found it difficult as a casual to get enough time for study. Although he was used to such pressure, he did not like it:

*Because like, before [when I was casual] they'd really put pressure on you if you wouldn't do the casual hours. Last year [in year 12], especially if I had to knock back hours, I just felt I was having pressure put on me, especially during exam time if I had to work Saturday. I would have preferred it off, but I needed the money anyway. (Brad, 19, produce assistant).*

## 4.3 Requesting Permanency: 'I begged them'

In one of her previous teaching jobs Maria repeatedly asked to be permanently employed:

*Yes. I begged them. I really did. I kept asking: was there any way there was something more permanent they could offer me? I'd do anything. I was prepared to study to expand into their literacy and numeracy and adult Aboriginal education programs, but there just wasn't the work available. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Mary wanted the stability of permanent work in the supermarket and she was prepared to sacrifice the extra income of casual employment when she went part-time:

*All up, I probably would have dropped in the vicinity of \$100 a week but that part of it didn't worry me. I knew that I was going to have that set wage come in every week. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Mary can't imagine a better employment arrangement than the situation she is now in, as a permanent part-time worker:

*Oh, I'm over the moon. I couldn't be happier with how I am employed at the moment.  
(Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Rachel recalls that she had always wanted permanent work in the government agency and was dismayed when it was denied – after seven years as a casual:

*Yes, I had hoped to become permanent with the department because I've been there for a long [time]. I was good at my job. I knew that I could go further if I had the opportunity.  
(Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Similarly, Gina who worked for 16 years for an un-unionised company as a casual had requested permanency and holiday and sick pay with a group of other women without success: 'they didn't like it, they said 'No, it's just not possible'. While her work was long-term and predictable, she sought security and paid leave, but is now too injured to work again. She and her husband are angry at her treatment and long-term casual experience.

#### **4.4 'There are better ways to work'**

Kate has been working casually for nine years since she was 15. She has experienced diverse conditions and has now secured permanent part-time work. She finds she can organise her ongoing part-time work, which is now predictable and secure, around her study and can still get the flexibility she wants:

*Being permanent made me realise that there are way better ways to work. All the things that I thought were unique to being casual like the flexibility, I discovered, were only unique to good employers. And the value of paid holidays is really more than just the hourly rate that you get whilst you're on that holiday. Yeah, it's such a difference to have a break and be paid and not have that stress ... [I took] a 15 hour a week contract which was great to me because I actually found that being part-time I had the same flexibility that I'd always had being casual in that I had my hours timetabled around my work, we worked it out at the beginning of each semester and fit it around uni and it was great. And then I would have holidays paid when I had to do exams and things like that. (Kate, 24, manufacturing)*

#### **4.5 Conclusion: The Strong Preference for Permanence**

When employees weigh up the total package of being casual, and compare it with permanency, most would happily trade their casual work, for permanency or an ongoing contract. Three-quarters of those in our study indicated a preference for permanency. Many have attempted to achieve it with very variable success, even where their employment is very long standing. Casual workers distinguish casual part-time work – which many prefer – from ongoing part-time work. While some want part-time work, they do not seek the kind of variability or lack of control that they experience as a part-time casual. Control over working time, emerges as an important theme in this discussion, as does the lack of power that many casuals experience. While some find having a good boss gives some control, many are not so lucky. This lack of power leaves many

dependent upon a good relationship with a good boss, underpinned by few formal rights that ensure the practical possibility of knowing or influencing their working time.

### **Casual Work Drives Employees into the Black Labour Market**

Some casual workers report working for years in the black labour market, often for low hourly rates and in unsafe conditions with little protection when things go wrong. Emma works in a big food hall amongst a large number of casual workers many of whom she believes are paid cash-in-hand. This gives her a higher effective rate of pay. Dave who works mostly as a market researcher in a call centre has worked 'off the books' in second jobs like house painting to cope with the uncertainty of earnings. He believes that insecure work drives such work:

If I was working permanently in some lovely job, well, I wouldn't need to be out there risking my life for, you know, \$15 an hour climbing over some guy's roof. (Dave, 39, market researcher)

## 5. Is Casual Work a Pathway to Permanency?

Not all casual workers seek permanency. However, as we have seen, many casual workers are looking for predictability of hours and earnings through an ongoing employment arrangement. For some casual staff, permanency is fairly readily available. In the case of April's fashion chain, senior management periodically ask casual staff to sign part-time contracts, but she always refused because she wants to keep the flexibility:

*They go through various changes as far as getting you to re-sign contracts and so forth and they wanted me to change from casual to part-time ... But I just didn't want to go part-time because I knew I wanted to stay casual and have that flexibility, that's all. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Kath's attempt to become permanent in a retail store met with success after 18 months casual work, and she was able move from casual night-filling of supermarket shelves to a morning shift that is permanent where she 'couldn't be happier'. She has lost the casual loading 'which was nice in the pay cheque' but would pick permanent over casual 'any day' because '[I have] my life back'. Others are confident, if not certain, of getting permanency if they seek it. Tony is hopeful that he will be able to convert from casual to permanent when he gets his TAFE Certificate:

*It is possible that they'll be making me permanent probably or maybe early next year because I'm doing a Certificate 4 ... That'll give me a few more credentials. That means a lot of study and just getting all my paperwork together. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Rhys feels that casual work is definitely a pathway to permanency in the case of security personnel because of their special expertise:

*Sort of, yes. In our line of work I'd say yes but I think that's more for the company's benefit than the worker's benefit ... I think with what we're doing, it's not a sort of a general easy access area that people can just slide into. The people that we've got have been there for a while, are fairly well trained (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

### 5.1 Short term Casual Work as a Pathway to Longer Term Casual Work

Some are optimistic about the opportunity for ongoing work – if casual employees are seen as keen and competent. April feels that if a casual employee is competent and willing, they will get ongoing work especially in a highly feminised industry where staff are constantly leaving to have children:

*Yeah, it can be [a leg up into permanent work]. Depending on the person ... if someone comes in casual and you think that person isn't going to work out – so therefore you can see that she does her hours that are requested and then she's never sort of invited back. But if you're a casual and you seem to prove yourself then yes it will go on into the future.*

*And because [companyV] is an organisation of basically women, women are moving out all the time obviously to have babies so there's always positions available. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Rhys feels that there is always ongoing work for a casual security worker who is good:

*There's always plenty of work for the right people and I always seem to be one of those right people... I do my job pretty well, I've had a lot of experience, a lot of training and all the rest of it. So yes, pretty definitely ongoing work. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

Rachel felt she could depend on continuing full-time work in the government agency but always as a casual because management preferred her to work as a 'permanent casual':

*I didn't ever feel like I wasn't going to have a job. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

In a number of examples, casual work of a day or two or a week or two is used as a testing ground for entry to ongoing casual work. Allan describes this approach in ESL teaching: 'you might get a little bit of relief work. You might get a week or two here. And you sort of get your foot in the door of a school, that you're reliable, you can do the job, you turn up on time, and you might get longer'. It was not, however, a pathway into permanent work: Allan's application to become permanent had been unsuccessful and a less experienced and cheaper casual was given permanency in front of him.

Some casual workers use their own networks to secure ongoing work. Patti feels she cannot rely on getting ongoing casual work because she won't take on security work in hotels and clubs. However she finds that the contact that she has with other industry people at various events gives her additional work – although this tends to be one-off rather than ongoing:

*The only advantage in the security industry is meeting a lot of different people from a lot of different organisations. And I could potentially make contacts there ... I have got work, private work, from some people that I know. But it's not ongoing, it's just a one-off thing. But I got to do it. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

## **5.2 For Most, Reliable Ongoing Work is Elusive**

Wayne is less confident that casual work is a 'leg up' into permanent work, but believes that casual work in his security firm can sometimes lead to more permanent work:

*Yes, in some ways it gets you to show your stuff so it can put you in a position where you might be able to get, you know, part-time or full-time work with the company. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

Other casual workers gain permanency only after a good deal of effort. While Wendy is pleased to be permanent, she feels she has had to push hard to get it:

*I had to keep on telling them, I really want lots of hours. Then one of our managers, he said that there's a position going for permanent and that's how I got into permanent but, no, I don't reckon [it's easy]. (Wendy, 25, shop assistant)*

Mary feels that her casual job was a pathway to more stable contract work, but only because she has been prepared to take any contract that was offered to her. In effect she had served her time as a casual and then taking short term contracts, while showing her commitment to her employer:

*If they offered me a one week contract or a two-week contract or a month contract when I was a casual, I never ever rejected it. I would always sign a contract. And I think that actually went in my favour because I've seen casuals who were offered contracts too and they haven't been prepared to take a pay cut so they said no and four years later I can still see those same people and they're still casual. ... The ones that sort of bend a little bit for them, they look after them. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

## Alice's Story

### Asking for Permanency with Award Backing

Alice is a work process operator in an engineering firm in the construction industry. She is in her 40s. She felt that her five years service as a regular casual would ease her path into permanency. A few years ago she heard that her award had been amended to allow employees to request to become permanent and she asked about converting at her performance appraisal. Six months later she made a written request which was rejected:

*And about four weeks after, I got called into the office. I actually got a written letter saying 'financial climate, not a good time, blah, blah, blah. We'll look at it again' ... That threw me for six actually ... I thought it was just a matter of making a written request and they'd say yeah, sure, rubber stamp. But no it didn't work like that and I felt a bit, it blew the confidence just a little bit ... [I felt] a little bit down in the dumps, and possibly even a little bit depressed.*

She had wondered if there would be a negative impact from her request but didn't feel she had been treated differently although she speculates: 'The repercussion could be that I'm still a casual'.

Alice had been interviewed for a new full-time permanent job in a different firm in the week before her interview for this research. A few weeks later she emailed the news that she had secured the job:

*The new job is permanent full-time (40 hours week!!!!) - so for the first time in 5 years I will get public holidays and paid annual leave!!!!*

The job gave her the duties, classification and permanency she wanted, though not the hours:

*It is not exactly what I wanted in relation to hours. But it is exactly what I wanted in relation to duties! So yes, I am adjusting to what I can get.*

Her new pay rate is at a classification that recognises her skills so that her pay rate is close to her previous rate despite the fact that she is now not being paid a casual loading. Like many other casuals, the low base rate of pay (which is often not related to experience and skills) made the casual loading vital to realising a fair or liveable rate.

### 5.3 A Legal Right To Become Permanent

Some workers have a formal right through their award or industrial instrument to convert from casual to more secure forms of employment. Such formal legal rights are not always easily exercised. In each case amongst interviewees where this had successfully occurred, they were union members with the active support of their unions, and sometimes – as in William’s experience – other external supports. William and his call centre colleagues discovered that casual work could lead to the security of a contract (though not permanency) – but only after a long battle with the labour hire agency, an appeal to the Minister and a ruling from the Industrial Commission:

*Well, the nature of the work, we had no right to be paid as permanent because it was government contract work, wasn't offered as a full-time position but under the legislation we found we're entitled to convert to permanent employment. That caused a bit of a fight with their agency employer which involved the Minister and the Industrial Commission, which subsequently produced a finding that they were actually lacking in what they'd done. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Alice’s story (see box) illustrates a similar, but unsuccessful, struggle to exercise her legal right to convert to permanency.

### 5.4 No Prospect for Permanency: ‘You wait for someone to die for those jobs’

Casuals have very varied experiences in terms of their access to permanency. Mostly, however, casual workers in this study believe they are unlikely to get permanency. Marko feels that only supervisors can get permanency in the contracting firm on his work site:

*Well, I have been up here, like I told you there, since 1998 and I have never been a permanent employee, that's the way they want you, permanent casual. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

And as for permanent jobs in the main company, these are extremely scarce:

*I mean there is the incentive there, but there are far and few between jobs. I mean, you wait for someone to die for them jobs. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Dorothy’s three years work as a research assistant in a university offers no prospects of permanency she says. Barney worked for many years in employment services and now works as a security guard. He sees no pathway from casual work into permanent work. Indeed, his own employment trajectory has been out of permanent work into casual work with no pathway back again. He sees the notion of a ‘pathway’ as ‘a big lie’:

*You know, it is just a big lie. It is not correct. It will never be correct. The way that people got a proper job in the old days, is no different from the way that people get – as my*

*children have got – a proper job nowadays. You get into a proper structure like the government, or the banks, or academia, and you work your way up and you learn both from academic studies and from training on the job. No amount of training on the job at McDonalds is going to get you a good job in the government. No amount of on-the-job training in KFC is ever going to get you a good job in a bank. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

Dave sees little opportunity for workers to become permanent in the call centre where he works. ‘Even the supervisors who have been there for five or six years are casual’:

*In practice, I’ve not seen a lot of people migrate from casual through to permanent work and certainly not in this industry, although I have seen, I guess, some people – three or four out of maybe, you know, 50 or 60 employees that I’ve had contact with - that have actually taken their call centre experience gained in market research and then gone out into permanent work with other companies in a call centre role. (Dave, 39, market research)*

Monique feels that casual work in her church youth agency would be unlikely to lead to permanency:

*Occasionally it can for those who are lucky enough, but often due to the arrangement of casual work I don’t think people are given the opportunity. Often they’ve been promised something and they don’t ever deliver. Due to not having to pay holiday pay and leave loading and all that sort of stuff but all those kind of more intricate things I don’t think that it is always a leg up into full-time work. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

With no permanent position after four years of casual teaching Maria decided that there was no future for her in her present location:

*Yes. It was ridiculous ... I’d just had enough of it. I’d gotten nowhere in those four years. It was demoralising ... from talking to people at TAFE, and in the university sector, even people who were quite specialised in that field still were on the ridiculous three to six month rolling contracts. I just felt like I could get nowhere with them. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Maggie has applied for permanent jobs in youth agencies without success, and believes that changing jobs in pursuit of permanency will mean starting back at the lowest classification:

*I’ve looked for opportunities. You’ve got to go through all this other rigmarole. It’s almost like having to start back at square one. Even if you have experience and people know you. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Rachel resigned from her job when she had a difficult pregnancy. When she returned to work, as a casual, she found that her this was not a way into permanent work in the government agency:

*I never looked at it that way, because I guess I never thought that you could rely on that or be certain of that. Like I took on casual work because I was trying to get back into the workforce. They kind of came to me and offered it to me. I knew I couldn’t go back as*

*permanent because when you left the government, there was no going back [permanent]. They changed that after a little while. So I knew I had no options but I never ever thought of [casual work] as a leg up, no. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

According to Rebecca it is very rare for casuals to be made permanent in the printing industry; she herself has recently applied for permanency but hasn't heard back:

*Well if you do, you're very, very lucky, but no, you'd have to be extremely lucky for them to hire you ... I'm still waiting. Yeah, it's just a brush off. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Sarah is sure she wouldn't have got permanency at the restaurant – even if she wanted to:

*At the time I wasn't looking for that. I mean I wouldn't have wanted to work for those bastards permanent anyway, it was untenable. But yeah I don't think they would have ever offered that anyway. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

## Darlene's Story

### Limited Term Contracts: One Step Up or Down?

Some workers would prefer a limited term contract to casual work, and some studies reveal higher levels of satisfaction amongst those on limited term contracts than amongst casual or ongoing workers (Wooden and Warren 2003). However, not all such contracts are the same. Some simply limit access to the casual loading while doing little to give greater predictability of working time and earnings. The critical issues, from casual workers' experience, are the length of the contract, the minimum number of hours they provide, and their relationship with other hours that are worked. For example, many casuals (especially those in the retail sector) have experience of limited term contracts interleaved or alongside their casual hours. Darlene, in her 40s, is a part-time delicatessen assistant and mother, who enjoys her job and especially the opportunity to swap shifts around personal and family needs. Her manager makes up her hours if she misses any because of sickness.

However, Darlene's employer has reduced wage costs and retained flexibility of labour deployment by means of a *monthly* contract with core hours of 10 a week. Darlene's contract 'used to be three-monthly'. Her ten regular hours do not attract the casual loading. Thus her contract results in the loss of \$40 a week casual loading on the hours that are now covered by her monthly 'contract'. Further, the contract does not protect her from unpredictable calls to work: she is often called in with a few hours notice for extra hours as needed by her employer. Darlene enjoys her job, but looks for predictability and paid sick and holiday leave (which she now has some access to in relation to her 10 hours a week). Darlene thus lives in a kind of contractual gray zone of uncertainty, with some security a month ahead, but upward flexibility at her employer's request for extra casual hours. Like Darlene, Donna in the tourism sector feels that limited term contracts are in some ways worse than casual employment because of the insecurity they engender. Will there be a next contract? For those on limited term contracts in the higher education sector, like Dorothy, there are real disadvantages associated with repetitive contracts:

*Well, you can only become permanent if there's an ongoing position and they're very careful now that they split contracts so that you don't even accumulate. On the [enterprise agreement], if you get one contract renewed twice, then you become eligible for severance pay and so they very carefully work it now so that you get the right number of weeks gaps between contracts so that that doesn't happen. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant)*

## 5.5 Locked in the Casual Ghetto? It Doesn't pay to be Skilled, Experienced and Available

Far from a leg up into permanency, for some long term casual work has meant they have become corralled as casuals: their availability, experience and age have in some cases worked against their permanency. In other cases long term casual experience has sapped the confidence to try for permanent work elsewhere. Emma has worked as a casual for 15 years supporting herself while trying to get her career underway in television and theatre. She has worked for a range of employers in hospitality and feels that casual work has locked her into a kind of cycle:

*It's kind of being in this, not a trap, that's a bit harsh, but just a sort of cycle ... my work has been hospitality, kind of casual, hoping that I'll find my niche somewhere or you know maybe I'll get that lucky acting break, or, which I have said no that's probably not going to happen any more. (Emma, 24, hospitality)*

She reflects on how she is now stuck in hospitality, and her confidence has diminished, along with the value of her arts degree: the jobs have allowed her 'a certain amount of flexibility' but at the same time have created a 'ridiculous sense of obligation to hang around for ten years and a bit of fear factor, like what else can I do, you know? ... It's better the devil you know. At least [Employer X] knows me.'

The chance to move to a more permanent job is greater in larger companies, like supermarkets and large retail stores, especially where enterprise agreements, award provisions or union membership underpin requests. For others, their ongoing casual employment is far from a road to permanency. Rather casual work constitutes a walled ghetto. Lynn has come to the realisation that being readily available for casual shifts in the youth agency has actually hindered her chances of getting permanency: 'After a while I thought this is not going to change, don't be a fool'.

The fact that her employer can keep her 'on tap' at a lower rate and call her in to closely fit workplace needs, is a clear barrier to her permanency. Rather than facilitate permanency, it stood in its way. Extensive experience as a casual contributed to the walled ghetto in George's experience:

*We have had several instances where our employer's taken people on full-time and I've missed out on several occasions. The first time was when the permanent people voted for who they'd like to be made full-time. I was working actually [in an area] where I didn't have a lot of interaction with the majority of the workforce at the time so I missed out on that job by three votes. However, the next two times when permanent people were taken on we had a whole interview process ... and I passed all those with flying colours according to management. But with my skills being as they are and the time that I've been there, I was told I didn't get the job over somebody that had no skills because in management's words 'I was already employed there, why put him on full-time, we've already got him. He's not going anywhere, he's been here for x amount of years now so it'd be foolish for us to put him on full-time when we've already got him' ... They've got me over a barrel and they know my situation is that I have to come in to work to obtain a wage, they know that I rely on that wage to carry through with paying my mortgage, the whole lot. I mean they know that and they know over the 10 or 11 years that I've been there ... I've always*

*been there. As I say I've hardly had a day off sick because I just can't afford to. So they know I am a reliable and conscientious worker and they know that I'll come in tomorrow if they called me tomorrow ... It's definitely worked against me. And I wouldn't say it's a leg up into a job at all. I'd say it's just [the employer] bloody being able to pick and choose what day you want somebody there and when you want to send them home you can send them home. (George, 40s technician)*

George's reliability and dependence upon his hours has worked against him: rather than a leg up into permanency, his skill has locked him into ongoing casual terms.

In another industry, Allan who has been teaching English as a second language for six years has become more expensive with his experience. He is unwilling to apply for the next step in his classification for fear that he will become 'too expensive and then they're prepared to say, sorry, we're going to hire someone who is \$50-\$100 cheaper per day'. Allan's skill and experience have worked against him when he applied for permanency: the position went to a much less experienced person.

Allan has recently bought a house and so security of employment is important to him. He would probably accept permanency if he could get it, even though he would lose money and have to take on more administration as a permanent. He has recently witnessed the process by which a fellow-worker was dismissed and he is concerned about the lack of redundancy pay and lack of security that exists in his workplace. He found the dismissal 'very salutary. And everyone was looking over their shoulders and going "Who's next?"' (Allan, 30s. ESL teacher). The threat of lay offs often leads to an interest in permanent terms.

In some occupational areas, like Allan's there are sub-groups of workers whose preferences about permanency vary. For example, in the ESL education sector, Allan distinguishes three types of ESL teachers:

- those on working holidays from overseas,
- Australians looking for a short term employment, and
- 'career Australians', like himself.

For him, secure employment is vital to buying a house. Despite his six years of employment, he had little chance of becoming permanent and his application had been unsuccessful. Not all those on working holidays from overseas, however, like their casual terms. Theresa finds that while she is not looking for an ongoing job, not knowing what days she works more than a few days in advance, and not knowing what time she will finish on any day are significant downsides of being casually employed.

Annadjies efforts to become permanent have not met with success. An internal applicant was made permanent in front of her. As a labour hire employee she was told she was not eligible to apply for the vacancy despite her years of service. When this appointment did not work out and the appointee resigned, Annadjise was asked to return to the job:

*She couldn't cope with that pressure and work ... and I was feeling that ... everyone gets promoted, while I am still stuck where I am. (Annadjies, 30s, administrative worker)*

Annadjies believes that favourism played a role in preventing her from becoming permanent: 'you have to be their friend' to get a promotion. Because she spoke up, she felt her chances were slim.

## 5.6 It Doesn't Pay to Grow Older

Brad, a 19 year old produce assistant, observed that other young people around him lost hours as they got older and became more expensive. Brad felt that his manager was 'sort of kicking himself' for giving Brad a 12 month permanent part-time contract just as he turned 19 and began to cost \$6/hour more than 16 year olds. Brad had seen many young people have their hours reduced as they aged ('I know that goes on'), and so was glad to have his 16 hours a week secure. He felt that his boss got an experienced worker for this but regretted the higher hourly rate.

Similarly, Daniel observed that nowadays as a 21 year old he would only get the 'graveyard shifts' because the fast food industry preferred young cheaper workers if they were available.

## 5.7 It Doesn't Pay to Speak Up

A number of casuals commented on the link between speaking up and getting ongoing work or access to permanency (see next section on 'voice'). For example, John at 43 with many years experience and sales success speaks his mind at work 'I say what I mean and I mean what I say'. His sales figures suggest that he is one of the best salesmen in his field. However, he was sacked from his ongoing job and then reemployed for eighteen months as a casual sales manager. He has not regained permanency because he has 'spoken up' and because his employer has him on tap as a casual:

*I said 'you promised me you weren't going to make anyone permanent. Since then you put on two people permanent ... Please tell me'. The excuse was 'you would not work down there' and I said 'hey, you didn't give me the opportunity. You didn't ask me or tell me nothing, I found this off my own bat.'* (John, 43, salesman)

In some cases, the request for permanency was met with reduced hours and then effective dismissal:

*I actually asked my supervisor twice and both times she rejected it. The last time the union asked and they were rejected too. And then all of a sudden these accusations were coming out that I supposedly said, and that's when my hours got dropped and so a couple of weeks after that I left.* (Abby, 30s, cleaner)

## 5.8 Conclusion: A Reservoir, Not a Pathway

Kenneth, 49, has had some years of experience as a manager in a manufacturing operation. He is now employed casually in the retail sector and feels that his current experience is not a pathway towards permanency but instead feels that 'employers see it as a vast reservoir of employees. If

this one doesn't work out, you get another one. So I don't think it is an opportunity for advancement at all.'

The absence of respect and being sidelined at work, along with under-classification, emerge as very significant concerns for many casuals, as we now discuss.

### **Employment Through Labour Hire Agencies**

A number of casuals in this study were employed through labour hire agencies. This had some positive effects: for example, Jeff felt that his skills were wider because of his broad experience through labour hire employment. However the offsetting downsides of low pay and poor integration are more negative in his view.

Many held the view that labour hire employers should provide their employees with ongoing work, rather than keep them in precarious employment, often on very short notice and frequently paid much less than the ongoing workers they work alongside – some for extended periods of employment of well over a year, and in one case a decade.

Some wondered at the cost of paying labour hire agencies large fees – well beyond the level of hourly pay received by the worker. Jeff for example, described his nine years of experience as an electrical apprentice through labour hire as 'a crock of shit. Employment agencies should be made to put people on full-time and then find them work'. Jeff had very little access to training, to workplace communication, was subjected to bullying, and his requests for permanency had met with the opposite in some cases, with the loss of employment following his request for permanency.

## 6. Working life: Respect, Performance, Surveillance, Voice

For many casuals the main issues arising from their casual status are predictable income and work, along with access to paid leave. However, many mention issues related to their treatment at work. This treatment sometimes shapes earnings and hours in important ways. In other examples, workers are concerned and affected by the respect they receive – or do not receive, more commonly. Their experiences of working life also show distinct patterns in relation to the performance of their jobs (the speed at which they work, for example) and the surveillance that they experience. The question of say at work is also often mentioned by casual workers. Their overall assessment of their casual status is as shaped by their perceptions of disrespect, secondary status, close surveillance and lack of voice, as their perceptions of employment predictability and fair pay.

### 6.1 Respect

Some casuals feel that they aren't treated any differently from permanent workers. However, they are rare in our sample, and many are in highly casualised workplaces so they lack points of comparison. Others feel that casuals are sometimes treated *better* by management than ongoing employees; these are also rare. For example, Tony believes casual staff are more valued by management because of their keenness to work more hours – and thus to earn money:

*I found that they tend to rely a lot more on the casuals because they know usually the casuals are usually doing it because they want the money. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Mary feels that casuals get better treatment from their managers because they are seen as extremely useful:

*Actually, I think especially from the night-fill point of view, I think [managers] sort of treat you very well because they rely on their casuals, when they need them. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

#### 6.1.1 Treatment by Co-workers

Casuals sometimes find that they are treated well by their fellow workers if not by management. Sue feels she gets on well with her peers because they have worked together for so long - but she feels that management's relationship with her is merely instrumental:

*When there's work and they want me, they love me, love me like a rash, and when there's no work, I don't exist. They don't even want to talk to me. I could ring up all I like, if there's no work, they're not interested. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

**Respect:**

**'It's Degrading' (George, 40s technician)**

*You don't ever feel that you fit in as part of the team properly. For instance they have work days where you are just rostered off and you're not even thought of so you know you're paid for that day but you're not also included in the things like the picnic days, the Christmas shows, any other functions that might be happening. You just feel left out, you don't feel part of it. You feel... it's hard. You always just feel like a fill in, if you know what I mean.*

*Interviewer: Even after ten years?*

*Oh, even after ten years. And you know, I'm not the only one there that feels like this. Sometimes I feel like a dirty dishrag where I've just been wiped ... you know. Because it's downgrading, it's depressing. I mean there's times where I just sit there and just put my hands in my chin and just think what the hell does this all mean, you know. I mean... you just have a feeling of no, you just have no belonging, no sense of belonging to anywhere, you're just in limbo.*

*Interviewer Does that reflect in the way other workers treat you?*

*Yes, it can. I mean a lot of times the comments made are 'he's just a contractor'. Well, I may be just a contractor but I'm also part of that team when I'm needed and an integral part of that team. But they always say 'Oh, you're just a contractor' or 'Contractors aren't allowed...' and you know, that reflects on your family life as well. You get depressed about it and you come home depressed ... It's a really hard existence.*

Support from co-workers can sometimes prevent arbitrary or unfair treatment from an employer, as it has in Sarah's experience:

*They took me in for a trial. They weren't going to pay me anything on New Years Eve for working like my five or six hours and then one of the waiters went to the boss and sort of said 'look are you going to give her something?', and I think because he did that the boss gave me a \$20 note for the whole night, so and then apart from that they didn't pay me at all for about two months, I didn't get any money and I was working like a lot, and then*

*finally they did because I basically had to force them, like I said 'I need the money now', and he said 'well we'll negotiate a rate with you because you're just a beginner I'll pay you between \$11 and \$12 an hour'. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Monique feels that she has always been treated well by her co-workers. Any discrimination has been by her bosses:

*I've had fairly good relationships with all my co workers and they have not treated me any different. It's more been the boss that has. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

In other examples, casual workers feel that co-workers 'look down' on casuals:

*Generally, a lot of [the permanents] had the same attitude, 'well you're just casuals'. I couldn't tell you the amount of times I had said to me, 'you're just a casual'. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Rebecca also feels that casuals were treated badly by permanent staff, probably because they were afraid for their own jobs:

*Permanent workers are bitchy is one way I suppose of putting it. Some of them are quite nasty. One place I was working, honestly I think they should put hormone replacement in the water, it was dreadful. They were dreadful. ... they'd be having a conversation and you'd try to join in and you'd get a look or a word like you know this is our conversation, what are you doing in it? (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

#### 6.1.2 Treatment by Managers: 'Just a Casual'

Some casuals feel they are treated well, and value their manager's attitudes of consultation and negotiation. Donna has had two managers: 'Both of them valued and asked and acted upon my input' and they have supported her requests for leave to care for her sick children. 'So I feel like a very valued member, despite the fact that I've said that my children come first and that I'm only there two days a week'. The organization she works for is family-focused and she gives her time to it in a voluntary as well as a paid capacity, which may assist her treatment.

Other casuals talk about the significance of individual managers and relations with them in shaping the experience of casual work. Personal relationships are very significant and casuals actively 'manage upwards', where they can, to keep things 'sweet'.

In many examples managers do not treat casuals in ways they consider respectful. The power that a casual form of employment confers upon supervisors allows them to exercise control in arbitrary ways. While not all do so, many casuals find that they do, or that the *possibility that they might*, hangs over them.

Rhys feels that casuals are sometimes put down unfairly by management:

*Well, I got a lot of comments... basically comes down to a lot of times they say 'oh, you're just a casual' so you don't mean as much to the company or you're not worth as much to the company or things like that. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

Wayne feels that in the security business casual workers are generally treated like a ‘poor cousin’ (Wayne, 42, security officer). William feels that when working as a casual for the labour hire firm, he was under-appreciated and under-rewarded in comparison with permanent staff:

*I’ve found that I was being taken for granted and as a casual, especially in my place of employment where I was working alongside permanent people doing the same work for more money with entitlements as sick leave and annual leave and I had neither. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

### 6.1.3 A Lack of Respect: ‘That whole nine years, I was still trying to earn respect’

Being treated with respect by others, both management and fellow workers matters a great deal to casual workers. For Rachel, the hurt of missing out on a full-time permanent job was mostly to do with the unfairness and lack of respect it represented:

*It comes back to the respect thing again. You’re working harder to try and earn that respect. You’re trying harder to prove yourself. And it goes on. A few of my friends have worked as casuals. After three months, they’ve been put on permanent. So it’s like this three-month probation period. And I think a lot of casuals hope for that. I knew the situation I was in was ongoing. That whole nine years, I was still trying to earn respect. I was still trying to prove myself. That’s what it felt like to me, that I had to continually do that to get anywhere in the job. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Many casuals find the way that they are treated a defining characteristic of their experience, and for most, this experience is negative. Some mention the issue of respect as a factor that shapes their experience of being casual as much as their security, or access to paid holidays and sick leave. This question of respect affects all ages, with both very young and quite old casual workers feeling their poor treatment and low standing keenly.

Jayda is only 15 years old and says that casuals are, in her experience, treated differently:

*Extremely. The way that we’re treated makes casual workers feel that we’re not as important ... They always treated me like I was incompetent, and a lot of my friends on the job, like we didn’t know what we were talking about. (Jayda, 15, retail)*

She ‘would like to be treated kind of like I matter in the job ... but I was treated like I was nothing. I would rather be treated as a human being’.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Don and Kenneth have been managers themselves, and feel the lack of respect now in other jobs, Don as a casual truck driver and Kenneth in the retail industry in a newsagency:

*[Being a casual] affects you a lot because you know that your future is up in the air, you haven’t got the stability that other people have got that you know of [being permanent], and plus being permanent for so many years then having to be in the casual work force, I mean it does make you feel a little bit degraded and you really don’t know how long the casual work’s going to last either so it can get you down. (Don, 46, truck driver).*

*I don't think that they think you get the full picture of the business. You just turn up and do what you're supposed to do and then leave and they don't appreciate the fact that you know as much about the business as what they do. And that you take your responsibilities just as importantly as what they would take theirs on a daily basis. And the other thing is that they do tend to take advantage of you a bit. You know, if there's any crap jobs around then you'll get it. (Kenneth, 40s, retail)*

In his years as a manager Don had seen great value in keeping 'your work force together and treat them all as equals so that they know that every one of them, or each part of those people, were an important cog in the machine'. This was not his experience as a casual. The lack of team work:

*causes animosity, and it causes disrespect for the company you're working for. It also causes you not to be proactive at work, you only do what you have to do and you don't go out of your way to do anything extra. It makes you feel like you're just a loose stone ready to be kicked down the road. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

*'They treat you very, very lowly'*

Many find they are treated with disrespect, which they hate – like Bruce who drives a bus for disabled children:

*[Managers and co-workers] sort of look down on you. You don't feel as though you're part of the workforce and whether you're working for a company, you don't feel as though you're part of the company: 'Oh, he only comes in for a couple of hours and he's gone again.' And they don't seem to involve you in much either. If you want to find something out, you get it through the grapevine. You don't get told until after events happen.*

*Interviewer: And what about having a say in the workplace?*

*None whatsoever ... They treat you very, very lowly. You're there but you're not there. There's no communication and you don't know what's going on and you don't get told anything and you're left in the dark. (Bruce, 50s, bus driver).*

Bruce feels that casual workers like him are not valued or backed up:

*I don't want a gold watch or pat on my back if I do something good. But you want someone to back you up, to stand by you, when you know you're a 100per cent in the right [when something goes wrong].*

*Permanents are 'Real' Staff*

Many casual workers feel peripheral to the mainstream workforce. This was confirmed through treatment by supervisors, other workers, the organisation of hours, communication and many other workplace features, as Kate summarises:

Being permanent, then you were the real staff, kind of thing. The casual staff weren't even employed by [the company], they were employed by the agency. I don't understand how it

works but the employment agency was farming us all out to [the company]. It wasn't until your real company contract that you were a real staff person. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)

In this workplace as in many others, the casual workers filled in and were 'considerably better paid than the casual staff. And the conditions were better too':

*I think generally casuals always feel a bit precarious. They're a bit on the outer of the staffing... of any place they're always the ones whose hours will go when there's cutbacks. And so they generally feel a lot more pressure to maintain their work at a higher level. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)*

#### 6.1.4 The Importance of a Good Boss

Some casuals, like Mary and Jenny, feel they have been treated well by their bosses and think highly of them:

*So you feel like you've been well looked after by your managers because they've needed you. ... I can't speak highly enough in any of the supermarkets I've been in I can't speak highly enough of the treatment I've received. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

*They're always really appreciative of the work that we do. They often give us special lunches and times when we go out as staff, they pay for that. It's just a really nice working environment. They're always very friendly and they never get annoyed or ... By that, they're always very gentle on staff. (Jenny, 20s, ESL administrator).*

However, because many casuals have little job security, they are very dependent upon good relationships at work, and very vulnerable to the exercise of arbitrary power. Their casual status introduces an element of particular dependence upon relationships and character that occurs in a framework of weak protection against unscrupulous practices. There are many examples of mixed experiences with bosses. Having worked in a number of stores in the fashion chain, April, a supervisor, feels that the way casuals are treated depends entirely on who the manager is:

*Depending on the manager. It just depends solely ... The manager where I am at the moment, she's just perfect. I'm what's called a permanent casual and she's fine with everything. You could go to another store and then that manager treats you secondary to other people because you are a casual. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Monique feels that the nature of the boss has been an important factor in her experience as a casual worker and she has had both good and bad:

*I've only had one bad experience with a boss that I didn't feel like I could say anything to. I've had a lot of really good bosses that have been really good to me. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

William stresses the importance of a boss's goodwill when seeking to convert from casual to permanent – especially if there is no effective union support:

*I think it depends then on how good a negotiator you are, and how good your employer is. When I was working in the service station, our employer ran a family business and he was pretty supportive and I would assume that if he was still running the place then, he would have quite happily converted us to permanent employment. Other employers won't wear that in any way, shape or form because they like to have the total control of the casual where they can hire and fire at will without this threat of having to pay severance pay or unfair dismissal encroaching their power, which seems to be a big concern to employers. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Some casuals have had bad luck with their bosses. Lynn recalls feeling undervalued by her employer when she was refused permanency after many years in the government agency. When she challenged her manager about this, Lynn found the explanation unconvincing:

*She wasn't sure that I was the right person for the job, which really, really upset me terribly. I said but I've been here 18 months, what's the matter with me? Why didn't you tell me? And she said 'oh, well, I've been watching you and you know you have a very strong personality and you might undermine some of the younger, your co-workers'. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Many find that their situation is contingent upon the character of the individual employer and their relationship with them::

*Some people might work with a good employer who treats them really well and the whole arrangement works really well, but if you're overall like relying on the goodwill of an employer to make the casual employment relationship work fairly, then it's just not going to happen for all people. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Workers like Allan and Klaus, experienced and mature, are very aware of the insecurity of their casual employment, the hole in their pay packet if they are sick, and the power that their employer has over them. Having a good relationship with a fair boss becomes very important, as Allan and Klaus outline, within their general assessments of their casual status:

*My overall feeling about [being] casual is that while I might be compensated with a higher wage or hourly rate or daily rate, depending on which schools I work at, the disadvantage seems to be that I have no security of work. I don't get paid for sick days at all or statutory holidays ... Although that is counter balanced by the fact that I can take (within reason, I've never tested it) as many holidays as I want when I want ... I suppose the disadvantage in being casual is that you have no consistent salary. It fluctuates if you're sick for a week and a half or a week ... you come back and when you do get paid, you're paid significantly less. So it's harder to budget on that sort of basis. But as I said, perhaps the biggest disadvantage would be the lack of security. And I notice it increasingly so. I mean, I've had a fairly good relationship with my director of studies, who pretty much decides my employment, although that could change if the management decided. (Allan, 30s, English language teacher)*

*In full-time employment, you have some security, whereas with casual employment, if the boss doesn't like you, if you have a rift with him, he can just phone up an agency and say*

*we don't want this bloke tomorrow, and put somebody else on. And the other thing of course is with permanent work, you've got your holiday leave, sick leave, you just seem to have a little bit more security. (Klaus, 56, plant operator)*

#### 6.1.5 Managing the Managers to Keep Relationships Sweet

The importance of good relationships with employers is a very consistent theme amongst casual workers. In some cases, the key relationship is with their immediate supervisor. In other cases, it is with the owner of the business, or with both. Many casual workers are close observers of workplace politics and manage their supervisors carefully – if they can:

*If you have a good relationship with your director of studies, they may decide that they can convince the management that they need extra staff ... If you rub someone up the wrong way, you'll be let go. So you've got to keep on their good side. You've got to manage that personal relationship with your director and certainly other management in the school because they would certainly have a say in your employment. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher).*

Brad had a good boss who was happy to negotiate his hours (see next section). Nonetheless he preferred a 12 month permanent part-time contract, because he had had more demanding employers in the past and knew that things could change: 'My boss and me get along well ... Sometimes I've worked with bosses who are not that great'. Such bosses, he says, can put the pressure on, to get the job done. For Brad, the quality of the boss affects the nature of flexibility 'definitely'.

Klaus comments that in his experience 'if the boss doesn't like you, if you have a rift' then your job is not secure.

Kylie feels she has a good relationship with her store boss and will draw on this when she wants to transfer to part-time; however she is somewhat timid about asking directly:

*If I still have got the manager that I have at the moment I will put it to her and say, I have got more time now to work, if I can have the hours. And hopefully she will get what I mean. So probably I will just approach her. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

Wayne is well aware of the importance of having a good relationship with his employers:

*As a casual worker someone else has got the power ... how many hours work that they give you. So, you know, if you've put them off-side, well you can find that the hours can drop substantially or, you know, if you're on the other side of the coin, you know, if you're in favour, well you know, the work hours can improve. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

#### 6.1.6 Bullying: The Link to Employment Insecurity

Casual workers have difficulty countering workplace bullying and many of those who have been bullied make a connection between their weak employment footing and the incidence of bullying:

*So [casual work gives] a security for [employers] but it's also a way of being the bully ... the undercurrent is 'we can get rid of workers when we don't need them'. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

Even where casuals have more experience and skill than those who bullied them, they are vulnerable. For example, Jeff is a skilled tradesman with almost a decade of experience who was bullied by an apprentice and eventually left the workplace to get relief. Like many casuals he was frequently told 'Oh you're only a contractor, you're only a casual'. Despite his age, experience and skill, his casual status made him weak in dealing with the bully:

*He was a workplace bully, no doubt about it. And being a casual makes it very hard to approach someone about that ... If you complain about it, you might be the one who goes. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)*

As a casual teacher Maria recalls being bullied by one of the managers in her foreign language school:

*One of the women ... was just unable to control her anger or sarcasm and she used to play people off against each other. She just seemed to enjoy leaving people guessing about their terms of employment and she was just a thoroughly unpleasant woman to deal with. She didn't think it untoward in a staff room meeting to be so unpleasant to some that they would cry. There were several teachers who were reduced to tears as a result of the way she spoke to them. She just seemed to treat the staff with contempt and with very little respect for their professional qualifications. She was just a thoroughly unpleasant woman. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Although this was due to the manager's personality, the bullying situation was also a product of the casual nature of the employment relationship:

*I feel pretty firm in the view that she felt that she was able to behave however she liked because we were employed as casual and if we didn't toe the line we really could be out on our ear the next day or the next week. We could be given 24 hours' notice. That's definitely a correlation we all drew. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Annadjies, a part-time administrative worker in government feels that generally casuals 'are treated unfairly'. She describes her experience of working long hours of unpaid overtime, of being called in at short notice to get workplaces 'out of trouble' to solve problems, to do jobs that permanent employees do not want to do, and of lacking power at work. While she likes her job, she often works under pressure. As a recent immigrant, Annadjies needs the income from work, and felt at a disadvantage facing supervisors who sometimes bullied her:

*[The supervisor] was a real bully and I worked extremely long hours, some of which I did never even get paid for because they were telling me 'Well, if you want the job you just have to do the work', so I was not stupid, it is a job to me, I am new in the country and I needed the money, so I had worked the hours without getting paid for them. (Annadjies, 30s, administrative worker).*

## **Bullying at Work: You are Expendable**

### **Daniel's Story**

Daniel is 21 and when working in the fast food industry he was mostly able to get time off when he needed it, provided he could predict his needs three weeks in advance. However, he feels that 'Given how much people who go for casual work often need the money so very much, the power situation means you don't have the ability to use that flexibility'. Another down side of his casual employment was bullying: his manager bullied him and this was a serious downside of his work. When he had a disagreement with his supervisor he was told that he was 'expendable ... I never knew when my next hours were to be'. Thereafter, he did his job 'less idealistically'. He felt very powerless when he was bullied which he was surprised about, given that at the time he was studying law:

*I really found it very difficult. In fact I felt very powerless, which is a strange situation ... I just didn't want to confront the conflict in the workplace. I didn't feel able to do that ... I felt pretty vulnerable when I was negotiating things with my boss. (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

Daniel has had permanent part-time work in the education sector since his casual employment in the fast food industry; for him this is much better: 'I knew the hours were coming every week. I knew I had a place in the workplace, and I had a sense of status and of belonging'. He has been able to save and organise his finances better: 'I guess being able to budget for each week is a lot easier if you know how much money you're going to have and that sort of thing'.

Daniel is about to get married: 'My life has changed now, where I have a wife and now I need stability in my family'. He does not want to go back to the fast food industry, although he may have to. He is concerned that at his age he would be allocated the worst shifts, and he is concerned about bullying and treatment of workers – almost all casual – in the sector:

*[I remember] a sense of powerlessness. I remember that keenly and I know that once I put on that uniform, the managers have a lot of power. The customer's always right. Even when they're patently not and they're bullying the workers. So, I would dread that. I hope I could deal with that and feel better now, perhaps but... (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

### **The Importance of A Manager Who Outlines The Options**

Brad's manager assisted his transfer to a twelve month contract by helping him calculate the difference between being casual and on contract. This explanation and calculation was important to Brad's decision, and he felt it was very important for other workers around him:

*Interviewer: Are most people around you electing for the contract?*

*After it's explained to them, yes. I was a little cautious about going on it at first, but then once I sat down with my boss – because I asked him, you know, can you show me what I'm getting? He was kind enough, and stuff - because I believe he is a good boss – he sat down with me for about half an hour and explained everything to me. And so, I guess if everything was explained in depth, it would persuade a lot more people to go to [permanent] part-time, rather than get casual pay. Because I know a lot of people on casual go, 'Oh, I'm losing money' – stuff like that. But in the long-term, you're gaining it. (Brad, 19, produce assistant).*

#### 6.1.7 Playing Favourites

Employers sometimes play casual workers against each other. Although Sue is overall positive about being casual because she can avoid night shifts, she feels that she is discriminated against in the allocation of hospital shifts. She feels this is sheer prejudice on the part of management. It has serious implications for her and her family:

*I know for a fact that other people get the weekend work over me ... I have been denied work for people's perceived stupid reasons which were entirely untrue. And I had to fight my way out of it to get back to getting work again and it's been exceedingly stressful. I've lost thousands of dollars over it, I've lost weeks of work over it, it's caused my family a lot of stress and it wouldn't have happened, and it couldn't have happened if I was permanent. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Maggie is certain there is a good deal of favouritism in the way her youth agency employer distributes shifts:

*Other people get shifts and they get tons of shifts. So she's got her favourites, because I think she's looking for reliability. But it's regular. It's once a week on a Saturday, but only an eight hour shift. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

#### 6.1.8 Payback and the Exercise of Arbitrary Power

Payback 'punishment' is a very effective as a way of controlling workers – especially if they are working casually. Moreover, the threat of payback can be as effective as actually carrying it out. April is convinced she was treated badly by the manager in her previous fashion store:

*At the last store the woman there was very temperamental and very moody - not just towards me, it was just her disposition I think in life. And if she didn't like you that particular week she might give you a horrible shift the next week or something like that. That is just something that you dealt with as a casual I think. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

In her previous casual jobs Monique sometimes felt she was being 'punished' for missing shifts:

*Yeah, I have [experienced payback] a few times just because I've been sick and occasionally in some of my previous jobs I had regular shifts and then I missed one shift a week because I was sick and then the next week after that I didn't get it, but then I got it back. After that it was just a bit of a payback for not being available that one week. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Casual workers like Marko are especially vulnerable to being penalised by management in a remote environment:

*Well, I mean they've got their means and ways, you know. If someone has got a grudge against you out there, you know. I mean they will keep an eye out. As soon as you got any safety breach or, you know, any little discrepancy they've got on you, they will use that to bloody have you out. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Maria recalls that casual teaching staff in her ESL workplace were under constant threat of repercussions from management:

*They were very unfair in the way they treated staff, because they gave them to believe that, if they didn't conform then they'd be out on their ear. It was quite a stressful environment to work in and we didn't have any security. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Maria is convinced that she was not re-employed by the private provider because of her involvement with the group who had been negotiating a contract under the Award:

*I felt that this was because I was part of the group that had tried to bring it in. And I know one the other teachers who was instrumental in the negotiations – she had had, basically, a really nasty altercation with that unpleasant woman that I was talking to you about earlier, and she had to leave under those circumstances. I think she was basically told to leave and she did. Legally they had to comply, because there were good reasons for implementing the Award and it was a good thing and, I sure they probably did their sums and realised*

*that they wouldn't be that much more out of pocket, but in terms of protecting those protagonists who initiated it, we certainly weren't protected. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Maggie is very conscious of the issue of 'payback' as a casual from personal experience: she lost her permanent job at a youth agency when she became a 'whistle-blower':

*Certainly, yes. I no longer have a contract with [organization Z] because I made a complaint about their treatment of young women. They were giving them [Depo-Provera] and they weren't even developed properly yet, so consequently I no longer have that contract. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Rachel feels she was penalised because of her involvement in the campaign to get casuals converted to permanent – first by the labour hire firm and then by the government agency:

*I was the first member to join with the [union] to push for casuals having more rights and become permanent with the labour hire. After the award changed and the department, after I did that, sort of moved me around, changed me around. I wasn't very popular. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

#### 6.1.9 Professional Standing and Safety

Some casuals feel strongly that their professional skills and responsibility are challenged because of the casual status of their employment, and this can have implications for health and safety. In her position as a contracted provider in a youth support agency, Maggie feels she doesn't get enough information to maintain a professional standard of care, and is critical of the recruitment of unqualified staff under the present arrangements::

*We get so little information [from] the employment agency – they don't tell you hardly anything about the children. The other point about this casualisation thing and this contract thing is that they hire people with no skills to work with some of the most difficult children in the state. They've actually put people at risk. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Some casuals are determined not to compromise their professional standards despite their casual status. Lynn is committed to doing a good job in her youth support agency, regardless of being 'only' a casual:

*But actually I do care and I have every intention of making a difference ... I don't have the luxury of time. That's why it's important for me to get on and to make change and change needs to be made and I want to be part of that. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

#### 6.1.10 The General Community Standing of Casual Workers: 'The Stigma of Being Casual'

An important element in the way casuals feel about respect and poor treatment is the level of general prejudice that exists in the wider society. Thus April, a supervisor, feels that casual workers have an undeservedly bad name in the retail industry:

*They always blame it on the casuals, they're the last to know everything, and it's not necessarily that they're worse workers, it's just that they obviously have other obligations elsewhere. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Rhys feels that there is an more general level of prejudice against casual workers:

*I think there's still a bit of a stigma with being casual. I think it's sort of... I think people sort of think you're less of a worker if you're casual, as a generalisation I suppose. ... I think that's just a prejudice, a generalisation, a thing in society. Casual workers I feel have been looked at in the past and maybe still in different lines of work to what we do, looked at I suppose as lesser workers. Not as committed or not as whatever, I'm not 100 per cent sure but I think there is that stigma in the community about casual work. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

### **Workers as Commodities**

Casual workers are aware that they are drawn from a big pool - or reservoir as Kenneth put it – so that they are easily replaced and always seen as temporary. Rachel feels casuals don't get the respect from management that permanent staff do because they are easy to replace:

*Because there's hundreds of other people out there who will do the work, they don't have to care about anybody. They, you know there's so many people out there that will do it, that they just don't care. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Sarah feels that the unscrupulous employer sees the casual worker as a 'commodity': 'they can toy with you' because they can get away with it:

*It's all part of this thing where they can toy with you however they want sort of, because you're just some sort of a commodity that they've called in, like labour hire you're not an employee any more you're just like this thing that can perform labour so they can call you in whenever, they can get rid of you whenever, they can treat you however they want, it's all part of it. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

#### 6.1.11 Belonging At Work: Marginalisation of Casual Workers

An important benefit of paid work is the sense of belonging in the workplace community. Many workers find the social aspects of their employment rewarding and an important part of their social fabric. Some casuals enjoy this, especially where most workers are of the same casual status. Thus William is able to enjoy a camaraderie with his colleagues are also working casually:

*Well as a casual in our group at the call centre, because we had so many of us casuals we were and still are fairly close as a team because we're all in the same position. That's still hasn't really changed much. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Similarly, Margaret feels that she and her colleagues are united by their vulnerability when working in the unstable market research industry 'because we were all in the same boat'.

Sometimes casual workers experience outright hostility from other workers. Margaret believes that colleagues can become hostile if they feel their 'territory' is threatened:

*You're sort of intimidated at times because you're going into areas that you may be impinging on others' territory and you need to be very thick-skinned, to put it that way, and very sure of who you are, to be able, to go into the area and say 'look, I'm only here for a short time and this will not impinge on your job'. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

However casuals are often simply ignored by their workplace colleagues – a situation which can be as stressful as hostility. Rebecca describes how casuals can be excluded from the office social life:

*At one place I've worked, the office staff, the permanent staff at Christmas have parties and you know they have their Christmas parties and everything. The casual workers are never invited no matter how often they go. One place I was going there for like a year or more and I never even got invited to their Christmas party. Other people were the same, they never got invited. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Tony, a nursing home carer, doesn't feel that casual nursing staff who are directly employed are treated differently by their peers; however those employed by a labour hire agency can be 'ostracised'. Maggie feels that casuals are marginalised from the mainstream (permanent) staff because others see them as unlikely to stay around:

*People are happy with the status quo, I mean: 'Don't rock the boat, we're happy with our pay, you're insignificant to us'. With casual work you can just not be employed the next day. They're like that, because you don't have to give reasons if you don't want to. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

In her current employment as a school assistant Margaret feels she is marginalised, especially by management:

*In the education department ... you get things like: 'Oh, so you're back now. So what's happening to you?' and all that kind of [thing] ... What you see in the hierarchy, they don't necessarily stop and say hello. Yes, so you do get treated differently. And many a time, they wouldn't even greet you. It's actually quite condescending ... They don't you take you seriously like they do other workers. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Margaret also found herself simply too busy to get involved socially:

*You have to be a lot more productive as a casual. You've got a lot less time to do work so you don't really get involved in the social aspects of the environment. And if you do, you have to do it in your own time, basically. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Because she has been excluded from the school's administrative system, Margaret makes the effort to get the information she needs herself:

*You are a minority. I have a voice and I say things, but many a time, you don't really fully grasp what's going on because you're only given half the information. You're only told half what's going on. So you have to really do a bit of research yourself. You have to really follow up yourself as to what's available. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

#### 6.1.12 'Out of the Loop'

As well as being marginalised socially, casual workers are more likely to be excluded from the formal structure of the workplace. Being part of the team was important to Jeff, he felt excluded from the work team:

*Oh, they treat them like shit. Just basically making you not feel part of the team even though you might have been there even longer than they have. You don't get invited to social events or something like that.*

Thus Rhys is worried about getting 'out of the loop':

*For example a long weekend's coming up, I'm doing something for long weekend so I'm not working Friday where I have to if I was full-time, I might miss out on what was going on Friday. And then you're sort of out of the loop of what's happened that day so you miss out on little things here and there. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

For Sue, being casual means being marginalised because she is not allied to any of the staff 'empires' that exist in the hospital system. Hence Sue doesn't get invited to formal meetings. However she doesn't think this is of great consequence: meetings are mostly 'drivel' and she gets the information she needs from tearoom chats. Sue feels at home amongst her peers:

*Yeah, there's little empires there and I don't belong in anyone's empire really. .... that could be a reason for my treatment by certain people ... it's the management that certainly counts but the people I just work with day to day, they're fine on the whole. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Margaret's way of dealing with organisational exclusion is to be more assertive about getting involved in the workplace system:

*It depends on who the employer or who the supervisor is, basically. There are some that give information; others don't. But I do attend meetings ... just recently there was a training day and they didn't tell me but I just said I want to come. And I know there were three others that were also casual but didn't turn up, they obviously weren't told it was on. So they do forget about you. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

The marginalisation of casual workers makes it more difficult for them to make their contribution in the workplace.

## 6.2 Work Performance: Do Casuals Work harder?

Many those in this study see little systematic difference between the effort made by casuals and permanents at work, feeling that work effort relates to the individual rather than their basis of employment. Sue sees nursing as a demanding occupation, but doesn't feel that casual nurses work harder than permanent staff:

*When I'm at work I generally work really, really hard. I come home absolutely exhausted. It's not unusual for me to collapse in a heap and have a little afternoon nap; I know I'm not the only one who does that... I don't know of other occupations who work as hard as nurses (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Wendy doesn't think that casuals work any harder than other staff – any differences are most likely due to experience rather than employment status:

*I don't think you can really say that permanent people work less than casuals and casuals work less than permanent. I just think we all work about the same amount. Some of us are there longer, some of us aren't there as long. You know what I mean? (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

Monique feels that in fact some casuals may work *less* hard because they feel they could get another job elsewhere – unlike permanents who are committed to staying:

*That also depends on the person but sometimes I think possibly because they know that it's just a casual job and you know, I'm only going to be here for a certain amount of time whereas permanent workers think you know, this is what I'm going to be doing for probably longer and I need this job kind of thing whereas I think sometimes casual workers often like, oh well, I might be able to get another job or it's a bit more flexible. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

### 6.2.1 'The Fear Factor'

However, many others felt that casuals often work harder than ongoing employees, reflecting their concern to maintain ongoing employment, the fact that they feel closely watched, and sometimes because permanent workers are happy to see casuals pick up tasks they do not want to do. This opinion is shared by people in very different industries and occupations, as well as various age groups. Kenneth believes that a 'fear factor' is at work '[Casuals] don't have any security of tenure so they're always under the microscope ... They're there for a short amount of time, generally, and so their level of energy is greater'.

Emma feels that being hourly paid means that casual workers must work hard consistently:

*I feel very much you're there for the four or five or six hours, every hour you're there they pay you for that hour. They want to get as much out of you as they can for that time. You*

*go there you do your six hours, bam, bam, bam, bam. You're gone. You've no other homework or obligations or lying awake at night worrying about the company, but when I sort of see other [ongoing] people - I used to do a bit of work at my brother's office doing catering, I'd do boardroom lunches and I'd look at people who'd just pop in and grab a cup of tea and walk back to their desk and make a couple of personal phone calls. I'd go 'Wow, I can't even imagine doing that at work!' You just can't do that ... the option is not there, the chance is not there: you're more like a little worker, you go there and you do it ... You can't just nick out for half an hour to do this or that. (Emma, 24, hospitality)*

Bruce, an older bus driver, says that, in his experience, casuals are 'more conscientious. They want to hang on to their jobs and try to do 100 per cent value for money ... We're watched fairly closely'.

In her supermarket job, Darlene believes that casuals work harder: 'The casuals are expected to keep working through breaks ... not stand around talking'. Jayda concurred:

*From what I observed [casuals work harder], yes, because I think we are more motivated because we are more worried about our jobs, I guess, whereas the managers and such that were around were a bit more secure about where they were. We were nervous about doing the wrong thing and getting in trouble but they kind of didn't care. (Jayda, 15, retail)*

#### 6.2.2 'Hit the ground running'

As a university researcher, Dorothy is expected to work very intensively: 'You're sort of expected to hit the ground at running speed and keep that up for the whole term.' Academics, she says 'because they're so busy and they work at really top stress levels all the time, I don't think they notice what they're doing in turn to other people'. Of course many of the academics who depend upon the work of Dorothy and her colleagues can look forward to, or are already enjoying, a highly developed and financially and personally rewarding career path and prospects<sup>3</sup>. Dorothy has no such career pathway, beginning successive jobs at the bottom of the pay schedule because 'that's all they can afford ... They don't seem to value research assistants as a career in itself'.

George believes that casuals do particular kinds of jobs, some of which permanents do not like:

*Without casual workers in this particular establishment, and I'm sure it's the same across the board, this place just wouldn't run. I mean these guys are protected by the system because they're full-time employed and they can slacken off, they can... if they're given a ten minute break they can go for half an hour. I mean the worse that can happen to them is they'll get [chatted]. For instance where we work there's always [debris], there's always liquid spills and if it wasn't for the casuals nobody would sweep the [debris] or hose liquid spills. And we're expected to do that but a full-time employee, you never see them pick up a broom, you never see them pick up a hose, you never see them on a shovel shoveling or doing just the shittier side of the job because they don't have to, they've got us*

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<sup>3</sup> This difference is reflected amongst the authors of this report, with one author tenured and two casually employed.

*there to do it. So you're abused and you feel abused and you're used. (George, 40, technician)*

### 6.2.3 Young Guns Against Old Hands

Like others he is very conscious of surveillance of his work effort, and the fact that older workers and measured against younger workers:

*You've got to perform in front of the eyes because if those people see you perform then it's more likely that they'll be keener to keep you coming back. And you have to perform, you have to show that you're working harder than a full-time employee because you want to be kept on ... and you're always head down and bum up just so that you're showing the bosses that you're keen.*

*Interviewer: Even after ten years George?*

*More so because we've got young guys coming in that have relatively no skills but they're so far... they're just trying so hard to show that they're keen, they're trying to outgun the people like me that have been there for a long time and have all the skills, have all the knowledge but in their, if you like, enthusiasm they're trying to outdo us. And I have seen blokes that have got eight, nine year records up that have been outdone by these guys that have been there for six months because they're working like Trojans you know. They're just like robots. (George, )*

Based on her experience as a full-time worker during the summer holidays, Kylie feels strongly that casuals work harder than others:

*[On the day shift] it didn't seem like I was working. At night you work four or five hours with a 15 or 10 minute break. When I was working 9-5, the whole day, I wouldn't go over one and a half hours without a break. I found that my time went a lot quicker. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

Marko is convinced that permanent staff have an easier time on the mining site because – unlike casuals - they can 'drag out' a job to fill the shift without fear of retribution:

*A lot of their blokes will drag a job out all day, you know ... so [that] they don't get another one during that 12 hour period, you know. That's what gives me the shits. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Mario feels that casuals work harder simply because they need the money:

*We do work harder because as I said you need the money and the more jobs you take on, well the more pay you get. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

### Performing the Job and the Self

Many casual staff say they work harder because of the competitive pressure to perform – or lose their jobs:

*I think there was pressure on us to be seen to be doing a very good job all the time ... amongst teachers it was destabilising and created some tension in personal relationships, because there were some people who were making a real effort to be seen to be doing not just their fair share, but even more. And there were some people, even, who were prepared to put in professional, full-time hours when they weren't remunerated for them. And that put stress upon the other workers, because everybody knew that that person who was doing that, was then used as a benchmark by which everyone else was being judged. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

*I think they [work harder] because you're always under that pressure that if you don't perform the job, you'll be let go. You're far more expendable than someone who's a permanent who would then be entitled to severance pay if they let you go, or unfair dismissal if they didn't have a reasonable excuse. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

*Yes, they [work harder] because they want the work and if they slack off they're not going to be asked to go back again.... the company would inform the agency, the hire agency that you're a slack worker so therefore the agency's not going to send you out anywhere. ... If you've got a reputation for being a slacker well then you're not going to get any work anywhere, the agency doesn't want to put slack people out. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Theresa describes how casual workers in her workplace work hard 'like a theatre' so they are seen as worth keeping on, and how they compete with each other for extra hours and tasks, or they are sent home:

*It's very competitive. Because you don't know how much money you are going to get every week so if, for example, a team leader asks for anybody who wants to work two hours more tonight because we need to finish the job, all the people fight for two hours. And when [you go to do something] some guy says 'Give me the broom, I do for you.' ... It is like a theatre ... it's a race then trying to demonstrate that you are very good. All the people ... try to demonstrate that they work quickly and they work very quickly, even when the workers don't need to work so quickly ... like a machine. (Theresa, 28, food manufacturing)*

Many casuals work very hard because of the insecurity of their employment. Rhys feels that casuals work harder because they have to prove themselves whereas ‘permanents know they’ve got their job’:

*There’s a little bit of a [try] and you have to prove yourself in some ways as a casual. Permanents know they’ve got their job. Once again a little bit different in our circumstances because it’s not sort of something that just anyone could go into but yeah, the casuals seem to have to work a little bit harder to basically cement their worthwhile being there. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

#### 6.2.4 Casuals Often Work Where the Workload is Heaviest

Casuals also often work harder because of the pressured situations they are brought into, as Margaret and Wayne describe:

*They have to [work harder] because they are forever in a stressful situation but they’re expected to perform at optimum peak and for the short hours that they’re there and without a break. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

*Casuals are put there at times where the load ... the workload is the heaviest. And sometimes the shifts will be shorter, like casuals don’t get a full day, like I might be called to do a four, five or six-hour shift where the work is full-on for four or five or six hours. If I was working part-time or full-time then I might be expected to do the same amount of work but over eight hours. So yes, I think casuals do work harder. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

In the highly competitive labour hire industry, casuals work hard because of the pressure ‘to skimp’ on staffing levels:

*I think casual workers are pushed, where we very rarely get breaks because the companies usually undercut each other and skimp on the workers which means that they want more from people ... It depends on the company, some are very good and they know their legal obligations. Others, well, I’ve worked an entire shift without a break for some people. And it’s because they undercut on their workers so they can get the contract, you know, for a lower price and then skimp on the workers and then it means they don’t have enough people to relieve the workers there, so you don’t get anything. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Casual status creates a strong incentive to work hard, in many situations, especially where workers of different status and forms of employment work alongside each other. A competitive labour market exists within many of these workplaces where casual workers are used to ‘set the pace’ and provide a ‘productivity whip’. Their insecure employment status creates a strong drive to work hard, for fear of losing hours, shifts or employment altogether. This ‘insecurity driven effort’ is strongest where employees feel their alternative labour market options are thin, and where their wage dependence is significant. Having skills and experience is, in some workplaces, no protection against such insecurity-driven effort. Many casuals feel that the work intensity expectations that they must meet are unfair, relative to other workers, and beyond reasonable.

They are made potent by the high level of surveillance that many casuals experience, which we now turn to.

### 6.3 Surveillance

A steady accompaniment to the insecurity that many casuals report is a feeling of constant scrutiny. Sometimes this scrutiny is general. Thus Rachel feels that casuals are held responsible for problems that occur simply because they are casuals:

*I think that a lot of times, it was held against the casuals if they made mistakes. In the job I was doing, as an example, balancing money and things like that, if there were mistakes made, they were held against them a lot more than they would as the permanent people. Like their records are brought up a lot more: 'Oh, we're watching you', that kind of thing. So in those circumstances, it was more difficult for casuals than it was for the permanent staff .... We're always aware that, yes, we've got to really watch what we're doing because they're watching us more. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Maria had a general feeling that she was being watched when working as a casual language teacher:

*Not in such explicit terms, but I always felt the threat. The two years that I was with the provider, I did. I was always watching my back. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

For Rebecca the biggest difference between casual and permanent is that casuals can never relax. The boss is always checking whether they are working:

*The permanent workers if they go off and have a chat or wander off to the toilet or duck outside to have a cigarette fine. Right you can do that, but if a casual worker was to do that you'd be sent home ... they get their money's worth. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Other casuals feel that the scrutiny is quite specific. Lynn feels her creative approach to dealing with young clients results in her being watched more closely by her manager:

*Sometimes I would do things that I knew my manager wouldn't be sure, about [it]. ... She's never pulled me up on it, but she says 'I will watch you, I am watching you'. And I don't actually like that. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

#### 6.3.1 'We were never allowed to be still'

Don has been a manager in the past for seven years. Now as a casual he believes that casual workers are closely watched. He sees that casuals work harder 'to try to impress' so that they get asked back to work again: 'they live on the knife edge' of uncertainty. In the fast food industry, Daniel worked amongst mostly casual workers and felt that he worked hard:

*I actually worked very hard, and a lot of us did, although there was a bit of a churn and burn effect too. Some people would become disillusioned and would tend to slack off, I think ...*

*Interviewer: Do you think casual workers are watched closely?*

*Oh, we were, yeah. They would say 'time to lean is time to clean' ... So we were never allowed to be still. If we were seen still, then that meant we were slacking off so it was always drummed into us that, basically if we're standing still, then we shouldn't really be on the shift (laughs) ... Yeah, which, you know, is very stressful and I would come home exhausted and very stressed ... Always, always buzzing, the whole time buzzing, yeah. It was always, always doing something and never standing still, never stopping. Always feeling like I was being watched and if I wasn't doing the right thing, someone would tell me off. (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

Although much older and a very different industry location, Jeff agrees about how casuals must manage their appearance of activity:

*[Casual's] are too afraid to stand around doing nothing because they can be out the door in an hour ... They have to be busy and they need to look busy. I mean you can be busy and not look busy and they'll give you the arse.*

*Interviewer: Right, okay. So you have to be performing in a way?*

*Yeah. You perform at a higher level than do the permanents. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)*

In some situations it is the casual's *colleagues* who do the surveillance. Marko feels he is sometimes spied on by fellow workers who are keen to earn 'brownie points' from management:

*I mean you get certain people out there and they are pretty quick, if they see someone doing unsafe things, they are too quick to pull their digital camera out or run to a phone and ring the contract company and dob you in instead of coming over and seeing the bloke and saying like 'you had better get down from there' or something, you know what I mean. ...They are not worried about safety, they are worried about bloody brownie points. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

## **6.4 Voice at Work**

Some casual workers report that their employment status does not interfere with the expression of their views at work. They feel able to speak up because of their special personal standing in the workplace, or their skill, seniority or experience. Thus Marko, as the operator of the biggest crane on site, feels he can make his voice heard, unlike those without his skill and experience:

*I mean I've got a bit of say there because I'm probably, you could say senior - not senior as in 'age' ... but I've got the biggest machine there - And I get a certain bit of leeway if I want something, you know what I mean. [But] the blokes that aren't as skilled and*

*experienced as me, they are more inclined to, you know, get the short end of the stick and do what they are told and get harassed for certain things. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Tony is convinced he has a strong influence in the workplace because of his previous experience and his status amongst his peers:

*I'm sort of a fair way up the totem pole because of my seniority, but even though I've only been there two years, I've been nursing for ten ... Oh yes, the boss always come and asking me such and such, such and such and she sort of looks to me and says, 'look, I'd like you to put the word around other staff and say can they do such and such and such and such'. Yeah, sure I can put the word around because she knows I was also a shop steward before ... My boss tends to listen to me a fair bit ... I sort of go and cause a little bit of noise where I am because I think she respects some of my seniority. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Rhys feels he has a say in his workplace not because he is a casual but because of his experience:

*I'd say as a casual no, but personally I'd say yes. With what I'm involved in, what I do, I'm probably a little bit more involved than most of the workers at work. I've got a good rapport with management. In fact management actually asked me to come back to the company I'm working for just recently after I got back from overseas. So I'd say yes [not much say] for everyone else but no for myself. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

As an experienced nurse, Sue doesn't feel that being casual prevents her from voicing her opinions. However she is skeptical of the outcomes:

*Whistle blowers never come off well, do they? That research shows it. Yeah, so I guess I keep a fairly low profile. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Some have the personal confidence to speak up regardless of their casual status. Thus, because of the maturity of her years, April is confident enough to speak her mind on workplace issues, while also seeing her casual status as an extra advantage in this:

*No, I'm too old for that. I'll say what I want to say ... I believe in honesty and I would say exactly how I feel so it has no effect on me at all ... And because I am casual and I think because maybe I am a little bit different to anybody else, I can leave anytime that I choose to, then I always say what I believe. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Kylie's confident personality enables her to speak out without fear of retribution, and believes that being a casual can lead to more permanent work – but only if you push for it:

*I'm a pretty confident person though, I haven't found it a problem ... Permanency's there, again, like I said, if you push for it a little bit more. If you don't, I think you get lost in the crowd ... I know some people who aren't happy with their hours, but it is because they don't speak up, that they put up with it. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

However, for many casuals, their employment status has the effect of silencing them both as individuals and collectively. The majority of casuals report very constrained workplace voice

and overall workplace citizenship (defined by their participation in workplace representation, collective and individual voice, communication, training, consultation and the rights and workplace standards generally available). Many casual workers feel excluded from basic workplace communication and say. This affects workers of all ages. Jackie is 15, and wants her supervisors to understand that she cannot work as many hours as they request. Her pleas are ignored, and ‘they just get very angry’ when she is too sick to work. She has had her shifts cut back when she has refused shifts because of her glandular fever:

*I feel like I'm just not being listened to all the time. I literally complain to them. I can't work both days on the weekend. I need to rest; I need to do homework. And they just don't listen. I don't know if that's part of me being at a cheaper rate or just part of being with a larger corporation. I haven't had enough experience with that ... I mean I've written letters and letters and I'm part of the union and nothing gets done. I'm always saying I've got glandular fever and I can't work. I'm sick so I got three weeks off or whatever the doctor gave me. And then I'm back and it's just bang, 15 hours again. (Jackie, 15, retail)*

Jackie feels that her complaints about sexual harassment were ignored:

*I had a customer that made some really bad sexual remarks to me at one time. I told my boss and nothing was ever done about it and that really frustrated me.*

Despite many years as a permanent full-time employee and an active unionist, Dorothy feels she cannot voice concerns as a casual for fear of losing her contracts:

*I think when you're in a casual position, if you're very vulnerable and very unable to voice, I don't think that that should actually stop me and it does. It does have that effect because you do feel vulnerable and because you know that you can't sort of stand your ground while things get sorted out because the way it would be sorted out is you wouldn't get another contract. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant)*

### Say at Work: Jeff's Story

Jeff is a skilled tradesman with extensive industry experience. He feels he is excluded from social contact through work and work teams.

*[Other workers] treat casuals like shit ... Just basically making you not feel part of the team even though you might have been there even longer than they have. You don't get invited to social events or something like that ... Just generally feel excluded all the time ... It makes you less happy to be at a particular place.*

*Interviewer: How about managers, do they treat casuals differently? And supervisors?*

*Yeah. Just basically there's no information flow to the casuals. They're just seen as basically cannon fodder and then they'll be told when it affects them. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician).*

Despite his years of experience across a variety of workplace types, and his skilled status, Jeff said he had no say at work: 'You have none ... I had no voice at all'. Now as a permanent he feels he has much more say:

*I mean, I have a hell of a lot more authority, they see that my experience, with the number of places that I've been at has given me a greater experience than say somebody who's been with the company for the whole working life. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)*

Maggie feels unable to have her voice heard as a casual because her irregular employment means she is excluded from information:

*Absolutely [no say]. Because you're not in with the regular team. You're not having regular team meetings, you don't have access to all the information. You're just given what you get. And I'm the kind of person who needs to have all the information. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Rebecca feels that she has no voice at all as a casual worker:

*I [know] having being a casual worker, it has no effect at all. No matter what you say, it doesn't matter. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Mostly, it is the precariousness of their employment that makes it difficult for casuals to speak up on workplace issues. Marko argues that casual workers are unlikely to take a stand on any workplace issues because of their insecure employment:

*And you get people come up here and they are living from week to week, what do you do? I mean, who are they going to argue with? (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Similarly, Patti feels she can't speak out on workplace issues because of the risk of losing shifts:

*I feel I don't have as much power in the workplace because I'm not a permanent employee and that I could be just dropped from the roster if spoke out too loudly. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Sometimes it is a straightforward fear of reprisal, especially the loss of work – or the loss of the job – that silences the casual worker. Thus Monique feels that being a casual makes it difficult to speak up; and in a previous workplace she couldn't speak up because of being 'punished' by the boss:

*I think it does [affect your say] because it's so easy to get rid of you if you're a casual that you're often not willing to say anything. ... I've had one particular [workplace] where there's all sorts of things happening but I just didn't feel like I could say anything because he was the type that would punish you for it. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

#### 6.4.1 'Gone in a Second'

Sarah feels that a major reason for the silence of casual workers is the fact that they can be got rid of on the spot:

*You could be gone in a second so that's the first thing, so no one's going to be particularly, you're not going to be a voice of authority really, because how can you be because if you are that's the exact thing that's going to get you booted out. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

The complexities of casual employment can make it more difficult to speak up. William feels that working as a casual for a labour hire company made it more complicated for a worker to stand up for him/herself:

*[As] a casual employee our host employer really didn't have much leverage in that arrangement because you were employed by someone else to do their work. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Casuals sometimes lose so much confidence they feel unable to speak up. Thus Lynn is concerned that she hasn't been paid overtime and that she has had to work 13 shifts straight, but is reluctant to discuss these matters with her manager directly:

*I've never claimed overtime but my Manager has never said to me, 'oh gosh, you worked last night with Betty and Betty had an hour's overtime, did you leave on time?' ...So she would have known, and she does know, and she knows ... I have an ethic about work, you*

*know, that I need to finish my work on time ... Having had one brief discussion about it and voicing my opinion because it is abused, it is not always abused but it can be, she knew my opinion but it didn't fess her terribly in the time that I was there anymore than doing 13 shifts in a row seemed to trouble her. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

#### 6.4.2 Fear of Collective Organisation and Voice

When casuals are silenced in these ways it can be difficult for others to get them involved in collective action. Thus, William feels that in the call centre a culture of fear prevented casual workers from taking action to improve their situation:

*Yeah, as a casual when we first started, most people were too scared to bring up any sort of issues. A fear of reprisal with just them being no long contracted. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Rebecca describes her unsuccessful attempt to get her fellow workers involved in improving their conditions:

*I tried to get some [changes], oh I was casual worker, but the company didn't have a union. They were dreadful. They were ripping people off left right and centre and I tried to encourage them to do something about the unions and no one would, so I just thought I'm not going to work here and be ripped off the way they rip you off, you've got no say whatsoever and no one else, they're willing to sit back and take it, well I wasn't going to. I don't stand up and get angry very often, but yeah, I did then. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Most casuals had the view that their voice in the workplace was reduced because of their basis of employment.

*Casuals don't really have much say... They can ring you up for a job one day and not have one the next, so there's no guarantee. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)*

*Being casual, I know it sounds horrible but I don't think you've got much say in it. You do what you're told literally. You sort of do what you're told and you keep your head down. (Darlene, 47, delicatessen assistant).*

#### 6.4.3 Permanency Confers Voice

Brad had more say on his 12 month permanent part-time contract than as a casual. He felt that his ideas had more effect and he had more influence in the workplace.

Don with his experience in the past as a manager, regretted the lack of say now as a casual: 'You don't feel that you can say too much because you're worried if you tread on someone's toes ... so you're very reluctant to say your piece or anything that might rock the boat.'

Julie's, Annadjies's and Margaret's experiences are very similar and they explain how the change in status gives 'bravado':

*You actually feel as soon as you become permanent part-time from casual, you actually feel a sense of relief that you - even though you have rights as casual, you feel your voice - You can actually say things that you wouldn't have said as a casual. If you're a casual, you let things ride a little bit because you don't want to upset the apple cart, you want those shifts. When you go to permanent part-time, you get this bravado or you can actually think, well I can actually say something now. By law, you couldn't said something when you are casual anyway. But you know the industry anyway, it's a very - industry that is [dobbled] with high class bullying. And you just feel when you're going from casual to permanent, well, no I will actually say something now because what can they do if they can't get rid of me. It's not an attitude you should have but it just - yeah, the relief is so much better. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

*[When you are permanent] you can walk up to your HR manager and say 'I've got a problem'. (Annadjies, 30s. administrative worker)*

*Because I guess from their point of view when you're casual and on night fill, I guess it's: Okay, so how long is this person going to stay? Where once you're permanent and sort of there, it's like they know you're in for the long haul then. And in those situations they are very approachable, management, but they just seem to listen a bit more when you're permanent to a casual. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

## **6.5 The Casual Working Life: Watched, Worked Hard and Out of the Loop**

The quality of working life – or its lack of quality – is a very significant question for casual workers. Job security and the question of flexibility dominate public discussion of casual work. These are important issues for casual workers, as is the issue of pay (which we turn to in the next section).

However, the issues of respect, marginalisation, work intensity, surveillance and say at work are of vital importance to many casual workers. For some they are the aspect of being casual that is most difficult and upsetting. To work for over a decade in a single workplace and not be part of established communication systems or be invited to the annual picnic, upsets casual workers. They do not like being the last to know. And the absence of employment security undermines their capacity to influence their work situation.

These issues get too little attention in the discussion of casual work. Casual terms imposes degraded workplace citizenship. Many are frightened to speak up, and face favouritism and bullying. They are vulnerable to the exercise of arbitrary power by individual supervisors and sometimes co-workers. They report careful performance of their jobs, and pressure to work intensively, sometimes missing breaks and working unpaid hours or compromising their professional standards. Many are frightened of speaking up individually, of asserting their rights, and of organising or speaking collectively.

These costs are the dark side of their employment form for many casual workers as individuals.

However, their effects go beyond the individual casual worker. They cast a shadow over many ongoing workers that casuals work alongside. Where casual workers or labour hire employees set

the pace, others must follow. Where a quarter of all employees are casual across the labour market, communication and worker voice across whole workplaces is impaired.

A lack of respect, intensive work, surveillance, and a lack of voice at work are significant features of casual employment for many casual workers. They feel their marginal status keenly. While not all experience it, many do. These aspects of working life affect workers of very different ages, experience and in many occupations and industries. While seniority and skill can protect against loss of respect and voice, much more significant protection is provided by the backup of other sources of income, and having other labour market options. Unfortunately, the absence of both undermines this capacity for many casuals.

## 7. Working Life: Pay and Conditions

The question of pay and conditions is obviously a very significant aspect of casual employment. Some casual workers are satisfied with the level of their pay – which usually (but not always) includes a casual loading. Others feel that their pay is too low, especially when they take into account the level at which they are paid, or their base rate, their lack of access to career advancement or skill recognition, and their long-run situation with respect to pay and conditions.

These concerns, expressed by many interviewees, are supported by large surveys that include analysis of pay rates. For example the HILDA survey includes a large group of casual employees and shows that casuals have relatively low earnings. Their average hourly rate in 2001 was around 83 per cent of that paid to ongoing workers ‘despite the fact that many casual employees receive a pay loading in lieu of leave entitlements’ (Wooden and Warren 2003:12).

Some are happy with their pay. April feels her pay is good compared to some of the permanent supervisors she works alongside. Sue, 33, a hospital nurse feels the 20 per cent loading as a casual hospital nurse just covers sick and holiday pay and is ‘reasonable’; moreover she is entitled to long service leave as part of the nurses award. Ideally, however, she would like an increase in the casual loading as well as double time on public holidays – the same rates as permanent staff get. Tony prefers casual work because of the casual loading. However he would go back to permanent if the base rate were high enough:

*If the [basic] hourly rate was a lot better then I would go back to wanting to be permanent ... Because the money would be better as a permanent and I would be on an acceptable wage. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Although her wage varies with the shift, Patti feels she can earn ‘a lot more money as a casual worker’ compared with permanent staff:

*Well, my pay varies on the time of day and the day of the week. For example, after midnight on Sunday is my highest rate and my pay rate also varies according to the job I do. For example, crowd control is a less per hour rate than a guard type situation. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Since she is categorised as an ‘independent contractor’ Maggie doesn’t get a casual loading, but she is fairly satisfied with her pay as a youth worker: ‘It’s OK’.

For a minority of fortunate casual workers, the insecurity of their employment isn’t an issue because they have another source of financial backing. With the security of private investments, Rhys feels able to live his life as he chooses:

*I’m in very different circumstances to most people...I’ve done a lot of investing independently and I’ve done fairly okay in that area so I’m not sort of money hungry I suppose like most people are and like I’d rather have a quality of life than be slaving away*

*at the grindstone all the time if you know what I mean. I'd rather be involved in personal activities and things that made my life worthwhile rather than have to work all the time. I suppose that's just circumstances in my case. Yes, I can only speak for myself of course. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

Similarly, William does not feel economically insecure as a casual because he owes nothing:

*My backup is because I don't have any debts. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

## **7.1 The Down-Side: Low, Unpredictable and Unfair Pay for Casuals**

However, the majority of casuals don't feel happy with aspects of their pay. For some this arises from unpredictable earnings. For others it relates to a low hourly rate or one that is too low relative to their level of skill, experience or responsibility – or relative to those who work alongside them doing the same work. A low classification makes the casual loading of particular significance, since it takes pay to a fairer, or more liveable, rate. Others worry about breaks in their pay between work periods and the work expenses they are expected to meet. Some casuals – like Wayne and Mario – find that these problems mean that they are amongst the working poor – someone who is in paid work but with the lifestyle of the unemployed:

*Some people say that there isn't, you know, different classes in Australia, ... there's the haves and the have-nots and there's those that have even less. So while I'm in the fortunate position that I do actually work, I don't really have anything to show for it. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

*It would've been okay, that level of pay, if they also provided an amount to cover the running expenses like petrol and things like that. But otherwise no, I'm not that happy at that sort of level ... Last year my car packed up and I need my car to drive round of course and it cost me... I was needing \$1,000 to get it fixed up. So my budget then just blew out of proportion and I had to struggle and struggle and cut down on a lot of things and I can't remember the last time I bought myself a decent pair of shoes. And so I had to minimise my expenses by cutting back on just the general things like say electricity and make sure that all the lights are off, switch everything off and everything in the dark when I come home. And so with water or gas, things like that. And even gas, I mean I had gas before. My house was totally electric except for gas heater but I had to have it disconnected because I could not afford to keep the gas on. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

## **7.2 Seven Negative Aspects of Pay for Casual Workers**

Seven characteristics of pay emerge as significant for casual workers:

1. Unpredictable pay through irregular or inadequate work;
2. Low pay arising from vulnerability to dismissal and arbitrary reductions in working hours;
3. Lower pay through under-classification and low base rates;
4. Lack of access to, and inadequacy of, the casual loading;
5. Low pay through delays and gaps in being paid;

6. Lower pay through labour hire employment;
7. Underpayment and enforcement of legal rates.

#### 7.2.1 Unpredictable pay through irregular or inadequate work: 'One pay-day away from bankruptcy'

Security of employment is a central worry for many and has several elements. At the most basic, casual employees are concerned about whether they will have work tomorrow or next week, given the nature of 'job -churning' in their sectors and workplaces, and the lack of financial back up that many have. Many casuals worry about whether they will be able to find the next job. This reflects the nature of the industry in which many casuals work. For example, Dorothy is concerned about future contracts as a researcher in a university. At present she is over-employed with multiple contracts and casual jobs, but will they be there in the future? Similarly, in her previous job as a casual market researcher, Margaret's employment is very insecure because of the unstable nature of the industry:

*It didn't lead anywhere, because a lot of the times the companies just went broke. So you go from one company to another and even though you would enjoy the work or enjoy the flexibility, it really didn't lead to anywhere else. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

In the manufacturing sector, George's concerns about pay security and income relate to the number of shifts that he gets, their predictability, sudden cancellation, and the impact on his weekly and annual pay. As a skilled worker, with many years standing in his workplace, he still suffers unpredictable pay, which is compounded by other effects, for example on superannuation: 'you don't contribute properly to a super fund'. George feels that his hourly rate is 'fantastic'; however, the variability and unpredictability of his shifts and total hours, means that his annual pay varies very widely, putting him and his family under great pressure:

*My salary from week to week is definitely unpredictable. On a good year I'll earn \$42,000. That's on a good year when things don't go wrong ... Last year, I almost went under. I almost had to declare bankruptcy and I had to fight like hell to try and make ends meet. I had to sell things like I had to sell a car and I had to sell a boat that I'd worked bloody hard to obtain. Just so I could pay the mortgage until things picked up. So my salary from week to week, although it may be good and my hourly rate is fantastic, it's variable. Like I say if I get two days and those two days get cancelled I've got nothing, my family has nothing. And this year I earned \$30,000. So I wouldn't consider that to be all that great. (George, 40, technician)*

Maria thinks her hourly pay as a casual was 'OK' but was tired of being 'constantly poor' as a teacher on rolling contracts who lived in steady fear of unemployment:

*Constantly living in rental accommodation. I drove an old car. I knew that I'd never be able to save enough money to buy property. At that stage, the banks frowned upon people with low deposits, unlike now, so I found it quite difficult approaching banks, because they just kept saying 'You don't have enough money.' ... We were constantly being told 'The funding's not coming through for next term, so we can't give you any kind of assurances.' Or they would say 'The funding has come through and we've got funding for three years'*

*and then they'd revoke this information that they'd given us. So, it was quite unstable (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Mario finds that casual work in his field of domestic aged care is unreliable:

*Casual work is not a really good position to be in because as I said before, you're subject to a lot of changes and subject to the company you work for could fold up and then you have to go and find another job. And again all I'll be able to find, all that I'd be able to find would be casual employment. So yeah, there's no future in it to be quite honest. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

Will I have any hours tomorrow is a constant concern of many casual employees. Their income can fluctuate for many reasons, including unexpected events at work:

*There was a bit of a hiccup on a job ... And they have thrown the whole company off site for a day. ... So, blokes that had nothing to do with the job, they have lost a day's pay. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Many casual employees are concerned about whether they will have a job tomorrow or next week, and they fear instant dismissal:

*Most of the people who work casual are really very apprehensive about being dismissed. You know, they're like me in respect of financial terms. My status is identical – I don't have much money, I'd have about \$25.00 in cash, would be about the maximum I'd ever have on me, and that's just to have a haircut or whatever. You're only one pay-day away from bankruptcy. You're hoping to Christ that the work that you're doing will finish – the shift will finish – without anybody reporting you. And you won't get into any sort of complicated scenario. And everything about your financial circumstances are determined at work. And because there's no permanent relationship, it's all very uncertain. It's a constant feeling of insecurity, is what you meet with casuals. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

In Barney's case, as a security guard dealing with the public, he is often concerned that things can go wrong and a negative report could result in the loss of his livelihood.

Monique feels that in her casual jobs there was always the insecurity about whether her employment would continue, especially as she got older – and more expensive to employ:

*There was always that risk that if you... particularly as I - in my previous jobs - got a bit older and they started to bring in younger people, there was always that instability that I might not be getting the same shift next week as what I did this week because they have to pay the young people less. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

For Brad as a casual high school student, having a predictable income was very important, so he could fit his study in and 'because the whole money thing – you didn't know how much money you were going to earn each week'. Now his 12 month contract as a permanent casual means that he is 'on track' financially, which is 'definitely' better. However, Brad found that his hours would be reduced if he didn't perform well: his pay was vulnerable to arbitrary change. Rhys

also points out that it is easy for casuals to be sacked – their managers simply reduce the hours of people they want to get rid of:

*I know, companies I've worked for in the past, if a casual worker doesn't do really well their hours just get cut, cut, cut, and cut and then eventually they might only be rostered for four hours a week and non one can survive on that so they have to find employment elsewhere. It's sort of an option for a company to get rid of someone easier than they would be able to a full-time employee. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

In many cases, effective dismissal occurs by reducing hours to 'unliveable' levels. Employees then leave.

#### 7.2.2 Fear of Dismissal: Formal Rights and Practical Access

If they are sacked, many casuals believe they have little recourse to unfair dismissal remedies, or lack the power to make use of them. This makes the issue of formal rights to contest unfair dismissal, along with their practical availability, very significant. While William feels that while all staff at the call centre were treated equally in relation to many aspects of employment, the crucial difference was that casuals who didn't 'measure up' could be dismissed at will whereas permanent staff were protected by set procedures:

*Where I worked in the call centre we were treated pretty much the same except for the fact that we were always aware that if you made a fairly severe error ... [y]ou'd be terminated straight away. Whereas as a permanent, because under their legislation, under their Act, they've got their counselling process where you've got to get several warnings before you'll be dismissed. Or if you were found to be totally lacking in the position, try and either re-deploy you to a similar position or you downgrade to another position within government. But as a casual, you don't have that right, if you didn't measure up you'd be dismissed. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

In Marko's view, casual workers have no financial or industrial protection against this kind of insecurity, even where some formal rights may exist:

*You've got no security there. You haven't got like a salary package or something where, you know, like if someone gets the shits with you they can't get rid of you for something stupid, or try railroading you. Well, they give you a day's notice up here and you're down the road. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Hence, because employers are seen as 'untouchable' in this regard they have the power to 'toy' with their casual workers, as Sarah sees it. She is convinced that employers of casuals know they can get away with exploiting their staff because they are 'pretty much untouchable':

*I think they know that they're pretty much untouchable. If you get driven out or whatever you've got no right of unjust dismissal which they don't understand legally but I'm sure they're aware that they can toy with you a hell of a lot more than they can if you're a permanent or part-time employee because also it's not particularly unionised. Like I was never a member of the union and they would have know that no one else was as well because I didn't know of any other union members in the workplace so they definitely I*

*think that that part of being casual and being in a precarious employment I think that they do sort of have this sense of they ... they can toy with you. ... Yeah, and they can and if they drive you out well then who cares? You know, there's going to be no retribution or whatever, well not retribution that's too strong a word but no consequence for them. (Sarah)*

### 7.2.3 Lower pay through under-classification and low base rates

Gratitude for a job does not prevent many casual workers from feeling that their pay arrangements are not fair. While they frequently say that they do not have the power to contest them, they see their pay as unjust, particularly in relation to their base rates of pay and their classification, which often takes their pay to less than the permanent workers they work alongside even allowing for the casual loading. This is especially true of many employed through labour hire companies, but it is not confined to them.

In a production environment, skilled workers like Jeff and George are paid less than those with the same skills as themselves, reflecting their employment through a labour hire agency. They feel this injustice keenly. When his pay rate matched the site rate, Jeff said 'It made me feel a lot better because... I mean it didn't make you feel like you were being used.'

George is employed through a labour hire company and although he believes he has skills four levels above the one he is paid at, he has little capacity to ensure that he is paid correctly. The ongoing employees around him are paid the correct classification, and even those on level 1 like him are paid more than he is:

*I'm a level one employee, but I know all the [skills] to be probably a level five. If they qualify me as level five they have to pay me that wage but being that I'm a casual employee they don't legally have to do that whereas the majority of their blokes know less jobs in the factory than I do but they're up in their levels and they get paid. Even level one full-time employees there are on more money than me. And I'm not sure why but that's just the way it goes there ... I think the lowest paid permanent there's on \$56,000 gross a year and as I say I've probably got \$30,000 this year so far. (George, 40, technician)*

Alice is an experienced work process operator. Her hourly rate includes a casual loading: 'they tell me that there's a 20 per cent loading to cover sick leave and annual leave'. However, her pay is only a dollar higher than her co-worker doing the same work who has been made permanent and is paid at a higher classification. She describes her pay as 'poor':

*I think I'm good at what I do. They're getting out of it at a cheap rate of pay basically and yeah and I won't make waves because I'm a casual I guess.*

*Interviewer: So [from what you have said] they can rely on you being a good worker, not stirring the pot as you said, but it's a cost thing, they've put you on a relatively low base rate, is that the thing?*

*It seems so. I mean I wouldn't work for my base rate. If they offered me a permanent position at the base rate they are paying now I'd say you've got to be joking.*

*Interviewer: So it's only the loading that makes your hourly rate acceptable to you?*

*That's correct, yeah. And I'd love a full time job with the hourly rate I'm getting now. (Alice, 41, word process operator).*

In Alice's view, the loading brought her pay up to what 'I believe I should be paid': the senior word process operator level 3 in the state award.

Barney, a security worker, has previously worked in employment services so he has considerable knowledge about the industrial and employment systems. A union member, neither his union membership nor his extensive knowledge of employment regulation, or his own willingness to speak up ('I am not a weak person'), have been much help in getting a fair pay rate:

*[The Victorian industrial system] enables employers to enter into agreements with employees to pay [very low rates] – there's no minimum amount which applies to their employment – none at all. So that in the security business, but also in particular hospitality, and especially in shops and things of that nature, employers can pay what they like. For example, the minimum award wage for myself on a day-shift – and I'll give it to the next rounded dollar – is \$15.00 dollars an hour, for a day's shift between 8am and 6pm. Between 6 and 8 during the night, it's about \$18.00. Saturdays it's \$22.00, Sundays it's \$27.00. Now, most employers for security guards in Victoria try to pay somewhere around about \$10-12.00 an hour. And the consequence of that is absolutely enormous. I've spent 19 hours in a row, and got something like \$14.00 an hour for the whole lot of it, and that included a weekend. Looking after a football club's grog. I'm tea-total so I get those sorts of jobs. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

Dorothy works full-time as a university researcher and has six projects underway, under five arrangements. One of these is a limited term contract while the remainder are casual jobs.

*I've got the most bizarre thing when my pay sheet comes. I have now got the pay office sending me an Excel sheet so that depicts which hours I've worked for which contract so I can then colour code it and know if I've done my hours for each one. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

Her pay rate is different in each job and she says the academics who employ her 'beat her rate down' to fit the job's funding rather than recognise her skills or the true size and nature of the job to be done:

*Because I don't get paid by the classification criteria of what they want me to do. I get paid by how much money they've got in their funding and how many hours they need it to last over, basically.*

Her 'bargaining' around pay is done in the shadow of unemployment:

*I guess it's up to me whether I say yes or no to the work but when the alternative is not having work, well that sort of ties one of my bargaining hands behind my back.*

At \$21 an hour Rhys feels his hourly pay rate is ‘OK’ but doesn’t really take into account the level of responsibility as a security officer, and Wayne – in the same industry – shares his view:

*I honestly believe we should be paid a lot more for what we do, the responsibility we’ve got. We all carry firearms, so there’s a big responsibility there and I suppose there’s a danger there as well. And what we’re responsible for is very, very valuable pieces of items and a lot of other valuable property. So the main thing is responsibility there considering a guy actually left us and went to drive a garbage truck and he was on about the same money as we’re on with no extra responsibility or anything like that. So that’s sort of a comparison we use at work. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

*So, you know, if you’ve been working with someone for a year, for example, it can be assumed that you have a certain amount of responsibility, it can be assumed that you’ve got quite a high degree of knowledge about certain things but your pay rate doesn’t change [laughs]. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

#### 7.2.4 The Casual Loading

Three-quarters (or 42 interviewees) in our study confirmed that they are paid the casual loading. Nine are not paid the loading and four did not know what the loading is or did not know whether they are paid it (‘Meaning? - what casual loading?’ asks Annadjies).

The majority of casual workers in our study do not believe that the loading makes up for what is lost in being casual. Amongst the 42 who receive the loading and whose views are known, 30 or 71 per cent do not think that it compensates for the difference between being casual and being permanent. Eight felt that it does adequately compensate and four were not sure (see table 7.1).

**Table 7.1 Views About the Adequacy of the Casual Loading in Compensating for the Gap Between Being Casual And Being Permanent**

Does the Loading Compensate?		
No loading doesn’t compensate	30	71per cent
Yes it does	8	19per cent
Not sure if it compensates	4	10per cent
Of those with Views	42	100per cent
<i>Don’t know because don’t get it</i>	9	
<i>View unknown</i>	4	
<i>Total interviewees</i>	55	

Wendy is amongst those positive about the loading. She feels that it is adequate compensation for the loss of leave entitlements; in her case she feels she is winning in the trade-off because she has ‘steady hours’:

*I’m losing in one way ... and winning in another way. You know what I mean? ... I’d say I’m winning because I’ve got steady hours. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

For Rachel the casual loading does not adequately compensate for things such as leave, redundancy payments – and respect:

*No, [the loading] was never a big thing for me. What I would've got out of being permanent far outweighed the loading that I was getting. I didn't ever even take that into consideration. ... being entitled to redundancy or long service leave and things like that and being treated with respect. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Lynn doesn't think that the casual loading compensates her for the difference between being permanent and casual, although 'I've never really sat down and worked it out, but no [I don't think it compensates]'. Lynn thinks she probably gets paid 'a couple of bucks more than the permanent people, so I don't actually think it's very worthwhile' (Lynn, 57, youth worker).

Rebecca is unsure about any casual loading, believing she is being paid a flat rate with an extra \$10/hr for a late afternoon shift. She gets a loading at one job, but thinks this is for working the afternoon shift rather than for being casual:

*No, you just get the flat \$15. You tell you when they ring you up to say do you want work, you say yes, you know, you're going to go to work. Then they tell most of the time what you're going to earn. That's it. Sometimes if I do stocktake at a weekend, I do that sometimes, that's only \$15 flat rate. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Others have carefully weighed up the loading in relation to their current employment. Some who have a higher hourly rate than those they work alongside, would elect to stay casual because of their higher earnings. However, most found the loading wanting. 'No way' was a common response.

Some employees, including young workers like Brad who is 19 and works as a produce assistant, had calculated the difference between the loading and being permanent and found that the loading did not compensate for lost conditions. Although Brad recognised 'I'm young, I just want the money', he had decided to take a 12 month contract to be permanent part-time because he saw that if he had been permanent part-time for the previous three years of his casual employment 'I would have a lot more benefits' like the chance of a paid holiday. He had sat down with his boss and worked it out and decided that the contract was 'definitely' better, even though he lost the loading. He felt he was 'on track' now and could plan things including his budget and social life. His employer's careful comparison of the two situations, with him, had helped Brad make a decision and he appreciated the effort.

Daniel, 21 in the fast food industry had also had experience of both casual and permanent part-time work. At the time he was employed casually:

*I might have preferred the 20 per cent [loading] ... But I think now, having had the experience of permanent part-time work, I can see the benefits of that ... such as knowing when my hours are going to be every week and knowing I'm going to have a job the week after and that sort of thing. (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

Bruce is one of the majority who do not think that the loading adequately compensates. He has been driving buses casually for over a decade: 'I don't think it comes anywhere near it'. Alice agrees 'No, I don't think it [compensates]'. John says 'No, definitely not I do more work than anyone else here and they pay them more money because they are permanent'. Jeff, a maintenance electrician, felt that the loading essentially 'bought' him three weeks paid holiday and sick leave a year, but did not address long service leave or other conditions. He has carefully weighed up the loading and says it 'no way near' compensates for what he loses. He wanted to see employers pay into a long service leave fund:

*As far as I'm concerned casual loading should be 100 per cent so then there is the incentive for the employer to put somebody on permanently. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)*

Allan had carefully calculated the leave and entitlements comparison:

*For me, although there's a 20 per cent loading, it only really compensates for the holidays and the sick leave and statutory [holidays] – there's seven weeks there – [in] all those three things – sick, and [statutories] and holidays ... So [the loading] does not compensate for the lack of security at all. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Many casuals are prepared to give up the casual loading for the benefits of permanence. Mary appreciated her casual loading when working as a night-fill worker, but is now happy to exchange that for the security of part-time employment:

*[The casual loading] was nice in the pay check but no, I would pick permanent part-time over casual any day. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

#### 7.2.5 Waiting for Pay: Pay Gaps

For some casual employees, pay is also affected by delays in payment. When reserves are very low and there is no other source of income, gaps in pay as employees wait for it to be reestablished are very serious. For example, Bruce is not paid in school holidays and he finds this hard: he must wait for a month after the holidays for his pay to begin again. These kinds of delays in his pay occur despite the fact that he works for the government and has been doing so for over a decade:

*Like any other person you've still got to pay all your bills, you've still got to pay gas, electricity, buy food and run your car and so forth ... The government only pays you each fortnight. So I go back to work after the holidays, work a fortnight, put that claim in and wait another fortnight to get that fortnight's pay. Cause they're always a fortnight behind. (Bruce, 50s, bus driver).*

#### 7.2.6 Labour Hire and Lower Pay

Some casuals find it hard to weight up the casual loading because of complex factors that make comparison hard, especially if casuals work alongside others working under different awards or employment arrangements like labour hire employees. Many labour hire employees are paid lower rates than generally prevail on their worksites. Many of these talked about how their

under-classification meant that, even with the loading, their hourly rate was below that paid to ongoing co-workers. They could not understand why their pay was so much lower than that paid to their co-workers, despite doing the same work often for extended periods:

*That was one of the things that was always highlighted to us as the difference because the permanent government employees were doing exactly the same job as us and getting paid so much more money than we were. It was always highlighted to us that just because you're casuals, you're not entitled to any more than what you're getting ... I think the department had its own [enterprise agreement] that they had won their hourly rates and it was much higher than the award. I think they also classified us lower. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

William is unsure whether his casual loading is fair compensation for the loss of leave entitlements because of his situation of being a long-term casual employee through a labour hire firm. 'without an end date theoretically'. He finds it difficult to compare his pay rate with the ongoing workers he is alongside.

#### 7.2.7 Getting Paid Right: 'You Don't want to Push Too hard Cause You're Scared'

Two factors shape the access of casual workers to their pay and entitlements. The first is information about their rights. Many young people – and older workers as well – lack basic knowledge about their rights. Several asked us about their entitlements in the process of interviews. This lack of knowledge about, for example, the casual loading, results in exploitation, as Sarah observes of one of her workplaces:

*Basically every single rule at that place totally went out the window and there was nothing I could have done about it and I was very, very ill informed of my rights and I didn't know, I didn't even have an appreciation of the award system because at school we never learned anything about it. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Secondly, many feel too vulnerable to try to have their legal rights and proper pay rates enforced. Sarah feels she 'allowed herself' to be exploited in her previous employment as a restaurant casual not only because she didn't know her rights, but also because she was afraid of losing shifts:

*I was being cheated out of my rights, you know by this \$12 flat rate. So yeah, at the time I sort of, you know, my main problem was I wasn't getting any money, that was the issue and then the \$12 I just accepted, you know, yeah whatever, because I didn't really know what my rights were and also you don't want to push too hard either like cause you're scared, cause I'd just started, they made it abundantly clear that I was a trainee and that I wasn't much value to them at that stage and all that kind of stuff, so I certainly didn't want to rock the boat too much by saying 'oh no here's the award, this is what you should be paying me', because he would have paid me like 10 bucks an hour if he had have got away with it. So to point to an award and say 'oh no, I see on midnight on a Saturday you should actually be paying me \$25' - he would have just laughed and probably told me to... you know. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Appropriate enforcement of legal pay rates is seen as an important issue by some casuals. Barney recommends a strengthening of the industrial inspectorate so that worker's rights are better enforced.

### 7.3 Paying for Work Expenses

Many casuals have to pay costs associated with their work and this adds to the financial pressures they experience. Mario must pay his own petrol costs as a roving care workers amongst the aged. As well as getting low wages, security workers like Patti and Barney have to buy their own uniforms and equipment – which proves costly if they have multiple jobs:

*We have to buy our own uniforms, which is, you know, very expensive if you work for four companies ... including shoes, torches, belts, shoes, uniform, packs, yes everything. The only thing the bosses supply - and sometimes they don't – is sunscreen. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Barney pays for all his training, licensing and 'batons and handcuffs and belts and all of that sort of stuff':

*You've got to pay for all your own training. The training to become a Security Guard in Victoria costs you about – I'm talking about a minimum now – about \$600.00 for your initial training. And each of the other courses that you need to do cost about \$400.00 each, so you do the Security Guard training, which is Security Guard Level 2 it's called, and that's \$600.00. You need also to have your First Aid Level 2, costs \$400.00. You have to have that. You're not allowed to operate without that. Then if you want to carry batons and handcuffs – and I will never go to any job unless I'm carrying them – then that costs another \$400.00, and then to carry a gun it's \$400.00 for training to do that. That includes about 80 shots with the weapons that you chose. Then if you want to have your own gear, which it's always wise, there's about another \$1,000.00 in belts, weapons, lights, all that sort of stuff. Plus, if you want to buy a gun, a handgun starts at about \$1,500.00 and runs up to about \$5,000.00. So they're the sort of costs that you're up for, if you want to do that sort of work. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

### 7.4 Youth Wages

Young people like Jackie (15) are aware of their comparative cheapness to employers while also seeing how their jobs meet their need for money:

*It helps them because we are cheaper. So it brings their costs and everything down and then it helps us out and I think there's not enough [adult full-timers] around. Maybe because younger people are more willing to do so much stuff for money or do the late nights and early morning just for the sake of getting some more money. Whereas [adult full-timers] probably really couldn't be bothered and wouldn't care if they were going to get an extra ten bucks or not. But I would. (Jackie, 15, supermarket).*

## 7.5 Financial Planning: Money and Life

Difficulties arising from pay and conditions shape the financial planning of many casual workers. Financial worries are commonly experienced by casual workers. These relate to four issues: having a low income, having an unpredictable income, difficulties relating to borrowing and credit, and fear of having no income. Many casual workers find it hard to plan their finances, to borrow and to save. Accumulation for retirement is also very difficult and older casual workers frequently mention their low retirement earnings and worry about their future:

*Because you can't plan for the future knowing that your work could end at any moment. And you can't plan to say well, let's plan our retirement, you can only plan for the next day. It really puts a big hole in your future. (Don, 46, truck driver).*

Others describe how being casual affected their plans for honeymoons, holidays, and general life. Many casual workers face limited financial options because of their casual status.

Because of the irregularity of income from their employment, casual workers often find it difficult to make financial plans, with some exceptions such as April. whose relatively affluent circumstances mean that she sees her wage as her own, while her husband is the breadwinner:

*I don't class [my earnings] as an income, I class mine as more like pocket money for me. That's one of my main reasons I go there ... I just like to mind my own business, I like to go to work get my money and come home. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

For most casuals, their job status makes financial planning more difficult:

*It is stressful because you never know when the next dollar's going to come and what bill's around the corner. ... [and] they never process your paperwork on time. It's always a month after everybody else's because you're only casual. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Monique feels that the unpredictability of her hours as a youth worker makes it difficult to make financial plans: 'Majorly ... Because you're never quite sure how many shifts you're going to get or when you're going to be working or what time of the day. It affects it.' Mary found it hard to plan her life when casual because of the uncertainty of income. Now, in permanent part-time work, she and her household can plan ahead:

*When you're casual you can't plan that 'okay I'm going to do this, this and this' because you weren't sure whether that money was going to be there to be able to do it ... So now I can actually plan ahead if I want to go to Tassie for a trip. Or if we want to go away for a weekend we can actually plan ahead because we know that money is going to be there to be able to do it. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Mario finds it impossible to budget for future expenses:

*The problem is of course it's not a steady income that you can budget with. I mean it fluctuates up and down on a weekly basis or fortnightly basis depending on the number of clients you have and the number of clients you lose. So you can never budget for the*

*future, never put money aside for all the little extravagances of life. So you've just got to do it and hope for the best. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

### **Managing Money: Barney's Plan**

*It's just awful to meet up with people who can't organise ... their money. With me, before leaving [my permanent job] I went to my credit union, and made sure that I had a \$5,000.00 line of credit. Okay? Because I knew it was going to be difficult. Thank Christ I did it. Then I established as many credit cards as I could, so that what I do is I organise all of my money. I've got one credit card for petrol, one credit card for food, one credit card for the bits and pieces I need for my work. So that I can keep it all well organised, and when it runs over for the month I can pay it out of my line of credit, which is around about 10per cent interest, as opposed to credit cards which are around about 18per cent. And I can organise my life, so that you've got your 55 days line of credit with your credit card. And over a 12 month period, I wouldn't save more than \$100.00 and I wouldn't be down more than \$100.00. But some months, like this month, I'll be down \$1,200.00. Right? Now for people who don't have access to a carefully coded form of credit like that, they are just in terror that their boss is going to find fault with them. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

#### **7.5.1 Borrowing Money**

The problems casual workers experience in financial planning are complicated by the difficulties of getting a loan without a secure income. Patti found it difficult to get a home loan because of her low and irregular income as a casual:

*Like nobody would give me a house loan for example. Because, well, for a start I'd have to get the deposit together, but I'm sure they wouldn't give me a loan, not on the hours that I do. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Allan, who has just bought a house, comments:

*It's fairly difficult to get a loan ... Fortunately, I'd been employed at the school for a long time. I think that weighed in my favour, but also my partner is a full-time employee ... and I think the bank would've taken that into consideration ... If my partner was not full-time, I think our chances of getting a loan or getting a loan that we want, or that is affordable, would have been a lot more difficult ... I think I probably would have had to pay more ... I might have had to go somewhere else and they would've ... charged me more or higher*

*interest rates or there may be fees involved. But I wouldn't have had so much choice. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher)*

He and his partner find it harder to plan given his casual status, and they try to 'make contingency plans for the eventuality that I am made redundant in my job, or lose my job ... There's always that at the back of your mind'. Dorothy cannot borrow money:

*I can't get a mortgage, [being casual] means I can't plan to have a break when I need it. Like, my son's getting married in Bali in September and I'm going to go but what that means is saying to people, 'I'm just not going to be here then' and taking the risk that that won't get me a contract in the next semester because I want to be away for a week. So yes, I haven't been able to organise any time out, I can't get a loan. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

Klaus had to work hard to convince his bank to lend him money by showing all his pay slips and threatening to go to another bank. He got his loan in the end. Jeff points out that becoming permanent means that he can now 'use interest free credit, and know that I'll have the money to be able to pay off a loan'. He had trouble convincing banks that he was in ongoing employment prior to becoming permanent, even though his casual work had been longstanding.

John a salesman, 43, cannot get a loan: 'You can't plan ahead when you're casual. When you're permanent you can go and buy a house and go and do things. I can't get a house because I'm casual'. According to Wayne, loans are impossible for casual employees – and credit cards have their limitations:

*Yeah, just to try to extend the credit card and then, you know, basically you don't always get an explanation but you just get a 'No'. People want to see some work history that's reliable and being a casual worker doesn't give you that ... I'd like to be able to feel like if I needed to get some financial help from a banking institution that they would give me a little bit more recognition. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

William finds difficult to plan finances and borrow in his present situation, especially when working as a casual:

*It does put some limitations on planning financially, because you can't be certain that you're still going to have work in the future. So for example, in my case, I've actually owned my own house but if I was doing anything like planning to upgrade to a newer car or say spend an extra \$50,000 on renovations for your house for example, or go on an overseas trip, it's really not within budget because you don't know if you're still going to have a job and I'm not prepared to take the risk of extending myself in case that happens. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

As a casual, Maggie has found it impossible to get a loan or contribute to her own superannuation:

*I was on the verge of getting a house and then I lost my job so without a regular job no-one will finance you, at all ... Everything. Absolutely. You can't even put super in. Unless*

*you're doing really regular work and getting a good amount of pay, you can't even contribute to your own super. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Moreover, a casual worker's financial plans can be disrupted by illness. Rhys argues, paid sick leave would help in this situation, as it does for permanent staff.

#### 7.5.2 Living in Survival Mode: 'As if you are unemployed'

For many casuals, their low and fluctuating earnings, and the threat of no earnings at all, add a great deal of stress and worry to their lives. Maria recalls that because of the unpredictability of her casual employment as an ESL teacher she was always in difficulties with money:

*Because I didn't have any money and I was constantly saving to cover myself in the holidays, I'd never had any money to do anything. I was never able to travel or go away, because I was trying to save. I never bothered buying myself any new clothes, because I was always in a survival mode. I always had at least \$4,000 in the bank, but I always felt that I was in survival, because I never knew what was around the corner. ... It also meant that, in the in-between times, between terms, teachers could only work term time, which is 40 weeks a year. It meant that for the 12 other weeks of the year you had no income derived from teaching. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Rebecca feels she is unable to make any financial plans because of the unpredictability of casual work:

*You can't. You just can't. We live sort of as if unemployed. Then you've got to have, make sure you've got the money to pay the rent and money for bills. Other than that you can't pay it on anything else. ... Yes. And then if you get a bit extra money it's woopey doo, you can go and buy an extra packet of biccys with the groceries or something. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

The problems of financial planning are intensified in the case of those casuals who are simply poor. Thus Rebecca and her student-partner have difficulty in living within their means because of her low wage:

*He's good and we try to be very tolerant about it, but I'm the one that gets upset about the financial, and you don't know from week to week how you're going to survive or what you're going to live on. You just don't know. We try to live [as if we are on] the dole but you can't do that either especially when you rent a house and you're not buying it or it's not paid for. You've got like over a hundred dollars \$150 or \$160 at least to pay out in rent before you even start. And then you've got your food and extras on top of that you know, like electricity, phone and all that stuff on top of that. It's impossible. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

## 8. Working Life: Training and Promotion

Training is important for workers to maintain their skills and to participate fully in the workplace. Similarly promotion is important as a reward for training and experience and a pathway to job security, higher earnings and respect at work.

### 8.1 Training

As Wooden and Warren have recently noted 'It has been well established that casual workers are far less likely to participate in employer-provided training programs than non-casual employees, even when other individual and job characteristics are controlled for' (2003: 3). This data is strongly supported by the views of casual workers, many of whom have no or little access to training, or must pay for it themselves or train in their own time. Others get minimal training that is instrumental to their job, or must train others in their workplace.

A few casual interviewees in our sample receive some training. Tony feels that casuals get their fair share of training opportunities in the nursing home environment, and their training time in his workplace is paid. Kylie feels she is able to get further training despite being a casual worker, but stresses that she has had to ask for it:

*Look, I think it is there if you push for it. I mean I also do the ad for the weekly catalogue, so I've been trained just to use the computers in that area, it is a bit of something different. [But] then, I enquired about that. So, unless you push for it I don't think ... like I know girls that have been there longer than me - it is probably not nice to say - but know less about things than me. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

Many casual employees are rarely given the opportunity of training. Monique feels she hasn't had necessary book-keeping training in her present casual employment as an office administrator:

*They haven't, no. Which has been quite difficult because I've had to do bookkeeping work which I didn't have any experience in. ... My dad is a bookkeeper. But yeah, there was no opportunities for training which is something I'm going to advise they do when I'm finished and get someone else. Because that's not ideal for me. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Casual employees also often find it difficult to take advantage of training that is available. The time that training is offered can be a problem. Sue's hospital shifts mean she is not able to take advantage of education and training opportunities during her paid work time, since she works in the morning and most courses are offered in the afternoon. Sue also feels that she gets less chance to develop her professional skills because she is usually allocated to wards with patients who are 'less sick': 'That's what I really hate about being casual is not being right on the ball all the time.' Margaret finds it is often difficult for casual workers to participate in training during their paid time, so it occurs mostly in their own time, if at all:

*Because of the nature of the casual work that I do, a lot of the times the courses are not necessarily the days that I'm working but if they were available on the days that I was working, I'm sure they'd give me time off. There have been courses where the conditions are that they will release me to employ someone else. So, yes, they are available but most of the courses that I've done, the training that I've done has all been my time. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Many casuals find themselves excluded from organisational structures and hence from related training. Rhys feels that casual staff are less likely to be involved in workplace structures like occupational health and safety committees, and hence less likely to get training:

*The permanent workers seem to be a little bit more involved with work in the sense that they want to get on to the committees and ... yeah, the committees I suppose is the main one, the occupational health and safety aspects, so the company provides them training but at the same time I feel a little bit pessimistically I suppose that it's just the basic level of training that they have to do as per government regulations. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

Some casuals may get training, but only in a limited form. William recalls that even though they had no obligation to do so, his host employer (but not the labour hire company) provided training 'to make your job easier' – in the casual worker's own time:

*That was reasonable considering, as we were only employed as casuals, our host employer didn't really have any obligation to supply a huge amount of training, but they actually did on occasions. These training courses were often done at weekends and we weren't paid for the time, but they actually paid for a lot of these courses that were done. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Wendy recalls some training as a casual but also she wasn't impressed with it:

*When I applied for a new position within the store, they trained me but because I've been working in that area before, I didn't need much training. But they did train you, but the focus isn't really customer oriented, so they didn't really train me as good as what they should have, but they did enough. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

Alice says she has received no training or opportunity for development or promotion as a work process operator in her five years regular casual part-time employment with the same employer. She has requested training and feels that she is falling behind in relation to technology as a result of it not being made available to her in the way it is to ongoing employees:

*Well, I think, I get ignored. I feel as if I'm being ignored and I don't know whether because I'm a casual or it's just the position I hold. I feel my request for training fell on deaf ears ...*

*Interviewer: And do you think people who are permanent or ongoing there get treated differently?*

*They do. Well they seem to get more training, a lot of the mid level people tend to get more training, more seminars to attend, they seem to have more opportunities to increase their*

*knowledge in whatever way shape or form, whether it's an official course or discussing with other people at seminars and things like that ... I may not be moving with technology. (Alice, 41, word process operator).*

Sometimes, casuals need to work harder to counteract their lack of familiarity – and the lack of support - within the workplace. Margaret describes the stresses of coming into an unfamiliar school environment:

*And a lot of times, you're thrown into a situation where you're given no training and there are no procedures whatsoever. So you have to say, 'Where are the procedures?' 'I don't know.' So you have to make them up on the spot. So it causes a lot of stress and other people don't have time to train you. So that's one of the downfalls, I suppose. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

### 8.1.1 Minimal Training

Annadjies describes her chances of promotion over her five years of full-time administrative employment as 'zero, because I am a casual'. She did however get access to the training and development that was essential to facilitate her doing her job: 'They were always good on that'. As a casual, Patti gets to do only the minimum necessary training:

*Well, I had to do a certain amount of training to be eligible to work. For example, I did a firewarden's course on Friday, which I was obliged to do because of the company that I work for. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Although Wayne has been told he has access to training while a casual, he feels he hasn't 'seen much of it yet' (42, security officer). Maggie only received the training that is mandatory for those that work with youth:

*See the training that they've done, it's mandatory for youth workers to have those experiences. So I've done my [National Certification on First Aid] years ago, and I keep updating them on a regular basis. But people who have come into this work haven't even got that. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Unlike permanent staff who were offered the chance for further development, Rachel was only given training which was directly relevant to her job:

*We were given training that was required to keep performing our jobs. But we weren't able to access any of the other training that were given to the permanent employees to further themselves, like management training and so on. I was lucky, early on back in my time when I came back as a casual, I had a great manager only for about six months who did give me some opportunities to do management training. And he was the only one ever. Across the board, normally, no, it wasn't offered to any ... Quite a few times I expressed an interest in ... health and safety and I wasn't allowed to do it because again you're casual, you can't do things like that. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

The quality of Sarah's training – at the hands of a 'prick' of a barman – was very poor:

*I got really, really shoddy training. I didn't know what was going on. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Most casuals say they have very limited access to training on the job. This exclusion reflects the general exclusion that many casuals feel, with limited access to workplace voice and a team sense. As Don, an ex-manager now a truck driver, put it;

*As a casual you're only taught the basics and you're really not part of the team ... You don't feel part of a team and I think you're kind of looked down upon.*

Dorothy has had some training provided by her employer, but can't spare the time from her jobs to do it. Her skills are under-valued, she feels and the area of university research assistance is treated as a 'student's job' rather than the demanding skilled job that it is.

Abby described how she often trained new employees without any recognition for the work: 'I didn't think that was fair because we didn't get any extra money for training them up' (30s, cleaner).

### 8.1.2 Quality of Training

Many casuals are taught by the age-old method of 'sitting next to Nellie':

*I didn't get trained to do the registers. I basically went into work to get my training and they sat me on the register and said, go for it. I didn't know what to do at all ... I had to ask the register operator behind me, she came over and showed me how and another casual worker ... My training session was supposed to go for about three hours. So the whole shift I was constantly asking her questions which is obviously interrupting her job ... I feel what we should have been trained in customer service because a lot of the casual employees that I've [learned] even if they've been working there for a longer time and they weren't very good at customer service and I feel that that should be have definitely been pushed more. (Jayda, 15, retail)*

## 8.2 Promotion: 'Once you're a cleaner you're a cleaner for the rest of your life'

As in the case of training, casual employees have fewer opportunities for promotion. For some casuals, promotion is not important. Sue recognises that her chances of promotion are 'zero' but she likes what she does and has no interest in taking on any management responsibilities:

*I enjoy the work I do. To move up you move into management and I don't want to do that. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Mary feels that she has had the chance of promotion as a casual, but has never been interested: the social aspect of work is more important:

*There are [chances for promotion] if I want to take them, but I don't want to. ... I wholly and solely took the job from the point of view of getting out in the community and meeting people. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Some casuals are optimistic about the likelihood of promotion. As a member of the OH&S Committee, Tony is confident of his own chances for promotion; he also believes that casuals generally get a fair chance – if they put the effort in:

*Yes, they can if they want [to] actually prove themselves. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Rhys feels he has a good chance of promotion because of his previous experience, but – in the same industry – Pattie feels that the ‘flat’ structure of the security industry her promotion opportunities are limited:

*I feel what I’m actually involved with and what I’m doing, I think there’ll be a good chance that there is going to be some opportunity in the future. Basically because what I’ve got myself involved in and what I’m very into ... a lot of other people can’t really compete with what I’ve done and what I’m doing ... not the types of people out there. I mean I’ve done a lot of training overseas actually, United States for example. And a lot of people have never even left the company so to speak. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

*It all depends. If, I’d say that there’s not room for many bosses in the industry, it’s ... the owner of the company and the obvious administrative people and then there’s a site supervisor or somebody who’s on for that shift that will supervise it and then the workers. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

A number of employees have the opportunity to progress to supervisory positions in fast food, supermarkets or restaurants, but do not wish to take up these promotions. They either see their jobs as short term (for a year or the length of their course), or as jobs where they do not want to take on extra responsibility. In the fast food industry, Daniel was never one of those invited to become a team leader and he did not look for this, seeing his work in fast food as a stage in his life when ‘I needed money and it gave me that’:

*Though there were some who could become crew trainers, they slowly become managers and work up that way. But that would only be one or two people from say the 40 or 50 that I worked with ... The vast majority of people didn’t have the opportunity and most probably didn’t want to do that either. (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

In some cases, years of casual work have stretched out unexpectedly, and career options have been ignored. As Emma said of her 15 years in restaurant employment: ‘it’s never been my career, but it has [turned out to be]. It’s been what I do for my whole working life but I’ve never wanted to sort of commit to it as a career because I’ve always thought I want to keep my options open, I want to perhaps explore other possibilities’.

Others saw little chance for promotion in their workplaces: these opportunities were reserved for ongoing employees, and casuals were seen as peripheral to the main core workforce. As John, a casual salesman, put it:

*[Promotion] in this company where I am in right now? You have more chance of meeting Jesus Christ. (John, 43, salesman)*

Allan and Margaret feel they have ‘limited’ chances of promotion:

*As a casual, I think your opportunities for promotion and advancement are severely restricted ... you're essentially just a casual worker. You don't have much standing. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher).*

*No. No, they didn't offer but there is an opportunity to apply for these jobs and I have done and it's sort of, once again, you need to have [continuous] experience. And a lot of time because you're doing different jobs all the time, you really don't have concrete experience in one area all the time. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Similarly, Wendy feels there has never much opportunity for promotion in a small country store, especially for a casual without much continuous experience:

*You don't really see much going on in stores like that. There's not that much chance for promotion. If you're really good at what you do and if you really want to become a manager or something, you've got a chance, but you've got to have the time on the floor [which I didn't have]. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

William recalls that in the whole five years of his casual call centre job there was no chance of being promoted and Mario dismisses the prospect of promotion for someone like himself:

*Once you're a cleaner I guess you're a cleaner for the rest of your life. ... I mean the management don't know me personally so they only know me by name and that's about it. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

Some managers ignore casual staff requests for promotion if they can get what they want done without it. Thus Rachel was asked to carry out higher duties when working as a labour hire casual in a government agency, but was never offered the chance of promotion:

*I kept hearing the whole time I was there: 'Rachel, we wish that we could offer you this or we wish that you could do this for us but you can't'. And then it got to: 'You do these duties for us, and we can't offer you the money or the title, but we'd really appreciate it if you did the role for us, did the duties for us'. So no, it was never, never even considered that we could get any higher than that. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Labour hire employees like Jeff feel that they had no opportunities for training or promotion 'absolutely none', even when they are on long-term assignments. They train and improve their skills in their own time.

## 9. Power, Collective Organisation and Unionism

It is commonly assumed that casual employees are not interested in being involved in unions. The low rate of unionisation amongst casual employees (half the level amongst ongoing workers in Australia) is often taken as evidence of this. However, many casuals find it difficult to join unions, find the right union, or are fearful about the consequences of joining. They are wary about the cost of being actively involved in collective efforts to improve working conditions to their employment security. These efforts are shaped by the low power that many individual casuals have, as well as their low collective power:

*Because their employment is not secure, they don't know how long they're going to be there, they're less likely to join a union or whatever, or to even know that unions exist. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Casual workers from a wide range of backgrounds and situations in this study have at some time or other sought help from a union to protect their interests. Even secure and confident casuals sometimes use their union for support. April has recently joined the shop assistants union, and this has given her a sense of security during an unsettling time of change in management strategy:

*They go through various changes as far as getting you to re-sign contracts and so forth and they wanted me to change from casual to part-time. It was just a sense of security by joining the union, that was all. Prior to that I'd never been in the union at all. But I just didn't want to go part-time because I knew I wanted to stay casual and have that flexibility, that's all. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Sue occasionally seeks advice from the nurses union, using them as a sounding board – but she doesn't ask them to take on any problems she may have, for two reasons. Firstly, she is fearful that she might be branded as a trouble-maker; secondly, she is skeptical of the role unions play in helping individual employees:

*It might [sound] pretty murky if you stand up for yourself too strongly I think ... I think they work for the whole industry but what I gather they don't really do much for the individual. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Rhys has changed his attitude to unions, having moved to a workplace where he feels a union could help workers have more say:

*I was very anti-union with companies I worked for before but I sort of agree with them nowadays. It's amazing how you change your attitudes and opinions after experiences ... We work for a company that is very un-union orientated now and at times it might be*

*better to have a union I feel to be able to have a little bit more pushing power so to speak.  
(Rhys, 29, security officer)*

Margaret does not currently belong to a union, but in her previous job as a market researcher she joined because of the relative insecurity of employment:

*I'm not in the union with the education department, no, no. But I was before for market research because there's more stability in this work than what there was in the other work, I suppose. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Although Monique is not currently in a union she has found them helpful in previous casual employment:

*In one of my jobs we weren't being paid the correct wages and so we all collectively joined the union and they helped us to get the correct rate of pay. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Wendy is enthusiastic about the union's help in a current difficulty she is having with management:

*I just feel like they're really helping me out a lot. The union's a really good idea to have.... I'd probably be out of a job right now actually if I was casual and this was happening to me now when I was casual. Yeah, I probably would be out of a job. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

Although 'only' a casual worker, Wayne feels able to defend himself against workplace injustice with the help of his union:

*I have had a boss, my manager, bully me ... but because I've been able to stand up for myself and, where necessary, get representation, I've been able to get it worked [out] ... I will always be a member of a union and I'll always encourage any or all of my colleagues to be members of the union (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

Although she can't afford union membership in her current position, Patti is a strong supporter of workplace unionism because of previous experience:

*I've always joined the union. In this instance in the security I haven't and it's for financial reasons not for any other reasons. ... I've had help from previous unions in other industries and for me it's like an insurance policy. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Some casuals have a strong union background. With his earlier experience as a shop steward in the health industry it isn't surprising that Tony is a firm believer in the importance of unions for casual workers:

*They give them support and some sort of stability. They help to protect all my entitlements. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Marko is a committed unionist, but feels his fellow workers are too fearful of their economic security to show support:

*I have a fair bit to do with the unions. I brought a union rep up here and tried to get the boys on the band wagon a few times, but a lot of people are scared and got money invested up here. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Some casuals seem unsure of the details of union support. Although she belongs to the relevant union Kylie is unsure what it does – except in terms of her pay:

*To be honest, the only thing I really know about them is they are the ones getting me my pay rise... So I guess I always think of them as a positive aspect of work (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

Currently, Maggie isn't a member of a union because she doesn't think they cover contractors – and also she feels she can't afford it:

*No, because as a sub-contractor there's no unions that cover you. If I wanted to join the union as a mentor with [\*\*], the fee would be too high so I wouldn't be able to afford it. It's just too high – it's the money. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Because she was not aware of any union representation Lynn approached her manager to represent the staff in negotiations with the larger contracting body:

*In the time that I worked there nobody ever really talked about a union or, there was no sort of representative as such. I did talk to my manager and I did say to her, look I think you ought to, we don't seem to have any go-between, you, our service and whoever is employing us. Maybe, you know you should be our representative because we need to sometimes get these things sorted out. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Rebecca feels that a union would be helpful to her as a casual worker in the printing industry:

*Yes. At least a little bit of support and a little bit of help. We've got nothing. If they want to work, good come to work, if they don't want you to work, well then you're out on your backside. They don't care. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Some casuals find that unions can be particularly helpful when they are trying to set up a more stable employment system at their workplace. Maria feels that the union was able to support her and her colleagues when campaigning for an award at one of her private school appointments, but only after being 'pushed' to do so:

*Eventually, it came good. But, we needed to push them. We needed to ... keep on the union's back to keep negotiating on our behalf. ... I think because at that stage private providers in the English language sector were a new beast. So, I suppose it took a while for them to realise ... I don't know. Maybe it had something to do with the union's workload, but they didn't seem to really take our particular case that seriously. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

William describes a campaign to get more stable contract employment at the call centre, where both the union and the casual workers themselves played a vital role:

*It was really important because if it wasn't for a few people with the help of the union to encourage us, it would probably be in a situation where we may still be employed under labour hire and be no better off. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Marko feels that in the absence of strong union presence, workers are vulnerable to individual contracts and inferior terms:

*And you haven't got a leg to stand on. If you've got any bit of an argument, you have to be a bit outspoken about something, all these AWA bullshit agreements they have got you on, they can just railroad you straight down the road. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Rachel is enthusiastic about the union's support for the workers' campaign to convert casuals to permanents in her government agency:

*They were amazing. I could not say enough about them and the support they gave me and the rest of the people. I don't think that we could've done it without them. Not just applying for the permanency with the agency, they also helped us applying for permanency with the department. Just the way they explained everything to us, they were always there. You'd just make a phone call and they'd back us up. And I learnt so much from them. And they always treated with respect. This is the difference. They always treated me differently from what I was being treated at work. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

There is, however, the problem of 'payback' from management if they want to discourage union involvement in the workplace. Sarah feels that casual employers will work hard to prevent their workers becoming unionised and amongst casuals, and will get rid of any casual who calls the union in:

*You've got the problem I said before, which is inherent in the casual thing, that even if you get your union rep in, they're going to drop you. They're going to make sure their casual workforce is not unionised because that's going to mean paying higher wages and whatever else. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Allan has little confidence in improving the situation of casual employees or that his union can assist in improving casual compensation, reflecting the weak power of casual employees:

*My union has suggested that they would like to negotiate for a higher loading of 30per cent but I personally think they have got no show in hell of getting anything out of the employer group. Our last pay increase expired on [date] and the union and the employer group have been in negotiations since then but the employer groups just don't negotiate, [they] just go 'no'. They can afford to because they know that the staff are highly casualised and chances of us - a lowly unionised very casual work force - actually striking to get an increase is minimal. If the teachers were to strike, the staff would simply be sacked. And they would send the employer more casuals to replace us ... None of us could afford to do that, you know, take the risk that we would more than likely lose our jobs. So we have to*

*wait and we're at the beck and call of the employers. It's up to them to decide when we get a pay rise and essentially how much it is. The union can negotiate and eventually it might go to some sort of arbitration but it's a long time happening ... A very powerless position essentially. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher).*

## **9.1 'Don't Rock the Boat'**

While unions have been a significant source of power for improving working conditions for individuals and groups of casual workers, many feel afraid of rocking the boat by joining unions, revealing their membership, or participating in union activities. Other casuals are unaware of a union that they could join or unsure how to organise it. Some have found unions unhelpful.

Many adopt an 'insurance approach' to union membership: that is, they are members in case they need back up. Given the current focus in many unions on an 'organising approach' - that relies on active union membership to sustain and increase union membership - union density amongst casuals may be unlikely to grow.

The difference in workplace power between casual and ongoing employees makes a significant difference to their capacity to unionise. This means that the effective capacity of casual workers to exercise the right to collective voice, is severely circumscribed. Amongst these interviewees, fear about such voice is a very significant barrier to union membership, and thus to collective voice.

## 10. What Happens When You are Sick?

Casual workers are not paid when they take sick leave. The casual loading is intended to compensate them for this. For some casuals, the lack of paid sick leave is not a serious difficulty. Some would rather have the cash loading in their weekly pay packet and some are rarely sick. Others have other sources of income so the loss of pay is not a big difficulty. When they are sick, they simply advise their employer and there are no negative implications beyond the effect on their pay packet. Indeed some casuals are treated very well by their employer. Mary describes the caring treatment she got from her country town supermarket employer when she was sick for a long period:

*They were absolutely fantastic. They were really good. I mean, there would be flowers sent to my home like I've had a couple of times where I've been off quite a length of time through operations and things. And there was always flowers sent. While I was in hospital, my night fill captain or management would pop in to see how I was going. There would be phone calls made at home to see how I was going. There was always that point of contact with 'how are you going?' and from the store manager point, it always came through, 'don't worry about us, you worry about yourself and get back on your feet'. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Tony finds that being off sick isn't a problem – he tries to make up the time and money later:

*I just [drop] time. I go to work as often as I can but I've just got to drop that money in my wages and try and make it up. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

When Rhys is sick, he simply rings in to report this. He is rarely or never ill so this isn't a big issue:

*Basically you have to ring up and say you're not coming in and that's fine, they have to cover you... they can't really say that you have to come in but at the same time you don't get paid. ... I'm not really sick at all, I'm a 29 year old male, fairly healthy and all the rest of it. I'm never really sick. About the only time I have days off is when I want them. I choose to have them basically. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

For Kylie, Monique and Maggie there are no problems in organising sick time off:

*You don't get paid at all. We just have to ring in and cancel your shift. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

*I am able to just take time off and I work from home when I'm sick and there's things to be done because it's flexible like that. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker):*

*In the contract there was a clause – but they crossed it out – that if you were sick you had to find your own replacement ... They can just give it to another person, or I'll just ring in to the coordinator and tell her I'm not available. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Although casuals have no obligation to the employer to work when they are sick, some casuals are grateful when management doesn't hassle them when they are ill. Wendy recalls that when she was a casual, her employers were 'lenient' about sick absence, but she didn't like to be away more than a day:

*They're lenient. They didn't worry much about it really. ...I'd take a day and that's about it. I didn't want to take any more than that. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

Since she is never sick, April sees no point in transferring to a more secure contract with sick leave:

*So in terms of that no, it's not worth it. And I'm never sick, so sick leave doesn't come in to the equation. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

Being a casual, Sue doesn't get sick pay; however she does not see this as a serious problem since her husband has a well-paid job and her income is not crucial to the family's economic well-being:

*Well, I think we never run a very tight budget so it's never been a problem (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

### 10.1 'How sick, how injured, how poor?'

For many others, however, being sick is a real problem. Casual employees carefully weigh up how sick they are in relation to the income they lose if they phone in sick. They often go to work sick. Sometimes the income they lose is not just the hours they are off sick, but ongoing hours as their employers look for very reliable casuals who do not take sick leave. Kate puts it like this:

*I do what a lot of casual workers do. You evaluate how sick, how injured, and how poor ... I might not be very sick but I might be feeling rich, so I'll have the day off, and I might be feeling quite sick but extremely poor, and I [go to] work. And I have worked when I've been quite sick because I felt that I have no choice financially. (Kate, 24, pattern maker)*

Kenneth uses the same framework and reflects on the problem of people going to work when sick (or 'presenteeism' as it is sometimes called):

*Somewhere along the line you have to call the shot yourself: 'Am I too sick to go to work? Am I really too sick to go to work? I'm only going to go in there and feel sick.' ... I think I'd have to be reasonably sick before I didn't turn up. (Kenneth, 49, retail)*

*Interviewer: When you compare how you used to deal with being sick when you were permanent and full-time, how would you compare it with the way you deal with it now [as a casual]?*

*Oh, it's quite different ... I recall working full-time in a semi-management position and basically deciding that for my own well-being I was going to have a psychological day off just because I think I really needed to step away for a day. But that's just not going to be a*

*proposition now and also when I really was ill - two weeks ago I caught this flu and I certainly would have stayed home but I try and recover more quickly and not contaminate everybody else but, you know, that's just really not an option.*

*Interviewer You've got to head into work and sneeze all over people?*

*Yeah, that's right. Give everybody the opportunity to be sick, yeah. It's not that great. I think it's a major problem. It's an undisclosed problem in places of employment now.*

Brad, a 19 year old produce worker says he usually weighs up how sick he is, only staying home if he is very sick. Daniel, 21 in the fast food industry, tried not to get sick: 'Or you try to go if you can'. He sometimes went to work sick:

*I'd sneeze and I actually vomited a couple of times ... I used to get bad migraines so, the hardest thing was if I'd get migraines and I'd be at work, working and it was very hard then to say 'I'm too sick to be working.' So that was the main situation that was really difficult, just to say, 'I need to go now.' ... Yeah [so I'd work through the migraine] too far and you know, I'd end up vomiting and go home. (Laughs) Having vomited, they'd let me go home. (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

## **10.2 'It really puts you in a spin'**

Don, an older man, doesn't like to have time off: 'often I would do into work ill' despite his concern about passing illness on. Genna at 60, and Julie aged 53, go to work sick in the different aged care services where they work:

*If I don't go to work, I don't get to pay my bills ... it's disgusting, it's terrible ... I won't go there if I've got a flu because I can give it them but if I'm really sore [I go] I've got a really sore back due to nursing for 38 years and I have to put on this front in front of these residents that I'm dealing with, because I can't let them know that there's anything wrong with me, so really it's a face thing you know. You hide it all and so you build all that stress up inside of you. (Genna, 60, aged care worker)*

*When it is your main income, [being sick] just puts you in a spin. It really puts you in a spin. That you're feeling like crap, you really shouldn't work, go into work, you've got the cold from hell, you've got the sore shoulder. But God, I can't afford to take two days off. And hopefully that you're sick on your days off anyway – the days that you would have already allocated to have days off. You just hope that you're sick in those days and not sick on your time. You do tend to drag yourself in a little bit more than you would if you knew you have that relief of having those 11 days off for you and could take a few sickies. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

Allan a full-time ESL teacher, has gone to work sick:

*On many occasions ... I will only stay home if I'm really sick ... I'd go to work sick more times than I would stay at home when I'm sick, put it that way. I think last year, I had a*

*week off because I had a bad flu. But if I just got a cold, I'd just go to work ... And most other people do as well. (Allan, 30s. ESL teacher).*

### **10.3 Accommodating Sickness: Working Intensively to Catch Up**

Not only do they not get paid when they are sick, a number of casual workers observe that when they are sick their ongoing work simply accumulates and so they must work more intensively when they return. As Dorothy and Margaret illustrate:

*I don't get paid. Well, I just had a situation a couple of months ago where I took ill on a Sunday night. I didn't know what was wrong and it turned out I had gallstones and I was having an acute attack so I was off work for two weeks and I mean, on the contracts I was on at the moment, they were all casual so I just don't get paid but then the horror of all that is that, because the casual contract is for a set term, you're still expected to finish the work in the same amount of time because when the contract ends you don't get paid more. And I've missed two weeks because I was off after an operation and so it just intensified my work even more.*

*Interviewer So you have to catch up?*

*Yeah, I'm working Sundays at the moment to catch up ... and with hospital bills on top of it and Centrelink won't pay because you're technically employed. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

Moreover, a casual worker may be expected to complete work left unfinished due to sick absence – in their own time, as Margaret has discovered.

*And if I am sick, I'll make up the time. Like if I've got a sore throat or I've got a cold or flu and because I'm working with students, I feel responsible that I don't like to pass that on, whatever, if I don't do office work, I would, for example, stay away and then I'll make that time up some other time. So you have to make up your time if ... you don't get paid for that, and that's why I get 20per cent loading I suppose. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Casuals tend to go to work when they are sick, 'grit their teeth and bear it', disregard their own illnesses, and sometimes spread their illnesses around. Maria recalls working even when she was sick – thus being a threat to others' welfare as well as her own:

*I remember going to work with a terrible flu and, basically the whole staff room caught it because everybody else was staying at work and not taking time off. It was stupid in retrospect, but really we didn't earn a whole lot of money, so you didn't want to lessen the amount that you had. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

### **10.4 Accommodating Sickness: Finding Your Own Replacement**

Sickness can be a problem for casuals since they don't have access to sick leave entitlements and can be penalised for being absent. Many take on the administrative task of filling their own job

when they are sick, in order to ensure no negative repercussions. When Patti is sick her employer is more concerned about the roster than her:

*If you're sick they get really pissed off because you're not available. Yes, they just get annoyed. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Sometimes casuals are expected to find a replacement if they are sick. Lynn asks the rhetorical question 'If a casual worker is unwell or on holidays, who takes their place?', recognising the pressure that she feels to come to work even if she is sick:

*I have a huge amount of energy and great resources and resilience, but I was unwell. I had a virus. I don't pick viruses up because I'm healthy but I'm not healthy because I'm overtired. I picked this virus up and I actually went to work because I'm thinking to myself before I go to work at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, who the hell are they going to ring to come in? (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

When Wayne is too sick to work, he can be asked to find someone else to take the shift:

*Well, if you're sick and you definitely can't work, well sometimes it's been put on me to actually find someone to cover the shift or, you know, cover the shift and if I can't, well then it's expected of me to work, which I don't think's very fair. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

In her previous jobs Monique has had to organise a replacement to take the shift. That has never been a problem, and doing so has protected her employment:

*And in the past I've always just been able to ring up and say I can't work today because I'm sick and usually I've got [it]... because I've had good relationships with people at work I've been able to swap with people. So I've never really had a huge problem. In the past the boss has acted like it's been a major issue but because I've organised someone to swap it hasn't had implications. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Sickness is a moment of real hazard for casual workers where they have no income back up. They tend to go to work sick, and their 'presenteeism' represents an uncosted externality of casual work, for both themselves, their long-term health and that of their co-workers. Paid sick leave is a reason behind the majority preference amongst interviewees for permanent work. As we see in the next section, paid holidays are also a significant part of that explanation.

### What Happens When You Are Sick?

*Well, I was in a position recently where I was quite ill but given the choice was either, you know, staying home and lose the money, so I felt that I was in a position where I couldn't... I couldn't do that so I had to work. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

*Well, it's just too bad. You either don't work so you don't get paid or you just sort of grit your teeth and bear it and go and work. Like I said there's no sickness benefits (Mario, 65, care worker)*

*For myself, it was [awful]. And it's not just those long sicknesses. It's kids being sick or parents being sick – you know, elderly parents – not just myself. I see other women come to work all the time leaving their sick kids at home because they had no choice but to work. So it's just really tough. I've sent my kids more times to school than I probably should've. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

*Most of the time, I ... carry on regardless. ... Yeah, that's why I go because I need the money, other than that I, like sometimes I just, I just don't want to get out of bed and go, but you have to. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

*I don't think I ever called in sick. I don't think I did. ... Yeah, I wasn't incredibly healthy I think I just, yeah I needed the money and I just didn't want to put them out. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

*I went to work yesterday, I had an accident in my car yesterday morning on the way to work but I still went to work ... I was pretty stunned. I was still in sort of shock ... but I got my work done ... I couldn't afford to drop the money and it was too late. I knew that they'd have to ring around and try and get someone. Within half hour of me starting work, for me to in ring sick, that's just the wrong thing to do for my workmates. They have to work short-staffed then ... You continue to go to work when you are sick, because you haven't got that sick leave. And when you're going to work, you're actually spreading your illness around someone else. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

## 11. Having a Holiday: 'That'd be nice!'

Experience around having holidays varies widely amongst casuals. Of course holidays are unpaid because the casual loading is assumed to compensate for them.

### 11.1 The Positive Side: Some Can Take a Break When They Want

For a few casuals – a minority in the interviewee sample - the lack of paid leave for a holiday is not a problem since they enjoy the flexibility to take holidays at any time, often relying on back up sources of income. Thus, with her current manager – and with a ready supply of replacements and backed by her husband's salary – April is able to take holidays when she likes:

*Well that's the thing, that's another reason why I like being casual because I enjoy quite a good life of holidays. ... [The manager of] the store that I'm at, she's a lot more flexible and she just lets me go on holidays when it suits me but that is not the case necessarily if you go to another store, I must emphasise that. ... I've already said to her you know, I won't be available in September — but I am fortunate enough that there's girls there who want more hours so they're happy to step in and take my hours from me. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

For Sue, the freedom to take holidays is a bonus:

*That is the nice part about being casual, you don't have to book holidays - you can go when you like. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

As a casual, Tony can arrange holidays - but hard to pay for them:

*I've got to save my money up beforehand. I did have holidays, I took two weeks off when I got married, which is about 18 months ago. ... That was a bit tight. I worked up to the wedding. I had a week off to prepare for the wedding but I also worked a couple of agency shifts which was casual in between time. It gave me a little bit of extra cash. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

Rhys is able to take holidays when he likes. He prefers to take longer, less frequent, breaks:

*Once again, we don't get our four weeks paid holiday of the year. At the same time that doesn't really affect me, I'm the type of person that I'd rather not have a holiday for a couple of years and then have a three month holiday for example or something like that. That's how I've been able to go overseas and then I've taken an extended leave from work and gone away for three, four, five, six months. I'd rather save up my money while I can, while I'm working and then budget for not be working at certain times and then go away for a long period of time rather than just be limited to your general four weeks a year like most people are. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

For some casuals the process of taking leave isn't difficult provided they give enough notice:

*As long as you give them a bit of warning, you know, two weeks warning, it never seems to be a problem with me. ... because I'm only 17 I have to go away with my family. It has never been a problem when I've needed to go away, to get time off work. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

## 11.2 The Negative Side

On the negative side, five main issues arise for casuals around holidays

### 11.2.1 Getting a break

First, is the question of having a holiday at all. The absence of paid leave creates financial barriers to having a holiday. Sometimes this is because they are low paid and cannot save easily in advance. For others, fear that they may be replaced while on holidays means that workers do not take a break. Many casual employees cannot afford to take a holiday because they do not have the funds to live on while they are not paid. Lower paid workers in particular report working for years without a break which many believe affects their health. Genna who has been working for many years in aged care for \$19 an hour says:

*I've never had a holiday for ten years, my dear, due to being a casual worker. Casual workers are put in this predicament where they can just say right you want a job [these are the terms], you don't want it, leave, we'll get someone else. (Genna, 60, aged care worker).*

In the same industry, Julie cannot afford to take holidays given her hourly rate (also \$19/hour), the difficulty of saving for holidays and the gap afterwards while you wait for your pay to begin again:

*It's awful, you tend to work through the holidays because your hours are so much less that you really can't afford to take time off. And when you do take time off, you have to start budgeting like six months before you take that time off to cover the basics, the rent or the mortgage, if you've got it, and everything else, because you're not going to get income for the time you have off and then depending on when your pay period is, you might take two weeks off, go back to work and then you're not going to get paid for [a while] ... If you're a casual, you had a week off, you're going back a week, but you're not going to be paid for another week, so that's three weeks that you had to budget for with no pay. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

It also affects their relationships especially with their children. Ironically, Kenneth has taken on casual work in an effort to find time to share care of his children (5 and 14), but finds that he cannot accumulate enough money to take a holiday: 'I sort of dream about holidays because I'm not going to be paid while I'm away and I'm not in a position to be able to accumulate any money to pay for a holiday so I don't think [a holiday's] likely to happen basically' (Kenneth, 49, retail).

### 11.2.3 Having a Job When You Get Back

The second issue relates to the security of ongoing work: many casuals do not take a holiday break for fear that being unavailable puts their ongoing employment at risk. Many are fearful that if they go away or are unavailable, they will be replaced. This is important for George, whose shifts are erratic, and so he feels he must work when it is offered. He misses holidays: 'I watch people go on holidays, I hear about their holidays when they come home from their holidays, I see them get paid for their holidays...'. His lack of holidays with his children – 'no holidays for over ten years' – is a defining aspect of his negative assessment of casual work. He is concerned about the impact on his children. His daughter goes on holiday with her grandparents 'and that hurts me, you know':

*When my 13 year old says to me 'Dad, my friend, they're all going on holidays or they're going here' and young Meg, they're going to Queensland with mum and dad for Christmas. I've got to work and I've had to work for the last ten years. My eldest girl's 13 and she's never been taken on a holiday by her mum and dad and that hurts me, you know? She must wonder why... and I explain to her 'Dad's got to work' and mum explains that dad's got to work but the whole system sucks because she's missing out, she's not getting quality time with her mum and her dad. I mean we can take her to the beach and sit on a Saturday or a Sunday but we can't do it for a week because I've got to bloody work. (George, 40, technician).*

Similarly, Lynn is concerned about taking holidays for fear of being replaced:

*I'm taking off the uni holidays. I'm going to take those three weeks and if they find another casual in that time - which is what I fear - if they do, then I'm not good enough that they'll keep me on - that's what life's about. I did take a few days and go to Holiday Island with the children because they said we need to go away, we need to be together. I mean if it weren't for my children I don't know where I'd be. ... Yes. It didn't happen when I went away for four days. They didn't say [anything], you know, and I didn't knock back shifts. If I go away for three weeks which I am doing, they may not keep me on. They may say - well they might not say anything, they just won't ring. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

### 11.2.4 Not Enough Money to take a Holiday

Some casuals don't take holidays because they can't afford them. As a casual call centre worker, William was in theory able to take holidays whenever he wanted, but in practice he was unable to afford this and rarely took leave:

*You could take holidays subject to the company that we were working for's staffing rules, but you weren't paid for it. So as a consequence, you couldn't really afford to take much in the way of holidays. ... I took two weeks in five years. ... the last time I took holidays was in 1994. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Because she needed the income, Rachel rarely took holidays as a casual – until her body began to suffer the strain:

*At first because I would go periods of, say, two to three years without having any time off. And then after a few years ... my knees, then I started to get a bit rundown. I started taking some time each year. So for about the last probably two or three years that I was there, I took, not four weeks in a year, probably took two weeks off every year. And I just had to budget for them and make sure I had the money put aside. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

For those whose need for money is desperate, holidays are an impossibility. Thus holidays are a luxury that Wayne dreams of:

*[Sighs] haven't really had a holiday [sighs] ... The thought of having four week's annual leave is just a pipedream. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

To Mario, the idea of having a holiday is a dream on his carer's wage:

*It's just out of the way with the sort of income that I get. What sort of holidays could I have and where could I go? Except for staying at home and watching television. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

Annadjies found not being paid for holidays 'dreadful'. When her children were young she had holidays only rarely:

*We never went away in five years ... We never went on holidays so my kids started getting used to mum having only two weeks off about Christmas and New Year (Annadjies, 30s, administrative worker).*

#### 11.2.5 Inflexible Holidays and Fitting a Holiday Around the Job

Of course many casuals have enforced 'holidays' when they are not called in for shifts. Some casuals take holidays when their employer shuts down. For Rebecca holidays are timed then:

*Last Christmas I went camping because there is no work between Christmas and New Year. ... So I go away just after Christmas and come back when the factories open in the new year. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Dorothy explains that she has two months of the year without any paid work while her university employers are away. She believes this is why they keep her employed on a casual basis 'so they haven't got to pay you over the long break'.

When Mary was a casual she was expected to fit her holidays around the permanent staff. Now as a permanent she gets the leave she asks for:

*[As a casual] you more or less have to fit your holiday ... if you wanted your time off, you more or less have to fit around your permanents when they were taking their holidays. But [on] the permanent part-time side, I haven't had holidays rejected yet. I've put in for two lots of holidays, I've got them when I've wanted them. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Some casuals find it difficult to take holidays because of their work situation. Instead of choosing their breaks, these are imposed upon them and around their jobs. For Marko, it was difficult to organise holidays because of the unpredictable workload:

*Well, you just have time off when you have to. You don't really plan, like I said – you don't know what you're doing from day to day. ... you know – you can get some jobs there, like you will plan to have a week off, and they will have a breakdown or they will pull a shutdown on you and they will ask 'can you sort of hang around for it'. And, I mean – you don't really know where you stand with them. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Marko also found it difficult to take holidays from a remote location:

*Well, I mean, the only time I really have a holiday is if I have got to go downtown, if I've got a family event on, or something, you know. ... Otherwise, because you are taking time off, you go down to Adelaide spending money and then you come back here. And if you have 3 days off, you've only got a couple of day's pay for the week and then it takes you a month to get back up where you were before. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

As a casual worker, Patti finds it difficult to organise a holiday. She has to organise her life around her work, rather than the other way round:

*Well, if I do want to have a break I'd ring up and say I'm not available on these dates and I risk losing the work, that's the alternative. Whereas, for example, if I know that there's an event coming up I won't plan to have a holiday during that time. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

In Sarah's case (24, a waitress/telemarketer) and a she had to resign to take a break: 'I had to quit my job to have a rest'.

#### 11.2.6 Not enough Holidays

Many casuals are careful not to take too many holidays and have a clear sense of what will be seen as a reasonable break and reasonable notice:

*I normally take ... probably four weeks a year. All I have to do is notify my employer when I'm taking holidays and for how long. There are restrictions in that: I just can't turn up one day and say I'm taking holiday tomorrow. I have to give reasonable notice. I've never taken holidays of more than two weeks, I don't think. So there is a sort of unspoken [rule] – we all know that to take unreasonable holidays would mean that you would possibly come back to a situation where you wouldn't have a job. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Jeff had had three weeks holiday and sick leave in the past four years, and went to work sick when he was not well: 'You tend to get run down fairly easily'. Abby also had difficulty getting enough holidays and, like Allan was careful not to take too many:

*You have to book a way in front – like six months down the track. Before everyone else does. Otherwise you'd have no hope in hell of getting the time off that you actually wanted because they never had cleaners for back ups at any of the sites. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)*

Abby had had two holidays in four years of casual cleaning. Her honeymoon break was dependent upon her husband working overtime. To save up for their honeymoon ‘He was doing 12 hours a day and that was everyday seven days a week and we just managed to put a bit of money away.’

Inadequate holidays have many effects upon casual workers, including on their own health and on their wider relationships. We turn to these in the next two sections.

### **Organising A Holiday: Julie’s story**

*It’s awful, you tend to work through the holidays because your hours are so much less that you really can’t afford - well, I can’t afford to take time off. And when you do take time off, you have to start budgeting like six months before you take that time off to cover the basics, the rent or the mortgage, if you’ve got it, and everything else, because you’re not going to get income for the time you have off and then depending on when your pay period is, you might take two weeks off, go back to work and then you’re not going to get paid for, you work for two weeks and remember you finish on probably a Thursday and you’re not going to get paid till the Friday. The days have gone where you used to get paid Monday to Friday, get your pay on Friday. I mean, in our industry, you work Monday to Friday but you don’t get paid till Thursday the next week. So if you’re a casual, you had a week off, you’re going back a week, but you’re not going to be paid for another week, so that’s three weeks that you had to budget for with no pay. (Julie, 53, aged care worker)*

## 12. How Does Being Casual Affect Your Health?

Many employees in Australia, including some casual workers, enjoy aspects of their jobs, including the social connections they make. They find these beneficial for their health and self-esteem. Kylie, for example, enjoys making friends through her job as a store assistant, which has improved her mental health she feels. April enjoys excellent health and has the time to exercise daily. Sue has been able to avoid the health risks experienced by permanent staff who experience broken sleep patterns because of their rotating shift. Sue works as an agency nurse specifically to avoid night shift and get hours that suit her and protect her health. Wendy a 25 year old sales assistant doesn't feel that her health is any better – or worse – as a casual: 'I don't think there was much difference'. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)

### 12.1 'I worry: Have I Got Enough Money to Tide Me Over. You Become Withdrawn'

However, the combination of job insecurity and work stress seriously affects the health of many casual workers. In some cases, bullying affects their working lives. In other cases, the stress of employment security affects mental and physical health, drives long hours or back-to-back shifts, creates health and safety risks at work, and leads to the deferral of health care. Further, casual status affects the reporting of workplace injuries and recovery from them.

Many worry about their incomes and security; these worries often spill onto partners. Jeff, for example, worries about 'how long I'm going to be at a particular job or whether I've got enough money to tide me over if I decide to have holidays, that sort of thing'. He tries to keep his work worries from his wife 'at any point in time, but I mean if it starts getting too bad, then I let her know and she says 'alright, that's why he's been in that particular sort of mood' ... You become more withdrawn'. Other workers also notice health effects, or fear ill health:

*It would break me if I had a major illness. (Barney, 67, security guard)*

Tony finds the work as a casual carer in a nursing home stressful. His stress is intensified by the fear of losing shifts:

*[It's] Very taxing mentally, fairly physical but I'd say very taxing mentally. ... [I'm] Pretty drained out when I knock off. ... [and] extra stress not knowing exactly what your money's going to be. You're thinking what's going to happen if we lose beds, and as a casual, you'd have to go first. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

While his own health isn't an issue, Rhys sees it might be a problem for someone who doesn't have his level of financial security, in a 'cycle' of sickness and lost income:

*Should someone not be in the same financial circumstances as me, being casual if you're sick you don't get paid so that if you're sick you don't get paid and then if you're sick*

*longer you still don't get paid and the cycle just perpetuates itself and you might get sicker because you can't afford things or medicines or going to the doctor or things like that. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

Monique feels that the pressure to take on casual work can be a threat to health, recalling a time when she became exhausted by trying to combine study with two casual jobs, one of which she eventually gave up:

*At one point I had two jobs at once that were both casual that got so much when I was at uni that I just couldn't cope with it and had to resign from one but it was nearly killing me before I did it. I needed the money to keep studying ... I was just doing extremely long hours and not getting a lot of sleep. ... [I get] tired and tired and all that stuff, I'm more stressed out and everything is affected in life. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Mary recalls that while she enjoyed her work as a night-fill person, at 47 she was beginning to suffer from the physical demands, intensified by the unpredictability of her casual employment:

*Because you hadn't give [your body] that chance to have some rest before you went into work that night. ... I mean to say you could be called in four hours before they wanted you to start. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

Lynn feels that her long hours are a threat to her own safety and that of others – further complicated by the fact that she is now studying five days a week at university:

*Now, sometimes I would work from 3 pm to 11 pm then I would stay and do a passive shift, which as I said are never passive and then I would stay and do a 7.30 am to 3.30 pm. Now at the time I did this I was thinking to myself 'I'm not actually sure I should be doing this. You know if something goes wrong and I make a blunder what will happen?' ... And that's why I got sick ... I mean, I said to one of [my] children: I'm going to be, I'm a real statistic ... I've never been vulnerable in my life. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

The unpredictability of Rebecca's working life as a casual makes her feel very stressed:

*I get very stressed because I don't know when I'm going to work again. I get migraines cause I'm just so stressed: 'how we're going to live, what we're going to do'. I get very stressed. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

Maggie feels that the conditions of contract and casual work affect worker's health:

*It certainly does affect your health, if you don't get concrete support, or you're working with people who are inexperienced, or you have bosses who are tyrants. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

'You Get the Fear'

Sarah recalls that her health began to suffer because of the insecurity and heavy workload of her two jobs, so she resigned from one of them:

*I had like eczema on my face and stuff which I had had before and I was getting migraines ... I was working seven days a week ... I left earlier because I couldn't cope cause I was getting really stressed because every single night they'd say 'you could lose your job tonight, you've got to get this many sales. If you don't that's it, you're out of a job'. You know. You'd get the fear which is great for morale at the beginning of the night and I just couldn't cope as I was waitressing as well and highly stressed, (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Some casuals are aware of a general impact of casual work on workers' health, but are unsure of the specifics. As Margaret puts it:

*I do grind my teeth so maybe subconsciously I do feel there is stress involved. I'm not sure. I think I've done [casual work] for so long now that I don't know what impact it has on me and then my children or family would tell me if I'm stressed anyway. ... From term to term, you're sort of waiting around and you might ring up and say, look, is there any work, and it impacts on your health as well. Just physical fitness, I suppose, just waiting around. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

Although William feels that his own health has not suffered, he feels that others are at risk because they can't afford to take time off:

*Not my health but I know in the work place with other people I'm sure it could have an effect on them in a negative manner, because they weren't able to take sick leave because they can't afford it. There were several people that I knew at our workplace that could not afford sick leave because their household income wouldn't cover it. They lived that close to the edge that they couldn't afford to have a day off. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Patti feels that long shifts without breaks are a risk to her health and safety – as well as to her security role:

*Well, it could be dangerous in the situation, where you're in a crowd control situation, for example, not having a break to eat and you start to feel a bit dizzy or a bit faint, or you're standing in the heat all day. You start to make wrong decisions, you know, things like that. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

Wayne sees casual work as a possible threat to his health for two reasons - the impact of financial stress and risky decisions at work:

*Well for one, you worry about your financial security. Two, you might tend to take more risks in the workplace with your safety, unfortunately. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

## **12.2 Health checks**

In some cases, uncertainty about working time means that casual workers - especially those whose households are depending on casual earnings - put off health checks and potential hospital visits. Dave and George describe how they put off medical appointments and how their work assumes priority in their lives:

*There's always an economic uncertainty around yourself and your position and that economic uncertainty means that – or it can, I suppose, lead to situations where you downplay health issues in the sense that you may choose to delay, to postpone medical treatment or seeking medical treatment simply because you either can't afford it or it's a choice between, 'well I can work today or I can go to the doctor to get that spot on my back checked out. Well, I'll have to just get that done later.' I've got to do the work, you know? And in my case I know there's certainly a couple of medical things that I basically should have checked out but I simply can't afford it at this point so when work improves I'll get myself off to the specialist but I've got the referral sitting there but I simply can't afford to take that up at the moment. (Dave, 39, market researcher).*

*My health has been affected greatly [being casual]. I mean two years ago I had precancerous polyps removed from my bowel, that is in the family. I had two days off work for that. I was supposed to go back in six months and I was told that if those polyps were left unchecked the doctor would give me five years to live. Now, as foolish as that sounds I haven't been back for another colonoscopy in fear of if they have to do greater surgery, the time it takes for me to take off from work, I don't get paid and two, the fear of losing my job to one of these young guns that have been there for six months that head down and arse up flat strap all day. And that's life threatening. It's only the last six months my wife's been heavily in my ear about it. I only spoke to my sister about it yesterday and she said 'George you've got to get it done. You know it is in your family'. But you know, as the breadwinner, the sole supplier of the mortgage payments, the car payments, you bloody well die just to pay these bloody bills ... It is bloody hard, it's really hard. And I was told in no uncertain terms, mate I'm giving you five years if you didn't have those polyps removed. And that was by a surgeon. Now, I know this is weighing heavily on my mind but it's just trying to find the buffer period because work's been a bit light on this year and you're trying to find a buffer to try and get maybe \$1,000 in the bank so that if you do have to take a week off you've got some money there to pay the bloody bills. (George, 40, technician)*

### **12.3 Depression**

Several workers talk about significant effects of precarious employment upon their mental health. These effects are most obvious amongst older men, several of whom have been seriously affected. They range from general feelings of despondency and depression, as Mario and Don discuss, through to persistent suicidal thoughts for George.

Mario finds he gets very tired and depressed from his work, which leaves him with little energy for life itself:

*I get very tired and very despondent that sometimes you get a little bit depressed of seeing a lot of the people you sort of get to meet over the period of time and they pass away or something happens to them. Yes, so it is. It's very tiring you know because a lot of the places especially the elderly ... their houses are not in clean condition unfortunately because of the personal situation. So yes, I'm always tired. You know, by the time I've finished work I just want to go to bed and really that's definitely my lifestyle. I mean I*

*work in the morning and come home and get something to eat, go to bed or watch TV and do the same thing again the next day. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

Don thinks that casual work severely affects people's self-esteem and mental health. Several of his friends have been affected like himself:

*A little bit devastated about the whole situation. Not to the point that they're going to chuck life, but their self esteem's not like it used to be and I don't think anyone should be put through that if they're decent people. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

For George, his unpredictable earnings, loss of face as a family breadwinner, and the uncertainty of his job has led to serious depression and suicidal thoughts:

*It's a terrible existence, it really is. And as I say you know, I've sat in my shed and I've contemplated the meaning of life, I really have. But I mean I'm too strong for that and I would never leave my wife and my children in such a terrible bloody way but I mean honestly you can get so depressed, you can sit there and ponder the meaning of life. (George, 40, technician)*

## **12.4 Work injury**

As with physical and mental illness, injury brings special problems for casual workers. Because of the lack of paid leave entitlements, casuals are under pressure to work while carrying an injury, thus risking even further problems. On at least three occasions Rachel has returned to work prematurely after injury, a decision which has cost her dearly:

*I had a couple of times I - I'm quite accident prone - and I fell and I broke my wrist and my elbow, had one day off, went and had it plastered and was told to take at least two to three weeks off work and not to use it. I just couldn't afford to do that so I went back to work the next day. So I'd had one day off and I went back to work. And I was working as a cashier at that time which needed both hands. Work wouldn't allow me to do lighter duties, so I kept doing my normal job and it was agony. And I'm still not properly healed because of that but I had no choice. I was a single parent at that time. I had to keep working ... And another time I had broken ribs - exactly the same thing. I was all strapped up, had problems breathing, had problems even moving or standing up. Same thing, I had to go to work. Twisting back and forth on my chair, cashiering and to talk to customers and having to stand for probably four or five hours in a day. It's a lot longer to heal than it normally would. But just no other choice ... Yeah, it's the same with anything that you break. If you don't let it heal properly or if the stress isn't taken off of it, none of them ever heal properly. I had a knee problem as well. When I was 15, I broke my kneecap and they gave it 20 years and it was nearly right on 20 years and it gave out. And I had to have that fixed. Well, I was meant to have eight weeks off work for reconstruction and I had one and a half and went back to work on a walking stick. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Many casual workers in our study did not report workplace injuries. This reinforces findings in other studies: a 2004 survey by Job Watch of 599 young casual employees in the fast food industry found that a quarter of young people had not reported a workplace injury to someone in

their workplace (Smiljanic 2004). This non-reporting is not confined to young people. In some cases, employees feel their jobs are at risk by reporting and in other cases their employer discourages them from reporting:

*I've had back and arm problems ... the first time I was going to fill out forms for [workers compensation] and the boss wanted to see me in the office. I went in with my husband and I was going to fill out the forms ... he didn't come straight out and say it, but he virtually insinuated that if I did put in a workers compensation form, that he would cut my hours back to nothing and he couldn't guarantee me a job. So I didn't bother to doing that and still worked but he went out and bought a back brace for me and actually paid for about five or six physio sessions and the same with my arm too when I had tennis elbow. He did the same thing there too ... One big con job ... Hubby had to work overtime to cover for my pay so it was just lucky he could do that at that specific time. So it kind of worked out in a way ... I wasn't happy at all. (Abby, 30s, cleaner)*

In the fast food industry, Daniel's employer had a lot of policy on reporting accidents but the pressure of work prevented many burns from being reported:

*I burned myself often. I would report occasionally ... but in reality it was often hard to find the time to report ... In fact the majority of injuries weren't reported. (Daniel, 21, fast food).*

It is not surprising that some casuals are reluctant to report injuries, given their weak workplace power. Genna did, with significant consequences for her working time:

*This registered nurse worked with me, this was last year, and she hooked up a resident on a lifter by herself and you're not allowed to do that, it's against the law and I went up to the room because I had to pump up the lifter and I said to the registered nurse, this lady is going to fall out of the lifter, we have to put the strap on her down near her back ... So anyhow what she did was she said 'oh, just move I't and moved the lifter up and I said 'I'm sorry but she's going to fall out'. She said 'move the lifter Genna' so I started pumping the lifter up and I could see this lady was going to fall, and I said 'I'm not moving her any more'. She said 'move the lifter' so I pumped it up a bit more and you know that lady fell out the lifter on the floor ... You know what [the nurse] did? Reported me and said I did it. Then that person refused to work with me at any shift. I lost work because of her. (Genna, 60, aged care worker)*

## Work Injury: A Hazard for Casuals.

### Gina's Story

Gina, for example, is now 56 and worked for 16 years as meat packer. English is her second language. Like many casuals she felt distressed at her lack of recognition in the workplace, alongside her poor conditions and low pay. She did not receive any superannuation. She expected long service leave when she finished her job but she was not paid it, despite her protests and her efforts to pursue it. While Gina was a long-term casual, she did not know her hours for the next day until the night before. She usually worked 30-50 hours for about \$13 an hour, and often did overtime. She often went to work sick and when she left 'they didn't say goodbye' – 'Not even a cake' her husband said. The events that eventually drove Gina to leave the labour market, however, relate to her treatment when she was injured at work. She resigned in the end when her return to work plan had left her in pain:

*I injured my back there. I was on WorkCover and I was out of a job for maybe two years. I went back there three hours, three times a week, light duties. And then I couldn't do it because, the work, the room there was so cold and it affected me too much, my back. So I decided to finish everything with WorkCover and that's it. I didn't want to go nowhere because my back was really, really in pain.*

Gina felt she had worked hard for her employer and her family for many years, doing the housework before going to work 'my family first and then my house and then other things'. She felt she was a hard worker: 'I really worked hard, and I looked after that company, very very well actually'. The outcomes for her, however, have been many years of a low hourly rate, no paid holidays, no superannuation or long service leave and an injured back, shoulder and neck.

## 12.5 Conclusion: Worry, Rest, and Mental and Physical Health

Reports of negative health effects arising from casual status are common amongst casual workers. While burns and injuries are more often mentioned by young casual workers (and are mostly not reported), older workers talk about debilitating physical and mental health effects.

Some of these are serious, ranging from deferral of important medical tests and preventative health checks, through to persistent depression and suicidal thoughts. These effects reach well beyond the body and mind of the casual worker: they also affect their families, friends and communities in many cases.

## 13. Relationships, Social Life and Community

Casual work has an impact that extends well beyond the individual employee and their health. It sometimes has positive effects upon individuals, family and households, on relationships and upon social life and community involvement. Like other workers, some casuals find that work is a place of social contact and community formation. For others, having some days off means they can maintain their friendships and enjoy community activities and sport. Engagement in these, however, depends upon two factors: predictability of work (including the days and hours of work and finish times) and the opportunity to refuse to work certain times without negative consequences. Some casuals work in these accommodating circumstances, but many do not.

On the positive side Christine's days off allow her to maintain her social contacts and as a casual she can take leave and holidays with her husband, which she values. If she had a permanent part-time job, she would not be able to holiday when she likes. Donna believes that being employed less than full-time has saved her from divorce. The critical factor for her, however, is not casual employment, but being less than full-time, as she clearly articulates:

*My husband loves the fact or appreciates the fact that I've chosen to take casual work. I mean, he'd be just as happy with permanent part-time. He's pleased that I have not gone on to take on full-time work because that would directly impinge on his – because then I would demand that he takes a lot of time off to look after the children. And given that they've been sick so often, it would strain us both. I may have set feminism back (laughs) a hundred years but I think the importance here is not just to our children but the relationship itself. I do believe that given the health circumstances of our children, if I had chosen to take on full-time work and put as much focus into my career as my husband did and demand him to put in equal time with looking after the kids when they're sick, I'd be a single mother today. I could guarantee that. (Donna, 41, receptionist clerk).*

### 13.1 Effects on Individuals: Feeling Demoralised and Disposable

On the negative side casual employment can undermine self esteem and their activities in the community. Recalling her experience as a teacher on insecure contracts, Maria feels her professional satisfaction was outweighed by the poverty and loss of confidence she experienced:

*I felt demoralised the way my life was heading, apart from what happened in the classroom – that was a separate area which was quite buoyant. People derive a certain self-respect from their positions and, if you constantly feel that you're in a position where you're getting nowhere, you're not respected, regardless of what your students think of you, it's quite difficult to be able to hold your head up high amongst company. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Wayne feels that being a casual worker lowers his self-esteem because he doesn't value what he is doing:

*Sometimes you sort of tend to say, 'Well, I'm only a casual worker' ... So it's a bit of a self-esteem issue there and generally the casual work that I've been doing is not the area that I want to work in anyway so I'm sort of ... What I'm doing, is I'm just working for the money, not for any sense of satisfaction. So it's frustrating and when one's feeling down about life, the universe and everything, just thinking about being a casual worker doesn't make you feel much better. (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

As a casual employee Maggie feels devalued as a 'disposable' worker at the mercy of her employer:

*You kind of feel that you're a persona non grata and that you can just be discarded at the whim of your employer. So you don't feel very valued as a worker. You're just another number to fill up the quota basically. That's the impression I get from other people. It's very insecure. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Sarah describes how casual work had a powerfully negative effect on her self-confidence:

*Because not only have you got the stress of you know, the frequency of the work and you know the moment's notice and stuff, but the work environment itself and the culture. Like, I wasn't being treated well at either of those places and my confidence really went down and you know, it was really, really taxing ... I was highly strung all the time. I was just depressed and stressed and you know because both these jobs, I was starting out as a waitress and they're telling me how stupid I was, and telemarketing, you know every single day telling you you're going to lose your job to the whole group. And because I've got a really solid work ethic that really crushed me, I thought if I get sacked I'm going to be devastated you know, that was hard. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Where previously skilled and experienced people have been personally damaged by having to take on poorly paid casual employment in later life, these effects are very pronounced. Thus Mario, previously a senior manager, feels embarrassed about how other people might see his present job as a casual cleaner and care worker for the elderly and disabled:

*You know, you're reluctant to tell people what your occupation is, what you're doing. They ask you and you try to avoid to answer them. It's a matter of pride I guess because after all I used to be in a senior management position, within a financial institution and then all of a sudden you're down to a low level as a cleaner. I mean minimum wages. So it does affect your sort of feelings, how you feel and how you perceive yourself to be in the eyes of everybody else. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

### **George's Story: 'You feel like an absolute friggin failure'**

*I'm the first one [affected], being the breadwinner, I'm the first one that gets down. I mean for instance it was my anniversary yesterday and because of being cancelled, like I say those two days they cancelled my work, I couldn't afford to buy my wife an anniversary present or take her for tea somewhere and make her feel special. And that got me down. And on our anniversary my wife is saying to me, 'come on George it's not so bad' you know... but I was depressed.*

*Interviewer: How did your wife react?*

*Well, it's hard for her too but she doesn't tend to get as worried about things as I do. Probably because she knows I'm down about it so she tried to pick the mood up. But you can see that she's worried when it's... our eldest daughter goes to a private school and we've got to try and find the money to pay for her school fees and if we're struggling that particular week, I mean you know? For instance my wife opened up the letterbox today and there's the telephone bill in there. And she hides these things from me because she knows if I've had a week off work, she hides them from me because she knows I get depressed about them ... It's put enormous strain on our relationship in many ways. I mean for my wife to see me sell my boat that I've worked so hard to buy and for her to see me sell it, I mean that made her cry her eyes out. She didn't want me to sell it but I had no option. And last year, I had to pay the mortgage, I couldn't stand by and look at the boat in the backyard - I couldn't afford to put fuel in to take fishing but yet it was doing nothing and I could see the value in selling that boat to keep our heads above water. But that really broke my wife's spirit, that really affected her to see me have to do that. It's affected us in many ways to the point where we've had arguments about money. And when the money's not coming in on a regular basis... I mean that's easy for somebody to get the shits and say well, what did you buy that for, we can't afford that you know. And this is what casual work does because you've got no steady income, you just can't rely on anything and you can't wake up one morning knowing that you've got five days work this week. You always got to keep a budget, you've always got to worry 'am I going to go in to work tomorrow?'*

*The children are only young so ... although my eldest daughter's 13 now ... I mean look, to hear us argue the kids cringe. I see my 13 year old girl hide if me and mum have argued over something that's brought on by a work related stress incident or having no money in, it has affected the kids in ways. I mean there's times where for instance my daughter needed money to go on a school camp, we had a lean year ... we just had to apologise to her and say sorry, we can't send you to camp. And all her friends have gone to camp so that affected her ... She cried her eyes out. I mean she bawled her eyes out. And as I say she's 13 years old and she cried like a baby but there was nothing we could do ... It's really hard. And then you feel that you've let your kids down. And like I say, being the sole provider I feel like I've let the whole family down and I just... I mean I have to be honest, there's times that I have sat there and contemplated just suicide because I've been so bloody depressed about not being able to provide for my family properly. You know, feeling like an absolute friggin failure.*

## 13.2 Family: The Effects of Casual Work Transmit to Households

Casual employment can also have an impact on an individual's family life. Unpredictable working hours make planning for family events very difficult. Many casual workers are concerned about the impact of their jobs on their partners and their children. George, for example, reflects on the impact of his 10 years of casual work on himself and his family. While the primary effects are felt by him, they extend to his whole household (see box). For Sue, the unpredictability of her hospital shiftwork has affected the organisation of her household:

*We would often make two sets of plans for the next day. One if I was home, one for if I was working. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Marko describes how family life in a remote town is highly vulnerable to the casual worker's unpredictable hours:

*You know, like when you're supposed to [say] 'rightio, I'm home for tea tonight'. You know your job for the day there and you are expecting to get out early and the next minute something gets held up and you are [held] back for 2 or 3 hours and yeah ... Some blokes get promised 'come in on a Saturday and that, have a bit of an early day and work 4 hours' and they end up being there for 12, you know ... They have got the day planned, they are going to take the kids for a barbeque, or something like that ... Obviously things would be hard on kids if they think they are going to have a barbeque with their old man because he has been promised and certain delays ... have held them up. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Wendy has had difficulty taking her mother shopping 'because I'll be called in to work' and Wayne's casual shiftwork means that he sometimes misses out on the satisfaction of being with his children, both at bedtime and in their sport:

*Well, you know, I don't get to always put them to bed at night. Sometimes I get home and they're already asleep so I don't see them 'till the next day ... Well, it's just things like having active children that want to ... you know, discovering the life of organised sport, you can't be there, you can't be with them every week ... So that takes its toll and you can't always expect children to understand, you know, 'why is dad's work more important than coming to watch me play football or something?' (Wayne, 42, security officer)*

Rachel is conscious of the impact of her casual work on her children:

*Because they didn't have me when they needed me most like times when they were really sick or when I was feeling so stressed out about what was happening to me. And I brought that home from work with me. ... It's just the most horrible feeling. You feel guilty and I felt like I've let them down. It would just devastate me some days. I would just cry. I would just come home and cry and still try to be there for them and then, on my own. On some days, it just felt like it got too hard to deal with but we got through it. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

### **Genna's Story: Working Casually As A Grandmother 'I can't help my family'**

Genna who has been working casually for many years in aged care, does not have a social life. She lives alone. She treasures her family but her casual job affects her relationship with them, including with her grandchildren:

*I have a beautiful family which I'm happy that I've got. I've got some girlfriends that I've had for years [from] when my kids were little and that's what 30 years ago, because all my kids are married now. But I don't have a social life ... Yeah, because of the hours that you do you can't. See all day today I'm going to be up, knowing that I have to go and do night duty tonight. I'll try to lie down this afternoon about 3 o'clock but I won't go to sleep, but I'll just relax my body and all things go through your mind: 'Why are you doing this? Why am I doing it at my age going out at 11 o'clock to work?' ... I can't ever be there for them ... I can't help my family. Like my son really went for me the other day, he said 'Mum he says I've got two sets of grandparents my children have and none of you can help us'. I said 'well I'm sorry Mark I'll mind your children if you pay my bills'.*

Don's change of status from permanent manager to casual truck driver has affected him and his wife and children:

*Because I was frustrated, I was upset, I was very niggly towards my wife because I felt like I wasn't the main breadwinner and wasn't performing properly so I thought to myself I was a little bit underdone and I took it out a little bit at home. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

Kenneth has had a similar shift from manager to newsagency worker, and describes the impact in relation to his children:

*I feel terribly guilty because I can't give them everything that they want. I mean, they've got everything that they need. I mean, sure, they're not going to get everything that they want but it would be just nice to be a bit more casual in an approach to spending money rather than having to plan and think everything through before you buy anything, really ... I'd like to take them away or, you know, have a holiday somewhere else. But no, that's not going to happen (Kenneth, 49, retail)*

Financially he finds 'it's a real balancing act'. Having separated from his wife, he cannot see his way to buying another home:

*Because, you know, you can only theorise on what you're going to get and really, it's only about a week ahead and for instance, I don't have any credit cards because I think that that could be a problem ... [Borrowing] that is an issue because I've talked to the bank – I've got a car loan and another personal loan, which were both taken out while I was employed full-time and it's pretty difficult to maintain them ... You know, sometimes you just don't. You've got to – you wait to receive a call [from the bank] or make the call. Not much fun. (Kenneth, 49, retail)*

Annadjies casual conditions restricted her participation in school activities which she and her children regretted:

*The younger one, because he always talks, [says] 'Mum, mothers come to opening days, and mums come and attend all these sport activities and things...', but I say to him 'I'm sorry my kids, but I'm casual and I have to work, if I don't work, I don't get paid'. (Annadjies, 30s, administrative worker).*

Her full-time casual employment had placed a strain on her relationship, with its extended hours and intensity:

*When I had worked that long hours, it definitely [affected our relationship] because we argued much more.*

Annadjies believes that getting a twelve month contract (as she hopes to soon) will be good for the whole family:

*Because I think the whole family will feel more relaxed because as an immigrant, we do need also the money ... We have put off buying our house for 3 years before we decided, well, okay. We didn't just jump into the market and get a house, and we still feel a bit scared: if I lose this job, how are we really going to pay for everything?*

### Planning: 'Everything's Just a Maybe'

*Well, it puts stress on the family because it's like, are you working this week or not? Are you working this term or not? (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

*You don't really plan, like I said – you don't know what you're doing from day to day ... like you will plan to have a week off, and they will have a breakdown or they will pull a shutdown on you and they will ask: 'Can you sort of hang around for it? And, I mean – you don't really know where you stand with them. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

*You could never actually often commit to things. Just like if had to go: Oh well, I might be there but I don't know and depends on work. I said that a lot...Yeah. And I think that frustrates people sometimes. Lots of people understand because it's the same for them when you're studying. Yeah, I think it does [affect you] because you're never quite sure what's going on so you can't really say: 'Oh, I'll definitely be there'. Everything's just a maybe. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

*You felt held back because you couldn't really — because you felt like they're going to call me to come in to work, so I can't go and do that. In a way, yeah, maybe it was you feel like you're held back a bit. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

*Well, it makes it difficult for me to plan anything. I can't plan to go away on holidays. I can't plan to go out to dinner and have a few drinks, for example, because I may get a call to say, you know, 'I want you to come in and start a shift,' and I can't have any alcohol 8 hours before a shift. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

*I've always been really involved in my son's football team. It got really hard for a time. I don't know. I think it's just again the pressures and the stress and not so much the financial side but just the pressures of it. You just can't plan to do anything. You just can't. You just can't plan ahead more than a couple of weeks because you don't know what you're going to be doing. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

*Because you can't make plans to go and do anything. Like if I'm going, if my daughter says 'all right then Mum let's go out to lunch tomorrow', I say 'yeah okay but I'll give you a ring if I've got to go to work'. So you can't make definite plans for anything. ... And if friends say you know, oh if you're not working, they'll say oh come over Friday night and have a few drinks, oh all right then if I'm not working. You know it's always if I'm not working. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

### **Planning** (continued)

*It gets up their nose because I can't plan. They don't mind if I'm not available providing they've got warning and do not like me cancelling things and I cancel, and then I say 'look it's the work'. And they say 'all right, all right, we know you want to do the work, okay'. And they're really good about it, but I know secretly that sometimes it gets up their nose. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

*The hours are just so irregular that it's just difficult to plan your life and to have your time out sort of and I think that's the biggest problem I've had with casual work (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Julie feels that her casual night shift work in aged care has affected her as a parent, as well as her daughter, 'greatly. Because I want to be there when she needs me to be' (Julie, 53, aged care worker). Her unpredictable work had also affected her capacity to be involved in Meals on Wheels: she could do it when she worked permanently on days, 12 years ago, but has had trouble contributing when she is working casually.

### **13.3 Relationships**

The stress and unpredictability of casual work also affects personal relationships. Interviewees across a range of occupations and ages discussed these negative effects. Some of these effects are felt within existing relationships, but a significant number are also experienced in relation to the formation of new relationships.

With the stress of two insecure jobs Sarah found her relationships with her boyfriend affected, especially when she wasn't allowed time off to go to his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party:

*Yeah, well it had a really significant effect on my relationship with my boyfriend at the time because we were living together at the time and it was highly stressful. ... I really wanted to get that Saturday night off, or to be able to finish early and they just outright said 'no, you're not doing it' ... That was really devastating, it was his 21<sup>st</sup>, it was a big occasion, that I just had to miss ... But the thing is, it was a casual: in theory I should have been able to give them a moment's notice. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

Lynn is conscious of a big impact of casual work on her own relationship:

*[There is] Enormous pressure because it does screw up your life, I mean, you're just not available and partners actually don't like it. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

#### 13.4 Relationship Formation

Previous research has suggested that precarious employment may be contributing to delayed or failure to form-relationships especially for prime-age men (Birrell, Rapson and Hourigan 2004). Our study confirms this. The effect extends to younger women. For example, Maria felt her relationships with others were compromised by the insecurity of her employment status:

*I didn't form any close relationships because I always felt that I was on the lookout for myself. I never felt that I was able to relax, because I knew my employment was temporary, I didn't know where it would be the next year. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Rachel feels that casual work has had an effect on her ability to develop new personal relationships:

*Well, you just can't really take time. I guess that's the first thing to be with someone. And you can't just leave the kids with anyone or that kind of thing. I guess it was more just a time thing and also the stress thing. You know, the feelings of stress and not knowing where you're at. And money wise, I guess, financially, it's hard. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Emma, now 24, felt her 15 years of casual work in various restaurants had 'annihilated' her social life and affected her capacity to form relationships, which she feels more as she grows older:

*I really resent the fact that I had no social life, no weekend social life and couldn't spontaneously say to a friend, let's go out for a movie tonight or on the weekend. And the older I've got the more important my friendships are to me and so I thought - they're not going out raging all weekend now, but I thought I just want to see my friends more, hang out with them more, be able to say come over whatever, to do something ... when you're younger and certainly from a student perspective, it's fine, all your friends are in the same boat. They are all in casual jobs as well, while we were at uni together so everyone was working funny hours, funny days, funny times. You'd catch up late or you know it was fine to meet at the pub at 1 a.m. which I just couldn't do now, but as I'm older and most of my friends are in full time employment, so I think I want to be able to see them more. They've only really got the weekends now or they're exhausted on the Sunday or they don't want to go out on a Wednesday ... It certainly hasn't been conducive to meeting boyfriends or partners or anything. (Emma, 24, hospitality)*

Similarly, Kate reflects on her nine years of casual work, combined with being a student. Her casual work has affected her relationship with boyfriends and friends in general. She reflects on how many young people now adopt a 'last minute' approach to social life which is not very healthy in her view, and requires them to prioritise work over life:

*[Doing casual work affects] social events. I know when I was working in retail I was only very young, I was sort of at school and just started at study at uni and I was in a relationship at the time and my boyfriend used to get really angry that I didn't consider plans with him to be more important than being called into work. And I would always say yes to work, I would always tell him we had to put off whatever we had planned ... It had a really negative impact. It made a great deal of stress between the two of us over the years, he really resented it. (Kate, 24, patternmaker)*

*Interviewer: So do you think, given that a lot of young people are working the kinds of hours in the way that you've had, that it affects relationship formation?*

*Definitely ... I mean I know that with a lot of my friends ... everything's very temporary, you don't make plans. You know, we all rely on mobile phones and being able to bail out on people at the last minute. And I think it changes your sense of responsibility to your friends and to your relationships. You're sort of put in this position where you are forced to prioritise work all the time because it is how you survive. And it is so precarious that if you do say no to shifts they do stop calling you. You know, if you're the person who's first on the list of on-call people and you say no you lose that spot. And so you do learn to prioritise work over the rest of your life which isn't really very healthy ... I think it doesn't help that we're all so used to it now that we sort of expect it from each other as well. We've learnt to forgive people who bail out on us at the last minute because we know that our work calls and that has to be prioritised.*

### **13.5 Living 'Minute to Minute': Work before Relationships**

Kate describes how her friends now live 'minute to minute ... a bit on call':

*It makes you learn to live minute to minute, financially and in terms of your activities and your relationships and everything you're doing. Everything is always a bit on call. You don't really have... if you have a lot of money to do... you want to go out and do something it's usually because you're working every hour that you possibly can be and the last thing you feel like doing is going out. You always think you have money and you have no time or you have time and you have no money, the two are so heavily linked. (Kate, 24, patternmaker)*

Younger casuals also discuss the effects of their jobs. Jackie finds that her school work, sport and school play activities are squeezed by her 15 hours casual work a week. While she chooses to work, the hours are sometimes longer than she wants and her social life has to be more carefully planned now:

*It's a lot more difficult to go out. The money side of it is great but it is a lot more difficult to go out and I need to be a lot more organised and say, okay, I can only go out with you in this period of time because I need to do stuff. (Jackie, 15, supermarket)*

An older worker like Kath, who lives in a country town, feels that her relationships have been positively affected in many ways in moving from casual night work to permanent day work. Kath feels that she is now able to be a grandmother who is not a 'crabby granny' and her

husband says ‘Gee it’s great to have the old Kath back!’ She is now able to do a range of voluntary activities that she enjoys and participate in her community:

*I love doing things with schools, if they need help somewhere, which if I’m able to, help them with, I love fundraising, and being able to help in that respect. I have done fundraising for the hospital and that here, and it has given me the chance to be able to do it. (Kath, 40s, retail).*

### 13.6 Social Life: ‘I’m on the edge of society’

The social life of casual workers is also affected by the nature of their employment. Unpredictable work makes social participation difficult. As does low income, variable shift and finish times. If work comes up, many feel they must take it. For example, Mario feels he has lost some of his friends because of his job as a casual cleaner, and Maggie feels that being a casual worker affects her ability to have a social life:

*Well considering my family relationships, it’s about making the time and effort. I think for me I feel like I’m in that position where I’m on the edge of society, and I feel like I’ve got to make some directions about where I want to go. So it’s certainly affected me. It’s quite isolating in some ways because all my other friends who I’ve worked with before are still studying or they’re in their chosen jobs and I’m thinking well what am I doing ... You tend to sort of withdraw. So on one level this casualisation thing, I don’t mind it because I’m not that accountable, but on the other hand you don’t feel that you’re worth so much, because you’re able to be disposed of much easier than if you were in a full-time job. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Margaret has rearranged her social life to accommodate her casual work; whereas she can still maintain contact with her working friends, she can no longer afford their more expensive outings:

*A lot of my friends work anyway full-time, so socially, we only catch up after work or on the weekend. ...[but] being casual, you really can’t afford to go out to those nice dinners that you used to be able to do when you’re working permanent or continuous hours. (Margaret, 47, school assistant)*

William feels that his social life with friends and family has suffered because his shifts are on nights and weekends:

*With friends it did make it a little difficult when I was working a casual at nights because you didn’t have a lot of contact hours, so you had to do a bit of juggling around that. And certainly when I was working nights and weekends at the service station, that did make things a little difficult for the odd family functions where they require you to be there, for example, a Friday night and I would always be working. (William, 44, call centre operator)*

Mary recalls that her social life was difficult while she was working casual night-shifts and Lynn finds planning their social lives difficult because of casual shiftwork:

*Oh absolutely, absolutely. And also a lot of the shifts fall on the weekends ... Well that's when my kids are playing sport. Or they're free, or my sisters aren't working, or my friends say we're having lunch and I say well 'I can't I'm working' ... it just means I don't have that flexibility of social interaction because I'm working ... Well I certainly don't have people here for lunch, I certainly wouldn't dream of asking people to lunch in case I had to make a choice ... Do I enjoy people for lunch in front of the fire or do I, say to work no I can't come. Or then do I ring people and say 'oh bad luck, you know I've got to change the date'. (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Maggie finds that casual work makes it hard to join in social activities with friends and family as her social life is contingent upon her unpredictable work:

*If you are casual and work comes up you have to take it. So, you know, everyone else might be having a party and you've got to work. I mean, it's the same as shift work, but still, when your casual, if you are desperate you'll take on the work at the expense of family outings or whatever. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Some casuals, however, are able to avoid any negative impact on their social life. Thus Wendy doesn't feel that her relationships or social life have been affected by her casual work:

*It didn't affect me at all [and] I didn't really do much sport or anything. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

And although Sue often works on weekends when most people are socialising, she doesn't believe this would be any different if she were permanent:

*The fact that I work weekends I suppose that's when most people socialise and there are those sort of things going on. But I might be working weekends whether I was casual or not. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

Monique feels that being a casual hasn't affected her ability to make friendships – she meets new friends at work:

*No, I don't think it does because I've made some really good friends at certain places that I've worked. So it might do outside [work] because if you've got to work and study, you don't have a lot of time to go out and socialise often, depends on how many hours you work. But yeah, it can sometimes help because I've made a lot of good friends at work. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

As for the impact of casual employment on the social life of workers in a remote town, Marko feels the risk is minimal, except for those in a relationship:

*I will always hit the pub and have a few beers [but] if you are in a bit of a relationship, sometimes it takes a bit of a hit. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

### 13.7 The Effects On Community Participation

Community participation is sometimes constrained by casual work as casual employees try to be available for hours as needed:

*Casual work, and the nature of the work I'm in at the moment, you work six days a week and you have to be there unless you make arrangements to say that you're not going to be there. Well, that's up to you and you lose that day's pay. But that takes away a lot of activities that you'd like to do on weekends and things that you want to be doing ... I had to let go of like being involved with football and other bits and pieces like I like fishing but some sporting activities. Yes, it has affected my way of life. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

Now that Mary works a permanent part-time day shift, she has been more able to pursue her other interests: the small business she runs, helping at the school and also fundraising activities. However until gaining permanent part-time work, Mary's community involvement has always been difficult because of her casual night-fill job:

*Yes because you get home at six o'clock in the morning and you might have some fundraiser happening at ten o'clock that morning. (Mary, 47, supermarket night-fill assistant)*

### 13.8 School

Some parents who are casually employed find that working part-time gives them the chance to participate in their children's school. On the other hand, others find that the unpredictability of hours obstructs their involvement. In the factory where Theresa works, many mothers depend on the extended family for their childcare. The fact that there is no set finish time for shifts, makes it very difficult for them – and the grandparents and others that they rely on. George finds it difficult to predict his time at kindy events:

*My daughter loves me picking her up from kindy but all of a sudden your world's turned upside down because at an instant you're expected to come in and break your routine because there's something else that's happened and they need you an hour ago. So you've got to go in and do a 12 hour day or whatever and your whole world's turned upside down. (George, 40, technician).*

### 13.9 Sport

Casual terms sometimes suit sporting involvement. In other cases, unpredictable work times, fear of reprisal for refusing shifts, lack of money for participation, and concern about the effects of a sporting-related injury on earnings constrain sporting activities for casual workers.

William feels that his sporting activities were not compromised by his casual work because he was able to juggle his hours – and with more ease than in his present contract position. Sometimes this flexibility exists for unique local reasons, as in Marko's experience. He is free to become involved in sporting activities because his supervisor shares his interest in bike racing:

*Like I said, it depends who you are working for, like my direct supervisor, he was in the Bike Club too. ... So, if it there was a job on a Saturday well [we had to] to get to the race track, someone else will get that bloody job ... So, they are hanging around the back, who knows what time, and I'm out of there early because I'm racing the bike because the boss is racing the bike too. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

Getting time off for sport has never been a problem for Kylie:

*I still play netball about two or three times a week, and I will just put down on my availability forms that I am not available during those hours. So for me my sport comes first, obviously, because I have blocked out those hours on my availability. So it hasn't really affected it. (Kylie, 17, store assistant)*

However, working casually has at times been a problem for Monique's weekend sport, and like others she discusses the fear of loss of future work if she doesn't accommodate requests to work:

*It has previously, because I always played sports and always made that kind of clear at the beginning of when I was working and that was always fine. But then there were a few times where I felt enough pressure that I'd stop playing. Because they wanted me to work Saturday afternoons or if I didn't work Saturday afternoons I wasn't going to get any more time at another point of the week. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

Maggie feels she doesn't have enough money or energy to join sporting activities:

*Yeah. I haven't played much sport, since I can remember ... You need money to get into memberships for sports. And I don't have the drive and the energy any more for that sort of stuff. So I'm better not to join those clubs and things. They're too expensive. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

Money also constrains Rebecca's activities. She and her partner find camping their only social activity:

*We don't [participate in sport]. Our main sport we go camping once a month, which is very cheap way of doing things because you've used everything from home. ... We're in a caravan and camping club and we just go camping once a month, but that's the extent of our activities. .... We've got to sort of curb off all other activities to save up and go and do that. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

For George fear of injury and loss of income means he will not participate in sport:

*You just can't risk getting injured, you just can't play sport. Contact sport is not on. I used to love playing football. I'm 40 years old and I'd still be able to play football, I'm fit and I'm active, I used to love riding motorcross, but you just cannot afford to get injured. If you get injured you can kiss your house goodbye and maybe your family. Maybe your wife would turn around ... hopefully not, but saying we're in this bloody predicament because you had to play football you know... So you just don't do it. Dare not do it. (George, 40, technician)*

## 14. Welfare, Tax, Superannuation

Many casuals have difficulty fine-tuning and predicting the effect of earnings on welfare entitlements. This complexity confuses very experienced employees and ex-managers like Kenneth who has not been able to get clear how his earnings affect his family benefits. For many, casual work exists in close relationship with the welfare system. Negotiating welfare, tax and superannuation with various government agencies is a complication for casual employees. This shapes the casual work experience for people at both ends of the life cycle. Young students talk about the complex relationship between their earnings and their Centrelink payments. At the other end of the spectrum, older retired workers are affected by its intersection between earnings and welfare payments and the taxation and superannuation systems.

### 14.1 Unemployment and Casual Work: The Paper Chase

Big fluctuations in earnings, which are often unpredictable, mean that many casual workers must work hard to understand the implications of their earnings for their benefit entitlements and obligations. Wendy experienced difficulties in getting access to Centrelink benefits while working as a casual, especially at times when her income increased markedly:

*During Christmas time, you get so much work that you couldn't get as much help from the dole. So it was kind of helping and not helping. ... I ended up giving up the dole completely just as I started permanent work. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

Planning her finances has been difficult for Maria because of the complications of getting Centrelink benefits in between casual work – a real ‘Catch 22’:

*It was really difficult ... at the end of that first year and in between I was able to get Centrelink payments. But, then, in the second year I decided that I wanted to buy a house. So, I started madly saving up my money. As a consequence of saving my money, I then became ineligible for Centrelink payments and, so, I shot myself in the foot, really. So, by the time Christmas came around, which was the longest break of all, which was about five weeks, I think ... I basically had to support myself. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

Patti's insecure employment means constant negotiations with Centrelink regarding her supplementary income; she also finds that the complications of getting benefits make financial planning difficult:

*It is [difficult] if I'm working. For example, doing the [\*\*\*] Festival I worked continually for about 3 or 4 weeks and I still had to look for work. So, yeah, I tried to tell them that I was actually working but I still have to satisfy their criteria to get the money in ... I have to receive unemployment benefit from the government to tide me over from week to week if I don't get any work. So, it's unstable like that and I can't really plan in advance any holidays or outings. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

### **Barney's Story: Managing Tax, Welfare and Superannuation**

Barney now works as a security guard, after decades of employment in employment services of various kinds. He sees the growth in casual work as 'just very, very sad'. Five issues stand out in his negative assessment: he talks about the insecurity, the low under-award pay, the high effective marginal tax rate, the lack of control over hours ('I'm just totally on call'), and the condescension he experiences 'you run into all sorts of categories of condescension all day long'. After many years in white collar government employment, he is now doing blue collar work ('You're right down the bottom end of the blue collar cul-de-sac, let me tell you') while receiving the pension. Like many casual workers Barney likes his job, but he does not like its insecurity and the system within which it is located, which imposes a very high effective marginal tax rate. His analysis is telling. He has major concerns with the structural treatment of casual work in relation to superannuation, taxation and Centrelink:

*I like my work – like all the work I've ever done. The problems that I have with it relate to the legislation relating to superannuation, taxation, and Centrelink. Those three things haven't been thought through from a policy position from the relevant federal government department, and its agencies. There's a real disincentive, and the income that you get out of it is very low indeed. So, my view of it is really, I suppose, strategic and also it's structural rather than personal ...*

*What I'm trying to do is to get enough [superannuation] together so that I'll be able to get some sort of additional amount that's payable, as well as your pension and it's not tax deductible or it's not Centrelink deducted. Now, when I work for the first employer I get taxed at the rate of somewhere around about 20 cents in the dollar ... When I work for the second employer I get taxed at the rate of 40 cents in the dollar, because I don't have the \$6,000.00 threshold ... But wait for it – because I'm eligible for the age pension and try to stay on it, because of the real fear that if I get sick, I'll have to pay for everything myself - it would break me if I had a major illness - then Centrelink then takes out 40 cents in the dollar. So, in effect you could call the whole lot taxation. I'm getting taxed well above what anybody else in Australia gets taxed, other than people in my category ... The highest income tax rate is nothing like 60 cents in the dollar. And yet I'm paying that ... So you get taxed at horrendous amounts of money. It is absolutely unbelievable. The last period that I worked for my second employer was back on the eighth of March, and I did a total of five hours for \$77.00 and the total tax was \$14.00 on that. But back in December I worked 48 hours and got \$740.00 and the tax on that was \$208.00. I got \$530.00 clear. But wait for it – when I declared that as \$740.00 to Centrelink, in addition to all the tax taken out, I then lost 40 cents in the dollar for the \$740.00. So, in effect, I was working for 20 cents in the dollar for each of the 48 hours. In addition to that I have to pay for my car to get to work, I've got to pay for my dry-cleaning, shoes. With that company I have to pay for all my own clothing. I've bought my own clothing and lights. All of that sort of gear. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

### **Barney's Story *Continued*: Superannuation and Casual Work**

Current superannuation arrangements impose certain rigidities on retired people who wish to keep accumulating super. For example, in order to keep accumulating funds in his superannuation scheme Barney 'must work 10 hours minimum a week':

*That means that I can never, ever [stop]. The week that I don't do 10 hours employment, my superannuation cannot continue in a superannuation fund. There is no possibility ever in the future of having a week off. Okay? That's a really degrading position. There's nothing could be worse than that. I mean this is just going back to the employment conditions ... in the middle ages.*

Barney must complete a ten page annual report to centrelink about his circumstances: 'Business people wouldn't wear it': 'I mean the clerical work I've got to do – and I'm a past government employee, I'm used to bureaucracy ... Boy are you under the thumb'.

Rebecca has had great difficulties dealing with Centrelink as a casual worker. As a result she has chosen to go off benefits:

*I've been called in to do this intensive job search training and I say to them, like 'you know I'm working I can't come in'. And they ring me: 'When are you coming in?' And they've really hassled me so much about going to do this intensive job search training that I've just gone off unemployment, I've just taken myself out of the system. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

In the case of Maggie, her designation as an 'independent contractor' by the youth agency has made it very difficult for her to clarify her employment status with the Australian Tax Office and Centrelink.

Daniel contrasts the effects of Youth Allowance which allow recipients to 'income bank' and average out fluctuating earnings, with Newstart which he has found much harder to manage in relation to unpredictable casual earnings.

Ava is perplexed about the approach of Centre link to her work as an adult chat room worker. This work has enabled her, working from home, to get off benefits which has increased her self-respect, allowed her to save, and to 'afford things that I haven't been able to do for that many years, simple things like going to the movies, going to a concert'. However, she finds the approach of Centrelink to her employment something of a double standard: they are happy to have her off their books, but unwilling to face up to the nature of her job:

*I find it strange that Centrelink allows me to do this sort of work and they don't step in with any assistance whatsoever and they don't acknowledge the fact that the only reason I'm doing it is because I can't work elsewhere [because of ill-health] ... They virtually forced me into talking about sex day in, day out because there is no other job available. I was on their intensive training scheme three times, not once did they offer this type of work to me. If it was supposed to be so legit why didn't ... they find this sort of work for me back then? ... To me it's like disgusting. It's like a total double standard. It's almost like even if I did the receptionist job an escort agency, they accept that, even though it's illegal ... And it's like they turn a blind eye to this type of work. It's like 'Oh yeah, it's not supposed to be, talk about sex', well what the Hell are men ringing in and paying this sort of money for if it's not sex talk that they're getting the majority of the time? ... So long as I'm off their stats, so [long as] I'm not getting benefits. And that to me stinks. (Ava, 40s, adult chat line worker)*

Darlene finds the intersection of her welfare benefits and her part-time casual/contract work 'a pain in the butt':

*It's a pain in the butt actually. Because I was doing so much work over summer – I did 12 weeks ... I wasn't entitled to benefits so they cut me off, so now I'm back to where I've got to fill in a diary. I'm back to where I started off 18 months ago. And I'm going to have to go through training, with all these other stuff that they insist you do, new staff, which is a real pain in the butt. It's going to be a real pain in the butt when it comes up. (Darlene, 49, delicatessen assistant).*

Similarly, Jeff's unpredictable earnings as an electrical apprentice had been difficult to navigate in relation to unemployment benefits:

*If work runs out you then have to go and apply for unemployment benefits and I've always found that as soon as I apply for unemployment benefits I would no longer be eligible because I'd find work again. It's an inconvenience in that regard. And so - then you've got to hand in your dole form and they say oh no, well you've earned money this week, yeah but I was [only employed] for a week... and no, it doesn't work. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician).*

Dave, for example, had one year decided not to sign up for unemployment benefits because his employer had said the Christmas shutdown would only be for a couple of weeks. In the end it was four weeks, and Dave's savings ran out. The next year he 'raced off' and signed up as soon as the Christmas shutdown was announced. At other times, he has had to reschedule his shifts so that he does not lose his entitlement to a health care card and transport concession:

*because you're on such a low income that you really need to take advantage of the transport concession, the Health Care Card, there's other concessions that are available to welfare recipients. And so, yes, it definitely does have an impact there. (Dave, 39, market researcher).*

Dorothy describes juggling the requirements of Centrelink with her casual work as an extra job:

*Having this sort of work and dealing with Centrelink is an absolute impossible nightmare because it's like having another contract. You have so much paperwork to do to keep your registration going because sometimes, say I've only got two contracts on the go, I might be entitled to some Centrelink benefit but the amount of running around and paperwork you have to do is incredible. It's like having another job ... I found a lot of the Centrelink interaction with working casual very, very difficult, to the point where you don't bother to go and find out what you're entitled to any more and I really think that's their aim because they make it so difficult that I don't bother a lot of the time. You just can't afford to get back into the stress and they have unrealistic expectations of you, like you have to tick boxes on a form every fortnight that says, 'Can you start work with one day's notice?' because all the time you're on casual work, you're expected to keep looking for full-time work. If you're on casual work and you're entitled to any benefit, you have to say you're continually looking for full-time work to technically be able to get that money and to be available for full-time, ongoing work you have to be able to start within, you know, a couple of day's notice. And all the conditions they've got, it's totally unrealistic because if you're committed to three contracts on a casual basis and somebody offers you some more work, I mean what do you do with the people you already work for? It just doesn't fit together. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

## Superannuation

Many casuals have patchy access to superannuation and have trouble keeping track of whether, and how much, they have received. Superannuation is a good example of the gap that exists between formal and legal rights and entitlements, and patchy reality on the ground. For example, Gina had not accumulated superannuation in her 16 years as a meat packer. John's superannuation had 'gone missing':

*At the moment this company has gone bust and is in voluntary administration now. I was entitled to [superannuation] ... They haven't paid me super for three years.*

*Interviewer And have you talked to them about that?*

*It's like talking to a brick wall ... I haven't been paid super for three years which is between \$8,000 and \$10,000. (John, 43, salesman)*

Emma had accumulated little superannuation despite her 15 years of steady casual work. She describes herself as a good saver and has bought a unit, but her super access has been restricted because she has often been paid a flat 'all in' rate, and has often worked in the black market for cash, even in long standing businesses. She is also unsure about how often and where she has been paid the casual loading. Some casuals point out that in some precarious forms of employment, special superannuation premiums are paid, but the reverse is true for ordinary casuals. For example, Jeff points out that politicians are paid high levels of superannuation in recognition of their impermanence:

*Politicians have always seen fit that their superannuation package is reflected in the fact that they're volatile positions. Why wasn't the same principle applied to casual workers? ... I mean politicians say 'Oh right, well end of three years we could possibly be out in our ass so that's why we deserve a very rewarding superannuation scheme'. Well, after an hour a casual employee can be out in their ass so how come theirs isn't even more rewarding?*

*Interviewer: What's your superannuation situation?*

*Oh, that's the other thing. Because you go through so many different agencies you end up with so many different superannuation accounts and it's very hard to keep track of them. They end up just getting eroded by fees. (Jeff, 45, maintenance electrician)*

## 15. The Past, The Future and The True Price of Casual Work

There are many different costs arising from the growing incidence of casual work in Australian workplaces. Some are hidden and some are not. Some costs affect employers and profitability. These include, in the eyes of casual workers, the under-utilisation of skills, lack of skill development, and a reluctance to speak up about productivity issues in their workplaces. Many casuals hold back from speaking up and contributing to improvements in their workplaces. They feel that they are hired for their effort, not their brain. As Don puts it ‘They sort of talk down to you because you’re only a casual ... You’re just a gopher. ‘Just do this, just do as you’re told’ sort of thing. An attitude, as if to say, you’re brain isn’t worth anything but we just want you for your labour skills.’

The remarkable thing is that some casuals, despite a highly developed critique of their employment terms, remain committed to doing a good job like Don and Klaus,:

*You just think to yourself well, I’ve got the goods, I’m concerned about their welfare as well as your own to be able to try and survive, I could be an important part of your work force and bring some fresh and new ideas and probably be able to save you time and money given the right amount of time. And you’d be able to help them as well as the might be able to help you. (Don, 46, truck driver)*

*Even being a casual worker, I still give 100 per cent. I still think of the company. And I do my job to the best of my ability. (Klaus, 40s, plant operator)*

As angry as Gina felt after 16 years employment in an abattoir (and not even a chocolate as she left, as her husband complains), she was committed to working hard: ‘I’m not really big a person, I really worked hard and I looked after that company very, very well, actually’.

However, not all employers can rely on this commitment: some are paying a price for the limited contributions of their casual employees, relative to their true potential. The savings they make on labour costs may make up for this (see box on why employers use casual workers). But the hidden costs for productivity are not inconsiderable.

Beyond the employer, the costs of casual work are high for the many who work far from how they want to, with high costs in terms of worry, stress and lack of control at work. These have implications for casual worker’s self-esteem, and beyond this, for their health and well being. The correlation between lack of control at work and poor health outcomes has been robustly established through the British Whitehall Studies (Marmot et al. 1987). For many casuals, lack of control is a defining aspect of their employment, and one of the things they most object to in relation to casual terms. While some casuals have control over their working time, the majority in this study do not, and this has important implications for their health and overall view of their jobs.

These costs go beyond the individual worker. They spill onto their households, children, partners and their communities. They may be hidden, but they are very real.

### 15.1 The Hidden Productivity Costs of Casual Work

Many casual employees comment on the direct and indirect costs of casual work for their employers. Lynn's youth agency misses out on her ideas about how to deal with clients simply because she is too afraid to speak up:

*It's a really important feature for me to actually try and contribute not in a way, not in any other way than 'look would this work, or this could, or I've had this experience or whatever' and if you think that your manager is not going to, or she thinks that anything you say might undermine what she says, and she's not a person who likes other people's ideas I can tell you that, you think 'oh I'm not going to say that. I'm not going to suggest that' because she might not like it and if she doesn't like it she might not give me any more work (Lynn, 57, youth worker)*

Worse still, an employee's skills and experience may be lost altogether, as when Rachel resigned after her employer failed to make her permanent after seven years as a permanent casual:

*I was the longest serving casual in the whole department, of all the casuals, with the most experience. I've been acting also as assistant manager .... They're willing to sacrifice that. So that is their choice and [I] found another job. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

Casual workers like George point to the underutilization of their skills, and the cost of remaining silent about how things might be improved at work:

*You dare not really have too much of a say through fear of retribution after a team meeting. We have team meetings often and you can see the system failing at work but you dare not say [anything] or point out any faults by a full-timer or manager because if you haven't got a safety net of being full-time you can't say at a meeting 'hey, perhaps you should have done this...' I mean the other week we had a three quarter of a million dollar blunder where cutting corners by the company cost the company three quarters of a million dollars. Now, I quite clearly see where it's happened ... but if I spoke up in that meeting and pointed it out I could probably get some recognition in that five minutes but be pretty sure I would get a DCM.*

*Interviewer What's a DCM?*

*Don't come Monday. (George, 40, technician).*

Others in various industries agreed. Kenneth, an experienced manager, holds himself back from making suggestions in his current workplace, partly because his ideas would threaten ongoing employees:

*The skills I have got, I actually don't utilize them and I have to take care not to think about it too much because I will get horribly frustrated. I consciously have to go to work and say 'Okay this is not my business. I don't have to worry about it.' I just do what I do then I go home. (Kenneth, 49, retail)*

## **15.2 Commitment to the Job**

George points out that casual work sometimes 'breeds contempt, it makes you feel like a dishrag. So when you know that nobody gives a shit about you, you don't really give a shit about them either in some ways'. This affects people's commitment to their job. Allan agrees, and Dorothy feels that short-sighted thinking by some managers prevents them from calculating the true long-term cost of casual employees:

*I think that it would be better if there were less casuals. I think it would make for a better workplace because if people have more certainty in their job, then they're more likely to be committed and do a better job. The fact that we had casuals who basically just walk in five minutes before and they walk out ten minutes later. They're on the hourly rate and they're only paid for being there from nine to one-thirty. There's no incentive for them to do a good job apart from the fact that they may lose their jobs if somebody twigs that they're not doing it properly – some students complain – I think that having a more full-time staff would mean that you've got a better level of commitment from employees. And it would be a happier place, I would think. If people are happier and feel safe, then they perform better. (Allan, 30s, ESL teacher).*

*I think [employers] have come to think and believe the rhetoric that it's more financially in their favour to [employ casuals], whereas I don't believe that at all. I believe having someone who can work in the comfort of knowing they've got an ongoing position can be calmer and probably be more attentive to their job. Not that I'm saying casuals aren't attentive but I spend a considerable amount of time managing my work rather than getting on with it and I think it's short-sighted. (Dorothy, 53, research assistant).*

## **15.3 Why do employers use casuals? 'We are cheap, disposable and convenient'**

Why do employers sometimes prefer to hire casual staff? Four main reasons are offered by casual workers out of their experience: they include flexible control of labour, lower costs, administrative simplicity and 'to harvest peak work effort'.

These motivations, seen from the perspectives of casual employees, are likely to remain strong into the future. In this context it is not surprising that many casual employees, when they look to the future, want to see efforts made to give greater general protection to casual employees, so that those who want to be casual can be so, and those who do not have better protection, including rights to paid sick and holiday leave, and the chance to convert to permanency when they have been casual for a while.

### 15.3.1 Why Use Casuals? Flexibility for Employers

The most commonly offered explanations for why their employers choose to employ them casually relate to flexible labour deployment and cost:

*Well, casuals are supposed to be flexible. They're supposed to be on call — I don't think anyone's ever been more flexible than me. I was available seven days a week and they could call me at an hour's notice and I could be in there. That's why they use casual staff members. (April, 47, fashion store supervisor)*

*When it's busy they can employ a lot of people and then when it's quiet they can cut the hours of those people. Whereas someone that's working full-time, they get their 40 hours a week no matter what. So from a company perspective it would probably be better to have casual employees. Also ... you can work for full shifts and not having allowances and things as a casual whereas other companies I've worked for after six and a half hours as a full timer you'd be straight onto double time rates. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

*Because they're short contracts, and it's a temporary measure. It's all temporary. It's all band-aid work. (Maggie, 40s, youth worker)*

*Because it's the freedom for them. You know it's the flexibility, if they don't want you they don't have to have you. You know if there's no work they don't call you in.... and then they work your backside off while you're there.. (Rebecca, 50s, printing labourer/labour hire)*

### 15.3.2 Why Employers Use Casuals: To Save Money

Many casuals see costs as driving their casual terms:

*[They use them because] A – money. B – money. C – money. And all the way right down to Z – money. (Barney, 67, security guard).*

*They staff exactly according to what is needed; there is no slack in the system, whatsoever. Which means when things go wrong or when we get a sudden influx of patients there is no slack. They use casuals because it works out cheaper, it's a financial thing. (Sue, 33, hospital nurse)*

*[Casual workers are] cheap, disposable, convenient. Basically they don't have to pay any holiday pay, etcetera. They don't have to be responsible for us. Yes, it's just, if they don't need us they can just give us the flick, you know, there's no responsibility for them. (Patti, 44, security officer/labour hire)*

*I reckon it's to save money. For them to save money, I think. I don't know how but I think they are saving money having casual people because most of the casual workforce is junior in a way, especially in this area, in this retail. Yeah, I reckon they're saving a lot more money. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

*I guess they tendered for contracts from the government and I suppose in order to get them initially they had to undercut the competition. And, in undercutting the competition, they cut back on Award conditions. I think that was the reason why the government tendered these contracts out in those days. (Maria, 30s, ESL teacher)*

*Because I was cheap (laughs a little). And I was available when other people weren't. (Brad, 19, produce assistant).*

*I think it's more of the fact that, especially with supermarkets and things like that is because they don't have to pay sick pay, they don't have to pay the holiday pay or superannuation, that sort of thing. (Darlene, 47, delicatessen assistant).*

### 15.3.3 Why Employers Use Casuals: For Ease of Management, Dismissal & Control

Issues of administrative ease are also seen as motivating casual forms of employment. Several casuals in this study felt that better organization would mean their employer could easily offer ongoing terms, and that this was the main explanation for their casual terms.

*Because they don't have to pay sick leave, holiday pay, have their flexibility and they're easy to fill in. ... If I ring in sick, they ring a casual up and say, listen, can you come in such and such? Okay. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

*I think that, to start with, it was easier for them to employ people that way, to not have to worry about everything that comes with employing someone, all the Workcover and all those kinds of things and having to select people or having any ongoing responsibility for them. I think it's the responsibility. It's just easier not to have it and to pass it on to someone else. And because if they don't want that person, they can get rid of him. And what if they, all of a sudden, didn't have the work, they could say you're not required ... Because if they don't want that person, they can get rid of him. And what if they, all of a sudden, didn't have the work, they could say you're not required. (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)*

*I know, companies I've worked for in the past, if a casual worker doesn't do really well their hours just get cut, cut, cut, and cut and then eventually they might only be rostered for four hours a week and non one can survive on that so they have to find employment elsewhere. It's sort of an option for a company to get rid of someone easier than they would be able to a full-time employee. (Rhys, 29, security officer)*

*They can just get rid of you. I mean, it might not come down to your work abilities, I mean you might be the best on work abilities, but if you are a bit outspoken about something, they have got the opportunity to railroad you. I mean, if you are permanent staff and you get a boss that takes a disliking to you and they really want to get rid of you and you are on a salary package, well they have got to pay you out. It all comes down to the bottom dollar. The way it is set up, they can give you a day's notice and walk down the road. (Marko, 20s, crane operator)*

#### 15.3.4 Why Employers Use Casuals: To Harvest Peak Work Effort

Finally several casuals mentioned that they could be relied upon to work at a high intensity while at their jobs, and this motivated casual terms:

*People invest a lot of their energy, a lot of their emotional energy, into the job for that short period of time and there's this churn effect where you work very hard and then if you burn out, well, they can ditch you, so they have a lot of young casuals who are cheap and work very hard and they get moved on when they get older ... and we became more expensive as we get older and our hours [get] cut back as time went by and is frustrating. (Daniel, 21, fast food worker)*

*My husband is an employer. He runs the family business, which I choose not to work at. And I know for a fact that there he chooses casual employees because it's really difficult to let go of staff ... He's found that if you take staff on and they do the right thing for the first three-month probationary period and then after three months, they slacken off. Once that happens they're locked into that position and it's extremely difficult to get them out. Far too difficult. So he's found a lot more success, a lot more willingness, a lot more positive can-do attitude from a person who simply applied for casual position. I'm presuming it's because they feel like their job is on the line each and every day they come to work so they put the effort in. Whereas someone who's locked into a job, they know that if they slacken off, it's damn hard for the employer to get rid of them. (Donna, 41, receptionist clerk).*

#### 15.4 Ways in Which Casual Work Could be Managed Better

Many casual workers recommend ways in which certain kinds of casual work should be reduced. Barney has a clear list of measure he wants to see implemented: he would like to see more legal rights to permanency, effective industrial inspectors, and changes to rules governing tax, government payments and superannuation.

Many see a place for casual work – to meet peak demands and to do irregular work. However, they do not support casual terms for ongoing work. For example, while William can see a role for casuals to meet peak demands, he feels that casuals should not be employed if they are replacing permanent staff 'I think they should get automatically converted' (William, 44, call centre operator).

### Ongoing Casuals Should Be Able to Become Permanent

*After a certain period of time being a casual that people actually be given the option of being [permanent] part-time or perhaps maybe that there is some guaranteed hours as a casual, even if the employer will say, 'Okay, well, I'll take you on as a casual. We'll guarantee you 10 or 15 hours part-time work and anything over that, we will pay you at the casual rate.'* (Wayne, 42, security officer)

*Casual work itself I don't mind as an adjunct to say boosting your income... [but] As a long-term thing it seems to be a bit of a trend, a lot of employers to using casual employment to exploit industrial law to avoid paying entitlements to people ... I think, really when someone first gets offered employment as a casual, there really needs to be some sort of formal legislation or even a contract - and the employer has to sign - which will state that if by some chance your employment turns out to be ongoing, on a consistent basis over twelve months, that the employer will agree to a negotiation if you wish to convert to permanent employment. And if that negotiation can't be reached on a mutual basis than that neither party has a problem to take it to Industrial Commission or to engage a union to negotiate.* (William, 44, call centre operator)

*If it's an ongoing situation, then make them permanent ... I understand the company's right to say no [to permanency] if they have a valid reasons and that should be protected as well.'* (Alice, 41, word processing operator)

*I think [casual work] should be abolished, especially if they've got you there so many hours per week and you're there everyday: that should be abolished, it should be [that] after three months ... you say that 'well this bloke's done the right thing and yes, we're going to give him a permanent job because he's done his three months probation. He's just what we're looking for' ... I suppose you've got to have casual work occasionally because when it gets busy you've got to have someone on call to be able to turn around and say we can have a couple of extra people to help us out, and they have to know that it's only a short term basis which some people don't mind doing that from job to job ... Put it this way, if I could change the government's policy I'd do that tomorrow and I'd like to have them go work in the position they've put a lot of people in: the position of just you try and survive and see how your self esteem is, mate.* (Don, 46, truck driver)

*I'd try and sort it out a bit better if I were my employer really, I think I'd try and give a bit more permanency and create more permanent part-time people rather than casual, just to give them, and also if I were a good manager I'd want to make sure I kept my casual people.* (Lynn, 57, youth worker)

*I think every person in the workforce is entitled to basic rights and that is to have the right to their leave, have the right to be treated in a manner which they are entitled to, especially with respect to the work that they are doing. And I think the changed award [and the right to request to become permanent] does that. I think it gives them - whether they're labour hire or whether they're just being casual with their employer. I think having that there is fantastic to at least let them have the right to ask.* (Rachel, 40s, cashier govt/labour hire)

Five main means of managing or reducing casual work are suggested by those who have experienced it.

1. A right to convert to ongoing terms after a period as a casual;
2. Access for casuals to paid sick and holiday leave;
3. Better protection against unfair dismissal;
4. Better treatment and more respect for casuals;
5. Better terms for those working through labour hire.

### **Ongoing Employees Should Get Paid Sick Leave and Holidays**

*Yeah, I'd like to see casual workers ... earn a portion of your sick leave and your annual leave. They would have some entitlements after a period of time. (Tony, 40s, nursing home carer)*

*I reckon maybe giving them a bit more options in the workplace, giving them more access to sick leave and stuff like that. I reckon that's important because some kids get sick or they need to get their wisdom teeth out or something like that. They're losing a lot of money because it's something that takes more time to recover from. I reckon sick leave and even every now and again if you working lot of hours as a casual, even holidays would be good. (Wendy, 25, sales assistant)*

*Well, I think first of all if the employer wants to continue with casual people I think that the people should then be entitled to things like long service leave, holiday pay, and WorkCover. ... and of course I think they should look at the wage structure as well. Because \$14.20 an hour is what they pay us. (Mario, 65, care worker)*

*If they're going to have to do casual, they [should] still have the same legal bits that permanents get. If it's their choice not have holiday pay or not have sick leave, that fine. But I think everybody should be covered by a set of rules that keeps them in that job. (Julie, 53, aged care industry)*

### **Better Protection against unfair dismissal**

Many casuals are unaware that they may have legal protections against unfair dismissal, or – if they know about them – are not confident of exercising them. The question of arbitrary dismissal, and in many cases effective arbitrary dismissal through cuts to hours to unliveable levels, emerges as a critical worry for many casuals. They may continue in their jobs for many years, but fear of dismissal remains strong. Monique hopes that in the future those that have to do casual work will enjoy more protection in relation to dismissal and termination generally:

*Casual workers [should be] given better rights about termination and various things in the workplace that at the moment they don't have any rights about because they are only casual. (Monique, 24, church youth office worker)*

*I think that casual workers need, they need more security I think, that's the main thing because a worker who can be dropped at a moment's notice or at any time all sorts of consequences flow from that and the main consequence is this like, total fear and repression, like no one is going to speak out, no one is going to try and protect their interests or their rights as long as they know that their boss can get rid of them. (Sarah, 24, student waitress/telemarketer)*

### **Better treatment and more respect for casuals**

Many casuals talk about the impact of their form of employment on their security and leave, but for a large proportion the way they are treated is very significant. Brad has a good manager and a good relationship with him, but when asked what he would like to see in the future, he says:

*I'd like to see them being treated better by managers ... If I can't work, I don't want to get grilled for it the next week just because I couldn't work one day last week. Say I've got family commitments, or I'm already doing something with friends, I don't want to, you know, pull out just because I have to work ... (Brad, 19, produce assistant).*

### **Better terms for those working through labour hire**

Many labour hire employees feel that labour hire companies should 'employ full-time and ongoing' and match workplace site rates. They are paid much less than those they work alongside, often for extended periods. They see this is unjust. They feel that pay arrangements should be fairer for labour hire employees.

## 15.5 Casual Work: An Acceptable Price for Being a Mother?

Many casual workers – like April and Donna – are mothers who juggle their jobs around care and find that part-time work is essential. However, the notion that, in order to take one's family responsibilities seriously one must accept casual terms has important effects for those who want both a secure, rewarding job, *and* to be active family members. The choice is structured around two classes of work: a 'proper job' - to which one is fully committed - and a 'carer's job' which has inferior terms and to which one is not committed. The duality of a proper committed worker and a secondary 'worker carer' is implicit in the words of Donna, who sees permanent workers as workers whose 'first commitment is to their job'. They cannot have significant responsibility for dependents beyond their job. If they do, then they must be casual, signifying their primary commitment elsewhere:

*[Promotional] permanent jobs with a higher level of responsibility essentially ... don't marry in with the casual concept. It just doesn't. Because you've got to have someone there who's always there, who's reliable, who is absolutely 100 per cent committed to that job. And just from a casual point of view, the very reason that I stick to the casual and don't look to get permanent part-time, is my employer knows that although when I'm on the job, I'm there and I'm committed to it, my first commitment is to my children. It's not to my job. Whereas I think there's a general consensus out there that if you're a full-time worker, ready to climb the ladder, your first commitment is to your job. (Donna, 41, reception clerk)*

Donna avoids guilt by being casual: the price for not having to think twice about putting her sick children first, is casual terms in her ongoing predictable work. However, constructing labour market standards around two sets of workers - those who put their jobs first, and those who put their children or other dependents first - creates a dual labour market with significant long term penalties for those who do not want to have to set priorities in such stark ways. Employment forms should accommodate the coincidence of parenting and working. Building labour standards and practices around a dual system of 'committed workers/non-carers' and 'committed carers/secondary workers' is unfair. It will not accommodate the growing proportion of working Australians who are simultaneously responsible for dependents. What is more, allowing general labour market standards to drop to the level that is acceptable – within very particular constraints – for working parents at particular moments in life cycles, or to working students for similarly brief life cycle windows, imposes high costs on the conscripted casual who do not want unpredictable incomes and all the other consequences that flow from being 'only a casual'.

## 15.6 How Casual Work is Remaking Work

The growth in casual employment in Australia is imposing high costs – for productivity, for employees, for their households and families, for the health system, and across the broader community. It undermines practical access to collective organisation or even individual voice.

The cost of casual work is measured in variable pay packets, unpredictable lives and inflexible work patterns. Many casuals are on call, rather than flexibly in charge of their working time.

While they see the need for casual work in some circumstances, ongoing long-term casual work is far from their preference and widely viewed as exploitative and unfair. Its costs extend well beyond the individual pay packet – to the chance for a holiday, to be sick without risk to livelihood, and to issues of respect, self esteem and physical and mental health and injury: Annadjies summarises:

*I think it is time that something gets done about it. People ought to know how we are being treated as casuals ... And it really, really stinks the way we are being treated and there is no rights for us. You know, why must this carry on? (Annadjies, 30s, administrative worker).*

Firm minimum standards are necessary if Annadjies' plea is to be answered. She is not alone. Kenneth with many years management experience feels that casual work 'needs a big clean up': 'If you can't afford to do it properly, you've got to change your business or close it. Take your pick. You see you can't take advantage of people to benefit yourself, that's just totally selfish'.

The growth in casual work in Australia, with a significant portion of it associated with diminished workplace rights, citizenship and power as described through this study – has shifted power relations in Australian workplaces. This shift affects those who work on casual terms. But it also remakes the terms of employment that surround many other employees whose workplaces are characterized by a growing proportion of casuals with limited respect, voice, training, security and low confidence in exerting their rights.

Several workers in this study reflected on the historical parallels with contemporary casual work. Theresa's experience of the Australian labour market her led to compare it with the European labour market two hundred years ago in the opening years of the industrial revolution when workers carried all the risks of insecure work, ill health, workplace injury and lacked paid holidays, sick leave and work breaks.

*I don't understand how Australia has developed this kind of system and I think that the government must finish with this. They have to change the way... I think you can find new systems ... Stability, stability means planning of hours and planning of income. And sick pay and holiday pay because these things were our main rights during the last two centuries and now you have lost them. I am sorry but you have lost them! ... I am not so worried because I am leaving Australia, but if I were an Australian citizen I would be very worried about this. People tell me that casual is good because you earn more money. Excuse me, I say to them, you are confused. You are totally wrong. The truth is that you have lost much and maybe tomorrow you are sick and you are on the street because you don't have anything. (Theresa, 28, food manufacturing)*

Barney reflects on the historical parallels in Australia around today's casual workforce:

*The men who returned from the war, I can just remember them. They were just skin and bone ... And all these people were discussing, they were all saying, 'Well this will all change because there's going to be a proper education system now, and there will be economists, and the world will be so much better'. And that's what I really believed in. I really believed that, we in Australia without the class system as I grew up, really believed*

*that it would be a better place to live. And now, this casualisation is just getting back to that depression era stuff. Where there are a group of people with a lot of money, and there's a hell of a lot of people without – a quarter of the workforce now are casuals. That's just very, very sad. That's the way I see it. (Barney, 67, security guard)*

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# **Appendix 1: Text of invitation to participate in study:**

**Are you a casual worker?**

**You may be able to help with a new study of casual work**

Australia has a growing proportion of casual workers. Casual work suits some workers while others find it has down-sides. This study investigates what casual workers themselves think about casual work and how it affects them.

We are keen to hear about all views of casual work, recognising that experience varies from situation to situation.

If you are a casual worker, and would be willing to be interviewed by phone for around 30 minutes outside working hours, please call me on the number below. Your name will then go into a pool of casual workers and we will randomly select a group for interview.

**If you would like to participate please call:  
DR BARBARA POCOCK  
08 8303 3736**

**For further information:**

*Associate Professor Barbara Pocock  
School of Social Sciences  
University of Adelaide  
ADELAIDE 5005  
Phone 08 8303 3736  
Email: [barbara.pocock@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:barbara.pocock@adelaide.edu.au)*

**Text of advertisement:**

The University of Adelaide,  
Australia

CASUAL WORKERS

Researchers at the University of Adelaide are carrying out a study of casual workers. If you are interested in being interviewed for this study please call Dr Barbara Pocock on 08 8303 3736

# Appendix 2: Interview Instrument

## Casual Employment in Australia

Chosen Pseudonym.....Real first name.....  
Interview No. ....DSS file name.....(as emailed to [www.pacificsolutions.com.au](http://www.pacificsolutions.com.au) )  
Date of interview.....Interviewer: Barb/Ros/other

**Interview Questions and NOTES** (these are *guidelines only*; pursue interesting issues where they arise. Skip questions already covered in earlier answers. Keep interview to 30-40 minutes skip questions if necessary)

After getting line established...

*...As you know, I am doing this interview as part of a research project at the University of Adelaide. Barbara Pocock is the research leader. I would like your permission to record this interview. Your name won't appear anywhere in our write up, and we will keep your real name and any details that identify you confidential – including the name of your employer. Do you agree to this interview being used in the report and recorded for that purpose? This agreement allows us to use what you say in our report. YES/NO*

- *This should take us about half an hour. Please feel free to stop the interview at any time if you need to.*
- *Would you like to choose a name that we can call you?*

- 1 Can you start by telling me what you think about casual work?
- 2 What is your occupation? And in what sort of industry/workplace do you do that work?
- 3 How long have you been doing it?
- 4 How would you describe your work pattern (for example, your hours)?
- 5 Are you effectively on call, or do you know your hours or shifts in advance? How does this affect you?
- 6 Would you describe your work (that is, what you actually do at work) as  
ongoing (or seasonal, relief work, short term work, or unpredictable work)
- 7 How would you describe your level of pay? Are you happy with it?
- 8 How would you describe your chances of getting promoted?
- 9 How would you describe your access to training and development?
- 10 Are casual workers treated differently by - other workers?  
by managers and superiors?

- 11 What happens when you are sick or injured?
- 12 What about holidays?
- 13 Some people say casual work is a leg up into ongoing work – do you think it works like that?
- 14 Some people say that being casual gives workers flexibility? What do you think?
- 15 Do you get paid a casual loading? Yes No
- 16 Do you think it compensates for the difference between being casual or being permanent?
- 17 Do you think casuals work harder than ongoing workers?
- 18 Do you think being casual affects your health? How?
- 19 Before we go on to your family, is there anything else you'd like to say about how being casual affects you as an individual?
- 20 Does being casual affect your relationships outside work? - *partners, friends, family, others?* (Probe: how has it affected your marriage/your wife/husband and your relationship)
- 21 If you have kids, how has casual work affected them, and you as parent?
- 22 Does being casual affect your ability to make new relationships?
- 23 How does being casual affect planning of your life? (money, kids, holidays, finances, family)
- 24 How does being a casual worker affect your involvement in activities like sport, community, church, school?
- 25 Has casual work affected your use of welfare benefits?
- 26 Have you ever had your shifts or hours changed because of because of something you have done as a kind of pay-back?
- 27 How does being casual affect your voice or say in the workplace?
- 28 What about unions – have they made any difference to you? ( Member? Not member?)
- 29 Why do you think employers use casual workers?

- 30 Have you ever tried to become permanent? What happened?
- 31 How would you *like* to be employed?
- 32 *Optional:* What would you like to see happen in the future about casual work?
- 33 Is there anything else you would like to add?
- 34 Do you feel OK about what you have said?
- 35 Would you be willing to be contacted later and tell your story to say a journalist provided they kept your identity confidential? Please don't feel under any pressure to do this – only if you feel comfortable with it:  Yes  No

***At end, check boxes***

**Children/dependents?**

- no kids  over 50
- 1 dependent child
- 2 dependent children
- 3 or more dependent children
- other dependents?

**Household Type**

- Couple, Double Income No Kids
- Couple, single Income No Kids
- Couple, Double Income with Kids
- Couple, Single Income with Kids
- Lone Person: with waged Income
- Lone Person: No waged Income
- Share Household
- Other

**Sex**

- male
- female

**Income**

- 0-10k
- 10-20k
- 20-30k
- 30-40k
- 40-50k
- 50-60k
- More than 60k

**Industry**

- Agric, forestry and fishing
- Mining
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Wholesale trade
- Retail trade
- Accommodation, cafes restaurants
- Transport and storage

**Age**

- Under 20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50

- Communication services
- Finance and insurance
- Property and business services
- Govt admin and defence
- Education
- Health and community services
- Cultural and recreational services
- Personal and other services

**Occupation**

- Managers and administrators
- Professionals
- Assoc professionals
- Tradespersons and related workers
- Advanced clerical and service workers
- Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers
- Intermediate production and transport workers
- Elementary clerical, sales and service workers
- Labourers and related worker

## Appendix 3 Interviewee Portraits

### CASUALS WITH A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THEIR CASUAL TERMS

#### Alison

Alison is over 60 years old and retired after 35 years as a health professional in another country. She now works as a hostess for various companies which ‘suits me’. She loves her casual hours in the evening and on weekends, which she fits around her grandchildren and other activities. She loves working again with young people, and feels that her work enhances her relationships and keeps her ‘sane’. Her earnings fill a gap between her overseas pension and her spending. She is thrilled to be working where no one questions her age.

#### April

April is 47, affluently married with two children and enjoys her work which earns her “pocket money”. For the last six years she has worked as a “permanent casual” supervisor in a series of stores in a mid-market fashion chain. Her experience in these stores has been varied, but currently she is very happy working under a store boss she gets on well with. She is paid well as a casual, and has resisted requests from the chain management to transfer to part-time – a move which would cost her nearly \$7 and hour.

#### Chelsea

Chelsea is 20 and is a full-time university student. She works casually for a major retail outlet. She thinks that casual work is flexible whilst at university because she can adjust her work hours to fit in with her timetable. She has a boyfriend who lives in another town and the casual work also allows her flexibility to visit him. She says that casual workers are on a call basis ‘when I need you I’ll call you’ and that this is how managers treat casuals generally. At the end of her studies she is thinking of taking six months to pay off some money and travel or keep working for a company. She is hopeful that she will find a job that uses her degree.

#### Christine

Christine is now 55 and her casual work in a family owned food manufacturing company suits her ‘at the moment’. She works generally works on a consistent basis a few days a week and to meet peak demands. While her employer is very good to her, her current supervisor is less sympathetic to her need for leave on occasion. However, on the whole Christine gets the flexibility she needs to see her friends and have holidays with her husband when she wants. Her husband is on a good salary and they are saving for retirement. His income is very important: ‘I wouldn’t be able to survive on what I earn’. Christine works hard, and says that in earlier years with dependents she needed more predictable income than she now has.

### Darleen

Darleen is 49 with older children. She found a job in her late 40s as her youngest child turned 16. She works as a delicatessen assistant for 10 hours a week and enjoys the social interaction of her job which has boosted her self-esteem. She was converted from casual to a three-monthly and now one-month contract (where she is not paid the casual loading). This was because of 'cost cutting'. She likes the contract and knowing what her hours are now ('it's a lot nicer doing the part-time work and actually getting paid [predictably] – now you've got sick pay and getting holiday pay'), and the fact that she can swap them with other workers, but she would like more hours of work. She thinks casual workers work harder and was concerned about a recent incident where a manager blamed a casual for something that was not her fault. She felt that casuals keep 'their heads down' to keep their jobs. Her ideal would be '20 hours a week' permanent part-time.

### Donna

Donna has worked part-time as a casual receptionist clerk in the tourism industry for 2.5 years. She has young children. She loves her job (it's 'a holiday' from home) but her children are her priority and both have a lot of ill-health. She is glad to be casual so that when she takes time off to look after her children she does not feel guilty, and she does not put her job at risk. She sees herself as 'a mother who's there to fill in her time, so to speak or bring in a little extra money' alongside the main earnings of her husband who runs the family business. Her managers have been very supportive of her family role, and she is not looking for promotion. She sees permanent workers as '100 per cent committed to their jobs' and as her primary commitment is to her family and children, this is a commitment she cannot make. She sees casual work as less stable, in a labour market where all jobs are less stable. In her view, casual work serves as an entry into ongoing work: a means by which employees prove they have ability, but its value for individuals depends on where they are in their life-cycle: for those with a mortgage 'being a casual is not an option'.

### Ellen

Ellen has been working for 30 years and has enjoyed casual work. She has a professional husband and her income is supplementary to his primary income. She chose casual work so that she would be available for her children when they were younger and to maintain her industry skills, she is concerned with maintaining these as a fallback if the need arises for her to become the primary income earner. She likes the lifestyle of casual work, it enables her to fit in a social life outside of work, saying 'people spend far too much time working and not living outside the dollar'. Having had a major health scare, Ellen is reflective about the importance of 'family, friends, what you make of your life', placing these before the job.

### James

James is a 21 year old university student who is working casually in a supermarket. He enjoys the freedom of being casual because he can do things outside of working hours but at the same time be able to work. He gets paid higher rates working mainly on Sundays and likes this. He wants to work full-time when he finishes university.

### Jenny

Jenny is in her twenties and has been working in a clerical position at a language school for international students where she is also involved in conversation classes. She has recently married and finds that the work helps her financially whilst studying and that it is difficult in the down times

when there is no work available. She is also on youth allowance which is supplemented by the casual wage. She likes the work and has good bosses whom she says are appreciative of the work that the casuals do. When she finishes her teaching degree she would like to be employed in a permanent capacity.

**Kylie**

Kylie is a 17 year old school student, and for the last two years has been working about 8 hours a week as a casual in a retail chain store earning \$3000-\$4000 annually. She is self-confident enough to ask for the hours which won't interfere with her year 12 studies and also to put herself forward to be trained on the publications computer. However she is unaware of the system of casual loading and is somewhat timid about asking point-blank to be transferred to part-time employment – although eventually successful in this.

**Rhys**

Rhys is now 29 (and single), has worked for the last ten years as a casual security officer for a multinational company's armoured delivery section. He enjoys his work and associated training, and is happy with his present employment situation, usually working five regular afternoon shifts a week. Earning \$20-30K a year, he feels he should get more pay for his responsibilities, but he doesn't mind the casual conditions: he is rarely sick and believes that he should only be paid for working, not for taking holidays - besides which it suits him to take time off to cull animals for a government wildlife agency.

**Sue**

Sue has been nursing for 33 years, and currently works two to three 8-hour shifts a week at a local hospital. She is married with two older children both living at home, one a fulltime dependent student, the other working and paying board. They live off her husband's relatively high income, so the \$20-30K a year she earns is 'extra'. She prefers casual work because she can avoid night shifts, and can take holidays whenever she wants. She doesn't envy permanent staff whose health can suffer from the stress and broken sleep patterns that come with rotating shiftwork. She feels the money compensation for casual work is "reasonable" although ideally would prefer an increased loading. Nevertheless, Sue doesn't feel truly valued by management, who only call her when they are short staffed. Moreover she feels that others sometimes get preferential treatment with regard to sought-after weekend work (time and a half on Saturdays, time and three quarters on Sunday). However she doesn't like discussing management issues – it makes her feel uncomfortable, and "whistle-blowers don't get anywhere". Although she is prepared to ask her union for advice on workplace issues she is skeptical of their ability to help and prefers to sort out problems herself.

**Tony**

Tony is in his 40s and recently remarried, works as a carer in a nursing home for dementia patients and earns under \$20K pa. After 8 years as a nurse on permanent part-time employment he chose to convert to casual work here two years ago because of the flexibility it affords. He feels he still has considerable influence in the workplace because of his previous nursing experience and his former role as a shop steward.

## CASUALS WHO ARE AMBIVALENT ABOUT THEIR CASUAL STATUS

### Ava

Ava works as an adult chat line worker. She often has often worked very long days and nights at short notice and without breaks. She has changed employer to achieve more control over her hours. She says ‘if you are good, you tend to get more control’. She would like to work ‘eight hours’ and have back up so she can take a holiday.

### Daniel

Daniel is 21 and worked for three years in fast food while studying law at university: I needed money and it gave me that’. He loved the social interaction and was mostly able to have time off when he needed it, if he was able to give 4 weeks notice. Sometimes he couldn’t get hours in school holidays (because cheaper school aged children were available), and then was offered too many hours when his exams were on. His main concern was about bullying and his lack of power, which limited ‘the ability to get flexibility’. He had been bullied by a manager and found it very difficult. He found it difficult to stop work when his migraines set in at work. He was allowed to go home when he vomited: ‘It was really difficult just to say “I need to go now” ’. He has since worked permanent part-time, which he much prefers because he knows he has ‘a job next week’; he is saving better. He will look for permanent work because he has just got married an ‘I need stability in my family’.

### Dave

Dave is 39 with a young daughter. He has been working casually in a call centre doing market research for a number of years. He says casual work is ‘good in some ways’. He works shifts in a pattern that he describes as ‘feast or famine’ – either many hours or too few. He often has 2 or 3 days notice of shifts and shift changes but is sometimes rung the night before. He can refuse shifts because he is seeing his daughter, or sick or taking a holiday (provided he gives notice), and that flexibility has worked well for him: he values it. At times he has worked in unsafe ‘black’ jobs because of his insecure casual earnings. Currently he must pay his own insurance and public liability as he has been ‘set up as’ an independent contractor; in fact his work is controlled by an employer and he works in an employment relationship. He has set aside health issues at times, because of needing to work, and his relationships including with his daughter have been negatively affected at times by his employment. Work like his rarely leads to permanent work in his experience: even supervisors are casual.

### Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a twenty five year old woman who has been working casually in retail sales for 8 years. She uses casual work to supplement her freelance work in video production. She lives at home with her parents and thinks that casual work gives her enough flexibility to undertake her freelance work. However she also says that the flexibility can be abused by the employer, ‘Regarding that you are casual; they can call you up at any time. Because you're the casual one, you're supposed to be filling in when everyone else is sick or can't make it’. Sometimes she works seven days in a row without a break. She generally works a thirty hour week as a casual and always on weekends and finds that she doesn’t have much of a social life.

### Emma

Emma is 34 years old and has been working as a casual for fifteen years in hospitality and performing arts. She has a university degree. Whilst recognising the flexibility and freedom that casual work gives her she talks about the trap of casual work and the ongoing worry about whether she should be thinking about a career. However this would impact on her availability for performing arts work. Emma is very considerate of her employer's needs, putting their requirements before hers in many cases and not 'wanting to let anyone down' by taking time off. The work that Emma would be interested in working in on a permanent basis would be in performing arts.

### Margaret

Margaret is 47, is married with three children. Following eight years as a casual market researcher, for the last three years she has been a casual clerical school assistant, working between 15 and 30 hours a week and earning between 10 and 20 thousand dollars [@\$18/hour]. At this stage she prefers casual work because of its flexibility, but is also conscious of the disadvantages in terms of insecurity, income and health (she grinds her teeth in her sleep). She is particularly concerned at the way casual staff are patronised and ignored, especially by those in authority, with an impact on self esteem and training opportunities. She thinks that it would be good if everyone worked part-time, so that they could have a life as well as work.

## CASUALS WHO ARE NEGATIVE ABOUT THEIR CASUAL STATUS

### Abby

Abby has been working as a cleaner through a cleaning contract company for 5 years. Her hours have been very unpredictable and when she had a disagreement with one employer and refused to sign an Australian Workplace Agreement (which greatly reduced the hourly rate) her hours were cut back significantly. She did not think the casual loading compensates her for lost conditions. She has had a holiday twice in five years and her unpredictable hours (where she readily filled in at short notice at her employer's request) have inhibited her social life and affected her relationship. She came back 3 days early from her honeymoon at her employer's request. She wants to be employed permanently.

### Alice

Alice has been working for 5 years for 30 hours a week in regular casual. She sees casual workers as 'used and abused'. The main downsides are security, paid holidays and sick leave and pay. The casual loading increases her pay to the level she believes is the appropriate rate: in other words she is under-classified which the loading makes up for. She sees casual work as a 'double edged sword' in terms of flexibility, with potential flexibility for her and for her employer. In fact in 5 years she has not made much use of her flexibility (once, when she was sick she took a day off and came back to a 'full in tray'). She has had only 2 weeks holidays in 5 years. She has just accepted a full-time permanent job with another employer at her proper classification and 'so for the first time in 5 years I will get public holidays and paid annual leave!!!!' as she writes to us in an email after interview. Her old employer's refusal to grant her request for conversion to permanency led her to change jobs. She wants to be employed permanently.

### Allan

Allan has been teaching English as a second language full-time for six years. He is concerned about job security in an industry that has ups and downs, and means that workers 'are looking over their shoulders'. He has recently bought a house, which was made possible at a decent interest rate by his partners' full-time income. Employment security is partly dependent upon good relationships with supervisors and managers he believes, and 'if you rub someone up the wrong way, you'll be let go'. He manages these relationships. Allan is aware that as his experience grows, his 'price' rises so that more experience as a casual actually works against ongoing employment because it increases his cost to the company. He wants to be employed permanently.

### Annadjies

Annadjies has been working for five years as a full-time casual administrative officer. She does not think that being casual gives her any flexibility, and she says 'You don't have any rights, like [permanents] have'. She has often worked unpaid overtime and has frequently stepped in to work in high pressure situations: her boss knows 'he can rely on me'. She has asked to become permanent and is now likely to be offered a 12 month contract. As a recent immigrant with children she and her husband depend on her income. She believes she is underpaid and underclassified. She has often missed school events and holidays which her children notice and miss. She would 'love' to be employed permanently.

### Barney

Barney has worked for many years in employment services, and now works casually as a security guard. He is over 60 years old and his pay is well short of any award rate. He pays for all his own training and equipment. He is very concerned about the high effective marginal tax rate on people receiving the pension and working casually, the difficulties it creates for his superannuation. His effective hourly rate is very low. He is 'condescended to all day'. He doesn't see casual work as a pathway to decent work. His is 'only one day-day from bankruptcy' and manages his finances with necessary precision. He sees the high level of casual employment as a return to the depression era: 'just very, very sad'.

### Brad

Brad is 19 and has worked for 2.5 years as a casual produce assistant. He is now on a 12 months permanent part-time contract while he is a full-time student in TAFE. His manager helped him weigh up the decision to take a contract and he saw information as critical to the right decision. He much prefers this to casual employment because his hours and income are predictable, 'I also get benefits', and his pay is the same (he is now 19 and the higher age rate compensates for the loss of the loading). He is planning to be an electrician. Last year, while studying year 12, having some say over his hours was important at times: 'I would have preferred that time off to be able to study'; mostly, his boss was good and he could get the flexibility he wanted, though at times he felt 'pressured' to work, and other managers have not always been understanding. Getting older and more experienced works against permanency in his workplace because the employer likes to employ 'cheap 16 year olds'.

### Bruce

Bruce loves his job as a bus driver of disabled children. He has been working casually part-time for 10 years. He works split shifts, is not paid a minimum call in rate so sometimes turns up for work

and is told the work is not available, or works very short times earning low pay. He is not paid in holidays and after school holidays must wait for a month for a pay cheque. He feels his employer does not back him in a job that has challenges. He feels that his level of pay 'is better than not having any at all'. He feels that people 'look down on' casuals and they are not included in the workplace. He feels he is conscientious but is 'watched closely'. He would like to be employed permanently 'and have holiday and sick pay'

#### Don

Don is 46 and before being made redundant was a manager for seven years. His wife does family day care and he has no dependent children living at home. His current work is truck driving and he refuses to work for labour hire companies because 'they don't look after you properly and send you on garbage assignments'. Don talks a lot about the future saying 'there's no future for you to look forward to, your future is up in the air, you can't plan for the future, and it's really a big hole in your future'. Don was able to compare casual work with permanent work saying 'it makes you feel degraded, you don't know how long the casual work is going to last so it can get you down'. Don's concern for his own and other casual workers comes down to lack of 'respect, self esteem and credibility'.

#### Dorothy

Dorothy is in her fifties and works full-time as a research assistant for various academics. She has six different jobs and works under five different arrangements. Her pay is worked out on a complex excel sheet, and she is paid a range of pay rates. She works very intensively and cannot see a career path. When she has unpaid sick leave, her work awaits her when she returns and must be done in lesser time. Like so many others, she likes her job, but not its terms and the failure of her university employer to employ her on an ongoing 'umbrella' basis that brought together all her jobs. Her lack of security and career underwrites the career paths of those she works for, and limits her social life, her access to borrowings, and holidays. Her recent illnesses have placed additional stress on her: no pay and extra hospital bills. Dorothy distinguishes between the flexibility she needed as a mother to work part-time, from the kind of 'flexibility' that being casual means.

#### Genna

Genna is a 59 year old woman who works as a casual in aged care. She has had a recent bad experience of casual work saying 'it's disgusting. We never know where we are. We cannot make arrangements with our life. Our life is on a standstill. It's like you're a casual worker, in a memo where I work, it's got if you don't like it, get work elsewhere'. Genna believes that she should work for a living and refuses to go to Centrelink even when her hours are substantially reduced and she earns \$100.00 a week. She has a positive outlook saying 'Because inside of me, even though all this has hurt me, I still, I look at life, I look at how beautiful life is'.

#### George

George is a trained technician who has worked in the same casual position for ten years He has a wife and two children and is a dedicated father and husband. George's finances are unpredictable and the insecurity of this has a significant impact on himself and his family. George says he is 'just an everyday Joe that wants a five day a week job'. If he did have permanent employment he would 'pay that bloody bill when it comes into the letterbox, ... and maybe buy a little boat so that our family can go out fishing together'.

### **Gina**

Gina is a 56 year old woman from an immigrant background who worked for 16 years as a casual in a small goods factory sometimes for 50 hours a week on an ongoing basis. She lives with her husband and now minds her grandchildren during the day having left casual employment due to an injury. Gina is very angry with the employer and hopes something can be done mainly to 'explain to the people when they start working', what their conditions are. When Gina left employment she thought she was entitled to long service leave. She was hoping to go on a holiday. Gina liked her work and would have liked full-time employment.

### **Jackie**

Jackie is a 17 year old high school student who lives with her mother. She has been working as a casual since she was 14. She now works permanent part-time in retail and finds that while the pay is not as good the fixed hours per week are worth the change from casual to permanent. Jackie is very involved in school activities and has had an illness that prevents her doing all of the things that she wants to. Jackie does not believe that casual work leads to other kinds of work saying 'no one's going to just go straight from being a nobody to an executive of some company'.

### **Jayda**

Jayda is a 16 year old high school student who lives with her family in a regional town. She is not currently employed casually because she found the experience had a negative impact on her health and study. However she has 'put her name down for more casual work and investigates every offer that comes up' but thinks that there is not much work in the town, 'they're basically supermarkets and that's it. And even they're closing down'. The lack of training in the casual position was a concern for Jayda, as was the loss of some Youth allowance when she started work, making casual work problematic.

### **Jeff**

Jeff is a qualified tradesman who worked seven years years in the casual workforce before finally attaining his dream of a fulltime permanent position. He is married with no dependent children and speaks a lot of the impact of casual work on his marriage. He called himself 'disgruntled, disillusioned and disenfranchised'. Jeff has ideas about the kinds of rights that casuals should have, particularly in relation to labour hire companies. He worked for many of these as a casual. His experience of managing different superannuation accounts and trying to keep track of them, and the lack of any kind of long service fund leaves casuals in a bad financial position in his estimation.

### **John**

John is a 44 year old single man who has been in sales for 20 years. He is paying off his house, and landscaping to make it look better. He was sacked from his permanent position and taken back on as a casual. He has a great deal of work experience and believes that he is kept on as a casual because of his sales figures, 'the best salesman in the country by my figures and that's why they use me'. John has a strong work ethic and arrives early to prepare the shop for the day because he thinks that is how a business should be run. John is prepared to speak out on his position of casual employment and takes a serious interest in the welfare of the company coming up with solutions to many problems.

**Julie**

Julie is 53 and works in aged care. Prior to her recently obtained position of permanent part-time she worked for 7 years as a casual in aged care. Until recently she was financially responsible for her daughter. Julie emphasises budgeting as a priority in living on an irregular and low income. She has been a volunteer supervisor with Meals on Wheels for twelve years from a time when the casual work she was doing had regular shifts and she knew her hours in advance.

**Kate**

Kate is 24 and a university student living in a share household. She has been working casually since the age of 15. Her experiences of casual work have been mixed, with 'casualness and unpleasantness going together'. She also says that 'it gave her flexibility around her study'. Kate has worked permanent part-time and found that 'paid holidays weren't something I worried about until I had them. Once I had them it was amazing'. Kate's experience of juggling study and casual work has been a difficult one at times with serious negative health outcomes.

**Kath**

Kath works in the retail sector in a country town. She has worked for a lengthy period as 'your typical burnt out' casual night-filler, but now works a regular permanent part-time shift in the mornings and 'could not be happier'. The shift to regular hours that suit her has had a very positive impact on her household, and on herself: 'I have my life back'. Kath can now do the other activities in her life that she enjoys.

**Kenneth**

Kenneth is a 49 year old university student and shares the care of his children 50-50 and works in retail sales. He likes casual work because it allows him the flexibility to be available for his children. He also likes the variation and not having to work in a 'daily grind'. Having previously been a senior manager he gets frustrated with his position as a casual because his skills are not being utilised. He says 'I consciously have to go to work and say, "Okay, this is not my business. I don't have to worry about it." I just do what I do and then I go home'. He talks about the moral need to work rather than be unemployed and worries about the kind of labour market his children are going into.

**Klaus**

Klaus is a plant operator and works in earthmoving. He has been working casually for six years and in the current job for eighteen months. He is 56 and his wife has just started a casual job, and he has no dependent children at home. He thinks that casual work has no security in it. The insecurity around taking holidays and not knowing whether you will have a job when you get back, the insecurity around being told not to come back tomorrow, these are concerns for Klaus. He works through a labour hire agency and sees the impact of this being the lack of connection to the employer. Prior to being casually employed he worked permanent full-time and would like to work in that way again. He comments, 'well this is what it's going to be like for the rest of my life. Just a casual employee'.

### Lynn

Lynn, 57 and recently widowed has a supportive family of 6 adult children and stepchildren. She works 3-4 casual shifts a week at a facility for adolescents at risk, as well as studying 5 days a week at uni. Since starting as a casual in 2002 Lynn has been trying to get a permanent job at the facility but without success. Although she has been told this is due to her lack of qualifications or lack of 'fit' with other staff, Lynn suspects the truth is that she is more useful to management as a casual than as a permanent worker. Lynn is a talented person with immense energy and a lot to give, but her capacities have been affected by the pressures of casual work.

### Maggie

Maggie, in her 40s, has been in community services for over 20years: for nine years as a full-time worker in a youth support agency (until she took a VSP after becoming a 'whistle-blower'), then two years as a casual in various government human services units. Three years ago she moved interstate where she has worked as a casual residential care worker – on an 'independent contractor' arrangement – for a non-profit organisation. Her current workplace is soon to be closed down and replaced by a disability unit where she would have to work for lower rates of pay. Living alone, she manages to survive on under \$20K but would like more hours – or better still, a permanent job. Maggie believes that the casualisation of the workforce has been a "mistake" resulting in the loss of employee security and confidence, as well as the importing of inexperienced people into the community services industry.

### Maria

Maria is now in her mid 30s, worked as a casual ESL teacher for four years during the 1990s: sometimes in private schools for foreign students, but mostly for private providers under the then adult migrant education program and, finally, a year in TAFE. She loved the teaching, but disliked the way the private employers tried to interfere in her work and was frustrated by the insecurity of her employment. In one place she felt bullied and exploited, a situation which was exacerbated by a staff campaign to negotiate an Award. After failing to get a suitable teaching job in the Education Dept she moved interstate, studied law and changed careers altogether. She now works as a lawyer in a government department.

### Mario

Mario, 65, left his management job in the finance industry to care for his sick wife until her death five years ago. Since then he has worked 12 hours a week for a labour hire company contracted to provide cleaning, respite care and transport for the elderly and disabled. Out of the \$14.20 an hour he earns he has to pay for cleaning materials and the running costs of his car, so he finds it extremely difficult to manage his living expenses. His gas heater has had to be disconnected, new shoes are a rarity and holidays are impossible. He is embarrassed about his job and feels casual workers need better pay and benefits such as paid leave.

### Marko

Marko is in his 20s, has worked as a crane operator on 'permanent casual' for a contractor in a remote mining community for the last 6 years. Although he earns good money, his hours are long and unpredictable and he feels hard done by in comparison with mining company employees on more permanent contracts. A strong unionist, Marko is assertive about his rights but feels that

others who are more dependent on their jobs are afraid to stand up for themselves. He sees no future for himself where he is and plans to work elsewhere in the more lucrative construction industry.

### Mary

Mary is 47, and her truck-driver husband have lived in three towns in three different states during the last five years. Mary has worked as a supermarket night-fill worker in all three places, averaging 25-30 hours a week as a casual, with occasional short-term contracts. After approaching 'burn-out' on a 25-hour contract was able to transfer to a permanent part-time day shift – which she sees as further evidence of management concern for her welfare. She and her husband are happy with the impact of the new arrangements on their relationship; she is also pleased that her new permanent status will enable her to visit her first grandchild interstate.

### Monique

Monique is a 24-year old Uni/TAFE student, has been working in various casual jobs since 1998. For the last two and a half years she has been working 8-10 hours a week earning between \$10-20K as an office administrator for a church-based student organisation. Monique accepts the low wage which is customary in this situation but is annoyed when she misses out on her (unpaid) holidays because of the responsibilities of the job. Although she likes the flexibility of casual work she feels its benefits are outweighed by the stress and insecurity, and she hopes to get a permanent position in the future.

### Patti

For the last three years Patti, 44, has been working as a casual security guard for four different employers – as well as in her own small horticulture business. She avoids all-night shifts and refuses jobs in the hotel and club industry, preferring to work at events. Because of the need to be available for work she finds it difficult to plan social activities or holidays with her partner. He employers sometimes skimp on staffing so as to get contracts, which can mean very long shifts without any breaks at all. Patti earns less than \$20,000 a year on average, and supplements her income from Centrelink payments. Ideally, she would like better wages and opportunities, and an employer who cares.

### Rachel

Rachel is in her forties and has two young children (11 & 14). After leaving permanent work after eight years as a cashier in a government agency because of a difficult pregnancy, she returned to the same workplace for a further seven years as a fulltime casual through a labour hire agency. Three times she has had to return from injury leave prematurely because as a single mother she needed the income, and she has suffered physically as a result. Rachel and other casuals campaigned with the support of the union for the chance to convert to permanent under the new award, lobbying both the government agency and the labour hire company. Despite the success of this she herself was not offered one of the fulltime permanent jobs that eventuated, and she subsequently left to take permanent work elsewhere. Apart from the insecurity of being a casual it was the lack of respect from management that upset her most.

**Rebecca**

Rebecca, in her 50s, is the sole breadwinner for herself and her student husband but her three casual jobs in the printing industry earn them less than \$20,000 a year. She hates the unpredictability of casual work, and also resents being exploited by management and ignored by permanent staff. She feels stressed and degraded as a casual and would dearly love to have a permanent job.

**Theresa**

Theresa is a visitor to Australia from Spain. She is 28 and travelling for a year with her partner. She has been working casually for three months in a food manufacturing plant as an unskilled worker through an agency. She has a degree in sociology. She finds out the days of her shift in the following week on a Thursday when she phones the agency. She knows her starting times on these days, but not her finishing time. Her shifts vary from 5 to 8 and a half hours, without notice. If she is not available for shifts it is highly likely she will not be offered more, so the flexibility is mostly on the side of her employer. She observes how difficult it is for those around her with children – most of whom are casual - to manage their childcare, most of which is done through extended families. She does not know if she is paid the leave loading, but she feels that ongoing work like hers should be done through ongoing employment with paid holidays and sick leave: ‘this is going back a hundred, two hundred years’. She compares casual work in Australia with precarious employment in Spain, where workers get paid sick leave and holidays and are protected when they are unjured. ‘It is barbaric’.

**Sarah**

Sarah, 24, comes from regional Victoria and is studying law in one of the capital cities where she has occasionally worked permanent part-time in telemarketing and as a casual in the hospitality industry. With a good deal of support from her family, she has not been dependent on her income but has nevertheless been the victim of exploitative management in both jobs. After trying unsuccessfully to make changes in both cases, she became ill from stress and exhaustion and eventually resigned.

**Wayne**

Wayne is 42 years old, partnered with two children. He has been working in two casual jobs throughout the last year, one in the gaming industry and the other in correctional services. Between them, he and his partner earn between \$40-50K per year. He feels that in casual work the employer has the upper hand and would very much like to have permanent employment.

**William**

William, 44, took a VSP from a bank in 1994 and for the next five years worked as a call centre operator on ‘permanent casual’ with a labour hire firm on a government contract. Some months ago the call centre staff and their union were able to get their positions changed under the new(?) Legislation and he now works on a contract with a government department. While William misses the flexibility that being casual offers, he no longer feels taken for granted and appreciates the security of the new contract

**Wendy**

Wendy is 25, worked as a casual sales assistant in a country store for two and a half years until she was invited to apply for the permanent part-time position she now holds. Although she felt obliged to be always available on call as a casual she feels this had little impact on her life. Nevertheless she now values the security of stable employment, holidays and sick leave and sees the changes in wages and conditions as a 'win some/lose some' outcome. Wendy appreciates the assistance her union has given her as a casual and now a permanent worker.