The work–family relationship

Work and family, the focus for this issue of Family Matters, is supported by a considerable amount of information in the Institute's database, Australian Family & Society Abstracts. This bibliography, on the relationship between work and family, is based on references from the database published since 2001, and examines concepts of work and family policy, men's and women's issues surrounding work and family, labour market forces and the effect of work on the family.

The references are available on interlibrary loan from the Institute's Family Information Centre. A number of the articles and papers are also available in full text on the Institute's Internet pages, with online addresses provided. Others are available from bookshops and libraries.

The following references have been selected from the Australian Family & Society Abstracts database, produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies to monitor the research, policy and practice literature on families and the social issues that affect them.

Commonly known by its short title of FAMILY, the database is publicly available on: Informit Online and the CD-ROM AUSTROM (RMIT Publishing); Family Studies Database CD-ROM and Biblioline on the Internet (US National Information Services Corporation).

**Work and family policy**


Navigating the intersection of work and family obligations is a major problem for an increasing number of Australian workers. This paper identifies new ways to help working parents. It is based on insights from Australian and overseas research, and explores one of the key transitions in life, namely that involved with the birth and rearing of children. The authors found that the tension between the competing demands of work and family is not being well managed, and is actually deteriorating. This publication aims to: identify new directions for policy in the area of work and parenting; assess the limitation of current policy approaches; and outline new policy priorities that will be more effective in addressing people's concerns.


This booklet is designed for union officers, delegates and activists. It sets out the commitment of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to achieving family-friendly workplaces for all Australian workers. Work and family balance has been selected as an ACTU priority because workers feel strongly about it and much more needs to be done to achieve it. Over a quarter of all Australian workers regularly report that they find it difficult to reconcile the needs of their families with their work commitments. A key part of the ACTU strategy will be a number of test cases in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission aimed at entrenching leave entitlements for workers with family responsibilities. This booklet sets out the history of current entitlements in awards and how these have been built on by current enterprise agreements. Examples of agreed clauses above the award standard in relation to additional unpaid leave, paid maternity and parental leave, carer's leave, pre-natal leave, elder care leave, part-time work, and flexible working hours are included in the booklet. A summary of recent literature and research, with a focus on studies of employee attitudes is also included in order to inform union officers about current thinking about work and family issues.


The author sets out to challenge some of the standard approaches to work–family issues, and offers a list of what he sees as the most significant changes in the nature and meaning of the work–family issue. He makes the following points. Work–family balance is the wrong term. It is questionable how much we have advanced towards a culture in which family life and the quality of personal life are treated as important, either in their own right, or as factors contributing to job performance and productivity. The central issue is that of control – employee control over the how, when and where of work versus the employers' distrust of work and the managers' fear of losing control. We have been too simple-minded and business focused about the work–family nexus. The discussion has to move on from women and child care to a broader definition of family life, and to some extent it has. The work–family discussion has to consider what it now means to be an employer-of-choice, and the shift in employees' values about the meaning of work. The real issue for workplaces is that of managing diversity and thinking creatively about employees as whole people wanting different things out of work, family and life in general at different stages of their lives. There are still obstacles to change. Work–family policies and programs cannot be left to employers and workplaces alone – they are a community matter. An appendix to the paper outlines the "New Links Workplace" proposed by the author.

**Men's issues**


This paper explores the effect of caregiving on the differentiation of employment and employment experiences by gender. The author looks at findings which illustrate that the female/male employment ratio is substantially lower in Australia among parents than among other subgroups. She notes that although part-time and casual work offer working mothers important employment opportunities, this pattern of work decreases women's access to a family-friendly work environment, and decreases their chance to achieve positions of power from which to negotiate family-friendly workplace entitlements. The author concludes that as men are more likely to have access to such entitlements it is important that workplaces encourage men's use of them; encouraging men to be more involved in childrearing would benefit their partners by allowing them greater employment opportunities.
The authors explain first why fatherhood in Australia has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years by researchers, policy makers, politicians, practitioners and the media. Noting that a substantial budget has been allocated to support projects and programs that directly address the needs of fathers, they then describe the Men at Work program which is designed to assist both the individual and the organisation explore issues of work-life balance. The program is conducted with groups of men at their workplaces, and covers four core areas: work-life balance; personal and psychological health; relationships (workplace, intimate, close); and parenting (including establishing a link between fathering and mentoring in the workplace). The rationale behind the program is explained, as is evaluation methodology. Findings are then presented from participants in three different organisations, with particular emphasis on the men who participated who were fathers.


This article reviews work–family issues for men, and reports on a project which will review and identify gaps in the existing research into factors that promote or inhibit men’s use of family-friendly provisions, and gather information from two organisations about company policies and practices.

Women’s issues


This article explores ideal and actual workplace participation of mothers with young children, using Australian data from the Independent Social Research Surveys – Australia (ISSA), and international data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). Seventy-one per cent of Australian women of childbearing age have children of school age, some of them may have been working longer hours than they would have liked, and 62 per cent in fact stayed at home through most of this stage of life. Family policy should reflect the diversity of preferences among parents of young children, but as most prefer full-time homemaking, this is the option that should be given pride of place. (Journal abstract, edited.)


Policy elites in Europe have not paid enough attention to women’s preferences in organising their home and work roles. As a result, legislation relating to child care and employment arrangements has generally not been effective in arresting the decline in birth rates across much of Europe. However, legislation in Finland, Norway and France, which does pay more attention to women’s preferences, appears to be helping to promote birth rates in these countries. Social engineering can be effective, states the author, but only if social policies start from a solid information base, rather than assumptions and stereotypes about what women want, or from ideologically-driven notions of the “ideal” family. She reports on her findings from a review and synthesis of empirical research on women’s preferences and motivations in prosperous modern societies over the last three decades. The crucial finding is that women’s preferences in regard to the balance between paid work and family work are not homogenous. Both women and men fall into three preference groups, the author explains, describing these and stating that it seems obvious that politicians and policy makers should take account of these distinctive preference groups when formulating policies.


The workplace and the home are commonly seen as conceptually separate or even opposing sites, reflecting public and private spheres that conflict when mothers (representing the home and the private sphere) carry out workplace commitments. But how temporarily separate are these sites? Findings from preliminary qualitative research of employees at a hospital in Canberra highlight the inadequacies of a dualistic approach because it renders invisible the synchronised experience of time that mothers report. This inability to synchronise time does not reflect structural harmony between the workplace and the home, but rather is evidence of the work mothers must do to maintain their attachments to both. (Journal abstract.)


Issues raised by a large-scale international project designed to capture the way different groups of men and women experienced their family and working lives in the 1950s and the 1990s are examined in this article. A brief history of the gender culture is outlined and issues are discussed of attitudes to mothers working, attitudes to motherhood and children’s needs; the ideology of domesticity; and whether there have been real changes in the gender culture. Implications for policy makers and supporters of a gender equality agenda are considered.

Labour market


The polarisation of households by labour market forces in the Australian case is explored in this chapter in relation to changes in the distribution of employment and in hours worked, paying particular attention to different types of households (both couples and other households). Factors which underpin growing labour market polarisation are identified. These are the change in the distribution of different types of work, such as the increase in part-time jobs rather than full-time jobs; the increasing dispersion of hours worked by individuals, with increased proportions of employees working either very long or very short hours per week; and changes in household composition over recent years. Findings covered include: the polarisation of families into work rich and work poor, the international experience; the distribution of jobs per household; polarisation among couples with dependent children; and hours worked by couples, and by those with dependent children. Findings indicate that polarisation of families in terms of work is a central feature of the Australian labour market.


The steady growth in the level and nature of casual employment in Australia poses unique challenges for the union movement. With a quarter of Australian workers and a third of women in the workforce now employed as casuals, a fresh look at the union movement’s traditional response to casual employment is required. The ACTU has recognised the changes in the labour force and the need to adopt a strategy which protects the interests of casual employees, while maintaining and enhancing the interests of ongoing part-time and full-time employees. This article outlines one element of the ACTU strategy, the campaign for parental leave for long-term casuals. (Journal abstract.)


The trend towards enterprise and individual level bargaining in Australia over the 1990s has been accompanied by a number of claims about associated work-family benefits. However, analysis of agreements shows a low incidence of measures designed specifically for this purpose, and the steady increase evident since the mid-1990s appears to have stalled in recent years. Moreover, provisions in agreements are unevenly distributed, being most prevalent in the public sector and in unionised agreements, and comparatively rare in male dominated agreements and those recording high wage increases. Limitations of delivery of work–family measures through agreements include their vulnerability in the
bargaining environment and a tendency to be countered by provisions that limit hours flexibility and control. Thus although agreements may be more reliable providers of work-family benefits than alternatives such as company policies, their ideal role would be as an adjunct to legislative and welfare provisions that ensure basic provisions are non-negotiable. (Journal abstract.)

The Australian Institute of Family Studies was commissioned by the Department of Family and Community Services to conduct a study that would parallel United States research conducted by Ellen Galinsky. The primary aim of the research was to compare and contrast the themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews with parents and children in Australia with the themes identified by Galinsky (1999). The secondary aims were to explore child and parent perspectives on how work impacts on parent–child relationships and child wellbeing, with attention to the concordance or discordance between parents and children from the same family. Furthermore, the research aimed to consider the ways in which parents work at maintaining positive parent–child relationships and child wellbeing. A non-random sample of 47 families in Melbourne was recruited from which 69 parents and 71 children were interviewed. This report provides an assessment of the findings, including identification of issues that may warrant further investigation or provide an impetus for future theoretical or policy development.


This study, commissioned by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, makes a first analysis of just over 50 families who experience long hours or hours that are unreasonable, like very long hours, changes in time zones, irregular shift work, unpredictable hours, or combinations of these. The study includes individuals and in most cases, their partners. In total, 89 interviews were conducted in May and June 2001. An overview of the effects of long hours on individuals, families and communities is provided and the 12 sectoral studies which form the remaining chapters cover these employees: engineers; strappers or stable hands in the racing industry; flight attendants; postal industry workers; teachers; supervisors in manufacturing; public servants; technicians in research facilities; paramedics; miners; doctors; and electricians. Methodology and the set of interviews are described and the limitations of the study are considered. Research protocols are included in the appendix.