

# A DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF BREADWINNER AND DOMESTIC CHILDCARE ROLES IN AUSTRALIA'S EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE

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A relatively high level of part-time employment exists in Australia, with part-time workers having little incentive to move into full-time work due to a lack of work and family provisions in industrial agreements. This engenders the need to understand how the demographic structure of employment is shaped by such policy. This study seeks to investigate the breadwinner and childcare roles within Australia's employment structure by analysing employment status and relevant demographic variables using data from the 'Australia at Work' survey. We found that among households with dependent children, men dominated breadwinner roles, possibly to countervail the partial employment of their female partners who were found to trade-off employment for child-caring roles within the household. This study shows how industrial agreements have influenced work and family roles in the employment structure, and serves as a basis for measuring the impact of recent policy reforms such as more flexible working arrangements for parents.

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THE EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE IN AUSTRALIA IS CHARACTERIZED BY A relatively high proportion of workers who are employed on a part-time basis. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that Australia ranks third highest among member countries in terms of the proportion of the workforce in part-time employment (OECD 2010a, p.215). Moreover, it concluded that part-time workers have poor financial incentives to move into full-time work because benefits in the welfare system are means-tested and clawed back as incomes rise (OECD 2010b, p.2). Whittard and Burgess (2007) pointed out that the traditional way to reconcile work and care is through part-time work. This implies that the popularity of part-time work in Australia's employment structure can be attributed to a lack of work and family reconciliation in Australian industrial agreements (Burgess, Henderson, and Strachan 2007), which can be expected of a liberal market economy with an emphasis on market-based resource allocation (Connell, Burgess and Hannif 2008). However, this is expected to change due to recent policy reforms such as the National Employment Standard, which enables employers to introduce more flexible working arrangements and leave for parents and carers (*National Employment Standard* 2010), and the Australian Government's Paid Parental Leave scheme, which took effect from 1 January 2011, which provides working parents with 18 weeks of parental leave pay at minimum wage (*Paid Parental Leave Scheme* 2011).

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The prior literature indicates that employee age and gender have an influence on the form of employment (for example, Rodgers 2004; Sheridan 2004; Warren 2004; Smithson and Stokoe 2005; McDonald, Bradley, and Brown 2008; Pini and McDonald 2008; Atkinson and Hall 2009). Moreover, the available evidence would suggest workplace agreements contain few provisions which seek to support employees seeking to reconcile work and family responsibilities. What is not clear, however, is how the structure of employment is changed with traditional 'breadwinner' and childcare provider roles within households. Having reviewed the relevant literature with these observations in mind, this study seeks to investigate three research questions:

1. How does the incidence of dependent children among employees influence employment status?
2. How do customary breadwinner and domestic childcare roles operate in the employment structure?
3. How does employee gender and age influence the employment structure?

In answering these research questions, data obtained from a survey of Australian workers undertaken in 2009 will be analysed. Before discussing the nature of this data and the findings, the next section seeks to contextualize this study in the prior research examining these facets of employment.

### **Literature Review**

For employers, part-time workers offer the availability and flexibility to deal with fluctuating demand and business conditions. Ngo (2002) has observed that, for employers, the use of part-time workers reduces labour costs and increases flexibility. Similarly, Brockbank and Airey (1994) have commented that part-time work has provided retail employers with a readily available pool of labour. O'Reilly (1992) suggested that part-time employees may also provide employers with a source of flexibility in periods of recession, as it is easier to dispense with the services of non-permanent staff. The benefits to employers of utilising flexible labour even extend to its use as a legal loophole. For example, Zeytinoglu, Lillevik, Seaton, and Moruz (2004) found that employees in cashier, store clerk, or bakery jobs are often scheduled to work in shorter shifts so that the employer may eliminate the costs associated with giving the legally required lunch and/or rest breaks.

Part-time employment can also serve as a bridge to obtaining full-time employment for career-minded employees, given a lack in availability of full-time positions. Tilly (2008), for example, found that many food retailers have a formal requirement that full-timers be hired exclusively from their part-time ranks, rather than from outside the company. However, not all part-timers seek progression into full-time jobs; for example women have been found to be less likely to do so. Research by Harris, Foster, and Whysall (2007) found that half of the female employees who were working part-time were not seeking promotion.

While part-time work can benefit employers, it may be viewed negatively by some employees, especially by those who prefer full-time work and experience it as a 'trap'. Employees that express opposition to part-time work often argue that part-time staff are employed because they are less costly, can be offered reduced benefits, and are treated less favourably (Browell and Ivers 1998), which are factors that, conversely, serve as benefits for employers. Similarly, Fagan (2001) found that part-time work is perceived as cost saving and is applied to marginal roles usually carried out by women. Rana (2002) found that employees who consider taking up flexible work options suggest a lack of commitment to their career and organization, with potentially negative consequences. In an example of hospitals, the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) Compendium (2001) found that

part-timers were excluded from higher nurse grades and that nurses who had previously worked in a higher grade were required to return to a lower grade if they wished to work part-time. In addition, Sheridan (2004) found that part-timers are also considered to be inappropriate for managerial roles. However, Atkinson and Hall (2009) found that informal work flexibility did not impact negatively on perceptions of commitment to career and career progression.

Labour market researchers have consistently found that that part-time work is dominated by women (for example, Crompton 2002; Warren 2004; Ngo 2002; Sheridan 2004; Pilcher 2007; Tomlinson 2007; McDonald *et al.* 2008; Atkinson and Hall 2009). Hence, issues related to part-time work tend to be more relevant to female employees. While women shoulder the burden of domestic labour, even when in professional occupations (Lewis 1997), in order to be considered successful they are typically expected to perform according to a male career model (Smithson and Stokoe 2005). Research by Tomlinson (2007) found that part-time work is highly gendered and often low-status, with serious consequences for women's economic independence, financial security, and quality of working life. Similarly, Sirianni and Negrey (2000) reported that part-time female employees may be limited to jobs that pay poorly, provide few benefits and offer few new skills.

Warren (2004) found that although part-time employment is concentrated in objectively poor jobs, the opportunity to work part-time is interpreted positively by female part-timers because it can be seen as one way for women with domestic responsibilities to be engaged in paid work and maintain work skills. Bu and McKeen (2001) found that women assigned greater importance to having a job which would accommodate family responsibilities, and to having more predictability and certainty on the job than their male counterparts. Part-time work is dominated by women and related to caring responsibilities (McDonald *et al.* 2008), with women are usually called upon to care for children, the ailing and the aging (Sirianni and Negrey 2000). Warren (2004) found that whether women had children or not had an impact on employment status. Many married women select part-time employment to cope with childcare and home-related activities, and that the majority of female part-timers are married and between 25 and 45 years of age (Ngo 2002). Women also use flexible work to maintain their skills and supplement the family income (Simpson, Dawkins, and Madden 1997).

The foregoing literature suggests that an increase in the proportion of women with domestic child-caring responsibilities in the workforce coincides with an increase in the proportion of part-time employment. Therefore, employees in such positions may accept inferior terms and conditions to accommodate their domestic obligations, as suggested by Brockbank and Airey (1994). It can thus be said that a trade-off exists in that flexibility gains by employees may be lost in the terms and conditions of employment; this conclusion is supported by findings from Negrey 1990; Ferber, Farrell, and Allen 1991; Brockbank and Airey 1994). From a more traditional perspective, Russo (1976) describes the 'motherhood mandate', which dictates that a woman's priority is expected to be care-giving for her children and commitment to her job should be secondary. This is relevant as a reason for employers to view employees who have parental responsibilities in lower regard based on the perception that a 'good mother' is incompatible with that of a 'good worker' because a good mother must be physically available to meet her child's every need (Etaugh and Study 1989). The foregoing findings provide the basis for the first research question concerning the influence of dependent children on employment:

*Research question 1:* How does the incidence of dependent children among employees influence employment status?

Societal gender expectations exist in employment (Beck 2000; Sheridan 2004; Smithson and Stokoe 2005). Tilly (2008) has noted that more skilled and responsible tasks tend to be covered by full-timers, while low-skill tasks are handled by part-timers, providing the example that most

supermarkets use only full-time workers in skilled meat-cutting jobs and part-time workers for relatively unskilled roles, such as cashiers and baggers. Incidental to the point that skilled positions are more likely to be occupied by full-timers, research also shows that men are more likely to occupy skilled positions. Charles (1992), for example, found that women are usually overrepresented in clerical, sales and service work, while men predominate in production and managerial occupations. Ngo (1997) has suggested that prestigious jobs are considered to be male-typed. Further, Anker (1997) has observed that neo-classical/human capital theories correctly illustrate how women are less qualified than men for certain occupations owing to differences in their education and years of experience. The foregoing findings are similar to research conducted over 20 years ago when Bielby and Baron (1986) found that women are most likely to be excluded from jobs that are specialised, involve variable tasks, require spatial skills and eye/hand/foot coordination, and from jobs in larger establishments. This reveals that such gender expectations have prevailed over the passage of time.

In contrast to the general pattern identified among women, the available research suggests that men are more likely to work longer hours and hold longer tenures than women (Schneer and Reitman 1990; O'Reilly 1992; Reskin 1993; Sheridan 2004). To that extent, Sheridan (2004) has pointed out that that men in professional and managerial roles do not consider part-time work as an option. This may relate to the perception that full-time paid work is a powerful symbolic and material expression of hegemonic masculinity (Pini and McDonald 2008) and the dominant ideology associated with the male breadwinner role (Smithson and Stokoe 2005). Sheridan (2004) has argued that:

Women are connected to others, so they consider part-time work, and men see themselves as independent, so they don't consider part-time work. These self-perceptions are reinforced through gendered social norms and organizational practices, with economic underpinnings to each (p. 222).

Employers have been found to be more reluctant to extend flexibility to male employees due to the perception that they have less domestic responsibilities. For example, Pini and McDonald (2008) found that it was more difficult for men to gain permission to flexible work than women, and that there is suspicion about men who seek to work flexibly to care for their children. Indeed, Baxter (1998) found that male part-time workers are less likely to be married and less likely to have children compared to male full-time workers. Berry and Rao (1997) stated that the culture of fatherhood suggests that the father's primary role is that of breadwinner and that commitment to work should be his primary concern. Additionally, seeking exceptions for parental responsibilities may have a greater negative impact for males than for females since the role of caregiver has typically been assigned to females (Allen and Russell 1999). Bittman, Hoffmann, and Thompson (2004) found that business environments are hostile to flexible work for men due to competitive pressures in the marketplace and have doubts about the legitimacy of men's claims to family responsibilities. These findings form the basis for the second research question concerning breadwinner and domestic childcare roles in employment:

*Research question 2:* How do customary breadwinner and domestic childcare roles operate in the employment structure?

While there is a significant body of research examining the relationship between gender and employment status, there is a paucity of contemporary research on the relationship between age and employment status. What little work has been done suggests that young employees tend to be part-timers because they are more likely to be students or recent graduates in transitional employment waiting to settle into more permanent jobs. To that extent, a substantial amount of research finds that the flexible nature of part-time work allows younger people to work while attending school (see, for example, Feldman 1990; Topel and Ward 1992; Lucas 1997; Simpson *et al.*, Dawkins, and Madden 1997; Wooden and Vandenheuevel 1999; Brown, Holdsworth, and Stokes 2001; Loughlin and Barling

2001; Smith and Green 2001; Brooks 2006). Brooks (2006) has pointed out that the increase of students in the labour market is a consequence of the casualisation of the workforce, ensuring flexible and low cost labour, and is connected to the emergence of consumption as a central element in young people's identities. Besides being flexible and cheaper to employ, young employees have also been expected to be independent workers (Stokes and Wyn 2007). Part-time work has also been found to suit older workers better. Rodgers (2004) found that with an increase of age (from a hypothetical 35 years), the probability of full-time work decreases while the probability of part-time work increases. Simpson *et al.* (1997) have pointed out that casual employment provides a means to supplement retirement income. Similarly, Nardone (1986) has suggested that part-time schedules may be attractive to older workers, who are able to use them as a transition into retirement. However, Gendall (2008) has concluded that those aged 59 and over are likely to participate in full-time employment due to benefits in contribution plans, climbing health care costs, and various government policies. The foregoing findings from the literature review establish the basis for the final research question concerning age and gender influences on employment:

*Research question 3:* How does employee gender and age influence the employment structure?

## **Data and Methodology**

The data used for this study is part of the 2009 'Australia at Work' survey (AWS) undertaken by the Workplace Research Centre at The University of Sydney.<sup>1</sup> The AWS is a longitudinal survey, which tracked the experiences of a sample of persons drawn from the Australian labour force over the period 2006 to 2011.

The 2009 AWS survey documented the findings of a total of 6,801 respondents who completed the survey via a telephone interview. Each interview, which was completed anonymously, took up to 20 minutes to complete.<sup>2</sup> The sample was weighted, using population estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Labour Force Survey, according to age, sex, location, labour force status and union membership. The relevant subset of the data used for this study consists of 6795 respondents (3578 men and 3217 women) employed in the Australian general workforce. Only data from selected questions (see Table 1) in the survey were relevant for use in this study. These included questions relating to respondents' gender, age, employment status, and dependent children.

Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) testing was employed to determine statistical significance between variables within the tables used in the analysis. This tests the association between two categorical samples for the likelihood that the distribution is due to chance or probability. With the exception of the analysis in Table 2, statistical significance at the conventionally accepted  $p < 0.05$  (5%) level was attained in all other tables analysed, which confirms that these results are accepted as statistically conclusive findings and are unlikely to have occurred by chance or probability.

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- 1 The AWS was funded by the Australian Research Council and Unions NSW. The researchers were advised by a board consisting of five labour market and industrial relations academics from around Australia; Dr Iain Campbell, Professors David Peetz, Barbara Pocock, Alison Preston and Mark Wooden.
  - 2 Participation was voluntary; but participants were offered the incentive of a chance to win an iPod (with 1 in 40 participants winning). The conduct of the survey was compliant with the privacy principles observed by the Association of Market and Social Research Organisations.

**Table 1. Survey questions used in this study**


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<i>Are you Male / Female</i>
<i>What is your date of birth?</i>
<i>Are you employed on a full-time or part-time basis?</i>
<i>Which of the following best describes your current employment?</i>
1. <i>Employed on a permanent or on-going basis</i>
2. <i>Employed as a casual</i>
<i>Do you have any children who are financially dependent on you (and/or your partner)?</i>

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**Source : Australia at Work 2009**

### Findings

Table 2 reports that the number of male respondents was slightly greater than the number of female employees. Similarly, the number of older workers was greater than the youngest cohort, with persons aged between 16-24 years representing the minority of respondents (14.5%). In contrast, persons aged 25-44 years accounted for 42.5% of all respondents, whilst those aged 45 and above accounted for 43% of the total. Overall, however, this table reveals that the distribution of respondents across gender and age groups was fairly evenly distributed, with no statistical significance between groups ( $\chi^2 = 2.52$ ,  $p=0.284$ ).

**Table 2. Respondents classified by age and gender<sup>1</sup>**

Gender	Age category			
	16-24	25-44	45+	All
<i>Number of male respondents</i>	498	1547	1533	3578
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(13.9)	(43.2)	(42.8)	(100.0)
<i>Number of female respondents</i>	484	1341	1392	3217
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(15.0)	(41.7)	(43.3)	(100.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>982</b>	<b>2888</b>	<b>2925</b>	<b>6795</b>
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	<b>(14.5)</b>	<b>(42.5)</b>	<b>(43.0)</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>

**Source : Australia at Work 2009**

1. (N= 6795). A chi square test of significance difference in distribution of respondents across age groups and gender found no statistically significant differences between these groups ( $\chi^2 = 2.52$ ,  $p<0.284$ , degrees of freedom=2)

Table 3 shows that among all employees surveyed, full-time positions accounted for 69.2% of the total, while part-time positions made up the remaining 30.8%. Within full-time positions, the vast majority (94.9%) were found to be permanent full-time (as opposed to casual full-time). Part-time positions were quite evenly distributed, with 45.6% casual and 54.4% permanent. Substantial employment status differences between male and female respondents were found. While almost half

(48.5%) of female employees accounted for part-time work (including casual and permanent part-time), this figure was only 13.4% for male employees, with 86.6% working full-time. This finding that men dominate full-time positions corresponds with the concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Pini and McDonald 2008), dominance of the male breadwinner role (Smithson and Stokoe 2005), and competitive pressures (Bittman, Hoffmann, and Thompson 2004). Within part-time positions, women were found to occupy more permanent part-time positions (59.6%) than casual part-time positions (40.4%). The figures for men reveal the opposite, with more working in casual part-time (64.2%) than permanent part-time (35.8%). This implies that women are more likely to commit themselves into ongoing part-time positions, which corresponds with their customary roles in domestic and childcare duties (for example, Brockbank and Airey 1994; Anker 1997; Sirianni and Negrey 2000; Warren 2004; McDonald *et al.* 2008).

**Table 3. Respondents classified by employment status and gender<sup>1</sup>**

Gender	Employment Status category				All
	Casual PT	Permanent PT	Casual FT	Permanent FT	
Number of male respondents (As a percentage of all respondents)	209 (8.6)	116 (4.8)	113 (4.7)	1979 (81.9)	2417 (100.0)
Number of female respondents (As a percentage of all respondents)	466 (19.6)	688 (28.9)	54 (2.3)	1174 (49.3)	2382 (100.0)
<b>Total</b> (As a percentage of all respondents)	<b>675</b> <b>(14.1)</b>	<b>804</b> <b>(16.8)</b>	<b>167</b> <b>(3.5)</b>	<b>3153</b> <b>(65.7)</b>	<b>4799</b> <b>(100.0)</b>

Source : Australia at Work 2009

1. (N= 4799). A chi square test of significance difference in distribution of respondents across employment status and gender found statistically significant differences between these groups ( $\chi^2 = 730.95, p < 0.001$ , degrees of freedom=3)

The findings in table 4 show that within the most likely child-caring age group of 25-44, 58.6% of women with dependent children were in part-time positions compared to 20.7% for those without dependent children. Furthermore, the majority (72.7%) of female part-timers with dependent children within this age group were occupying permanent part-time positions, which indicates an ongoing commitment to part-time work. As for men within the same child-caring age group of 25-44, the findings are opposed to that of women, in that only 5.4% of men with dependent children were in part-time positions compared to 10.2% for those without dependent children. This suggests a more salient breadwinner role among men with dependent children.

**Table 4. Respondents classified by employment status, gender/age, and dependent children<sup>1</sup>**

Dependent Children	Gender and Age	Employment Status				
		Casual PT	Permanent PT	Casual FT	Permanent FT	All
<i>With dependent children</i>	<i>Males aged 16-24</i>	0	1	0	7	8
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(0.0)	(12.5)	(0.0)	(87.5)	(100.0)
	<i>Females aged 16-24</i>	3	3	1	4	11
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(27.3)	(27.3)	(9.1)	(36.4)	(100.0)
	<i>Males aged 25-44</i>	19	19	28	643	709
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(2.7)	(2.7)	(3.9)	(90.7)	(100.0)
	<i>Females aged 25-44</i>	102	272	8	256	638
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(16.0)	(42.6)	(1.3)	(40.1)	(100.0)
<i>Males aged 45+</i>	16	15	16	460	507	
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(3.2)	(3.0)	(3.2)	(90.7)	(100.0)	
<i>Females aged 45+</i>	76	185	12	212	485	
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(15.7)	(38.1)	(2.5)	(43.7)	(100.0)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>1582</b>	<b>2358</b>
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	<b>(9.2)</b>	<b>(21.0)</b>	<b>(2.8)</b>	<b>(67.1)</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>
<i>Without dependent children</i>	<i>Males aged 16-24</i>	133	30	21	156	340
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(39.1)	(8.8)	(6.2)	(45.9)	(100.0)
	<i>Females aged 16-24</i>	173	41	21	123	358
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(48.3)	(11.5)	(5.9)	(34.4)	(100.0)
	<i>Males aged 25-44</i>	16	24	24	330	394
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(4.1)	(6.1)	(6.1)	(83.8)	(100.0)
	<i>Females aged 25-44</i>	32	40	5	272	349
	<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(9.2)	(11.5)	(1.4)	(77.9)	(100.0)
<i>Males aged 45+</i>	25	27	24	383	459	
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(5.4)	(5.9)	(5.2)	(83.4)	(100.0)	
<i>Females aged 45+</i>	80	147	7	307	541	
<i>(As a percentage of all respondents)</i>	(14.8)	(27.2)	(1.3)	(56.7)	(100.0)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>1571</b>	<b>2441</b>



(As a percentage of all respondents)	(18.8)	(12.7)	(4.2)	(64.4)	100.0
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**Source : Australia at Work 2009**

- (N= 2441). A chi square test of significance difference in distribution of respondents across employment status, gender/age groups, and dependent children found statistically significant differences between these groups ( $\chi^2 = 737.56, p < 0.001$ , degrees of freedom=15)

Table 5 reports that substantial employment status differences were found between respondents in different age groups. In the youngest age group of 16-24, employees in full and part-time employment were quite evenly distributed, with 53.6% in part-time positions and 46.4% in full-time positions. In the older age groups, the majority of employees accounted for full-time positions, with full-time positions held by 74.9% of employees aged 25-44 and 71.4% of employees aged 45 and above. Within part-time positions, a notable finding was that the majority of younger employees aged 16-24 were casual part-timers, with 80.4% in casual part-time and 19.6% in permanent part-time positions. This was found to be markedly different in the case of employees in the older age groups. The majority of employees aged 25 and above were permanent part-timers. For employees aged 25-44, 32.3% were in casual part-time and 67.7% in permanent part-time positions. For employees aged 45 and above, 34.5% were in casual part-time and 65.5% were in permanent part-time positions. The finding that younger employees aged 16-24 dominate casual part-time positions is best explained by the popular practice of working while attending school (for example, Feldman 1990; Topel and Ward 1992; Lucas 1997; Simpson *et al.* 1997; Wooden and Vandenheuvel 1999; Brown *et al.* 2001; Loughlin and Barling 2001; Smith and Green 2001; Brooks 2006).

**Table 5. Respondents classified by Employment Status and Age<sup>1</sup>**

Gender	Employment Status category				All
	Casual PT	Permanent PT	Casual FT	Permanent FT	
Number of respondents aged 16-24 (As a percentage of all respondents)	309 (43.1)	75 (10.5)	43 (6.0)	290 (40.4)	717 (100.0)
Number of respondents aged 24-44 (As a percentage of all respondents)	169 (8.1)	355 (17.0)	65 (3.1)	1501 (71.8)	2090 (100.0)
Number of respondents aged 45+ (As a percentage of all respondents)	197 (9.9)	374 (18.8)	59 (3.0)	1362 (68.4)	1992 (100.0)
<b>Total</b> (As a percentage of all respondents)	<b>675</b> <b>(14.1)</b>	<b>804</b> <b>(16.7)</b>	<b>167</b> <b>(3.5)</b>	<b>3153</b> <b>(65.7)</b>	<b>4799</b> <b>(100.0)</b>

**Source : Australia at Work 2009**

- (N= 4799). A chi square test of significance difference in distribution of respondents across employment status and age groups found statistically significant differences between these groups ( $\chi^2 = 628.40, p < 0.001$ , degrees of freedom=6)

Table 6 shows that the distribution between full-time and part-time employment between men and women aged 16-24 were found to be slightly different, with 52.8% of men working full-time compared to 40.4% of women. However, findings among respondents aged 25 and above revealed substantial differences. For employees aged 25-44, 92.9% of men worked full-time compared to 54.8% of women. Findings are similar for those over 45 years of age, where 91.4% of men worked full-time compared to 52.5% of women. This implies that as women enter into childcare and domestic responsibilities as they advance in age by transitioning from full-time to part-time positions, while men retain full-time employment throughout their careers. This strengthens the foregoing implication that women take up customary roles in domestic and childcare duties while men retain their 'breadwinner roles'.

**Table 6. Respondents classified by Employment Status and Gender/Age<sup>1</sup>**

Gender	Employment Status category				
	Casual	Permanent	Casual	Permanent	All
	PT	PT	FT	FT	
<i>Male respondents aged 16-24</i> (As a percentage of all respondents)	133 (38.2)	31 (8.9)	21 (6.0)	163 (46.8)	348 (100.0)
<i>Female respondents aged 16-24</i> (As a percentage of all respondents)	176 (47.7)	44 (11.9)	22 (6.0)	127 (34.4)	369 (100.0)
<i>Male respondents aged 24-44</i> (As a percentage of all respondents)	35 (3.2)	43 (3.9)	52 (4.7)	973 (88.2)	1103 (100.0)
<i>Female respondents aged 24-44</i> (As a percentage of all respondents)	134 (13.6)	312 (31.6)	13 (1.3)	528 (53.5)	987 (100.0)
<i>Male respondents aged 45+</i> (As a percentage of all respondents)	41 (4.2)	42 (4.3)	40 (4.1)	843 (87.3)	966 (100.0)
<i>Female respondents aged 45+</i> (As a percentage of all respondents)	156 (15.2)	332 (32.4)	19 (1.9)	519 (50.6)	1026 (100.0)
<b>Total</b> (As a percentage of all respondents)	<b>675</b> <b>(14.1)</b>	<b>804</b> <b>(16.8)</b>	<b>167</b> <b>(3.5)</b>	<b>3153</b> <b>(65.7)</b>	<b>4799</b> <b>(100.0)</b>

**Source : Australia at Work 2009**

1. (N= 4799). A chi square test of significance difference in distribution of respondents across employment status and gender/age groups found statistically significant differences between these groups ( $\chi^2 = 1421.62, p < 0.001$ , degrees of freedom=15)

## Discussion and Conclusion

The survey results presented above reveal employee gender and age influences on Australia's employment structure, which are now presented in the context of the three research questions developed in this paper:

1. How does the incidence of dependent children among employees influence employment status?
2. How do customary breadwinner and domestic childcare roles operate in the employment structure?
3. How does employee gender and age influence the employment structure?

### **How does the incidence of dependent children among employees influence employment status?**

Among employees with dependent children within the most likely child-caring age group of 25-44, the majority of women (58.6%) were found occupy part-time positions, while the opposite was found with women without dependent children where only a small minority (20.7%) were part-timers. Furthermore, the majority (72.7%) of female part-timers with dependent children between the same age group were occupying permanent part-time positions, which indicates an ongoing commitment to part-time work. Importantly, the findings among men within the same child-caring age group are opposed to that of women, in that less men with dependent children were in part-time positions (5.4%) compared to those without dependent children (10.2%). This implies a more salient breadwinner role among men with dependent children, possibly to countervail the lower employment capacity of their female partners who were found to trade-off employment for child-caring roles within the household.

### **How do customary breadwinner and domestic childcare roles operate in the employment structure?**

Men were found to dominate full-time positions while women were found to dominate part-time positions. On one hand, this finding suggests that the concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Pini and McDonald 2008) and the breadwinner role (Smithson and Stokoe 2005) apply to men. On the other, it suggests that females commit to customary roles in domestic and childcare duties (Brockbank and Airey 1994; Anker 1997; Sirianni and Negrey 2000; Warren 2004; McDonald *et al.* 2008). Importantly, the implication that females commit to customary roles in domestic and childcare duties is supported by three additional findings. The first is that women occupied more permanent part-time positions than casual part-time positions, while the opposite was found to be true for men. This suggests that women deliberately plan to work part-time, while for men, part-time work appears to be transitional. The second is that the percentages of men and women aged below 25 years of age working full-time were only slightly different, but from 25 years of age, over 90% of male employees work full-time while only about half of female employees do so. This suggests that female employees begin to commit to customary childcare and domestic responsibilities from the approximate age of 25 and trade-off career commitments in the process. It is important to note that female employees did not stop working due to such commitments, but rather, they transitioned into part-time jobs. This is evidenced by the finding that despite a closely balanced male-to-female employee ratio throughout all age groups, only the older age groups are strongly dominated by female employees. The third and most compelling finding is that while women with dependent children were found to occupy higher

percentage of part-time roles compared to those without dependent children, men with dependent children occupied a lower percentage of part-time work compared to those without dependent children (as explained in the preceding section), corroborating the breadwinner role of men and the domestic childcare roles of women.

### **How does employee gender and age influence the employment structure?**

The distribution between gender and age groups in the general workforce were closely balanced, which shows that the workforce in Australia is not as inherently male dominated as might be expected in more customary contexts (for example, Beck 2000; Sheridan 2004; Smithson and Stokoe 2005). However, substantial employment status differences were found between men and women, where men were found to strongly dominate in full-time positions, corresponding with the prior literature (for example, Crompton 2002; Warren 2004; Ngo 2002; Sheridan 2004; Pilcher 2007; Tomlinson 2007; McDonald *et al.* 2008; Atkinson and Hall 2009). Substantial employment status differences were noted between age groups, with the vast majority of younger employees (aged 16-24) being largely casual part-timers. This age group represents the majority of senior high school and university students, which suggests that they are likely to be attending school while working. This corresponds with the widely reported practice of working while attending school (for example, Feldman 1990; Topel and Ward 1992; Lucas 1997; Simpson *et al.* 1997; Wooden and Vandenheuvel 1999; Brown *et al.* 2001; Loughlin and Barling 2001; Smith and Green 2001; Brooks 2006).

The results of this study can serve as a corroboratory report for corresponding labour studies, as well as a basis of comparison for similar studies done outside Australia. Given the scope of the results, it is expected that this article can help managers better understand the influences of employee demographics on the employment structure, especially where childcare commitments are relevant. The incorporation of such knowledge into the planning of the employment structure can lead to improvements such as the ability to deal with dynamic labour supply and demand conditions, possibly enabling employment cost savings. This can be done by formulating hiring strategies that optimise the balance of full-time and part-time staff based on demographic considerations that include breadwinner and domestic childcare roles among employees. From a policy standpoint, this study shows how Australian industrial agreements have influenced work and family roles in the employment structure, and serves as a basis for measuring the impact of recent policy reforms such as more flexible working arrangements for parents (*National Employment Standard* 2010) and the *Paid Parental Leave Scheme* (2011). A limitation of this study is that the quantitative nature of analysis inevitably does not provide an insight into the reasons that employees make work commitment choices, such as the considerations made by parents in assigning breadwinner and childcare roles. Therefore, further research using qualitative methods based on the findings from this study will provide more conclusive knowledge in this area.

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