

NATIONAL FAMILIES WEEK – 11-17 May 2008

The Changing Nature of Work and Family: The Facts

Families form the foundation of society. They provide for the growth and development of children and care for the elderly. The nature and structure of families is changing, as well as the working climate and habits in Australia.

Today there is increased pressure on family budgets with rising property prices, rising petrol prices, increases in the price of basic essentials such as food and healthcare as well as rising education costs.

The theme of National Families Week in 2008 is striking the right balance between work and family. There are a number of issues related to this subject that include:

- Leave entitlements in Australia (personal leave, carers leave, maternity/paternity leave)
- Time spent at work
- Time spent at home on leisure activities
- Time spent caring for family members, including children and the elderly
- Time spent doing voluntary work
- Policies of governments towards providing for a better work/life balance
- The position of business towards a better work/life balance

FAMILIES TODAY

What does the average Australian family look like today? **The most common family type in Australia is a couple with children according to the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. Over 45 per cent of all families (2.4 million) fell into this groupⁱ.** The average number of children living in couple families with children under 15 was 2.16 children. Of the almost 4 million children living in Australia at the time of the 2006 Census, three quarters (almost 3 million) were living in a couple family and almost all of these (2.7 million) were with both their natural or adoptive parentsⁱⁱ.

POPULATION CHANGES

Australia's population is ageing faster than fertility rates are increasingⁱⁱⁱ, despite the population growing^{iv}. The number of people aged under 15 decreased as a proportion of all people from 20.8 per cent to 19.8 per cent over the last five years^v.

The ABS warns the ageing of the population will result in a decrease in the number of people in the workforce who pay taxes to fund Government services, which will also result in shortages of skilled labour. It argues that Australia needs to ensure it has as many people in the workforce as possible. **The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identifies women with children as the group that has the greatest scope to raise labour force participation in Australia^{vi}.**

The number of women in the workforce has increased over the last quarter of a century. The labour force participation rate for women of childbearing age (15-44 years) has risen from 59 per cent to 71 per cent over the period November 1980 to November 2005^{vii}.

Government must continue to provide assistance to families to ensure they can participate in the workforce as well as ensuring they have financial support if time is taken away from paid work to care for children or family members. Governments must also ensure there is sufficient avenue for public debate on issues around raising families, parenting and caring.

On the other hand, business must be encouraged, wherever possible, to provide flexible working arrangements for people with children. This will ensure people can remain in the workforce as well as being able to provide for their families.

Fertility rates

Although the fertility rate has increased slightly, it is still not rising fast enough to counter the ageing population. This is not only an issue facing Australia but a global problem in developed countries (the case is not the same in developing countries).

There is some debate about the impact of policies such as the Baby Bonus on fertility rates. The 2006 Census data shows there were 266,000 births in 2006, the highest since 1971 and the second highest in Australia's history^{viii}.

Data shows that families consisting of parents with children are still the major component of Australian society and that fertility rates are slowly increasing. This begs some serious questions:

- Why are fertility rates continuing to drop?
- Is there a disincentive for people to start families (financial pressures)?
- Can this be addressed with changes to Government policy (financial assistance) or with the introduction of paid parental leave?
- Are people unable to have a balanced work and family life?

LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

While there are different leave entitlements depending on employment, generally people are entitled to four weeks annual leave per year. With the abolition of Australian Workplace Agreements employees are entitled to be covered by a collective agreement or by an award, depending on industry and role^{ix}.

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HOURS SPENT WORKING

The ABS statistics show Australians are spending more time working and less time sleeping, playing and eating today^x.

It found men spent 31 hours and 51 minutes a week on paid work (up 5 per cent on 1997), which was nearly double the amount of time that women spent on paid work (16 hours and 27 minutes a week for women, up 7 per cent on 1997)^{xi}. There are various reasons for this; the most common would be due to the birth of children and their subsequent care.

This same release also stated that men spent much less time on unpaid work (20 hours and 4 minutes) than did women (36 hours and 31 minutes). Domestic activities made up just over half of the time spent on unpaid work by both men and women. Time spent by women on domestic activities has decreased nearly an hour a week from 1997, while men spent the same amount of time as in 1997^{xii}. This suggests there is still a clear differentiation between the roles of men and women in regards to paid and unpaid work, suggesting that raising children and household duties are factors that keep women out of the workforce.

HOURS SPENT ON LEISURE

If Australians are spending more time at work, they must be spending less time at home or on leisure activities.

ABS data suggests time spent on recreation and leisure activities has decreased by one hour and 45 minutes per week since 1997 to 29 hours and 31 minutes a week.

There has been a decrease in time spent on sport and outdoor activities by nearly an hour compared to an average week in 1997 – now only two hours and 13 minutes in 2006^{xiii}. However Australians now spend, on average, six hours and twenty minutes a week watching television and using the Internet, an increase of around an hour since 1997.

Australians spend less time at home and on leisure activities, which may indicate there is more emphasis placed on the benefits of paid work than on unpaid work and domestic duties. **These statistics indicate there also remains a difference in the perceived roles between women and men in regards to family duties and that women predominantly take on carer roles, whether they be of children or other family members. This results in women spending less time in paid work.**

CARING FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

In regards to childcare (a new question in the 2006 Census), 27 per cent of people aged 15 and over provided some kind of childcare in the two weeks before the 2006 Census. Twenty one percent of women and 18 per cent of men provided care for their own children only, while nine per cent of women and five per cent of men cared only for other people's children^{xiv}. This shows women continue to spend more time than men caring for children.

Eighty per cent of childcare provided by parents for their own children was provided by people aged 30-49 years, while half (50 per cent) of childcare provided to other people's children was by people aged 50-69 years. Many of these were likely to be the children's grandparents^{xv}. It seems that where it is possible, grandparents are assisting with childcare, which suggests people are spending more time away from their children.

Around 1.6 million Australians over the age of 15 provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long-term illness or problems related to old age in the two weeks leading up to the 2006 Census^{xvi}.

Women are the majority caregivers in Australia, at 62 per cent. Women of every age were more likely to provide unpaid care than men of the same age, except those aged 75 years and over^{xvii}. This highlights the importance of ensuring there are strategies and policies in place to ensure it is easier for women to engage in employment while still partaking in their care-giving activities.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is an activity that many people and their families engage in on a regular basis, whether it is at their children's school, a community or church group. Activities can include fundraising, preparing and serving food, repairs and maintenance, gardening, coaching and refereeing, management, administration, transporting people, performing and media production, lobbying and protecting the environment.

The 2006 Census showed that one in five Australians engages in voluntary work^{xviii}. Volunteering is considered by many to be an important part of society and gives people a sense of fulfillment. It is important in the discussion of work/family balance, as volunteering activities can contribute to a person's sense of well-being, to the community as a whole and can contribute to a better work/family balance if the activities involve family members.

An interesting statistic shows those who were in paid work were more likely to volunteer, whether full-time (34 per cent) or part-time work (44 per cent), compared to those who were unemployed (26 per cent) or not in the labour force (30 per cent). Men employed full-time were as likely to volunteer (34 per cent) as women employed on the same basis (33 per cent)^{xix}.

However, 55 per cent of employed women work part-time and among these women 47 per cent undertake voluntary work, indicating that many may have been choosing part-time participation in the labour force to make other activities possible^{xx}.

FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

The most important method of Government support is financial. There are several types of family payments:

- Family Tax Benefit; Part A^{xxi} (two tiered payment linked to the number and age of children) and Part B (for families with one main income and sole parents)
- Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate to assist with child care expenses
- Baby Bonus, a payment following the birth or adoption of a baby
- Maternity Immunisation Allowance to immunise children aged 18-24 months^{xxii}

The Parenting Payment is another form of financial support for sole parents as well as couples. This payment is only available to one of the parents. Changes to this payment were made in 2006 under the Howard Government's *Welfare to Work* reforms^{xxiii}.

There is no legislative right to paid maternity or paternity leave, however if you are a female permanent full-time or part-time employee or a regular casual with 12 months continuous service you can take up to 52 weeks of unpaid parental leave following the birth or adoption of a baby^{xxiv}.

In 2008, the Federal Government instructed the Productivity Commission to hold an inquiry into the issue of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave in Australia. The Commission has the following guidelines:

- explore the extent of paid parental leave provided by employers in Australia
- identify models of paid parental leave that could be used in Australia^{xxv}

The Commission will assess different models of paid parental leave and their potential impact on:

- the financial and regulatory costs and benefits for small and medium-sized businesses
- the employment of women, their workforce participation and earnings and the workforce participation of both parents more generally
- the work/family preferences of both parents in the first two years after the child's birth
- the post-birth health of the mother
- the development of young children, including the particular development needs of newborns in their first two years
- relieving the financial pressures on families^{xxvi}

There is clear evidence that the financial assistance given to families has steadily increased over time and some organisations offer paid parental leave. The question remains whether these family oriented policies are making it easier for people to have children, participate in the workforce and strike a balance with leisure and volunteer activities.

The Productivity Commission is due to report back to the Federal Government in February 2009 and will take submissions from the public until June 2008. Recent media reports state that issues such as the value of breastfeeding, bonding with newborns, the role of fathers and models of paid leave are to be considered by the Commission^{xxvii}.

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Introducing a system of some form of paid parental leave may at first be a logical step in helping increase birth rates and making it easier for women to stay in work and have children, however there must be consideration to whether this will act as a disincentive^{xxviii}. Ultimately government or business will have to find the money to pay for such a scheme and small business as the largest employer in Australia would shoulder a significant share. Any discussion of work and family balance must ensure the needs of business are met – after all, small businesses owners also have to provide for their families. Also it must be remembered that any increase in the cost of business will ultimately be born by the consumer while any additional burden on the public purse will result in higher taxes.

SUMMARY:

- Men spend almost twice as much time in paid work than women
- Women spend more time on unpaid (domestic) duties than men; although the amount of time women spent on such duties has decreased nearly an hour a week from 1997
- Overall, Australians spend less time on leisure activities and sport, while there has been an increase in the amount of time spent watching TV or using the Internet
- Twenty seven per cent of people aged 15 and over care for children
- Women spend more time caring for children than men; this includes their own children as well as other people's children
- 1.6 million Australians aged 15 and over provide unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long-term illness or problems related to old age
- Women are the major caregivers in Australia no matter their age
- People who are employed are more likely to volunteer; however over half of employed women worked part-time and of these women slightly less than half partake in voluntary work

RESOURCES

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

- The impact of long working hours on employed fathers and their families, <http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/Biblio/cp/conf-p08.pdf>

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

- It's About Time – Men, Women, Work and Family final paper 2007
http://www.humanrights.gov.au/sex_discrimination/its_about_time/docs/its_about_time_2007.pdf

Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave in Australia

- Issues Paper – Parental Leave http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0003/78492/parentalsupport.rtf
- Personal Feedback Paper http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0010/78499/personalfeedbackpaper.rtf

Australian Bureau of Statistics

- Australian Social Trends, 2007
<http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/F1C08F3A539FED51CA25732C00207DE0?opendocument#>
- Voluntary Work Australia 2006, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/cat/4441.0>
- How Australians Use Their Time, 2006
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyTopic/C1866BB6582046A5CA2573F5001959CF?OpenDocument#>
- Forms of Employment 2007
[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/AEF1FAC518A463AACA2572EC0018F125/\\$File/63590_novper cent202006per cent20\(reissue\).pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/AEF1FAC518A463AACA2572EC0018F125/$File/63590_novper cent202006per cent20(reissue).pdf)
- 2006 Census fast facts and figures
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- Media Release – One in 25 people need help with basic duties
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/25751785d566d5eaca257306000d59a5!OpenDocument#>
- Media Release – More than a quarter of Australians provide childcare
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- Census paints a picture of average Australian family
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/0648b5bbc99f6433ca257306000d508c!OpenDocument#>

MORE RESOURCES

Australian Institute of Family Studies

- Fertility and Family Policy in Australia <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/rp41/rp41.html>

Australian Government Workplace Authority

- Information for employees
<http://www.workplaceauthority.gov.au/graphics.asp?showdoc=/employees/default.asp>
- Employees entitlements
<http://www.workplaceauthority.gov.au/graphics.asp?showdoc=/employers/payconditions/PayAndConditions.asp>

News articles

- Karvelas, P. The Australian, Maternity leave in focus, 8 April 2008
<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23503866-5013404,00.html>
- Low, C. Moree Champion. Maternity Leave study to focus on 'balance', 18 February 2008
<http://moree.yourguide.com.au/news/national/political/maternity-leave-study-to-focus-on-balance/1184956.html>

Ministers and Members of Parliament

- Hon Peter Costello MP (former Treasurer)
Speech: Launch of 2006 Census
<http://www.treasurer.gov.au/DisplayDocs.aspx?pageID=&doc=speeches/2007/011.htm&min=phc>
- Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Workplace Relations
Media Release: Proclamation of Transition to Forward with Fairness Act
<http://www.workplaceauthority.gov.au/docs/NEWS/087L1013.pdf>

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Family Studies – Fertility and Family Policy in Australia
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- ^{ix} Australian Government Workplace Authority – Employees entitlements
<http://www.workplaceauthority.gov.au/graphics.asp?showdoc=/employers/payconditions/PayAndConditions.asp>
- ^x ABS, How Australians Use Their Time, 2006,
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyTopic/C1866BB6582046A5CA2573F5001959CF?OpenDocument#>
- ^{xi} ABS, How Australians Use Their Time, 2006,
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- ^{xii} ABS, How Australians Use Their Time, 2006,
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- ^{xix} Voluntary Work Australia 2006, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/cat/4441.0>
- ^{xx} Voluntary Work Australia 2006, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/cat/4441.0>
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- ^{xxii} Fertility and Family Policy in Australia <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/rp41/rp41.html>
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