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WOMEN'S LIFEWORK: LABOUR MARKET TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN

FINAL REPORT

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Glossary of Abbreviations

F/T	Full-time
P/T	Part-time
NCW	Not currently working
NESB	Non-English speaking background

Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Commonwealth, State, Territories and New Zealand Ministers on the Status of Women with funds from the Women's Activities Trust Fund. It aims to capture the labour market transition experiences of Australian mothers who are balancing work and family responsibilities. The study employed a qualitative approach, which enables women's stories and voices to be heard. The qualitative data was supplemented by quantitative analysis. The study seeks to fill a gap in existing Australian research on work and family issues, much of which focuses exclusively on quantitative analysis. It attempts to give policy makers a better understanding of mothers' labour market experiences, their work preferences and the factors that constrain or facilitate their ability to balance their parenting and paid employment roles over the life course. The study reveals the contextual, fluid and complex nature of the life and work decisions that women who are parents make over the life course.

Methodology

The study involved in-depth interviews with 20 mothers. The study sought to include a diversity of women and experiences including: sole parents; Aboriginal women; women from a non-English speaking background; and women living in non-metropolitan/rural areas. The youngest participant was 22 years old and the oldest was 48 years of age. The women in the study had between one and four children, most of whom were primary school-aged. Women employed full-time at the time of the interview comprised the largest group, followed by women in part-time employment. A number of women were not working at the time of the interview. The study also included an analysis of quantitative data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) relating to women's labour force participation, family formation, work preferences and life satisfaction.

Key findings

Labour force trajectories

The interviews revealed the dynamic and fluid nature of movement into and out of the labour force that many of the women experienced, indicating the varying impact of childbearing and childrearing on their labour market participation. Employment patterns that were revealed by the interviews are presented in the table below:

Mothers' predominant employment pattern	No. of participants
Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – part-time work	8
Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – full-time work	5
Full-time work– withdrawal from the labour market – part-time work – full-time work	3
Study – birth of first child – part-time work	2
Part-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – full-time work	1
Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – not in labour force	1

It is important to emphasise that these patterns describe the *predominant* employment pattern that the women had followed at the time of the interview. However, this masks the dynamic and fluid nature of movement into and out of the labour force that many of the women experienced. In particular, some women had several spells out of the labour force following the birth of a child/ren and many varied their hours of work particularly when their children were young. This movement into and out of the labour force was often influenced by the individual's particular circumstances. It is also important to note that these employment patterns are *not fixed* as factors influencing labour market participation and preferences may change over the life course.

The HILDA analysis also underlines the significant impact that the birth of a child has on women's labour force participation. It showed that the proportion of women in full-time employment dropped from three-fifths to 12 per cent after the birth of a child. The HILDA analysis also confirms the fluidity of women's labour force participation with one quarter of women with resident children having a different labour force status 12 months after they were first interviewed.

Preferences

The interviews highlighted a range of work preferences, with similar numbers of participants expressing a preference for part-time and full-time employment at the time of the interview. A number of women expressed a preference for remaining at home full-time, while a few were somewhat conflicted about their preferences. In most cases, it was not possible to identify a single factor driving the participants' current preference and often multiple factors were found to interact. These included: finances; enjoyment of work; time with children; the importance of career; time out from caring; domestic arrangements; and being a role model.

Analysis of the interview data also suggests that it may be more appropriate to speak of 'contextual preferences', because work preferences are not formed in a vacuum but are often determined by the woman's context. Many women who expressed a preference for part-time or full-time work stressed the financial importance of paid work for their household. Those who stated a preference for no work at the time of the interview said their partners' income allowed them to act on their preference. Others expressed a preference for part-time work because they were solely responsible for domestic tasks and would not be able to manage full-time employment on top of household duties. This study showed that preferences are often expressed taking domestic and work spheres into account and because contexts are not static, neither are preferences. It is also possible that preferences are formed *after* taking constraining and facilitating factors into account and that these preferences change during the life course, with several women describing changing work/home priorities since the birth of their child/ren.

The HILDA data support the interview findings that preferences are not fixed, with over a third of women with children changing their work preference over a one-year period. Even among women whose labour force status did not change between Waves 1 and 2, one third changed their work preference.

The majority of the study participants were satisfied with their labour force status at the time of the interview, suggesting that they were able to act on their preference.

However, a number of women in paid employment expressed a preference for shorter/part-time working hours indicating a mismatch between their work preference and actual work arrangements. This highlights the problematic nature of standard work hours for many working mothers and suggests that these hours are often incompatible with having a good work/life balance.

The HILDA data also reveal a mismatch between actual hours worked and work preference for many women. Half of the women with children in full-time employment would like to work fewer hours, even with the reduction in income taken into account. Again, this underscores the difficulty that a significant proportion of women experience when trying to juggle work and home life. Conversely, the data also reveal that a quarter of women in part-time employment would like more hours of work. This may point to the increasing polarisation in working hours that leaves people with fewer options between very long full-time hours and very short part-time hours.

Constraining and facilitating factors

A range of constraining and facilitating factors that influence women's workforce decisions were identified through the interviews.

On the domestic front, the interviews revealed that women still bear the burden of household duties, however, some male partners were taking more active parenting roles. The availability of support from extended families, particularly grandparents, made a significant difference for many women.

The interview participants reported a range of experiences with employers. Those in public sector positions were better supported as parents than those in other sectors, particularly those in the private retail sector. However, the study showed that 'good employers' were not just those with good written policies, but those who understood parental responsibilities. For many mothers in unsupportive work environments, child sickness and school holidays continue to cause difficulties in managing the work/home balance. The study also found that the widespread use of information technologies appears to be providing much greater flexibility for new parents. A number of women spoke about mixing work at the office with work at home in the transition back to work after the birth of a child. Whilst many appreciated this flexibility, the research provides some evidence of a blurring of boundaries between work and home.

Matching child care hours with work needs was an ongoing struggle for many women, particularly sole parents. This suggests that the mismatch between child care/work hours and school/work holidays is a highly constraining factor for many mothers. Filling gaps was costly or led to women making unsatisfactory child care arrangements. Out of school hours care was particularly problematic for parents of teenage children. This challenges the assumption that child care gets easier as children get older.

Social policy and employment initiatives aimed at assisting parents balance work and home had little influence on these women's work decisions, largely because eligibility and entitlement were patchy. Only a small proportion were entitled to paid maternity leave, and a number were not eligible for any child care allowances or subsidies.

Those who were eligible said the allowances had little influence on their family-planning decisions because the amounts available were considered to be quite minimal relative to the cost of raising a child. There was a clear perception that child care costs were expensive, although Child Care Benefit made a significant difference to a number of women, particularly those receiving large subsidies.

Unique experiences of particular groups

The emotional and physical burden of being the sole carer and provider was evident in the experiences of sole parents. Juggling full-time work, home responsibilities and complex child care arrangements was a constant challenge for these women.

Among the Aboriginal women interviewed, there was recognition that labour market participation was important to redress the social, economic and educational disadvantages that have affected Aboriginal people. Child care was of great importance to these women and all sought child care that affirmed and celebrated Indigenous culture. There was great diversity among the women in relation to their attitude to and use of informal care.

The women from a non-English speaking background had strong connections to the labour market, primarily for financial reasons. For recently arrived migrants, work and income were of vital importance, leading hopefully to 'a better life'. Some experienced difficulties in the labour market due to their lack of English proficiency or not having their qualifications recognised. Others reported experiencing racism in the workplace and illegal employment conditions.

Travel was a feature of the rural women's experiences, both for employment and for child care. Some spoke of the lack of formal child care and relied totally on informal grandparent care for children under school age. Finding a 'good employer' was even more important for these women in balancing work and family responsibilities and often more difficult due to the lack of employment alternatives.

Further research

The study identified a number of areas for further research:

- Employers' and employees' negotiation and management of transitions back into the workforce after maternity leave;
- Men's experiences of balancing work and family with a particular focus on factors that constrain their involvement in family life;
- The transitions mature age and older women make into/out of the workforce to manage caring responsibilities;
- The take up and eligibility of maternity leave entitlements by Aboriginal women and women from a non-English speaking background;
- Flexible work and part-time arrangements;
- Child care for older children; and
- Strategies to address the current partial nature of maternity leave/family leave entitlements.

1 Background

This study was commissioned by the Commonwealth, State, Territories and New Zealand Ministers on the Status of Women with funds from the Women's Activities Trust Fund. It aims to capture the labour market transition experiences of Australian mothers who are balancing work and family responsibilities. The study employed a qualitative approach, which enables women's stories and voices to be heard. The qualitative data was supplemented by quantitative analysis. The study seeks to fill a gap in existing Australian research on work and family issues, much of which focuses exclusively on quantitative analysis. It attempts to give policy makers a better understanding of mothers' labour market experiences, their work preferences and the factors that constrain or facilitate their ability to balance their parenting and paid employment roles over the life course.

This report presents the findings from the study. Section 2 provides a select review of the literature. Section 3 outlines the research methodology. Section 4 presents the results of the quantitative analysis. Sections 5, 6 and 7 present the findings from the qualitative stage of the research. The final section draws together the findings from the various stages of the study and suggests areas for further research.

2 Literature review

The spheres of family and work have undergone profound changes in recent decades. More women are now engaged in paid work outside the home. Family breakdown has led to changes in family composition and an increase in the proportion of lone parent households (ABS, 2004a). At the same time, there have been significant changes in the labour market. Part-time and casual employment have increased and working hours have become increasingly polarised with very long full-time hours on the one hand and very short part-time hours on the other (ABS, 2003c; 2003d). From a policy perspective, the need to prepare for the structural ageing of the workforce as well as the need to assist people better balance work/home responsibilities have been of growing concern in recent years. This select review of the literature highlights the key debates and provides a background to the current study.

Women, work and family

Over the last few decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of Australian women in paid employment. The proportion of women with dependent children in paid employment has also increased. Between 1983 and 2003, the labour market participation rate of women in couple families where the youngest dependent child was less than five years increased from a third (32%) to half (52%) (ABS, 2005b). This increase in women's labour market participation has led to a decline in the traditional male breadwinner/female carer model of the family and dual income families are now the most common household form. However, the reality for many families with dependent children is more likely to be a one and a half earner family, where the male works full-time and the female works part-time[1]. This increase in mothers' labour market participation 'introduces large numbers of workers with significant caring responsibilities', which may conflict with their work responsibilities (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004:10).

While there has been an increase in the proportion of women with dependent children entering the labour market, Australia compares unfavourably with other OECD countries. Although the employment rate declines for women with children in all other countries, Australia is noteworthy for the steepness of this decline. While the decline in participation is substantial for women with one child[2], it is among the most extreme of 23 OECD countries for women with two or more children[3]. This suggests that motherhood has a more detrimental impact on women's labour force participation

[1] Labour force data show a drop in full-time employment among women of child-bearing age, with many combining part-time employment with caring for children. In 1983, the full-time participation rate was lowest for women aged 30-34, while in 2003 the full-time participation rate was lowest for women aged 35-39, reflecting the increase in mothers' average age at birth (ABS, 2005b).

[2] In 2000, the employment rate for Australian women with one child was 55.3 per cent compared to the OECD average of 70.6 per cent, placing Australia in 19th place out of 23 OECD countries (OECD, 2002b, table reproduced in Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004).

[3] The employment rate for Australian women with two children was 43.2 compared to the OECD average of 61.9 per cent, placing Australia in 22nd place out of 23 OECD countries. This was marginally higher than Ireland at 42.4 per cent (OECD, 2002b table reproduced in Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004).

in Australia than in most other OECD countries (OECD, 2002b in Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004).

Policy objectives

The importance of helping mothers achieve a better balance between work and family has been framed in terms of both individual and societal goals. On an individual level, the fact that many Australian women are not having as many children as they would like to have suggests that many are facing barriers (Weston et al., 2004; Paice, 2003; De Vaus, 2002). Work and family decisions are also financially important to individuals and to their quality of life. Factors that influence individuals' work and family decisions include financial constraints, labour market constraints, industrial/ workplace constraints, partnership difficulties and gendered assumptions about childrearing and the domestic division of labour.

From a societal point of view, Australia's ageing population, a problem compounded by fertility decline, will radically alter the age profile of Australia's population. ABS projections suggest that by 2021 the number of people aged 65 and over will outnumber those aged under 15, and by 2051 they will constitute a quarter of the population (Weston et al., 2001). Australia's changing demographic profile has a number of implications. First, the labour force dependency ratio is likely to increase as the ratio of non-workers to workers increases (McDonald and Kippen, 1999)[4]. Second, fertility decline will reduce the size of the working age population and contribute to population ageing, which some argue will negatively affect economic growth and productivity (Martin, 2002). Third, this changing age structure will require a change in government spending which will affect health and aged care expenditure in particular (Treasurer, 2002).

The importance of encouraging women's labour force participation and facilitating improved work/life harmony is inextricably linked to population ageing for two major reasons. First, with the projected increase in the labour force dependency ratio women who are currently not employed or working short hours will become an increasingly important source of labour (Austen and Giles, 2003[5]; Jaumotte, 2005). Second, the cost of sustaining an ageing population, in terms of age pension expenditure, could also be reduced if more women are given the opportunity to work and accrue superannuation savings. However, since the superannuation system is an occupation-linked system, the majority of women accumulate far less superannuation than men due to their pattern of labour force participation (ABS, 2002). Gendered assumptions about domestic care arrangements, the gender pay gap and the mismatch between standard work hours and school hours means that many women with caring duties tend to work on a part-time or casual basis and often in lower paid sectors of the

[4] The labour force dependency ratio is projected to decline until 2018, then rise but only to its 1998 level by 2048 (McDonald & Kippen, 1999: 58).

[5] However, as Austen and Giles, (2003) note, women's increased labour force participation will only become a reality over coming decades 'if the 'supply side' aspects of women's participation and hours of work decisions are also conducive to such an increase' (2003: 268). This includes the gendered division of labour within the home and institutional support.

workforce or in sectors where non-compliance with the superannuation guarantee is most common (Olsberg and Ferris, 2001)[6].

Work/family choice

The language of 'choice' pervades work/family debates in Australia, where 'the avowed policy objective is to give parents a *choice* about whether they work or care for children' (OECD, 2002a: 15). Much research has been done on the issue of women's labour market participation and the work of Catherine Hakim has received a great deal of attention in Australia (Hand and Hughes, 2005).

Hakim's (2000) Preference Theory seeks to explain women's choice between family work and market work. Preference Theory argues that five major societal changes[7] occurred in the late twentieth century, which have produced a 'qualitatively different and new scenario' for women in the twenty-first century (2000: 2). Hakim contends that these changes have enabled the vast majority of women to exercise 'genuine choices' about reconciling work-family conflict (Hakim, 2003). Once choices are open to women, 'three distinct 'packages' of predispositions and work-lifestyle preferences' (2000: 189) emerge, displaying the heterogeneity of women's lifestyle preferences in the twenty-first century:

- *Home-centred women* give priority to family life over labour market participation and are the most likely to have large families. Hakim argues that home-centred women will invest in qualifications, because 'the educational system functions as a marriage market as well as a training institution'. She estimates that home-centred women make up approximately 20 per cent of women, but can vary between 10 and 30 per cent of all women.
- *Adaptive women* combine work and family without giving a priority to one over the other. This group constitutes the largest group of women in a society. Adaptive women tend to choose occupations that facilitate the work/family combination. Hakim estimates that adaptive women constitute approximately 60 per cent of women, but this can vary between 40 and 80 per cent of all women.
- *Work-centred women* give preference to labour market participation. Family life is fitted around work and many remain childless. Hakim estimates that work-centred women make up approximately 20 per cent of women, but can vary between 10 and 30 per cent of all women.

Hakim argues that these three distinct groups have different priorities, values and interests and therefore each group responds differently to different government policies. Home-centered women, for example, are unresponsive to employment or

6 A number of measures have been introduced to address women's low superannuation balances (Treasury, 2004).

7 These changes are: the contraceptive revolution; the equal opportunities revolution; the expansion of white-collar occupations; the creation of jobs for secondary earners; and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and preferences in the lifestyle choices of modern societies.

other policies that affect opportunities in the public sphere, while work-centred women are responsive to employment policy but unresponsive to family or social policy. Adaptive women, she argues, respond to all government policies.

Preference Theory contends that women are predisposed to one of these three lifestyle preferences and that these preferences are a *determinant* of their labour market behaviour. It argues that home and work-centred women have stable but contrasting preferences (representing anywhere between 20 to 60 per cent of all women), whereas the adaptive group 'does not *appear* to have stable tastes' (2000: 190, original emphasis). And while Hakim does acknowledge that economic and social structural factors remain important, she asserts that 'their relative weight declines as the relative importance of lifestyle preference grows', (2000: 17).

Hakim's work has prompted a wealth of research around women, work and family decisions. While some researchers have found support for certain aspects of Preference Theory (Houston, and Marks, 2003; McRae, 2003), many challenge other aspects of her theory. In particular, her downplay of the circumstantial constraints that prevent many women from acting on their preference has provoked strong criticism[8].

The circumstantial constraints women face when making choices around work and family can be classified as normative or structural (McRae, 2003). Normative constraints include women's identities, gender relations in the home and partners' attitudes. Structural constraints include job availability, the cost and availability of child care and the differences in opportunities afforded to people from different social backgrounds (i.e. education level, early pregnancy, health, culture).

Rose's (2001) study found that while some women were able to act on their employment preference many could not. Rose, therefore, argues that imputing choice to explain women's labour market status should be avoided. Instead, he suggests that while some people can make choices based on their attitudes and values 'more often, action is the product of a structure of opportunities and constraints', (2001: 38).

Similarly, Fagan (2001) argues that people's work orientations, preferences and attitudes emerge in a gradual, but continual 'adaptive process' and are shaped by their experiences in education, the labour market, their domestic circumstances and their evaluation of the options they perceive to be open to them. These options 'are structured by the societal context of economic conditions, state policies and other social institutions' (2001: 243) in addition to social norms and dominant ideologies. Fagan found that child care and domestic responsibilities influence women's preferences to a greater extent than men's.

Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) focus on both normative and structural constraints, arguing that internal and external constraints have an impact on women's employment decisions. They conducted interviews with 34 women who had at least one pre-school child and found that, in terms of finances, views on quality child care and working time, both personal identities and external circumstances limited the women's

[8] For example, McRae (2003) contends that '[p]reference theory is built on a remarkable (for a *sociological* theory) restricted view of potential and real structural constraints and their impacts on individual action.' (2003: 334, original emphasis).

choices. They also found that the women varied in how much power they had when negotiating work hours with their employer and that 'those lower down the hierarchy had less power in negotiating their hours' (2004: 465).

Much of the research on women's labour market participation also suggests that work/family orientations and preferences are not fixed but subject to change. Ginn et al. (1996) suggest that it might be more useful to consider orientation to paid work as fluctuating over the life course 'reflecting the interplay between attitudes and situational factors' (1996: 169). Fagan (2001) also found that work orientations and preferences are strongly related to individuals' occupational status and their position in the life course. Hynes and Clarkberg (2005) argue that a woman's movement out of the labour force after the birth of a child does not represent an enduring change in work orientation 'but must instead be considered in the larger context of a woman's employment trajectory' (2005: 224).

Much of the research on work preferences advises caution when interpreting preference data however. Houston and Marks (2003) suggest that cognitive dissonance theory may shed light on why people express certain preferences. The theory asserts that while attitudes are deemed to have a causal impact on behaviour, behaviour can also cause a change in attitude. If, for example, an individual has a preference but is unable to act on it, they may alter their preference so that it corresponds with their behaviour. In other words, 'the preferences that women express are related to attitudes that may be a *consequence* of their lifestyle rather than the cause of it' (2003: 199). Fagan (2001) also warns that preferences and levels of satisfaction adapt in the light of perceived alternatives. She suggests that interview participants may be reluctant to speak of dissatisfaction with their circumstances 'particularly if this is felt to indicate a lack of labour market power or status' (2001: 245), or if their views challenge accepted norms.

Reconciling work and family

A growing body of research points to the difficulties and feelings of time pressure that many parents, particularly mothers, experience when trying to combine work and family. For instance, Australian time-use research has shown that working mothers are the most time-pressured of all demographic groups (Bittman and Rice, 2002; Bittman, 2004) and that lone mothers feel the most time pressure (Craig, 2004).

Part-time employment is often championed as a key strategy to enable Australian women to achieve a work/life balance. However, much research has pointed to the negative repercussions of part-time employment for women's careers (Warren, 2004; Houston and Marks 2003). In addition, the *quality* of part-time work needs to be considered when exploring whether part-time work helps people achieve a good work/life balance (Campbell, Chalmers and Charlesworth, 2005). In particular, there is concern about the lower hourly wage relative to full-time employment (Whitehouse, 2001), the short hours and the concentration of part-time employment in female-dominated sectors (hospitality, retail, cleaning). The disadvantages associated with much part-time employment lead Campbell and Charlesworth to argue that 'part-time employment represents a trade-off for many women, whereby in return for the opportunity of reduced hours, they tolerate poor conditions' (2004: 48).

A study by Doorewand et al. (2004) lends support to the contention that part-time employment represents a trade-off for many women. They found that women who seek to re-enter the work force after several years of unpaid caring duties do not re-enter the workforce to find a challenging job that can develop their knowledge and skills. Instead, women who have caring responsibilities at home tend to accept relatively low-skilled part-time jobs. Similarly, Ginn et al. (1996) argue that the preference for part-time work amongst women needs to be recognised as a constrained choice and 'must be understood in the context of demands on their time and child care costs, which limit their employment options more than men's' (1996: 170). They argue that an issue that needs to be addressed is whether women want part-time jobs or jobs with short hours.

Employer-provided family benefits, often referred to as family-friendly measures, are seen as a way to ease the clash between work and family demands. Family-friendly workplace measures include: paid leave, flex-time, rostered days off and time in lieu. On the flip side, workplace measures that heighten the tensions between work and caring responsibilities – family hostile measures – include: rigid organisational cultures, long (and lengthening) hours, variable start and finish times under the employer's control, compulsory overtime at unpredictable intervals and with limited notice, unsympathetic supervisors and poor quality part-time schedules (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004). Indeed, workplace inflexibility acts as a significant constraining factor that prevents many women from acting on their preferences (Houston and Marks, 2003). In addition, flexibility in family-friendly workplaces can be problematic if it rests with the employer alone (Probert, 1997).

In Australia, family-friendly entitlements are not legislated for beyond a minimum and Australia is one of only two OECD countries that has no statutory paid maternity leave[9] (OECD, 2002a). Instead, the emphasis is on negotiation of family–friendly initiatives at the workplace level. This voluntary, rather than mandatory, approach to family-friendly entitlements has resulted in a situation where family-friendly practices are not universally available. This approach inevitably forces many women to organise their working life around their family responsibilities and is unlikely to effect long-term change without government legislation (OECD, 2002a; 2005).

Access to family-friendly entitlements varies by sector and employment status. In 2004, three quarters of employees were entitled to one or more types of paid leave (holiday, sick, long service or maternity/paternity) in their main job. Employees in the public sector had greater access to one or more of these benefits than employees in the private sector (91 and 71 per cent respectively). Among the 28 per cent of employees without paid holiday and/or sick leave entitlements, two-thirds were in part-time employment, half were female and a quarter worked in the retail industry (ABS, 2005a). These data suggest that many employees who choose particular types of employment to facilitate their work/family balance, may in fact miss out on family-friendly entitlements (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004).

[9] Australia does, however, have unpaid parental leave provisions outlined in the Workplace Relations Act (1996).

Even when family-friendly measures are available, however, take-up by men in particular tends to be low. In 1999, over two-thirds of couple families where both parents were employed used mothers' working arrangements to care for children whilst a third used fathers' working arrangements (ABS, 2003b). These data highlight the endurance of gendered assumptions about child care within the home and that 'even when both parents are working, women… are more likely than their partners to organise their work around child care responsibilities' (ABS, 2003b). This has prompted concern that greater use of family-friendly provisions by women could lead some employers to discriminate[10].

At the same time, however, the low uptake of family-friendly provisions amongst men is also a cause for concern. A recent study found that barriers to men's uptake arose from the organisation of their workplace, the business environment in which they operated and the domestic organisation in the employees' own homes (Bittman et al., 2004). A recent OECD report (2002a) emphasised the need for a change in workplace culture that penalises fathers who use family-friendly benefits: 'Without a shift in workplace culture 'providing choice to parents' will more often than not contribute to perpetuating existing gender inequalities in the labour market' (2002a: 29).

Additional areas of policy that influence individuals' work decisions are the tax/benefit system and child care. A cross-national study by Gornick et al. (1996) found compelling evidence of the association between public policy and mothers' employment. Of the 14 countries included in their study, Australia ranked in the bottom two for the magnitude of its 'child penalty', that is, the estimated decrease in the employment of married mothers' given the presence of young children in the home.

In Australia, McDonald (2004) argues that tax transfers benefit single-earner couple families to a greater extent than dual earner couples, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles. And while families may receive an income related tax benefit and a universal payment of $3000 for each child[11], there is an additional non-means tested payment for single income families.

The availability of affordable, quality child care is another key policy area that influences individuals' work decisions. In Australia, Child Care Benefit is paid to parents on a means-tested basis to subsidise the cost of child care. While the cost of caring for under two year olds is higher, this extra cost is not matched by child care fee relief[12], which a recent OECD report has suggested leads to fewer places for this age group, some unmet demand and greater reliance on informal child care

[10] A number of submissions received in response to a HREOC paper on the issue of paid maternity leave suggest that pregnant women and women with family responsibilities continue to face discrimination in the workplace. In addition, HREOC reports that in the year 2001-02, almost a third of complaints made under the Sex Discrimination Act related to pregnancy and family responsibilities discrimination (HREOC, 2002).

[11] As a result of indexation, the rate of Maternity Payment at March 2005 was $3079. From 1 July 2006 the Maternity Payment will increase to $4000 and to $5000 from 1 July 2008.

[12] The new Child Care Tax Rebate will cover 30 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses for families who receive the Child Care Benefit (CCB) and meet the CCB work/study/training test, up to a maximum of $4,000 per child.

arrangements (OECD, 2002a). The mismatch between standard working hours and school hours 'and summer breaks which exceed parents' annual vacation allowance by a long margin' (OECD, 2005: 5) are additional factors that complicate many parents' arrangements.

Toohey (2005) found that Child Care Benefit reduces the cost of child care for all women and women with lower incomes and more children receive the greatest reduction. However, mothers with two or more children were often worse off when they worked full-time rather than part-time suggesting 'that the combination of increasing child care costs and a reduction in other forms of assistance to families with children acts as a strong deterrent to full-time work for mothers with several young children' (2005: 18).

Summary

The combined effect of the changes that have occurred in the worlds of work and family in recent decades has heightened the pressure that many people feel when trying to combine the two. This has generated increasing interest in policies that will help people to achieve a better work/life balance. Moreover, the importance of facilitating women's labour force participation is of even greater importance given the ageing of the Australian population. While the policy stance in Australia is to give parents a choice about whether they work or care for children, it is important however to acknowledge the normative and structural constraints that prevent many women from finding suitable employment arrangements. Some of these constraints are directly influenced by government policy, including the tax and benefits system, access to family-friendly measures, leave entitlements and the availability of affordable, quality child care. In addition, the increasing proportion of people with caring responsibilities in the labour market lends urgency to the need to support movement into and out of the labour market without undue penalty in response to changing caring duties over the life course.

3 Methodology and sample

3.1 Methodology

The aim of this study was to capture the labour market transition experiences of Australian mothers who are balancing work and family responsibilities. It employed a qualitative approach, which was supplemented by quantitative analysis. It seeks to fill a gap in existing Australian research on work and family issues, much of which focuses exclusively on quantitative analysis. The methodological triangulation employed in this study enables the exploration of the one set of research questions using a combination of methods (Mason, 1996).

The study involved in-depth face-to-face interviews with 20 mothers and an analysis of survey data. It was undertaken by a team of researchers from the Social Policy Research Centre. Researchers included: Michael Bittman (chief investigator; methodology; oversight); kylie valentine (methodology, tools; recruitment and interviews); Kyungja Jung (recruitment and interviews); Peter Siminski (quantitative analysis and report writing); Ciara Smyth (methodology; recruitment; interviews; and report writing); and Margot Rawsthorne (methodology; recruitment; interviews; and report writing).

Quantitative component

A key component of the project was an analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. HILDA is a longitudinal, household-based panel survey in which households and individuals are interviewed on an annual basis. The HILDA survey has much potential for analysis of changes over the life-course, and of temporal dynamics in labour market participation and family formation. However, as the survey commenced recently (in 2001) there are only three waves of data currently available, only two of which were available during the analysis stage of this study. As such, HILDA is yet to reach its potential as a tool of longitudinal analysis, but the data are already useful for a number of forms of analysis.

This report presents cross-sectional accounts of women's labour force participation, partnering and parenting, as well as attitudes, work preferences and satisfaction. A summary of results from a limited set of retrospective work history questions is also presented. The cross-sectional analyses were performed on Wave 1 data (2001) rather than Wave 2 (2002). This decision was made because a series of relevant questions were asked in Wave 1 but were not subsequently asked in Wave 2. Amongst others, these include a question about the importance placed on one's 'employment and work situation' and a question about whether the respondent agrees that 'in order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job'.

In addition, forms of longitudinal analyses have been conducted. These show the extent of change over a one-year period in the labour force status and work preferences of women with children. Only those women who completed a personal questionnaire in both waves were considered in these comparisons. An analysis of changes observed around the key transition point of childbirth, including changes to labour force status and work preferences, was also conducted. This was done by considering the group of women who had a child ('natural', adopted, step or foster

child) aged less than one year at Wave 2 of the survey. Their responses at Wave 1 (before the birth of the child) were then contrasted with those at Wave 2 (after the birth of the child). The birth of a first child is considered separately from that of any subsequent child. The resulting sample sizes are relatively small, and so some of the changes are not statistically significant.

Qualitative component

In-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 20 women from a range of backgrounds and circumstances in January and February 2005. This approach allowed for the collection of individual points of view and greater understanding of individual experiences as well as emphasising the social and cultural forces that act on individuals. The interview schedule provided guidance for interviewers without inhibiting them from pursuing specific issues raised by participants. Interviews were structured to ensure consistency and glean the most pertinent information. At the same time, the interview process was sufficiently flexible to allow for a range of perspectives and modes of expression to emerge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The interview schedule was developed in consultation with the Project Steering Committee and finalised following piloting (Appendix B).

The interviews explored the life and work decisions that women who are parents make in 2005. It was particularly interested in the factors that influence these decisions and in identifying potential policy and cultural changes that would lessen the stress associated with juggling family and work. The research sought to answer the following questions:

- How do women's labour market experiences change over their life course?
- How do women currently experience their work/home balance?
- What is the ideal working arrangement for women who are parents?
- What are the factors that enable or inhibit women reaching a better balance?
- What are the unique experiences of women from different social groups, for example Aboriginal women, women from a non-English speaking background and sole parents?

Qualitative research proceeds by inductive reasoning and uses narrative techniques. It is based on Glaser and Strauss' model of grounded theory, which seeks to avoid limiting research findings to prior theories. Instead the orientation is towards generating theory from empirical or lived experiences (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A qualitative approach does not aim at being representative of a particular population. Instead, the value of a qualitative approach lies in the fact that it explores the 'how' and 'why' questions and enables the development of a more in-depth understanding. The current study describes *how* and *why* individuals come to life/work decisions. This approach seeks to shed light on the ways in which individuals understand themselves and their actions. Qualitative research also allows for individuals' beliefs and experiences to be positioned within particular social and cultural fields at particular moments. This positioning and analysis is crucial for social research as it recognises the importance of both individual actions and the social forces that act on individuals.

During the process of analysis, interview data were used as empirical evidence and were thematically sorted and coded. This form of analysis does not determine the categories and narratives into which data will be sorted beforehand as they emerge from the data. The analysis identified patterns, arguments and narratives that recurred throughout the interview data; organised these into thematic codes; and ensured all relevant data were incorporated into these identified codes. Thematic coding organises data into key lessons or themes that emerge from different perspectives, whilst ensuring these perspectives are acknowledged and contextualised. This seeks to produce analysis that takes into account individual differences while recognising that these are, in part, shaped by, and thus reveal, cultural values and ideas.

Interviews were undertaken both face-to-face and by telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Most interviews lasted for approximately one hour. One small group interview (comprising two women) was undertaken with women from a non-English speaking background. Four interviewers were involved in collecting data. One interviewer was bilingual, enabling the inclusion of Korean speaking women in the study. Interviewer reliability was maintained by adherence to the interview schedule and ongoing consultation between interviewers.

4 Australian women's life/work balance: quantitative data [13, 14]

This chapter presents a summary of relevant data from the first two waves of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA hereafter). Labour force participation and labour force status dynamics are addressed in the first section. A cross sectional summary of other socio-economic characteristics is presented in the next section. Women's work preferences, and changes therein over time are also described. Satisfaction with and importance placed on various life domains are addressed in the following section. In the final section, changes to labour force status and other variables before and after the birth of (first or subsequent) children are investigated. These results are descriptive and causal inferences cannot be made with any certainty. Indicative standard errors are shown in Appendix D.

In many sections of this chapter, comparisons are made between women with resident children and women without resident children.[15] These two groups of women have quite different age distributions (Figure 1). Almost 99 per cent of women with children were between 20 and 54 years of age. Thus the results shown for women without children are restricted to those women aged 20-54 years. Nevertheless, possible confounding effects related to age may remain in the comparisons between women with and without children. Differences between women with and without children may partly reflect their age profiles.

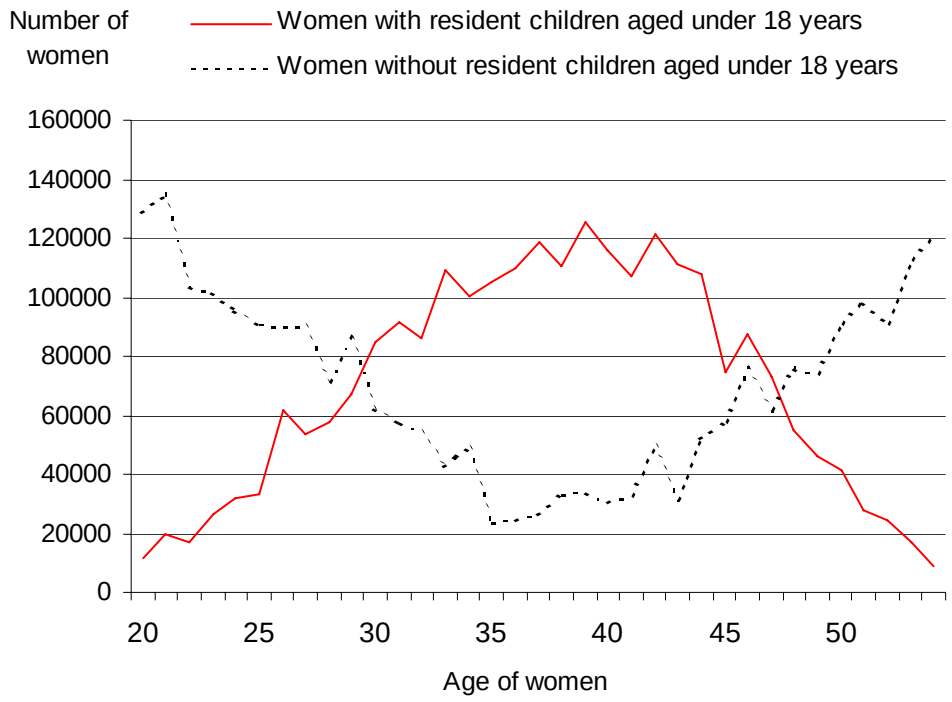
Estimates derived from the HILDA data indicate that there were 4.9 million women in Australia aged between 20 and 54 years in 2001. This is confirmed by official Australian Bureau of Statistics' population estimates (ABS, 2003a). Half of these women (49.8%) had one or more children (aged under 18 years) living with them.

[13] This paper uses confidentialised unit record files from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (MIAESR). The findings and views reported in this paper, however, are those of the authors and should not be attributed to either FaCS or the MIAESR.

[14] Statistical analysis was performed using SAS Version 8.2.

[15] 'Children' were defined to include biological, adopted, step and foster children.

Figure 1: Number of women by age and presence of resident children in 2001 (HILDA)



4.1 Labour force participation

Table 1 gives a broad overview of women's labour force status in 2001, from Wave 1 of the HILDA data. Some respondents (those who were working part-time or had stopped working) were also asked to give reasons for their employment status, and a summary of such reasons is also included in the table. The first column shows results for women with children. Results are also shown for women aged 20-54 without children in the second column. The final column shows results for all women aged 20-54 years. Table C.1 in Appendix C displays corresponding results by age of youngest child.

More than two thirds (68.7%) of women aged 20-54 years were employed, 39.1 per cent were employed full-time, while 29.7 per cent were employed part-time. A small proportion (3.7%) were unemployed, and the remainder were not in the labour force (NILF) (27.6%). Amongst women with children, more than one third (35.0%) were employed part-time, almost one quarter were employed full-time (23.4%), while close to two-fifths (38.2%) were not in the labour force. The majority (54.4%) of women without children were employed full-time, almost one quarter were employed part-time (24.2%), while 17.3 per cent were not in the labour force.

There were major differences in labour force status amongst women with children by age of youngest child. The proportion of these women who worked full time increased steadily with age of youngest child. Only 6.6 per cent of women with a youngest child aged less than one year were employed full-time, compared to 38.0 per cent of women whose youngest was of high school age (12 to 17 years old). The proportion of women who were not in the labour force decreased steadily with age. Three quarters (75.1%) of women with a child aged under one year were not in the labour force,

compared with about one quarter (25.9%) of women whose youngest was of high school age. With the exception of mothers of children aged less than one year, the proportion of women who worked part time did not vary greatly with age of youngest child. This proportion was greatest (42.0%) for women whose youngest child was of primary school age (5-11 years). But this was not much higher than those whose youngest was 1 year old (32.7%), 2 to 4 years old (36.1%), or 12-17 years old (32.5%).

Respondents were also asked how long it had been since they left full-time education for the first time, and how much of that time they had been in paid employment. On average, women with children had been in paid employment for 64.1 per cent of the time since they first left full-time education, compared to an average of 74.3 per cent for women without children.

Women who worked part-time were asked for the main reason why they were working part-time hours instead of full-time hours. Overall, the most prevalent reasons given were 'Caring for children' (40.1%), 'Prefer to work part-time' (21.1%), 'Going to school, university, college, etc.' (13.1%), and 'Could not find full-time work' (8.7%). For two thirds (66.8%) of women with children who worked part-time, 'Caring for children' was the main reason for working part-time hours rather than full-time hours. The most prevalent reasons given by women without children were 'Going to school, university, college, etc.' (29.7%) and 'prefer to work part-time' (28.4%).

Women who were not working at the time of the survey, but previously had been in paid employment, were asked why they stopped working in their previous job. While a number of reasons were prominent, the most frequent reasons given overall were 'Pregnancy/to have children' (33.0%), 'To stay at home to look after children, house or someone else' (11.6%), 'Got laid off / No work available / Retrenched / Made redundant / Employer went out of business / Dismissed etc.' (10.8%), 'Own sickness, disability or injury' (10.8%). Amongst women with children, the most frequently cited reason was 'Pregnancy/to have children' (45.7%). Amongst women without children, the most frequently cited reason was 'Own sickness, disability or injury' (19.5%).

It is important to emphasise the nature of the questions discussed in the preceding two paragraphs. It is clear that respondents were essentially asked why they were not working *more* than they were currently working. A set of questions on why women were working full-time rather than part-time, or indeed why they were working at all, would most likely yield completely different results.

Table 1: Labour market participation of women with and without resident children, 2001 (HILDA)

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	All women (aged 20-54 years)
Sample (n)	2,618	2,189	4,771
Estimated Population (N)	2,472,734	2,455,773	4,893,200
Age last birthday (average)	37.6	36.2	36.9
Labour Force Status (%)			
Employed Full-time	23.4	54.4	39.1
Employed Part-time	35.0	24.2	29.7
Unemployed	3.4	4.1	3.7
Not in Labour Force	38.2	17.3	27.6
Years in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (average)	13.5	14.0	13.7
Proportion of time in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (average %)	64.1	74.4	69.5
Main reason working PT hours rather than FT hours (% of PT WORKERS)			
Caring for children	66.8	1.4	40.1
Prefer to work part-time	16.1	28.4	21.1
Going to school, university, college, etc	1.7	29.7	13.1
Could not find full-time work	4.1	15.3	8.7
Main reason stopped working (% of NOT WORKING)			
Pregnancy/to have children	45.7	7.4	33.0
To stay at home to look after children, house or someone else	13.2	8.5	11.6
Got laid off / No work available / Retrenched / Made redundant / Employer went out of business / Dismissed etc.	8.6	15.9	10.8
Own sickness, disability or injury	6.6	19.5	10.8
Job was temporary or seasonal	5.2	8.1	6.2
Returned to study / started to study / needed more time to study	2.3	12.5	5.7

Table 2 gives some, albeit limited, insight into the dynamics of labour force status amongst women with children. This table includes data for all women who had resident children at Wave 1 of the survey. Their labour force status at Wave 1 is contrasted with their labour force status approximately one year later. A proportion (12.7%) of women were not interviewed in the second wave of the survey and hence they are excluded from this table. Overall, the table shows a considerable degree of fluidity in labour force status. One quarter (25.4%) of women with resident children had a different labour force status at the time of the Wave 2 interview, as compared to that of the Wave 1 interview. This was more than twice as high as the corresponding percentage amongst men with resident children (11.8%). The greatest mobility was observed for women who were unemployed at Wave 1. One fifth (19.8%) of these women were unemployed at Wave 2, while the remainder were equally likely to be in employment (40.6%) as to be out of the labour force (39.5%).

Table 2: Labour force status dynamics of women with resident children at Wave 1 (HILDA) (row %)

	Employment Status at Wave 2				
Employment Status at Wave 1	Employed full-time	Employed part-time	Unemployed	NILF	All
Employed full-time	81.5	14.1	0.9	3.4	100.0
Employed part-time	11.8	76.4	1.5	10.2	100.0
Unemployed	16.8	23.8	19.8	39.5	100.0
NILF	3.7	16.5	6.2	73.6	100.0

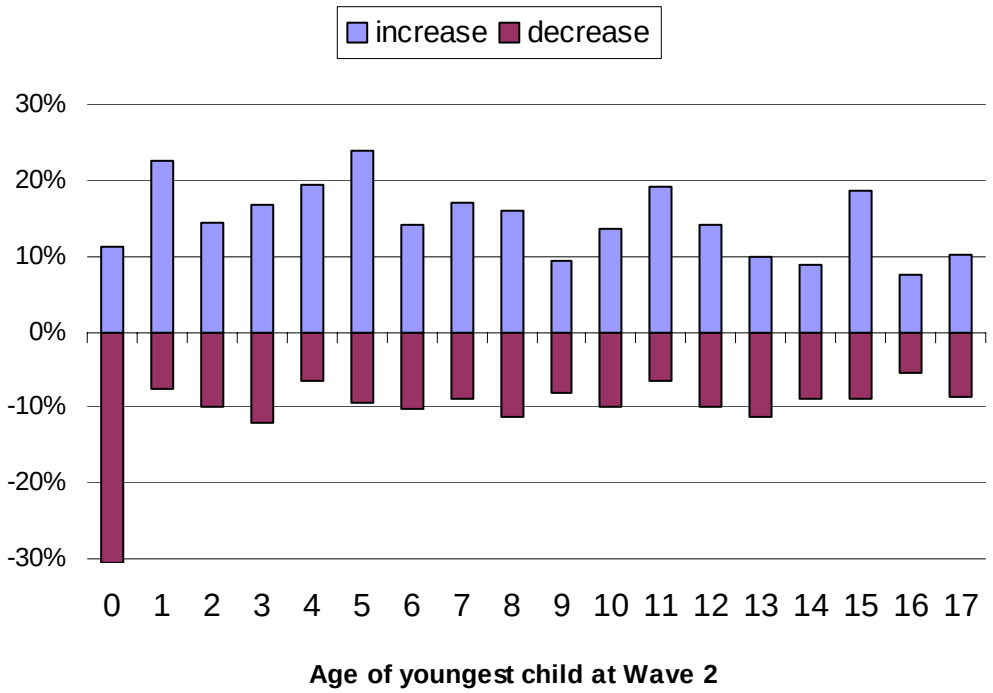
In Figure 2 mothers' labour force dynamics are investigated further. Here mothers were grouped according to the age of their youngest child at Wave 2 of the survey[16]. They were also grouped according to whether they had 'increased' or 'decreased' their labour force participation compared to one year earlier (or stayed the same)[17]. The most obvious finding is that many women (30%) decreased their labour force participation around the birth of a child. Apart from this, the most striking observation is the lack of a clear relationship between age of youngest child and changes in labour force participation. The proportion of women who increased participation was estimated to be highest (24%) amongst women whose youngest children had recently reached school age (five years). The proportion was also high (23%) amongst women whose youngest child had turned one in the previous year. But the percentages were almost as high across the range of ages, and many of the differences are not statistically significant (see Table D.3 for standard errors). Similarly, there was little relationship between age of youngest child and the proportion of women who decreased participation.

These findings suggest that transitions in mothers' labour force participation were not particularly concentrated at any age of youngest child (apart from the first year). On average, however, mothers appeared to be more likely to increase participation than to decrease it regardless of the age of their youngest child, subsequent to the first year.

[16] The sample sizes were sufficiently large (at least 79 observations for each individual age of youngest child) for this analysis to be meaningful. Nevertheless, the standard errors should be taken into account (see Table D.3).

[17] Women who were NILF at Wave 1 were considered to have increased their labour force participation if they were in one of the other three categories at Wave 2. Women who were unemployed at Wave 1 were considered to have increased their participation if they were employed at Wave 2, or to have decreased their participation if they were NILF at Wave 2. Those employed part-time at Wave 1 were considered to have increased their participation if they were employed full-time at Wave 2, or decreased their participation if they were not employed (unemployed or NILF) at Wave 2. Women employed full-time at Wave 1 were considered to have decreased their participation if they were in one of the other categories at Wave 2. Changes in number of hours of full-time or part-time work were not included in this classification.

Figure 2: Change in labour force participation between Waves 1 & 2 (HILDA) by mothers by age of youngest child at Wave 2[a]



a) See footnote 17 for an explanation of 'increase' and 'decrease'.

4.2 Other socio-economic characteristics

Table 3 provides a summary of other socio-economic characteristics of women with children, including the number of children in the household, marital status, income and highest level of education. As above, the characteristics of women without children are also shown for comparative purposes. Table C.2 in Appendix C displays corresponding results by age of youngest child.

As can be seen from the first column, women with resident children had an average of just under two (1.95) children aged under 18 living with them. When older resident children (those aged 18 or over) are also counted, the average increases to 2.10. When non-resident children of any age are also included, the average number of children per woman is higher again at 2.41. One fifth (20.8%) of women with children suggested that they would like to have more children in the future, while 15.9 per cent believed that they were likely to have more children. A much higher proportion of women without children would like to have children in the future (44.1%). This reflects the high proportion of such women who are relatively young and who have not yet had any children.

Four fifths of women with children were either married (71.3%) or living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them (9.5%). About 12.3 per cent of women with children were separated, divorced or widowed, while 7.0 per cent had never been legally married nor were currently living with someone in a relationship. A smaller percentage of women without children were married (38.1%), while a much

higher percentage had never been legally married (38.1%) or were living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them (17.0%).

Women without children had an average annual household income that was 8.5 per cent higher than women with children ($56,508 compared to $52,059). When the relative consumption needs of different household sizes are taken into account through equivalisation[18], the difference in average household incomes between women with and without children is much larger (38.8%).

Some 7.1 per cent of women with children had a postgraduate qualification as their highest educational attainment, 13.4 per cent had a bachelor degree, 34.7 per cent had a diploma or certificate, 11.2 per cent had Year 12, 28.4 per cent had Year 11 or lower, while educational attainment was not determined for 5.2 per cent of these women.

[18] Incomes are adjusted on the basis of the 'revised OECD' equivalence scale, which is the most commonly used equivalence scale internationally. This scale takes into account the additional consumption needs of additional household members, as well as the benefits of economies of scale. Consumption needs are thus estimated to be proportional to 1 + 0.5 * (A-1) + 0.3 * C, where A is the number of adults and C is the number of children (defined here as children aged under 15 years) in the household. Equivalised income is equal to income divided by this measure of consumption need.

Table 3: Other socio-economic characteristics of women with and without children, 2001 (HILDA)

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years)
Children			
Number of resident children (<18) (average)	1.95	0.00	0.98
Number of own children (any age) living with you at least 50% of time (average)	2.10	0.23	1.17
Total children ever had (average)	2.41	0.85	1.62
Age of youngest child last birthday (average)	7.2	-	-
Would like to have more children in the future (%)	20.8	44.1	32.4
Are likely to have more children in the future (%)	15.9	38.1	27.0
Marital Status (%)			
Legally married and living with spouse	71.3	38.1	54.8
Living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them	9.5	17.0	13.2
Separated	5.9	2.8	4.4
Divorced	5.8	5.9	5.8
Widowed	0.6	1.2	0.9
Never legally married	7.0	34.8	20.9
Years married to current partner (average across all marital statuses)	9.9	6.9	8.4
Years living with current partner (average across all marital statuses)	11.2	8.0	9.6
Income			
Annual household disposable income (average)	$52,059	$56,508	$54,399
Equivalised (revised-OECD) annual household disposable income (average)[a]	$23,685	$32,864	$28,347
Highest Qualification (%)			
Postgraduate	7.1	7.8	7.5
Bachelor degree	13.4	18.6	16.0
Diploma or certificate	34.7	31.7	33.3
Year 12	11.2	16.2	13.8
Year 11 or lower	28.4	22.3	25.2
Undetermined	5.2	3.3	4.2

a) See footnote 18 for an explanation of equivalisation.

4.3 Work preferences

The HILDA data also explore women's work preferences (Table 4). Table C.3 in Appendix C displays corresponding results by age of youngest child. People in paid employment were asked whether they would like to work more or fewer hours[19]. Of those people who were not employed, it is also possible to determine who would like

[19] 'If you could choose the number of hours you work each week, and taking into account how that would affect your income, would you prefer to work… fewer hours than you do now?; about the same hours as you do now?; more hours than you do now?'

to work[20]. By combining those questions, people were classified into one of three work preference groups. Those who were employed and indicated that they wanted to work more hours, and those who were not employed and were looking for work or otherwise 'would like a job' were classified as wanting to work more. Those who were employed and indicated that they wanted to work fewer hours were classified as wanting to work less. Those who were employed and wanted to work the same hours as they currently do, and those who were not employed and were neither looking for work nor wanted to work were classified as being content with the quantity of their paid work.

The following results should be interpreted with some caution. As shown in footnote 19, the question regarding preferred hours of work asks respondents to take 'into account how [changed hours] would affect your income'. Similarly, whilst financial considerations are not explicit in the categorisation of women who were not employed, one could be looking for work purely out of financial necessity. Whether respondents considered finances when responding to the question of whether they would 'like a job' was less clear. Nevertheless, the responses should certainly not be interpreted as people's 'ideal', context-free preferences. One could speculate that fewer people would want to work more hours if financial considerations were to be disregarded. This does not make the questions invalid. Indeed, it would make little sense to consider preferences in isolation of context and some consideration of constraints. But this context must be explicit in the interpretation of these results.

With the above proviso in mind, it is clear from Table 4 that a great number of women would like to work either more or less than they do. As shown in the second column, almost half (48.8%) of women with children who work full-time would like to work fewer hours. In comparison, only one tenth (10.3%) of women with children who work part-time would like to work fewer hours. But more than one quarter (26.9%) of women with children who work part-time would like to work more hours. More than half (51.9%) of women with children who are not employed would like to work. In the final two rows of the table, the results are combined across all labour force status categories. Almost one third (31.9%) of all women with children would like to work more hours (if they were employed) or would like paid employment (if they were not employed). Only 15.0 per cent of all women with children would like to work fewer hours. Thus a small majority (53.1%) of women with children were content with their quantity of paid work. Most of these results are broadly similar for women without resident children. However, a greater proportion of women with children want to work more than they do (31.9 per cent compared to 22.2 per cent of women without children). This is mostly due to the high proportion of women with children who are not employed. For similar reasons, the proportion of all women with children who want to work fewer hours (15.0%) is lower than that for women without children (24.1%).

[20] People who were not in paid employment were asked whether they were looking for work. Those that were not looking for work were asked: 'Even though you are not looking for work now, would you like a job? (Assume that suitable child care arrangements could be found)'. We consider those people who were either looking for work or otherwise 'would like a job' as people who would like to work.

From a policy perspective, the interpretation of these responses is not straightforward. There is clearly a large number of mothers who report that they would like to work more. This may suggest a need to focus on the family-friendliness of workplaces or on issues surrounding access to child care, in order facilitate greater participation. But the results could just as easily reflect the financial constraints associated with not working or working part-time. If so, this would suggest a need to address the financial consequences of caring for children. Other factors could also be influential in these results, such as partners' attitudes towards women's roles, differences between women with and without children in characteristics such as skills, or the availability of work.

Table 4: Work preferences of women with and without children, 2001 (HILDA)

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years)
Full-time employees			
Want to work fewer hours (%)	48.8	40.1	42.8
Want to work more hours (%)	3.7	6.5	5.7
Content with work quantity (%)	47.4	53.4	51.5
All FT employees	100.0	100.0	100.0
Part-time employees			
Want to work fewer hours (%)	10.3	9.3	9.8
Want to work more hours (%)	26.9	35.7	30.6
Content with work quantity (%)	62.8	55.1	59.6
All PT employees	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not employed			
Want to work (%)	51.9	46.7	50.3
Content with work quantity (%)	48.1	53.3	49.7
All PT employees	100.0	100.0	100.0
All			
Want to work fewer hours (%)	15.0	24.1	19.6
Want to work [more hours] (%)	31.9	22.2	27.0
Content with work quantity (%)	53.1	53.8	53.4
All	100.0	100.0	100.0

As shown in Table 5, HILDA data also facilitate an investigation into how women's work preferences change over time. Changes in work preferences over a one-year period, using the same categories as those discussed above in relation to Table 4, are examined. The work preference dynamics of all women with children are shown in the top half of the table, where it is clear that a large proportion (37.8%) changed their preferences. Of women who wanted to work fewer hours when interviewed in Wave 1, almost half (49.0%) had a different response when interviewed a year later. About one third (32.3%) of women who were initially satisfied with their quantity of work had also changed their response one year later, most of whom wanted to work more. A large proportion (40.9%) of women who initially suggested that they wanted to work more, had also changed their preference.

The results described above in part reflect changes in labour force status between the two waves. In the bottom half of the table, only those women whose labour force

status was the same in the two waves (comprising 74.2% of the initial group) were considered. The results are revealing. One third (33.2%) of this subgroup changed their work preferences, despite not changing labour force status. Those who were satisfied with the amount they worked at Wave 1 were less likely (28.4%) to give a different response in Wave 2 than were the other women (39.3%).

Table 5: Work preference dynamics of women with resident children at Wave 1 (HILDA) (row %)

Wave 1	Wave 2 Want to…			
Women with children Want to...	Work fewer hours	Work about the same hours/ continue to not work	Work [more hours]	All
Work fewer hours	51.0	40.3	8.7	100.0
Work about the same hours/ continue to not work	12.0	67.7	20.3	100.0
Work [more hours]	4.3	36.6	59.1	100.0
Women with children whose labour force status was the same in both waves				
Want to...				
Work fewer hours	60.7	35.0	4.3	100.0
Work about the same hours/ continue to not work	10.3	71.6	18.1	100.0
Work [more hours]	2.0	37.3	60.7	100.0

4.4 Satisfaction and values

A number of questions were asked in HILDA about certain forms of life satisfaction, and about the importance placed by respondents on various domains of life. Some more general attitudinal questions were also asked. The results of the most relevant such questions are shown in Table 6. Table C.4 in Appendix C displays corresponding results by age of youngest child.

On average, women with children were less satisfied than other women with the amount of free time they have. There is a strong association between satisfaction with free time and age of youngest child (Table C.4). There is some suggestion that women with children may also be slightly less satisfied with employment and work opportunities and with their financial situation, but these differences are not quite statistically significant. But the two groups of women reported almost identical satisfaction with their lives overall. Women with children also reported a lower level of importance placed on their employment and work situation and on leisure activities, than did women without children. Women without children were slightly more likely than women with children to agree that 'in order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job'.

Table 6: Satisfaction with and importance of various life domains for women with and without children, 2001 (HILDA)

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years)
Satisfaction with… (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=Totally satisfied)			
Your employment opportunities	6.5	6.9	6.7
Your financial situation	5.7	6.1	5.9
The amount of free time you have	5.6	6.5	6.1
Your life	7.8	7.9	7.8
Importance of … (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=The most important thing)			
Your employment and work situation	6.8	7.9	7.8
Your financial situation	7.9	8.1	8.0
Your family	9.8	9.5	9.6
Leisure activities, such as hobbies, sports and contact with friends	7.6	8.1	7.8
Attitudes (average response to scale of 1-7, where 7=strongly agree)			
In order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job	4.7	5.1	4.9

4.5 Changes around the birth of a child

In this section HILDA is used to illustrate some of the changes that occur for women around the birth of a child (Table 7). This includes an exploration of changes in labour force status; work-time preferences; marital status; and satisfaction with various life domains. Only statistically significant changes (p=0.05 for two-sided tests of significance) are discussed.

The changes in labour force status for women around the birth of their first child were dramatic. Three-fifths (60.4%) were employed full-time prior to having the child, while only one eighth (12.3%) were employed full-time after having the child. This fall was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the proportions of women not in the labour force (from 26.9% to 64.4%). Changes observed around the birth of subsequent children were not statistically significant.

Table 7: Selected characteristics of women before and after the birth of a child (Waves 1 and 2, HILDA)

	Birth of First Child		Birth of Subsequent Child	
	Before (Wave 1)	After (Wave 2)	Before (Wave 1)	After (Wave 2)
Sample (n)	68		193	
Estimated Population (N)	87,394		208,322	
Labour Force Status (%)				
Employed full-time	60.4	12.3	11.1	6.4
Employed part-time	6.8	14.6	22.8	27.6
Unemployed	5.9	8.7	3.1	1.8
Not in Labour Force	26.9	64.4	63.0	64.2
Want to work fewer hours (%)	25.7	8.5	12.1	8.2
Want to work [more hours] (%)	17.4	29.6	36.1	35.6
Marital Status (%)				
Legally married and living with spouse	54.1	59.6	71.5	70.2
Living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them	27.9	32.0	16.1	18.5
Separated, Divorced or Widowed	1.9	1.9	3.9	4.5
Never legally married	16.1	6.4	8.5	6.8
Satisfaction with… (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=Totally satisfied)				
Your employment opportunities	6.8	7.1	6.7	6.5
Your financial situation	6.1	5.8	5.8	5.4
The amount of free time you have	7.3	5.7	5.3	4.4
Your life	8.3	8.0	8.0	8.0

Only 8.5 per cent of women who had their first child in the previous year wanted to work fewer hours than they currently worked, as compared to 25.7 per cent of the same group of women before their child was born. Changes in preferences observed around the birth of subsequent children were not statistically significant.

The proportion of women who were never legally married decreased around the time of a first child's birth from 16.1 per cent to 6.4 per cent (p=0.04 one-sided). Other changes in marital status were not statistically significant.

Of the satisfaction questions, the only statistically significant change was a large decline in satisfaction with the amount of free time that the women had. On a scale of zero to ten, satisfaction with amount of free time declined by an average of 1.6 points (p=0.01) after the birth of a first child and 0.9 points (p=0.01) after the birth of a subsequent child.

Changes in average household incomes between the two waves were not ascertained, due to the nature of the income variable itself. Income was recorded for the previous financial year, while the interviews took place throughout the second half of the calendar year. Thus income recorded at Wave 2 cannot rightly be interpreted as income after the birth of a child in the present context. Such an analysis may be more meaningful when three or more Waves of data are used.

Questions on importance and on attitudes (as shown in Table 6) were not asked in Wave 2, and so it was not possible to assess changes therein.

This HILDA analysis highlights the impact of childbearing and childrearing on women's labour force participation, revealing striking differences between women with and without children. The data show that many women with children choose part-time rather than full-time employment because of their child care responsibilities. The data also show a considerable degree of fluidity in labour force status, with a quarter of women with resident children having a different labour force status 12 months after they were first surveyed. The analysis also underlines a mismatch between actual hours worked and work preference for many women. HILDA shows that half of the women with children in full-time employment would like to work fewer hours, even with the reduction in income taken into account. Conversely, a quarter of women in part-time employment would like more hours of work. The HILDA data also reveal the dynamic nature of preferences, with over a third of women with children changing their work preference over a one-year period.

5 Stories of women's life/work experiences: qualitative data

Whilst there has been considerable debate concerning women's experience of life/work, the voices and lived experiences of individual women are often absent. As the previous section highlights, women's life/work experiences are complex, varied and fluid. This section aims to give voice to this complexity, variety and fluidity. It presents stories of the life and work decisions that women who are parents make in 2005 derived from in-depth interviews. The inclusion of specific women's experiences enables the development of a more in-depth understanding. However, the stories presented in this section are not 'representative'. A qualitative approach does not aim at being representative of a particular population. Instead, the value of a qualitative approach lies in the fact that it explores the 'how' and 'why' questions. The current study describes *how* and *why* individuals come to life/work decisions.

The participants' demographic and background information is presented in the first section. This information helps contextualise their experiences and comments, which are presented in the following sections. The second section describes changing labour market experience over the life course and work preferences. The next section explores the factors that shape women's work trajectories, including home, work, children and social policy measures. The following section explores the unique factors that shape the experiences of women from specific backgrounds, including sole parents, Aboriginal women, women from a non-English speaking background and women living in rural locations.

5.1 Participant profiles

In-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 20 women from a range of backgrounds and circumstances. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Recruitment of participants was guided by a simple sample frame based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data that indicated the proportion of different categories of women in the New South Wales population (e.g. proportion of sole parents, proportion of Aboriginal women). This sample frame ensured that a breadth of experiences and perspectives were included in the study. The outcome is a study reflecting the multiplicity of voices, positions and experiences that constitute typical narratives of lifework.

An advertisement was distributed to a range of organisations seeking participants for the study. Organisations that were likely to have clients who were parents of young children, such as vacation care providers, baby health centres, women's health centres and child care centres were contacted. Interest groups, such as the Sole Parents Union, were also contacted seeking participants. Existing networks of the researchers were also used to identify potential participants, particularly in relation to groups more difficult to contact through advertising (such as Aboriginal women and women from a non-English speaking background).

Table 8 presents some demographic data on the participants. As the table shows, whilst the majority of participants were married the study includes the perspectives of five sole parents. Four women from rural communities were included in the study as well as one woman identified as 'fringe' who lives on the very edge of the Sydney basin. The language skills of one of the interviews enabled the participation of five

Korean women. Additionally, one other woman from a non-English speaking background was interviewed and another had recently migrated from the United Kingdom. Three Aboriginal women were also interviewed. At the time of the interview, eight of the women were employed in full-time roles and another two were effectively working full-time hours as they were combining two or three part-time jobs. Six of the women were working between two and four days in part-time jobs and four of the women were not working at the time of the interview. The youngest participant was 22 years old and the oldest 48 years. Four women had more than two children and four had only one child at the time of the interview. The youngest child was six months and the oldest 17 years. Most were primary school aged children.

Table 8: Participant profiles

Name	No. of Children/Ages	Education	Relationship	Labour force status	Ethnicity	Place
1. A_1	3 children – 16, 12, 5	Degree	Sole parent	Full-time - professional	Korean	Metro
2. A_2	1 child – 6 months	Degree	Partnered	Part-time – professional	Anglo	Rural
3. B	2 children – 15, 12	Year 10	Partnered	Not working – (previously retail)	Anglo	Rural
4. C_1	3 children – 17, 14, 9	Year 12	Partnered	Part-time – untrained carer	Anglo	Rural
5. C_2	2 children – 10, 8	Degree	Partnered	Full-time – professional	Korean	Metro
6. C_3	2 children – 4, 2	Degree	Partnered	Full-time – warehouse work	Korean	Metro
7. C_4	2 children – 7, 5 ½	Year 10	Partnered	Part-time – admin.	Anglo	Metro
8. F	1 child – 4	Year 11	Sole parent	Full-time – retail	Aboriginal	Metro
9. J_1	2 children – 4, 1	Degree	Partnered	Full-time – professional	Korean	Metro
10. J_2	2 children – 12, 9	Degree	Sole parent	Full-time – professional	Anglo	Metro
11. L_1	2 children – 7, 4	Year 12	Partnered	Not working (previously clerical)	Anglo	Metro
12. L_2	2 children – 11, 8	Degree	Partnered	Part-time – professional	Chilean	Metro
13. M	2 children – 3½, 10 months	Degree	Partnered	Not working (previously professional)	Anglo	Metro
14. P	2 children – 5, 2	Degree	Partnered	Part-time – professional	Anglo	Metro
15. S_1	1 child – 3 ½	Year 10	Sole parent	2 x part-time jobs - clerical	Aboriginal	Metro
16. S_2	1 child – 2	Degree	Partnered	Not working (previously professional)	British	Metro
17. S_3	1 child – 17	Degree	Sole parent	3 x Part-time jobs – professional	Anglo	Metro
18. S_4	2 children – 12 & 21 yr old step son	Degree	Partnered	Full-time – horticulture	Korean	Outer metro
19. T	4 children – 10, 4, 18 month twins	Year 10 & post-graduate	Partnered	Full-time-professional	Anglo	Metro
20. V	4 children – 6, 4, 3, 1	Degree	Partnered	Part-time – professional	Aboriginal	Rural

5.2 Changing labour market experience over the life course

At the time of the interview, eight of the women were employed in full-time roles and another two were effectively working full-time hours as they were combining two or three part-time jobs. Six of the women were working between two and four days in part-time jobs and four of the women were not working at the time of the interview. However, many of these women had changed employment status over the years and the interviews highlighted the varying impact of childbearing and childrearing on their labour market participation[21]. The six employment patterns that were identifiable from the interviews are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Mothers' predominant employment pattern

	No. of participants
Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – part-time work	8
Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – full-time work	5
Full-time work– withdrawal from the labour market – part-time work – full-time work	3
Study – birth of first child – part-time work	2
Part-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – full-time work	1
Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – not in labour force	1

It is important to emphasise that these patterns describe the *predominant* employment pattern that the women had followed at the time of the interview. However, focusing on predominant employment pattern masks the dynamic and fluid nature of movement into and out of the labour force that many of the women have experienced. In particular, some women have had several spells out of the labour force following the birth of a child/ren and many have varied the hours they work particularly when their children are young. This movement into and out of the labour force is often influenced by the individual's particular circumstances. It is also important to note that these employment patterns are *not fixed* as factors influencing labour market participation and preferences may change over the life course.

The starting point for assigning the women to these categories was based on their labour force participation prior to first birth. Many of the women had been in the labour market for several years and had very established patterns of employment prior to their first birth, while others had limited or no labour market participation prior to their first birth. Those who were studying when they fell pregnant were assigned to categories based on labour force attachment prior to first birth. Some who fell pregnant whilst studying already had several years of employment behind them. In other words, their employment patterns were fairly well established prior to commencing their studies and falling pregnant. Others fell pregnant whilst studying and had no established patterns of employment prior to their first birth. A number of the women were not in the labour force at the time of the interview, but were assigned

[21] See Appendix A for a more detailed account of the participants' work trajectories/life histories.

to categories based on previous labour force participation and stated intentions to resume employment shortly after the interview.

The second stage for assigning the women to these patterns of employment was whether they resumed part-time or full-time employment after their first birth. The next stage was defined by the analysis. It showed that, taking additional periods of labour market withdrawal into account, labour force attachment generally remained consistent with employment status post first birth.

Ideally, these established employment patterns would have been based on completed fertility. That is, the number of interruptions to labour force participation due to childbearing over the life course. However, this would not have been meaningful given that some of the women have completed childbearing whilst others were planning to have more children.

Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – part-time work

Eight of the women had worked full-time for several years prior to the birth of their first child and subsequently returned to part-time employment. Six of these women had spells out of the labour market to have an additional child, but their employment pattern was predominantly a move in and out of part-time work. This group also includes one woman who was not working at the time of the interview but was planning on returning to part-time employment after a few months' break.

Length of time out of the labour force after the birth of their children ranged from 2 months to 5/6 years. Their children ranged in age from 6 months to 17 years suggesting that this pattern of employment is not confined to women who have very young children, but continues well beyond preschool age for some. Seven of the women returned to the same employer on a part-time basis after the birth of their children. Some have subsequently changed jobs in the years since they had their children, one has taken given up work in recent months and one was planning on returning to part-time work after taking time off to have her second child. Six of the women had degrees and two had left school after Year 10.

Two of the women had worked full-time for several years before commencing full-time study and both fell pregnant during their studies. Since completing her studies one has remained in part-time employment and the other is currently planning on returning to part-time work.

Making the transition from full-time to part-time employment was a challenge for some of the women, particularly those who returned to the same employer.

One described how she felt pressured when her employer asked her when she was going to return to full-time work two days after she returned from (unpaid) maternity leave. She was fearful that she could lose her part-time job if her employer felt the role should be full-time. She felt that motherhood was incompatible with having a career and described the 'choice' that she felt she would have to make,

> But I can see the more [children] I have the more it's going to be harder to actually go back to work... I think there may come a time when I'm going to have to decide whether to stay at home or to try

> and keep my job, and I guess it's up to my boss as well, whether he wants somebody part-time or if he needs somebody more full-time. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

She also described how she no longer felt as involved in her work when she returned on a part-time basis, because she found it harder to get things done and felt she was not there enough 'to see things through'.

Two of the women also described how despite working and only being paid for part-time hours, they checked email and were available by phone five days a week. One of the women seemed to regard being allowed to work part-time as a favour rather than an entitlement,

> In the office two days, one from home, then I checked my emails five days a week and was on the mobile. So I was accessible and quite happy to be accessible for the five days as they were being so flexible. I was quite happy to return the favour. (M – 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro).

Another participant described how having children has forced her to make compromises as far as her career is concerned. She described how she had very high career aspirations after leaving university but that she has turned down jobs with better salaries and career opportunities to stick with part-time employment, because of her children,

> But I've [unclear] of higher positions to make because it's like OK financially it would have been better, and also career-wise I think it would have been getting more challenging, and that's where you come back to the balancing act and having children you know. And then sometimes their needs are greater than yours. (L_2 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro, NESB)

One of the women expressed concern about the impact of motherhood on her career. She plans to have a third child but is concerned about the interruption to her career,

> But at the moment the hardest thing for me is to work and then stop to have children and you have to take 12 months off…so you haven't got the continuity and you can't sort of build something up. (M – 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

A number of the women described how the move from no work to either part-time or full-time work was often determined by their children. One described how her children reached an age where they were more independent and self-sufficient so she felt she could return to work. The other described how her daughter's needs changed as she got older and that it was not healthy for the two of them to be together constantly.

For some of the women the return to part-time work was a welcome break from being at home (See section on 'Current preferences').

Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – full-time work

Five of the women worked full-time prior to the birth of their first child. Three of these women had spells out of the labour market to have an additional child, but their employment pattern has been characterised predominantly by moves into and out of full-time work.

Four of these women were Korean, three of whom had two children. The other had one child and lived with her husband and 21 year old stepson. Their children ranged in age from 12 years to one year. The length of time they spent out of the labour force after the birth of their children ranged from 2 weeks to three years. All four had degrees, but two were not working in a field related to their qualifications. All four stressed the financial importance of work. Only one returned to the same employer after the birth of both her children. She took two weeks combined sick and annual leave after each birth, deliberately minimising the amount of time she spent out of work for fear of the damage it could do to her career,

> For my career as a [professional], career interruption would be very serious damage to career advancement. I can be away from work until my kids turned three or four. Which company is going to hire me after that break in this sector? (J_1 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB).

One described how she has had to tone down her ambitions after having children. Despite working a 40-hour week and occasionally working 50-55 hours, she described how having children has limited her career progression. She described how she has to accommodate more to suit work and family than her husband and how she is the one who has to juggle everything. She also explained that she is unwilling to take on more demanding roles at the moment because her current workplace accommodates her family,

> I can't put the extra hours that other people can at work, therefore that limits my career advancement and especially when it is school breaks, kids' vacation breaks, then I make it explicit at workplaces that I can't put in long hours, and that sort of underlying factor, and that's one of the reasons why I don't want to enhance my career path at the moment. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

The move into and out of full-time employment was not always a straightforward move. One of the women had a prolonged break from full-time work prior to the birth of her child. S_4 worked several years full-time as a teacher in Korea before moving to Australia. Her Korean qualifications were not recognised in Australia so she decided to study in Australia. After completing her studies, she got married and had a child shortly after but did not work during that period. She started working in the family business when her child turned three years and she has been working full-time ever since.

One of the women, a sole parent, worked full-time for a short period after leaving school before leaving work to have her first child. She withdrew from the workforce for three years before returning to full-time work in retail for financial reasons and to give her child more opportunities.

Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – part-time work – full-time work

Three of the women worked full-time for several years before having their first child. Each returned to work on a part-time basis and took additional time off after subsequent births before returning to part-time employment. All have since returned to full-time work, but their stories are very different.

J_2 spent several years working full-time before having her first child. She took several months off before returning to part-time work. Her marriage broke up shortly after the birth of her second child. She returned to part-time work for a few months but then decided that she would have to work full-time to avoid financial hardship and give her children opportunities. She has been working full-time ever since, but feels very guilty for having missed out on so much with her children.

T worked full-time for several years in nursing before having her first child. She has since had three more children, including twins and she took 15 months off to care for them. She has gone back to full-time nursing in that last few months primarily for financial reasons.

A_1 described how she expected to stay at home as a housewife and therefore did not plan her career. After her marriage she said that she discovered she enjoyed work but that since her divorce a few years ago she *has* to work full-time for financial reasons. The length of time she spent out of the labour force after her three births ranged from one year after the first child, four years after the second and one year after the third. In between, she varied her hours of work in response to caring for her children, mainly in part-time work. She has been working full-time since returning to work three years ago.

Study – birth of first child – part-time work

Two of the women fell pregnant when they were studying full-time and both have stayed in part-time employment.

One of the women, a sole parent, fell pregnant when she was studying and started part-time work a few weeks after her son was born. She has always worked part-time, primarily so that she can be around for her son, who is now 17 years old She is currently working in three part-time jobs (contract/casual), but for the past few years she has been hoping to find secure full-time employment. She is very conscious of the impact her part-time employment has had on her career,

> I'm like a 30 year old when I'm actually 40, career-wise. In terms of where I am, what I get paid, my sense of employment security, all that stuff is, like, ten years retarded because of part-time work. (S_3 – 1 child, sole parent, 3 x P/T jobs, metro).

V was studying and working part-time when she had her first child. She returned to study and work (three days per week) six weeks after the birth of her first child. She has had spells out of the labour market to have additional children, but her employment pattern has been predominantly a move into and out of part-time work.

She has made a conscious choice to remain in part-time employment because her children are her priority. As an Aboriginal woman, she also feels it is important for her children to see her going to work to show 'that Aboriginal women can work and be successful at it too'.

Part-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – full-time work

One of the women, a sole parent with a four year old child, left school when she fell pregnant and worked part-time for several months before the birth of her son. She did not look for work until her son was two years old. She is currently working full-time hours in two part-time jobs purely for financial reasons.

Full-time work – withdrawal from the labour market – not in labour force

One of the women worked full-time for several years before having two children, aged seven and four. She has not worked since her first child was born but is hoping to find part-time work in the coming months now that both her children are going to school. She said that she would not have been able to look for work over the years, because they have had to move several times for her husband's job. She also stressed that having no family living nearby to help with child care, she would not be able to afford to work and pay for child care. Despite her prolonged period out of the labour force it is likely that she may move into the first employment pattern described above (full-time work – withdrawal form the labour market - part-time employment).

The interviews show that childbearing and childrearing influence women's labour market participation in a number of ways. Women who worked full-time prior to the birth of their first child and subsequently returned to part-time employment comprised the largest group. Women whose employment pattern has been characterised predominantly by moves into and out of full-time work comprised the next largest group. Even when additional periods of labour market withdrawal were taken into account, ongoing labour force attachment generally remained consistent with employment status post first birth. The interviews also highlighted the dynamic and fluid nature of movement into and out of the labour force that many of the women have experienced, often influenced by their particular circumstances.

5.3 Current work preference

The women were asked what their preference for work was at the time of the interview. While some of the women anticipated changing their labour force status in the weeks/months following the interview, this question explored their labour force preference *at the time of the interview*. Seven of the women expressed a preference for part-time employment, four expressed a preference for remaining at home full-time and six expressed a preference for full-time employment. Three of the women were somewhat conflicted about their preferences.

The women gave a number of reasons for their current work preference. In most cases it was not possible to identify a single factor driving the participants' current preference and in many cases multiple factors interacted to shape their preference. Although each of the key factors driving the women's current preferences is described separately below they should not be considered in isolation. As Table 10 demonstrates several factors shaped the preference of most of the women in the study.

Table 10: Factors shaping the participants' work preferences

	Preference	Time with Child/ren	Work enjoyable	Career important	Own time	Financial imperative	Domestic arrangements	Role model
A_1	Full-Time		x		x	x		
A_2	Part-Time /home	x	x	x	x	x	x	
B	Not work	x						
C_1	Part-Time /home	x	x			x	x	
C_2	Full-Time			x	x	x	x	
C_3	Full-Time				x	x		
C_4	Part-Time	x	x		x	x	x	
F	Part-Time		x			x		
J_1	Full-Time			x		x		
J_2	Full-Time(less intensive)/ part-time			x		x		
L_1	Not work	x						
L_2	Part-Time		x			x		
M	Not work	x		x				
P	Part-Time		x		x		x	
S_1	Part-Time		x			x		
S_2	Not work	x						
S_3	Full-Time					x		
S_4	Full-Time		x		x	x		
T	Part-Time		x			x	x	
V	Part-Time	x	x	x		x		x

Finances

The dominant factor driving current work preference was finances. All of the participants who were working both part-time and full-time stressed the financial importance of paid employment,

> Financial pressure was the main reason why I returned to work. On top of that, I really wanted to work. I value career highly. (C_3 –2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

> Although it's not just that status of working, but I also find that financially in Australia it is much easier to manage your finances if you have both double income. But that is not the only reason for working really, for me to work is finding my own self, of being my own self, rather than being tied to the children and the husband and

> the housework and so forth. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

Those who stated a preference for no work at the time of the interview indicated that their partner's income facilitated their ability to act on their preference,

> I liked the company. I liked having my own money. But then I found not having my own wage, you just learned to do without those little extras. Like it's disposable income because like I mean R's wage covered the, in the late years R's wage covered the house and things like that. (B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

Two of the women who were not working at the time of the interview described how their financial circumstances had allowed them to remain at home with their children. This also spills over into their plans to return to work on a part-time basis,

> We're lucky enough that way, I don't have to go back. If we were struggling financially then I would. And obviously she would have to, we would just have to get on with it. But we're lucky enough that I don't have to [go to work]. But I suppose that's because we made a conscious decision that we'll just get by on what we've got. (S_2 – 1 child, partnered, NCW, metro)

Work enjoyable

Many of the women in paid employment were keen to stress the fact that they chose to work because they find work enjoyable. Many valued the social interaction they got at work and others enjoyed the mental stimulation,

> I just really enjoy it. I enjoy the company of the staff, I enjoy the company of the parents and getting to know the children in their family, that's really really nice… And being with other people, yes, it's good. And it gets you out of the house. You're not, you've always got things to think about and talk about, you're not sort of just on the one track. Kids, family, whatever. You get a bit of variety. (C_1 – 3 children, partnered, P/T, rural)

Time with children

In many cases, the preference for no work or part-time employment was driven by the participants' desire to spend time with their children. Many of the women chose to work either part-time or not at all when their children were quite young,

> It's been wonderful. It's been really really wonderful. I mean you have, I have the times where I would love to be able to drop the kids off at Mum's and go to the shops for an hour… But it's also a very short period of time. You know five years, it's not a very long period of time before they're off your hands and at school really. (L_1 - 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

Another woman described how she had originally turned down her current high profile job, because of her commitments to her children. When she was approached a

second time to take on the role, she was very explicit about how much she was prepared to work,

> And I said to them, these are my terms. If you accept them, OK, if you don't you don't. And part of the terms were I need two days a week officially, if there's any issue with my children, then I have to deal with that first. (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

Although most of the women opted to stay at home or work part-time when their children were young, one of the women described how she recently gave up work so that she could spend time with her 12 year old son. She described how after several years working long part-time hours she felt she had missed out on attending a lot of her children's school activities and had not been around when her children got home from school. She was very happy with her decision,

> I probably should have, maybe I should have done it a couple of years ago, because like I've never really been at home when H's come home from school. But this year's been great because it was J's last year in primary school. (B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

Career important

Among the six women who emphasised that they work because their career is very important to them all were degree qualified. Four were working full-time, one was working part-time and one was not working at the time of the interview. Some of the women spoke of the importance of work in terms of career advancement, self-fulfillment and identity,

> But also, it's my own identity. I need to, I am the type of person who needs to work. It's very important for me to work. I enjoy working. I find myself, like my own identity in terms of working and I don't like to be just, I mean being a mother is important and being a wife is important, but I don't want to identify myself as a mother and a wife. And I want to, I certainly was not the type who went to university just for the sake of going to university. I wanted a career. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

Two of the women interviewed were quite clear that their work often took priority over their children. One described how as a woman she felt that she could not show that her caring responsibilities affected her work in any way,

> When the kids were little and when they were sick, I mean it should have affected my work but it didn't. You actually can't show that in workplaces. You can't as a woman…I'm reluctant to show that it's affecting my work in terms of my family, you know in having kids and all that…because you're in competition with other people who are not in the same situation, you don't want to show your weak points. So yes there have been problems, but it cannot affect your

> work. You don't let it affect your work. (J_1 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

Another women was a sole parent and stressed that she was driven to pursue her career after her marriage broke up, in order to avoid a life of financial disadvantage for her and her children. At the same time, she described herself as having always been ambitious but recognises that as a single parent her children were the impetus for her to pursue her career so doggedly.

'Time out'

Many women expressed a preference for paid employment because it gave them a break from being with their child/ren and gave them their own time. Again, this included women who were working both full-time and part-time,

> And I did find when I first went back, it made me feel a little bit more human too…Ah, I guess, having J, I guess I didn't realise how hard it was going to be. And how full on and how much attention she needed from me. And just having the day away from her, it was hard at first, and it's still hard now just to leave her for the day... You feel a little bit guilty leaving her and that you should be at home with her. And on the other hand it's my time away. I get to talk about other things rather than gooing and gaaing all day. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

Domestic arrangements

Some of the women who expressed a preference for both part-time and full-time work explained their preference in terms of their domestic responsibilities, which are described in Section 6.1 on household division of labour.

Role model

One of the participants emphasised the importance of working to provide a role model to her children. This is discussed in more depth in Section 7.2 concerning the unique factors that shape the work trajectories of Aboriginal women.

The interviews showed that often it was not possible to identify a single factor driving the current work/home preference of most of the women in the study thus highlighting the multifaceted nature of preferences (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004). Several factors interacted to shape the preference of most of the women. All of the women who expressed a preference for either part-time or full-time employment stressed the financial importance of work. However, many also spoke of their desire to work because they found work enjoyable and it gave the women something of their own. Most of the women who emphasised that their career was important to them expressed a preference for full-time employment. However, one of the women who expressed a preference for remaining at home at the time of the interview was also keen to stress the importance of her work. She was looking forward to returning to work on a part-time basis in the following weeks. Another woman who expressed a preference for part-time work because she wished to spend time with her children also spoke of the importance of career. Many of the women who expressed a desire to spend time with their children expressed a preference for no work or part-time

employment at the time of the interview. However, many of the women spoke of changing work/home priorities since the birth of their child/ren (See Section 5.5) and some spoke of plans to change their working arrangements in the future.

An analysis of the interview data suggests that it may be more appropriate to speak of 'contextual preferences'. That is, work preferences are not formed in a vacuum but are determined by a woman's particular context and circumstances. Many women express a preference taking their domestic and work spheres into account and because contexts are not static, neither are preferences. It is also possible that preferences are formed *after* taking constraining and facilitating factors into account. The constraining and facilitating factors that influence women's preferences are considered in Section 6.

5.4 Current labour force status and current preference

Table 11 shows each of the women's current labour force status and their current work preference. It shows that many of the women were satisfied with their current labour force status, including those working full-time, part-time and those not in paid employment at the time of the interview. It also shows that some of the women had work preferences that differed from their current labour force status, suggesting that they were not able to act on their preference (highlighted in bold text).

Table 11: Current labour force status & current preference

	Current Labour Force Status	Current Preference
A_1	Full-Time	Full-Time
A_2	**Part-Time – 2 days**	**Part-Time/home**
B	Not working	Not work
C_1	**Part-Time –17 hours**	**Part-Time/home**
C_2	Full-Time	Full-Time
C_3	Full-Time	Full-Time
C_4	Part-Time – 2 days	Part-Time
F	**Full-Time**	**Part-Time**
J_1	Full-Time	Full-Time
J_2	**Full-Time**	**Full-Time (less intensive)/part-time**
L_1	Not working	Not work
L_2	**Part-Time – 4 days**	**Part-Time – fewer hours/days**
M	Not working	Not work
P	Part-Time – 3 days	Part-Time
S_1	**2 x Part-Time jobs – 5 days**	**Part-Time**
S_2	Not working	Not work
S_3	**3 x Part-Time jobs– 5 days**	**Full-Time**
S_4	Full-Time	Full-Time
T	**Full-Time**	**Part-Time**
V	Part-Time - 2 days	Part-Time

While many of those who were working said they were satisfied with their current labour force status, many also spoke of a financial imperative to work,

> I enjoy work. I prefer work to staying home. And also economically I need to work. I don't want to stay home all the time. Since I became a single mom, work is more important for me financially. (A_1– 3 children, sole parent, F/T, metro, NESB)

> I would have liked to have longer [maternity leave] and I would have liked to not work, but it's just not possible with the bills that have to be paid and a nice house. We can't have everything…At the moment, two days is enough. Three days at the most. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

The interviews also revealed some facilitating/constraining factors that came into play allowing the women to act on their preference. These are considered in Section 6.

However, six of the interviews revealed a mismatch between current labour force status and the participants' preference. Significantly, four of the six women who expressed dissatisfaction with their current work arrangements were sole parents. Five of the women were working full-time and said that they would prefer to work either shorter hours or fewer days,

> The hours. Ten to three would be perfect. Absolutely perfect. But there's nothing else that I would change. It's close. It's a hard job but it could be worse. (F – 1 child, sole parent, F/T, metro, Aboriginal)

> Three days a week would be perfect for me. Yes. Three days. (S_1 – 1 child, sole parent, 2 x P/T jobs, metro, Aboriginal)

One of the women was working in three part-time jobs and expressed a desire to find secure, permanent full-time employment,

> I mean the whole casualisation, the casualisation of work is really difficult, because you feel that you've got to say yes to everything, and when do you get sick leave and when do you get holiday leave and when do you, you know, and that's happening to a lot of women as well I reckon. So yes. That's why I'm going to get a steady permanent job with annual leave, whether or not that's the best thing for me to do in terms of my long term career. (S_3 – 1 child, sole parent, 3 x P/T jobs, metro)

Another participant described how she is planning on returning to the workforce soon, but plans to do so on a part-time basis. Her preference at this stage is for two days per week, but she is fearful that no employer will want to take her on for less than three days,

> I'd love two, but I think three is probably going to be more practical. I don't think anyone would be interested in two days. (M – 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

The analysis of the interviews also showed that work preference was not clear-cut for all of the women. Three of the participants were somewhat conflicted, expressing a preference for both part-time work and being able to stay at home full-time. Another participant who worked full-time stated that she wanted to work fewer hours. It was unclear whether she wanted to reduce to part-time employment, or whether she simply wanted to work shorter full-time hours, stating that her full-time job was 'more than full-time at times'.

Another participant described how she had not worked since her first child was born. Although she described how she has enjoyed her time with her children, she explained that it would not have been possible for her to look for work because they had to travel for her husband's job. Child care has also been an issue because they do not have any extended family living nearby to rely on and she stressed that she 'couldn't afford to do child care and work. I just wouldn't make enough money to be able to do that.' While describing herself as content with her 'choice' to remain at home she

emphasised the priority given to her husband's job and the prohibitive cost of child care, suggesting that her stated preference merely reflected her circumstances,

> Ah, no and especially the women with the children, are just expected to pack up and go. There can often be recognition of the wife that's not got children. But the women with the children, no, you just, if you want the job you pack up and you go. Yes. So I mean you'd have to take all that into consideration as well. (L_1 - 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

Many of the women were satisfied with their labour force status for a variety of reasons outlined in the previous section. This included those working full-time, part-time and not working at the time of the interview. However, for a number of women who were in paid employment there was a mismatch between their preferred hours of work and the hours they were actually working, with many wishing to work shorter hours. This suggests that for a number of women in the study standard working hours were not compatible with raising children. The mismatch between preferred and actual working hours was often constrained by a number of factors outlined in Section 6.

5.5 Changing preference

A number of women described how their attitude to their job had changed after the birth of their child/ren. For many of the women, their children were now their priority and work was of secondary importance. One of the women described how she was quite career-focused before the birth of her daughter and how she had attained seniority in her profession, but that since her daughter's birth, work is no longer as important. Even before going on maternity leave, she anticipated returning to work sooner than she did. She was very clear about her change of perspective about work and its priority,

> Ah, well I suppose since she's come along, it isn't important at all. I just do it to bring in money. It really isn't important. Well it was quite important then [before the baby]…Well, I suppose she's the most important thing to me now and it just puts everything else in perspective really. (S_2 – 1 child, partnered, NCW, metro)

However, one of the women described the reverse situation. She had expected to stay at home as a housewife after she got married, and therefore did not plan her career, but after the birth of her children she started working and discovered she enjoyed work. She described how her work/family preference changed after the birth of her third child, although there was also a financial need to work full-time after her marriage broke down,

> When I had my first and second, work wasn't important, I just gave up work for my kids and family. I chose to stay home and look after the children. After having the third one, because I had already stayed home for so many years, I didn't want to stay home any more. (A_1– 3 children, sole parent, F/T, metro, NESB).

6 Facilitating or constraining factors

The interviews highlighted a number of facilitating or constraining factors that shape the participants' workforce participation and experience. The way these factors interact with different women's preferences is not straightforward. For one woman, her family's financial circumstances may constrain her choices whilst for another they may facilitate her preferences. This section discusses the influences of home, workplaces, children and social policy measures on these women's decisions.

6.1 Home

This section explores constraining and facilitating factors within the 'home sphere', including the household division of labour, partners, and extended families.

Household division of labour

Among the participants, there were few examples of genuine sharing of domestic responsibilities. Most male partners had some involvement in the dropping and picking up of children from various child care arrangements or school. Beyond this, however, cooking, cleaning, organising child care, packing lunches, preparing for the next day, attending doctor appointments and supporting children's education were viewed as primarily 'women's work'. These numerous tasks required to keep a household functioning were described as a drudge, thankless, mundane and repetitive by more than one woman. Despite the lack of genuine sharing, most of the women seem to accept the inevitability of their greater share of household duties.

These women's experiences coincide with other research indicating very little movement on the gendered nature of domestic responsibilities (Bittman et al., 2003). The women's home responsibilities appeared to be constant, regardless of the age of their children or the extent of their workforce participation. One woman who worked full-time after her husband went part-time found, to her dismay that nothing had changed in relation to domestic duties and she 'still did everything'. Whilst most of the women accepted a traditional division of household labour, this did not mean that they were happy with this situation,

> And I do all the housework as well. Like he works full-time and I work two days a week, but he doesn't really do anything at home. I do all the domestic work and I don't know whether if I did work full-time that he'd pull his weight a bit more or not. (C_4 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro)

A number of women clearly viewed the 'burden' of domestic responsibilities as 'women's work' or their responsibility. B had previously worked four days per week some distance from home, requiring considerable travel and time-consuming child care arrangements. She was solely responsible for household tasks, despite her husband finishing work at 3.15pm each day and working within walking distance of their home. At one stage she employed a cleaner but felt this was 'extravagant' and something she should do herself,

> I found after I'd been at work all week and then I knew I had to do my housework on Friday, I didn't have any life. And people would

> ask me to go somewhere and I'd go 'No, I have to clean the house' (B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

One of the rare exceptions was C_1's husband (rural) whose involvement went beyond general involvement in domestic responsibilities to a genuine sharing. This was revealed in an awareness of the tasks required to keep the household functioning, such as washing up and participating in managing the household,

> He's always been great. And pick them up, drop them off, whatever, it's always 'What's going on today? Who is doing what?'. And then sometimes I'd get home from work and you know, well pretty often actually, four out of five weeknights and tea would be all cooked. He's a really good cook. So that's been really good. And he'll tell the kids, 'Get the clothes off the line or put them on, or unpack the dishwasher'. He's got them pretty organised. (C_1 – 3 children, partnered, P/T, rural)

The organisational skills required to 'get to work' was commented on by a number of women. For many women, their preparations commenced the night before or even on the prior weekend. For those working full-time, this 'logistical nightmare' consumed most of their waking hours. If work was at a distance from their homes, women often started their days at 6am, organising breakfast, the day's lunches, dropping children at various child care arrangements between 7 and 8am and then travelling on to work. They were then faced with a full day's work before picking up children, feeding, bathing, reading and preparing again for the next day. Establishing a routine and being organised was the key for a number of women in balancing work and home. However, as V below hints, even the best-laid plans can sometimes go wrong. A sick or tired child (or parent) can turn the morning into 'chaos',

> It's turned into like a military operation that has to be thought through a couple of days in advance. Things like, you've got to have your washing done and your ironing done a couple of days before so you can pack their bags the day before. Practically that's really the most challenging thing in a day. Getting the kids ready and off…There are days when it's like chaos. But I try to get things organised to combat that. Sometimes it doesn't happen. (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

The long term impacts of juggling home and work, particularly for those working full-time, is unknown. One young woman, a sole parent, spoke of ongoing sickness last winter. She described herself as 'very tired' all the time and lamented that she was far too young to be this tired as she was only 22 years old. Another sole parent wondered whether operating at such a fast pace all the time would render her unable to 'sit still' sometime in the future. Adrenaline appeared to be vital to her being able to get up every morning and to continue the 'ongoing slog',

> The most difficult thing, I think the most difficult thing and it's difficult to articulate it, is the ongoing slog. The constantly rushing from here to there. I'm fearful that it's going to have a long term effect on my, sort of my demeanour, that I'll turn into a person that

> can never sit still for two seconds. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

Partners

The majority of participants were or had been married at some stage. Only two young Aboriginal women had not been married, although both were living with a de facto partner when they gave birth. The biological father of F's child is still very actively involved in that child's life, lives nearby, involves the child in his extended families and has regular weekend and holiday full-time care. The biological father of S_1's child no longer lives in the same city so has less contact with their child. S_1 has formed another relationship although this has not moved to a de facto situation yet. The third sole parent, J_2, has a fraught history with the biological father of her children due to his lack of involvement in their children's lives. There appeared to be little involvement from the other biological fathers of the sole parents, one of whom had been abusive.

Some of the women described how their partners had a strong desire to be more involved in their children's lives. The women described how their partners felt a strong tension between workplace responsibilities and home responsibilities. P's husband changed the hours he worked, reducing the amount of overnight travel he was doing. This was out of a desire to be more supportive of his partner, but also out of recognition of what he was missing,

> Because of the young family that we have, he's made a choice that any of those trips, he's going to do them in a day because he doesn't want to be away for too often. Because like in the early years when we were together, he was away for like days on end, like for weeks, a week at a time (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

There was only one example of a male who had extended periods of primary care of children. However, two other women spoke of a planned 'role swap' with their husbands sometime in the future. M's husband, due to his profession and earning capacity, was able to make workplace arrangements that enabled him to work on a part-time basis. For most of the women and their partners, this was not an option due to the greater earning capacity of their partners, the inflexibility of their workplaces or desire,

> So we made the decision for me to go up to three days and then he went back to three days. He's actually a [professional] and works rostered hours. So he's very flexible which is great. He wanted to spend more time with [our son] as well and sort of have a day or two being the primary care giver. (M – 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

Although M's experience was exceptional, there was evidence in other women's experiences that some shifts were occurring in male attitudes towards the home/work balance and women's employment. S_2, who was not working at the time of the interview, spoke of plans to resume part-time employment in the weeks after the interview. At that stage, her husband, a contractor, would undertake the primary care of their daughter. L_2's partner did not view his job as 'more important' than hers and

was willing to make workplace arrangements that supported her in her work or training and study. Even so, there was a sense that if a decision had to be made between her or his job, his would prevail due to its status as a 'permanent job',

> We take it in turns, if one child, you know if I've been off a day with one of the kids not well, unless they're not, if they've just got a bad cold or something, but he'll take the next day off. You know, we share that out. It's pretty good in that way. (L_2 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro, NESB)

Extended families

The experience of the women in this study coincides with the growing body of research about the importance of extended families, particularly grandparents, in enabling the work/home balance (Goodfellow and Laverty, 2003). Grandparents were actively involved in the informal care of children and also participated in children's activities as surrogates for their parents. Grandparents attended school events, did voluntary work at school and pre-school in lieu of parents, as well as transporting children.

> And you're meant, at the school, you're meant to have a parent stay, a parent has to come and volunteer. And because I can't do that, I get my [grandmother] to go in there for the story telling. (S_1 – 1 child, sole parent, 2 x P/T jobs, metro, Aboriginal)

The expectations of institutions such as school and pre-school appear to still be structured around a husband/worker, mother/carer model of home life. These institutions have changed little in their expectations of women, despite the huge increase in women's workforce participation and the increase in single parent families. This disjuncture between institutional expectations and women's experiences is likely to contribute to some women's feelings of guilt. For those women who worked full-time, there was a real sense of having 'missed out', but little anger about the continued structuring of institutions on a 1950s model of family life.

Interestingly, three of the women who had decided not to work had no family support in Sydney, having migrated from overseas or internally within Australia. The inverse of this experience is evident in other women who spoke of the importance of family support in enabling them to participate in the workforce. Whilst the lack of family support was cited by these women other factors also contributed to the decision not to work,

> I suppose the other thing is…not having family over here. I think if I had family here I would probably have gone back [to work] a lot earlier because obviously she would have had a relationship with them from the beginning. (S_2 – 1 child, partnered, NCW, metro)

Whilst for most participants the concept of 'family' was defined narrowly to mean immediate family, others received support from people outside their immediate family. This support could be from friends, neighbours or colleagues who 'helped out' picking up or dropping children off, and was often reciprocal,

> It's all local…And a lot of my friends that I work with…have children at the same school. So it works out, you know, 'Can you pick the girls up today for me and I'll pick yours up tomorrow?', or whatever. (C_4 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro)

This wider community support made the juggle possible for some women, particularly when arrangements or plans broke down. One rural woman spoke of her neighbour giving her son breakfast in emergencies or looking out for him after school. For one sole parent, the support of her 'community of friends' was a deciding factor in having a child alone. During the first 18 months of her son's life, her friends provided informal child care two days per week. She later reciprocated this support, providing care and support for one of these friends when she had a child,

> When I was pregnant there was a group of people around me who said 'We're your friends, we're going to support you and we're prepared to make that level of commitment.' (S_3 – 1 child, sole parent, 3 x P/T jobs, metro)

This is indicative of high levels of trust and it is this form of reciprocal support that theorists such as Putnam (1993; 1995) and Cox (1995) speak of as 'social capital' or the glue that binds communities.

6.2 Workplaces

This section explores constraining and facilitating factors within the 'work sphere', including employer attitudes, flexible work practices, and individuals' bargaining power.

Employer attitudes

Over the past decade, increasing attention has been paid to the role of employers, workplace culture and legal rights in supporting or constraining parents' labour market participation. This study adds to the large body of evidence that points to the importance of employers in parents' experience of juggling work and home responsibilities. In the pool of women interviewed, there are examples of the success of these strategies in creating more family-friendly workplaces. Public sector employment stood out as an environment that was flexible and supportive of parents, even more so than community sector organisations possibly due to resource limitations. A number of the women employed in the health sector were able to negotiate a staggered return to work, moving from full-time work prior to maternity leave to two days per week, then switching to three when circumstances changed. Some were also fortunate enough to have workplace child care for which their children were given priority. Even in public sector workplaces, however, there is also a suggestion that support at the micro-level may be as important. A number of women spoke of the flexibility and support they received from their direct manager rather than the organisation. In some cases, it helped that their direct managers were also parents, but this was not consistent across all the women. A 'good' employer made a significant difference in terms of women's experiences. This was as much an acknowledgement of parental responsibilities as it was benefits or conditions,

> And you know just acknowledging the fact that you're a parent and that personal responsibility is attached to it. (L_2 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro, NESB)

For many women, employers' attitude to sick children was a litmus test of their 'family-friendliness'. Sickness, particularly among young children, unravelled the complex arrangements women made in order to work. Older children were more able to be left at home with minimal parental supervision, but younger children usually required one-on-one care. All the women spoke of the importance of feeling able to 'just leave' if called about a sick child. It was in these circumstances that the support of direct managers proved more important than the overall organisation's policies and procedures. 'Good' managers took control of dealing with workplace issues that might arise as a consequence of the woman's departure (such as cancelling clients, arranging for replacements, re-distributing urgent work, etc.).

One woman, B, contrasted the experiences of two different employers (one a bank, the other a private small business). The small business employer created a culture of fear among the working parents, constantly displaying his displeasure when children were sick. B felt she was comparatively lucky, as her children were older and less reliant on her when they were sick. Other parents with younger children had ongoing problems with the employer. It was this type of attitude and inflexibility about leave in school holidays that led B to leave this position after eight years. She requested one day's annual leave during the school holidays so she could have a four-day weekend with her family. He refused, saying it was 'too busy',

> A couple of times the kids might have had an accident during the day and if Mum rang up and said 'I think you'd better come home', there was no problem. I could just go. [The bank]'d say, 'Get your bag and go.' So I'd just go. But they were really good. [But at the small business] everything was always such a major big thing. If you had a sick child, you know, he used to have staff talks and he'd say, 'If your children are going to be sick can you let me know?' and it was like as if, well how do we know when they're going to be sick? *(*B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

B was not the only woman who spoke of specific workplace cultures that conflict with parental responsibilities. This conflict appears particularly relevant to those women who worked in the retail industry. One woman not currently in the workforce had a long work history in the travel industry and felt the hours would not be compatible with caring for children. She saw no way she could return to her previous career now that she had children and was considering what type of job she might do in the future. Another who worked casually in retail spoke of her boss complaining when her caring responsibilities conflicted with work,

> A few days like I couldn't come to work because [grandmother] was sick so I had to stay home with [my daughter], and [the manager] never said anything to my face, but she said stuff behind my back … saying that I was a casual and I should be available all day, every day. And I said 'Well, when my daughter gets sick, or my [grandmother] gets sick that's just not possible', you know. (F – 1 child, sole parent, F/T, metro, Aboriginal)

F has since left this employer and has a much better relationship with her current manager. For those in the retail industry, it appeared to be a matter of changing jobs until finding a 'good' employer.

Four women were employed in the community sector, with voluntary management committees or boards as their employers. Generally, these women found the community sector employers supportive of their parental responsibilities although this was not always the case. For one sole parent, inflexibility about her finish time created ongoing difficulties with her son's pick up from child care. For others though, particularly those employed in women's service, the workplace culture was very supportive,

> It was because it was a women's service, you know. And they were really open to that. A couple were feminists. A couple of the women had children as well and were really fine about it. And they loved having the baby come in to the staff meetings. I just had great people I worked with. And it was really about those workers around me that made the difference. (S_3 – 1 child, sole parent, 3 x P/T jobs, metro)

Flexible work practices

The widespread use of new technologies, particularly the internet and mobile phones, appears to be impacting on some women's relationships with the workplace. These technologies are breaking down the separation between home and work, allowing a much greater blurring of boundaries.

The blurring of boundaries between work and home was particularly noticeable for women in professional or managerial positions. For these women, email and mobile phones meant they were constantly contactable by work. Some professional women negotiated 'flexible' return to work arrangements, which included a mixture of working from the office and working from home.

The benefits that accrue for these women, however, were not straightforward. Working from home meant bringing the world of work into their home, sometimes in conflict with the needs of their children. In this way, these women were never really 'clocked off' from work, but 'ducking out' to check emails throughout the day or night. If something urgent happened at work they were often called rather than having someone else solve the problem. This contact, however, maintained their presence and position within their organisation which most saw as a long-term investment,

> It presents some difficulties, especially when you've got children at home. You know the question for me is always how can I manage that, but I'm able to spend time with the kids, but then I have responsibilities at work, or to complete work. But for me the priority is always the kids and if there's ever anything pressing for work, well they're just going to have to wait. But you see I'm working my own hours and I'm able to make those decisions for myself and what I say, that's how it is. (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

For other women, however, the demands of work spilled over into home life on a regular basis. For $J_{2,}$ a sole parent who works full-time in a management position, the nature of her work often puts it in conflict with her role as a parent. She freely admits that she has prioritised her career in order to ensure a better quality of life and future for her children. For J_2's children, however, work is a competitor for her attention, adding to the already significant psychological burden she carries,

> The fact that you're in the house, your child does not understand you know, a two year old or whatever, does not understand why you are not available to them. And they would just start bashing at the door. And to a certain extent that's still happening to me because my work, I sort of take it home with me, and my nine year old would just come over and just shout over the top of the work conversation on the phone. The kids are right in some ways. You know, I can be at work until 7 p.m. at night and then when I go home I should be available for them, and I'm not. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

Flexible work practices may allow women to reach a better balance when their children are very young by allowing them to work from home. However, it remains to be seen whether this has long-term negative consequences for women and their families.

Bargaining power in the workplace

The research suggests that individual women exercise bargaining power in different ways in the workplace. Few had a sense of their own power in negotiating workforce participation, with some expressing surprise when employers agreed to their requests. Others appeared to diminish their bargaining power, feeling strongly that they had to maintain the pretence of being 'just like any other worker' and not allowing their parental responsibilities influence their work.

There was no evident association between higher education qualifications and employment status or bargaining power. Among those who were not currently in the workforce were women who had invested considerable time in education and professional development. From this research, it appears that women gain power to bargain in the workplace from a number of sources. For some women in public sector employment, length of employment appeared to enable them to bargain for a particular preference. These women exhibited a great deal of flexibility in their workforce participation, moving hours according to the needs of children and family as well as their own career aspirations. For others, qualifications, experience and professional status gave them a sense of control over their choices enabling them to move out of the workforce with minimal consequences. For one or two others, their specific characteristics (Aboriginal professional) enabled them to exercise power in the workforce.

6.3 Children

This section explores factors related to children that influence parents' work preferences and labour force status, including the age and number of children, child care, out of school care and 'missing out' on time with their children.

Age and number of children

Previous research indicates that the age and number of children is influential in women's experience of work/home balance (Pocock, 2003). There was considerable diversity among the women in this study in terms of number and age of children.

The family sizes in this study were similar to Australian-wide trends. Only four of the 20 women had more than two children. V and T both had four children, with T having 18-month-old twins. C_1 and A_1 both had three children. Seven of the women had two children and five had one child. It would seem likely that three younger women might have more children in the future. Twelve women were unlikely to have further children due to the size of their current family, their family circumstances and/or their ages. Five other women may have more children in the future.

Six women had children aged under two years at the time of the study, one of whom had twins. Under two years of age is a period in which children require intensive care and most participants with children under two worked minimal part-time hours or not at all. Ten women had children aged between two and five years. For these parents, the availability of suitable child care was important in work decisions. In all, the women had 22 children attending school, mostly primary school. Only four women had high-school children.

A number of women were facing significant transitions in 2005, with three having children start school and five having children start high school. Three of the four women who had withdrawn from the workforce had at least one pre-school aged child. Over recent years, there has been strong social, political and psychological importance placed on early years development for children. It would seem likely that this has influenced the decision of many women to withdraw from the workforce. At least for S_2 below, the difficulty of leaving her child was a factor in her current decision to withdraw from the workforce,

> I sort of thought that I would go back [to work] when she was six months old… I thought I'd have her in day care, but once she came along. No… because you've got that psychological attachment. It's your child. Couldn't do it. (S_2 – 1 child, partnered, NCW, metro)

Child care – mixing and matching

All of the women interviewed described complex and fluid child care arrangements. Most used a mixture of formal care and informal care. This mixing and matching was affected by the availability of various types of care, the cost of care, income capacity, children's ages and children's needs,

> Well, it's always been a bit of a scramble… around working hours. And then apart from that, they've attended long day care when they were younger, family day care, out of hours school care, private babysitting, families, friends, you know, just a scramble. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

The 'search' for suitable child care was a common experience among women, regardless of their current work force participation. There was a strong sense among

the women that child care was expensive and a counterbalance in their workforce decisions. Interestingly, most conceived of child care fees as their responsibility rather than a household cost. This once again confirms women's role as primary carer and positions women's workforce participation as secondary, regardless of household decisions,

> And child care is a prohibitive thing. Perhaps I would have thought about returning to work except that I can't afford to pay full-time child care and work at the same time. I suppose that is one point that I haven't made clear. That I couldn't afford to do child care and work. *I just wouldn't make enough money to be able to do that.*(L1, Married, 2 children, NCW - emphasis added)

Those working in the public sector were more likely to have work-based child care provided for which they had priority. It also tended to be less expensive. Care for under two year olds was particularly difficult but also emotionally fraught for some women. Some women had been told that the child care waiting list for under two year olds was more than 24 months, rendering it pointless to place names on waiting lists. Very few could access formal child care without waiting some time, which required some planning in terms of applying for work,

> And that's something I've got to work out. It's kind of hard to work it out until I've actually got a job. It's a bit of a chicken and egg thing. I organise the care and then get the job, or do I get the job and then organise the care? (M – 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

Some women were dissatisfied with the care arrangements they had made for their children. One woman, a sole parent, finished work at 4 p.m. one hour away from her four year old son's child care which also finished at 4 p.m. Each day she had to make arrangements for his care for the hour she travelled home. This was sometimes her high school aged cousins, sometimes older family members, sometimes friends. This arrangement was extremely distressing for her, resulting in her reducing from five days to two days, which she supplemented with another part-time job closer to home. Whilst this made arrangements slightly easier, it did not address the fundamental difficulty.

Mixing and matching also meant sometimes stretching legislative frameworks. One woman spoke of a centre accepting her child at 18 months even though they were not registered to take children under 2 years of age. She made this arrangement after failing to get any other care for him. Another spoke of a child care centre providing before and after school care for her five year old.

Arranging suitable care, however, was only the first step, with many women describing a 'logistics nightmare' preparing lunches, dropping children off and arriving at work. For those with more than one child, particularly if they were not being cared for in the same setting, this became even more complex. Drop off times, pick up times, lunches and clothes requirements differed between settings. In a number of cases, this process added two or more hours to the women's 'work' day.

These arrangements were also contingent upon the child's ability to settle. The transition to child care is often fraught for both parents and children, especially if they have had little non-parental care in the past. If children where unhappy at child care this added to women's already considerable psychological burden,

> I found it really difficult when they're crying when we'd leave. I hate that. You know I'd be driving to work and I'd be crying myself. Then I'd get to work and I'm all nervous and upset (L_2 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro, NESB)

The importance of informal care or, more correctly, grandparent care, was commented on by a number of women. For those who lived at a distance from grandparents, the unavailability of family support was strongly felt. For those who did use grandparent care, it provided not only a low cost option, but also greater flexibility. Changing work hours or days or attending to other responsibilities were all possible due to the availability of informal care. One woman changed her work hours when her mother wanted to reduce the amount of child care she was doing. For two women living in rural communities, grandparents did all the child care at a time when there were few other options in terms of formal care. A downside of informal care was the travel time that was often involved,

> So I'd get up in the morning and get A organised because she was 11 months of age, put her in the car, take her down to mum and dad and… it would take me about an hour in the morning to get, once I left the house to actually get her to mum's and then to get me to work. And then the same thing used to happen of an afternoon. And I did that until when I left to have J. (B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

The cost of formal child care was commented on by many women. For those with low paid jobs, the cost of formal child care could be a major disincentive to increasing hours or working at all. This was particularly the case for those with more than one child or for sole parents with few family supports. One woman graphically commented,

> I would have described it myself as haemorrhaging money for child care. Literally. As I mentioned, I often paid privately which was a minimum, sort of $100 a day for, or probably $80 a day or whatever. You know you were working for nothing. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

Out of school hours care

The 'scramble' as J_2 describes above continues well beyond school commencement age, although some women felt child care became easier once children reached school commencement age. It also generally became less expensive. School attendance, however, had its own challenges in terms of before and after school care, school holidays and the lack of suitable care arrangements for teenage children,

> And, you know, at times, sometimes it's easier than others, but there's actually a crucial period in the year, which we've just come

> through, which is two weeks at Christmas where the vast majority of child care centres actually close down and there's no formal child care. But that doesn't mean that you necessarily stop work at that time, so it's really hard. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

Teenage children were a source of concern among the women. Some felt their teenage children spent too much time watching TV, listening to music or sitting on the internet after school and too little time on homework. The worry about unsupervised children was even greater for sole parents. During the teenage years the conflict between 'labour force participation' and 'parental responsibility' discourses come most starkly into conflict. Socially, there is a sense (reflected in government policy) that once children enter high school they are 'old enough' to look after themselves and women should re-enter or increase their workforce participation. At the same time, parents are held responsible if their children 'go off the rails'. Balancing these two expectations contributed to women's sense of guilt about their work/home roles,

> I was a little bit concerned about taking on a full-time commitment to work until I knew he'd got beyond teens… because… I really believe that that early teen phase, 12, 13, 14, is the most vulnerable age, and… if they haven't got enough supervision, the potential of the damage that can occur during that period is quite high. (S_3 – 1 child, sole parent, 3 x P/T jobs, metro)

Not surprisingly, many women spoke about the preference for work hours that were compatible with school hours in order to be at home with their older children. Some organised their work lives around this. Formal care for teenagers was particularly difficult as most before and after school care services catered for younger children. There was also some concern about the long waiting lists and the difficulty of changing hours if work requirements changed. Additionally, by the time they were teenagers some children were 'fed up' with child care,

> It got to a point that [my daughter] even told us 'I can't stand child care'. You know once she'd started school, she started then getting picked up for after school care, and she just told us, 'Look I hate this. I really hate this. I'm sick and tired of going to school and child care. I've had enough.' (L_2 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro, NESB)

'Missing out'

Concern about 'missing out' on spending time with children was identified by many women as a factor in determining their workforce participation. Full-time workers particularly were unable to attend school functions or children's events that were important to their children. One woman had recently stopped working altogether after a long history of workforce participation, as she no longer wanted to 'miss out'. For B, her ability to 'be there' for her children since she had withdrawn from the workforce contrasted strongly with her experience of parenting whilst working,

> I've been finished work for eight months. I decided to have some time at home so that J could finish his last year in primary school and I want to be at home so I can attend some school functions,

> which I've missed out all the way. (B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

As much as possible, women built flexibility into their work hours to enable them to participate and support their children in these events. For some women, this meant not taking on longer working hours or more permanent positions because being casual gave them greater flexibility. It was not always possible for the women to mould their work and home lives, however, which was a source of sadness for A_1,

> I was a bit sad when I was not able to attend my kid's important activities because of my work commitments. For example, my son presented his speech, but because of meetings I couldn't make it. Overall, it is the most difficult [thing] not to be able to spend enough time with the kids. (A_1– 3 children, sole parent, F/T, metro, NESB)

6.4 Social policy

This section discusses a number of social policy initiatives aimed at assisting families better balance work/home. The first initiative, maternity leave, is not a universal entitlement, however some women are able to access it through Commonwealth or state provisions or workplace provisions. Child Care Benefit, Family Tax Benefit and Parenting Payment Single are all federal social policy initiatives.

Maternity leave

Most women took some time off after the birth of a child (first or otherwise) and the length of time spent out of the workforce varied quite substantially. Time spent out of the workforce was often dependent on whether the woman was working during her pregnancy, her employment conditions (i.e. entitlement to paid/unpaid maternity leave), her attachment to her job, her circumstances or a combination of these factors. The time spent out of the workforce also appeared to reduce with subsequent children. For the vast majority of the women the availability of maternity leave (both paid and unpaid) did not influence the timing or number of children they had, largely because only a small proportion were entitled to paid maternity leave.

Six of the women described how maternity leave was inconsequential to their pregnancy due to their particular circumstances. Some who had been working when they fell pregnant were not eligible for maternity leave, because they did not have at least 12 months continuous employment. Others became pregnant whilst studying or moving to another location. Many of the women were completely unaware of their entitlement to maternity leave. One woman who described the job she was in at the time of her first pregnancy as 'a dead end job' said she simply resigned towards the end of her pregnancy without enquiring about her entitlements or whether the job would be available on her return.

Six of the women said that they were entitled to paid maternity leave, however three of them were unable to remember clearly what level of payment they received, because it had been some time since they had taken it. Among the three women who were unclear about their entitlement, the amount of paid leave they said they received

ranged from three weeks to three months, but all of them took additional unpaid leave ranging from a few weeks to 12 months.

Two of the women, both of whom were employed in the public sector, said that they were influenced by paid maternity leave as they was able to combine this with annual leave to have a substantial break. One of the women described how her ability to accrue annual leave to combine with maternity leave was a factor in the timing of her pregnancy:

> I was actually entitled to 12 weeks full pay when I went off with E, and then I'd saved up enough holidays, so basically I got six months paid leave with her, full-time, which was great. So definitely it made it a lot easier. I don't know if we would have done it then if you were getting no benefits. (C_4 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro)

> I saved all my leave up, and I had 14 months off at paid leave. And I think six weeks of that was unpaid. All of it was half pay or full pay… I waited for my long service leave to come up and then I knew that the time was good to have children because I'd have quite a bit of leave up my sleeve, (P – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro).

Another woman employed in the public sector was able to combine her nine weeks' paid maternity leave with additional unpaid leave.

Three of the women described how they would have liked to have taken more time off work after the birth of their child, but had to return to work because they were not entitled to paid maternity leave and could not afford to stay home. One of the women described how she took unpaid maternity leave after the birth of her child but returned to work part-time after eight or nine weeks for financial reasons. She and her husband had just built a new house and she simply could not afford to stay at home.

One of the women described how she was entitled to nine weeks paid maternity leave and took additional leave without pay, but had to return to work part-time for financial reasons. Another described how she was entitled to maternity leave, but did not take it because it was unpaid. Instead, she used a combination of sick leave and annual leave, which amounted to two weeks leave after both her first and second birth,

> Although three months maternity leave was available in this company, I wasn't able to stay home because that was unpaid maternity leave. I just used sick leave and annual leave when I had the baby. (J_1 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

Child Care Benefit[22]

Seven of the women reported receiving a Child Care Benefit and the level of fee relief they received varied. The relative importance of the fee relief varied from case to case.

[22] The Child Care Tax Rebate was a 2005-06 Budget measure and as such was not available to any of the women at the time of the interviews.

Only one of the women, a sole parent who always worked part-time, reported receiving the maximum child care fee relief. Another received 65 per cent of the child care fee, but said she no longer received it when she started paid employment because her income was over the threshold. Another woman commented that the child care fee relief helped a lot because the amount she had to pay per day was reduced by a third.

It is important to note that some participants made statements about their lack of entitlement to any child care fee relief in cases where they may in fact have been entitled. This may point to a divergence between actual entitlement and some women's understanding of their entitlement and highlights a need for clearer information.

One woman described how she was pleasantly surprised by the level of Child Care Benefit she received when she returned to work part-time. Initially, her mother was going to look after her daughter on the two days she was at work, but she opted for formal child care after she found out how much it would cost her with the fee relief. She also felt it would be a better option because her mother was not well and caring for a child all day would tire her out. However, she also said that there was a disincentive for her to work more than two days, because she gets subsidised for two days but would have to pay the full rate on any additional days[23].

One woman, a sole parent working full-time, described how the cost of child care has been particularly burdensome for her over the years. She has received various Child Care Benefits over the years, but spoke in particular of the expense of vacation care. Although she received some fee relief for vacation care it was her understanding that it was capped[24]. On top of that she has also had to pay for an average of three excursions per week, the cost of which is non-rebatable.

Three of the women said they could not afford to work and pay child care (See also Section 6.3 on child care). Two of these women reported that they relied on their parents/grandparents to provide care. Another commented that being ineligible for Child Care Benefit and having no relatives living nearby meant that she could not

[23] It is possible that this participant may actually be entitled to claim more hours of Child Care Benefit per week for work related care. Child Care Benefit is usually paid for up to 20 hours for non-work related care and 50 hours for work related care each week. For those using registered care, Child Care Benefit is payable at a flat hourly rate for up to 50 hours per week for work related care.

[24] Child Care Benefit is actually available for eligible families using approved vacation care without being capped.

afford to work and pay for child care[25],

> You know we're not going to get any assistance. We don't get any. There's no hope of us ever getting any…We can't even get a subsidy for the child care or anything. (L_1 - 2 children, partnered, NCW, metro)

Family Tax Benefit

A few of the women said they had received/were receiving the Family Tax Benefit. Two of them were very pleased with the amount they received:

> A couple of times I've ended up with $2,000 which was really nice to get that benefit. And you know it would help if it was generally around Christmas time that it was coming in, by the time you put the paperwork in. So you know, the government I think is quite generous in the money they give you for nothing, really. (C_4 – 2 children, partnered, P/T, metro)

One of the women described how she expected to get some form of Family Tax Benefit when she had her first child, but was ineligible because they had had a double income in the previous tax year. Another described how she receives Family Tax A, but would lose it if she did any more paid work then she is currently doing, stating 'that's always a thought in your mind.'

Parenting Payment Single

Two of the single parents in the study spoke of the Parenting Payment Single. J_2 started receiving the Parenting Payment Single shortly after her marriage broke up. She descried the payment as 'a lifeline' at the time, even though she realised after a few months that she 'couldn't survive on a part pension and working part-time.' She also spoke very highly of the Jobs Education and Training Program that was available to her as a single parent. She felt it was invaluable because it allowed her to gain some computer skills, but is concerned that single parents these days do not get the same support. She felt that single parents deserve targeted help due to the challenges they face if they want to work, particularly in regards to child care.

S_3 also described how she accessed the Parenting Payment Single when she fell pregnant in 1986. She says that over the years eligibility for the payment has become increasingly tight with a number of rules for eligibility introduced. She feels fortunate that she was not subject to the scrutiny that she says other parents on the payment are subjected to nowadays.

General comments on allowances/subsidies

None of the women said that the availability of subsidies or allowances influenced their plans to have children. Some of the women said they were not eligible for any

[25] It is possible that this participant was not aware that all families who use approved or registered child care are eligible for Child Care Benefit (if using approved care up to 50 hours per week for work related care and up to 20 hours per week for non-work related care; if using registered care up to 50 hours per week for work related care).

allowances[26] and others who were eligible said the allowances had no influence on the timing or number of children, largely because the amounts available were considered quite minimal relative to the cost of raising a child. At the same time, however, the money received was a welcome bonus to some:

> Anything that we get is a bonus. That's how we see it. We wouldn't turn around and have another kid because we get all this money. Because you do have to pay for them for the rest of your life. It's only going to help a little bit. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

Although she has never been eligible for any allowances or subsidies, one of the women felt that the availability of allowances/subsidies would help with planning:

> It certainly would help in terms of planning your children and how long you can have time, how many months you can take from work. That would certainly have influenced how long I can take, if I knew that I was getting some kind of subsidies, then I can plan ahead. You know, I don't think the choice is there for most women anyway. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB).

Two of the women mentioned that they received the 'baby bonus', but neither said that it had any influence on their plans:

> Well not so much banking on it… I mean it wasn't anything near the $3,000, but I think I got like nearly $2,000 with that because there was two of them. I thought 'Oh, $2,000, that will keep them in nappies for a while.' (T – 4 children, partnered, F/T, metro)

One of the women expressed strong views about the baby bonus and other payments for mothers who stay at home:

> About the baby bonus… and I think the stay at home allowance for women and everything, it's just trapping women at home. The question is whether those sorts of incentives actually change women's behaviour. You could argue that some people would make a decision, you know… with or without those considerations, but I think there is an attempt… to really just to go backwards in terms of advances that women have made in the working environment. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro).

[26] The Maternity Payment was introduced on 1 July 2004. As such, many of the women interviewed did not receive this payment as their children were born prior to 2004.

7 Unique factors shaping the experiences of women from specific backgrounds

Whilst the experiences of sole parents, Aboriginal, women from a non-English speaking background and rural women had much in common with other women in the study there were some unique factors that shaped their experiences. This section discusses these factors but should be read in conjunction with the remainder of the report.

7.1 Sole parents

Of the five women identifying as sole parents, two became sole parents following the breakdown of their marriage. The three other women became sole parents through unplanned pregnancies in unstable relationships. This meant that the women had different expectations and experiences of workforce participation. Neither J_2 nor A_1 had a very strong attachment to the workforce whilst married. J_2 was self-employed whilst her children were young and A_1 returned to work after the birth of her third child. They were both the primary carer for their children whilst their husbands were the breadwinners. The transition from carer to sole carer/provider was a shock, but in retrospect not an unwelcome one (see below). For S_3, having a child meant being the 'financial provider',

> And most women are becoming single parents as divorcees, and they've gone and they've had, they've been out of the workforce because they've been keeping the family going and keeping the husband at work and doing all that stuff, and for them to get back into the workforce after they've been out childrearing and then going through the trauma of a relationship breakdown, it's a really big call. For most women it's huge. Whereas for me, I went into it knowing I was going to be the financial provider and approached my employment knowing that it would have to be family flexible and knowing that I would have to be able to juggle around my child. (S_3 – 1 child, sole parent, 3 x P/T jobs, metro)

A significant difference between sole parents and other women in the study was the extent to which they were working full-time. Three of the sole parents worked in full-time roles and two others worked effectively full-time by combining two or more part-time jobs. Work was of much more fundamental importance for the sole parents as it related directly to their 'survival'. For these sole parents, labour force participation was shaped by a desire for a better future for their children. All had received the sole parent pension at some stage but felt 'they were going nowhere'. Whilst life was less stressful for them and their children on the pension, it severely limited their options and opportunities. There was a sense that there was a compulsion for these women to work full-time rather than choice.

> I've got no choice whatsoever. Well I do have a choice, like you know, I don't know, I've been thinking I might drop back hours and get into a cheaper place. But like my house is shabby shabby. You know, I don't want my kid to grow up in a hovel. It's good to have a

> yard and that. (S_1 – 1 child, sole parent, 2 x P/T jobs, metro, Aboriginal)

These sole parents weighed up the costs and benefits of working as against remaining on the pension. They made an active choice to participate in the workforce, but were aware of the costs, particularly loss of benefits such as subsidised housing and child care. One benefit of working was the ability to avoid government scrutiny and monitoring. For those whose earning capacity was limited, this was an ongoing dilemma,

> Well, while you get less money, but you get you know, you get a pension card, you get like other things. Like my rent was only $74 a fortnight. And you know J only had to go to school two or three days a week and that was only $5 a day. So things like that, like it's easier. Like I don't know, but I looked at myself when I was on the pension, I was not so stressed and it was easier for me than what it is now that I'm working, getting more money, and I still have to pay more for everything you know. (S_1 – 1 child, sole parent, 2 x P/T jobs, metro, Aboriginal)

Some of the sole parents were surprised to find that despite the hardship of working and being a sole parent, they enjoyed their work. Two sole parents indicated that the marriage ending had given them a greater career focus and drive. This was one of the few positives they could see arising from the marriage breakdown,

> I like working. I enjoy work. I prefer work to staying at home. And also economically I need to work. I don't want to stay home all the time. Since I became a single mother, work is more important for me financially. When I was younger, I thought I would stay home as a housewife. So I didn't plan my career. After marriage I got a job and I found I really like to work. After the divorce, I have to work full-time in order to support my family and myself. (A_1– 3 children, sole parent, F/T, metro, NESB)

Child care was especially difficult for sole parents, although the availability of support from extended families ameliorated this to some extent. Formal care provided some support for these sole parents, however, logistics surrounding 'gaps' in care were considerable. For school-aged children, before and after school care was an issue, as was transportation from one form of care to another. J_2, a sole parent with a good income, paid a person to do pick ups and drop offs as well as after-school home-based care for her children. In this way, she had effectively commercialised elements of care most commonly done by parents. S_1, who did not have a sufficient income to support such an arrangement, relied on extended family support to fill the 'gaps' in formal care, although she was not entirely happy about this. F, who lived with her grandmother who cared for her child, experienced some problems in filling in 'gaps' if her grandmother was sick, away or had other obligations. S_3 made an active decision to create supportive environments around herself and her son. Living in communal housing meant her housemates ensured he had breakfast before going off to school or watched him whilst she did overnight shift work.

Among the sole parents, their relationship with their children was the primary emotional relationship in their lives. For the younger ones, this was a situation they were happy with, although the older sole parent commented on the loneliness that comes from being a full-time worker and sole carer of children. Younger sole parents spoke of the absolute joy of sharing their life with their child, including them in even mundane everyday tasks. For $S_{1,}$ her son was an important source of meaning in her life and she would 'love' to have another child, but felt she was unable to afford one. F wanted marriage, home and stability before having another child. For J_2, whose children were older, she desired adult company,

> I really haven't had time to have much of a social life or really you know, I think that's one of the reasons I haven't repartnered in a sense. And I'm very conscious that women by and large don't tend to repartner as quickly as men do after separation. And the most strikingly obvious reason I can find for that is that they're looking after the kids. You know, try having a romantic night with the kids sort of locked out of the bedroom or whatever. Of course it's all the social thing around, spending time with people your own age, just going out and seeing a movie. All those things would be a real treat. (J_2 – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

The sole parents also had the need for ongoing negotiations with their children's biological fathers. Among the five in the study, there was a range of experiences, but most put effort into maintaining some form of relationship between the father and children. The exception was $S_{3,}$ as the biological father 'bowed out' and has never been part of her son's life. Only one woman had come to an agreement with the biological father with which she was happy, although the lack of ongoing child support remained an issue. In general, though, the relationship was not a difficult one,

> When he has her on the weekends he pays for everything that she does on the weekends, and he's helping me with her schooling costs and uniform costs and everything like that. So you know he's making some contribution. So I'm happy with that. (F – 1 child, sole parent, F/T, metro, Aboriginal)

For one sole parent, however, getting her ex-husband to fulfil his obligations to his children was an ongoing source of stress. She very much wanted him to contribute more financially, but probably more importantly to take some of the care burden so she could have some respite,

> I actually put my foot down and said… 'This is the standard agreement. You're going to have the kids every second fortnight'. And you know, I think I tried to force him to take them in school holidays but up until this year he really hadn't done anything in the school holidays. So I put my foot down and he tried to take them then, I counted it, it was 36 hours, from Saturday morning to Sunday night. And I said 'That's absolute rubbish. Here's when you pick them up, Friday evening. So you have Friday, Saturday, only at fortnightly weekends', so I forced him to do that. (J_2, – 2 children, sole parent, F/T, metro)

7.2 Aboriginal women

The three Aboriginal women interviewed had very different workforce experiences, reflecting their different educational qualifications and work histories. F, who had studied at TAFE since completing her HSC, had only ever worked in retail positions. She was currently working full-time in retail. $S_{1,}$ completed her HSC through TAFE after the birth of her child and had worked in project positions in the community sector. She was currently combining two part-time jobs in the community sector and working five days. The third Aboriginal woman, V had two degrees and, like S1, had worked primarily in community services. She worked officially two days per week, but was contactable by phone and email on other days. Her responsibilities went well beyond two days per week. Two of the Aboriginal women had become sole parents whilst quite young and the third was married with four children.

Despite the evident differences among these women, all three Aboriginal women interviewed felt it was important that the care setting provided for their children acknowledged and celebrated Indigenous culture. They all hoped their children would develop a strong sense of themselves as Indigenous people. Two women used Aboriginal community child care whilst the third used a non-Indigenous centre. Aboriginal community child care enabled their children to learn more about their culture, languages and stories. After being approached about cultural issues, the non-Indigenous centre introduced cultural awareness training for all staff, including Indigenous culture celebrations (NAIDOC) in their events calendar as well as other strategies to better meet the needs of Indigenous children. Child care for these women was, perhaps more so than for the other women in the study, viewed as more than care, but an educational investment. All three believed it was important that they assisted their children's transition into mainstream school as much as possible and assisted their social development,

> To know where she comes from. I think it's very important. Yes, she's starting to now, because we send her over to [an Aboriginal child care centre]. She's got a lot to learn, she's done a bit of stuff over there, so she's getting there. (F – 1 child, sole parent, F/T, metro, Aboriginal)

All three women had different experiences of family care hinting at the potential inaccuracies of assumptions about 'family care'. One woman lived with her grandmother and uncle. Her grandmother (the child's great grandmother) did the vast majority of the care for the child on an informal basis. For F, the involvement of her grandmother in her child's life was very positive. It gave F greater flexibility, but also peace of mind, knowing her child was being cared for properly. S_1, whilst she had a strong family network, was mindful that her mother 'worked full-time and was very busy'. Additionally, S_1 did not want to rely on her extended family as she saw her son as 'her responsibility'. The third woman was very wary of informal care due to the risk this exposed her children to in terms of child abuse. Her stance on child protection had caused a rift between her and some members of her family. She and her husband were 'very selective' about who they would leave their children with. For this reason, she preferred her child to be cared for in public settings such as long day care centres,

> A lot of our extended families…have been involved in violence, sexual violence, physical violence, neglect… and we've made choices that we won't leave our kids with certain people. And we probably have alienated some of our family members because of that choice. (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

None of the Aboriginal women received paid maternity leave or maternity leave entitlements due to the nature of their workforce participation at the time of giving birth (one received an ex-gratia payment of $1,000). Both V and S_1 have a history of working in time specific, part-time, positions rendering them ineligible for maternity leave entitlements. F was probably eligible for maternity leave (both paid and unpaid) but due to relocating did not pursue it. The lack of maternity rights effectively reinforces their marginal connections with the labour force.

For the Aboriginal women interviewed, providing a role model for their children was important. These women saw participation in work, education and community life as a means of sheltering their children from the disadvantages many Aboriginal people face,

> And that's why [my husband] and I have made a really strong decision around us working… It's to send the message to my kids that Aboriginal women can work and be successful at it too. That's education on another level for them. I think that's so important. Mummy goes to work. That sends a really strong work ethic message to the kids. (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

7.3 Women from a non-English speaking background

Six women from a non-English speaking background (NESB) were interviewed as part of this study, five from a Korean background and one from a Chilean background. The Korean women were interviewed by a Korean-speaking researcher, who translated the transcripts into English. Three of the women had been resident in Australia since primary school and three others had migrated to Australia as adults. The inclusion of five Korean women provides an important opportunity to hear their experiences and voices. Caution is advised, however, about generalising their experiences to all women from a non-English speaking background. It is likely that their stories and experiences are shaped by culturally-specific factors.

The NESB women in the study were less reliant on formal child care than other women in the study. Child care arrangements for these women were a mixture of extended family care, nannies and some formal care.

Whilst the importance of extended families was common among all the women interviewed for this study, it was of even greater importance to the women from a non-English speaking background. Among the Korean women, family relationships were culturally very important. 'Helping out' family members was assumed if at all possible,

> I have various people who look after my children. My father in law looks after them after school. I also have my father who drops them off and picks them up from school. And from time to time when they are not available I have my sisters who look after them as well. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

Extended family support in child care was common among the NESB women, even those whose parents did not live in Australia. One woman's child was currently being cared for by her parents in Korea to support her study and work. Another spoke of parents inviting her to send children to Korea so she could better manage work and family responsibilities. However, the assistance received from extended family members was not uncomplicated. The importance of family ties also meant obligations towards parents in terms of caring. This obligation was likely to increase over time as parents aged. One woman spoke of needing to go to doctors and other appointments with her parents as neither spoke English. For C_3, her inability to give her extended family 'enough time' created a sense of guilt. She felt being reliant on family members for child care reduced her sense of independence and adulthood,

> For a while we lived with [my parents in law] for child care… For me, I thought we were adults so we need independence from our parents. (C_3 –2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

Due to the nature of the work and hours that the Korean women worked, some relied on nannies to provide care for their children. Whilst this was expensive (one woman paid $500 per week for two children) it gave greater flexibility around hours than mainstream child care.

Whilst the extended family was an important source of support for the NESB women, access to child care was also important as it exposed children to mainstream Australian culture. For these women, child care ensured their children's social, language and educational development. This meant, however, that the transition to child care was very fraught for some children and their parents,

> I was worried a lot about sending him [to child care]…but soon I found that he played with friends well and he didn't hate to go there…That was another advantage of sending him to child care. He wouldn't have learned English if he didn't go to the child care centre because my family speak in Korean at home… I think that this kind of experience will be good for him to live and survive in a multicultural society like Australia. (C_3 –2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

The NESB women interviewed for this study had strong connections to the labour market. Only one of the six women was working less than full-time and she was working four days per week. The other five women were working on a full-time basis, up to as much as 50 hours per week. One woman worked in the family business with her husband and so, in addition to her regular hours, she often did work at home at night, such as bookkeeping work. Three were employed in private sector positions, one worked in the public sector and one worked in the community sector.

The two key factors influencing their long working hours were the financial importance of work and the nature of the work they were doing. One woman described how she works full-time because she enjoys going to work and that since she got divorced a few years ago there was a financial need for her to work full-time (she previously worked part-time). Another felt that a dual income was important in Australia. The other key factor influencing their long working hours was the fact that three of the women held professional/managerial positions that demanded long hours. Another woman, who was self-employed, explained that the nature of her work demands long hours.

The woman who worked in the public sector spoke of making a conscious decision to move to the public sector to better balance her work and caring responsibilities. She found even in this setting, however, that being a parent adversely affected her career,

> Even though some male colleagues may work shorter work hours, I don't see myself doing that because I know that the men will make a behind remark that 'She's like that because she's got children'. And stuff like that. And I don't like prejudice against me like that. I like to have equal standing and in actual fact I think women in workplaces might have to work even harder to prove that yes, we can do it. You know. And the fact that we must almost prove that our children do not influence the way we work, whereas the men don't have that same pressure. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

For others in the private sector, this pressure to minimise the impact of being a parent on work performance was even stronger. This led J_1 to return to work after one month of giving birth, but she found even taking one month off was difficult. J_1's professional role was extremely demanding in terms of hours and travel, making juggling work and family very difficult. The demands of her work meant breastfeeding was difficult, resulting in her expressing milk at work either to take home in the evening or flushing it down the toilet,

> I had to return to work as soon as possible after childbirth. If I had been away from work more than one month, I couldn't survive in this sector…Luckily I was healthy enough to start work that early after childbirth as well... No one was in charge of my business while I was away…[and] because work was waiting for me, I couldn't stay home for too long, even a month. (J_1 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

The experience of these women confirms previous research about the marginal position of non-English speaking women in the Australian labour force (Alcorso, 1995; Callus, 1995). The priority given to work, their lack of Australian experience and sometimes-limited English exposed these women to the risk of exploitation. Some of these women reported experiencing racism, illegal employment conditions or not having their qualifications recognised. For recently arrived migrants, work and the associated income are of vital importance, leading hopefully to 'a better life',

> We are migrants here and came to have a better and more comfortable life here. To live a better life, I wanted to do more paid work. (C_3 –2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

The experience of being 'other' in Australian culture influenced both those women who had migrated as adults and those who arrived as young people. One woman, who viewed herself as 'Australian' and came to Australia almost 30 years ago, spoke of the racism she experienced in looking for work and at work and the assumptions people make about 'Asians',

> When they first saw me, you can tell that from their facial expression that they were not sure if they wanted to do interview … I realised I am Korean. I looked different. Everything was different. (A_1– 3 children, sole parent, F/T, metro, NESB).

Lack of familiarity with Australian employment laws combined with a degree of desperation about work and securing an income led to C_3 being exploited in earlier jobs. She is currently employed by a firm that meets its legal obligations in relation to sick leave and holiday leave for which she is grateful,

> I did some 'cash jobs' as well. Since I got this permanent position, this company is concerned with the welfare of workers like sick leave and holidays etc. That is a good thing. When I did a casual cash job, they didn't care about sick leave or holidays. I got paid according to how many hours I worked. The shop paid me in cash and there was no official pay slip. I think that it is a sort of illegal practice. (C_3 –2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

For others, lack of proficiency in English and the lack of recognition of their qualifications affected their work experience and put them in a marginal position within the labour market. Although all of the Korean women held a higher education degree, their qualifications were not fully recognised in Australia and those who had migrated more recently found it difficult to continue careers established in Korea. C_3, for example, worked as a nurse in Korea, but took a job doing clerical work in a factory and S_4 worked as a teacher in Korea, but has undertaken work in an unrelated field in Australia.

Some of the women who migrated more recently found work in Korean companies, largely because of the language barrier they faced and because of the cultural familiarity of working in a Korean environment. Two were working for a Korean company at the time of the interview while another had worked for Korean companies prior to her current job,

> Also it was not easy to find a job. I came here four years ago. My English was not fluent. I have been working for Korean shops and Korean companies including this company. My qualification was not recognised here. I need to get a nursing degree or training here to get a nursing job in Australia. Because of my language barrier, I couldn't even think of doing a nursing job here. (C_3 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

For these women, there was a sense that family life and time with children had to be 'sacrificed' for short term financial or career demands. One woman spoke of sacrificing time with her children at the moment, but was hoping for a better situation when they were school aged,

> There are many times when I felt that I should have stayed at home when they were quite little, but it also conflicts with work demands, especially when you've got projects and you've got deadlines. Then you've got to compromise the time you spend with your children. (C_2 – 2 children, partnered, F/T, metro, NESB)

7.4 Rural women

Four women who lived in rural settings were interviewed for this study. All four had worked primarily on a part-time basis since having children, although one had recently withdrawn from the labour market altogether. All had strong workforce connections prior to having children, working full-time for a number of years.

Travel was a feature of the rural women's experiences, both for employment and for child care. Three travelled to another place for work, highlighting the importance of regional labour markets to their job prospects. All travelled at least 30 minutes to work, although this was often lengthened through needing to drop children off at care. One rural woman travelled two hours each way to work two days per week,

> For me to be in the city about 8.30-9, I leave here at 6 in the morning, and I catch the train…I think the other limitation for me as well is my days in the city. I can only spend a couple of hours. Because of the public transport situation I have to leave Sydney by 3.30 to get here by 5.30 to pick the kids from preschool. (V – 4 children, partnered, P/T, rural, Aboriginal)

For those living at a distance from regional cities, accessing formal child care was difficult. Two of the women (with teenage children) who spoke of the lack of formal child care, relied totally on informal grandparent care for child care prior to school age. This enabled them to work and without that support they were doubtful that they would have been able to work. Over recent years, the accessibility of child care had improved in regional towns with the opening of new centres, however, these fill quickly. The cost of child care in the country was considerably less than paid by other women in the study. A_2, for example, paid $42 for two days in long day care (with Child Care Benefit) whereas many city women spoke of paying $70 or more a day,

> I was really lucky because it was a new daycare that was opening, so as soon as it opened I put her name straight down, so there wasn't really a waiting list. But I have, I just asked the other day if there's any other days available and at the moment there's not. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

Two of the rural women had previously worked full-time in 'the city'. The move to the country and part-time work had affected their earning capacity as well as their

career prospects. For those with specialist skills or occupations, finding suitable work in the country was not always easy,

> And a [professional] position up here is quite hard to get. So that's why another reason is to, I don't want to totally give up my job just yet. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

Finding a 'good employer' was even more important for rural women and sometimes more fraught. Apart from V, who was able (and willing) to travel to the city to access work, the three other rural women were reliant on relatively small labour markets. C_1 spoke of moving between casual positions due to employer demands,

> [They] kept wanting me to do more and more and more days and then he'd say to me about two days before the school holidays, 'I want you to work two weeks in the school holidays'. And that was just a nightmare. Even though I enjoyed the job, it was a great job, it was just [the employer] had got no idea about women and kids, none whatsoever…[In the country] because you haven't got the alternative places to be able to go and find another job. (C_1 – 3 children, partnered, P/T, rural)

The major benefit of living in the country and working, however, was seen as the closeness of the community and supports. These supports included immediate family members (grandparents and sisters), but also neighbours and other friends,

> Because it's a small community and you know a lot more of the people and you've got family support. Or like of an afternoon I'm not going to be home, get such and such, pick them off the bus. And my next door neighbour is really good…if I'm not going to be home, [my daughter] will duck over to her place for an hour until I get home…Whereas I think in the city you probably don't have that close a relationship with some people. (C_1 – 3 children, partnered, P/T, rural)

Despite this, there appeared to be less support culturally for women working in country towns, leaving A_2 feeling judged about her decision to work,

> I just probably feel that other people think that I should be at home with [my daughter]. I don't know. A lot of people, a lot of mums do stay at home. And I guess no one says anything, but just being a mum, you always feel, you probably feel guilty. (A_2 – 1 child, partnered, P/T, rural)

The two women with teenage children also spoke of the lack of options available to their children in terms of education, employment and life opportunities. Local apprenticeships, whilst viewed as leading to good careers, also narrowed young people's options. C_1's oldest son had just completed Year 12 and was facing a decision about his future. Drawing on her own experiences, she was hoping he would not leave school and would learn that life had more to offer than their home town. This runs counter somewhat to media portrayals of small towns being concerned

about young people being 'forced' to leave. B could see her daughter becoming a hairdresser, but hoped this was not in their home town,

> And well they can't stay around here. I don't want them to stay around here. I want them to go and see the big wide world (B – 2 children, partnered, NCW, rural)

8 Discussion

The aim of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the work and life decisions of women with children in 2005. Many of the findings confirm research undertaken into women's workforce experiences over the past 30 years. These women still experience a 'double burden' of household duties and work (Pocock, 2003; Bittman *et al*., 2003). Women's workforce participation is conditional upon a range of factors, requiring constant attention and negotiation. These factors include: the attitudes of partners; quality child care; workplace cultures; and social policy initiatives. In 2005, however, there seem to be new influences affecting women's experiences. Some male partners are taking more active parenting roles. Where greater workplace flexibility exists it is enhancing parents' ability to achieve a better work/home balance and social policy initiatives are providing support for working parents.

Using a trajectory approach, the interviews showed that childbearing and childrearing influence women's labour market participation in a number of ways. Women who worked full-time prior to the birth of their first child and subsequently returned to part-time employment comprised the largest group. The HILDA data also showed that for two thirds (66.8%) of women with children who worked part-time, 'caring for children' was the main reason for working part-time rather than full-time. Women whose employment pattern has been characterised predominantly by moves into and out of full-time work comprised the next largest interview group. The interviews also showed that movement into and out of the labour force was often influenced by the women's particular circumstances. HILDA confirms the fluidity of women's labour force participation, as one quarter (25.4%) of women with resident children had a different labour force status at the time of the Wave 2 interview, as compared to that of the Wave 1 interview. This percentage is more than twice as high as that of men with resident children.

Part-time work enabled many women to reach some balance between their work and family roles and responsibilities. Our research suggests that the concept of 'adaptive women' (Hakim, 2000) masks the complexity of combining work and family. For the women in this study, combining work and family created ongoing stress and considerable guilt. The stress related to what some described as a 'military operation' organising home, children, child care, transportation and work. Organisation and forward planning were essential for the women who had to get to work each day. For many, combining work and family added two or three hours to their working day. Even the best organised plan, however, could be derailed by a sick or distraught child or parent. Most of the women interviewed experienced periods of guilt, either about their ability to be 'good parents' or 'good workers'. Further research is needed into the long-term impact of juggling work and family on women's health.

While part-time work can be an effective strategy for managing the work/life balance, the negative impact of part-time work on women's careers must be considered (Warren, 2004; Houston and Marks 2003; Campbell, Chalmers, Charlesworth, 2005). The notion that women 'choose' occupations that facilitate work/family balance fails to acknowledge the impact this may have on their career aspirations and masks gender segregation of the labour force. A number of women in our study spoke of sacrificing their careers, taking lesser jobs or not applying for senior positions, due to their caring

responsibilities. Conversely, other women in the study, the sole parents in particular, worked full-time in order to provide better opportunities for their children.

The interviews revealed the dynamic and fluid nature of movement into and out of the labour force that many of the women have experienced over the years. Many withdrew from the labour force following the birth of a child/ren and many have varied the hours they work particularly when their children are young. The interviews also show that employment patterns are not fixed, but change in response to the individual's particular circumstances.

There appeared to be little formalised negotiation between the participants and their employers about the transition back to work following the birth of a child. Arrangements appeared to be rather vague and open-ended. Research elsewhere highlights the importance of workplace planning and support to ease the transition back to work after maternity leave (Houston and Marks, 2003). Further research could be done into how employers and employees negotiate and manage the transition as well as the production of resources (policies, procedures, etc.) to help manage the transition. It would seem from these women's experiences that flexible hours are an important feature of the transition, with gradual increases over time.

The interviews also revealed the multifaceted nature of women's work preferences (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004). In most cases, it was not possible to identify a single factor driving the current work/home preference of most of the women in the study. Instead, several factors interacted to shape their preference. These factors were: time with children; finding work enjoyable; wishing to further develop their career; wanting time for themselves; financial imperatives; domestic arrangements; and wanting to be a role model. The dominant factor driving current work preference was finances, with all of the participants who were working both part-time and full-time stressing the financial importance of paid employment. Those who were not working at the time of the interview said that their financial circumstances permitted them to stay at home full-time. However, financial circumstances, although significant, did not alone explain women's work decisions.

The interviews showed that work preferences are not formed in a vacuum, but are determined by the woman's particular context and circumstances (Fagan, 2001). In other words, many women express a preference taking their domestic and work spheres into account. Consequently, it may be more appropriate to speak of 'contextual preferences'. Moreover, because contexts are not static, neither are preferences (Ginn, 1996). A change in one or more of the factors that drive preferences means that many women altered their perspectives on labour market participation. The HILDA data also reveal the dynamic nature of preferences, with over a third of women with children changing their work preference over a one-year period.

While many of the women were satisfied with their labour force status at the time of the interview, suggesting that they were able to act on their preference, the interviews also revealed that many women could not. This supports work by Rose (2001) who found that while some women were able to act on their employment preference many could not. In particular, a number of women who were in paid employment expressed a preference for shorter working hours. This highlights the problematic nature of

standard work hours for many working mothers and suggests that the hours are often incompatible with having a desirable work/life balance. An undertow in many women's experience was that of guilt. Very few of the women participating in the workforce felt satisfied with the level of time and energy they were able to give to their children. This corresponds with the findings from the HILDA survey that on average women with children were less satisfied than other women with the amount of free time they have. These findings call to mind Australian time-use research that has shown that working mothers are the most time-pressured of all demographic groups (Bittman and Rice, 2002; Bittman, 2004)

The HILDA data also reveal a mismatch between actual hours worked and work preference for many women. The data show that half of the women with children in full-time employment would like to work fewer hours, even with the reduction in income taken into account. Again, this underscores the difficulty that a significant proportion of women experience when trying to juggle work and home life. Conversely, the data also reveal that a quarter of women in part-time employment would like more hours of work. This could point to the increasing polarisation in working hours that leaves people with fewer options between very long full-time hours and very short part-time hours (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004). However, the HILDA finding that some women expressed a desire to work more hours should be interpreted carefully, as these women were asked to take finances into account. Responses would have been influenced by financial constraints, and so the policy implications are not obvious.

This research suggests that many women cannot exercise genuine choices about reconciling work and family. It identified many constraining and facilitating factors that shape women's work choices and found that work/family preference does not always determine labour market behaviour. It suggests that the avowed policy objective of giving parents a *choice* about whether to work or care for children is available to only a minority of women. Most women in the study felt compelled to combine both work and caring responsibilities. Financial necessity was a key factor in many women's choice, although rarely the only factor.

The interviews identified a range of constraining or facilitating factors that shape women's workforce participation and experience. These constraints were both normative and structural (McRae, 2003; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). The way these factors interact with different women's preferences is not straightforward. For one woman, her family's financial circumstances may constrain her choices whilst for another they may facilitate her preferences. These factors related to circumstances at home (household division of labour; partners' attitudes; and, extended families); work (employer attitudes; flexible work practices; and, bargaining power in the workplace); children (age and number of children; child care; out of school hours care); and social policy measures (maternity leave; Child Care Benefits; family tax benefit; allowance and subsidies; Parenting Payment Single). The research suggests that action in one area alone will have only minimal impact on women's ability to better balance work and home.

In terms of home-based factors, the lack of change in the division of household labour was noteworthy. Women still bear the burden of household duties such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, ironing and organising child care, even when they work full-time

(Bittman et al. 2003). Many women described this work as 'drudge', but there were a few examples of specific efforts to change current arrangements. Male partners had greater involvement in the care of children, particularly picking up or dropping children at child care or taking time off when children were sick. Men's experiences of balancing work and family with a particular focus on factors that constrain their involvement in family life requires further research. The availability of support from extended families, particularly grandparents, made a significant difference for many women (Goodfellow and Laverty, 2003). For those without extended family support, the absence was strongly felt.

The women interviewed reported a range of experiences with employers. Those in public sector positions were better supported as parents than those in other sectors, particularly those in the private retail sector. This confirms research elsewhere that shows that only a minority of Australian employees have access to family-friendly entitlements and those in the public sector have greatest access (OECD, 2002). There is an irony in the fact that many of the women interviewed were in part-time or casual employment in order to manage the work/life balance, but were not entitled to family-friendly benefits as a result of their marginal labour force position (Campbell and Charlesworth, 2004).

Among the interview group, 'good employers' were not necessarily those with good written policies, but those who understood parental responsibilities. The attitude of immediate line managers appeared more important than overall organisational policy. Child sickness and school holidays continue to cause difficulties for mothers in balancing work/home. The widespread use of information technologies, such as email, internet and mobile phones, appears to be providing much greater flexibility for new parents. A number of women spoke about mixing work at the office with work at home in the transition back to work after the birth of a child. Whilst many appreciated this flexibility, the research provides some evidence of a blurring of boundaries and the long-term impact of this trend deserves further research.

The search for flexible, affordable and quality child care was a common thread among the women interviewed. Most women used a mixture of formal and informal care, although a few were totally reliant on informal grandparent care. This informal care provided greater flexibility, but did not provide the socialisation benefits of formal care. Several women spoke of the educational and social outcomes from child care that was unrelated to their work decisions. For some women, leaving children, particularly those unhappy, at child care was emotionally fraught. Finding 'good' care was important and meant the difference between working or not for some women. For Aboriginal women, good care meant culturally affirming care.

Matching child care hours with work needs was an ongoing struggle for many women, particularly those with sole care of children, suggesting that the mismatch between child care/work hours and school/work holidays is a highly constraining factor for many mothers, (OECD, 2005). Filling gaps was costly or led to women making unsatisfactory child care arrangements. Out of school hours care was particularly problematic for parents of teenage children. This challenges the assumption that child care gets easier as children get older and challenges the policy focus on providing support to parents of young children (OECD, 2005).

For most women, the decision to have children was shaped by a range of factors, such as life stage, relationship circumstances and finances. The availability of both paid and unpaid maternity leave, whilst important, was not a determining factor in women's decisions. Most had some maternity leave at the time of giving birth, mainly on an unpaid basis. Few received payments beyond 12 weeks, although one or two were able to extend this by using accumulated leave. However, the ability to return to the same employer after unpaid maternity leave on a part-time basis was important. The high number of women not in the workforce whilst their youngest child is under two years of age suggests current arrangements of 12 months unpaid leave may be inadequate. Further research should be undertaken into strategies to address the current partial nature of maternity leave entitlements, with a particular focus on Aboriginal and women from a non-English speaking background.

There was a clear perception that child care costs were expensive. Child Care Benefits made a significant difference to a number of women, particularly those receiving large subsidies. The tapering of benefits, however, meant that some women only received the minimum rate. Other benefits, such as the Family Tax Benefit, maternity allowances and baby bonuses, were welcome, but not relied upon. None of the women seemed to believe these benefits were large enough to have a significant influence on their decisions.

The research also provided an opportunity to explore the unique factors that may influence sole parents, Aboriginal women, women from a non-English speaking background and rural women. The research highlights that these women had much in common with the other women in the study. Their individual circumstances, however, were often accompanied by particular constraining or facilitating factors.

The emotional and physical burden of being the sole carer and provider for children was evident in the experiences of sole parents. For these women, child care arrangements were often very complex due to the difficulty of filling gaps in care. Informal care was important for filling these gaps, however, these arrangements were not always ideal. Those with older children spoke of the importance of supervision and support of teenage children, which at times was at odds with workforce participation. The sole parents' workforce participation was shaped by a desire to provide a better future for their children, as well as a belief that the sole parent pension limited their options and opportunities. All of the sole parents interviewed worked effectively full-time. Significantly, many of the women who expressed dissatisfaction with their work hours were sole parents. This finding lends support to time-use research that shows that lone mothers feel the most time pressure (Craig, 2004).

The labour force participation of the sole parents in this study differs quite substantially from Australian-wide trends. Australian Bureau of Statistics' data indicate that in 2002, almost half of lone mothers were not in the labour force (47 per cent), over a quarter (27.2 per cent) were employed part-time and under a fifth (16.8 per cent) were employed full-time (ABS, 2003b). An additional factor that differentiates the sole parents in this study even further from Australian-wide trends is the association between labour force participation and the age of their youngest dependent. Labour force data show that lone parents of younger children are less

likely than lone parents of older children to be in employment (ABS, 2000; 2004)[27]. However, two of the sole parents in the current study had under school-aged kids and worked full-time.

For the Aboriginal women interviewed, the nature of their work history meant they were not eligible for paid or unpaid maternity leave. How widespread this experience is among Aboriginal women is not know. Further research is needed to assess Aboriginal women's access to entitlements that facilitate managing work and family responsibilities. This gains added importance as the Aboriginal women interviewed viewed labour force participation as a means to redress the social, economic and educational disadvantages that have affected Aboriginal people.

Labour force participation was of vital importance to women from a non-English speaking background, primarily for financial reasons. These women were more career-focused than others in the study, although this may reflect specific cultural values. Most gave priority to work and felt that they needed to 'sacrifice' their relationship with their children in the short term to maintain their employment status and secure their income. For some, it seems likely that the strength of attachment to the workforce was shaped by their experience of migration and the need to establish their families in the Australian community. The experiences of these women from a non-English speaking background confirm previous research about the disadvantages migrant women face (Alcorso, 1995; Callus, 1995). Those women who had migrated as adults were unable to continue careers established in their homeland as their degrees were not recognized in Australia. Others experienced racism in the workplace or were forced to accept exploitative positions due to limited language proficiency.

This study once again highlights the particular constraints and opportunities faced by rural women. Distance, access to services, limited opportunities and conservative cultural norms all shaped the experiences of the rural women interviewed. These constraints were countered by the availability of a large network of supports (family, friends and neighbours) that facilitated balancing work and family responsibilities. Any further research arising from this study should ensure the unique experiences of rural women be included, particularly in relation to employer practices. The limited labour market opportunities available to rural women increase the importance of employer practices in enabling work and family balance.

Three decades after second wave feminists demanded women's right to paid work, this is a reality for more and more Australian women. Social changes (such as family breakdown, housing costs, labour market changes) have meant for many this 'right' has become a necessity. Whether women enter the paid workforce as a right or a necessity, many now face the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities as parents. Their ability to do this is constrained by the embedded gendered nature of the household division of labour, employer practices and the search for quality child

[27] In 2000, under a third of sole parents whose youngest child was under four years of age were in employment compared to almost three-quarters (70 per cent) of sole parents whose youngest dependent was aged 15-24 years (ABS, 2000). In 2003, 76 per cent of lone parents with a dependent child 15-24 years were in employment compared to 28 per cent of lone parents whose youngest child was aged 0-2 years (ABS, 2004b).

care. Policy interventions that address such constraints and that support women as both parents and workers will help women achieve a better work/life balance.

Further research is recommended in relation to:

- Employers' and employees' negotiation and management of transitions back into the workforce after maternity leave;
- Men's experiences of balancing work and family with a particular focus on factors that constrain their involvement in family life;
- The transitions mature age and older women make into/out of the workforce to manage caring responsibilities;
- The take up and eligibility of maternity leave entitlements by Aboriginal women and women from a non-English speaking background;
- Flexible work and part-time arrangements;
- Child care for older children; and
- Strategies to address the current partial nature of maternity leave/family leave entitlements.

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Appendix A: Women's work trajectories/life histories

A_1– 3 children (16, 12 & 5 years), sole parent, working full-time, metro, non-English speaking background

A_1 is 40 years old and came to Australia from Korea when she was 8 years old. Since her divorce two years ago she has been living with her three children. She had her first child at 24 and did not work during any of her pregnancies. She was keen to return to work after having each of her children, because she gets bored easily and likes to learn new things. She had no trouble finding child care places because she pays for private child care and her parents help out on occasions. A_1 has held a number of part-time and full-time jobs over the years. She chose part-time work when she was raising her children. She has been in her current full-time managerial role for the last three years. She works 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 12pm on Saturdays. Her youngest (5 years old) has been in child care since she was 2½ years old. Since her divorce it is even more important for her to work full-time. On occasions she has felt discrimination against her at work her because she is Korean.

A_2 – 1 child (6 months), partnered, working part-time, rural

A_2 is degree-qualified and has held several full-time roles in her chosen field over the past ten years. She was working full-time when she had her daughter at the age of 30. She took 8/9 weeks of unpaid maternity leave before returning to work on a part-time basis (2 days). She returned to work a few weeks earlier than planned for financial reasons and would have preferred more time off. She feels somewhat pressured by her employer to return to full-time work and feels uncomfortable having to take time off work if her daughter is ill. Her daughter goes to day care on the two days she's at work. She plans on having more children, possibly one or two, and plans to have the next child when her daughter turns one. Her husband is self-employed and does not do much of the child care. He would like to spend one day a week with their daughter but is the principal earner. Although she really enjoys her work, she does not anticipate returning on a full-time basis for some time due to the difficulties of 'having to try and juggle everything'.

B – 2 children (15 and 12 years), partnered, not currently working, rural

B is a 43 year old mother of two high school aged children (15 and 12) who lives in a small rural town. B has recently given up work after continuous participation since completing Year 10 and then a TAFE secretarial course. After graduating from TAFE she worked for a bank for 18 years. Whilst working for the bank, she had her first child at the age of 28. She took 12 months maternity leave (which included a paid component of about three weeks) and then returned to work on a part-time basis, three days per week. On the birth of her second child three years later, she took another 12 months off before returning to work two days per week. Her manager at the bank was supportive and understanding of her parental responsibilities. She left the bank when it closed down. She then commenced 'casual' employment four days per week with a local small business, where she remained for eight years. The workplace culture of the business was not family-friendly and particularly unsupportive of parents with sick children. B found negotiating leave around school holidays also very difficult and recently resigned after being refused a day's leave during the school holidays. Her parents provided all the child care for her children when they were young as the

limited child care available in her community was very expensive. This involved driving to her parents' farm to drop the children off and pick them up, adding about an hour to her trip to work. Her husband worked shift work (6.30am to 3.15pm). B was solely responsible for domestic tasks, including cooking and cleaning. At one stage she employed a cleaner however stopped this, as it felt 'extravagant'.

C_1 – 3 children (17, 14 and 9 years old), partnered, working part-time, rural

C_1 lives in a rural area, is married, has three children and is 44 years old. She is currently working part-time (17 hours per week over three days) in her local area. She finds her workplace very flexible and is one of a number of part-time or casual staff. If one of C_1's children has a school activity that she would like to attend she negotiates with other staff to change shifts or cover for each other. Her workplace hours are the same as school hours so she has no concerns about before and after school care or holiday care. Financially, she would like to work more hours but is mindful of the impact this would have on the 'fine balance' she has between work/home/children. She loves her workplace and has just commenced a diploma to make her better qualified for the work she is doing. C_1's partner takes an equal share in managing home responsibilities. Her partner cooks most nights and is generally actively aware of the duties required to keep the house functioning. C_1 worked less when her children were younger and her last full-time job was in 1986 in the public sector. She took 12 months' maternity leave after the birth of her first child, before returning to work three days per week. Her parents did all the pre-school care for her children. Whilst on maternity leave with her second child she took voluntary redundancy. She has some regrets about this decision (which was financially attractive at the time), as she would now be in quite a senior position. She was, however, happy to stay at home whilst the children were young and worked in a range of casual positions before starting at her current workplace (5 or 6 years later). This made her aware of the importance of employers in making the juggle of work/home easier for parents. As she was casual she was able to leave jobs where employers where hostile to parents.

C_2 – 2 children (10 & 8 years), partnered, working full-time, metro, non-English speaking background

C_2 is 40 years old and came to Australia from Korea when she was 12 years old. She is married and has two children aged 10 and 8 years. C_2 is currently working full-time as a manager in the public sector. She is degree-qualified and has worked full-time in her chosen field for most of her working life. She reduced her hours temporarily when both her children were born. Her parents and parents-in-law help out with child care. However, she also pays for child care so that her children have some interaction with children of the same age. She returned to full-time work two years after her first child was born, and returned to part-time work two months after her second child was born. She was working in the public sector and found her employers to be very accommodating and flexible. Work is very important to C_2 because she finds it stimulating and it takes her away from housework. She also finds that having a double household income makes managing the finances easier. C_2 feels her career prospects are limited somewhat by her caring duties as a mother, because she is unable to put in the extra hours that some of her co-workers do and she has had to take breaks over the years when raising her children. She is very concerned not to show that her caring duties affect her work in any way. She deliberately avoids taking on more demanding

roles due to the difficulties of balancing work and home and because her current workplace accommodates her family life. She shares domestic tasks with her husband.

C_3 –2 children (2 & 4 years), partnered, working full-time, metro, non-English speaking background, employed full-time

C_3 has a permanent, full-time clerical job (38 hours per week). She lives with her husband, the eldest of her two children (4 years), brother, and a flat mate. Her youngest child (2 years) was sent to Korea six months ago to be cared for by C_3's mother and will remain there for another six months before C_3 brings him back to Australia. Her parents-in-law also live in Australia and live close by. She has a degree from Korea and worked in her chosen field for several months before moving to Australia in 1999 after she got married. Her first job in Australia was in retail. Her husband was studying full-time so she has had to support the family financially. She was not working when she had her first child at 25 and her second child was unplanned. She started working three months after her first child and her parents-in-law minded her child. Later she sent her child to child care, which she found very beneficial, because it gave him the opportunity to learn English. She stayed at home for a year after her second child. The hardest thing for her about combining work and family is not having enough time to spend with her children. She sends her eldest child to child care, but because child care finishes at 3pm her parents-in-law have to pick him up and mind him until she gets home from work. She would like to do more paid work for financial security, but cannot because of increased housework and child care. Her priority is her family, but she also wants to work. She has not done any work related to her qualification since she arrived in Australia. She is currently working part-time and plans to commence a degree soon. She intends to switch from full-time work to part-time when she begins her studies.

C_4 – 2 children (7½ & 5½ years), partnered, working part-time, metro

C_4 completed one year of secretarial college after she left school in Year 10 and worked in a number of clerical/administrative positions for four years. She then found a job at the local hospital where she has held several different positions over the last 14 years. She worked full-time until she took six months' maternity leave when her first child was born (at the age of 28) and then returned to work three days per week in a jobshare arrangement. She remained working part-time and then took another six months' maternity leave when her second child was born, before retuning to work two days per week. She returned to work for financial reasons but feels very glad to have maintained her attachment to her workplace because the job is flexible. Her oldest child is at school and the youngest is in preschool. Her mother takes the children to and from school and pre-school one day a week and cares for them at other times when C_4 works additional days at the hospital. She is keen to remain in part-time employment for as long as possible, because she wants to maintain her involvement in the children's school activities and daily lives. She feels very fortunate that her work, school, preschool and her mother are in all very close proximity. C_4 is solely responsible for all the domestic work.

F – 1 child (4 years old), sole parent, working full-time, metro, Aboriginal

F is a young Aboriginal woman (23) who is the sole parent of a four year old child. She works full-time in retail close to her home. She has a good relationship with her direct line manager who is aware that F will always give priority to her child and family. So far, she has found balancing full-time work and home manageable. She lives with two members of her extended family. When she fell pregnant she was living and working in a regional city. For various reasons, she and her partner at the time moved locations prior to the birth of their daughter. She worked casually for the same company in the new location, but assumed she would not be eligible for maternity leave and did not enquire about it. F withdrew from the workforce for three years following the birth of her child before starting casual work. Since F has been working her grandmother has provided informal care for her daughter. Approximately 12 months ago F enrolled her daughter in an Aboriginal pre-school, at least partly to give her grandmother respite. If her grandmother was not available to provide informal care, F feels she would not be able to work as her income is low and child care costs are high. She was not entirely happy about returning to work prior to her daughter commencing school. She loved her time at home with her daughter and was pleased she saw the milestones such as crawling, talking and walking. She realised, however, that her child needed the company of other children and returning to work would have both financial and social benefits for her. She associated work with greater opportunities and control. Whilst her life might be easier in some ways on the parenting pension it meant 'not going anywhere'. She hopes to do an apprenticeship and open her own business in the future.

J_1 – 2 children (4 & 1 year), partnered, working full-time, metro, non-English speaking background

J_1 has been working in her profession for the last nine and a half years. She spent the first three years of her career working in Korea where she obtained her degree. She moved to Australia in 1998 and has been working in the same professional job for the last six years. Her job is permanent full-time and she works 50 hours a week. She has two children, aged four and one, and they are cared for by a nanny. She says that family and work are equally important to her, but that at times she would prefer to spend more time with her children. Her company is supportive of her family situation, because there are many female employees and she occasionally takes her youngest to work with her on Saturdays. She had her first child at 29. Maternity leave was available to her, but because it was unpaid she could not afford to stay at home. Therefore she used a combination sick leave and annual leave and returned to work two weeks after the birth of her child. She also tried to reduce the amount of time she took off because she was aware that no-one would do her work in her absence and it would just build up while she was away. She returned to work primarily for financial reasons but career is also important to her. She brought her child to work with her for about 3-4 weeks because she was breastfeeding and had not managed to find a nanny. Because of the demands of her job she continued to work 50 hours per week. She took two weeks off when her second child was born. She spends $500 per week on child care. Her husband's salary is used to pay the mortgage and hers is used to pay for child care and living costs. She feels that her only alternative to paying for care in Australia is to send her children to Korea to be cared for by her parents, but she is reluctant to do that.

J_2 – 2 children (9 & 12 years), sole parent, working full-time, metro

J_2 was working full-time in retail when she fell pregnant with her first child at the age of 31. She resigned towards the end of her pregnancy and took nine months off before setting up her own business. She worked part-time from home three days a week, because she felt that it would be more flexible and would allow her to spend more time with her child. However, even though she paid someone to mind her child while she was working, she found it hard to maintain the home/work separation. About two years later she had her second child and shortly afterwards her marriage broke up. She returned to work on a part-time basis when the baby was six months old and was also receiving the sole parent pension. After a few months she decided that she would not be able to survive on a part pension and part-time work and that taking up full-time employment was her only option. She commenced full-time employment when her second child was 12 months old. She has remained in full-time employment ever since and has been paying for child care all that time. She spent 12 months working full-time on a casual basis and has been with her current employer on a permanent basis for the last seven years. Three years ago she was promoted to a permanent, full-time executive role. She says that the company is not necessarily flexible but that since her promotion she has more autonomy in terms of taking time off if need be as long as the work gets done. She has managed to organise her work day so that she starts later and finishes later so that she can avoid having to pay for morning care. However, because she works late, she has to pay someone to pick her children up from after-school care and look after them until she gets home. Child care is particularly expensive during school holidays and when the children are ill.

L_1 - 2 children (7 & 4 years), partnered, not currently working, metro

L_1 spent several years working full-time in clerical roles before leaving to have her first child at the age of 30. Maternity leave was not available when she left work. A factor that has prevented her from looking for employment is the fact that her husband has had to travel for work so they have had to relocate to a number of different cities both overseas and in Australia over the years. Another factor that has prevented her from looking for work is the fact that she does not have any family nearby to help out with child care and she feels that the cost of child care is prohibitive. Paid work has been a low priority for her because of her children. However, now that her oldest child is in school and her youngest is in preschool, she plans on returning to work this year. While she has enjoyed staying at home to care for her children, the hardest part about not working is being with the children 24 hours a day. She is looking forward to working again so that she has 'that extra outlet'. She is hoping to find work that fits around her children's hours. Her husband travels a lot for work and so he cannot/will not take on much domestic responsibility, and will not be able to even when she does get a job.

L_2 – 2 children (7 and 4 years old), partnered, working part-time, metro, non-English speaking background

L_2 is 38 years old, married, and a mother of two children. She migrated to Australia from Chile with her parents when she was very young. She works four days per week as a nurse. She was studying at university when she became pregnant with her first child and completed her studies just prior to the birth. At this time there were few nursing positions available, particularly for new graduates. She saw and applied for a part-time nursing position and commenced work when her child was two weeks old. At that time, she worked only two days per week. Her parents and her husband did the child care. Her parents took the child to her workplace at lunch time so she could breastfeed. This was a very stressful time for L_2 and she looks back and wonders why/how she did it. She was able to take two months off after the birth of her second child and returned to work on reduced hours. Her workplace has always been flexible and supportive of her parenting responsibilities. Over the 12 years she has been at her workplace she has changed her hours on a number of occasions due to changed circumstances at home. For example, she negotiated to start later when her son commenced school as he was finding the transition hard. L_2 sees herself as 'work oriented' and feels work keeps her 'sane'. She wonders about the cost of having children to her career and what she might have done in other circumstances. She receives good support from her husband and his workplace has also been flexible allowing him to pick up children from school, for example. Her parents were more involved in supporting her when her children were younger but about three years ago they moved a few hours drive away. She used formal child care for both her children but found it stressful to find and organise. Now that her children are older, before and after school care has become a concern. Some days she drops her children at the school 30 minutes before there is any teacher supervision and this causes her considerable anxiety.

M – 2 children (3½ years & 10 months), partnered, not currently working, metro

M had been in her full-time professional role for about three years when she fell pregnant with her first child at the age of 29. She took nine months unpaid maternity leave and found her manager to be very supportive when she was negotiating a return to work. She was told she could work as much as she wanted, so initially she worked one day from home and one day in the office and after three months increased to two days in the office and one at home. Although she was being paid for three days she checked her email five days a week and was available by phone. When she returned to part-time work her husband also reduced his working hours to part-time so that they could both care for their son. They also had a nanny for two days per week because their son had a medical condition and they did not want to send him to child care. She resigned after a year of part-time work in order to care for her son because he had to undergo an operation, even though her employers had encouraged her to take leave without pay rather than resign. Two weeks after resigning she discovered that she was pregnant with her second child and decided not to look for work, because she knew that she would have to leave again soon. She has not worked since the birth of her second child and is currently planning on returning to work for two to three days per week. She feels fortunate that there is no financial pressure on her to work full-time. She plans to have a third child, but is unsure when would be the best time and is concerned about the lack of continuity of employment if she has a third child. She

also feels fortunate that her husband's career is flexible and that he would be able to reduce his hours if she wanted to increase hers.

P – 2 children (5 & 2 years), partnered, working part-time, metro

P undertook several years of nursing studies and had been working full-time as a registered nurse for about seven years when she had her first child at 32. Using a combination of maternity leave and accumulated recreational leave she was able to take 14 months off when her child was born. She took eight months off when her second child was born and then her husband took over the caring duties as he had four months long service leave. P is currently doing part-time (three days per week) clerical work at the hospital where she has been working for over fifteen years. Her workplace is very flexible, which also benefits from her being flexible in the sense that she'll work additional days when necessary. Her eldest child (5 years old) is about to start preschool and will also continue to attend daycare two days a week. Her youngest child (2 years old) is cared for by a nanny when she is at work and will start attending child care in the coming weeks. She opted for a nanny for her daughter because her son's mild autism has caused some disruption for the family and felt that her daughter deserved some one-on-one care. Her mother babysits for the children once a fortnight. Work is very important to P because it is challenging, gives her a sense of purpose and gives her a break from the repetition and mundaneness of housework. She is solely responsible for all the domestic tasks. She finds that the hardest thing about combing work and family is managing to get all the housework done, getting up in the middle of the night to look after the children and taking time off work when the children are sick.

S_1 – 1 child (3 ½ years old), sole parent, working 2 part-time jobs (35 hours), metro, Aboriginal

S_1 is a young Aboriginal woman (22 years old) who is the sole parent of a three and a half year old. She is currently working effectively full-time combining two part-time positions. Both positions are with non-governmental organisations. The two organisations, however, contrast strongly in their support of S_1 as a sole parent. One organisation has been inflexible with her hours, resulting in S_1 making haphazard and unsatisfactory informal care arrangements for her son between 4pm and 5pm three days per week. The other organisation welcomes children in the workplace and is very supportive of S_1 as a sole parent. Prior to the birth of her child she was working in a time specific project and was thus not eligible for maternity leave or to return to that position. She did only one-off casual work for the first two years of her son's life. She was not comfortable during this time having him in formal care. She felt around two years of age was a good time to re-enter the workforce. She waited seven months to secure a child care place. Her son attends an Aboriginal child care centre close to her home. S_1's extended family are involved in providing informal care, however, her mother works full-time and her grandmother is now elderly. S_1's ideal work/family arrangement would involve work-based child care and the ability to work from home more often. S_1 believes her life would be much less stressful if she did not work, however, she feels the pension limits her son's and her own options. On the pension she could not afford a car but working enables that and opens up a lot of other opportunities.

S_2 – 1 child (2 years), partnered, not currently working, metro

S_2 qualified as a health professional in the UK in 1994. She worked in her field for five years, before moving to Australia in 1999 with her husband. She worked as a health professional on a casual basis for one year before commencing a research job. When that research job finished she continued working as a health professional on a casual basis and then started on a full-time post-graduate scholarship in January 2001. She fell pregnant at the age of 36 whilst undertaking her studies and her daughter was born in November 2002. She recommenced her studies three months after the birth of her daughter, but did not really consider it as 'going back to work' because she was writing up the results of her research from home and her daughter was at home with her. She had to find the time to work when her daughter was sleeping and at weekends when her husband looked after their daughter. At times she did not feel like continuing with her studies but because she had received a grant she felt an obligation to the school that had given her the opportunity. She has not worked since she finished her research in August 2004, but is planning to return to work in the next three months. She is hoping to get a place for her daughter in daycare, but is unsure when one will come up. However, even if they cannot get a child care place, her husband, who works as a contractor, will be able to undertake caring duties when his current contract finishes in March. At that point she will do some casual shifts on a part-time basis and then maybe look for work in a health centre.

S_3 – 1 child (18 years), sole parent, working 3 part-time jobs, metro

S_3 is a metro-based single parent with an 18 year old son. She currently holds three part-time jobs in the community sector and university sector. She has worked part-time for most of the last 18 years and has also received the single parenting payment. She has always combined part-time work, including shift-work, with informal and formal child care arrangements. A number of her workplaces have been family-friendly, flexible workplaces. She returned to work when her son was six weeks old and was able to take him to work for overnight shifts one day a week. She took six months off work when her son was 18 months old because she was feeling burnt out and her working environment was becoming too stressful. Over the years she has also availed of after school care and informal child care and feels fortunate to have had very supportive friends and flatmates. She made a conscious decision to work part-time, despite the impact this had on pay, conditions, and entitlements, because her earlier work experience had showed that the early teenage years are a particularly vulnerable time. She did not want to be working full-time and leave her son alone unsupervised during his early teenage years. She has never spent extended time away from the workforce for fear that she would not be able to get back in. For the last three/four years she has been hoping to find permanent secure full-time employment with proper pay and conditions.

S_4 – 2 children (12 years & 21 year old step child, partnered, self-employed full-time, outer metro, non-English speaking background

S_4 worked as a teacher in Korea before moving to Australia in 1987. She found it difficult to look for work in Australia because of the language barrier and because her Korean qualifications were not recognised. Given these difficulties she did another post-graduate degree in Australia and was studying full-time until she got married. She gave birth to her daughter in 1993 shortly after getting married. She was 36 years of age at the time. She did not work during the pregnancy and stayed at home to care for her daughter for three years. She then started working with her husband who was self-employed. She has been working there for the past nine years. She works from 9:30am to 3:30pm each day when she picks her daughter up from school and then does some paper work in the evenings. She found it difficult to return to work after the birth of her daughter, because of the difficulties of finding child care. She enjoys work because it gives her time of her own and gets her away from the tedium of housework, children and family. S_4 is generally happy with the hours she works, but would prefer to have more free time during school holidays so that she could spend more time with her daughter. She and her husband can be flexible with their time if their daughter is ill because they are self-employed. She is not keen to increase her work hours because she wants to be around for her daughter, her health is not great and she is a shy person so would find it difficult working with other people. S_4 lives with her husband, daughter and stepson.

T – 4 children (10 & 4 years, 18 month twins), partnered, working full-time, metro

T qualified as a registered nurse at the age of 21 and has been working as a nurse since then. She was working full-time when she fell pregnant with her first child at the age of 26. She got nine weeks paid maternity leave and took some additional leave without pay. She returned to work on a part-time basis for two days a week for financial reasons. She took six months off work when she had her second child six years later. She was working part-time when she had her youngest children (twins) and then took 15 months off to care for them. She has gone back to full-time nursing in that last few months. She is currently working nine to five Monday to Friday. She has worked nights and weekends previously while her husband looked after the children. She feels her workplace is quite flexible and attributes this to the fact that her boss has children. In the past she has had difficulties finding child care places and has had to rely on relatives to care for the children. At the moment, she has one child in school, one in child care, and two are looked after by the grandparents. Her husband dropped to part-time employment when she resumed full-time work. She is solely responsible for all the domestic chores and feels that the hardest thing about combining work and family is doing all the housework after a day at work.

V – 4 children (6, 4, 3 and 1 years), partnered, working part-time (2 days), rural, Aboriginal

V is a 33 year old Aboriginal mother of four young children (5, 3 ½, 2 ½ and 10 months). She is currently officially working two days per week although is 'available' via email and telephone as well as often working from home on other days. She has considerable experience and interest in her chosen field and has worked with numerous state bodies over the years. She has two degrees in fields that have enabled her to exercise considerable workplace autonomy. The children, however, remain her priority. On the days she works, she travels to the city (2 hours by train) and her children attend long day care (7am to 6pm) or school. The long day care provides before and after school care for her school aged child. When she became pregnant with her first child she was completing her studies and working part-time in the public service. As this was a temporary position she did not return to this job and was not eligible for maternity leave. She returned to study and work (three days per week) six weeks after the birth of her first child. She was then employed in a non-government agency, which provided her with a one-off payment of $1,000 in lieu of maternity leave with her second child although she was not technically entitled to it. Due to working part-time and moving jobs she was not eligible for maternity leave for her other two children. Her husband is a very active parent, despite having state-wide travel responsibilities. He also has considerable workplace autonomy due to his seniority and specific skills. Both parents have been active 'consumers' of child care and education demanding acknowledgement and integration of indigenous culture. V views her career as part of her children's education that Aboriginal women can make important contributions to the community.

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Women's Lifework Project – Interviews

The Women's Lifework Project has been commissioned by the Office for Women, NSW Premier's Department. It aims to achieve a deeper understanding of women's experiences of work and family and a better understanding of how work and family commitments affect different social groups.

We will be asking you questions about your experiences of entering and leaving the workforce at different stages in your life. Some of the questions are about paid work, and some are about unpaid work, including caring for family members.

Warm up

1. Are you working now? What kind of work do you do? (prompts: full-time, part-time, casual, type of work, length of time in sector, self-employed, family business, shifts, rosters)
2. How many children do you have? How old? Who looks after them, other than you?
3. Who lives with you? (prompts: any regular long-term visitors, family members close by)
4. Do you have many family and caring obligations, besides your own children?

Work experience

This section of the interview asks about your educational and work history.

5. What was your first full-time job? How long did you work in that job? What was it like? (prompts: level of education, post-secondary education, training, workplace culture)
6. Can you tell me a little about the different types of work you've done, and some of the reasons why you've started and finished them? (prompts: full time to part time, part time to full time, career advancement, having children, flexible workplaces)
7. How important is work to you?
8. Have there been times when you would have liked to do more paid work? Why couldn't you? (prompts: family responsibilities, tax or income support implications, inflexible job arrangements, child care, difficulty finding work, shifts, rosters)
9. Have there been times when you would have liked to spend more time at home and less time at work? Why couldn't you? (prompts: financial pressures, career advancement, family/partner influences, job instability)
10. Has your health or the health of your family ever affected your work? (prompts: ability to take time off to care for family, response of employer and co-workers)

Family and Children

This final section of the interview is about the impact of work on having a family, and your experiences of leaving and returning to work when having children.

11. How old were you when you had your first child? Were you working when you became pregnant? Was maternity leave available to you? (prompt: paid, unpaid)
12. Did the availability of maternity leave affect your plans to have children? (prompt: timing, considerations of returning to work)
13. How much influence did your job (or career plans) have on your plans to have children? (prompt: timing, number of children, financial pressures, social identity, family/partner influences)
14. How long were you away from work after you had your first child? After your other children? Did you return to the same job?
15. Could you tell me about any allowances, subsidies and payments you've received (eg Family Tax Benefit, CCB, maternity payment)? What happened to them when you entered and left paid work? How have they been affected by changes to your job? (prompt for knowledge about payments, disputes over payments, whether impact of working on payments was known prior to going back to work).
16. How important were allowances and subsidies to you when planning children? When planning to leave and re-enter the workforce?
17. How easy was it to start working again after having children? Would you have liked to return to work earlier or later than you did?
18. How easy was it to organise child care arrangements when you returned to work? (prompts: when did you start thinking about child care? how long did you have to wait for paid child care? how much child care is done by family members or friends?)
19. Was it important to you to return to work? (prompts: financial pressures, tax arrangements, family, social identity, partner's view, career prospects) How much did your attitudes towards your job change when you had children?
20. What was it like when your first child turned two? What was it like when they started school? Your other children? (other milestones: started high school, left school)
21. What would you change about your job now?
22. What are the most difficult things about working and having a family?

Appendix C: Supplementary Tables from HILDA

In the tables presented in this Appendix, women with resident children are grouped into categories based on the age of youngest child at last birthday. The categories used are 0 years, 1 year, 2-4 years, 5-11 years and 12-17 years. The 5-11 years category was chosen to approximate primary school ages. The 12-17 years category was chosen to approximate high school ages.

Table C.1: Labour market participation of mothers by age of youngest child, 2001 (HILDA)

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Sample (n)	244	269	553	950	602
Estimated Population (N)	232652	251320	508253	839341	641168
Age last birthday (average)	29.8	31.0	33.1	38.9	45.0
Labour Force Status (%)					
Employed FT	6.6	10.3	14.7	26.1	38.0
Employed Part-time	16.4	32.7	36.1	42.0	32.5
Unemployed	1.9	5.6	3.4	3.0	3.5
Not in Labour Force	75.1	51.5	45.8	28.8	25.9
Years in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (average)	8.5	9.9	10.5	14.3	17.9
Proportion of time in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (average %)	64.5	68.3	62.4	64.2	63.7
Main reason working PT hours rather than FT hours (% of PT WORKERS)					
Caring for children	88.3	95.7	84.4	68.9	32.7
Prefer to work part-time	4.6	1.4	8.2	13.7	35.1
Going to school, university, college, etc	0.0	0.9	0.5	1.4	3.9
Could not find full-time work	1.8	0.0	3.5	3.6	7.3
Main reason stopped working (% of NOT WORKING)					
Pregnancy/to have children	73.2	66.4	44.1	34.3	23.3
To stay at home to look after children, house or someone else	6.6	8.5	13.8	14.9	19.9
Got laid off / No work available / Retrenched / Made redundant / Employer went out of business / Dismissed etc.	1.4	7.8	9.6	10.2	12.4
Own sickness, disability or injury	3.1	1.4	2.8	10.1	13.2
Job was temporary or seasonal	2.7	3.0	8.5	6.2	3.8
Returned to study / started to study / needed more time to study	0.6	2.1	2.9	3.9	1.0

Table C.2: Other socio-economic characteristics of mothers by age of youngest child, 2001 (HILDA)

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Children					
Number of resident children (<18) (average)	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.2	1.4
Number of own children (any age) living with you at least 50% of time (average)	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.3	1.9
Total children ever had (average)	2.2	2.1	2.3	2.6	2.5
Age of youngest child last birthday (average)	0.0	1.0	2.8	8.0	14.7
Would like to have more children in the future (%)	45.4	50.0	28.6	11.6	5.8
Are likely to have more children in the future (%)	43.2	46.3	23.1	5.9	1.3
Marital Status (%)					
Legally married and living with spouse	69.9	71.7	70.1	69.9	74.4
Living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them	16.2	13.5	11.6	8.5	5.1
Separated	3.4	3.0	5.6	6.8	6.9
Divorced	0.5	0.0	2.4	7.5	10.5
Widowed	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	1.1
Never legally married	10.0	11.8	10.4	6.6	2.0
Years married to current partner (average across all marital statuses)	4.0	4.9	6.7	10.5	15.7
Years living with current partner (average across all marital statuses)	5.7	6.6	8.2	11.9	16.6
Income					
Annual household disposable income (average)	$46,918	$48,159	$47,537	$50,284	$61,361
Equivalised (revised-OECD) annual household disposable income (average)	$22,420	$23,106	$22,183	$22,821	$26,693
Highest Qualification (%)					
Postgraduate	7.0	4.6	9.4	6.9	6.4
Bachelor degree	15.5	12.8	13.7	12.1	14.3
Diploma or certificate	34.7	35.2	34.9	36.0	32.7
Year 12	11.4	15.6	11.6	11.1	9.5
Year 11 or lower	26.5	28.1	25.7	29.1	30.6
Undetermined	4.9	3.7	4.8	4.9	6.5

Table C.3: Work preferences of mothers by age of youngest child, 2001 (HILDA)

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Full-time employees					
Want to work fewer hours (%)	66.6	47.8	54.8	49.1	45.8
Want to work more hours (%)	0.0	0.0	2.7	2.1	6.2
Content with work quantity (%)	33.4	52.2	42.5	48.8	48.1
All FT employees	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Part-time employees					
Want to work fewer hours (%)	16.7	8.9	8.0	9.4	13.4
Want to work more hours (%)	22.3	35.1	24.8	27.9	24.8
Content with work quantity (%)	61.0	56.1	67.2	62.7	61.8
All PT employees	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not employed					
Want to work (%)	36.6	52.5	59.1	60.6	44.0
Content with work quantity (%)	63.4	47.5	40.9	39.4	56.0
All Not employed	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
All					
Want to work fewer hours (%)	7.1	7.8	11.0	16.7	21.8
Want to work [more hours] (%)	31.9	41.4	38.5	31.6	23.4
Content with work quantity (%)	61.0	50.8	50.6	51.7	54.9
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table C.4: Satisfaction with and importance of various life domains for mothers by age of youngest child, 2001 (HILDA)

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Satisfaction with… (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=Totally satisfied)					
Your employment opportunities	6.4	6.5	6.4	6.6	6.6
Your financial situation	5.6	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.9
The amount of free time you have	4.5	5.0	5.4	5.7	6.3
Your life	7.9	8.1	7.7	7.8	7.8
Importance of … (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=The most important thing)					
Your employment and work situation	5.6	6.4	6.6	7.0	7.2
Your financial situation	7.7	8.1	8.0	7.8	8.0
Your family	9.9	9.9	9.8	9.8	9.8
Leisure activities, such as hobbies, sports and contact with friends	7.1	7.2	7.4	7.7	7.7
Attitudes (average response to scale of 1-7, where 7=strongly agree)					
In order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job	4.4	4.3	4.8	4.7	4.9

Appendix D: Indicative Standard Errors

The results derived from HILDA data are subject to sampling errors. Indicative standard errors are presented in this appendix to assist readers in gauging the magnitude of sampling error. The tables in this appendix correspond to the tables that appear in the main text and in 0.

The sampling design of the HILDA survey is complex. The sample was stratified by state and part of state. Households were also clustered within Collectors' Districts (CDs), while persons are clustered within households. Such a sample design violates the independence assumption that underlies simple formulas for calculating standard errors. While various methods are available to account for these design effects on standard error calculations, resampling methods such as the Jackknife technique are considered the most practical for sufficiently complex designs. But such methods are complex and time consuming. An alternative approach is to model the relationship between relative standard errors (RSEs), and estimated population size for a range of parameters. Thus 'indicative' RSEs can be estimated as a function of estimated population size alone, for a particular survey design, unit of analysis and sub-population. Horn (2004) has done this for cross-sectional relationships in Wave 1 of HILDA. His models explained a high proportion of variation in RSEs (R-squared > 90%), thus suggesting that these indicative standard errors are likely to be reasonably accurate.

Horn's indicative RSEs have been used to calculate standard errors for most of the tables presented in this appendix, including those longitudinal tables that are merely cross-tabulations of categories between the two Waves (corresponding to Table 2, Figure 2 and Table 5). We assume that Horn's indicative RSEs also apply in such a context. But this method is not appropriate for calculating standard errors corresponding to Table 7. For Table 7, we conservatively apply a 30% design effect adjustment for the estimated standard errors on the differences between Waves. Horn (2004: Attachment) tentatively estimated that the corresponding design effect for estimates associated with cross-sectional estimates for enumerated persons was equal to 22%. It seems reasonable to assume that a design effect that applies cross-sectionally also applies longitudinally for responding persons. However, there is a degree of uncertainty that accompanies such an assumption, hence the more conservative 30% design effect estimate that we have applied.

Table D.1: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 1

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	All women (aged 20-54 years)
Age last birthday (average)	0.91	0.88	0.64
Labour Force Status (%)			
Employed FT	1.00	1.19	0.83
Employed Part-time	1.13	1.02	0.78
Unemployed	0.42	0.47	0.32
Not in Labour Force	1.16	0.90	0.76
Years in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (average)	0.33	0.34	0.24
Proportion of time in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (average %)	1.14	1.05	0.79
Main reason working PT hours rather than FT hours (% of PT WORKERS)			
Caring for children	1.12	0.27	0.83
Prefer to work part-time	0.87	1.08	0.69
Going to school, university, college, etc	0.30	1.09	0.57
Could not find full-time work	0.47	0.86	0.48
Main reason stopped working (% of NOT WORKING)			
Pregnancy/to have children	1.19	0.62	0.80
To stay at home to look after children, house or someone else	0.80	0.66	0.54
Got laid off / No work available / Retrenched / Made redundant / Employer went out of business / Dismissed etc.	0.66	0.87	0.52
Own sickness, disability or injury	0.58	0.94	0.52
Job was temporary or seasonal	0.52	0.65	0.41
Returned to study / started to study / needed more time to study	0.35	0.78	0.39

Table D.2: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 2 (percentage points)

	Employment Status at Wave 2			
Employment Status at Wave 1	Employed full-time	Employed part-time	Unemployed	NILF
Employed full-time	1.9	1.7	0.4	0.9
Employed part-time	1.3	1.7	0.5	1.2
Unemployed	4.7	5.3	5.0	6.1
NILF	0.7	1.4	0.9	1.7

Table D.3: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Figure 2 (percentage points)

Age of youngest child	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Increase	2.1	3.3	3.0	3.2	3.8	4.4	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.1	3.6	3.9	4.3	3.7	3.5	4.4	2.6	3.3
Decrease	3.1	2.1	2.5	2.8	2.4	3.0	3.3	3.0	3.3	2.9	3.1	2.5	3.7	3.9	3.4	3.2	2.2	3.1

Table D.4: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 3

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years)
Children			
Number of resident children (<18) (average)	0.05	0.00	0.02
Number of own children (any age) living with you at least 50% of time (average)	0.05	0.01	0.02
Total children ever had (average)	0.06	0.02	0.03
Age of youngest child last birthday (average)	0.17	-	-
Would like to have more children in the future (%)	0.96	1.19	0.80
Are likely to have more children in the future (%)	0.87	1.16	0.75
Marital Status (%)			
Legally married and living with spouse	1.08	1.16	0.85
Living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them	0.69	0.89	0.57
Separated	0.55	0.39	0.34
Divorced	0.55	0.56	0.39
Widowed	0.18	0.25	0.16
Never legally married	0.60	1.14	0.69
Years married to current partner (average across all marital statuses)	0.24	0.17	0.14
Years living with current partner (average across all marital statuses)	0.27	0.19	0.17
Income			
Annual household disposable income (average)	$1,255	$1,367	$937
Equivalised (revised-OECD) annual household disposable income (average)	$571	$795	$489
Highest Qualification (%)			
Postgraduate	0.60	0.63	0.44
Bachelor degree	0.81	0.93	0.62
Diploma or certificate	1.13	1.11	0.80
Year 12	0.74	0.88	0.58
Year 11 or lower	1.07	0.99	0.74
Undetermined	0.52	0.42	0.34

Table D.5: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 4 (percentage points)

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years)
Full-time employees			
Want to work fewer hours (%)	2.43	1.58	1.34
Want to work more hours (%)	0.87	0.79	0.62
Content with work quantity (%)	2.43	1.61	1.35
Part-time employees			
Want to work fewer hours (%)	1.20	1.38	0.91
Want to work more hours (%)	1.77	2.30	1.42
Content with work quantity (%)	1.93	2.39	1.52
Not employed			
Want to work (%)	1.83	2.55	1.51
Content with work quantity (%)	1.83	2.55	1.51
All			
Want to work fewer hours (%)	0.85	1.02	0.67
Want to work [more hours] (%)	1.11	0.99	0.75
Content with work quantity (%)	1.19	1.19	0.85

Table D.6: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 5 (percentage points)

Wave 1	Wave 2 Want to…		
Women with children	Work fewer hours	Work about the same hours/ continue to not work	Work [more hours]
Want to...			
Work fewer hours	3.0	3.0	1.7
Work about the same hours/ continue to not work	1.0	1.5	1.3
Work [more hours]	0.8	2.0	2.1
Women with children whose labour force status was the same in both waves			
Want to...			
Work fewer hours	3.4	3.3	1.4
Work about the same hours/ continue to not work	1.1	1.6	1.4
Work [more hours]	0.7	2.5	2.6

Table D.7: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 6

	Women with resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years) without resident children	Women (aged 20-54 years)
Satisfaction with… (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=Totally satisfied)			
Your employment opportunities	0.16	0.17	0.12
Your financial situation	0.14	0.15	0.10
The amount of free time you have	0.13	0.16	0.11
Your life	0.19	0.19	0.13
Importance of … (average response to scale of 0-10, where 10=The most important thing)			
Your employment and work situation	0.16	0.19	0.13
Your financial situation	0.19	0.20	0.14
Your family	0.24	0.23	0.17
Leisure activities, such as hobbies, sports and contact with friends	0.18	0.20	0.13
Attitudes (average response to scale of 1-7, where 7=strongly agree)			
In order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job	0.11	0.12	0.08

Table D.8: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table 7

	Birth of First Child	Birth of Subsequent Child
Labour Force Status (%)		
Employed full-time	7.9	3.1
Employed part-time	6.3	4.6
Unemployed	4.7	2.0
Not in Labour Force	9.1	5.0
Want to work fewer hours (%)	7.5	3.3
Want to work [more hours] (%)	6.8	5.0
Marital Status (%)		
Legally married and living with spouse	3.6	1.7
Living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them	6.7	2.0
Separated, Divorced or Widowed	0.0	2.2
Never legally married	5.3	1.8
Satisfaction with… (scale of 0-10, where 10=Totally satisfied)		
Your employment opportunities	0.36	0.22
Your financial situation	0.38	0.21
The amount of free time you have	0.50	0.28
Your life	0.21	0.15

Table D.9: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table C.1

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Age last birthday	2.30	2.30	1.74	1.60	2.11
Labour Force Status (%)					
Employed FT	1.87	2.21	1.82	1.77	2.24
Employed Part-time	2.80	3.43	2.49	2.00	2.16
Unemployed	1.02	1.66	0.92	0.68	0.84
Not in Labour Force	3.30	3.67	2.58	1.83	2.02
Years in paid employment since left FT education for the first time	0.66	0.73	0.55	0.59	0.84
Proportion of time in paid employment since left FT education for the first time (%)	3.65	3.42	2.52	1.95	2.23
Main reason working PT hours rather than FT hours (% of PT WORKERS)					
Caring for children	2.46	1.49	1.89	1.88	2.17
Prefer to work part-time	1.57	0.84	1.41	1.38	2.21
Going to school, university, college, etc	n/a	0.67	0.35	0.47	0.88
Could not find full-time work	0.99	n/a	0.94	0.74	1.19
Main reason stopped working (% of NOT WORKING)					
Pregnancy/to have children	3.38	3.47	2.57	1.92	1.95
To stay at home to look after children, house or someone else	1.87	2.02	1.78	1.43	1.84
Got laid off / No work available / Retrenched / Made redundant / Employer went out of business / Dismissed etc.	0.87	1.95	1.51	1.22	1.51
Own sickness, disability or injury	1.30	0.84	0.84	1.21	1.55
Job was temporary or seasonal	1.21	1.23	1.43	0.97	0.87
Returned to study / started to study / needed more time to study	0.57	1.03	0.85	0.77	0.45

Table D.10: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table C.2

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Children					
Number of resident children (<18)	0.16	0.15	0.11	0.09	0.07
Number of own children (any age) living with you at least 50% of time	0.16	0.15	0.11	0.09	0.09
Total children ever had	0.17	0.16	0.12	0.11	0.12
Age of youngest child last birthday	0.00	0.07	0.15	0.33	0.69
Would like to have more children in the future (%)	3.79	3.67	2.34	1.29	1.07
Are likely to have more children in the future (%)	3.77	3.66	2.18	0.94	0.51
Marital Status (%)					
Legally married and living with spouse	3.50	3.31	2.38	1.86	2.02
Living with someone in a relationship but not legally married to them	2.79	2.49	1.65	1.12	1.00
Separated	1.36	1.23	1.18	1.01	1.16
Divorced	0.52	n/a	0.78	1.06	1.41
Widowed	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.35	0.47
Never legally married	2.26	2.35	1.57	0.99	0.63
Years married to current partner (average across all marital statuses)	0.31	0.36	0.35	0.43	0.74
Years living with current partner (average across all marital statuses)	0.44	0.49	0.43	0.49	0.78
Income					
Annual household disposable income	$3,617	$3,574	$2,495	$2,062	$2,873
Equivalised (revised-OECD) annual household disposable income	$1,728	$1,715	$1,164	$936	$1,250
Highest Qualification (%)					
Postgraduate	1.92	1.51	1.50	1.02	1.12
Bachelor degree	2.74	2.43	1.77	1.31	1.61
Diploma or certificate	3.62	3.50	2.47	1.94	2.17
Year 12	2.40	2.64	1.65	1.26	1.34
Year 11 or lower	3.35	3.29	2.26	1.84	2.13
Undetermined	1.62	1.36	1.09	0.86	1.13

Table D.11: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table C.3 (percentage points)

STANDARD ERRORS	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Full-time employees					
Want to work fewer hours	23.3	15.2	9.5	5.2	4.6
Want to work more hours	n/a	n/a	2.1	1.1	1.8
Content with work quantity	16.6	15.8	8.4	5.1	4.7
Part-time employees					
Want to work fewer hours	7.4	3.7	2.4	1.8	2.9
Want to work more hours	8.6	7.1	4.1	3.1	3.8
Content with work quantity	13.8	8.6	6.1	4.2	5.7
Not employed					
Want to work	4.4	5.9	4.8	5.0	5.2
Content with work quantity	4.9	5.7	4.2	4.2	5.8
All					
Want to work fewer hours	1.9	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.9
Want to work [more hours]	3.5	3.6	2.5	1.9	2.0
Content with work quantity	3.7	3.7	2.6	2.0	2.3

Table D.12: Indicative Standard Errors Corresponding to Table C.4

	Age of youngest child				
	0 years	1 year	2 to 4	5 to 11	12 to 17
Satisfaction with… (scale of 0-10, where 10=Totally satisfied)					
Your employment opportunities	0.49	0.48	0.34	0.27	0.31
Your financial situation	0.43	0.43	0.29	0.23	0.28
The amount of free time you have	0.35	0.37	0.28	0.23	0.29
Your life	0.61	0.60	0.40	0.32	0.37
Importance of … (scale of 0-10, where 10=The most important thing)					
Your employment and work situation	0.43	0.47	0.35	0.29	0.34
Your financial situation	0.59	0.60	0.42	0.32	0.37
Your family	0.76	0.73	0.51	0.40	0.46
Leisure activities, such as hobbies, sports and contact with friends	0.55	0.53	0.39	0.32	0.36
Attitudes (scale of 1-7, where 7=strongly agree)					
In order to be happy in life it is important to have a paying job	0.34	0.32	0.25	0.19	0.23