

Excessive Working Hours – On a Tightrope

Abstract

This paper draws from the responses of more than 9,500 women to the 2009/10 CPSU *What Women Want* survey to investigate the working hours of women in the public service.

As well as dispelling the common general misconception that public sector workers are not exposed to long working hours, the survey results clearly show evidence of a growing sandwich generation – women working increasingly long hours while caring for children and others – most often parents, adult children and/or partners. Added to these pressures is the growing intrusion of work into the non-working lives of women through technological change – through mobile phones, Blackberries and iPhones.

Although various forms of mobile technology have been around for more than two decades, there has been limited research into the effect of these technological changes on non-working life. Given the responses of public sector women to questions around work life balance and the increasing use of technology that they respond to around the clock, it is timely to ask - are Australian women further losing the battle to balance work with life and if so, what can be done to redress this?

Introduction

This paper briefly outlines the key issues discussed in the literature around working hours. It highlights the groups of workers most likely to be affected by long working hours before turning to evidence from the CPSU annual *What Women Want* survey to provide a picture of working hours among public sector women.

The data reveals details about the women in the public sector who work long hours, and provides information about their age, qualification and job type. Data on caring responsibilities is analysed to uncover some of the non-work pressures felt by women. The reasons why long hours are worked by some women are discussed including how, if at all they are compensated. The paper then considers evidence about the effect of long working hours on non-work life and analyses data on out of hours contact by employers and women's' responses to this intrusion.

It is concluded that there is a growing group of public sector work who not only work long hours, but are often not compensated for these hours. They are juggling caring responsibilities and are likely to report that long hours take a toll on personal relationships and that they feel tired and overworked.

The story thus far...

There is a plethora of research, spanning a number of years, which concludes that Australians work some of the longest hours amongst comparable nations. Most often, the key contributor is said to be our high levels of overtime, a large proportion of which is unpaid. In 2007, Campbell concluded that the proportion of Australians working very long hours had grown over the last two decades and was continuing to grow. He found that a large contributor was 'the prominence of what is called 'unpaid' overtime', concluding that 'growth in unpaid overtime seems to be the main component in the increase in the proportion of full time employees working long hours' (2007:37).

While it has been typically men who have worked long hours, Campbell's analysis of ABS data revealed that in August 2006, a quarter of the 2.5 million plus employees working long hours were women, and that this group was growing (2007:41).

According to the latest ABS data, 27.9 per cent of women working 'full time'¹ hours actually work 45 hours or more each week. Further disaggregation of the data reveals that 17.3 per cent of full time women work 50 or more hours per week. A staggering 10.3 per cent work 60 or more hours per week (ABS 2010).

Research shows that specific occupational groups are most likely to be working long hours. For example, Pocock et al found that 'managerial and professional workers are especially negatively affected with poor work-life scores and long hours of work' (2010:2). While men dominate these occupational groups, women are also employed in these roles in increasing numbers.

The consequences of these pressures have also been documented. More than half of workers report that work 'interferes with their activities beyond work and (they) feel often or almost always rushed and pressed for time' (Pocock et al 2010:2) and in their most recent AWALI report Pocock et al concluded that 'the majority of women – 60 per cent – feel consistently time pressured, and nearly half of men also feel this way: The 'barbecue-stopper' of 2001, as John Howard termed it, has not diminished in recent years. Indeed, some groups appear to be showing signs of increased stress, especially women in full-time work and working mothers' (2010:2). This is hardly surprising given that it is 'women who continue to do two-thirds of all unpaid work and care' (Pocock et al 2010:1).

The Public Sector Working Hours Myth

While the general perception is that public servants do not work excessive hours, this is increasingly being proven incorrect. The Australian Public Service (APS) which employs approximately 160,000 workers is certainly not immune to long working hours. In 2008-9, ten per cent of APS employees said

¹ Defined as 35 hours or more a week.

they worked more than 90 hours a fortnight (with 3 per cent saying they worked 100 or more hours a fortnight) (APSC 2010:95).

Similar to the conclusions about the general workforce, a significant proportion of APS employees are not satisfied with the balance between their work and non-work lives. In 2008-9, 28 per cent of APS employees said that they were not satisfied with the work-life balance in their current job and 29 per cent did not agree that their 'workplace culture supported people to achieve a good work/life balance' (APSC 2010:95).

Like the general workforce, the APS is becoming increasingly feminised, with 57.5 per cent of the APS workforce in 2008-9 women. However, although part time workers in the APS are more likely to be women (19.7% of women in the APS work part time compared to just 3.7% of men), the APS does not offer significant opportunities for part time work with just 12.9 per cent of ongoing employees working part time hours (APSC 2009:4). This means that APS women are more likely to be juggling full time work with child care and other caring and non-work responsibilities.

This paper draws from the CPSU annual women's survey to further explore the working hours of women in the APS, identify the characteristics of the women who work long hours and identify the impact of these hours on their non-work lives.

Methodology

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union with approximately 55,000 members. The CPSU represents employees of the Australian Public Service (APS), the ACT Public Service, the Northern Territory Public Service, Telstra, the telecommunications sector, call centres, employment services and broadcasting.

The annual CPSU *What Women Want* survey has been conducted since 2006, and has been done in conjunction with the University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research since 2008.

An invitation to participate in the 2009 survey was emailed to 46,235 women members and potential members on 13th October 2009. These women worked in the Australian Public Service (APS) (including the ABC and SBS), the Northern Territory Public Service (NTPS), the Australian Capital Territory Public Service (ACTPS) and areas of private sector coverage of the CPSU. On the same day, a news item was published on the CPSU website alerting visitors to the survey. An invitation to participate in the survey was also included in the regular CPSU News that was emailed to CPSU members on the 21st October 2009 and a final follow up reminder email was sent out to the same group on the 27th October 2009.

The online survey was open for responses for 4 weeks from the 13th October 2009, closing on the 6th November 2009. 9,428 valid responses were collected via the on-line survey. A limited number of paper copies of the survey were provided to those who requested a copy. These surveys were returned to the CPSU office via prepaid mail or fax with 76 complete surveys received by 31st December 2009. In total 9,504 women participated in the 2009 survey, a response rate of 20.6 per cent¹.

Among other things, the annual survey seeks women's views on hours of work, overtime, caring responsibilities, access to flexible work arrangements, contact by employers outside of ordinary work hours, and levels of job satisfaction and influence over work.

Hours of work

The survey results revealed that, contrary to popular belief (and at odds with the data reported by the Australian Public Service Commission), most women working in the public sector work additional hours each week. A significant proportion of these women work what could be considered excessive hours².

According to the survey, 88.1 per cent of full time women worked beyond their standard hours each week. While a large proportion of women (40.5%) worked less than 3 hours of overtime each week, a similar proportion (two in five women) worked five or more additional hours each week.

Additional hours worked per week 2008-2009

	2008 (%) (n=6833)	2009 (%) (n=6727)
Less than an hour of overtime	11.8	12.4
1 to less than 3 hours overtime	27.9	28.1
3 to less than 5 hours overtime	22.7	19.3
5 to less than 10 hours overtime	20.5	21.0
10 to less than 15 hours overtime	5.0	6.6
15 or more hours overtime	12.1	12.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Further, nearly one in five full time women reported working 10 or more additional hours each week – and between the 2008 and 2009 surveys, this group has grown. These women are the primary focus of this paper – what do they do, why do they work additional hours, do they have dependent children, do they have other caring responsibilities, how do they juggle work and life?

Who are the women working excessive additional hours?

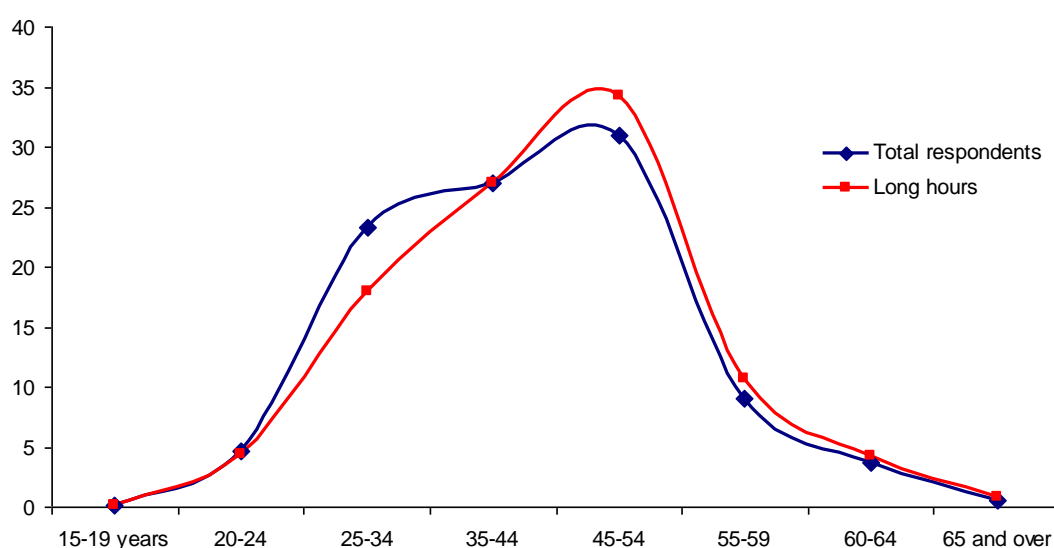
² Defined in this paper as 10 or more additional hours each week.

Women who are working excessive hours are slightly older than the average, are more likely than other APS women to work in a managerial position, are more likely to have dependent children and more likely to be caring for others including parents, adult children and partners.

Age

The age of women working excessive additional hours is shown in the graph below. This group is slightly older than women who work fewer additional hours.

Age of those working excessive additional hours (10+ per week) compared to total respondents



Qualification and job type

Women working excessive hours are no more likely to be employed in higher classification levels than those not working excessive hours and they are no more likely to hold a bachelors degree or higher qualification. They are however more likely to report that they are working in a managerial position than those not working excessive additional hours (11.8% of those working excessive hours said they were managers compared to 7.5% of those not working more than 10 additional hours each week). This aligns with research findings that suggest that the occupational groups most likely to be working long hours include managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals (Campbell 2007:41).

Caring responsibilities

Women working excessive hours are more likely to have dependent children than those not working excessive hours. Thirty two per cent of women working excessive hours reported having dependent children.

Dependent children by hours of work

	Dependent children	No dependent children	Total
Working excessive hours	31.5%	68.5%	100.0% (n=1294)
Not working excessive hours	26.1%	73.9%	100.0% (n=5433)
Total	27.1%	72.9%	100.0% (n=6727)

A quarter of all women said that they had regular caring responsibilities for people other than dependent children. Most often they said they cared for their parents, but many had caring responsibilities for adult children and/or their partner. Women working excessive hours were slightly more likely to have caring responsibilities for people other than dependent children. Twenty eight per cent of these women had regular caring responsibilities for others compared to 24 per cent of those working less than 10 additional hours each week.

Other caring responsibilities by hours of work

	Other caring responsibilities	No other caring responsibilities	Total
Working excessive hours	28.0%	78.0%	100.0% (n=1273)
Not working excessive hours	24.1%	75.9%	100.0% (n=5387)
Total	24.8%	75.2%	100.0% (n=6660)

Of the 356 women who said they regularly cared for others and worked more than 10 hours per week, 143 (or 40%) also had dependent children. Sixty per cent of these children were aged between 12 and 18 years.

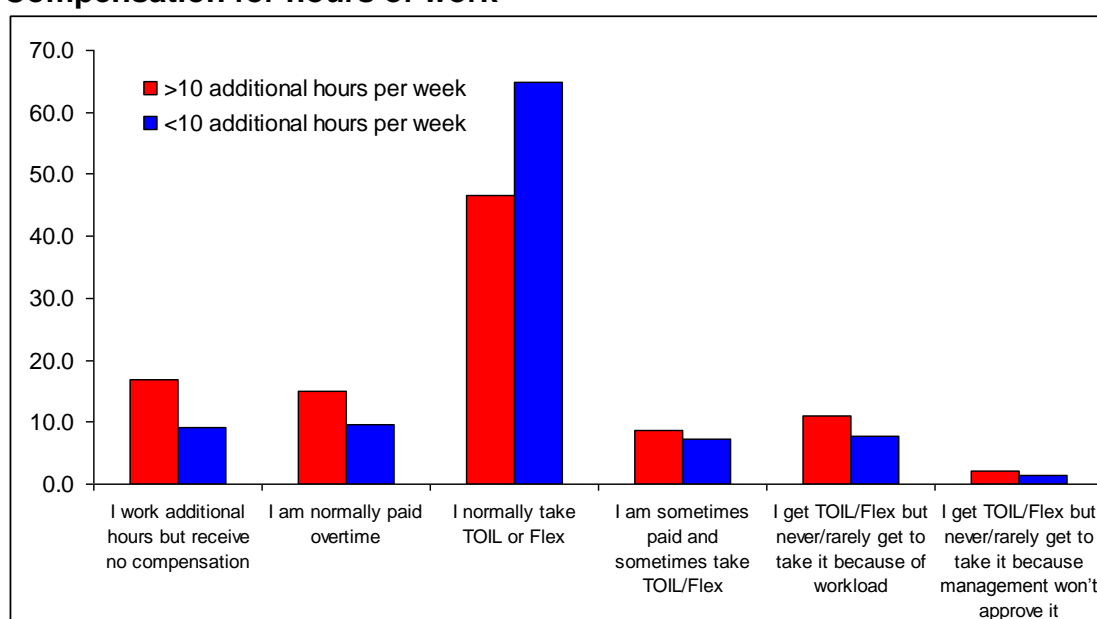
Why are women working excessive hours?

The literature suggests that the varying forms of possible compensation for 'unpaid overtime' usually at the discretion of the employer, means that this type of 'overtime' is difficult to analyse. Regardless, Campbell concludes that employees working unpaid overtime are more likely to work longer hours than those working paid overtime (Campbell 2007:46, also see Peetz et al 2003).

This reflects the findings of the CPSU survey: women working excessive hours are not necessarily working these hours to earn overtime, although they are more likely to be paid overtime and less likely to take time off in lieu of

overtime than those not working excessive hours³. However, overall, the group working long hours is less likely to be compensated (either in TOIL or monetarily) for their excessive working hours than those working fewer additional hours. Where they are entitled to TOIL or flex time, they often report not being able to take time off due to workload. Again this accords with Australian research that concludes that those working long hours often do not get overtime pay or time off (Peetz et al 2003) and those who are entitled to TOIL are often unable to access it due to workloads (Peetz and Cameron 2005).

Compensation for hours of work



If women are not always being compensated for working additional hours, at the same time as some of them are trying to juggle numerous caring responsibilities, why are they doing it?

According to the CPSU survey data, women who work additional hours (regardless of duration) are increasingly reporting that they do it to get all their work done and get it done to a proper standard.

Reasons Overtime/Extra Hours are Worked (all women working extra hours)

	2008 (n=8634)	2009 (n=6383)
I enjoy my work	17.8%	18.9%
I need the money from overtime pay	12.2%	11.1%
I want to maximise my performance bonus	.9%	1.3%
I want to build up my flex time	28.9%	27.4%

³ This result is because women working in service delivery agencies are likely to be paid overtime while those working in policy roles are not.

So I can get all my work done	44.7%	48.2%
So I can get my work done to a proper standard	33.8%	36.3%
It's the culture that we work extra hours	8.3%	10.1%
It is expected by management that we work extra hours	8.5%	10.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

However those working excessive hours are not more likely to say they work these hours because they like their job, or to get their work done or to get their work done to a proper standard. Instead they are more likely than others to report that they work long hours because it's the culture and/or it's expected by management that they work extra hours⁴. In contrast, in his analysis of ABS data from 2000, Campbell concluded that those working long hours did so because 'there is too much work' (73.5%) but another ten per cent worked long hours because of management expectation (2003:58).

Campbell's suggestion of a link between management expectations and long hours is borne out by the CPSU data. Women working excessive hours in the public sector are more likely to believe that they will get ahead by working excessive hours and that taking work home is a key to career success. Further they are more likely to agree that unless they put work before their family, they will not be noticed by management. Again this accords with the findings in the literature that employees do not necessarily exercise free choice when working long hours but do it because of a range of reasons including workload and perceived labour market advantages (Campbell 2007).

Other reasons why excessive hours are worked

	Women working <10 hours additional per week	Women working >10 additional hours per week
Employees who 'get ahead' work long hours (eg 50+ per week) – agree/strongly agree	35.7%	41.5%
Employees who 'get ahead' regularly take work home – agree/strongly agree	30.5%	35.7%
Unless you put work before family you don't get noticed by management	30.9%	38.2%

What is the effect of working excessive hours?

Overall, more than half of women working additional hours reported that it caused them some personal difficulty. Most commonly, women said that working overtime/extra hours was difficult because they already felt fatigued and overworked (44.3%). This is an increase from the 2008 survey where

⁴ Unsurprisingly those who do receive payment or other compensation (TOIL or flex) for working excessive hours also were more likely to report they worked extra hours to build up their flex time or because they needed money from the overtime pay.

40.9 per cent reported this reason. Allan et al note that not only do long working hours lead to fatigue, but it is also ‘an issue of the stress employees endure at work, and the emotional baggage they bring home (2007:235).

Certainly public sector women reported that working additional hours took a toll on their personal relationships (42.3%), and, similar to the 2008 survey, women also commonly said that having to reprioritise other non-work commitments was difficult (40.1%). Interestingly, insufficient notice of overtime did not cause personal difficulties for many women.

Types of Personal Difficulty Working Overtime/Extra Hours Causes (multiple response)

	All women		Women working excessive hours
	2008	2009	2009
I am not given sufficient notice of additional hours	7.0%	6.7%	5.7%
Travel home early/late from work is difficult	31.4%	31.6%	31.4%
I am already fatigued and overworked	40.9%	44.3%	49.8%
I only get TOIL/Flex for overtime and would rather be paid	9.5%	9.0%	8.4%
Having to reprioritise other non-work commitments is difficult	40.1%	40.1%	44.2%
It takes a toll on personal relationships	39.0%	42.3%	51.9%
Caring responsibilities are difficult to organise	35.4%	26.9%	30.2%

While 54.3% of women said that working additional hours caused some form of personal difficulty, it is of no surprise that the proportion reporting personal difficulties from additional hours was higher among those working excessive hours (60.8%). These women were more likely to report that caring responsibilities were difficult to organise (30.2%), reprioritising non-work commitment was difficult (44.2%), they were already fatigued and overworked (49.8%) and 51.9 per cent reported that excessive hours of work took a toll on their personal relationships.

What happens when women are not at work?

As well as working additional hours, women were increasingly being contacted outside of work hours whether it was a requirement of their job or not. Almost two in five women (39.1%) reported that they were contacted outside of work hours via telephone or email in the six months prior to the survey. This represented an increase on 2008 survey results where 35.5 per cent of women said they had been contacted outside of work hours. Despite their long working hours, 41.3 per cent of women working excessive hours reported they were contacted outside of work.

Although it was a requirement to be available outside of working hours for just 33.5 per cent of women, an amazing 98.9 per cent of women said that they either responded (77.5%) or sometimes responded (21.4%) to employer contact outside of work hours. This is despite 78.6 per cent of women saying that they were not compensated in any way for contact outside of working hours.

Interestingly, 48.7 per cent of those working excessive hours said that it was a requirement of their job to be available outside of work hours but just 14.7 per cent received any compensation for this contact. Despite this, 99.3 per cent of women working excessive hours, regardless of whether it was a requirement or not, responded to out of work contact.

Crucially, compared with the 2008 survey results, the frequency of contact by employers outside of work time has increased, with more women reporting daily or regular contact. Correspondingly the percentage of women reporting that the contact is occasional has decreased.

Frequency of Contact outside of work hours

	2008	2009	Women working excessive hours
Daily	3.3%	3.4%	8.5%
Every couple of days	8.7%	10.4%	21.6%
Occasionally	86.5%	85.5%	68.8%
I prefer not to respond	1.5%	0.7%	1.2%

There is increasing concern about whether the use of technology such as mobile phones, increased internet connectivity within the home and the use of handheld devices such as Blackberries and iPhones are ultimately beneficial for women. Gregg (2010) for example observes that rather than ‘new media devices ... putting an end to women’s alienation from career success and the culture of long hours necessary to achieve it’, ‘women’s actual use of technology indicated that such models are among the least satisfying in providing sustainable and adequately measured workforce participation’. Gregg’s conclusions require further research to test if they extend beyond the part time workforce that was the subject of her study.

Dery and McCormick (2010) also question whether the ultimate outcome of mobile technology is positive for women. They suggest that the impact of mobile technology is highest among three groups - those ‘juggling temporal, spatial boundaries particularly in the context of meeting family commitments’; those with global responsibilities or other roles that require connectivity outside of standard working hours; and, where the nature of the job requires (or is perceived as requiring) constant availability to be successful’. The question that arises for the women who responded to the *What Women Want* survey is how much the requirement to be contactable is perceived rather than actual and how much a perception of constant availability really does equate to career success.

The story thus far...

The findings from the CPSU What Women Want survey add to the growing body of evidence that Australians are increasingly working long hours. Women who work long hours are more likely than others to be doing these hours while trying to juggle caring for dependent children and elderly parents, adult children and/or their partner. While they are juggling these demands, they are also more likely to answer phone calls and/or emails from their employer outside of work time.

Women are not always working excessive hours to accrue time off or earn overtime. In fact, many women are not compensated for working extra hours and the more hours worked, the less likely a woman is to be compensated for them.

So, why do they do it? Significant proportions of women say they work extra hours so they can get all their work done and get it done to a proper standard. Those working excessively long hours do it because they believe it is expected by management and the culture of their workplace. They also are more likely to believe that progressing up the career ladder is helped if you work long hours, are seen by management as putting work before family and, by regularly taking work home.

However working excessive hours is likely to have an impact on personal relationships and cause women to report that they feel fatigued and overworked. Yet, rather than gain control over their working lives and have a clear separation between work and non work time, women are increasingly responding to employer contact outside of work hours. It is of no surprise that nearly half of women working excessive hours report that they cannot sufficiently balance work and family commitments and that they feel dissatisfied with their ability to control their workload.

Future considerations

Although working hours has been the subject of many research papers and journal articles, and it is clear that excessive hours of work adversely affect the lives of workers, their families and the public, even if worked voluntarily (Golden 2004 in Messenger 2006), the CPSU survey (and the research findings of others) suggests that the problem of excessive working hours in Australia is getting worse.

The ILO 5 dimensions of 'decent working time' - that working time arrangements should 'promote health and safety, be family friendly, promote gender equality, advance the productivity of enterprise and facilitate worker choice and influence over their hours of work' - are often referred to in the literature as a way forward (Messenger 2006:420). However, the ILO dimensions cannot be considered in isolation and some weight must be given

to the argument that ‘appropriate public policies to protect workers against excessively long and “unsocial” hours are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for achieving the goal of unhealthy working time’ (Messenger 2006:421).

Rather than 5 disparate dimensions, these issues must be considered holistically if improvements to work and non-work life are to be achieved. For example, family friendly working time measures must also promote gender equality. To achieve this, there must be a shift so that working time policies place women on an ‘equal footing’ with men in employment (including the types of jobs, remuneration of those jobs and career progression) and in sharing care, domestic responsibilities and enabling equal access to education and training (Messenger 2006:427).

Regulation of work hours provides one possible solution to the increasingly long hours worked by Australians. At present, awards and agreements generally set minimum hours rather than maximum hours. The ACTU reasonable hours test case was an attempt to set a maximum by allowing workers to refuse to work ‘unreasonable’ additional hours. However, a persistent lack of clarity about ‘reasonableness’ and difficulties of enforcement have meant that the parameters around working time set by the test case have not been broadly successful. There is a need to consider a ceiling on working hours but any ceiling would need to be enforceable and accompanied by significant cultural change.

In Australian workplaces, the leading culprits for working long hours are managers and professional workers. ‘Their pressured working lives do not augur well for the changes in workplace cultures and supervision and leadership that research shows are very important factors associated with good work-life outcomes’ (Pocock et al 2010:2). Certainly, in the public sector, where persistent annual cuts to agency budgets have resulted in ever increasing workloads, it is no surprise that occupational groups such as managers work long hours, in turn setting the ‘cultural bar’ for others who increasingly link career progression to long working hours and availability outside of work. Until managerial expectations change, it cannot be expected that workers will change their perception of what is needed ‘to get ahead’.

In the 2010 AWALI Report, Pocock et al conclude that ‘the factors that create time strains and pressures for working women are well documented: lack of quality, accessible, affordable childcare, inflexibility at work, unsupportive cultures, disincentives in the wages, benefits and taxation systems, and inequality in time spent on childcare and domestic work at home. Efforts to redistribute unpaid work and care would assist many women to deal with their time pressure. More flexibility in their working conditions would also assist, as would a reduction in the hours worked by their partners where these reduce engagement on the home front’ (Pocock et al 2010:7). The evidence is clear and mounting. Now it is time for policy makers and legislators to tackle the incredibly complex issues that need resolution so that Australians can rebalance their work and non-work lives.

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ⁱ This is significantly lower than in 2008 because of the inclusion of a high number of non-members in the sample.